SB 203

FISCAL NOTE

STATE OF ALASKA **BILL NO.** CSSSSB 203(HES)
1998 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Revision Date: 7-Apr-98 Dept. Affected: EDUCATION
Title: "An Act related to phonemic awareness" BRU: Teaching and Learning Support
Component: Quality Schools
Sponsor: Senator Taylor
Requester: Senate HES **COMPONENT SERIAL NO.** 2147

Expenditures/Revenues: (Thousands of Dollars)

OPERATING EXPENDITURES	FY99	FY00	FY01	FY02	FY03	FY04
PERSONAL SERVICES						
TRAVEL						
CONTRACTUAL						
SUPPLIES						
EQUIPMENT						
LAND & STRUCTURES						
GRANTS, CLAIMS	*	*	*	*	*	*
MISCELLANEOUS						
TOTAL OPERATING	*	*	*	*	*	*
CAPITAL EXPENDITURES	0	0	0	0	0	0
CHANGES IN REVENUES						

FUNDING: (Thousands of Dollars)

1002 Federal Receipts						
1003 GF Match						
1004 GF	*	*	*	*	*	*
1005 GF/Program Receipts						
Other:						
TOTAL	*	*	*	*	*	*

Estimate of current year (FY98) cost: $ $0

POSITIONS:

FULL-TIME						
PART-TIME						
TEMPORARY						

ANALYSIS: (Attach a separate page if necessary)

School District Costs - There will be significant costs to the school districts in Alaska to conduct two new levels of testing related to students in grades 1, 2, and 3 and to establish an alternative instructional program in language arts. Statewide costs for districts to implement the testing provisions of this bill range from $996.3 to $4,353.0. Costs related to establishing an alternative instructional program in language arts for each district cannot be estimated at this time. Without additional funding for school districts to implement the provisions of CSSSSB 203(HES), this will be an unfunded mandate. The total school district costs across the state cannot be determined at this time and is represented by an asterisk.

Prepared by: Barbara Thompson, Director Phone: 465-8727
Division: Teaching and Learning Support Date: 4/10/98

Approved by Commissioner: Shirley J. Holloway, Ph.D. Date: 4/10/98
Agency: Department of Education

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Additional Analysis

This legislation seeks to ensure that all public school elementary students receive adequate language arts education, requires school districts to adopt a balanced approach to language arts instruction, and encourages elementary schools to begin preparing students for the high school graduation examination. Mandatory testing of all students in second and third grades is required annually using a nationally normed test. Testing in the first grade is optional. Additional, individual diagnostic testing is required for students who test in the lowest 25% of the nationally normed test. For elementary schools in which a student in a grade tests at or below the 25th percentile rank, an alternative instructional program in language arts shall be established.

The Department of Education shall provide the names of one group administered and one individually administered nationally normed test. Providing multiple test options would result in data that could not be compared across districts throughout the state.

There are significant costs to school districts to implement the provisions of CSSSSB 203(HES). Without additional funding, school districts will face an unfunded mandate to provide two new levels of testing for students in grades 1, 2, and 3, and to establish an alternative instructional program in language arts for any student testing at or below the 25th percentile rank.

The Department estimates the costs to school districts to implement the provision of CSSSSB 203(HES) to range from $996.3 to $4,353.0. These estimates are based on the following assumptions:

- 10,000 children in each of the following grades: 1st, 2nd, and 3rd
- Costs reflect testing all children in all grades. While the bill mandates annual testing of 2nd and 3rd grade students only, school districts may choose to test all 1st grade students.
- Costs reflect testing all students, in all three grades using group-administered tests and individualized tests for the annual testing, using qualified personnel. School districts may use either method, according to this bill.
- Costs reflect conducting individualized tests for 25% of students in grades 1, 2, and 3, who score at or below the 25th percentile rank, using qualified personnel. This number would conservatively total 7,500.

If all school districts used a group administered test for the initial annual testing and used an individualized test for 25% of the students who scored at or below the 25th percentile rank, the cost is estimated to be $996.3.

If all school districts used an individualized test for the initial annual testing and used an individualized test for 25% of the students who scored at or below the 25th percentile rank, the cost is $4,353.0.

Estimated costs for the establishment of alternative instructional programs in language arts have not been included in this fiscal note, as insufficient information is available.

FISCAL NOTE

STATE OF ALASKA
1998 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

BILL NO. SSSB 203

Revision Date: 5-Mar-98
Dept. Affected: EDUCATION
Title: Language Education
BRU: Teaching and Learning Support
Component: Quality Schools
Sponsor: Senator Taylor
Requester: Senate HESS
COMPONENT SERIAL NO. 2147

Expenditures/Revenues: (Thousands of Dollars)

OPERATING EXPENDITURES	FY99	FY00	FY01	FY02	FY03	FY04
PERSONAL SERVICES	150.0	150.0	150.0	150.0	150.0	150.0
TRAVEL	15.0	15.0	15.0	15.0	15.0	15.0
CONTRACTUAL	792.0	792.0	792.0	792.0	792.0	792.0
SUPPLIES	161.0	161.0	161.0	161.0	161.0	161.0
EQUIPMENT	9.0	9.0	9.0	9.0	9.0	9.0
LAND & STRUCTURES						
GRANTS, CLAIMS						
MISCELLANEOUS						
TOTAL OPERATING	**1127.0**	**1127.0**	**1127.0**	**1127.0**	**1127.0**	**1127.0**
CAPITAL EXPENDITURES	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
CHANGES IN REVENUES						

FUNDING: (Thousands of Dollars)

1002 Federal Receipts	0	0	0	0	0	0
1003 GF Match	0	0	0	0	0	0
1004 GF	**1127.0**	**1127.0**	**1127.0**	**1127.0**	**1127.0**	**1127.0**
1005 GF/Program Receipts						
Other:						
TOTAL	**1127.0**	**1127.0**	**1127.0**	**1127.0**	**1127.0**	**1127.0**

Estimate of current year (FY98) cost: $ $0

POSITIONS:

FULL-TIME	2					
PART-TIME						
TEMPORARY						

ANALYSIS: (Attach a separate page if necessary)

Please see attached analysis of estimated costs.

