

What whole language really implies.

Whole language beliefs inconsistent with research

1. That reading is natural.

“Literacy learning proceeds naturally if the environment support young children’s experimentation with print.”

Schickendanz, J. A. (1986). *More than the ABC’s: The early stages of reading and writing*. Washington, DC: NAEYC.

"Children must develop reading strategies by and for themselves" (p. 178).

Weaver, C. (1988). *Reading process and practice*. Exeter, NH: Heinemann.

"Knowledge of reading is developed through the practice of reading, not through anything that is taught at school"

Smith, F. (1973). *Psychology and reading*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

(It is) ... “through using language and hearing others use it in everyday situations--that children learn to talk. Our research has indicated that the same is true of learning to read and write”

National Council of Teachers of English. (1999). *Elementary school practices*. [On-Line]. Available at <http://ncte.org>

“... have faith in children as learners. They can and usually will develop a grasp of letter/sound relationships with little direct instruction, just as they learned to talk without direct instruction in the rules of the English language.” Connie Weaver (Phonics in whole language classrooms) at

<http://kidsource.com/kidsource/content2/Phonics.html>

When language (oral or written) is an integral part of functioning of a community and is used around and with neophytes, it is learned "incidentally".

Artwergen, B., Edelsky, C. & Flores, B. (1987). Whole language: What's new? *Reading Teacher* 41, 144-154.

In a book published for the Ministry of Education, Mooney (1988) argued that "Children do not learn to read in order to be able to read a book, they learn to read by reading books." (p. 3)

Mooney, M. (1988). *Developing life-long readers*. Wellington, New Zealand: Learning Media.

"There is nothing unique about reading, either visually or as far as language is concerned" (p. 188).

Smith, R (1986). *Understanding reading*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

“Learning is continuous, spontaneous, and effortless, requiring no particular attention, conscious motivation, or specific reinforcement.” p432

Smith, F. (1992). Learning to read: The never-ending debate. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 74, 432-441.

“Saying that we are determined to teach every child to read does not mean that we will teach every child to read.” p.441

Smith, F. (1992). Learning to read: the never-ending debate. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 74, 432-441.

“Methods can never ensure that children learn to read. It is the relationships that exist within the classroom that matter. ... Tests are not required to find out whether children are learning” . p.440

Smith, F. (1992). Learning to read: The never-ending debate. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 74, 432-441.

"The child is already programmed to learn to read"

Smith, F. (1973). *Psychology and reading*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

"Children can develop and use an intuitive knowledge of letter-sound correspondences [without] any phonics instruction [or] without deliberate instruction from adults" (p. 86).

Weaver, C. (1980). *Psycholinguistics and reading*. Cambridge, MA: Winthrop.

"We cannot teach another person directly; we can only facilitate his learning".

Rogers, C. (1961). *On becoming a person*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

"No one will teach your child how to read. Reading isn't taught. Reading is developed. ... They have learned how to speak - a much more difficult process - and they will learn how to read! All you have to do is set the right conditions."

Failure Free Reading (2005). 30 Ways to Improve Your Child's Reading. See at

<http://www.failurefree.com/downloads/30Ways.pdf>

2. A whole language belief inconsistent with research is that the use of contextual cues is the sign of skilled reading. Below are some examples

"Reading without guessing is not reading at all"

Smith, F. (1973). *Psychology and reading*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

"In Reading in Junior Classes, (Department of Education, 1985) it was argued that children sample the text, predict what will happen, confirm their predictions and self-correct if their predictions don't fit with the sampled text. Advice of teaching children how to sample was given: "Helping beginning readers to sample effectively means showing them how to attend only to those details of meaning and print which are necessary to make predictions, and to confirm or correct them." (p. 32)

Department of Education (1985). *Reading in junior classes: With guidelines to the revised Ready to Read Series*. Wellington: Author.

