

**“The main story  
tells how well  
American students  
in grades 4, 8 and 12  
are able to read.”**

NAEP 1998 Reading Report Card  
for the Nation and the States  
National Center for Education Statistics  
US Department of Education

In 1998, the average reading scale score of Grade 4 students in Wisconsin was 224. This was higher than that of students across the nation (215).

Only one state (Connecticut) had a statistically higher average score for Grade 4 students than Wisconsin.

In 1998, the average reading scale score of Grade 8 students in Wisconsin was 266. This was higher than that of students across the nation (261).

Only two states (Connecticut and Maine) had statistically higher average scores for Grade 8 students than Wisconsin.

**When Reading Instruction Involves Real Reading  
with a Focus on Comprehension,  
It is a Consistent Winner over Skills  
in Scientific Quantitative Experimental Method  
Comparison Studies**

**Reading attitudes were significantly higher  
McKenna (1995)**

**Read more in school  
Had more sophisticated selection strategies  
Read more at home  
Merver and Heibert (1989)**

**Better scores on standardized comprehension measures  
Better scores on writing samples  
Hagerty, Hiebert and Owens (1989)**

**Stronger on reading comprehension tests  
Stronger on story retelling tests  
Stronger on concepts of about books and print  
Equal on skills and reading readiness measures  
Morrow, O'Conner and Smith (1990)**

**Significantly better on all measures  
including tests of phonics and reading attitudes  
Eldredge (1991)**

**Equal gains on phonemic awareness skills and spelling  
Equal gains on reading comprehension  
Klesius, Griffith and Zielonka (1991)**

**Read more books and magazines after school**  
**Able to name more favorite book titles and authors**  
**Out perform on a variety of tests including**  
**story retelling, story rewriting, reading comprehension**  
**and oral and written story creation**  
**Equal performance on standardized measures of reading and language**  
**Morrow (1992, 1996)**

**Significant differences in reading motivation and behaviors**  
**More motivated to read**  
**spent more time reading independently**  
**engaged in book and story discussions more frequently**  
**took more books home to read**  
**spent more time reading with family members**  
**Gambrell (1996)**

**Comparable increases in use of written characteristics**  
**Comparable increases in fluency**  
**Equal performance on story retelling**  
**Equal performance on tests of oral reading**  
**More engaged in written language at school**  
**Wrote more in school**  
**Read more at home**  
**Parents observed a keen interest in literacy**  
**Freppon (1995)**

**Better gains in the use of literary language**  
**Purcell-Gates, McIntyre and Freppon (1995)**

**Results favorable to real reading though both groups read a lot**  
**Reutzel and Cooter (1990)**

**“This set of studies suggests that students who do more real reading have better attitudes toward reading, read more, do as well as traditional students on tests if the focus is on form, do as well or better on more communicative tests and show better development of the kind of language used in books.”**

**“Method comparison studies that involve groups that clearly differ in the amount of real reading done present results consistent with studies of older children and adults: More reading typically results in better literacy development.”**

Stephen D. Krashen, 1999  
*Three Arguments Against Whole Language  
and Why They Are Wrong*

**“Much of our competence in reading and in literacy in general comes from one source: voluntary free reading. Free reading profoundly improves our reading ability, our writing ability, our spelling, our grammar and our vocabulary”**

**“Correlations between the amount of self-reported reading people do and scores of measures of literacy achievement are nearly always positive.”**

**“In-school free reading programs such as sustained silent reading programs (SSR) in which children select their own reading material and are not tested on what they have read, have been shown to be consistently superior to skill oriented programs in literacy development as long as the programs run a minimum of one academic year.”**

**“Children read more when they have access to interesting reading materials.”**

**“Two kinds of evidence confirm the importance of the school library. First, children get a substantial percentage of their material from libraries. A second kind of evidence is a series of recent studies showing that better libraries are related to better reading, as measured by standardized tests of reading comprehension.”**

**“Among the best predictors of the NAEP performance was the number of books per student in the school library. Access to print in general was a powerful predictor of NAEP scores... Access to books was a significant predictor of reading achievement even when poverty was controlled, however, which strongly suggested that access to books is the crucial factor. Access to books is also a significant predictor of SAT scores. A state’s school library holdings as well as per capita public library circulation were independent and significant predictors of SAT scores.”**

