

Fletcher's PlaceTM Reading and Spelling Program



A SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH BASIS FOR FLETCHER'S PLACE AND THE READING REVOLUTION METHODOLOGY



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Fletcher's Place™: A Reading Revolution Program

Research-Based Principles We Use To Teach Children To Read

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Leave No Child Behind

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 instituted education reform to ensure that in the classroom, “no child would be left behind.”¹ In many schools around the United States, however, students are failing to keep up: In 2000, nearly 70% of fourth-graders in high poverty schools failed to reach basic reading level.² In response, the Department of Education has mandated that federal funds be spent on reading programs whose effectiveness has been proven; i.e., that are clearly supported by scientific research. Reading Revolution’s Fletcher’s Place Kindergarten and Pre-School program uses scientifically verified methodology that gives all students the skills and motivation they need to read with fluency, comprehension, and confidence.

To keep up with grade-level standards, children must begin to develop reading skills in early childhood: “...Success in learning to read is based in large part on developing language and literacy-related skills very early in life.”³ Fletcher’s Place uses Reading Revolution’s systematic, comprehensive instruction that provides the strong foundation imperative for future reading success and is effective for all children regardless of socioeconomic status, reading level, and literacy background.⁴

¹ No Child Left Behind Act, The: Executive Summary. (2002). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education. Available: <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/esea/exec-summ.html>

² Basic reading level determined by the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Reading Excellence Act: Overview. (2001) Available: <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/REA/overview.html>

³ Lyon, Dr. Reid G. How Do Children Learn to Read: Understanding How Sounds Are Connected to Print. Testimony before the Committee on Education and the Workforce, U.S. House of Representatives.

⁴ In 1999, the National Reading Panel published the “Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read,” which assessed “the status of research-based knowledge, including the effectiveness of various approaches to teaching children to read” (National Reading Panel (2000). *Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading*

This article examines the Fletcher's Place program in the five areas of instruction that the National Reading Panel has deemed essential for reading success: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension.⁵

B. Learning By Doing

Fletcher's Place uses a multi-sensory structured language approach that involves children's bodies, minds, and creativity to reach students of all learning styles. Since most young children learn kinesthetically, Reading Revolution teaches "learning by doing," as explained by renowned researcher and educator Louisa Moats:

"The brain responds to novelty and sensory involvement; that's why we learn better by doing than by listening. Some powerful approaches to phonological awareness, for example, emphasize mouth position.... [Some reading programs] use manipulative letters.... Hand gestures are employed for sweeping through sounds and blending them into words. All of these active techniques require the learner to select, classify, and consciously manipulate sounds and letters so that more thorough word learning occurs."⁶

The Fletcher's Place program is varied and experiential, providing students with motivation to develop reading skills and read for pleasure. Researchers agree that "children need automatic decoding skills, but they also need to acquire the motivation that comes from engagement in purposeful, meaningful, literacy tasks."⁷

Howard Gardner names seven distinct intelligences in his work *Multiple Intelligences*: visual, auditory/linguistic, spatial, interactive, intra-active, musical, kinesthetic/physical, and logical.⁸ Children of these intelligences learn in different ways. Reading Revolution's Fletcher's Place engages every intelligence and learning style through

instruction. Washington, DC: National Institute of Child and Health Development, page 1). This report compiled the results of scientific experimental or quasi-experimental studies that fit its "set of rigorous research methodological standards." Studies had to be published in English refereed journals, focus on the reading development of children from preschool to grade 12, and use experimental and control groups.

⁵ Murray, Amy Eckman. (2002). Reading's New Rules: ESEA Demands a Scientific Approach. *Education Update*, vol 44, #5.

⁶ Moats, L. C. (1998). Teaching decoding. *American Educator* 22

⁷ Allen, L. (1998) An Integrated Strategies Approach. *The Reading Teacher* vol 52 # 3. 225.

