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Beginning Reading Instruction: Issues in Phonics and Modality Preferences

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Beginning Reading Instruction: Issues in

Phonics and Modality Preferences

(TITLE)

BY

Debra A. Kelley

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

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Abstract

This thesis reviews the major trends regarding the place of phonics in reading instruction since the 1950's and attempts to integrate current perspectives on phonics in regard to both classroom and individualized instruction. In the 1950's, instruction in the regular classroom tended to emphasize sight-words at the expense of word analysis or phonic skills. The mid-1960's classic study by Chall, Learning to Read: The Great Debate, documented the value of phonic instruction in beginning reading and led to later refinements regarding the place of phonics in beginning reading instruction.

The attempt to match individual children's preferred modality for learning to instructional method received widespread attention in the early 1970's following growing interest in the new field of learning disabilities and assumed that many children prefer the visual or auditory modality. Although intuitively logical, this either phonics (for children preferring the auditory modality) or sight-words (for children preferring visual modality) approach to instruction was not supported by research. More recent work with processing style preference, in which suggestions are made for teaching reading via methods geared to the child's most efficient mode of processing information, have limited research support. A few recent studies suggest that some children with extreme processing preferences may benefit from

differing instructional approaches. However, the content of instruction needs to include phonic analysis skills for all children.

Current views of phonics and reading instruction no longer suggest an either phonics or sight-words approach, but generally accept the importance of phonics instruction in beginning reading for all children. This issue is not the phonics or sight-words dichotomy of earlier decades, but rather the new question of how to most effectively teach word analysis skills and how to incorporate phonic instruction into meaningful reading instruction.

The field of emergent literacy, which has developed since the 1970's, describes the range of early reading skills many children acquire informally before entering school. This body of research is pertinent to issues regarding phonics in beginning reading instruction since those children who enter school with several years of informal introduction to print at home or preschool are the most successful with beginning reading instruction. Several effective programs are described which suggest that attention to emergent literacy skills, such as the ability to hear individual sounds in words, is a useful task for explaining why many children continue to have difficulty with beginning reading instruction.

Reading Recovery is presented as a model approach to reading instruction. This program targets children not succeeding with first grade instruction and provides daily

individualized instruction incorporating word analysis skills in meaningful reading and writing. Reading Recovery is a program which shows educators how to adapt instruction to best meet the needs of children getting off to a slow start in learning to read and integrate the development of phonic skills into meaningful reading.

Introduction

The best methods for teaching reading have been debated for many years and variations on this debate continue today. Issues of phonic versus sight-word instructional emphasis have had a long history. As far back as 1886, Cattell (as cited by Venezky, 1983) was doing research pertinent to the field of reading instruction in which he examined individual differences in letter and word recognition. However, until the 1950's, most reading instruction included some combination of phonic analysis and sight words with no one approach being predominant.

This combined strategy emphasis changed after 1951 when Dolch published a list of 220 basic sight words. He emphasized that these words involved at least 60 percent of words a beginning reader would encounter. These words were ones that made up the "body" of paragraphs. Dolch further emphasized that these words needed to be memorized by a beginning reader. As a result of his influence, phonic methods in reading were de-emphasized and reading instruction using the look-say, sight-word approach predominated during the 1950's (Gordon, 1982). However, this sight-word emphasis was not without critics. Flesch (1955) in his popular book, Why Johnny Can't Read, challenged the prevailing views on beginning reading instruction. He concluded that an increasing number of children were poor readers because of the sight-word emphasis and the solution was to emphasize phonic

skill instruction.

During the late 1950's and early 1960's, basal programs were being revised and much research was being completed that revolved around this phonic vs. look-say controversy. Chall (1967) indicated that phonics were indeed a part of many workbooks and teachers' materials, unlike what Flesch had previously indicated. Chall wanted to clarify the controversy and coordinated a large, thorough study completed during 1962-1965. Some of the most widely used reading programs used during the 1950's and 1960's were examined. An analysis of the research comparing the various approaches in the beginning stages of reading was the major topic of concern in the study. The relationship between methods of instruction and the kinds of reading failures children experienced was another area of the investigation.

