

Average intelligence, below average reading.

In my private practice I hear comments each day from parents and teachers such as, 'my child is smart, he can pull apart a machine and put it back together again but doesn't get reading.' Or, "my child is excellent at math but for some reason cannot read." "He seems to get everything else however he just doesn't seem to get reading." For many children, school is a never ending cycle of special reading programs where a sense of failure is nurtured through a constant failure to improve in reading. Why is it that year after year the same children participate in reading programs where irrespective of the intervention they still struggle with reading? Research conducted by Watson and Bandenhop (1992) suggests that persistent failure to learn can lead to a sense of helplessness in which the person acts as if there is no point in trying because I can't do it anyway. This undermines confidence and has a debilitating impact. Clay (1993) suggests that such children learn to be learning disabled.

For over a century researchers have examined the difficulties faced by students with average intelligence who also have specific difficulties in regards to reading acquisition. The concept of unexpected underachievement has been reported in both medical and psychological literature since the early 19th century. In 1896 Pringle Morgan reported the case of a 14 year old boy, who despite normal intelligence, educational opportunity and desire appeared to have serious trouble learning to read.

There are many reasons as to why a child may not be reading despite average intelligence including psychological deficits, ineffective programming, biological deficits, family situations etc. What is essential in assisting children with reading difficulties is successful and appropriate assessment, planning and intervention based on solid, established and current research.

There are many ways to teach a child how to read and unfortunately many reading programs have been taught in our schools for decades without appropriate research being applied. Knowledge of effective reading instruction for children experiencing difficulties has been refined over the past 20 years however classroom practice has not kept pace with this knowledge base. Shaywitz and Shaywitz (1996) estimated that 74% of children who are poor readers at the end of third grade will likely be poor readers at the end of the ninth grade. Research also indicates that if children's reading skills haven't improved by the end of the third grade, these children will have considerable difficulty overcoming their slow and unsuccessful start to reading.

The purpose of this article is to get you considering your child, a friend's child, a relative or a student in your class. Does the child seem only to have difficulties with reading? Is the child failing to progress in reading despite constant intervention? Are tears and fights the normal at home reading time? Does the child exhibit normal intelligence but struggles only with reading? Answering yes to these questions may indicate that specialist literacy intervention is required. A word of warning however, be wary of programs that have all of the bells and whistles, that flash, make sounds, provide the best pictures and guarantee success without any effort. Success without any effort is no success at all.

If you would like a Reading Checklist then please visit <http://www.auslit.com.au>. If you would like to post a comment then please do so at contact@auslit.com.au.

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*Official Journal of the American Academy of Paediatrics. Published online July 27, 2009
PEDIATRICS Vol. 124 No. 2 August 2009, pp. 837-844 (doi:10.1542/peds.2009-1445).*