"Proficient readers seem unconsciously to use initial letters plus prior knowledge and context to predict what a word might be, before focusing on more of the word or the following context to confirm or correct". Weaver (Phonics in whole language classrooms) at:

<http://kidsource.com/kidsource/content2/Phonics.html>

The student:

- **Attends to the meaning of what is read rather than focusing on figuring out words.**
- **Uses context, pictures, syntax, and structural analysis clues to predict meaning of unknown words.**
- **Uses fix-it strategies (predicts, uses pictorial cues, asks a friend, skips the word, substitutes another meaningful word)**

Oklahoma State Department of Education (1992). Reading learner outcomes. In the Oklahoma State Competencies, Grade One, pp.15-22. [Online]. Available: <http://www.ourcivilisation.com/dumb/dumb3.htm>

"It is easier for a reader to remember the unique appearance and pronunciation of a whole word like 'photograph' than to remember the unique pronunciations of meaningless syllables and spelling units" (p. 146).

Smith, F. (1985). *Reading without nonsense: Making sense of reading*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Inference and prediction make it possible to leap toward meaning without fully completing the optical, perceptual and syntactic cycles. Yet the reader, once sense is achieved, has the sense of having seen every graphic feature, identified every pattern and word, assigned every syntactic pattern. (p. 835)
Goodman, K.S. (1985). Unity in reading. In H. Singer & R.B. Ruddell (Eds.), *Theoretical models and processes of reading* (pp. 813-840). Newark, DE: International Reading Association

“One word in five can be completely eliminated from most English texts with scarcely any effect on its overall comprehensibility” (p. 79).

Smith, F. (1973). *Psychology and reading*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

"Even if the child substitutes words of his own for some that are on the page, provided that those express the meaning, it is an encouraging sign that the reading has been real, and recognition of details will come as it is needed. Reading to be truthful, must be free of what is on the page."

Huey, E. (1908). *The psychology and pedagogy of reading*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

3. A whole language belief inconsistent with research is that phonics is best downplayed or rejected. Below are some examples

“Sounding out a word is a cumbersome, time-consuming, and unnecessary activity” (p. 86).

Weaver, C. (1980). *Psycholinguistics and reading*. Cambridge, NM: Winthrop.

“Extensive phonics teaching is a hopeless endeavour (p. 33).

Krashen, S. (2002). Defending whole language: The limits of phonics instruction and the efficacy of whole language instruction. *Reading Improvement*, 39(1), 32-42.

"Children will not learn by trying to relate letters sounds, partly because the task does not make sense to them and partly because written language does not work that way. In my view, readings is not a matter of decoding letters to sound but of bringing meaning to print." p. 41

Smith, F. (1986). *Reading without nonsense*. New York: Arbor House.

"Furthermore, until a child can read, talking about letters and about the sounds of letters is sheer jabberwacky. Thorough knowledge of letters and their sounds is not required in order to read words; phonic skills come with reading." p. 108

Goodman, K. (1991). *Organizing for whole language*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann.

“Children can develop and use an intuitive knowledge of letter-sound correspondences [without] any phonics instruction [or] without deliberate instruction from adults” (p. 86).

Weaver, C. (1980). *Psycholinguistics and reading*. Cambridge, NM: Winthrop.

"Matching letters with sounds is a flat-earth view of the world, one that rejects modern science about reading" (Goodman, 1986, p. 371).

Goodman, K. S. (1986). *What's whole in whole language*. Richmond Hill, Ontario: Scholastic.

"English is spelled so unpredictably that there is no way of predicting when a particular spelling correspondence applies" (p. 53).

Smith, F. (1985). *Reading*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

“Phonics, which means teaching a set of spelling to sound correspondence rules that permit the decoding of written language into speech, just does not work”

Smith, F. (1985). *Reading without nonsense* (2nd. Ed). New York: Teachers College Press.

“Carefully controlled vocabulary and decontextualised phonics instruction are incompatible with meaningful authentic texts”.

Goodman, K. S. (1989). Whole language research: Foundations and development. *The Elementary School Journal*, 90, 208-221.

