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## Teaching reading: combine and make it effective

According to Russian Educational Standard children in primary schools should be taught to read aloud short texts based on well-known language with reasonably correct pronunciation and intonation [Cit. in 4].

However, and not only in Russia but even in English-speaking countries, children come across multiple difficulties while learning to read. There are two main approaches to teaching reading: *Phonics* and *Whole-Word Reading*. They have been taking turns being in favour among scholars for more than a century [3, 6]. Let's have a critical look at them.

When the *Phonics* method is used, first initial letters and their sounds are taught (as [k] for *cat* or [b] for *bee*). Then sound blends are practiced (such as pl, pe, pa, etc). Then they are combined into words, then phrases and sentences come. Only then does the reading for meaning begin. That is to say, the approach is purely deductive, from bottom up.

The method that we called the “*Russian*” approach is similar to *Phonics*, but has its peculiarities. Here the stress is on vowels in so called ‘open’ and ‘closed’ positions. The accent is also on letter blends that are not specific to the Russian language (such as *ch, sh, ee* or *ea*).

In the *Whole-Word* method words are presented as an entity in a meaningful setting and are taught as “sight” vocabulary. Through various activities students remember how a word looks like. Rather soon students read short meaningful texts. The approach is inductive.

Thus, the distinctive features of the *Phonics* and the “*Russian*” approaches are the following:

- they aim to develop and consolidate children’s phonological, phonemic and morphological awareness;
- teach initial sounds, sound blends, consonant and vowel combinations;
- teach explicitly;
- teach the technical side of reading, not paying much attention to meaning;
- develop the ability to sound letters of any word, even unfamiliar ones;
- are systematically organized and sequenced.

*Whole-Word* (or *Linguistic*) approach has the following features:

- focuses on whole-word recognition of most common words;
- emphasizes building up a sight vocabulary based on most common words;
- students are repeatedly exposed to the new words;
- develops lexical knowledge (collocations);
- attention is focused on the meaning from the very beginning;
- students are not explicitly taught that there is a relationship between words and sounds.

There are also several approaches that are not so well-known. One of them is the *Multi-Sensory approach* that claims that while learning to read one has to make use of all the senses available: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile. The *Language Experience approach* implies that children learn by listening to, reading and rereading books with the teacher’s guidance.

Now let’s consider limitations that the approaches mentioned above seem to have. For *Phonics* and the “*Russian*” approach they may be the following: