

## This May Be Difficult to Read: But You Really Should (for Your Child's Sake)

**Claire N. Rubman**

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*Featuring tangible strategies for parents concerned about their children's reading skills, This May Be Difficult to Read is a knowledgeable education text.*

Critiquing contemporary reading instruction practices for children, psychologist Claire N. Rubman's upbeat education book *This May Be Difficult to Read* suggests concrete methods of improving childhood reading comprehension.

Arguing that excessive emphasis is placed on decoding in reading instruction, this book instead emphasizes comprehension. Its focus is on enhancing children's real-world experiences to help build the schematic knowledge necessary for later formal instruction. Exemplifying the teaching strategies that it recommends, the book's chapters have interactive elements that mimic how young children experience reading. Its visual elements also illustrate how text-centered pictures engage children's imaginations about what they are reading. This meta-approach (using reading comprehension strategies to explain those strategies) is effective and experiential, contextualizing the book's analyses of how reading instruction methods like phonics fail to address comprehension. It also demonstrates how particular methods align with contemporary theories of cognitive development.

Ample peer-reviewed evidence is used to support the book's claims, though some inconsistencies exist. In a section refuting the idea that getting an early start on reading benefits children because prodigies start early, the book argues that "starting early isn't what caused their [the prodigies'] greatness," but there's no discussion of what does cause some children to be prodigies in particular fields. And a bullet list of "irrefutable" facts includes one that is only "believed to be responsible" for changes in brain mass. Further, although the book decries the use of standardized tests in education, it sometimes relies on data collected from standardized test results to support its arguments.

Still, the book's straightforward language makes it compelling, as does its tangible strategies for parents concerned about their children's reading skills. It includes an accessible outline of cognitive development and its relationship to pre-reading experiences and formal reading instruction. Its material is organized in a logical fashion, beginning with an analysis of current instruction practices and research into children's cognitive capacities. As the book's arguments develop, charts and graphics featuring relevant statistics are used to support its claims. Theory meets practice in its four-level reading program that can be implemented by parents or teachers, while discussion questions are present to follow up on the book's interactive content, helping to integrate it with personal experiences.

Based on the science of cognitive development, *This May Be Difficult to Read* is a persuasive education text regarding preschoolers' cognitive abilities and how these relate to formal and informal reading instruction.

MICHELE SHARPE (March 2, 2023)

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