



Big Ideas in Beginning Reading: Overview

Big Ideas in Beginning Reading (BIBR) focuses on the *five BIG IDEAS of early literacy*:

- *Phonemic Awareness*: The ability to hear and manipulate sounds in words.
- *Alphabetic Principle*: The ability to associate sounds with letters and use these sounds to form words.
- *Fluency with Text*: The effortless, automatic ability to read words in connected text.
- *Vocabulary*: The ability to understand (receptive) and use (expressive) words to acquire and convey meaning.
- *Comprehension*: The complex cognitive process involving the intentional interaction between reader and text to convey meaning.

* Big Ideas are the basis for effective reading curriculum and instruction.

* Big Ideas inspire the measures we use.

BIBR content available from the *University of Oregon's Center on Teaching and Learning* includes definitions and descriptions of the research and theories behind each of the big ideas, describes how to assess the big ideas, and provides information on how to teach the big ideas including instructional examples.

Where did the Big Ideas come from?*

In 1997, congress asked the NICHD, along with the U.S. Department of Education, to form the **National Reading Panel** to review research on how children learn to read and determine which methods of teaching reading are most effective based on the research evidence.

The panel included members from different backgrounds, including school administrators, working teachers, and scientists involved in reading research.

Why was the National Reading Panel formed?

Many of the nation's children have problems learning to read. If they don't get the help they need, these children will fall behind in school and struggle with reading throughout their lives.

Although parents, teachers, and school officials work hard to help kids learn to read, there have been many different ideas about what ways of teaching reading worked the best - and some ideas contradicted each other.

Congress asked the NICHD and the U.S. Department of Education to form the National Reading Panel to evaluate existing research about reading and, based on the evidence, determine what methods work best for teaching children to read.

What did the National Reading Panel do?

Specifically, congress asked the panel to:

- Review all the research available (more than 100,000 reading studies) on how children learn to read.
- Determine the most effective evidence-based methods for teaching children to read.

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- Describe which methods of reading instruction are ready for use in the classroom and recommend ways of getting this information into schools.
- Suggest a plan for additional research in reading development and instruction.

In addition, the National Reading Panel held public hearings where people could give their opinions on what topics the panel should study.

What are the findings of the National Reading Panel?

The National Reading Panel's analysis made it clear that the best approach to reading instruction is one that incorporates explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, systematic phonics instruction, methods to improve fluency, and ways to enhance comprehension.

The following is a summary of the panel's findings:

Concept	Description	Finding
Phonemic Awareness	Means knowing that spoken words are made up of smaller parts called phonemes. Teaching phonemic awareness gives children a basic foundation that helps them learn to read and spell.	The panel found that children who learned to read through specific instruction in phonemic awareness improved their reading skills more than those who learned without attention to phonemic awareness.
Phonics Instruction	Phonics teaches students about the relationship between phonemes and printed letters and explains how to use this knowledge to read and spell.	The panel found that students show marked benefits from explicit phonics instruction, from kindergarten through 6th grade.
Fluency	Fluency means being able to read quickly, knowing what the words are and what they mean, and properly expressing certain words - putting the right feeling, emotion, or emphasis on the right word or phrase. Teaching fluency includes guided oral reading, in which students read out loud to someone who corrects their mistakes and provides them with feedback, and independent silent reading where students read silently to themselves.	The panel found that reading fluently improved the students' abilities to recognize new words; read with greater speed, accuracy, and expression; and better understand what they read.
Comprehension: Vocabulary instruction	Teaches students how to recognize words and understand them.	The panel found that vocabulary instruction and repeated contact with vocabulary words is important.
Comprehension: Text comprehension instruction	Teaches specific plans or strategies students can use to help them understand what they are reading	The panel identified seven ways of teaching text comprehension that helped improve reading strategies in children who didn't have learning disabilities. For instance, creating and answering questions and cooperative learning helped to improve reading outcomes.

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Concept	Description	Finding
Comprehension: Teacher Preparation and comprehension strategies instruction	Refers to how well a teacher knows things such as the content of the text, comprehension strategies to teach the students, and how to keep students interested.	The panel found that teachers were better prepared to use and teach comprehension strategies if they themselves received formal instruction on reading comprehension strategies.
Teacher Education in Reading Instruction	Includes how reading teachers are taught, how effective their methods of teaching reading are, and how research can improve their knowledge of teaching students to read.	In general, the panel found that studies related to teacher education were broader than the criteria used by the panel. Because the studies didn't focus on specific variables, the panel could not draw conclusions. Therefore, the panel recommended more research on this subject.
Computer Technology in Reading Instruction	Examines how well computer technology can be used to deliver reading instruction.	Because few studies focused on the use of computers in reading education, the panel could draw few conclusions. But, it noted that all of the 21 studies on this topic reported positive results from using computers for reading instruction.

How were the findings of the National Reading Panel used?

The findings of the National Reading Panel are highlighted in President Bush's plan for improving education—the No Child Left Behind Act.

The NICHD, the National Institute for Literacy, and the U.S. Department of Education also united to form the Partnership for Reading.

The Partnership is an effort to distribute evidence-based reading research - such as the findings of the National Reading Panel—to those who can benefit the most from it. The Partnership works to ensure that the methods of reading instruction used in the classroom reflect evidence-based methods, such as those put forth by the National Reading Panel.

Additional Resources

To get more information about NICHD Publications and Materials about Reading, visit:
http://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/national_reading_panel.cfm

To learn more about the National Reading Panel, visit:
<http://www.nationalreadingpanel.org/default.htm>

*Content retrieved from the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, NIH, DHHS.