A Summary of the Research Papers
# Table of Contents

**Phyllis C. Hunter:**
- Raising Students Who Want to Read .......................... 3

**Jeffrey D. Wilhelm:**
- Inquiring Minds Learn to Read ............................... 4

**Henry Jenkins:**
- Gaming, Learning, and Motivation .......................... 5

**Kevin Feldman and Kate Kinsella:**
- Narrowing the Language Gap ................................. 6

**David Rose:**
- Reading and the Brain ........................................ 8
Introduction

Third-through sixth-grade teachers across the country struggle with a common challenge: How do I meet the needs of 30 individual learners, each with a unique combination of reading skills and background knowledge?

To address this problem, Scholastic developed ReadAbout, a self-managed reading achievement program that uses technology to personalize literacy and vocabulary instruction. Designed to complement the core reading program, ReadAbout delivers highly engaging, nonfiction content, plus skills instruction and reinforcement tailored to the interests and reading level of each individual student. The program also includes detailed reporting that enables the teacher to continue differentiating instruction offline if they choose. The result? The whole class accelerates, one student at a time.

ReadAbout draws upon the latest trends in educational theory, research, and practice to provide teachers with a powerful tool for teaching reading. To help teachers build the most powerful reading programs possible, the ReadAbout editorial staff at Scholastic invited six leading researchers and educators to discuss the current state of the art in reading instruction. These papers can be found in the ReadAbout program materials or online at www.scholastic.com/readabout

ReadAbout addresses a diverse array of research to create a comprehensive picture of how upper elementary students learn to read nonfiction. Research-based strategies include:

- Improving nonfiction reading comprehension skills
- Teaching expository text structures
- Leveling text to individual reading levels and differentiated instruction
- Direct instruction of high-utility and content-area vocabulary
- Building background knowledge through anchored instruction
- Using graphic organizers
- Motivating students with engaging text
- Ongoing, data driven assessment
- Writing in response to text

The program also provides support for English-language learners and children who have other particular learning needs

The following summaries will provide you with information about the depth and breadth of research conducted during the development of ReadAbout. In the full articles, our experts lay out concrete steps you can take to help your students develop the skills and attitudes they need to become effective readers.
Raising Students Who Want to Read

By Phyllis C. Hunter

Literacy education involves more than simply providing students with skills; motivation is also a key component of any effective reading program. This paper discusses ten steps teachers can take to help students develop an intrinsic motivation to read:

- Match individual students to “just-right” texts that fit their reading level.
- Provide a wide range of interesting and personally relevant texts.
- Empower students by allowing them to choose the texts they want to read.
- Let students know what to expect.
- Encourage students to monitor their own progress.
- Talk about books continually.
- Give immediate feedback and encouragement.
- Use technology to excite students’ interest.
- Set expectations for success.
- Be alert to signs of reading difficulties, and intervene when necessary to get students back on track.

When students are motivated to read, they will work harder to improve their skills. Thus, even students who have had difficulty reading in the past can succeed in the future.

How ReadAbout Supports the Research

In ReadAbout, students can choose among a wide variety of interesting and engaging topics in the content areas of science, social studies, and arts & entertainment. ReadAbout’s adaptive algorithm delivers text that matches a student's individual reading level. Motivating activities such as collecting, sorting, quizzing, and word challenges are provided in the program to encourage word consciousness and vocabulary acquisition. As students move through the program, they continuously receive immediate feedback on their progress. ReadAbout reports automatically alert a teacher when students are struggling so that she can intervene immediately.

About the Author

Mrs. Hunter, president of Phyllis C. Hunter Consulting, Inc., was appointed by Congress and President Bush to the board of the National Institute for Literacy, and has served as an advisor on the President’s Educational Transition Team. On November 15, 2002, she was honored with the Marcus Foster Memorial Award for Distinguished Educator of the Year by the National Alliance of Black School Educators. As a reading consultant who specializes in scientific research-based programs, Mrs. Hunter has traveled the nation providing on-site technical assistance to states implementing comprehensive reading programs. Mrs. Hunter proclaims that reading is the new civil right!
Inquiring Minds Learn to Read
By Jeffrey D. Wilhelm

Inquiry-based approaches to reading help students develop “big understandings” of informational texts. Teachers can adopt an inquiry-based approach by employing teaching strategies before, during, and after reading.

