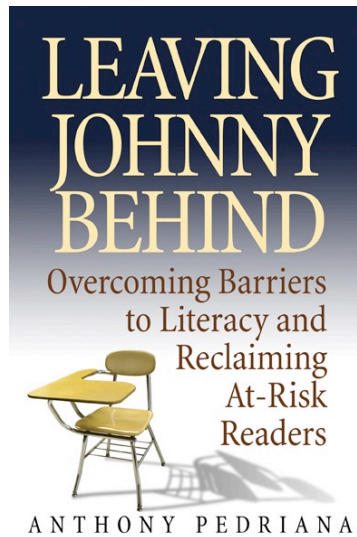


*What is research, but a blind date with knowledge?*  
-William Henry

# Preponderance of the Evidence

A Summary of Comparative Data on Early Reading

Adapted from the book



*Leaving Johnny Behind:  
Overcoming Barriers to Literacy and Reclaiming At-Risk Readers*

The reports described in this summary represent the end product of research syntheses whose credibility is bolstered by the following:

1. They represent massive compilations of data as opposed to individual studies.
2. They represent quantitative evidence of actual reading ability rather than that obtained through qualitative measures such as observation, anecdotal records and surveys.
3. All studies within each synthesis demonstrate statistical power, meaning that each has significance for the general population.
4. Studies in each synthesis were weaned from thousands of others based on their superior adherence to scientific rigor.
5. All include both experimental and control groups; all groups exceed minimum standards for sample size, degree of randomization, maintenance of parallel groupings, etc.
6. All groups include provisions that assure fidelity to research design.

The following pages brief descriptions of nine research syntheses with sample statements from each.

## ***Learning to Read: The great Debate<sup>1</sup> (1967)***

Harvard researcher Jeanne Chall reviewed all of the comparative studies on early reading conducted between 1910 and 1965. She also visited more than 300 kindergarten, and primary grade classrooms in the U.S., England and Scotland and analyzed the most frequently used basal reading texts. Her analyses caused her to conclude thusly:

*What distinguished the more effective beginning reading instruction was its early emphasis on learning the code.*

*A code-emphasis was particularly beneficial for those at greatest risk of reading failure.*

*By an overwhelming margin, the programs that included systematic phonics resulted in significantly better word recognition, better spelling, better vocabulary, and better reading comprehension.*

## ***The Cooperative Research Program in First-Grade Reading Instruction<sup>2</sup> (1967)***

An analysis similar to that of Chall using new and improved data

1. Approaches that included both systematic phonics and large emphasis on connected reading surpassed strictly basal approaches.
2. Reading readiness levels were not predictive of whether or not children could benefit from developmental and systematized approaches.

The results of the CRP studies were replicated six years later by Dykstra, prompting him to conclude that:

*Early systematic instruction in phonics provides the child with the skills necessary to become an independent reader at an earlier age than is likely if phonics instruction is delayed or less systematic.<sup>3</sup>*

## ***Project Follow Through<sup>4</sup> (Early 1970's)***

This study looked at instructional approaches from three separate domains – 1) *basic skills* 2) *cognitive or conceptual* 3) *affective*. Basic skills models that included direct, systematic and intensive instruction in the alphabetic code significantly out-performed programs in the remaining two categories. In fact, one program in the affective domain produced a negative relationship – students using that program actually regressed.

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<sup>1</sup> Chall, Jeanne S. *Learning to Read: the Great Debate*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1996

<sup>2</sup> Bond, Guy L., and Dykstra, R. "The Cooperative Research Program in First-Grade Reading Instruction." *Reading Research Quarterly* (Summer 1967): 5-142

<sup>3</sup> Dykstra, "Phonics and Beginning Reading Instruction," 1974

<sup>4</sup> Report issued by Abt and Associates, Authors, Stebbins, St. Pierre, Proper, Anderson and Cerva, 1977

### ***Reading Instruction: A Quantitative Analysis*<sup>5</sup> (1980)**

An analysis of all studies that merited inclusion in the International Reading Association's *Annual Summary of Investigations Related to Reading* between 1965 and 1978.