**“Time devoted to phonics was a negative predictor: More time for phonics meant lower NAEP scores. When this effect of poverty was controlled, [no relationship was found] between phonics instruction and NAEP scores. Access to books was a significant predictor of reading achievement even when poverty was controlled, however, which strongly suggested that access to books is the crucial factor.”**

Jeff McQuillan, 1998  
*The Literacy Crisis: False Claims and Real Solutions*

**"A strong research base supports the importance of access to books. Children who are allowed to self-select to read and who have access to varied sources of print materials in their classrooms, school libraries, town libraries and at home, read more and read more widely, both for pleasure and for information. Children who do a substantial amount of voluntary reading demonstrate positive attitudes toward reading, and these students tend to be the best readers."**

*Providing Books and Other Prints Materials  
for Classroom and School Libraries:  
A Position Statement of the International Reading Association  
International Reading Association, 1999*

**"It is easy to dismiss the issue addressed in this position statement. Providing access to books is not controversial, nor does it achieve the same high profile as other educational concerns that seem to be more pressing. However, among all the issues we face few concern a more basic educational need; that our children have access to current, quality literature. We must never allow that to go unaddressed."**

*Providing Books and Other Prints Materials  
for Classroom and School Libraries:  
A Position Statement of the International Reading Association  
International Reading Association, 1999*

**180 days in a school year**

**Each child should be able to select  
a new book each day.**

**7 books per child  
in a classroom library**

**20 books per child in a school library**

**1 new book per child added  
to a classroom library every year**

**2 new books per child added  
to a school library every year**

*Providing Books and Other Prints Materials  
for Classroom and School Libraries:  
A Position Statement of the International Reading Association  
International Reading Association, 1999*

**Children become fluent readers when they have opportunities to practice reading. Without appropriate access to books, children will be taught to read, but will not develop the habit of reading. If schools fail to provide children with an opportunity to practice skills in the meaningful contexts of literature, substantial numbers of children will choose not to read for pleasure or information on their own.**

**Research has found a relation between the amount of time that children read for fun on their own and reading achievement.**

**Children in classrooms without literature collections read 50% less than children in classrooms with such collection.**

*Providing Books and Other Prints Materials  
for Classroom and School Libraries:  
A Position Statement of the International Reading Association  
International Reading Association, 1999*

**But what about the Foorman Study?  
A.K.A. the Houston Study?  
A.K.A. the Open Court Study?**

**The Foorman Study asked this question...**

Which instructional reading approach or method, or combination of approaches or methods, provided in which setting or combination of settings, under which conditions and teacher-student interactions, provided for what period of time and by which type of teacher, have the greatest impact on well-defined elements of reading behavior and reading-related behaviors for which children, for how long, and for what reasons?

**However...**

The study only looked at four approaches in two grade levels (first and second) in one geographic area (Houston) for a short period of time (less than a school year) according to a limited list of variables.

***Should the results of this study be used to set policy decisions?  
Are the results generalizable to the students in our district?***

## **The Foorman study also asked this question...**

Will children who receive explicit instruction in the alphabetic principle with an emphasis on letter-sound correspondences show greater growth over one school year of classroom instruction relative to children receiving less explicit instruction focusing on spelling patterns or children receiving implicit instruction in the alphabetic principle?

## ***But fails to ask these questions...***

*Why would you want to limit teachers to one technique or the other?  
Why not encourage teachers to use multiple techniques in trying to reach the needs of the students?*

*Why the importance of showing greater growth in this area? Does it lead to differences in comprehension? Does it lead to enhanced learning in other areas? Does it lead to changes in behaviors? Do students read more?*

*Why limit a study to examining a single variable? Why not attempt to explain how other classroom factors, student factors and external factors play a role in learning to read?*

The Foorman study sets up a false situation (teachers have to pick between this approach or that) to produce results in an area that in and of itself is not as important (ability to decode without understanding, learning or behavioral change) by reducing the complexity of teaching and learning to simple contrived cause-effect relationships.

## **FOORMAN FALSE CLAIM #1:**

The Open Court Beginning Reading Program  
is the best beginning reading program

### **THE CLAIM IS...**

Children taught with the Open Court beginning reading program, which emphasizes the direct, systematic instruction of phonemic awareness and phonics skills, had test scores on word skills, word identification and reading comprehension that were superior to those taught with other reading series.

### **THE TRUTH IS...**

The Foorman study never measured the effectiveness the Open Court beginning reading program against any other major commercial reading program. It was never compared to Harcourt Brace, Houghton-Mifflin, Rigby, Scholastic, Scott Foresman or Wright Group beginning reading programs.

