



## The Latest on Phonics Research

One of the hottest educational issue of the recent past 10 years has been whole language versus phonics.

It began with this premise: children have a language base, thus reading should be predicated on a child's natural language usage. Therefore, reading books that do not sound like the natural language of a child should be avoided. (Good-bye basals, hello literature.) As children are involved in print rich literature, they will automatically pick up the phonemic patterns of speech, so phonemic awareness does not need to be taught directly. (Good-bye phonics, hello sight vocabulary.) In connection with this, if children are listening to print rich literature and are writing authentic student text, children will naturally pick up the spelling patterns in the written word. (Good-bye spelling, hello high frequency words.)

It is easy to see that the whole language movement has had a positive impact on several areas in curriculum development: it forced teachers to become more imaginative, to integrate the curriculum and to provide children with authentic reading and writing opportunities, rather than "busy" work. It also helped teachers move away from inane little stories and, instead, brought wonderful books, rich with vocabulary and artwork into the children's experiences.

The only thing that was forgotten in this whole decade of "natural education" was the child's brain and how it processes information. It does not like random information and stores it poorly.

With the whole language movement, we have virtually thrown the baby out with the bath, rather than artfully combining all the wonderful aspects of whole language and phonemic awareness. (It really wasn't "whole" without phonics.) You don't have to negate a child's language base and self discovery because you highlight and teach a certain phoneme in your lesson plans.

Since the alphabet is made up of symbols, which are abstract and left-brained, how do we reconcile this with four, five and six year olds whose brains are not yet ready for assimilating this type of information? To make matters worse, we expect a kindergarten child to not only know the letter names (a), but we expect them to recognize them by sight, know the sounds they make (a), and know their upper and lower case counterparts, (A, a). This is just too much information for most five year old children to handle.

"In Project Follow Through, the largest educational study ever conducted in the history of education research, the U.S. Department of Education compared a systematic, comprehensive, phonics-based approach against eight other styles of teaching reading. The results indicated the overwhelming superiority of the phonics-based approach. (The study was especially interesting because it was conducted in "real-world" classrooms rather than in the lab.)" *From Research regarding Phonics*