Prepared by: Barbara Thompson, Director
Phone: 465-8727
Division: Teaching and Learning Support
Date: 3/20/98

Approved by Commissioner: Shirley J. Holloway, Ph.D.
Date: 3/20/98
Agency: Department of Education

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Additional Analysis

This legislation seeks to ensure that all public school elementary students receive adequate language instruction. Mandatory testing of all students in first, second, and third grades is required annually. Additional diagnostic testing is required for students who test at or below the 25th percentile rank. For elementary schools in which a majority of students in a grade test at or below the 25th percentile rank for three consecutive years, intensive systematic phonics and spelling instruction must be included in the curriculum of the school.

This fiscal note represents funding necessary to implement, administer and maintain two levels of testing at the state and local levels; compilation, analysis and reporting of test information; and assistance for schools required to implement a new language education curriculum, as a result of testing data.

This request will fund staff necessary to:

- Provide technical assistance and training for teachers and school staff related to the administration of tests
- Provide technical assistance and training for teachers, school staff, parents, and community members to better help our young children to be successful readers
- Identify and disseminate information and models on promising practices, standards-based reading instruction and assessment, and program development. The teaching of phonics is embedded in these activities.
- Compile, analyze and report on school and statewide test data, as related to all requirements of SSSB 203

Funding included in this fiscal note represents the following:

Personal Services – $150.0

This will provide funding for a full-time Education Specialist II, Range 21, to provide training and technical assistance to teaching staff in school districts across the state. This position will be responsible for ensuring that a language education curriculum is developed and implemented, when necessary and will ensure that staff are trained to teach the components of this curriculum, including phonics, in the context of a total reading program. This staff person will prepare school and statewide reports related to the testing data that is gathered.

This funding will also provide funding for a full-time Research Analyst III to compile and analyze statewide testing data and prepare statistical reports and information for schools and for public dissemination.

Travel - $15.0

This funding will allow department staff to provide direct training and technical assistance to school districts in matters relating to language education curriculum development and implementation and test administration.

Contractual - $792.0
This will provide basic scoring services for the standardized tests; funding for school district staff training and administration of individual diagnostic tests; contractual costs related to researching and disseminating information and model language education programs, and general costs for phone, fax, copier and printing.

Supplies – $161.0
These funds will be used to purchase necessary testing materials (booklets, directions, examiner kits); office supplies and educational materials, as needed to compile, analyze, and report on testing data.

Equipment – $9.0
These funds will be used to purchase the necessary computer and office equipment for the new staff positions and ongoing upgrade and replacement costs.

FISCAL NOTE

STATE OF ALASKA **BILL NO.** SB 203
1998 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Revision Date:
Dept. Affected: EDUCATION
Title: Literacy Restoration Act
BRU: Teaching and Learning Support
Component: Quality Schools
Sponsor: Senator Taylor
Requester: Senate HES
COMPONENT SERIAL NO. 2147

Expenditures/Revenues: (Thousands of Dollars)

OPERATING EXPENDITURES	FY99	FY00	FY01	FY02	FY03	FY04
PERSONAL SERVICES	75.0	75.0	75.0	75.0	75.0	75.0
TRAVEL	15.0	15.0	15.0	15.0	15.0	15.0
CONTRACTUAL	150.0	150.0	150.0	150.0	150.0	150.0
SUPPLIES	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0
EQUIPMENT	5.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.0	0.0
LAND & STRUCTURES						
GRANTS, CLAIMS						
MISCELLANEOUS						
TOTAL OPERATING	**250.0**	**245.0**	**245.0**	**245.0**	**250.0**	**245.0**
CAPITAL EXPENDITURES	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
CHANGES IN REVENUES						

FUNDING: (Thousands of Dollars)

1002 Federal Receipts	0	0	0	0	0	0
1003 GF Match	0	0	0	0	0	0
1004 GF	**250.0**	**245.0**	**245.0**	**245.0**	**250.0**	**245.0**
1005 GF/Program Receipts						
Other:						
TOTAL	**250.0**	**245.0**	**245.0**	**245.0**	**250.0**	**245.0**

Estimate of current year (FY98) cost: $

POSITIONS:

FULL-TIME	1					
PART-TIME						
TEMPORARY						

ANALYSIS: (Attach a separate page if necessary)

This legislation requires that phonics be taught in kindergarten through third grades in the public school system. Research favors a balanced approach to the teaching of reading. The department strongly supports this balanced approach. In the context of a total reading program, phonics is an important component.

Please see attached analysis of estimated costs.

Prepared by: Barbara Thompson, Director
Phone: 465-8727
Division: Teaching and Learning Support
Date: 2/19/98

Approved by Commissioner: Shirley J. Holloway, Ph.D. /s/ Shirley Holloway
Date: 2/19/98
Agency: Department of Education

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Additional Analysis

This legislation seeks to ensure that all students become competent readers by requiring that phonics be taught in kindergarten through third grades in the public school system. Research favors a balanced approach to the teaching of reading. The department strongly supports this balanced approach. In the context of a total reading program, phonics is an important component.

Reading is the most important indicator of student success. This fiscal note represents funding that is requested in the Governor's FY99 Operating Budget for a statewide reading initiative to ensure that all children will read at or above grade level by the fourth grade. This request will fund staff resources necessary to provide technical assistance and training for teachers, school staff, parents, and community members to better help our young children to be successful readers. Additionally, information and models on promising practices, standards-based reading instruction and assessment, and program development will be identified and disseminated. The teaching of phonics is embedded in these activities.

Additionally, SB 257/HB351, the Quality Schools Bill, includes performance standards for reading, which address phonics at the first benchmark (ages 5-7). This bill also provides for a comprehensive assessment system to ensure that students meet these performance standards.

Funding included in this fiscal note represents the following:

Personal Services - $75.0

This will provide funding for a full-time Education Specialist II, Range 21, to provide training and technical assistance to teaching staff in school districts across the state. This position will be responsible for ensuring that a phonics curriculum is developed and implemented and that staff are trained to teach phonics, in the context of a total reading program.

