

# Assessing, Preventing, and Overcoming Reading Difficulties

*A professional learning series presented by David A. Kilpatrick, Ph.D.*

## Module 11 Session 2

*Sponsored by the Exceptional Student Services Unit (ESSU) and created in collaboration with  
Specific Learning Disability Specialists Jill Marshall and Veronica Fiedler*



**COLORADO**  
Department of Education

## **Module 11: Effective Interventions for Reading Difficulties**

*Session 2: Popular Interventions with With Minimal to Modest Results*

# Assessing, Preventing, and Overcoming Reading Difficulties

## Objective:

Through engagement in this series of 13 on-demand webinars, participants will understand the current research, implications, and the essential elements necessary for assessing, preventing, and overcoming reading difficulties.



**ASSESS**



**PREVENT**



**OVERCOME**

# Assessing, Preventing, and Overcoming Reading Difficulties

## Webinar Series Modules

**Module 1:** Reading Research and the Research to Practice Gap

**Module 2:** Current Approaches to Reading Instruction: Why Many Learners Still Struggle

**Module 3:** The Simple View of Reading

**Module 4:** Word-Level Reading

**Module 5:** Reading Comprehension

**Module 6:** Introduction to Reading Assessment; Assessing Phonological Skills

**Module 7:** Assessing Phonics Skills

**Module 8:** Assessing Word Identification and Reading Fluency

**Module 9:** Assessing Reading Comprehension and Related Skills

**Module 10:** Effective Approaches for Preventing Reading Difficulties

**MODULE 11: Effective Interventions for Reading Difficulties**

**Module 12:** Case Examples of Reading Disabilities

**Module 13:** Specific Learning Disability Identification

# Module 11 Overview

## **Module 11: Effective Interventions for Reading Difficulties**

11.1 How Do We Determine What is Effective?

**11.2 Popular Interventions With Minimal to Modest Results**

11.3 Phonological Proficiency Intervention Continuum

11.4 Highly Effective Intervention for Reading Difficulties

# Learning Intentions



## **Module 11 Session 2: Popular Interventions with Minimal to Modest Results**

Participants will be able to:

- ✓ **Identify types of interventions that have limited results**
- ✓ **Explain why these approaches do not substantially “close the gap” between struggling readers and their typically-developing peers**

# Common Assumptions About Reading Improvement

- 1. Reading is based on visual memory/paired-associate learning**
- 2. Weak readers can improve their fluency with reading practice**
- 3. Phonics intervention will close the gap between struggling readers and their typically developing peers**
- 4. Interventions based upon the three-cueing systems approach will get students up to grade level**
- 5. Phonological awareness is not important after first grade**
  - Once children can decode simple CVC words, it is no longer relevant
- 6. If students cannot read well by late elementary school, they will not become good readers**

# Common Assumptions Drive Teaching Practices

- **The following practices align with these common assumptions**
  1. Teach irregular words as whole units (visual memory assumption)
  2. Repeated readings, reading practice (practice assumption)
  3. Break down the task into smaller units and develop more fine-grained letter-sound knowledge (phonics assumption)
  4. Teach students to make better use of context when reading (three-cueing assumption)
  5. Ignore phonological skills after first grade (phonological assumption)
  6. Abandon targeted word-reading instruction after late elementary school (statute of limitations assumption)



# Teaching Irregular Words as Unanalyzed Wholes

- Based upon intuition and tradition
- Inconsistent with extensive evidence against the visual memory hypothesis of word-level reading (see Module 2.3)
- Inconsistent with our scientific understanding of how words are remembered for later, instant retrieval (i.e., orthographic mapping; see Module 4.4)
- No evidence in the literature that this approach helps weak readers close the gap with their typically developing peers

# Practice and Fluency Approaches & Repeated Reading

- **Strongly intuitive and a very common approach**
- **Based on older assumptions about fluency (see Module 4.5)**
  - Not informed by research on orthographic learning
  - Weak readers do not remember the words they read
- **Oddly, recent research reviews seem to support repeated reading**
  - No reference to standard score point gains (such gains are very limited)
  - No strong or consistent generalization to non practiced passages
  - No evidence for normalizing reading skills
- **Some commercial programs are based on volume of reading**

# Phonics Intervention Often Does Not Close the Gap

- **Phonics skills are necessary for reading alphabetic writing**
  - However, there are often too many non-responders (see Module 2.5)
- **Consider three responses to phonic intervention based on severity of phonological-core deficit**
  - Mild—these students “take off” with phonics interventions
  - Moderate—these students become better at sounding out new words but do not remember the words they read (and thus lack fluency)
  - Severe—these students do not seem to benefit from phonics instruction
- **Recall how word-reading develops (Module 4.2)**