## **FOORMAN FALSE CLAIM #2**

Direct systematic phonics is better than embedded or implicit phonics

### **THE CLAIM IS...**

Children taught with direct systematic phonics (Open Court) did better on decoding (letter identification, word identification and word attack with pseudo words) than children taught with other methods

### **THE TRUTH IS...**

The Foorman study manipulates statistical analysis by grouping extreme scores and scores across-grade levels to show differences. These differences did not exist when the scores for first graders are separated from second graders and the two extreme scores which skewed the data were eliminated. The majority of scores did not show any substantial differences among teaching approaches when examined by grade-score outcomes. Even if they had, superior skills in decoding did not have an impact on scores in reading comprehension, spelling and other areas.

## **The Foorman Study (When data are disaggregated)**

### Decoding (Rankings)

#### First Grade

1. Direct Phonics (School 5)
2. Implicit Phonics (School 8)
3. Direct Phonics (School 6)
4. Direct Phonics (School 7)
5. Direct Phonics (School 4)
6. Implicit Phonics (School 6)
7. Implicit Phonics (School 2)

### Decoding (Rankings)

#### Second Grade

1. Implicit Phonics (School 6A)
2. Direct Phonics (School 6)
3. Implicit Phonics (School 8)
4. Implicit Phonics (School 6B)
5. Direct Phonics (School 7)
6. Implicit Phonics (School 2)

**Some Direct Schools were > Implicit Schools**

**Some Implicit Schools were > Direct Schools**

If the method was the significant factor, why was there variation among Direct Phonics schools?

If the method was the significant factor, why was there variation among Implicit Phonics schools?

If the method was the significant factor, why was there variation between Direct Phonics and Implicit Phonics schools?

Could the variations be in part due to differences in teachers or students or both? Could differences be in part due to the alignment of the assessment measures better with one method than the other?

## **FOORMAN FALSE CLAIM #3**

*Phonics is better than Whole Language*

### **THE CLAIM WAS...**

Children taught with direct systematic phonics (Open Court) did better in reading measures than children taught with Whole Language methods

### **THE TRUTH IS...**

Again any differences shown by the Foorman study occurred through the use of statistical analysis which manipulated the grouping of extreme scores and scores across-grade levels. The majority of scores did not show any substantial differences among teaching approaches when examined by grade-score outcomes. There was no statistical significant differences among groups in comprehension, vocabulary and spelling. Whole Language classrooms actually showed significant positive differences on measures of attitudes and behaviors.

**Actually...**

**The scores on the Formal Reading Inventory showed a standard score average of 83.1 for Whole Language Students and 81.8 for Open Court students.**

## **And besides...**

Unlike other researchers, the Foorman study did not try to identify teachers who were well-prepared and experienced with the whole language philosophy to use in their comparative study of methodology. The researchers “created” whole language teachers during training in a limited number of summer workshops. In reality, the teachers were only trained in how to teach embedded or implicit phonics. The teachers were never prepared to create comprehensive classrooms and programs based on the whole language philosophy. To say that the Foorman study used whole language teachers is unsubstantiated. To say that the Foorman study compared phonics programs to whole language programs is also unsubstantiated.

## **The Foorman Study (When data are disaggregated)**

### Comprehension (Rankings) First Grade

1. Open Court (School 5)
2. Open Court (School 6)
3. Whole Language (School 8)
4. Whole Language (School 6)
5. Open Court (School 4)
6. Whole Language (School 2)
7. Open Court (School 7)

### Comprehension (Rankings) Second Grade

1. Whole Language (School 8)
2. Whole Language (School 6B)
3. Whole Language (School 6A)
4. Open Court (School 6)
5. Open Court (School 7)
6. Whole Language (School 2)

**Some OC Schools were > WL Schools**

**Some WL Schools were > OC Schools**

If the method was the significant factor, why was there variation among Open Court schools?

If the method was the significant factor, why was there variation among Whole Language schools?

If the method was the significant factor, why was there variation between Open Court and Whole Language schools?

Could the variations be in part due to differences in teachers? or students? or both?