Travel - $15.0

This funding will allow the department's education specialist to provide direct training and technical assistance to school districts.

Contractual - $150.0

This will provide funding for school district staff participation in training, contractual costs related to researching and disseminating information and model reading programs, and general costs for phone, fax, copier and printing.

Supplies - $5.0

These funds will be used to purchase the necessary educational materials and office supplies.

Equipment - $5.0

These funds will be used to purchase the necessary computer and office equipment for the new staff position and ongoing upgrade and replacement costs.

[redacted]SENATE COMMITTEE RE[redacted]
First Committee of Referral

DATE: 3/5/98 FURTHER:

Date of 5-Day Notice: 3/19/98
(in accordance with Uniform Rule 23)

DATE TURNED IN TO OFFICE: 4/9/98

HESS Committee considered SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE FOR SENATE BILL NO. 203

"An Act relating to phonemic awareness, letter-sound correspondence, word-attack skills, spelling, vocabulary, use of decodable text, reading comprehension strategies, and testing for basic reading and reading comprehension skills in the public school system."

and recommends:

[✓] be **replaced** with ______ CS SS SB 203 (HES)
[ ] adopt **previous** ______ CS ______________ (______)
[ ] attached amendment(s)
[ ] adopt Letter of Intent by ______________ Committee
[ ] further referral to the ______________ Committee

Senate Bill:
[✓] same title
[ ] new title

House Bill:
[ ] same title
[ ] technical title
[ ] new: SCR# ______

SIGNING DO PASS	DP	OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS	NR	DNP	AM
[signature]	✓	[signature]	X		
[signature]	✓				
[signature]	✓				
CHAIR: [signature]	✓	CHAIR:			

NEW FISCAL NOTE(S):

Department	Date	Zero	Fiscal
SSSB DOE	3/20/98		$1.127
DOE for CS SSSB 203 (HES)			
forthcoming			

PREVIOUS FISCAL NOTE(S):*

Department	Date	Zero	Fiscal

[ ] **APPROPRIATION -- no fiscal note**

*include fiscal notes accompanying Governor's bill

0-LS1002\H
Ford
2/19/98

CS FOR SENATE BILL NO. 203( )

IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA

TWENTIETH LEGISLATURE - SECOND SESSION

BY

Offered:
Referred:

Sponsor(s): SENATOR TAYLOR

A BILL

FOR AN ACT ENTITLED

"An Act relating to phonics and spelling in the public school system."

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:

*** Section 1.** SHORT TITLE. This Act may be known as the Literacy Restoration Act.

*** Sec. 2.** FINDINGS. The legislature finds that

(1) the English language is the common language of the United States of America;

(2) written English is based on the principle of the alphabet, and that English is a phonetic language;

(3) it is the existing practice of some public schools to teach phonics only incidentally;

(4) scientific research proves that direct, systematic phonics and spelling should be a part of the elementary curriculum in the public schools;

(5) a recent Education Week report card gave students in Alaska a D minus grade; and

(6) according to the California Achievement Test, 45 percent of children in the

fourth grade in Alaska had below average basic reading and language skills.

* **Sec. 3.** AS 14.30 is amended by adding a new section to read:

Article 12. Required Language Education.

Sec. 14.30.800. Required language education curriculum. (a) A governing body shall include intensive systematic phonics and spelling instruction in the curriculum for elementary school, beginning in kindergarten if kindergarten is offered. In kindergarten, or early in first grade if the district does not offer kindergarten, the language education curriculum must include, in addition to children's literature, explicit, systematic instruction in phonemic awareness, letter-sound correspondence, word-attack skills, spelling, vocabulary, use of decodable text, and reading comprehension strategies.

(b) All students in the first, second, and third grades shall be tested for basic reading and reading comprehension skills, using a nationally normed group-administered test approved by the department. Testing shall be conducted in the fall of each school year. The individual results of tests required under this subsection must be provided to each student's parent or guardian and to the principal of the school. Group results for each grade level in the school must be provided to each student's parent or guardian, to the school district, to the commissioner, and to the legislature. A student in the first, second, or third grade who tests at or in the lowest 25 percent of the nationally normed test, or a student who a parent or teacher believes has a reading, writing, spelling, or math learning problem, shall also be tested for word-attack and word identification skills, vocabulary, and reading comprehension, using a nationally normed and individually administered test approved by the department.

(c) When hiring an elementary school teacher, a school district shall give a hiring preference to a teacher who has completed a course in the language basis of reading. The course required under this subsection must include phonemic awareness, letter and sound correspondence, work-attack skills, spelling, vocabulary, use of decodable text, comprehension strategies, and an overview of reading disabilities.

(d) In this section,

(1) "elementary school" means grades kindergarten through six;

(2) "phonics instruction" means direct instruction, assessment, and

practice designed to ensure learning and use of the English alphabet in reading;

(3) "school district" means a municipal school district or a regional educational attendance area.

0-LS1002\C
Ford
4/7/98

EXISTING

NEW

CS FOR SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE FOR SENATE BILL NO. 203(HES)

IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA

TWENTIETH LEGISLATURE - SECOND SESSION

BY THE SENATE HEALTH, EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

Offered:
Referred:

Sponsor(s): SENATOR TAYLOR

A BILL

FOR AN ACT ENTITLED

"An Act relating to phonemic awareness, letter-sound correspondence, word-attack skills, spelling, vocabulary, use of decodable text, reading comprehension strategies, and testing for basic reading and reading comprehension skills in the public school system."

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:

*** Section 1.** PURPOSE. It is the purpose of this Act to

(1) ensure that all public school elementary students receive adequate language arts education;

(2) require school districts to adopt a balanced approach to language arts instruction that includes intensive systematic phonics and spelling instruction in the elementary school curriculum, along with other methods of instruction, in order to increase skills in reading, writing, and spelling; and

(3) encourage elementary schools to begin preparing public school students for the high school graduation examination.