Chall (1967) found that an early advantage in rate and comprehension of silent reading was shown in children who were taught through the look-say method. It was also discovered that a word recognition advantage, especially word recognition for untaught words, was exhibited and maintained for the children who were taught phonics. Not only did the phonic-taught children catch up and pass the look-say children in silent reading rate by the end of the second grade, but they also surpassed them in comprehension and vocabulary. Another important finding by Chall involved long-term advantages. Even after third grade, low levels of reading achievement were

found to be associated with low levels of phonic knowledge. From the research completed, Chall recommended a code emphasis (phonic) method for teaching beginning reading. Chall felt that in order for schools to improve standards in reading instruction, either a complete code (phonic) method program or a separate supplemental phonic program was necessary to achieve the goal of children learning to read successfully.

Not only was research regarding overall methods of reading instruction being completed, but in the 1960's, the issue of modality instruction was widely researched. Modality issues emerged from the phonic vs. look-say debate and there was a growing interest in adapting instruction to ability differences. Issues of adapting reading instruction to individual differences have held the interest of many educators and researchers since early research was conducted in the area. Although some questions have been answered, research in reading continues to evolve around issues of phonics in beginning reading instruction.

Review of Modality Research

When teaching reading, many educators attempt to match instruction to a student's individual needs. One way of adapting to individual differences is to attempt to match instructional strategy to an individual's particular style for learning or preferred modality. This approach, which received

widespread attention in the early 1970's following growing interest in the new field of learning disabilities, assumes that many children prefer the visual or auditory modality. The further assumption is that if the teacher adapts instruction to these differences by providing instructional methods that capitalize on strengths or modality preferences, then academic gains will be greater than if instruction is not adapted to these preferences. For example, Johnson and Mykelbust (1967) suggested that children with auditory preferences and skill strengths would do better with a phonics-based program of reading instruction that played to their strengths. Children with a visual preference should be taught using a sight- or whole-word reading approach since these methods rely more heavily on visual presentation of materials. Although intuitively logical, this either phonics or sight-words approach to instruction has not been supported by research. Reviews of the research on modality preference and beginning reading instruction have consistently shown little positive benefit from this approach.

A classic study by Robinson (1972) is mentioned in several reviews of research involving modality considerations (Kampwirth & Bates, 1980; Larrivee, 1981; and Adams, 1990). Robinson completed a longitudinal study, one of three (also Freer, 1971 & Bateman, 1979) more thorough studies that failed to prove a positive interaction between preferred modalities and instruction. A total of 448 students from 22 classrooms

was included in Robinson's study. The purpose of the study was to determine reading progress made by students with differing visual and auditory abilities when they were taught to read using two approaches (sight-word or phonic).

To determine the student's abilities in perception, various tests of modalities were administered. Visual perception tests included The Picture Squares Test, Reversals Test, The Pattern Copying Test, and the Ortho-Rater visual screening battery. The Wepman Auditory Discrimination Test was administered, as well as the Maico Audiometer, to test auditory acuity. Robinson wanted to see if those children scoring low on tests of auditory perception learn to read better by a whole word approach and to determine whether children with low scores on visual perception tests learn to read better by using a strong phonic approach. Students in the study received either an auditory (phonics) or a visual (whole word) instructional reading approach. Means and standard deviations for each experimental group were compared at the end of first, second, and third grades. Multivariate and univariate analyses of variance were used to determine the significance of the differences in mean scores on the criterion variables. The Metropolitan Achievement Tests, The Gray Oral Reading Test, and the Huelsman's Word Discrimination Test were administered to test differences and progress in reading. Students with a preferred visual modality did not make significantly greater progress in reading when taught by

a sight-word rather than phonics approach. Likewise, students with a preferred auditory modality did not make significantly greater progress in reading when taught phonics rather than a sight approach. Freer, (1971) in his study of 160 students, also found no modality-method interaction. Bateman (1979), as well, reports the same finding of failed modality-matched reading instruction when examining efforts of matching learner characteristics and reading method.