*One specific treatment, sound-symbol blending, made a significantly greater impact on reading than the other experimental treatments. With the different techniques for synthesizing research used in this study, this support for systematic phonics appears to be a strong one.*

### ***Becoming a Nation of Readers*<sup>6</sup> (1985)**

A report by a commission of experts from multiple disciplines and divergent viewpoints.

*The picture that emerges from the research is that phonics facilitates word identification which is a necessary but not sufficient condition for comprehension..... Thus, the issue is no longer, as it was several decades ago, whether children should be taught phonics. The issues now are specific ones of just how it should be done.*

### ***Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning About Print*<sup>7</sup> (1990)**

The culmination of a four-year investigation by the Center for the Study of Reading.

*Research indicates that regaining conscious awareness of the phonemic structure of speech is among the most difficult and critical steps toward becoming a reader. Importantly, research also indicates that children's awareness of phonemes can be hastened through appropriate training – and that such training produces significant acceleration in their acquisition of reading and writing skills.*

### ***Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*<sup>8</sup> (1998)**

This report called upon educators to assure that their daily lessons reflected what came to be known as Scientifically Based Reading Instruction or SBRI. In so doing, it identified the five critical elements of instruction needed to guarantee children's literacy advancement – Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary and Comprehension.

### ***Report of the National Reading Panel*<sup>9</sup> (2000)**

This effort by the National Reading Panel produced new data relevant to the five critical areas identified in 1998. Even though the panel had recommendations for each category, only the phonetic component is referenced below because that is the aspect of instruction that is so frequently disregarded in classrooms, especially with regard to the direct and systematic treatment recommended by the data.

*PA training helps children learn to read, spell and comprehend and is especially helpful to children in kindergarten and those at greatest risk of reading failure.*

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<sup>5</sup> Pflaum et al, "Reading Instruction: a Quantitative Analysis," *Educational Researcher* (July-August, 1980): 12-18

<sup>6</sup> Anderson et al, *The Report of the Commission on Reading*. Washington, DC: The National Institute of Education, U.S. Department of Education, 1985

<sup>7</sup> Adams, Marilyn J., Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1990

<sup>8</sup> Snow, Catherine E., et al, Washington, D.C. National Academy Press, 1998

<sup>9</sup> National Reading Panel, *Reports of the Subgroups*, 2000

*Systematic phonics makes a more significant contribution to reading growth than do alternative programs providing unsystematic or no phonics instruction.*

### ***Developing Early Literacy*<sup>10</sup> (2009)**

This report by the National Early Literacy Panel (NELP) analyzed thousands of studies to determine those precursor skills that were most highly correlated or predictive of later literacy attainment.

The skills thus identified were alphabetic knowledge, phonemic awareness, the ability to rapidly name letters, objects and colors, the ability to write letters in isolation, and the ability to remember spoken information.

#### **Summary**

1. Children taught the relationship between sound and symbol go on to become better readers than those who do not receive such instruction.
2. Children are more likely to master this relationship when taught in a direct, systematic and comprehensive manner.
3. Instruction in the phonetic code should begin at the earliest of levels.
4. To become proficient readers, children need to receive daily instruction in five critical areas:
  - Phonemic Awareness
  - Phonics
  - Fluency
  - Vocabulary
  - Comprehension
5. Comprehension, or deriving meaning from text is the real reason for reading. Instruction in the other four critical areas should facilitate that purpose.

Adapted from the book, *Leaving Johnny Behind: Overcoming Barriers to Literacy and Reclaiming At-Risk Readers*, by Anthony Pedriana  
<http://www.leavingjohnnybehind.com>

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<sup>10</sup> Report of the National Early Literacy Panel, *A scientific Synthesis of Early Literacy Development and Implications for Intervention*, 2009