* **Sec. 2.** AS 14.30 is amended by adding a new section to read:

Article 12. Language Arts Education.

Sec. 14.30.800. Language arts education curriculum. (a) All students in the second and third grades shall be tested for basic reading and reading comprehension skills using a nationally normed test approved by the department. A district may test students in the first grade as described in this subsection. Testing shall be conducted in the fall of each school year. The individual results of tests required under this subsection must be provided to each student's parent or guardian and to the principal of the school. Results for each grade level in the school must be provided to each student's parent or guardian, to the school district, to the commissioner, and to the legislature. A student in the first, second, or third grade who tests at or in the lowest 25 percent of the nationally normed test, or a student who a parent or teacher believes has a reading, writing, spelling, or math learning deficiency, shall also be tested for word-attack and word identification skills, vocabulary, and reading comprehension, using a nationally normed and individually administered test approved by the department.

(b) If a student tested under (a) of this section tests at or below the 25th percentile of the nationally tested students, a governing body shall establish an alternative instructional program in language arts that is intended to improve the student's basic reading and reading comprehension skills. The alternative instructional program must include, in addition to children's literature, explicit, systematic instruction in phonemic awareness, letter-sound correspondence, word-attack skills, spelling, vocabulary, use of decodable text, and reading comprehension strategies.

(c) Upon request, the department shall provide a list of those nationally normed tests that are approved by the department.

#1

AMENDMENT

BY: SENATOR Ward

TO: SSSB 203

Page 2, Line 13:

Delete: "a majority"

Insert: "25 percent or more"

Revised Amendments from the Alaska Department of Education
March 28, 1998 – 5:00 pm

BILL ID: SSSB 203

SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE FOR SENATE BILL NO. 203

"An Act relating to [phonemic awareness, letter-sound correspondence, word-attack skills, spelling, vocabulary, use of decodable text, reading comprehension strategies, and testing for basic reading and reading comprehension skills] using a balanced approach for reading and language arts instruction in the public school system."

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:

* Section 1. PURPOSE. It is the purpose of this Act to ensure that all public school elementary students receive adequate language arts education. [If the public school students of a school district fall below the national average for language education,] [i]It is [also] the purpose of this Act to [encourage the] require school districts to adopt a balanced approach to reading and language arts instruction which includes intensive systematic phonics and spelling instruction in the elementary school curriculum, along with instruction in word meaning in context, the structure of the English language, and other methods of instruction appropriate to the needs of each child, in order to [increase skills in reading, writing, and spelling] meet high student standards in reading and language arts.

* Sec. 2. AS 14.30 is amended by adding a new section to read:

Article 12. Language Arts Education.

Sec. 14.30.800. Language arts education curriculum. (a) [All s] Students in the first, second, and third grades shall be [tested for basic reading and reading comprehension skills, using a nationally normed group-administered test approved by the department. Testing shall be conducted in the fall of each school year.] assessed for reading and language arts difficulties if the classroom teacher determines that the child is not making adequate progress towards meeting

the student standards in reading and language arts. The student standards will include the areas of phonics, spelling, word meaning in context, the structure of the English language, writing, listening, speaking, and other language arts standards appropriate for the child's age. The department shall develop and score an examination that assesses the student standards for students aged 5-7 years old and for students aged 8-10 years old. All students shall be assessed using these standards-based assessments. The student standards along with the related assessments will be benchmarked against the academic standards and assessments of other high-achieving states. The individual results of tests required under this subsection must be provided to each student's parent or guardian and to the principal of the school. Results for each grade level in the school must be provided to each student's parent or guardian, to the school district, to the commissioner, and to the legislature. [A student in the first, second, or third grade who tests at or in the lowest 25 percent of the nationally normed test, or a student who a parent or teacher believes has a reading, writing, spelling, or math learning problem, shall also be tested for word-attack and word identification skills, vocabulary, and reading comprehension, using a nationally normed and individually administered test approved by the department.]

(b) If a [majority of the] student[s in a grade level tested under (a) of this section tests at or below the 25th percentile of the nationally tested students for three consecutive school years] fails the assessment of the student standards in reading and language arts for ages 5-7 or for ages 8-10, a governing body shall [include intensive systematic phonics and spelling instruction in the curriculum for elementary school.] establish an alternative instructional program in reading and language arts which will address the student's deficiencies. The [language education curriculum] alternative instructional program must include, in addition to children's literature, explicit, systematic instruction in phonemic awareness, letter-sound correspondence, word-attack skills, spelling, vocabulary, use of decodable text, and reading comprehension strategies and other areas of deficiencies.

* Sec. 3. REQUIRED REPORT. By January 31, 1999, the department shall provide a report to the legislature containing the standards referenced in Sec.1 and 2 of this Act.

Alaska State Legislature

Chairman,
Judiciary Committee

Member,
Resources Committee
Rules Committee
Committee on Committees

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Senator Robin L. Taylor
Senate Majority Leader

TO: Senator Gary Wilken, Chair
Senate Health, Education and
Social Services Committee

FROM: Senator Robin Taylor R.L.T.

DATE: February 5, 1998

RE: Senate Bill 203 "An Act requiring systematic phonics and spelling be taught in kindergarten through third grades in the public school system."

We have a serious problem in our public school system. Our children are not learning basic reading and writing skills. This is in large part due to the "whole language" system of instruction which utilizes a "see and guess" method of learning. Scientific studies have proven that the majority of children do far better when taught systematic phonics than when taught with the "whole language" approach.

Some students will learn to read regardless of what method of instruction is used. It is believed that this small percentage of students come from upper middle class families where there has been some phonics instruction in the home before the child ever comes to the classroom. There is also a small percentage of children who will have difficulties in learning to read no matter what method is used. This bill is aimed at those students in the middle which comprise the vast majority of the children in the public school system.

Test scores comparing two groups of students, one group having been taught with whole language methodology and one group having been taught with systematic phonics, have consistently been higher for the

group having been taught systematic phonics than for those who have only had the whole language approach.