Before reading, teachers can:
• Create a meaningful context for reading by asking an essential question (e.g., “What are civil rights, and how can they be protected?”).
• Provide a purpose for each reading that is clear, personally relevant, and socially significant.
• Provide a wide range of engaging texts that match students’ reading level.
• Activate and/or build the background knowledge that students need in order to understand the text.
• Foster mastery by introducing and teaching new reading strategies (e.g., identifying central ideas).

During reading, teachers can:
• Support and scaffold struggling readers.
• Motivate students by building a sense of competence.
• Show students that care about their reading progress.
• Provide enough time for students to read, practice, and grow.

After reading, teachers can:
• Encourage students to consolidate and reflect upon what they’ve learned.
• Set goals for the future.
• Provide time for collaborative peer discussions.
• Have students make or do something that makes learning visible, usable, and accountable.
• Help students engage in inquiries of their own.

How ReadAbout Supports the Research
Before reading, students encounter the Think About It question to get them to connect the topic to their own lives. The question sets a meaningful purpose for reading. Anchor videos introduce important information to help students build background and mental models for understanding. New skills and strategies are introduced to the student during Skill Briefs. During reading, ReadAbout provides a variety of scaffolds to support students who need help. After reading, students respond to the Think About It question in writing with the Knowledge Card. This response encourages them to reflect upon what they have learned and to engage in their own inquiries about the topic.

About the Author
Dr. Jeffrey Wilhelm is a well-known teacher, author, and presenter. His interests include team teaching, co-constructing inquiry-driven curriculum with students, and pursuing teacher research. His recent research agenda includes studying how student reading, writing, and thinking can be supported through the use of art, drama, and technology. Most recently, he studied adolescent boys and their reading, attitudes, aspirations, and the school opportunities available to them for actualizing and performing different ways of being literate. He is particularly interested in supporting the learning of students who are often considered to be reluctant or resistant.
Gaming, Learning, and Motivation
By Henry Jenkins

Because games are inherently appealing and motivating for children, they hold great potential to serve as a compelling context for education. Researchers have proposed different possible mechanisms to explain how games engage their players (e.g., “flow” states of attention, challenging “hard fun,” projective identification). Whatever the mechanism, however, games are consistent with the best available research on cognitive development and learning. Games can promote learning in several ways:

- Games encourage students to take intellectual risks and reduce the threat of failure.
- Game simulations foster engagement through immersion.
- Well-designed games sequence tasks to allow early success and gradually increase difficulty, so that students are continually challenged but not overwhelmed.
- Games link learning to clear goals and rules.
- Games create a social context among players.
- Games are multimodal, accommodating a variety of learning styles.
- Games support early steps and provide a catalyst for additional research and learning more.

How ReadAbout Supports the Research

ReadAbout motivates students by providing and selecting content that is personally meaningful and presenting reading in an engaging environment. Students also encounter activities which provide a sense of challenge just on the verge of success.

Collecting, sorting, quizzing, and word challenges are all activities in ReadAbout that engage students in reading and learning. Vocabulary activities and games are designed to gradually increase in difficulty so that students may experience success early on in the program. Clear goals and immediate feedback are provided to encourage and motivate students to continue with the task at hand, even when it gets difficult.

About the Author

Dr. Henry Jenkins is the Director of the MIT Comparative Media Studies Program and recipient of the Peter de Florez Professorship. He is the author and/or editor of twelve books on various aspects of media and popular culture, including Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture; Hop on Pop: The Politic and Pleasures of Popular Culture; and From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and Computer Games. He is currently completing a book, Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Intersect, which deals with the shifting relations of media producers and consumers in an age of media change.
Narrowing the Language Gap:  
The Case for Explicit Vocabulary Instruction

By Kevin Feldman and Kate Kinsella

Vocabulary is essential to literacy, and it is also associated with more general academic performance and IQ. Effective vocabulary instruction involves more than simply looking up words in a dictionary, using context to infer meaning, or extemporaneous, unplanned teaching when the class encounters an unfamiliar word. Effective vocabulary instruction also includes wide reading of fiction and non-fiction texts, direct teaching of individual words, teaching independent word learning strategies, and fostering “word consciousness” (e.g., engaging in language play, being sensitive to parts of words). When teaching words directly, an effective approach entails five steps:

• Have students pronounce the word several times.
• Explain the word in familiar language.
• Provide examples of use.
• Have students elaborate with their own examples and visual representations.
• Assess learning, either formally or informally.