Arter and Jenkins (1979) reviewed 14 reading studies that 1) assessed modality strengths and weaknesses, 2) designed or used instructional materials that stress various modalities, and 3) attempted to discover modality-instructional interactions by using various materials to instruct students with different modality patterns. Their findings were very consistent. Thirteen of the 14 studies found no interactions and only one (Bursuk, 1971) reported an interaction consistent with modality model predictions. Whereas in all other studies, elementary students were the learners and beginning reading skills were the dependent measures, the Bursuk study involved tenth-graders as subjects and reading comprehension as the dependent measure. Arter and Jenkins (1979) concluded that the modality model was invalid and, given current limitations in educational assessment and techniques, modality instruction was not applicable at that time.

Tarver and Dawson (1978) also reviewed many studies from 1968-1978 which investigated the interaction between

perceptual modality preference and method of teaching reading. Several of these studies were included in the Arter & Jenkins review. Three questions were addressed by the researchers when reviewing the studies: 1) Is there a significant interaction between modality preference and method of teaching reading; 2) does modality preference affect reading achievement regardless of method of teaching reading; 3) does method of teaching reading affect reading achievement regardless of modality preference? Thirteen of the 15 studies investigated demonstrated no positive interaction between modality preference and method of teaching reading. The authors indicate that there is little support for the modality strength concept. Bursuk (1971), previously mentioned in this review, and Lily & Kelleher (1973) were the two studies reporting a significant interaction. In regard to the Lily & Kelleher study, Tarver & Dawson (1978) concluded that rather than investigating preference-method interaction, this particular study showed the relative effects of reading and listening on recall. This is reported because those students regarded as visual learners recalled more story facts by actually reading stories while auditory students recalled more of the story facts while listening to stories being read to them. If this conclusion is true, then it is noteworthy to state that only one of the 15 studies showed an interaction effect between modality preference and teaching method. The researchers' evidence seems to indicate that modality

instruction as conceived in the 1960's is ineffective. In regard to questions two and three of the review, the authors found less clear evidence and added that further research needed to be completed in those areas.

Even though the literature indicated no positive interaction between modality preference and instructional method, Arter & Jenkins (1977) felt many educators accepted and adopted the ideas of modality instruction. Because of this, the researchers conducted a survey to see just what special educators felt about this subject. The population Arter & Jenkins (1977) surveyed consisted of 4,089 elementary, special education teachers in Illinois. Of the population, 40% were employed as teachers of the mentally retarded (MR), 17% were employed as teachers of the emotionally disturbed (ED), and 43% were teachers of the learning disabled (LD). A random sample of approximately 17%, drawn from each subpopulation, composed the experimental sample. A total of 700 questionnaires was sent out. These questionnaires were designed to gather information on the teacher's knowledge, perception, and use of the modality model. The survey also consisted of information on such background factors as education and experience of the teacher. Arter and Jenkins found that 87 percent of special education teachers in Illinois were familiar with the modality model. Of the teachers familiar with this, 99 percent believed that modality considerations should be a primary consideration in devising

any type of instructional task for children with learning disabilities. The researchers also indicated that 95 percent of these teachers believed that the modality argument was supported by research and that a child's learning is improved by the planning of instruction in relationship to their modality strengths.

Research on modality was not as plentiful in the 1980's as in the 1970's. This may be because many researchers had concluded modality instruction was not beneficial. Some reviews of research, however, continued to be written. Kampwirth and Bates (1980) discussed studies that investigated the issue and that had not been discussed in previous reviews of the literature. The two researchers covered only studies concerning children under ten years of age in which there was a clear attempt to compare auditory and visual modality preferences to visual and/or auditory methods of teaching words or other verbal symbols to these children. Two of the 22 studies reviewed did indicate "positive" results. Both studies, from the early 1970's, indicated that teaching to preferred modalities resulted in better reading ability. P. N. Daniel and R. S. Tacker (1974) found significant results favoring the preferred modalities idea when investigating the effects of auditory and visual modality preferences on the learning of CVC (consonant-vowel-consonant) pattern trigrams when these were taught either auditorally or visually. L. D. Waters (1973) found that when instructional reading approaches

were matched to third grader's perceptual strengths, greater reading achievement scores resulted. The remaining 20 studies either resulted in no clear evidence either way or demonstrated that teaching to the non-preferred modality produced better results than did teaching to the preferred modality. Larrivee (1981) also reviewed research relating to the identification of modality preferences and instruction of students in beginning reading. All studies were quite consistent in their findings of no method-by-modality interaction. Although the studies reviewed employed varied approaches to modality assessment and instructional techniques, Larivee concluded that the research did not support differential instruction based on modality preference.