⁸ Gardner, Howard. (1993). *Multiple Intelligences: A Theory in Practice* New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.

songs, physically active and interactive games, use of manipulatives, independent Game Book activities, and numerous language opportunities.

Most elementary and pre-school students learn best through kinesthetic means—by physically touching, manipulating, or interacting with educational materials: “Children enter kindergarten as kinesthetic and tactual learners, moving and touching everything as they learn.”⁹ Accordingly, Fletcher’s Place gives students an effective physical/kinesthetic means of reading, spelling, and remembering words. Each letter is associated with a Sound Movement, a unique hand motion that relates to a connotation of its sound (e.g., the /s/ Sound Movement is a snakelike, slithering gesture) as well as to correct mouth and tongue placement for its accurate pronunciation. (E.g., for the /t/ Sound Movement, flick the pointer finger against the thumb just as the tongue flicks the roof of the mouth behind the top teeth.) Strategies such as the use of hand gestures to represent letters provide important motivation for young children.¹⁰

C. A Balanced Program

The No Child Left Behind Act calls for balanced, complete reading programs that teach all dimensions of literacy: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Reading Revolution’s Fletcher’s Place program is comprehensive and includes all aspects of effective reading instruction as set forth by the International Reading Association:

The panel determined that effective reading instruction includes teaching children to break apart and manipulate the sounds in words (phonemic awareness), teaching them that these sounds are represented by letters of the alphabet which can then be blended together to form words (phonics), having them practice what they’ve learned by reading aloud with guidance and feedback (guided oral reading), and applying reading comprehension strategies to guide and improve reading comprehension.¹¹

⁹ Stafford, Rita, and Dunn, Kenneth J. (1993). *Teaching Secondary Students Through Their Individual Learning Styles*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1993.

¹⁰ “The motivational value of associating letters with interesting characters or hand motions and incorporating this into activities and games that are fun is important for promoting young children’s learning.” (International Reading Association. (2000). *Summary of the National Reading Panel Report “Teaching Children to Read”* Newark, DE: International Reading Association.)

¹¹ International Reading Association.

Reading Revolution’s reading and spelling programs are balanced and complete, teaching phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.¹² The sections that follow explain how Fletcher’s Place teaches each of these skills and summarize the research-based principles guiding our methodology.

II. PHONEMIC AWARENESS

A. Manipulating Sounds

Experts confirm that phonemic awareness training is “necessary for beginning readers to be successful in decoding and learning words”¹³ and therefore an essential component of reading instruction. Fletcher’s Place teaches many phonemic awareness skills, all of which have been proven to effectively increase reading and spelling proficiency.¹⁴

Phonemic awareness instruction teaches children to focus on and manipulate the individual sounds, or phonemes, in spoken syllables and words.¹⁵ The National Reading Panel’s report, *Teaching Children to Read*, finds that phonemic awareness training is highly effective for students of varying abilities, grade levels, and socioeconomic backgrounds under a range of teaching conditions. Further, “...teaching phonemic awareness to children significantly improves their reading more than instruction that lacks any attention to phonemic awareness.” As found in the National Reading Panel study, phonemic awareness training increases students’ reading and spelling skills and the results last “well beyond the end of training.”¹⁶

Specifically, Fletcher’s Place uses games such as Cross It Out and Circle the Same to teach phoneme identity and categorization. Activities including Silly Mixed-Up Spelling and Word Toss require children to isolate, delete, add, and substitute sounds. The active game Sound Run is a kinesthetic way to teach the blending of phonemes and the segmentation of words.

¹² Fletcher’s Place, Reading Revolution’s kindergarten program, will occasionally be used as an example of Reading Revolution’s applied pedagogy.

¹³ Beers, Jim. What Should We Do About Reading Instruction? Leadership Letters. Scott Foresman. 2.

