

I DO know what is contributing unnecessarily to reading failure:

1) Teachers do not know the alphabetic code, frequently referred to as the alphabetic principle, and they DON'T KNOW HOW IT WORKS. They really don't, even if they incorporate phonics instruction. They too frequently see spelling in terms of individual letters that have sound and those that don't; i.e. silent letters. The code needs to be seen as individual letters (for sure) as well as fixed combinations of two, three, or four letters which may represent one or more sounds when seen in isolation, but representing only one sound when in a given word.

2) They see the five vowels as either long or short. (This is unfortunate terminology. Vowels are not long or short any more than they are thin or fat!) Beyond this, learning to read (decode) fluently and accurately is a process that should be basically related to written spelling, not reading; the purpose of reading is to comprehend text, not teach phonics.

3) It is physically impossible to be sounding out words (decoding) and comprehending text at the same time; trying to do this is what creates frustration. These are two distinctly different neurological processes -- decoding and comprehension. Decoding has to be in place and function at an automatic level of response before comprehension can occur. They can not be done simultaneously anymore than I can whistle and sing at the same time!

4) Practice oral reading is important in the early grades, though most teachers stress silent reading: Reading is essentially translating print to speech. Silent reading didn't occur until the 4th century when it was discovered that's what St. Jerome was doing one day!

5) Writing words is important, not just reading them, i.e. employing multisensory learning.

6) As soon as polysyllabic words are introduced, teaching prefixes, roots and suffixes should be introduced with every word taught to spell. Special attention should be given to prefixes, since suffixes essentially do not effect meaning, rather just part of speech, and;

7) Teaching sight words from the start, **they are the thalidomide of reading instruction**, in so far as our brains do not have good "delete" buttons: It is very difficult to develop a particular neurological

response pattern in which words are perceived as symbols of meaning when in fact they represent a sequence of phonograms representing speech sounds which, when sequenced, represent meaning.

What is amazing is so many do figure out the code or they have inordinately fine memories for reading, but a little shaky for spelling!

Lastly, it doesn't matter what scientific research has shown to be true over the years, teachers teach what they want to BELIEVE. No matter what the irrefutable facts are, they filter them through their psycho/social philosophy of learning theory, not through a knowledge base of facts about the code. The facts of truth get rationalized as irrelevant. It is belief, not knowledge, that drives their instruction.

Reading reform is occurring; however, it is in the private sector of homeschooling which is totally committed to direct, systematic phonics instruction, and the best of it with a multisensory component. So take heart!

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