Senate Bill 203 will require school districts to implement a reading program teaching systematic phonics and spelling in all grades K through 3 in the public school system. I should note here that this bill does not do away with whole language programs in our public schools. It simply requires that districts incorporate a program of systematic phonics and spelling into the Language Arts program in all elementary schools.

Alaska State Legislature

Chairman,
Judiciary Committee

Member,
Resources Committee
Rules Committee
Committee on Committees

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Senator Robin L. Taylor
Senate Majority Leader

SPONSOR STATEMENT

Senate Bill 203

"An Act requiring that phonics be taught in kindergarten through third grades in the public school system"

Illiteracy in the United States is growing at an alarming rate, and Alaska is no exception. This places enormous demands on resources from all levels of government and society. According to the International Reading Association, our classrooms have been used by psychologists, sociologists, educationists, and politicians as a giant laboratory for unproven, untried theories of learning, all resulting in the near collapse of the public education system.

According to information obtained from the Alaska Department of Education, 51% of our students are in some type of supplemental program. CAT scores for fourth graders showed 21.3% in the bottom 25% in reading and 25.5% in the bottom 25% in language. In grade 11, 24.1% scored in the bottom 25% in reading. We are graduating illiterates. We must get back to the tried and true method of teaching our students how to read. We must reinitiate intensive phonics instruction into our elementary education curriculum.

Here are some statistics gathered by the National Adult Literacy Survey:

- 24 million adult Americans can't read; 50 million are limited to a 4th or 5th grade reading level;
- the number of functionally illiterate adults is increasing by approximately 2.25 million per year;
- eighty-four percent of the 23,000 people who took an exam for entry-level jobs at NY Telephone in 1988, failed.
- More than half of Fortune 500 companies have become educators of last resort with the cost of remedial employee training reaching more than 300,000 million dollars per year.

- One estimate places the yearly cost in welfare programs and unemployment compensation due to illiteracy at 6 billion dollars. An additional 237 billion dollars a year in unrealized earnings is forfeited by persons who lack basic reading skills, according to Literacy Volunteers of America.
- The total amount of money being spent on illiteracy by the federal government alone can only be guessed at because there has never been a complete assessment prepared. A conservative estimate would place the amount at more than ten billion dollars each year, and growing.

Alaska is part of these statistics. We have a problem! Senate Bill 203 will help fix this problem by mandating that systematic phonics instruction be added to the language arts programs for grades K through 3 in all public schools in Alaska.

The National Right to Read Foundation

ɔundations in Reading

Essential Elements of Reading Instruction in Grades K-3

Introduction

Reading, writing, spelling, and handwriting are the foundation tools of literacy. They can be seen, heard, and measured. They are portable. But unless these language/literacy tools are in place by the end of third grade, children will have no firm academic ground on which to stand. Nothing else learned in school will ever make up for the deficit.

School officials should be able to document how students are learning the skills listed below, and make the information available to parents in an understandable way.

Mastering the tools of learning in language, and becoming confident in their use, requires systematic instruction across grades, and lots of supervised practice in applying these tools to reading and writing.

Whatever else a school claims to teach, if students don't master the foundation skills of language, nothing else really matters.

Following are baseline performance skills in language that must be learned in grades K-3. These skills are what every child of normal sight, hearing and intelligence should be able to do, and what the school must be prepared to measure. Advanced skills and creativity are built on this foundation. Without these foundational skills, many children will experience a lifetime of reading frustration.

Read More
Return to Home Page

The National Right to Read Foundation

Literacy Statistics in America

- At the opening of the 20th century the United States' literacy rate was approaching 100% for those who had attended school;
- A U.S. Department of Labor Survey found that nearly 20% of high school graduates can't even read their own diplomas;
- The National Adult Literacy Survey, issued in the fall of 1993, found that 42 million adults (22%) can't read;
- The 1994 National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) found that only 25% of 4th graders and 8th graders, and just over 33% of 12th graders, scored at the "Proficient" or "Advanced" levels of reading;
- Conversely, NAEP found that 75% of 4th graders scored BELOW the proficient level of reading;
- Education expenditures reached $484 billion in the1993-94 school year, with 59% being spent at the Elementary and Secondary school level;
- There are nearly 43 million elementary and secondary students in our public schools, and 2.9 million teachers;
- Federal and state Special Education programs cost taxpayers more than $40 billion annually, and 80% of those students are of normal sight hearing and intelligence. They simply haven't been taught to read;
- U.S. Justice Department estimates find that nearly 85% of juvenile delinquents can't read;
- In 1995, The Journal of the American Medical Association claimed that 33 percent of patients receiving prescription drugs can't read the labels;
- Industry estimates that more than $300 billion dollars is being spent on employee remediation, with $250 billion more being lost due to illiteracy;
- Almost half of college freshman have to take "bonehead English" because their reading skills are deficient.

Go Back
Return to Home Page

The National Right to Read Foundation

Research from the National Institutes of Child Health and Human Development

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The following information has been taken from studies supported by the National Institutes of Child Health and Human Development and documented in a paper entitled "Research in Learning Disabilities at the NICHD". For the full report, contact NICHD at 6100 Building, Room 4B05, 9000 Rockville Pike, Bethesda, MD 20892 or call (301) 496-6591.

The ability to decode single words accurately and fluently is dependent upon the ability to segment words and syllables into abstract individual sound units (phonemes).

The best predictor of reading ability/disability from kindergarten and first grade test performance is phoneme segmentation ability.

Reading disabilities (dyslexia) affect at least 10 million children, or approximately 1 child in 5.

Studies show that of the children who are reading disabled in the third grade, 74 percent remain disabled in the ninth grade. Reading disability reflects a persistent deficit rather than a developmental lag in linguistic and reading skills.

Disabled readers do not readily acquire the alphabetic code when learning to read due to deficiencies in the processing of phonological processing. As such, disabled readers must be presented highly structured, explicit and intensive instruction in phonics rules and the application of the rules to print.

Systematic structured phonics instruction results in more favorable outcomes in reading than does a context-emphasis (Whole Language) approach.

