

# PREFACE

Congratulations! You have purchased this easy to use, direct-systematic-phonics program that will get your child on the right track to reading success. Research clearly shows direct-systematic-phonics programs are the most effective way to teach children how to read. This complete step-by-step program is easy to use for parents who have never taught reading before as well as seasoned educators. You now have the tools you need to teach your child to read.

This book evolved with my passion to teach kids to read successfully. It started when my son was almost five and asked me to show him how to read. I had never taught anyone to read before and did not know how to begin. I wanted to do it the right way so I started learning about reading. I investigated different methods and read numerous reports. I looked closely at research that evaluated effectiveness of reading methods. I discovered validated research clearly shows structured, systematic phonemic based programs are the most effective way to teach reading.<sup>1</sup> Based on this, I selected an inexpensive direct phonetic based book designed for home use. My son learned to read successfully and teaching him was an enjoyable experience. We both loved our “reading lessons” with a special cup of tea as his little sisters took their afternoon nap.

I compared my children’s success learning to read with the failure rates prevalent in most schools. We moved several times, so I had direct experience with the school systems as well as many other kids in three different communities. I met many perfectly bright children with serious difficulties reading. As a volunteer in my daughter’s kindergarten class, I had direct experience with a sight word program. I saw first hand how this method of instruction directly caused reading problems in the children. I discovered that most schools use programs and methods that have significant rates of reading failure. Use of “whole/sight word” approaches, “whole literature” programs, and weak, indirect and embedded phonics instruction or “balanced” or “integrated” programs that include a little of everything are widespread. Most schools do NOT use direct-systematic-phonics instruction proven by research to be the most effective method of teaching kids how to read. In addition, many of the commercial programs marketed to parents are not only very expensive but contain highly ineffective methods.

As time passed, I continued to educate myself on reading issues. I started working with some children who were struggling with reading. My knowledge of how kids learn to read grew. I learned by observing exactly what struggling children do wrong. I saw how specific instruction methods unintentionally cause problems. Improper reading instruction gets many perfectly normal children on the wrong track with reading. A critically important note is the ineffective programs are to blame, *not* the individual teachers. This is why fabulous teachers who we absolutely love still have high rates of reading failure. I firmly believe that all children can learn to read successfully unless they have physical disabilities where they can not accurately hear spoken language, vision problems where they can not see the print or are severely disabled. If normal children are not learning, they are being taught in an ineffective manner they are not able to understand.

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<sup>1</sup> This is summarized in “Teaching Children to Read” Summary Report of the National Reading Panel [www.nationalreadingpanel.org/publications/summary.htm](http://www.nationalreadingpanel.org/publications/summary.htm) and the University of Oregon “Big Ideas in Beginning Reading” <http://reading.uoregon.edu/>.

By the time I started teaching my youngest child to read, I looked for a more effective program for her. Although the book I used with my son and other daughter started them in the right direction, it inaccurately represented the phonetic code and had other deficiencies, particularly in teaching vowel combinations. I could not find an affordable reading program that met my expectations. Therefore, I started putting my own material together. As the first draft began to take shape, I started sharing this information with some other moms who were searching for a way to teach their children to read. The program was highly effective and easy to use. I wanted to be able to share it with more than a few friends or the small number of children I could personally tutor. So I decided to publish this book. My objectives are to provide a highly effective direct-systematic-phonics reading program that is easy to use and affordable so that other parents can also experience the joy of teaching their kids to read successfully.

I based my program on research data and careful analysis. I used my science background and previous experience in environmental analysis to tackle the question of how to teach children to read. I used a scientific approach and applied critical thinking and analysis skills. I objectively evaluated different methods and techniques. I filtered out the incidental and emotional defense of specific programs. I focused on the scientifically valid research results. Not having a professional education degree was an advantage as I was able to evaluate methods objectively without a pre-formed philosophy or ownership in a specific program or school of thought. I am not one of the experts who conducted the brain imaging research that show us neurologically how the brain reads proficiently. However, I sure learned from and applied their valuable results to how I designed this program. I also learned an amazing amount by teaching my own children successfully and working with other children especially those who were struggling. I put together a complete list of the sounds, included direct instruction of necessary subskills, made word lists, added some phonetic activities and included materials I found useful when tutoring kids. Importantly, I also applied my 'mom' expertise of truly understanding and knowing how to work with children to make the program effective for kids. Technically accurate information is useless if the child does not understand it. With my 'mom' insight and actual kid testing, I was able to present the needed technical details of the program in kid friendly and effective manner. I also kept in mind that busy parents need a well-designed, easy to use program.

