

Getting to the Core of Reading Difficulties:

The Old Schoolhouse Interviews Matthew Glavach, PhD

Christine Field

Have you tried to teach an older child to read? They quickly tire of reading about S-a-m and his c-a-t. There has to be a way to get these children involved in reading while immersing them in more grown-up content.

Dr. Glavach saw this need and dedicated himself to producing such materials. He has a master's degree in special education and a doctorate in psychology. He is the author or coauthor of more than 30 educational programs, including the highly acclaimed Core Reading System.

TOS: I can only imagine the frustration of the middle school child who cannot read adequately. What led you to the work of helping this group of struggling readers?

Dr. Glavach: I began teaching as a science teacher in an inner-city high school where more than half of the students could not read or comprehend the textbooks. Their frustration with being disconnected from textbooks often resulted in trouble-making and recalcitrant behavior. The hard work and small successes of my beginning teaching year had a profound effect on my life. I realized that I wanted to help make struggling middle school and high school students' lives more productive and meaningful by developing programs that worked for them. The programs quickly would improve students' reading, connect them to the textbooks, and eliminate their frustration and failure.

TOS: The world moves so fast, and the child who cannot keep up with reading will be left in the dust in so many areas of life. What is the experience of the middle school or high school student who struggles to read?

Dr. Glavach: Reading difficulties often lead to disharmony in students' lives, and the disharmony becomes greater as students pass to higher grades facing greater reading challenges. Students' other abilities are overlooked or masked by reading difficulties. Failure and frustration begin to dominate their thinking and their world.

TOS: So, what is the solution?

Dr. Glavach: Progress in the study of brain functioning has been amazing. Sally Shaywitz, MD, through recent brain imaging studies, has identified three neural pathways in the brain specifically for reading. Her imaging studies show vastly different activation patterns in dyslexic readers and poor readers as compared to the patterns of good readers. (Dyslexic readers have difficulty in the mechanics of reading and have slowness of reading despite good comprehension. Poor readers may have experienced a combination of poor reading instruction and a disadvantaged language environment at home.) In dyslexic readers and poor readers, lack of success in reading is caused by the underactivation of the neural pathways in the brain area for analyzing words and transforming letters into sounds. Dr. Shaywitz's research has concluded that the core problem in dyslexic readers and poor readers is phonologic (turning print into sound).

Dr. Shaywitz's brain imaging studies also have shown that early intervention, with effective reading programs, can produce startling results.

According to Dr. Shaywitz, "After more than a century of frustration, it has been shown that the brain can be rewired and that struggling readers can become skilled readers."

My research at the middle school and high school levels shows similar results. By targeting the neural pathways for analyzing words and transforming letters into sounds with an effective reading intervention program such as Core Reading, the response is often dramatic. Students average three years' growth in one year, and many make four and five years' growth.

TOS: What makes the Core Reading System unique?

Dr. Glavach: Appropriate for middle school and high school students because it is adult-oriented and challenging, Core Reading is based on current brain research in reading. Rather than being remedial, it is an intensive and activity-based program designed to connect students to the school's core curriculum. The 25 weekly lessons use a core vocabulary from English, biology, science, and social studies curriculums. Students move step-by-step from two-syllable words to words of five syllables or more, through a unique spelling approach and timed readings to develop reading fluency. Each lesson is organized by specific words with consistent ending patterns. (The brain naturally organizes information by patterns.) A middle school teacher commented that in addition to finding reading success in Core Reading, students find enjoyment in working in the program.

TOS: How are the lessons organized?

Dr. Glavach: Core Reading is organized into 25 lessons based on consistent word patterns. Using the word pattern approach assists in spelling and transition to reading longer words. For example, words like *plastic*, *fantastic*, *scholastic*, and *nation*, *station*, *communication* have rhyming qualities that form natural bridges from shorter to longer words in the patterns. Each lesson packet includes spelling, dictionary study for core vocabulary development, an oral word list and a timed reading selection focusing on the pattern being studied and is tied to an important subject in the core curriculum. Each lesson has a similar structure that allows the student to be self-directed and comfortable with what is coming next.

TOS: How do I, as a parent, determine whether this is a good program for my child? Is there an assessment instrument I can use?

Dr. Glavach: If the middle school or high school student is reading at a third-grade to seventh-grade level, he or she would benefit from Core Reading. A parent who is unsure of the reading level may write to me at my website, and I can help them determine a program that would be helpful.

TOS: Are the lessons geared to the classroom, or are they homeschool-friendly?

Dr. Glavach: Lessons in Core Reading are easy to use for both the classroom and the homeschool. The program provides a script for presenting the first lesson, and lesson notes are all that are needed for subsequent lessons. Also, another publisher is developing a computer software version of Core Reading.

TOS: What other products did you create for these middle learners?

Dr. Glavach: I have developed programs for middle school and high school struggling readers that cover phonics, reading fluency, Latin and Greek word roots, capitalization and punctuation. Some of the programs are audio-based with cassette tapes and correlated workbooks. They are self-teaching, easy to use, and appropriate for homeschools.

TOS: Do you offer materials for younger children as well?

Dr. Glavach: Yes, I also offer programs that are carefully sequenced to bring success to young struggling readers and learners. My website describes the programs.

TOS: What new projects are you working on?

Dr. Glavach: After spending five years developing Core Reading, I am working on a second program for Latin and Greek work roots. As I review new, promising research, I try to develop the ideas into concrete experiences for struggling students.

TOS: How can readers learn more about you?

Dr. Glavach: At my website, readers can find more information about my programs and me.

TOS: Are you available to personally consult with parents to choose appropriate materials for their children?

Dr. Glavach: Yes, I can consult with parents through my website in making recommendations for ways to assist their struggling students.

TOS: Dr. Glavach, thank you for taking the time to talk with us about helping our struggling readers. For more information about materials discussed, please see <http://www.strugglingreaders.com> or email info@strugglingreaders.com.

Biographical Information

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Christine M. Field practiced law for eight years before becoming a full-time mommy. She and her husband live and homeschool their four children in Wheaton, Illinois, where her husband serves as chief of police. Three of their four children are adopted: one through private adoption and two from Korea. As special needs expert columnist of TOS Magazine's Resource Room,

Christine welcomes readers' comments, personal stories, and questions. Please contact Christine at RR@TOSMag.com. As the author of books Help For the Harried Homeschooler, A Field Guide to Home Schooling, Coming Home to Raise Your Children, Should You Adopt? and Life Skills for Kids, Christine is a ready and willing help to the homeschooling community.

Crosswalk.com has featured her a number of times as have other publications. For more information on Christine and her resources please visit her website:

www.homefieldadvantage.org.

" . . . I am the harried homeschooler as I seek to play the many roles and meet the many demands in my life."