Lewis (1983) reviewed misconceptions in regard to learning disabilities and reading instruction and concluded that there is little empirical evidence to support differential instruction for auditory or visual learners. Her primary recommendation for reading instruction of the learning disabled was allocating more time to reading instruction using a code-emphasis approach in the early stages and teaching skills directly with less time involving the off-task behavior of the student. That is, learning disabled children do not require different teaching strategies, but primarily more focused instruction time.

Research examining the issue of matching modality preference to reading instruction has been consistently

indicative of no positive academic gain, yet a strikingly similar issue was presented by Kaufman & Kaufman (1983) in the Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children-(K-ABC) in their discussion of Aptitude-Treatment-Interaction (ATI). ATI, as described by the Kaufmans, can be defined as the direct teaching of academic areas by methods that are geared to the child's most efficient mode of processing information. Kaufman & Kaufman state the Mental Processing Scales "hold the key to selecting the most appropriate strategies for teaching a given child" (p. 13). They further indicate

a child's preferred mode of processing information relates closely to his or her learning style, thereby providing insight into methods that may be quite effective for teaching specific content...There is an intuitive relationship between processing style on the K-ABC and teaching or learning style in the classroom...in addition, several research investigations have supported the notion that effective learning takes place when the mode of teaching matches an individual's preferred processing style (p. 13).

Although the K-ABC authors suggest direct implications for instructional planning, there is no supportive research base relating processing style as assessed on the K-ABC to instruction method. The authors do list references when discussing the sequential-simultaneous processing dichotomy and tentative research findings suggesting that the ATI

approach may be promising. However, researchers such as Salvia and Ysseldyke (1988) point out, "no data are presented to validate the K-ABC for use in educational planning (p.460)." Salvia & Hritcke (1984) also examined K-ABC research to determine if performance on the K-ABC could be positively linked to classroom teaching and pupil learning. All references cited by the Kaufmans pertaining to reading instruction were examined. The researchers indicate that the reports cited may suggest an advantage in considering processing abilities in reading instruction with first grade students. The degree of this advantage is left unclear. However, all evidence regarding preschoolers and students ranging in age from 6 to 9 years old is quite inconclusive regarding reading instruction.

In the years since the K-ABC was published, there has been virtually no published research linking K-ABC performance to specific instructional approaches. Ayres, Cooley, & Severson (1988) examined student's scores on the K-ABC in relation to educational programming based on the battery's identification of a particular student's sequential or simultaneous information processing strengths. The researchers looked at children who were identified as reading delayed. These children were administered a short form of the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Revised-(WISC-R), the K-ABC, and two novel learning tasks. These learning tasks were designed to require sequential or simultaneous processing

and were analogous to tasks in beginning reading. The Processing Scales of the K-ABC failed to predict differential performance on the parallel learning tasks.

Hooper and Willis (1989) discuss recent research and theoretical arguments in support of ATI approaches based on neuropsychological processing. Although empirical studies are less prevalent than theoretical intuitions, recent work in this area suggests a refinement of the earlier modality-instruction approach. Several studies described in the Hooper and Willis chapter on treatment for learning disabled children indicate that there may be differing optimal instructional approaches for beginning reading which can be matched to a processing strength. However, this is not the sight-words or phonics dichotomy of earlier decades, but rather the new question of how to most effectively teach word analysis skills. In the two empirical studies of reading instruction which demonstrated successful adaptation of instruction to processing strengths, the content of that instruction included word analysis (phonic) skills.

Current Views on Phonics

Phonics is a term that is often mentioned in much of the current literature today and Adams (1990) presents convincing evidence for the necessity of phonics instruction in her comprehensive overview and synthesis of reading research. The issue is no longer an "either sight-words or phonics" matter,

but involves how to include both approaches into the teaching of reading. Adams (1990) defines phonics as "referring to a system of teaching reading that builds on the alphabetic principle, a system of which a central component is the teaching of correspondences between letters or groups of letters and their pronunciations" (p. 50).