¹⁴ National Reading Panel, 8

¹⁵ National Reading Panel, 7

¹⁶ National Reading Panel, 7

B. From Phonemic Awareness to Fluency

Phonemic awareness is an essential prerequisite for studying phonics¹⁷ and phonics training is necessary for fluency. Fletcher's Place teaches all three skills in simple progression, giving students the background necessary to read fluently and comprehensively.¹⁸

In order to decode or sound out text, beginning readers must become aware of "the phonological structure of oral language." Once children are comfortable identifying and manipulating sounds, Fletcher's Place teaches the letter-sound correspondences that constitute phonics instruction. After practice reading decodable texts like the Little Book series, students will be able to recognize words by sight. Rapid word recognition leads to fluency, which in turn is vital for reading comprehension.

III. PHONICS

Phonics instruction is the most important word recognition strategy used by beginning readers.¹⁹ Fletcher's Place instruction is phonics-based, teaching students that there are "systematic and predictable relationships between written letters and spoken sounds."²⁰

Research states that a strong foundation of phonics knowledge is necessary for all good readers.²¹ As children progress in their literary education, they will refer back to the "deep and ready knowledge of

¹⁷ Fletcher J, Jack M., and Lyon, G. Reid (1998). Reading: A research-based approach. In Evers, W. (Ed.), *What's Gone Wrong in America's Classrooms?* Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 56.

¹⁸ "The connection between phonemic awareness, phonics, and spelling helps young readers learn to rapidly recognize words without having to sound out the words they read. The ability to recognize words quickly in turn helps promote reading fluency in young readers." (Beers, Jim. *What Should We Do About Reading Instruction?* Leadership Letters. Scott Foresman. 3)

¹⁹ Office of Elementary, Middle, Secondary, and Continuing Education, Office of New York City Literacy Guidance – PreK-3. *Reading for Results: Tutorial Assistance Subgrants 2002-2004*. Appendix C: Early Literacy Guidance – PreK-3. New York: The University of the State of New York, The State Education Department.

"...The development of phoneme awareness, the development of an understanding of the alphabetic principle, and the translation of these skills to the application of phonics in reading words are non-negotiable beginning reading skills that ALL children must master..." (Fletcher, J., Jack, M., and Lyon, G. Reid, 2).

²⁰ Office of Elementary, Middle, Secondary, and Continuing Education, Office of New York City Literacy Guidance – PreK-3, 22.

²¹ Lyon, Reid G.

spelling sound correspondence”²² afforded by early phonics instruction to decode, or sound out, new words.

A. Systematic, Explicit Phonics Instruction

Fletcher’s Place teaches phonics systematically and explicitly, using a well-defined and planned sequence of phonic elements. The National Reading Panel states that systematic, explicit phonics instruction is “a valuable and essential part of a successful classroom reading program” and “significantly more effective than instruction that teaches little or no phonics.”²³

As recommended by educator and researcher Louisa Moats, Fletcher’s Place begins phonics instruction with a limited set of letters introduced in a logical order of increasing complexity.²⁴ Each lesson teaches “one linguistic concept at a time, a sound or spelling....”²⁵ Children immediately begin reading and building words composed of these letters, adding more elements as they become comfortable with each sound or concept.

The superiority of systematic, explicit phonics instruction is especially evident in the progress of students with learning disabilities, of low achieving students, and of pre-schoolers, kindergarteners and first-graders from low-income families.²⁶ Systematic phonics instruction is also a proven preventative measure: the National Reading Panel study shows that it is “significantly more effective in preventing difficulties among at-risk readers” than programs with little or no phonics. Further, the NRP finds that phonics instruction is invaluable in a remedial capacity for both struggling and disabled readers.²⁷

IV. ALPHABETIC CONVENTIONS: SPELLING, SIGHT WORDS, LETTER NAMES, PRINT

²² Learning First Alliance. (1998). Every Child Reading: An action plan. Available: <http://www.learningfirst.org/readingaction.html>. p 12.

