



Reading Proficiency: Differences That Matter

A Closer Look at High Risk Populations - Literacy Development & Practices That Work

Follow Up Questions & Answers with Dr. Louisa Moats



What is your objection to balanced literacy?

I wrote a long paper about this years ago and nothing has changed (Whole Language Lives On: The Illusion of Balanced Literacy Instruction). You can access it here: <http://www.idonline.org/article/6394/>

Have you considered creating a practice assessment that would give school districts an idea of what their teachers know or don't know? Or one for professors?

I and other colleagues have developed many such assessments. You can find my original assessment in Speech to Print. Malt Joshi, Emily Binks-Cantrell, Nancy Mather, Joanne Carlisle, and Louise Spear-Swerling have all published papers that include tests for teachers and/or their professors. I am in favor of using such assessments only as a precursor to good professional development that promises to teach the content. I can also recommend the Certification Exam for Educators of Reading Instruction (CEERI), sponsored by the International Dyslexia Association, as an independent verification of a teacher's knowledge base.

Why don't reading levels matter?

I criticized "leveled books" but not the global idea of reading "levels" as measured by valid, standardized tests that compare students to a norm. Those are best expressed by standard scores and percentile ranks. The key to matching students to instruction is their performance on phonological awareness testing, their knowledge of phonic correspondences, their spelling errors, their rate of reading words and passages, and their language comprehension – not whether they are on "Level E" text or "Level N" text. The leveled texts are not sequenced according to a logical progression of decoding skills and therefore students must resort to looking at pictures, guessing from context, or memorizing in order to read them. Those methods are not consistent with scientific research how kids learn to read and how we should be teaching them.

What do you mean by cueing systems?

Mercifully, if you asked this question, you escaped some very bad ideas that pervade reading education. I suggest looking up some good articles by Kerry Hempenstall, an Australian professor who has been writing critiques for years. www.iferi.org/iferi_forum/viewtopic.php?t=701

How would you differentiate reading instruction for a student with an IQ of 95 vs an IQ of 75?

It would depend on their reading skills, not their IQ. Phonological processing? Language comprehension? Other aspects of language processing? Memory for print patterns and words? Fluency and automaticity? Interests and background? Etc.

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2017 Speaker Biographies

Diane August is a Managing Researcher at the American Institutes for Research (AIR). At AIR she is responsible for directing the English-language learner work. Her area of expertise is policy, research, and technical assistance related to the education of pre-school and school age English learners (ELs). Dr. August brings 40 years of experience in the many aspects of educating language-minority children. Prior to her position at AIR, she was a Senior Research Scientist at the Center for Applied Linguistics where she also directed federally-funded studies on the development of literacy in English-language learners. She served as Co-Principal Investigator of at the IES-funded National Research and Development Center on English language Learners where she developed, implemented and evaluated innovative STEM programs for secondary school ELLs. She has been a Senior Program Officer at the National Academy of Sciences where she was study director for the Committee on Developing a Research Agenda on the Education of Limited English Proficient and Bilingual Students. Dr. August has worked as a teacher, school administrator, legislative assistant, Grants Officer for the Carnegie Corporation, and Director of Education for the Children's Defense Fund. In 1981, she received her Ph.D. in education from Stanford University, and in 1982 completed a postdoctoral fellowship in psychology also at Stanford. She has published widely in journals and books.

Nadine Gaab is an Associate Professor of Pediatrics at Boston Children's Hospital and the Harvard Medical School and a member of the faculty at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. She received a PhD in Psychology from the University of Zurich in Switzerland in 2004 and did postdoctoral training at Stanford University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She joined the faculty at Boston Children's and Harvard Medical School in 2007. Her current research within the Laboratories of Cognitive Neuroscience addresses contemporary challenges of education with neuroscientific methods from infancy to adulthood. Her work primarily focuses on auditory, language and music processing in the human brain and its applications for the development of typical and atypical language and literacy skills. The Gaablab utilizes structural and functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) as well as behavioral measurement tools and is currently working on various research questions such as (a) Which brain learns to read best under which circumstances? (b) How do environmental factors influence the brain's ability to read? (c) Can neuroscience help to improve the early identification of children at risk for reading impairments? and (d) What factors are important for shaping a 'resilient' (reading) brain? The Gaablab employs cross-sectional and longitudinal study designs and works closely with over 20 private and public schools within the Greater New England area.

Louisa Moats has been a teacher, psychologist, researcher, graduate school faculty member, and author of many influential scientific journal articles, books, and policy papers on the topics of reading, spelling, language, and teacher preparation. Dr. Moats developed the content and methods of LETRS over many years as an instructor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, St. Michael's College in Vermont, the Dartmouth Medical School Department of Psychiatry, and the University of Texas, Houston as Co-Principal Investigator of an NICHD Early Interventions Project in Washington, DC public schools. Dr. Moats was also Principal Investigator on two small business innovation research (SBIR) grants from the National Institutes of Health awarded to Sopris West. She led the committee that developed the International Dyslexia Association's Knowledge and Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading.

Dr. Moats is also the lead author of LANGUAGE!Live, a structured language, blended learning program for adolescent poor readers. Dr. Moats' awards include the prestigious Samuel T. and June L. Orton award from the International Dyslexia Association, for outstanding contributions to the field, and the Eminent Researcher Award from Learning Disabilities Australia.

Julie A. Washington is a professor and the program director in Communication Sciences and Disorders. In addition, Washington is an affiliate faculty of the Research on the Challenges of Acquiring Language and Literacy initiative and the Urban Child Study Center at Georgia State. Her work focuses on understanding cultural dialect use in African American children with a specific emphasis on the impact of dialect on language assessment, literacy attainment and academic performance. Her work with preschoolers has focused on understanding and improving the emergent literacy skills necessary to support later reading proficiency in high-risk groups, with a special focus on the needs of children growing up in poverty in urban contexts. Currently, Washington is a principal investigator on the Georgia Language Disabilities Research Innovation Hub, funded by the National Institutes of Health – Eunice Shriver National Institute on Child Health and Human Development. This research hub is focused on improving early identification of reading disabilities in elementary school aged African American children, and includes a focus on children, their families, teachers and communities.