Teaching methods absolutely do matter! I have witnessed the dramatic effectiveness of teaching with this direct systematic phonics program. The second grader that I just started working with "could not even sound out the word 'at'" when his teacher asked me to work with him. This little boy had been in school 2 years and had no clue *how* to read. He disliked school and was frustrated and discouraged at not being able to read. After only six tutoring sessions using this program, he read me a list of over 100 words. Importantly, he suddenly loves school and is excited about reading. He looks forward to his reading lessons. His proud grin, complete with missing front teeth, proves beyond a doubt the dramatic difference this program made for him. This program put him on the right track to reading success.

This book gives parents, grandparents or other teachers a highly effective way to teach their children to read. It is designed to teach beginning reading one-on-one to young children. However, it also includes advanced chapters and can be used to remediate children who struggle with reading. Teaching a child to read correctly is a wonderful and rewarding experience. Grab this book and share the joy of reading with your child.

# INTRODUCTION

## A. Overview of Reading:

We all want our children to read proficiently. They need to be able to look at black squiggly marks on a page and to translate this written code into our English language. Reading is the key that unlocks the door to the vast wealth of information and stories. Reading is critical to a successful education. If a child, or adult, struggles with reading, they suffer in all other areas of education because they cannot easily access information contained in our written language.

Unfortunately reading failure is a significant and serious problem throughout our country. In 2003, 69% of the 4<sup>th</sup> graders in this country were NOT at the proficient level and 37% were below basic level.<sup>2</sup> When you see information on “reading success”, you need to look closely. Often true reading success rates are disguised in deceptive statistics. When results are given as comparisons to average, remember, the national average is horrible. Even the “top in the nation” states still have alarming failure rates. Colorado, which had the best scores in the nation for 4th graders, had 64% of its kids NOT proficient in reading. Often “success” is claimed when reading rates rise. Findings brag, “The percent of 4<sup>th</sup> graders performing at or above proficient was higher in 2003 than in 1992”. However, when you actually look, you find this much-applauded “progress” was only a slight improvement in dismal scores. In 1992, 29% of the kids were proficient and in 2003 this ‘improved’ to 32%. In other words, even with the “good news”, 68% of the kids still are NOT proficient! You must always look at the actual children who are proficient readers to measure true reading success.

The distressing fact is most the children in this country are not taught to read proficiently. Sadly, this failure is not limited to children as tens of millions of adults are functionally illiterate. The purpose of this book is not to discuss the significant failure of our education system, but rather to provide parents and other teachers an effective way to teach reading. It is very important to get children on the “right track” to reading success. The best way to ensure that children learn to read successfully is to teach them correctly with effective methods and to avoid strategies that potentially lead to reading difficulty.

First, we need to understand that English is a phonetic language. This means words are made up of sounds blended together. The alphabetic characters, the artificial black squiggly marks, are the way we show or write our phonetic language on paper. In English, the written letters and combination of letters represent specific sounds. To read, we need to translate or decode these black squiggly marks back into the sounds that blend to form specific words. Decoding is the essential foundation for proficient reading. The more advanced skills in fluency, vocabulary and comprehension critical to reading proficiency are dependant on first mastering phonetic decoding.

Reading is a complex process. The best way to make sure your kid learns to read successfully is to explicitly teach him all the specific steps. It should not be left to chance for the child to figure it out on their own. It is not an innate human biological process to know automatically how to read the English language. Like all complex learned skills it is best taught step by step with mastery of the individual steps before moving on to more complex skills. Lots of practice is also necessary.