"But reading is not accomplished by decoding to sound - meaning must usually be grasped before the appropriate sounds can be produced, and the production of sounds alone does not give meaning. Decoding directly from letters to sound is unnecessary as well as inefficient." p.184

Smith, F. (1973). *Psycholinguistics and reading*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

“The rules of phonics are too complex, ... and too unreliable ... to be useful.”

Smith, F. (1992). Learning to read: The never-ending debate. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 74, 432-441

“To the fluent reader the alphabetic principle is completely irrelevant. He identifies every word (if he identifies words at all) as an ideogram.” p.124

Smith, F. (1973). *Psycholinguistics and reading*. New York: Holt, Rhinehart, & Winston.

“The worst readers are those who try to sound out unfamiliar words according to the rules of phonics.” p.438

Smith, F. (1992). Learning to read: the never-ending debate. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 74, 432-441.

“Focus on the subsystems of language results in useless, time-wasting and confusing instruction”.

King, D.F., & Goodman, K.S. (1990). Whole language: Cherishing learners and their language. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, 21, 221-227.

"English is spelled so unpredictably that there is no way of predicting when a particular spelling correspondence applies" (p. 53).

Smith, F. (1985). *Reading*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

"Phonics is a flat-earth view of the world, since it rejects modern science about reading and writing and how they develop."

Goodman, K. S. (1986). *What's whole in whole language*. Richmond Hill, Ontario: Scholastic.

"It is easier for a reader to remember the unique appearance and pronunciation of a whole word like 'photograph' than to remember the unique pronunciations of meaningless syllables and spelling units" (p. 146).

Smith, F. (1985). *Reading without nonsense: Making sense of reading*. New York: Teachers College Press.

"Basal readers, workbooks, skills sequences, and practice materials that fragment the process are unacceptable to whole language teachers. Their presentation of language phenomena is unscientific, and they steal teachers' and learners' time away from productive reading and writing." p.29

Goodman, K. S. (1986). *What's whole in whole language*. Richmond Hill, Ontario: Scholastic.

"Sounding out a word is a cumbersome, time-consuming, and unnecessary activity" (p. 86).

Weaver, C. (1980). *Psycholinguistics and reading*. Cambridge, NM: Winthrop.

“Early in our miscue research, we concluded

- **That a story is easier to read than a page, a page easier to read than a paragraph, a paragraph easier than a sentence, a sentence easier than a word, and a word easier than a letter. Our research continues to support this conclusion and we believe it to be true**

- **It is through errors ... that we've learned that reading is a psycholinguistic guessing game.**
- **We can teach children letter names and the sounds letters represent and we can teach them words in isolation from the context of language, but we know that these methods do not lead children to read.**

Goodman, K. & Goodman, Y. (1981). Twenty questions about teaching language. *Educational Leadership* 38, 437-442.

“The way you interpret what the child does will reflect what you understand reading to be. For instance, if she reads the word *feather* for *father*, a phonics-oriented teacher might be pleased because she's come close to sounding the word out.

However, if you believe reading is a meaning-seeking process, you may be concerned that she's overly dependent on phonics at the expense of meaning. You'd be happier with a miscue such as *daddy*, even though it doesn't look or sound anything like the word in the text. At least the meaning would be intact.” p. 19

Baskwill, J., & Whitman, P. (1988). *Evaluation: Whole Language, Whole Child*. New York: Scholastic.

Initial consonants and consonant clusters, used with syntactic and semantic information, usually provide sufficient information for word recognition and reading for meaning. Teaching children to sound out words letter by letter is unnecessary and confusing. In learning phonics children best acquire phonic and related knowledge through rich experiences with using print for real purposes.

Emmitt, M. (1996). *Have I got my head in the sand? - Literacy matters*. In 'Keys to life' Conference proceedings, Early Years of Schooling Conference, Sunday 26 & Monday 27 May 1996, World Congress Centre, Melbourne' pp. 69- 75. Melbourne: Directorate of School Education. [On-Line]. Available: <http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/eys/pdf/Proc96.pdf>

4. A whole language belief inconsistent with research is that phonemic awareness and the alphabetic principle are insignificant. Below are some examples

“Some studies in reading development are being centred around a narrow and sterile concept of phonemic awareness. All children who learn to understand oral language must be aware of the phonemes (significant perceptual sound units of language) or they could not comprehend speech.” p. 1102.

