

# Why Teach Phonics?

In "Informed Instruction for Reading Success: Foundations for Teacher Preparation", (1999) a position paper for The International Dyslexia Association, **Susan Brady**, Ph.D. and **Louisa Moats**, Ed. D., state:

"Equipped with a sharpened sensitivity to the individual sounds in words, the child has a conceptual framework for understanding the nature of an alphabetic writing system. (Without it, both phonics and whole language approaches to reading instruction may be baffling.) A necessary step is to link knowledge of the speech sounds (i.e., phonemes) with their corresponding letter patterns (i.e., both graphemes and spelling patterns.)"

**Edward J. Kame'enui**, Ph. D. Univ. of Oregon, presenting at the IDA conference in Vancouver, 2001 talked about "Big Ideas in Beginning Reading":

1. **Phonemic Awareness:** The ability to hear and manipulate sound in words.
2. **Alphabetic Principle:** The ability to associate sounds with letters and use these sounds to read words.
3. **Automaticity with the Code:** The effortless, automatic ability to read words in connected text.

**Ericson & Juliebo**, in their book "The Phonological Awareness Handbook for Kindergarten and Primary Teachers" (1998), state, "The explicit awareness of the sound structure of language is the most accurate predictor of reading achievement cited in the research literature" and go on to say, "phonological awareness activities have a greater impact on reading success when combined with instruction in letter-sound correspondence."

**Dr. Joe Torgesen**, Director, Florida Center for Reading Research, stated in his Keynote address to the 2003 IDA conference: ". . . mastering the alphabetic principle is essential to becoming proficient in the skill of reading . . . and . . . instructional techniques (namely phonics) that teach this principle directly are more effective than those that do not."

**Dr. Reid Lyon**, Chief, National Institute for Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), commenting on a PBS series, *Children of the Code*, stated: "Phonics is absolutely essential. Non-negotiable. . . . We've got a lot of five year olds who know all the letters of the alphabet, who know quite a few of the sounds, if not all of the sounds and they're ready to go. They have the building blocks. . . . The fact of the matter is most of our kids at risk are kids who did not have these interactions that built the fundamental, foundational linguistic building blocks. They come into kindergarten, first grade, and if they then get instructional approaches that don't take advantage of what we know about the code, if they get instructional approaches that are philosophically based, holistic and so forth, they'll never get it."

In the 1998 joint position statement of the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), they state, "A fundamental insight developed in children's early years through instruction is the **alphabetic principle**, the understanding that there is a systematic relationship between letters and sounds (**M.J. Adams**, 1990). The research of **Gibson and Levin** (1975) indicates that the shapes of letters are learned by distinguishing one character from another by its type of spatial features. Teachers will often involve children in comparing letter shapes, helping them to differentiate a number of letters visually. Alphabet books and alphabet puzzles in which children can see and compare letters may be a key to efficient and easy learning."

In Just the Facts . . . c.2000 by International Dyslexia Association, they state: "Sound-symbol association must be taught (and mastered) in two directions: visual to auditory and auditory to visual. "

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An essential part of the process for beginners involves learning the alphabetic system, that is, letter-sound correspondences and spelling patterns, and learning how to apply this knowledge in their reading. (pg. 2-89)

. . . knowledge of the alphabetic system contributes greatly to children's ability to read words in isolation or connected text. (pg. 2-90)

Findings provided solid support for the conclusion that systematic phonics instruction makes a bigger contribution to children's growth in reading than alternative programs providing unsystematic or no phonics instruction. (pg. 2-92)

To be effective, systematic phonics instruction introduced in kindergarten must be appropriately designed for learners and must begin with foundational knowledge involving letters and phonemic awareness. (pg. 2-93)

. . .systematic phonics instruction is significantly more effective than non-phonics instruction in helping to prevent reading difficulties among at risk students and in helping to remediate reading difficulties in disabled readers. (pg 2-94)

Systematic phonics instruction is thought to contribute to the process of learning to read words in these various ways by teaching readers use of the alphabetic system. Alphabetic knowledge is needed to decode words, to retain sight words in memory and to call on sight word memory to read words by analogy. In addition, the process of predicting words from context benefits from alphabetic knowledge. (pg. 2-107)