²³ National Reading Panel, 9

²⁴ “Systematic programs begin with a limited set of sound-symbol correspondences, a few consonants and one or two vowels, so that words can be built right away... children need cumulative practice building words with letters they know. Other consonants and vowels are added gradually to those already known” (Moats, 43).

²⁵ In systematic, explicit phonics instruction, “The phonics elements are taught in a logical order, simple to complex.... One linguistic concept at a time, a sound or a spelling is spotlighted in a lesson and constitutes the organizing principle of the lesson” (Moates, 46).

²⁶ National Reading Panel, 9

²⁷ International Reading Association

A. Spelling and Sight Words

Learning to spell should come hand in hand with learning to read. Fletcher's Place ensures that children acquire both skills by teaching common spelling patterns and phonetically regular words adding difficult, irregular words. Cognitive-development psychologist Dianne McGuinness asserts that "...in order to learn to spell, you must focus first on what is regular. By paying attention only to what is irregular, you have to remember each word as a unique visual pattern."²⁸

According to the Center for Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, successful primary-level reading instruction is

...consistent, well-designed, and focused. Teachers lead lessons where children receive systematic word recognition instruction on common, consistent letter-sound relationships and important but often unpredictable high-frequency words such as *the* and *what*.²⁹

Fletcher's Place bases each lesson on a new set of letter sounds, which students use to decode phonetically regular words. Most reading and spelling programs teach long lists of predictable, high frequency words as "sight words" when they are in actuality easily decodable words such as *and* or *jump* and thus require no memorization. Using the Reading Revolution methodology, students learn how to sound out high-frequency words that are phonetically regular.

Words such as *the* and *what* occur often in text but are spelled irregularly; Fletcher's Place teaches words with irregular spellings as words with "Clown Sounds." Students identify the irregularly spelled sound in the word rather than having to memorize the whole word. Students learn words with Clown Sounds in the context of sentences to help them decipher the words independently.

B. Learn Letter Sounds, Then Letter Names

According to systematic studies, teaching children letter sounds before letter names promotes good reading skills; teaching them in opposite order does not.³⁰ Fletcher's Place first teaches the sounds that

²⁸ McGuinness, Diane (PhD). (1997). *Why Our Children Can't Read*. New York, NY: Touchstone. 211

²⁹ Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement. (1998). *Improving the Reading Achievement of America's Children: 10 research-based principles* .

Available: <http://www.ciera.org/ciera/information/principles/principles.html>. 1.

³⁰ McGuinness, 213

letters make, permitting children to immediately begin sounding out words. Once students have the letter sound to letter shape association firmly in place, they are taught the conventional letter names.

Experts support this practice:

Reading specialists working with poor readers report that letter names get in the way of training automatic decoding skill and recommend that they not be taught until the child has a clear understanding of the fact that phonemes are the basis for our writing systems.³¹

C. Conventions of Print

In order to understand text, students must be aware of the conventions of print. Fletcher's Place progressively teaches children rules of directionality, capitalization, and punctuation: Text is read from left to right across a row, proceeding from the top to the bottom of the page; spaces separate words; capitals begin sentences and periods end them. In later lessons children learn more sophisticated concepts of print.

McGuinness characterizes visually scanning text from left to right as an unnatural act that can be difficult for some children.³² The concept of top to bottom, however, is easy for young readers to grasp. To avoid confusion, Reading Revolution first teaches children to read two-letter words from the top down. Once students have experience blending sounds into words, left-to-right directionality is taught. Tools such as the left-to-right reading arrows help learners remember reading direction.

Another challenge emerging readers face is that of capital versus lower-case letters. Many capital letters look entirely different from their lower-case letters (R and r, G and g); traditional reading programs frequently teach capital letters before lower-case letters. However, "lower case is used far more often and should be taught first."³³ Fletcher's Place therefore teaches children to recognize lower-case letter shapes before moving on to their capitals. Once students have learned to read words and phrases, Fletcher's Place introduces sentences and their conventions. Games like Sentence Puzzles teach students that capital letters occur at the beginning of a sentence and that subsequent letters are lower-case. By identifying the capital letter and period, students can reconstruct fragmented sentences.