# **Reported Results from the Foorman Houston Open Court Study**

1. Phonological Processing

Direct Code (DC) > Embedded Code (EC)  
Implicit Code (IC)

2. Word Reading

DC > EC and IC

3. End-of-Year Achievement: Decoding

DC > EC and IC

4. Vocabulary

NO DIFFERENCES

5. End-of-Year Achievement: Comprehension

NO DIFFERENCES

6. End-of-Year Achievement: Spelling

NO DIFFERENCES

7. Attitudes

IC > DC and EC

8. Behaviors

IC > DC and EC

## **Eleven Major Problems with the Foorman Houston Open Court Study**

1. Sample Heterogeneity and Definition
2. Poorly Defined Interventions
3. The Problem of Inadequate Control Groups
4. Inadequate Intervention Time and Transfer Effects
5. Effects of Past and Concurrent Instruction
6. Method and Teacher Effects
7. Generalization and Maintenance Issues
8. Lack of Consistency Across Teachers
9. Parochial Scientific Methods and Measurement Practices
10. No external evaluators representing other paradigms, beliefs, programs, theories or philosophies.
11. Financial, political and professional-vested interest in seeing results interpreted in a certain way

**“First, the data for the direct instruction group show there is no significant difference between (1) the scores on Foorman’s word reading test achieved by first-grade children after one full year of the Direct Phonics basal reading program, and (2) those children beginning second grade who had not had Direct Phonics during their first-grade year and who had only the school district’s preexisting reading curriculum. *This is a flat contradiction of Foorman’s claim that children in Direct Phonics/ Direct Instruction group out performed the school district’s existing reading curriculum.*”**

Denny Taylor, 1998

*Beginning to Read and the Spin Doctors of Science:  
The Political Campaign to Change America’s Mind  
about How Children Learn to Read*

**“A second important finding for the Direct Phonics/ Direct Instruction group is that there is no significant difference between (1) the scores on Foorman’s phonological processing tests achieved by the first grade children after one full year of the Direct Phonics basal reading program and (2) those children beginning second grade who had not had Direct Phonics and who had only the school district’s pre-existing whole language program. *The bottom line is that the school district’s pre-existing reading curriculum, before Foorman, before phonemic awareness training and before systematic explicit phonics was just as effective as the Direct Phonics/Direct Instruction reading program.*”**

Denny Taylor, 1998

*Beginning to Read and the Spin Doctors of Science:  
The Political Campaign to Change America’s Mind  
about How Children Learn to Read*

**“A third important finding is that in the other three groups, the beginning second graders, who has not received any instruction in Foorman’s study, scored significantly better on her word reading test than the first grade children who had been subjected to a full year of [Foorman’s] reading “treatments” ...It is clear from the data that it was Foorman’s quasi-experimental treatment which had a negative impact on word reading scores of the first graders and we have to ask if Foorman’s study which created the “curriculum disability” to which she refers.”**

Denny Taylor, 1998

*Beginning to Read and the Spin Doctors of Science:  
The Political Campaign to Change America’s Mind  
about How Children Learn to Read*

**“Foorman and her colleagues made no attempt to falsify their hypothesis or refute their theory that training in phonological awareness and direct instruction in systematic explicit phonics is effective in improving beginning reading instruction. They failed to examine the effects of a clear sample bias on the word reading scores, the phonological processing scores, and the end-of year achievement scores. They ignored the fact that there was no significant difference in test scores between children at the end of the first grade Direct Phonics/Direct Instruction treatment and the beginning of second grade who had only experienced the districts’ existing reading curriculum. And disregarded the negative effect their study apparently had on test performance of the children in the three other groups.**

Denny Taylor, 1998

*Beginning to Read and the Spin Doctors of Science:  
The Political Campaign to Change America’s Mind  
about How Children Learn to Read*

“[The Foorman] study appeared to be based on 4 assumptions which caused the authors to **not** view reading, students, teachers and professional development broadly.”

**Assumption #1: Word level processing = Reading**

*Defines “reading” narrowly*

*Overemphasizes significant outcome measures  
like letter/word identification*

*Marginalizes non-significant outcome measures  
like comprehension, vocabulary, spelling, behaviors and attitudes*

**Assumption #2: Deprivation = Difference**

*Differences due to poverty are largely ignored*

**Assumptions #3 and 4:**

Instructional Method = Teaching & Training = Professional Development

*Only 30 minutes of daily instruction in the alphabetic principle investigated, not the 60 minutes of reading/language arts instruction or the 30 minute tutorial*

“Discretion is certainly warranted in promulgating conclusions from a single study or single line of research. We must be mindful that, particularly in schools in low-income communities, issues of curriculum and instruction must be considered with factors such as poverty, violence, drug abuse and deteriorating buildings. Policies likely to be successful in raising literacy throughout the nation will address the wider systems that promote or hinder children’s learning to read.”