Goodman, K. S. (1994). Reading, writing, and written texts: A transactional sociopsycholinguistic view. In Robert. B. Ruddell, Martha Rapp Ruddell, Harry Singer (Eds.). *Theoretical models and processes of reading* .Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association. pp. 1093-1130.

“Accuracy, correctly naming or identifying each word or word part in a graphic sequence, is not necessary for effective reading since the reader can get the meaning without accurate word identification.... Furthermore, readers who strive for accuracy are likely to be inefficient”. p.826.

Goodman, K. S. (1974, Sept). Effective teachers of reading know language and children. *Elementary English*, 51, 823-828.

“Rarely do we interrupt the flow of meaning (when we read) to identify a particular word”.

Newman, J.M. (1985). Using children's books to teach reading. In J.M. Newman (Ed.), *Whole language: Theory and in use* (pp.55-64). Portsmouth, NJ: Heinemann.

“When Josie doesn't know a word she asks what it is, and remembers it the next time she sees it, as do all early readers. They pause at a word, are told what it is, then move along quickly. They extrapolate,

through the logic of language, what the other words will be in the sentence they're reading, and confirm their hunches by looking at the print."

Mem Fox (2005). Phonics has a phoney role in the literacy wars. *Sydney Morning Herald*. 16/8/2005

"But if in fact you are not making errors when you read, you are probably not reading efficiently, you are processing more visual information than you need."

Smith, F., (1992). Learning to read: The never-ending debate. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 74, 432-441.

"One word in five can be completely eliminated from most English texts with scarcely any effect on its overall comprehensibility" (p. 79).

Smith, F. (1973). *Psychology and reading*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

"In turn his sense of syntactic structure and meaning make it possible to predict the graphic input so he is largely selective, sampling the print to confirm his prediction (p.9).

Goodman, K.S. (1973). *Miscue analysis: Applications to reading instruction*. Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English.

"Don't expect word perfect reading. ... This is acceptable. ... We want them to make mistakes. We want them to know that reading is not saying the words right. We want them to know that reading is getting meaning from the printed page. ... Learn the difference between good mistakes and bad mistakes. Good mistakes occur when the meaning of the story is not changed. For example, a child who substitutes the word children for the words kids in the sentence: "The kids are on the playground." has made a good mistake. ... Don't try to correct this type of error. ... Remember substitutions and omissions are normal."

Failure Free Reading (2005). 30 Ways to Improve Your Child's Reading. See at <http://www.failurefree.com/downloads/30Ways.pdf>

5. A whole language belief inconsistent with research is that research and accountability are unnecessary. Below are some examples

"(Teachers are) wise to the often tortuous attempts of educational, psychological, and cognitive researchers to cloak themselves in the sometimes ill-fitting garb of 'science.'"

Zemelman, S., Daniels, H., & Bizar, M. (1999, March). Sixty years of reading research -- But who's listening? *Phi Delta Kappan*. [Online.] Available: <http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/kzem9903.htm>

"It seems futile to try to demonstrate superiority of one teaching method over another by empirical research" (p.220)

Weaver, C. (1988). *Reading: Progress and practice*. Porsmouth, NJ: Heinemann.

"Only one kind of research has anything useful to say about literacy, and that is ethnographic or naturalistic research" (p. 356)

Smith, K. (1989). Overselling literacy. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 70, 353-359.

"Through a series of sham scientific panels and reports they have established that there is a simple solution to the literacy crisis supported by a consensus of the scientific community and that the crisis is so great that it warrants federal interventions in the schools right down to the class room levels".

Goodman, K. (2002). When the fail proof reading programs fail, blow up the Colleges of Education. Retrieved 12/4/2004 from <http://tlc.ousd.k12.ca.us/~acody/goodman.html>

Experimental research is limited in value with regard to education.