³¹ McGuinness, 213-14

³² McGuinness, 211

³³ McGuinness, 214

V. FLUENCY

Fluency, the ability to read text quickly, accurately, and expressively, is “one of several critical factors necessary for reading comprehension”³⁴ and an important component in Reading Revolution’s reading and spelling programs. Students using Fletcher’s Place practice fluency skills through reading the phonetically decodable Little Book series; playing physically active games that include reading and following directions; working in the Game Book, which requires fluent oral reading and knowledge of print conventions; and participating in classroom book activities.

A. Reading Decodable Books

When learning to read, children must practice their skills by reading easily decodable books, that is, books that they can sound out independently.³⁵ Fletcher’s Place uses a series of “Little Books”: short, decodable texts that align with the sound-symbol associations and word recognition strategies taught at each step along the way.

As Dr. G. Reid Lyon states, “it is vital that children read a large amount of text at their independent reading level (95% accuracy)...”³⁶ The Little Books, as well as other series recommended by Reading Revolution, are texts that children can read independently with at least 95% accuracy.³⁷ Such texts offer students opportunities to practice their literacy skills with minimal frustration and are especially essential for children having difficulty learning to read.³⁸

B. Book Activities and Guided Oral Reading

Children gain fluency by reading orally under the guidance of another. Studies investigated by the National Reading Panel show that

³⁴ National Reading Panel, 11

³⁵ Felton, R.H. (1993). Effects of Instruction on the Decoding Skills of Children with Phonological Processing Problems. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*. 26.
Foorman, B., Fletcher, J., and Francis, D. (1997) *A Scientific Approach to Reading Instruction*. LD online. Available: http://www.ldonline.org/ld_indepth/reading/cars.html

³⁶ Lyon, Dr. Reid G.

³⁷ Reading Revolution recommends three sets of trade books that are decodable at the beginning level: the Steck Vaughn Phonics Readers, the Scholastic Bob Books, and Modern Curriculum Press Phonics Readers.

³⁸ Fletcher, J; Jack, M.; and Lyon, G. Reid, 71.

this guided repeated oral reading, an integral part of the Reading Revolution programs, has “a significant and positive impact on word recognition, fluency, and comprehension across a range of grade levels.”³⁹ It should be noted that scientific studies have not shown that independent silent reading improves children’s reading skills.⁴⁰

Students are given models of appropriate strategies for sounding out words and reading aloud—for example, in Fletcher’s Place, students can watch characters onscreen orally decoding text with guidance and feedback. Through various book activities in all its programs, Reading Revolution provides multiple opportunities for children to read aloud by themselves or in a group. Specifically, the National Reading Panel and the New York State Education Department recommend the following reading strategies:

- a. Students read in pairs, helping each other sound out and comprehend text;
- b. Students read in small groups, taking turns;
- c. The entire class reads together, either echoing the teacher or in chorus.⁴¹

Reading Revolution also encourages learners to become familiar with high quality literature, whether read by a parent or listened to on audiotapes.

VI. COMPREHENSION

The National Reading Panel cites text comprehension as the heart of successful reading and even of a successful education; therefore, it is at the heart of the Reading Revolution programs: “Comprehension is critically important to the development of children’s reading skills and therefore to the ability to obtain an education.”⁴²

Fletcher’s Place teaches comprehension at every step of the reading process. First students attach meaning to words, then phrases, and then complete sentences in the form of directions, riddles, clues, or as part of a story.

A. Vocabulary

³⁹ National Reading Panel, 12

⁴⁰ National Reading Panel, 13

⁴¹ National Reading Panel, 12. Office of Elementary, Middle, Secondary, and Continuing Education, Office of New York City Literacy Guidance – PreK-3, 22.

