Statement of Purpose

 Research supports that struggling readers must have their phonics skills strengthened. Beginning with phonemic awareness, reading develops through a series of interconnected stages. The sound symbol relationship is very important because without it decoding is difficult. This then affects reading fluency, comprehension and learning and makes reading not enjoyable. Regardless of age, students need critical skills necessary for fluent and meaningful reading including decoding strategies (Moats, 2001).

Many children are not proficient decoders because they have not fully developed phoneme awareness, that letters represent spoken sounds. The process of developing sound symbol awareness may be difficult because when speaking, the listener does not hear individual sounds within the words. It is argued that there is no “natural” practice or feedback applying the phonemic principal, that words are comprised of smaller abstract sounds. Learning to read is very different from learning to speak because of the skills needed to apply phonemes from speech to the symbols used in our writing system (Lyon, 1998).

In addition to the importance of practice, it is also important to keep in mind the impact of memory research on learning. The optimal range for short-term memory function is seven digits plus or minus two. This cognitive psychological research informs the teaching of decoding by reinforcing the need to “chunk” information into smaller pieces. Additional research attributes difficulty blending two or more sounds to the overwhelming demands on a readers’ working memory when larger words need to be blended to form a word. (MacArthur, C. A., Ferretti, R. P.,Okolo, C. M., Cavalier, A. R., 2001).

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