The goal of phonics is to develop the student's ability to read connected text independently. Adams presents as support for the importance of phonic instruction in learning to read, the point that many of the words in classroom texts are not ones which the child has come into contact with previously, and phonic strategies are necessary to identify these words. Carroll, Davies, & Richman (1971) researched the frequencies of words which students encounter when using classroom reading textbooks by sampling common textbooks for grades 3 through 8. They sampled 5,088,721 words from these textbooks and counted the number of times each different word occurred. A total of 86,741 different words were found in the sample. It was noted that 50 percent of the total sampled words made up only 109 common words (e.g., the, or, and, he). Many of these 109 words are similar to those noted by Dolch. However, these words do not carry the major content of the text. Ninety percent of the sample consisted of an additional 5,000 different words. Approximately 80,000 words remain in the final 10 percent of the sample and are words students encounter infrequently; yet these infrequent words carry the

meaning in the text. If the school-aged reader is going to encounter this many words in text which are very uncommon to him or her, the authors concluded that phonic skills are very important in order to help the student decode the words.

Juel and Roper/Schneider (1985) investigated the impact of connected text on children's word recognition skills in 11 classrooms. Children with phonic-oriented preprimers were far more successful in decoding pseudowords whose spelling-sound correspondence had not been explicitly taught. This finding can be useful when looking at the Carroll, et al. (1971) study described above because of the fact many of the words children are going to encounter in texts are nonfamiliar words. Phonic strategies enable children to identify the new and infrequent words which are continuously appearing in their texts.

Current research in reading suggests that attention to developing phonic skills for all children may be far more beneficial than focusing on a phonic/sight-word dichotomy, based on auditory and visual preferences. Fisher et al. (1978, cited in Rosenshine & Stevens, 1984) points out that in early grades the amount of time for which all students are engaged in phonics is found to be a strong predictor of their reading achievement. The key issue involves developing phonic analysis skills in all children. Phonic instruction may be incorporated in whole language or basal approaches as well as individualized instruction, but phonic strategy training needs to be included somewhere. Questions of how to best

incorporate phonic instruction into meaningful reading experiences is more promising than sight-words or phonic instruction based on modality preference.

Emergent Literacy and Beginning Reading

In addition to the argument that all children need to learn phonic strategies in beginning reading, Adams (1990) points out that those children who benefit the most from beginning reading instruction are those children who enter first grade with the most knowledge about reading. In the last decade, a tremendous amount of research has examined what happens in the homes of children where literacy is a priority. Called emergent literacy, this body of research has described the informal, foundational activities that prepare a child for success with systematic instruction (Teale & Sulzby, 1986, Allen & Mason, 1989). Cunningham (1991) summarizes these foundational activities as knowledge of print conventions, phonological or phonemic awareness, familiarity with print, recognition of some familiar printed words, and some knowledge of letter names and letter sounds.

Similarly, Klein, Peterson, & Simington (1991) state that the instruction of phonics introduces children to the decoding process. Success with phonic instruction, however, requires several prerequisite skills: 1) Significant skills in discriminating the different sounds (phonemic awareness); 2) recognition of some familiar words in print and; 3)

demonstrated interest in the reading process. Klein, et al (1991) indicate that these skills often develop informally in children as they interact with print in the environment. With this informal preparation, the child will most likely succeed in beginning reading instruction.

Phonemic awareness or the ability to discriminate different sounds in words has been shown to be of critical importance for success in beginning reading instruction and programs developing such skills are receiving increasing attention by researchers (Share, Jorm, Maclean, & Matthews, 1984). Although the results must be considered preliminary, several model programs offer supportive evidence for the effectiveness of developing early reading skills, particularly phonemic awareness, in children less likely to acquire them informally at home.

In the late seventies, a program with low-readiness first graders from Chicago's South Side was implemented (Wallach & Wallach, 1979). The Wallachs' program involved a practical instructional program that was developed to target children's phoneme identification skills. The child first learned to attend to the phoneme auditorally and then identified the beginning and ending speech sounds in a particular word. For instance, understanding that "ee" after the sound "mm" leads to making the word "me". The child learns a strategy that is applicable to a word to make the phoneme recognizable to him or her. One skill is not being learned in isolation. Three

key attributes characterize the program: 1) Helping the child recognize phonemes and match phonemes to print; 2) using the principle of cumulative mastery throughout; 3) applying what is known already to the task. The researchers found phonemic awareness skills can be taught and with great success.