# Phonological Skill Development

## 1. Early Phonological Awareness

Rhyming, first sounds, syllable segmentation

## 2. Basic Phoneme Awareness

Blending and segmentation

## 3. Advanced Phonemic Awareness/Proficiency

Automatic, unconscious access to phonemes in spoken words

# Word Reading Skill Development

## 1. Letter Names and Letter Sounds

Phonological storage and retrieval

## 2. Phonic Decoding and Encoding (Spelling)

## 3. Orthographic Mapping

Efficient memory for printed words; rapid sight vocabulary expansion

The Interactive Relationship Between the Development of Phonological Skills and Word-Level Reading Skills

Adapted From David Kilpatrick, *Essentials of Assessing, Preventing, and Overcoming Reading Difficulties* (Wiley, 2015)

# Phonics Intervention With Struggling Readers

- **Foundational phonics concepts pre-date our scientific understanding of reading development**
- **Most phonics interventions require supplementation with more explicit and intensive phonemic awareness training**
- **If students become competent at reading nonsense words that follow the six common syllable types, more fine-grained teaching of rules or patterns or exceptions to patterns will not likely result in major gains**
  - Word memory is their issue at this point
- **Students who do not benefit from phonics lack the phonological skills and this is correctable**

# Three-Cueing Systems – Getting Up to Grade Level?

- **Three-cueing intervention approach is very popular**
  - Covered in Module 2.4
- **No *independent* evidence that it helps beyond one year**
- **Inconsistent with what we know about reading development**
- **Emphasizes strategies that come naturally to weak readers**
  - Guessing from contextual cues or picture cues
  - Looking at the first letter
  - Weak readers are poor at sounding out words and remembering words
  - They do not have a large pool of familiar words in memory to propel fluency

# Phonological Awareness (PA) Beyond First Grade

- **Universal screenings typically discontinue PA after first grade**
  - The correlation between PA and reading decreases after first grade
  - Largely due to the use of a less sensitive PA task (phoneme segmentation)
- **PA grows until 3<sup>rd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> grade in typical readers**
  - Older struggling readers have PA skills parallel to K-1 typical readers
- **Aggressively training PA beyond a first grade level had the best reading outcomes in the research literature (next module)**
- **PA consistent with orthographic learning literature**

# No Age Limit on Correcting Word Reading Difficulties

- **Schools normally stop or limit intervention for word-reading difficulties after elementary school**
  - Presumably due to the limited benefits of the approaches mentioned in this session beyond a particular point in reading development
  - If these methods worked with older students, they would be used
  - None of these approaches address PA beyond a first grade skill level
- **Fortunately, some studies show that dramatic gains can occur with older students and adults**
  - Such studies used interventions that “fixed” the PA difficulties holding students back (see next module)



# Research Results on Specific Intervention Programs

- **Studies of common commercially available programs consistently show very limited standard score point gains**
  - No evidence that any of these interventions close the gap between struggling readers and their typically developing peers
  - This is consistent with four decades of research on general and special educational remedial reading: weak readers remain weak readers
- **No need to “name names” here**
  - Consider any current program operating from the previously mentioned assumptions and they will have limited gains (i.e., visual memory/exposure to words, reading practice, three-cueing, phonics without post-first grade level phonemic awareness)
- **Unfortunately, this describes most current programs**

# Why the Limited Results?

- **These interventions are not based upon research into how word-level reading develops**
  - They are based on the unsupported assumptions mentioned at the beginning of this session
  - These same assumptions keep getting recycled into most of the commercially available programs
- **Fortunately, researchers can provide a better understanding of how word reading develops and why some students struggle**
  - Covered in Modules 4.1 to 4.7
- **The best intervention results in the research are consistent with this scientific understanding of reading (see next session)**

# Summary: Module 11 Session 2

- ✓ There are several common assumptions about reading intervention that affect our instructional efforts with weak readers
- ✓ These assumptions are not consistent with what researchers have discovered about reading development and reading difficulties
- ✓ Most commercially available approaches are based upon these unsupported assumptions
- ✓ As a result, the most commonly used interventions are of limited helpfulness for weak readers



A woman with long brown hair and black-rimmed glasses is shown from the chest up, looking upwards and to the right with a thoughtful expression. Her right index finger is pressed against her lips. The background is a light gray wall covered with numerous hand-drawn black question marks of various sizes. A large black thought bubble with a blue outline is positioned on the left side of the image, containing white text.