Go Back
Return to Home Page

The National Right to Read Foundation

FACT SHEET: Can You Trust The "Research?"

"Everyone seems to think that all you need to do to be a good teacher is to love to teach. But no one thinks that all you need to do to be a good surgeon is to love to cut." Adam Urbanski, Vice President, American Federation of Teachers.

Lengthy bibliographies of "studies" supporting various techniques in reading are shot back and forth between proponents of phonics and whole language in an effort to provide conclusive evidence that their perspective is correct. Bewildered parents, school board members, legislators and interested observers look on with little knowledge or understanding of what is actually referred to in these seemingly well documented lists of studies.

In the hard sciences, like physics, chemistry, biology, medicine and engineering, references to research studies are more likely to be helpful to "practitioners" or those searching for solutions to complicated, often cutting edge problems, because careful documentation of findings are recorded, checked and double checked, before any thought of application is considered. Peer review panels are convened to scrutinize every aspect of the study. Useful research should arrive at reliable predictions using a scientific method of inquiry. This approach to research should "separate quackery from best practice."[1]

Education Research is altogether different. Here is how most education "research" is conducted: (1) Build the theory; (2) Test the theory; (3) Replicate the results in large-scale studies in classrooms, schools or district wide implementations; (4) No objective evaluation using control groups is conducted. And, theories of learning abound. For decades educators have followed the theories of developmental psychologist John Jacques Piaget. Piaget never

d to teach children, he only tried to describe what they do at different ages."[2] Yet in our public schools today developmentally appropriate practice," which undergirds whole language and almost all "child centered" educational programs, has become almost sacred. Anyone daring to challenge the underlying premises of these theories is considered "unprofessional" or just ignorant.

For example, block scheduling and an integrated curriculum, now the rage in our schools, has no empirical scientific evidence to support its educational value.[3] Cooperative learning, another fine sounding theory, is one of the most widely used innovations of our time, and yet is often implemented without clear goals or any individual accountability.

Educational literature now includes citations that look impressive. Names, dates, well known journals, and often prestigious Universities are listed as confirmation that the theories presented have been carefully researched and tested, when what is being cited is often nothing more than opinion laced with "happy faced" anecdotal stories.

"A small number of prolific professionals with strong beliefs can write a great deal and quote each other's ideas. This creates a circular knowledge base that may appear to be research, but which can, in fact, just be "bull."[5]

Ken Goodman, one of the most prolific writers and proponents of whole language, conducted a "research" study in New Zealand in 1965. His findings have served as one of the main stays of current whole language practice in America. Specifically, Goodman found that "children's reading accuracy improved 60% - 80% in context, in comparison with a [word] list. However, Tom Nicholson, Professor of Education at the University of Auckland, New Zealand twice replicated Goodman's study, and found that this classic study that supported "enlightened [word] guessing is incorrect..."[6] This is especially important because in today's "whole language," "balanced approach" ssrooms guessing at words by context to identify them is strongly recommended as one of the three "cueing tems" essential in how a child learns to read. Thus, Ken Goodman's research advocating the use of context clues to identify unknown words is bogus. Does Dr. Nicholson's finding change how most teachers are teaching our children to read? Not in the least. If the scientific method were used to validate educational programs there would be: (1) Development of an hypothesis; (2) Testing the hypothesis by formal experiment; (3) Analyzing data to determine the truth of the hypothesis; (4) Peer review, replication of the experiment, large-scale and/or long-term follow-up

studies. Parents should be told [redacted] children are in experimental classroom[redacted] and schools should ask parents' permission to include their children in such experiments.

One federal education research study, Project Follow Through, conducted over the past twenty five years, did apply scientific method. It cost the taxpayers more than one billion dollars, and funding only ceased in 1995. The goal of the study was to identify the specific teaching methods that could raise the performance levels of America's poorest schools from the 20th percentile (the normal level of performance for children in poverty) up to the 50th percentile (even with mainstream America). The results of this massive study were conclusive. Direct instruction, (one of the Follow Through models) included direct, systematic instruction in phonics as one component, and was found to be "the only program which consistently produced substantial progress"[7] in reading. Project Follow Through also evaluated the "child centered," "developmentally appropriate practices" model that relied almost exclusively on a form of instruction that could be called "relevant activity." The goal of this model was to "develop problem solving abilities, healthy self-concepts, and culturally pluralistic attitudes and behaviors."[8] Not only did the "child centered" approach fall far short in reaching its goals, but students in the Direct Instruction Model improved their academic skills in reading, writing and mathematics, while at the same time enhancing their self-esteem and problem solving abilities.

The lack of rigor in testing most educational theories, including whole language and its clones, and its implication for policy makers should be obvious. Students who are taught direct, systematic phonics develop reading skills far superior to those exposed to the unproven whole language philosophy. If schools are going to use unproven theories, they should do so only if parents approve, and they should be held accountable for the results. These studies have been conducted using the "scientific method,"and the findings are based on empirical evidence.

A bibliography of studies is available from The National Right to Read Foundation.

End Notes

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Go Back
Return to Home Page

The National Right to Read Foundation

ILLITERACY:
An Incurable Disease or Education Malpractice?

by
Robert W. Sweet, Jr.

"Learning to read is like learning to drive a car. You take lessons and learn the mechanics and the rules of the road. After a few weeks you have learned how to drive, how to stop, how to shift gears, how to park, and how to signal. You have also learned to stop at a red light and understand road signs. When you are ready, you take a road test, and if you pass, you can drive. Phonics-first works the same way. The child learns the mechanics of reading, and when he's through, he can read. Look and say works differently. The child is taught to read before he has learned the mechanics -- the sounds of the letters. It is like learning to drive by starting your car and driving ahead. . . . And the mechanics of driving? You would pick those up as you go along."

Rudolf Flesch,
Why Johnny Still Can't Read, 1981

Illiteracy in America is still growing at an alarming rate and that fact has not changed much since Rudolf Flesch wrote his best selling expose of reading instruction in 1955. Illiteracy continues to be a critical problem, demanding enormous resources from local, state, and federal taxes, while arguments about how to teach children to read continue to rage within the education research community, on Capitol Hill, in business, and in the classroom.