Another promising approach to developing phonemic awareness in early reading instruction is seen in Joanna Williams (1979) program entitled the ABD's of Reading (analysis, blending, and decoding). The children ranging in age from 7 to 12 years involved in this program learn to auditorally analyze syllables into phonemes. From this, the child learns to blend phonemes into syllables and words. After proficiency in these auditory tasks, individual letter-phoneme correspondences and decoding are taught. When the child successfully completes the program, he or she is able to decode normally spelled words and pseudowords.

For two years, this program was implemented in New York City classrooms for learning-disabled children (Williams, 1980). The program was designed to be used with whatever reading program was already being used in the classroom at the time. The data indicated that the children who were administered the instructional program performed significantly better on a test of decoding than did the control children. Williams also found that the instructed children did acquire general decoding skills and strategies because they not only demonstrated superiority in reading words that were used in

instruction, but also demonstrated proficiency on novel words. Although learning disabled children were used as subjects in this particular study, Williams concluded most children can benefit from this sequence of learning. All children are more likely to do better with a structured approach such as this program. The child is given specific tasks and then has significant time for practice that involves feedback from a teacher.

Blachman's (1987) program in New Haven, CT involved two inner city schools and begins with developing phoneme discrimination. In this program, Blachman redesigned the reading curricula for two schools. She did not work with the students as in most studies of this type, but she did work with the teachers. The teachers were involved in workshops which considered the importance of helping children identify segments in speech, especially individual phonemes. Blachman helped the teachers with a series of thirty-minute lesson plans designed to help develop the child's awareness of individual words, syllables, and phonemes. Blachman emphasized that the teachers (classroom, reading, and special education teachers) all needed to "speak the same language." By improving communication with each other and by teaching the same skills in phonemes, blending, and beginning reading in general, there was much improvement among teaching skills in the studied schools. What is most beneficial is the fact that there was improvement in the children's reading proficiency.

These programs provide converging evidence that success with beginning reading instruction can be demonstrated when specific early reading skills are emphasized. Of special importance is phonemic awareness or skill in attending to and identifying sounds in spoken language before matching auditory phonemes to print equivalents.

While most educators do agree that phonics should be taught in beginning reading, the kind of phonics, how soon phonics should begin, and what method should be used are factors upon which some educators are unable to agree (Hillerich, 1983), and these issues will continue to be investigated and debated. Cunningham (1991) summarizes the current view when she states

if you had to choose between teaching either phonics or reading and writing, you would always choose reading and writing. But you don't have to make a choice. You can engage the children's minds and hearts in reading

....teach them how our alphabetic language works! (p. 1)

Although there continues to be debate regarding the instruction of phonics, the evidence suggests that phonic skill instruction is a valuable tool at the beginning stages of reading. Phonics is especially good if the content of words is already in the listening-speaking vocabulary of the reader. The child would know what the word means when it is spoken orally to him or her. The words just seem unfamiliar because these words are in printed form. If the child can

identify the word by "sounding it out" or by using another phonic strategy and thus recognize the word as familiar, he or she is better able to remember how to identify this word when it is encountered again. Even if the word is unknown in the child's vocabulary, phonic skills will provide strategies to decode the word. Recognizing that phonics is a tool toward success in reading instruction is an important factor for all educators to consider.

Summary

The emphasis of phonic instruction in beginning reading has been debated for decades, especially since the sight-words emphasis of the 1950's. The 1970's attempts to match instructional approaches, sight-words or phonics, to particular groups of children was largely unsuccessful. The newer approach, ATI, which argues for using the child's processing strengths to teach skills, likewise provides no applied research for teaching some children by primarily sight-words methods. Although very recent ATI research may offer insight on how best to teach phonic strategies, current views emphasize that all children need to learn phonological coding or phonics to be successful readers.