## **Reflect and Connect:**

What assumptions have you brought to the task of reading instruction or intervention?  
How have they affected your choice of approach?



# Wrap Up

A photograph of a desert landscape featuring rolling sand dunes. The dunes are illuminated by warm, golden light, likely from the setting or rising sun, creating strong shadows and highlights that emphasize their undulating shapes. The sky is a clear, pale blue.

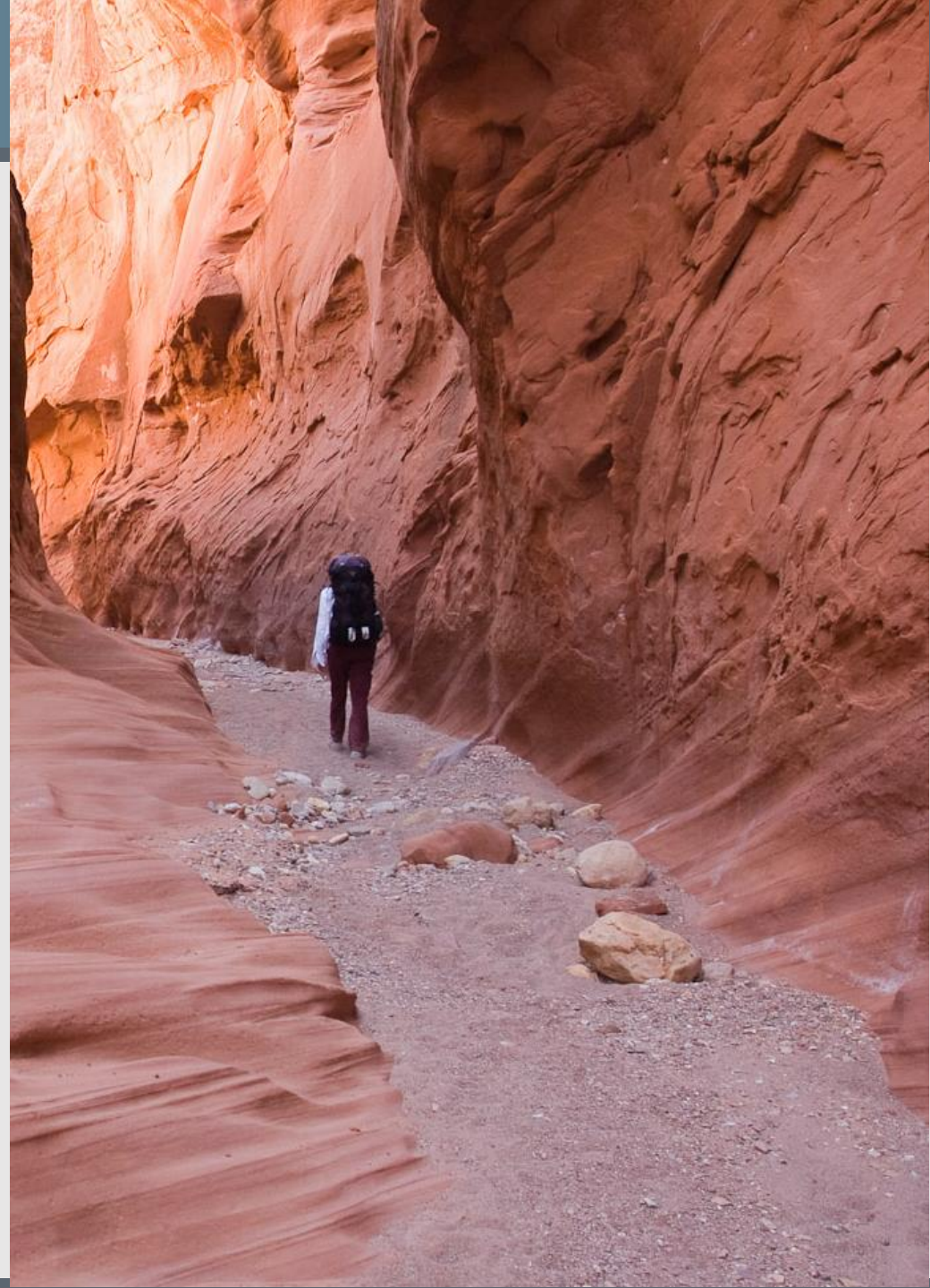
**What was your biggest takeaway?**

**What questions do you still have?**

# Up Next

## **Module 11.3**

### **Phonological Proficiency Intervention Continuum**







*Thank You*

**Please visit the CDE Specific Learning Disability Website  
for more information:**

**<https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/SD-SLD>**