The International Reading Association estimates that more than one thousand research papers are prepared each year on the subject of literacy, and that is very likely a low figure. For the past 50 years, America's classrooms have been used by psychologists, sociologists, educationists, and politicians as a giant laboratory for unproven, untried theories of learning, resulting in a near collapse of public education. It is time we begin to move away from "what's new" and move toward "what works."

Here Are the Grim Statistics

- According to the National Adult Literacy Survey, 42 million adult Americans can't read; 50 million can recognize so few printed words they are limited to a 4th or 5th grade reading level;
- One out of every four teenagers drops out of high school, and of those who graduate, one out of every four has the equivalent or less of an eighth grade education.
- According to current estimates, the number of functionally illiterate adults is increasing by approximately two and one quarter million persons each year. This number includes nearly 1 million young people who drop out of school before graduation, 400,000 legal immigrants, 100,000 refugees, and 800,000 illegal immigrants, and 20 % of all high school graduates.
- Eighty-four percent of the 23,000 people who took an exam for entry-level jobs at New York Telephone in 1988, failed.
- More than half of Fortune 500 companies have become educators of last resort, with the cost of remedial employee training in the three R's reaching more than 300 million dollars a year.
- One estimate places the yearly cost in welfare programs and unemployment compensation due to illiteracy at six billion dollars. An additional 237 billion dollars a year in unrealized earnings is forfeited by persons who lack basic reading skills, according to Literacy Volunteers of America.
- The federal government alone has more than 79 literacy-related programs administered by 14 federal agencies.
- The total amount of money being spent on illiteracy by the federal government can only be guessed at, because there has never been a complete assessment prepared. A conservative estimate would place the amount at more than ten billion dollars each year, and growing steadily.

Why Does America Have A Reading Problem?

The question that must be asked is this: Why does America have a reading problem at all? We are the most affluent and technologically advanced of all the industrial nations on earth. We have "free" compulsory education for all, a network of state owned and operated teachers' colleges, strict teacher certification requirements, and more money and resources dedicated to educating our children than any other nation on earth.

Why Johnny Can't Read Provides an Answer

Rudolf Flesch, author of Why Johnny Can't Read wrote the following in a letter to his daughter in 1955, after teaching his grandson to read:

"Since I started to work with Johnny, I have looked into this whole reading business. I worked my way through a mountain of books and articles on the subject, I talked to dozens of people, and I spent many hours in classrooms, watching what was going on.

What I found is absolutely fantastic. The teaching of reading -- all over the United States, in all the schools, in all the textbooks -- is totally wrong and flies in the face of all logic and common sense. Johnny couldn't read until half a year ago for the simple reason that nobody ever showed him how."

Time magazine called his book "the outstanding educational event of that year" and suggested that he represented "the devil in the flesch" to the education establishment.

There is an answer to "why Johnny can't read," but the answer is tough medicine to swallow. It requires education professionals, who for years have been engaged in a form of education malpractice, to admit that the methods of teaching reading they have vigorously advocated and staunchly defended ever since the 1930's are dead wrong.

If we are to seriously reverse the increasing number of illiterate adults in America and prevent the problem of illiteracy, we must swallow the medicine, as quickly as possible, and reject the instructional methods that have resulted in the widespread illiteracy we have today.

Everyone Can Be Taught To Read

Historically, all American school children were taught to read. Teachers never considered that a child "could not" be taught to read, and remedial reading was unheard of. In fact, the first remedial reading clinic opened in 1930, soon after the results of the "look and say" (the so called "Dick and Jane" program) reading methods were beginning to be felt.

Up until the early part of the 20th century, children were taught to read by first learning the alphabet, then the sounds of each letter, how they blended into syllables, and how those syllables made up words. They were taught that English spelling is logical and systematic, and that to become a fluent reader it was necessary to master the alphabetic "code" in which English words are written, to the point where it [the code] is used automatically with little conscious thought given to it.

Once a child learned the mechanics of the code, attention could be turned to more advanced content. It seldom, if ever, occurred to teachers to give children word lists to read, or to make beginning readers memorize whole words before learning the components of those words, or to memorize whole stories as today's proponents of the "whole language approach" recommend.

Several recent studies funded by the U.S. Department of Education, including Preventing Reading Failure: The Myths of Reading Instruction, found that 90 percent of remedial reading students today are not able to decode fluently, accurately, and at an automatic level of response. In a March, 1989, Phi Delta Kappan article, Harvard Professor Jeanne Chall (author of Learning to Read: The Great Debate) cites a study by Peter Freebody and Brian Byrne, that confirms the same finding. Today's students are not being taught the fundamental structure of language, but rather are engaged in what Dr. Kenneth Goodman (a proponent of "the whole language approach") has called a "psycholinguistic guessing game."

Two Ways to Teach Reading

One philosophy is usually called "whole language" but many other labels are, or have been used to describe it, such as: the whole-word method; language experience; psycholinguistics; look and say; reading recovery or integrated reading instruction. The "whole language" or "look and say" method teaches that children should memorize or "guess" at words in context by using initial letter or picture clues. According to estimates given in one widely used "look and say" reading series, a child taught this method should be able to recognize 349 words by the end of the first grade; 1,094 by the end of the second; 1,216 by the end of the third; and 1,554 by the end of the fourth grade. Learning to read this way is supposed to be more meaningful and fun. This way of teaching is currently used by nearly all of the schools in the United States. It is clear that the current high illiteracy rate is directly due to this scientifically invalidated approach to reading instruction.

Another approach is called intensive, systematic phonics first. With this technique, children are taught how to sound out and blend the letters that make up words in a specific sequence, from the simple to the complex. Today, educators call this method the "code" approach because it teaches the skills and logic children need to understand the English spelling system. When a child comes to school he/she has a spoken vocabulary of up to 24,000 words. Children taught to read using systematic phonics can usually read and understand at least as many words as they have in their spoken vocabulary by the end of the third grade.