Weaver, C., Patterson, L, Ellis, L, Zinke, S., Eastman, P., & Moustafa, M. (1997). "Big Brother" and reading instruction. [On-Line]. Available at: <http://www.m4pe.org/elsewhere.htm>

"In my inaugural [Convention] address I called for a greater separation between school and state and the emancipation of education from the arbitrariness of political pressures. I advanced the idea that schools, like religion and the press, needed the protection of something like a Constitutional amendment to keep education free of interference in matters of materials, methods, and curriculum from the winds of political change and the passing hysterias of public opinion." (NCTE president, Sheridan Blau) National Council of Teachers of English. (1999). Elementary school practices. [On-Line]. Available at <http://ncte.org>

Conservatives look to education mainly to supply basic skills for a competent labor force -- skills taught one at a time and tested by standardized, impersonal instruments -- while progressives want school mainly to nurture active citizens and creative individuals. ... When research is touted ... this old, ongoing debate is probably the subtext.

Zemelman, S., Daniels, H., & Bizar, M. (1999, March). Sixty years of reading research -- But who's listening? *Phi Delta Kappan*. [Online.] Available: <http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/kzem9903.htm>

6. A whole language belief inconsistent with research is what to do when students struggle. Below are some examples?

"The first alternative and preference is - to skip over the puzzling word. The second alternative is to guess what the unknown word might be. And the final and least preferred alternative is to sound the word out. Phonics, in other words, comes last."

Smith, F. (1999). Why systematic phonics and phonemic awareness instruction constitute an educational hazard. *Language Arts*, 77, 150-155.

"Good spelling is merely a convenience. ... There are some people like secretaries, who need to be accurate, but usually even they can use a word processor with a good spelling check."

Gentry, J.R. (1987). *Spel . . . is a four-letter word*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.

"Children must develop reading strategies by and for themselves" (p. 178).

Weaver, C. (1988). *Reading process and practice*. Exeter, NH: Heinemann.

"The best we can do ... is ... to ensure that, if not every child lives up to our hopes, there is a minimum of guilt and anguish on the part of teachers, students, and parents." p.441

Smith, F. (1992). Learning to read: the never-ending debate. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 74, 432-441.

"If children experience difficulty in learning particular things ... they must be shown more patience and sensitivity" p. 441

Smith, F. (1992). Learning to read: The never-ending debate. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 74, 432-441.

"Should teachers find that children are not progressing as readers, the most significant intervention they can make is to find texts which allow children to restore sound functioning".

Education Department of South Australia. (1984). *Early Literacy In-service Course: Matching children with books*. South Australia: Education Department of South Australia.

7. A lack of professional courtesy to opposing viewpoints makes reasoned debate difficult.

"At a meeting of the International Reading Association four years ago Ken Goodman attacked Marilyn Adams [a phonics advocate] as a 'vampire' who threatened the literacy of America's youth" (p. 42). Levine, A. (1994, December). The great debate revisited. *Atlantic Monthly*, 38-44.

Teachers are ... "wise to the often tortuous attempts of educational, psychological, and cognitive researchers to cloak themselves in the sometimes ill-fitting garb of 'science'." ... the interlocking directorate of the right-wing back-to-basics movement: John Saxon, Chester Finn, William Bennett, Diane Ravitch, Jeanne Chall, Charles Sykes."

Zemelman, S., Daniels, H., & Bizar, M. (1999, March). Sixty years of reading research -- But who's listening? *Phi Delta Kappan*. [Online.] Available: <http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/kzem9903.htm>

"It (direct instruction) is a scripted pedagogy for producing compliant, conformist, competitive students and adults."

Coles, G. (1998, Dec. 2). No end to the reading wars. *Education Week*. [Online]. Available: <http://www.edweek.org/ew/vol-18/14coles.h18>

"Now the forces aiming to destroy social justice and limit democracy have learned to use their money and power and the processes of democratic institutions to accomplish their goals. They no longer confront, they co-opt and subvert the very groups whose interests they attack. They don't stand in the school house door, they close down the failing neighborhood schools using test scores as their bludgeons."