When teaching it is very important to realize children are naïve about our written language. Many do not understand how letters represents sounds blended into the words that make up our oral language. For all they know, somehow adults simply glance at a page full of random black squiggles and come up with a

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<sup>2</sup> The 2003 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Reading Report Card  
[www.nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/reading](http://www.nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/reading).

story. When we fail to teach them carefully, some children adopt incorrect strategies and end up with serious reading difficulties. The problem with many reading programs is they teach incorrect reading strategies and contain potentially misleading information. Often they rely on analytical, embedded, implicit and other indirect instruction that is ineffective with many kids. They do not teach all the specific steps. They are incomplete, failing to teach necessary parts of the phonetic code. It is true that *some* kids figure out the process on their own and become good readers under any reading program. However, many do *not* learn and develop serious reading difficulties. If the child gets on the “wrong track” on their approach to reading, they face serious and persistent difficulties. Sadly, the research data proves that most struggling kids never catch up.

The reason some children fail while others succeed has nothing to do with intelligence or ability, but rather with how different kids learn and process information. From what I have seen, some bright kids, possibly ones with strong visual memory skills or those who just have difficulty hearing the separate sounds within words, are the ones who often develop reading problems under less effective types of reading instruction.

The new scientific research on dyslexia is enlightening. Dyslexia is defined as a problem learning to read despite normal intelligence. Scientific advances allow researchers to view images of the brain as it reads and actually map out these neural pathways. Amazingly, researchers can actually see how the brain reads! Sally Shaywitz describes this information in the book *Overcoming Dyslexia*.<sup>3</sup> The researchers discovered that dyslexic readers use different neural pathways than proficient readers do and that these improper neural pathways form because the child does not recognize the sound structure of words. *Dyslexics have problems turning print into sound*. This brain imaging shows literally the “wrong track” that those with reading difficulties use and that these incorrect neural pathways form in beginning readers. The research also provides details on the neural processes that proficient readers use. The studies show how proficient reading develops word by word, based first on slow phonologic analysis of individual sounds. Then with repeated practice of the correctly phonologically analyzed word, the brain forms a ‘neural model’ of the word and stores it in a different ‘fast’ reading area.

Very importantly, the research shows proper reading instruction can change the dyslexic incorrect neural pathways. Direct intensive phonologic intervention programs eliminated incorrect neural pathways in struggling children. In other words, effective programs that specifically taught letter-sound correspondence improved reading skills and changed brain activity to the “correct” pathway that good readers use. Teaching methods do matter. The brain imaging shows that effective instruction using direct-phonological-based reading programs develops the neural pathways for proficient reading. Although it is easier and quicker to remediate younger children, the research showed noticeable improvements in reading and changes in neural activity in adults. (I highly recommend reading the book *Overcoming Dyslexia* by Sally Shaywitz and reviewing some of the specific research summaries on dyslexia and phonological based reading).

This brain imaging research on dyslexia further validates and supports the information on what types of reading programs are most effective in teaching kids to read successfully. The details on exactly how proficient reading neural pathways function, provide a wealth of information on how best to design effective reading programs. Remember, reading is not a natural biologic process. To efficiently perform this artificial task of turning man-made black squiggles into our language, the child needs to tap into the existing brain functioning areas that are naturally designed to process spoken language. This brain research shows *why* the direct systematic phonics programs work.

Despite many claims, arguments and opinions to the contrary, the scientific evidence clearly shows that the specific program of reading instruction has significant effect on rates of reading success. There is a “right way” to teach reading if effectiveness is the standard you use to measure success. There is a “right way” to ensure the correct ‘good reader’ neural pathways are activated. The continued arguments for

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<sup>3</sup> Shaywitz, Sally. *Overcoming Dyslexia A New and Complete Science-Based Program for Reading Problems at Any Level*. New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2004.

‘whole literature’ and ‘balanced’ programs may inherently sound good but in reality, these methods have a proven record of high rates of reading failure. Now the new brain research shows why these methods fail many children. They allow and often even encourage development of incorrect neural pathways. While some of the overall concepts of whole literature programs are worthwhile, they are just NOT effective in teaching children *how* to read successfully.

It is like a railroad tracks leading from a beginning point, if the child accidentally gets on the ‘wrong track’ they most likely will never make it to the proficient reader station, unless direct appropriate intervention occurs. In contrast, an effective program will make sure the child is on the “right track” to reading proficiency. This program is designed to make sure your child is on the “right track”!