Recent research in the area of emergent literacy has added new insight to the issue of phonics in beginning reading. This examination of children's early reading knowledge, often acquired through informal experience at home,

has shown that success with school instruction requires acquaintance with print, knowledge of letter names, and an understanding of how spoken words can be separated into particular sounds (phonemic awareness). Attention to developing these prerequisite skills is proving to be more effective than instructional methods based on sight-words or phonic approaches.

Conclusions

Although the research on modality issues and reading instruction has shown basically no established evidence to support a sight-word versus phonic instructional method based on modality preference in regular or special education classroom instruction, this notion of a modality preference and instructional interaction still appears prevalent. While listening to teachers in graduate education classes, I have been made aware of continuing beliefs in the value of modality instruction. Discussions indicated that some elementary teachers and professors continue to believe that modality emphasis are important factors in beginning reading instruction and imply a phonic or sight-words approach. This is surprising in that the vast majority of published research in the area of beginning reading instruction and modality instruction has shown that matching modality preference and instructional method does not increase reading achievement.

School psychologists and learning disability specialists

may want to examine modality issues in their own schools to see if the phonics versus sight words approach to modality consideration and reading instruction is prevalent. To do this, a brief survey similar to that of Arter & Jenkins (1977) may be appropriate to see what beliefs are held in this area of beginning reading instruction. This survey could be completed without much effort and could help pinpoint rather quickly any beliefs that are held by teachers or administrators that may be considered largely ineffective according to current research. Inservices relating important research conducted by reading specialists current in the literature could prove to be very beneficial among all school personnel.

Psychologists and teachers need to fully understand that matching modality preference to beginning reading instruction in terms of phonics or sight words has not proven effective. There is little supportive research to validate modality/instruction issues in beginning reading, nor is there any substantive evidence to validate the use of the K-ABC in instructional planning for reading. Thus, if instructional planning is developed using data from the K-ABC, one needs to realize that links between testing and instructional strategies are not clearly established and whatever suggestions are made, evaluation of the effectiveness of these suggestions is necessary to establish a working program for each child.

An area of increasing importance to school psychologists and other special needs service personnel is that of early literacy skills. Emergent literacy research has shown that learning to read does not begin in the first grade or even kindergarten. Those children who do well with school instruction are those children with several years of informal interaction with print at home or in preschool (Adams, 1990; Teale & Sulzby, 1986; Allen & Mason, 1989). As programs are developed to better meet the needs of children less familiar with print, school psychologists may receive fewer referrals from kindergarten and first graders with reading delays and perhaps encourage schools to adapt curricular practices consistent with the insights of emergent literacy.

Reading Recovery is a program that can be presented as a synthesis of many issues brought out in this review. Marie Clay's program (1979) is targeted toward helping the first grade child labeled "at risk for failing" to learn to read. The program is designed to help the bottom 10-20% of the class within an average of 12-20 weeks.

A trained teacher observes the child's reading behavior to find out about the child's current skills to help the child learn to read. Each child in the program receives daily, 1/2 hour individualized instruction outside the classroom. The goal involves the child gaining effective strategies for reading text. In order to develop these strategies, the child reads and writes daily, even if not conventional reading and

writing at first. Each day, a new, more difficult book is introduced in order for the child to read without the help of his or her teacher. A challenge is made by the teacher in which sentences and phrase structures of the text are taken into account. The child, when engaged in this program,

is not expected to predict the precise upcoming word on the basis of syntax or meaning; they are taught to check potential responses made on the basis of one source of information (structure, meaning, phonology, orthography) with other sources of information (Clay, p. 87).

It has been discovered that even the very lowest children involved in this program have usually caught-up or even passed the reading skills of their peers by the 2nd or 3rd grades (Napolitano, 1991). Reading Recovery is a program that shows educators how to adapt instruction to best meet the needs of children getting off to a slow start in learning to read and integrate the development of phonic skills into meaningful reading.

Although research and program development continue in the area of beginning reading instruction, current research cannot be beneficial if professionals do not keep up-to-date in regard to reading instruction and share information across regular and special education boundaries. Keeping current in the literature is especially necessary in order for school psychologists to give accurate recommendations to teachers regarding beginning reading instruction.

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