



Patricia Cunningham (2000). *Phonics They Use: Third Addition*. Addison-Wesley

Pat conducted both formal and action-research in her many classrooms and resource rooms. She received her master's in Reading from Florida State in 1968 and then went on to receive her doctorate at University of Georgia. Her dissertation topic, "How do we decode an unknown word, and particularly an unknown big word?" (Cunningham, 1975-76) yielded the theory, Compare and Contrast by Analog. In addition to her dissertation she did even more research around analogic decoding, (Cunningham, 1979; 1980; Cunningham & Guthrie, 1982; Gaskins et. al. 1988)

### **Findings:**

**Decoding takes place in a compare/contrast way—to later be called "Decoding by Analogy"** When readers come to unfamiliar words:

- They do a fast search through their cognitive word stores for similar words with the same letters in the same places
- They use these analogs to come up with a possible pronunciation
- They cross check for meaning—context

### **The Brain is not a rule-applier but a pattern-detector**

- Students must be taught patterns exist everywhere
- Students must be taught to look for patterns

### **What We Know Now About How Good Readers Read Words**

The most widely embraced theory around word recognition is the theory of "Parallel Distributed Processing". The theory's most important tenets regarding how information about a word is gained are:

1. Spelling-orthography
2. Pronunciation-phonology
3. Meaning-semantics
4. Context

In an effort to answer the question of what kind of phonics instruction we should have, the following facts seem particularly pertinent:

- Readers look at virtually all of the words and almost all the letters in those words
- Readers usually recode printed words into sound
- Readers recognize most words immediately and automatically without using context
- Readers accurately and quickly pronounce infrequent, phonetically regular words
- Readers use spelling patterns and analogy to decode words
- Readers divide big words as they see them based on interletter frequencies

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## **What We Know About How Children Learn to Read Words**

- Phonemic awareness is critical to success in beginning readers
- Children who can decode well learn sight words better
- The division of words into onset and rime is a psychological reality
- Lots of successful reading is essential for readers to develop automaticity and rapid decoding
- Children become better decoders when encouraged to invent-spell as they write
- Spelling is a language arts content area in it's own right and a highly effective method for teaching word study knowledge (Wasowicz, Masterson, Apel, 2003)