In addition, teachers can also employ broader strategies and tools, such as: providing note-taking guides to help students keep track of new words; encouraging good vocabulary study strategies; creating accountable contexts for students to use the words in speaking and writing; and focusing instruction on the words that matter most (e.g., words related to the central concepts in a text, or words that students are likely to encounter repeatedly across academic subjects and over time). Helping students build a powerful vocabulary will help them thrive, both in reading and throughout their academic lives.

How ReadAbout Supports the Research

The ReadAbout vocabulary instructional sequence is informed by the following sequence, developed by Dr. Kinsella and Dr. Feldman: Pronounce, Explain, Provide Examples, Elaborate, and Assess. In ReadAbout, students begin by recording themselves pronouncing the word aloud. Then students read the meaning of the word and hear the meaning read aloud. ReadAbout provides students with meanings that are “student-friendly” and connected to experiences and situations that they would encounter in their lives. Next, examples are provided for the student in the form of an image and a caption. Students then encounter Word Wise, which presents a thought-provoking question to help elaborate on the meaning of the word. Finally students are tested on their knowledge of the word and their answers are assessed.
Vocabulary instruction is focused on high-utility words—words that students are likely to encounter across the subjects—and content area words—words that are important to the understanding of the topic at hand. *Smart Cards* are interactive vocabulary cards which teach explicitly high-utility and content area words vital to the comprehension of the text. Six word-learning strategies are provided as lesson plans and taught to students during small-group instruction time. The software fosters word consciousness by providing students with the opportunity to explore, interact, sort, and play with their collection of vocabulary words. Students can also unlock special bonus words once they have exhibited vocabulary mastery in a topic.

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**About the Authors**

Dr. Kevin Feldman is the Director of Reading and Early Intervention with the Sonoma County Office of Education (SCOE). His career in education spans thirty-two years. As the Director of Reading and Early Intervention for SCOE he develops, organizes, and monitors programs related to K–12 literacy and prevention of reading difficulties. He also serves as a Leadership Team Consultant to the California Reading and Literature Project and assists in the development and implementation of PreK–12 programs throughout California and across the nation.

Kate Kinsella, Ed.D. is a teacher educator in the Department of Secondary Education at San Francisco State University addressing academic language and literacy development in linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms. She maintains secondary classroom involvement by teaching an academic literacy class for adolescent English learners through the University's Step to College Program. She publishes and provides consultancy and training nationally, addressing responsible instructional practices that provide second-language learners and less proficient readers in Grades 4–12 with the language and literacy skills vital to educational mobility.
Reading and the Brain: Toward a New Definition of a Balanced Approach to Reading

By David Rose

Recent physiological research on the brain suggests that a balanced reading program should teach students to recognize patterns in text, help them become strategic readers, and foster interest in reading. Reading and learning involve three neural systems in the brain: one system recognizes patterns (e.g., decoding words), one generates patterns (e.g., strategies for thinking, searching, and planning), and one determines which patterns are personally important due to interest and motivation (thus allowing the student to prioritize goals, develop preferences and confidence, and care about learning).

As a result, a balanced approach to reading:

- Emphasizes and practices common patterns in text.
- Models and scaffolds strategies for deriving sounds and meanings from text.
- Provides rich, meaningful texts that engage students in the importance and joy of reading.

In this way, a balanced approach “lights up” the whole brain to provide powerful results.

How ReadAbout Supports the Research

ReadAbout provides a variety of tools to help students monitor their comprehension so they can become strategic readers. Each topic includes a question that requires students to go back to the text, reread a difficult or confusing section, and electronically highlight the section of text that is most important or relevant. Skill Tutorials coach students who are performing poorly on their assessments in the program. They review the skills students are struggling with and have them practice when to use the appropriate comprehension strategy. ReadAbout topics cover a wide variety of highly-engaging and age-appropriate content for students.

About the Author

In 1984 Dr. David Rose helped to found CAST (Center for Applied Special Technology) with a vision of expanding opportunities for students through the innovative development and application of technology. Dr. Rose specializes in developmental neuropsychology and in the universal design of learning technologies that will impact learning for the diverse students found in today's classrooms.
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