Goodman, K. (2002). When the fail proof reading programs fail, blow up the Colleges of Education Retrieved 12/4/2004 from <http://tlc.ousd.k12.ca.us/~acody/goodman.html>

"How is it that Reid Lyon, of whom most of us never heard before this year, has become the media superstar on reading? The best way to make sense of this is to view it through Chomsky's notion of manufactured consent: a concerted and strategic campaign to manipulate and instruct public opinion."

National Council of Teachers of English. (1999). Elementary school practices. [On-Line]. Available at <http://ncte.org>.

"His (Reid Lyon) whole 15 minute presentation is an amazing set of lies, cliches and exaggerations."

Goodman, K. (2002). When the fail proof reading programs fail, blow up the Colleges of Education Retrieved 12/4/2004 from <http://tlc.ousd.k12.ca.us/~acody/goodman.html>

"The political Far Right's agenda is well-served," she writes, "by promoting docility and obedience on the part of the lower classes." Ultraconservatives advocate phonics teaching because it is authoritarian, she says, and serves to socialize "nonmainstream students, especially those in so-called lower ability groups or tracks . . . into subordinate roles."

Weaver, C. (1994). *Reading process and practice*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.

According to Weaver, who directed the Commission on Reading for the National Council of Teachers of English in the late 1980s, right-wing extremists believe that kids who study phonics will get "the words 'right'" and thus read what the Bible actually says rather than approximate its meaning. Moreover, she writes, "Teaching intensive phonics. . . is also a way of keeping children's attention on doing what they're told and keeping them from reading or thinking for themselves."

Weaver, C. (1994). *Reading process and practice*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.

The antagonism of the Christian Right to these (WL) programs is based on a fear of losing control over their children's thinking, rather than any compelling empirical data.

Berliner, D.C. (1996). *Educational psychology meets the Christian right: Differing views of children, schooling, teaching, and learning*. Retrieved 11/11/2002 from <http://courses.ed.asu.edu/berliner/readings/differingh.htm>

"Whole language teachers need not be defensive or apologetic. They believe in kids, respect them as learners, cherish them in all their diversity, and treat them with love and dignity. That's a lot better than regarding children as empty pots that need filling, as blobs of clay that need moulding, or worse, as evil little troublemakers forever battling teachers." p. 25

Goodman, K. (1986). *What's whole in whole language*. Portsmouth, NH : Heinemann.

8. Rewriting the research

"The research overwhelmingly favors holistic, literature-centered approaches to reading. Indeed, the proof is massive and overwhelming."

Zemelman, S., Daniels, H., & Bizar, M. (1999, March). Sixty years of reading research -- But who's listening? *Phi Delta Kappan*. [Online.] Available: <http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/kzem9903.htm>

"The notion that an emphasis primarily on skills and phonics instruction produces superior results to programs centered on providing children with a lot of interesting and comprehensible texts is not supported by the available evidence" (p. 66).

McQuillan, J. (1998). *The literacy crisis: False claims, real solutions*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

"Research has shown that reading to your child especially after they are in the third grade or higher will actually improve their reading as much as having them read by themselves."

Failure Free Reading (2005). 30 Ways to Improve Your Child's Reading at <http://www.failurefree.com/downloads/30Ways.pdf>

9. The problem is not in instruction, blame others

"While instruction can profoundly influence children and their approach to reading the best way to explain large-scale differences in reading achievement is first to focus on the access to reading materials."

McQuillan, J. (1998). *The literacy crisis: False claims, real solutions*. Publisher's review. [On Line]. Available: <http://www.languagebooks.com/2.0/books/literacycrisis.html>

"Don't be upset if they have trouble understanding all of this. The main thing is to have them become aware of just how confusing our language is."

Failure Free Reading (2005). 30 Ways to Improve Your Child's Reading at <http://www.failurefree.com/downloads/30Ways.pdf>