⁴² National Reading Panel, 13

An active vocabulary is required for reading comprehension; further, studies have shown that vocabulary instruction leads to gains in text comprehension. In order to promote vocabulary retention and recall, Fletcher's Place teaches students to assign meaning to a word as soon as they have read it by physically showing or verbally explaining what the word means. If children are unfamiliar with a word, they are encouraged to look at context for clues. This strategy combined with the phonics skills necessary to decode unknown words allows children to continue building their vocabulary indefinitely. According to Professor Jim Beers, as children mature as readers, "it will be spelling patterns coupled with phonics and context that will become the most commonly used information in learning new words as they read."⁴³

B. Active Comprehension

Reading Revolution's techniques allow children of every learning style to comprehend what they read through active and meaningful engagement with text: "Comprehension is an active process that requires an intentional and thoughtful interaction between the reader and the text."⁴⁴ Reading Revolution students also gain comprehension through cooperative learning, one of the most effective comprehension strategies.⁴⁵

Activities such as solving and composing riddles, following treasure hunt clues, and giving and following Crazy Directions require students' physical and intellectual involvement in reading comprehension. With various fun, interactive tasks, Fletcher's Place teaches children how to attend to diction, infer meaning, and draw conclusions. These cooperative methods of comprehension increase the learning of strategies, promote intellectual discussion, and improve reading comprehension including on standardized text performance.⁴⁶

In addition to employing inductive and deductive reasoning to solve riddles and follow clues, students discuss the material they have read, relating it to their own lives and asking each other questions to ensure comprehension. These active strategies not only promote

⁴³ Beers, Jim. "Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, and Spelling: The Road to Word Recognition." *Leadership Letters*. Scott Foresman. Available: <http://www.scottforesman.com/educators/index.html>. 3. Jim Beers is a professor at the College of William and Mary.

⁴⁴ National Reading Panel, 13

⁴⁵ International Reading Association, 14

⁴⁶ International Reading Association, 14

comprehension but motivate children to read: “Children are motivated to learn through their engagement in purposeful, meaningful literacy tasks.”⁴⁷

VII. ASSESSMENTS

The No Child Left Behind Act demands accountability of states, school districts, and schools to ensure that all children learn to read by the end of third grade.⁴⁸ Reading Revolution programs include regular, systematic assessments that specifically address the skills taught in each lesson. These allow the teacher to tailor lesson plans to the specific needs of his or her students; “a balanced approach adapts to students’ instructional needs since it relies on teachers’ informed decisions.”⁴⁹

Fletcher’s Place uses assessments and close teacher supervision to be certain that all students succeed in “developing competence associated with all of the dimensions of reading and language arts that comprise the early literacy program.”⁵⁰

VIII. CONCLUSION

Reading Revolution’s methodology is founded on evidence collected from sound scientific studies and extensive research. Proven, evidence-based techniques teach students of all ages to read in a fun, stimulating environment. It is Reading Revolution’s belief, and our experience, that when working with a competent and supportive teacher in the Fletcher’s Place program, *every child* can learn to read.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Allen, L. (1998). An Integrated Strategies Approach. *The Reading Teacher* vol 52 # 3, p 225.

⁴⁸ The goal of George W. Bush’s Reading First Initiative, as specified in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

⁴⁹ Beers, Jim. What Should We Do About Reading Instruction?. *Leadership Letters*. Scott Foresman.

Available: <http://www.scottforesman.com/educators/index.html>. 4

⁵⁰ Office of Elementary, Middle, Secondary, and Continuing Education, Office of New York City Literacy Guidance – PreK-3, 18-19

⁵¹ In addition to hundreds of children and adults without these impairments, Reading Revolution has taught students with severe language disabilities, severe dyslexia, dyspraxia, audio and visual processing disorders, and mild autism and Downs Syndrome to read.

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