*Discretion of Translation of Research to Policy:*

*A Case from Beginning Reading*

Taylor, Anderson, Au & Raphael, 1999

**“While we believe that research can and should inform decisions about policy and practice, we believe that literacy research cited to justify policy should reflect a broad understanding of literacy, meet high standards of quality, and have the potential to improve student achievement. Our analysis suggests that the [Foorman study] does not meet these criteria, although it has been cited as prime evidence to support policy decisions.”**

*Discretion in the Translation of Reading Research to Policy*  
Taylor, Anderson, Au & Raphael  
1999

**“In fact, the [Foorman study] failed to find significant differences on more than half their measures, including all of those addressing reading beyond the letter level... In the presentation and discussion of results, [Foorman] fails to acknowledge the narrow and highly specific nature of the findings. [She] fails to break out of the closed circle of decoding instruction and decoding tests. Results on any but the decoding tests are downplayed.”**

*Discretion in the Translation of Reading Research to Policy*  
Taylor, Anderson, Au & Raphael  
1999

**The Foorman results provide little credible evidence for the superiority of the Direct Code method:**

**First, the range of evidence is limited**

**Second, the groups that received the four methods were not initially equivalent**

**The Foorman study is an example of research that has been overly promoted by the media and misused by some policymakers and educational leaders in the search for answers to improving children's reading achievement. In and of itself, the study is not one upon which policy decisions should be based.**

*Discretion in the Translation of Reading Research to Policy*  
Taylor, Anderson, Au & Raphael  
1999

## **What about Decodeable Text?**

**“I submit that there exists not a single well-designed study that supports the exclusive use of decodable texts in beginning reading (or remedial instruction). I recently spent the better part of six weeks examining a number of studies that were suggested as supporting a recommendation for use of decodable texts. None of these studies offer support for the recommendation. None.**

**There *is* research support for providing children with *manageable* texts — texts they can read without too much difficulty. There is also evidence that some of the recently published reading series provide reading material that is quite difficult. But none of this suggests that a return to *Nat the Rat* is the solution.”**

Richard Allington, 1997-98  
*Introduction of the Overselling of Phonics  
for Teachers in Wisconsin*

## **What about Decodeable Text?**

**(A second opinion)**

**“To the incontrovertible finding that *only decodeable text provides children the opportunity to practice their new knowledge of sound-letter relationships*, all I can say again is that there is no evidence for this finding. To accept this proposition we would have to throw out much of the teacher-research that has taken place in the last ten-years...In thirty years of working with young children learning to read and write, I have never used texts such as those.”**

Denny Taylor, 1998

*Beginning to Read and the Spin Doctors of Science:  
The Political Campaign to Change America's Mind  
about How Children Learn to Read*

## **Concerns to Surface about Decodeable Texts**

- I. They do not provide students a meaningful context for reading. They are not a “real reading” experience.**

These are not “real” books. They are primarily created for the instructional purpose of practicing letter-sound skills. Since these are not real books that children will encounter in real life situations, this teaches a child that reading at school is different from reading real books outside of school. The two types of reading experiences are seen as different. They do not end up complimenting one another or allowing a child to use one situation to support and strengthen the other.

## **2. Meaning is compromised in creating decodeable texts.**

Since the focus is on creating a story with words a child can decode (though there is no consensus on how many words need to be decodeable before a text can be called decodeable), meaning is often compromised in creating decodeable texts. Having a child read stories that do not make much sense tells the child that making meaning while reading is not as important as saying the words right. Since pictures are used to convey the meaning of the story that can not be captured in the controlled vocabulary text, children often have to over rely on the pictures as a way of understanding the story. This teaches a child that it is the picture not the print that is important for making meaning.

**3. Decodeable texts are based on artificial, contrived, unnatural language patterns.**

Decodeable texts provide a poor model for oral language particularly for children with limited English proficiency. They provide a poor model for written language. As models they teach children to write only words they can spell. This will limit their written expression skills and strategies and reduce instructional insights for teachers.

**4. Decodeable texts do not promote the sort of lengthy engagement that leads to rereading of texts.**

There is very little joy in reading decodeable texts. They send a message that reading is not a joyous activity. They are often texts that children do not revisit. Without revisiting, confidence, comfort, fluency and positive habits are not fostered.