

# Elementary education essay sample

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The debate on whether phonics or whole language method is the most effective in the learning process of children has been going on for years now. Currently, there are individuals and groups of people conducting studies and research programs on the seemingly unending conflict. A study conducted by a group of psychologist arrived in a conclusion that the “ program (phonics) appears useful with students having difficulty in reading and spelling, a student who is a “ beginner,” or for adults who wish to improve their reading skills.” (Dr. Susan Cobb, et al.) In this program there was six weeks of phonics instruction and conspicuous progress was observed in the group.

The researchers found out a significant development among the students and who even applied their skills to complete other academic tasks. Another study was conducted on the other hand to test the effectiveness of the whole language approaches on the oral literacy skills of pre-schoolers. It concluded that “ without documentation that demonstrates a strong relationship between whole language methods and language progress, advocates of the philosophy cannot expect it to be seriously considered as an alternative to traditional instructional methods.”(Ziminsky)

Taking into consideration the various studies conducted advocating for each approach, the question on whether whole language or phonics is the best approach is still unanswered. Debates among parents, educators, students, and experts have escalated. Advocates for each approach assert that their method is the more effective way to attract children in reading.

To say it simply, “ supporters of the whole language approach think children’s literature, writing activities, and communication activities can be used across the curriculum to teach reading; backers of phonics instruction insist that a direct, sequential mode of teaching enables students to master reading in an organized way.”(Cromwell 1997).

The debate over whole language and phonics has spread in all corners of educational institution. The ongoing debate has prompted the International Reading Association (IRA) to dispose a position statement. It supported phonics within a whole-language program. In “ The Role of Phonics in Reading Instruction,” the IRA stated that:

- The teaching of phonics is an important aspect of beginning reading instruction.
- Classroom teachers in the primary grades do value and do teach phonics as a part of their reading programs.
- Phonics instruction, to be effective in promoting independence in reading, must be embedded in the context of a total reading/language arts program.

The support manifested by the International Reading Association to phonics as the most effective approach in kids’ early reading development has ignited more debate. Advocates of whole language approach still assert that it greatly enhance the reading capability of the early learners. In an article entitled *Whole Language and Phonics: Can they work together?* Marie Carbo asserts that “ Children who do well in whole-language programs tend to have visual, tactile, and global reading styles.” Global learners such as these, she

maintains, tend to enjoy and learn from the popular literature, hands-on learning and peer interactions prominent in the whole language approach. (Cromwell 1997)

In his writing, Carbo stated on the other hand that “ If the systematic teaching of phonics doesn’t take place, analytic learners can fall behind and fail to develop the tools they need for decoding words.” She believed that “ Using a single approach to reading generally doesn’t work. Many combinations and permutations are necessary to provide an optimal learning environment for an entire class of readers. She cites an extensive body of research that backs “ the global approach of whole language as a framework for teaching young children and poor readers — but only as a framework.” Within that framework, strategies from different approaches need to be utilized.” (Cromwell 1997)

In the book *Invitation* it asserts that “ one key to a successful whole language program is teaching for strategies rather than simply teaching for skills. In teaching for skills, she says, the teacher decides what the learner needs, and the skill is taught directly, often in a predetermined sequence. The student then practices the skill in isolation.” (Regie Routman) He also said that in whole-language method, opportunities to teach phonics arise in shared reading, shared writing, writing aloud, self-selected writing, and guided reading. The question whether which one is actually the winner in this debate is raised. Phonics or whole language? Most of experts now believe that not one of the methods per se is always effective but that both strategies of teaching language deserve merit.

In the article *Language and Phonics: Can they work together?* it asserted that “ Parental involvement is vital to reading success no matter which approaches are used. Many parents follow debates like phonics vs. whole language in the media, and form opinions on one side or the other. Explaining why and how phonics, whole language, or another method of instruction is used will help bring students’ parents on board and support the classroom teaching of reading.” (Cromwell 1997) But there are other advocates that believe phonics is most effective even without combining it with the whole language approach.

They believe that the only effective universal approach in teaching reading is through the utilization of thorough phonics for a long period of time including a school year. The article *Turning the Tide of Illiteracy* “ points out that both Cuba and Israel discovered they had high illiteracy rates after using whole language methods. Both solved their problem by returning to intensive phonics. Fortunately for them, both are small, authoritarian nations; once they find a solution, they can implement it nationwide almost immediately.” Some people believe that it is hard for children to learn to read if they do not understand phonics. In order to handle a conversation, children must have knowledge on how the ABCs are sounded.

“ The question in early childhood programs is not whether to teach “ phonics” or “ whole language learning,” but how to teach phonics in context—rather than in isolation—so that children make connections between letters, sounds, and meaning.”(kidsource. com) Jenny Curtis in her article stated that phonics-based reading programs tend to build better pronunciation and word recognition. The phonics formulas can be applied <https://assignbuster.com/elementary-education-essay-sample/>

again and again, and will help a child with spelling far more than the memorization and guesswork of whole language. She further asserted that “ if only taught phonetically, however, a child may have difficulty understanding the full meaning of a text, due to the constant breaking down of words into parts.”

Curtis also pointed out that “ whole language learning is thought to provide a better understanding of the text, and a more interesting and creative approach to reading. However, whole language learning may come at the expense of accuracy and correctness. A child might be awarded high marks for “ overall language use,” even if he or she has misspelled many words.” In other words, whole language is useful in learning words as a whole.

Children maybe good in pronouncing words but if they are asked to spell them will be very difficult. Most of the early learners recognize words by hearing them so there may be a problem in utilizing the whole language approach. Curtis moreover continued asserting that “ small children tend to fall into the categories of either visual or auditory learners. Visual learners, on the one hand, are more likely to benefit from the whole language approach since their strength is in recognizing words and word sequences that they have seen before.

On the other hand, auditory students learn what they hear — so they rely more on phonetics.” The question arises therefore on whether which method is the best for the kids. The learning differences of the kids must approach through a combination of methods. Each approach has its advantages and

disadvantages and in taking both of them may minimize these disadvantages and boost the children's reading development.

The debate between whole language and phonics has challenged almost all sectors in education most especially the parents. The parents want the schools to apply phonics as a method of reaching reading but some schools still insist that whole language is the most effective tool. This conflict confused a number of people including teachers and particularly the students who are stuck in the middle. In a holistic perspective however, it is believed that “ children first hear language by listening to their parents. But they do not merely copy the sounds of their parents. A child must make an enormous mental step in order to begin learning this language.

Every word in our language represents a particular and single concept. When children first learn language, they first have to understand — in a mind that has no language at all — that the strange sound they are hearing is *connected* to whatever the parent is pointing or referring to.” ( Whole Language versus Phonics, 2005) This auditory skill of children is making them more susceptible to phonics as the most effective method in learning to read. But this cannot be apply to the general children population since some children learn more effectively through whole language approach. In an article Reading Wars it stated that “ this battle is going on in newspaper editorial pages, in state legislatures, and congress.

Proponents of phonics point to declining reading test scores that they see as a result of whole language instruction and scientific studies that indicate phonics instruction produces better reading scores than other methods.

Whole language advocates point to other reasons to explain those instances of declining reading scores and to ethnographic studies of students in classrooms to support their position.”(Reyhner 2003) People in the field of education believe that it is easier to use the whole language approach in teaching reading to children. However, this does not guarantee that it may be more effective than using phonics.

Reyhner pointed out that “ While knowing basic phonetic rules helps students sound out words, other very common “ outlaw words” still need to be memorized as sight words because they don’t follow any but the most complicated rules. It is estimated about half the words in the English language cannot be pronounced correctly using commonly taught phonic rules. Other problems with phonics include the differing size of students’ vocabularies and differing dialects of English that vary in their pronunciation rules.” (Reading Wars 2003) True to say that phonics has very complicated rules in pronunciation that in the process some children get tired of learning it. The dialect, of course, plays a great rule in the reading skill of the child.

For the young learners it may be too complicated to decode words’ pronunciation as Reyhner continued stating that “ Phonics is considered a “ bottom up” approach where students “ decode” the meaning of a text. The advantage of phonics, especially for students who come to schools with large vocabularies, is that once students get the basics down, they can go to the library and read a wide variety of children’s literature.” (Reading Wars 2005) Another article by Eakman asserted however that “ Education researchers have identified hundreds of phonics rules, most are useless, and in the totality, actually counter productive.

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There are, however, a couple of dozen phonics rules that are very useful. The use of this phonics rules work for over 85% of the words in the English language, most of the rest were imported from other languages curriculum.”(Cloning of the American Mind) It may be difficult to think that when kids go to the library and decode words while reading literature can be very tedious and exhausting. Hence the whole language approach can be of tremendous help. Reyhner believed that “ with whole language, teachers are expected to provide a literacy rich environment for their students and to combine speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

Whole language teachers emphasize the meaning of texts over the sounds of letters, and phonics instruction becomes just one component of the whole language classroom.” In other words, both of the methods can be utilized in the classroom but as Reyhner emphasized phonics must just go as a supporting approach to the whole language method. The advocates for phonics however are not amenable that phonics would be secondary to the whole language approach. Whatever may be the case both approaches have its own loopholes that educators must be aware of and can work them out for the benefit of the students.

Each approach has its own effectiveness in helping the children learn to read. It will be vital for the educators to learn how to shift the approach based on learning ability, background, and age of the students. In this way, both approaches can be effective in its own way. To sum it up, the effectiveness of each approach solely depends on the educators and schools on how they can manage to utilize the approach in the right way.

Educational methodology is then imperative for the success of learning process in children.

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