Read More
Return to Home Page

Will The Bureaucrats Ever Learn?

The Observer Staff

The May 1997 EDUCATION REPORTER says that Title I students have continued to trail behind their classmates. In fact, the gap has widened. The final report of a five-year, $29 million study has concluded that Title I, the federal government's largest K-12 education program, has failed to close the gap between low-achieving students and their peers. It is the largest longitudinal study conducted of Title I since its start in 1965. Title I costs taxpayers $7.2 billion per year.
It's also a proven fact that children, who are in early childhood development programs, are no further advanced in later years than those who did not attend these classes.

More than another $7 billion down a rat hole per year. Will the bureaucrats ever learn? Without a strong phonics program, these children will continue to fall behind. This brings us to HB 2701-A in the Oregon legislature which the House defeated by a 32-27 vote the end of May. They claim the law is unnecessary because teachers already use phonics. The bill was sponsored by Rep. Ron Sunseri (R-Gresham).

In September 1995, the INVESTOR'S BUSINESS DAILY said that whole language was given a failing grade by a California task force assigned to evaluate whole language. Whole language, not intensive phonics, is being taught in Oregon government schools.

Some teachers attend the Riggs Institute in Beaverton, Oregon which concentrates heavily on teaching teachers how to teach intensive phonics. Comments from some in August 1988 were:
"There seems to be more organization to spelling in this method and it answers the 'why' questions. It gives a better understanding to letter combinations." -- Second Grade Milner Crest Teacher.

"I am really excited about beginning this program. It's the most useful class I've taken in a long time. Teacher ·cation colleges should be teaching this class. I wish I'd had it years ago!" -- 2nd grade Bunker Hill teacher

"...Last year we adopted (against strong opposition) a "look-say" basal. Many of us were extremely frustrated trying to teach the beginning reading skills..." -- 3rd grade Madison teacher "I am very anxious to get in my classroom and teach my students this method." -4th grade Charleston teacher.

"This course has unlocked the door for spelling for me... The Spalding method of phonics as taught by the Riggs Institute really unlocks the door for spelling, reading, writing and speech."--5th Grade Eastside Elementary teacher

Elected Officials Want Dumbed Down Kids - Easier To Control

It seems our elected officials really don't want answers to solve our educational problems which are turning out functional illiterates by the droves. They simply look for problems for which they can appropriate billions more in tax dollars.

Why is this you might ask? In the book, NEA-TROJAN HORSE (P. 106) Dewey's goal was to produce inferior readers with inferior intelligence dependent on a socialist educational elite for guidance, wisdom and control. Intensive phonics was the approach used prior to 1930 which gave us a highly literate population, probably the most literate in the world.

Johnny can't read because of the failure to teach first graders how to decode the English language with systematic phonics, says Phyllis Schlafly. And it is obvious that our Oregon legislators, who voted down Sunseri's phonics bill, simply are desirous of keeping our children from attaining the best they can be. It's a proven fact that the top-scoring schools teach intensive phonics because when it is taught correctly, children cannot help but learn.

There is more involved, however, than just keeping our children dumbed down. Expensive ·rkbooks would be unnecessary when phonics is taught. Follow the money! And think of all se workers within the prison system who would become unemployed. Illiteracy seems to be one of the biggest causes of people turning to crime.

What the Oregon legislature did on Sunseri's phonics legislation is educational malpractice and parents have absolutely no recourse except to pull their children from the public system and put

them in a school where int[redacted]ive phonics are taught in the ve[redacted]early years. But why should they have to pay taxes to support the public school system and also pay for private school tuition?

:k to June index

The National Right to Read Foundation

A CENTURY OF MISEDUCATION IN READING

by
Robert W. Sweet, Jr.
1996

The literacy rate for adults who have been to school for at least six years will be less in the year 2000 than it was in 1900. We are fast becoming a nation divided between those who can read and those who cannot. Every day, somewhere in America, news headlines shout at us, "Illiteracy is increasing; our kids aren't being taught to read." How is it possible that a nation that prides itself on having the most educated population in the world can deny to its own children the ability to read?

We are spending almost a half trillion dollars on education at all levels,[1] and a third of a trillion of that tax money is being spent on elementary and secondary education. We are all being drawn into the vortex of the world wide web whether we like it or not. We are rushing to place a computer terminal in every classroom, and yet the simple concept of teaching our children the 26 letters of the alphabet, the 44 sounds those letters make, and the 70 common ways to spell them, is being rejected by the education elite, without regard to the overwhelming scientific evidence to the contrary.

Yes, we have had almost a century of education malpractice when it comes to teaching our children to read. We must apply some common sense and stop the academic child abuse that goes on under the guise of what today is called "whole language," and in the 1920's was called "look and say" reading instruction.

My purpose today is to explain why I believe illiteracy is rampant in America, but I offer a solution. It will not cost billions of dollars, and it will unlock the door for countless children, who would otherwise be left to aimlessly wander the corridors of beautiful school buildings, unable to read job notices on the bulletin boards.

Although statistics are always subject to challenge by some, the overwhelming evidence from such prestigious sources as the National Assessment of Education Progress,[2] (which found that "70 percent of fourth graders, 30 percent of eighth graders, and 64 percent of 12th graders did not... attain a proficient level of reading") cannot be ignored. These students have not attained the minimum skill level in reading considered necessary to do the academic work at their grade level. The National Adult Literacy Survey, after a five year study, confirmed that finding indicating that 42 million adults can't read, and that 50 million more recognize so few printed words they are limited to a 4th and 5th grade level of reading.[3]

Even more troubling are the findings of The Orton Dyslexia Society, that illiterate adults account for 75 percent of the unemployed, one third of the mothers receiving AFDC, 85 percent of the juveniles who appear in court, 60 percent of prison inmates, and nearly 40 percent of minority youth. Of people in the work force, 15 percent are functionally illiterate, including 11 percent of professional and managerial workers, and 30 percent of semiskilled and unskilled workers.[4] Is it any wonder that a Census Bureau survey released in February of this year found that "American employers regard the nation's educational system as an irrelevance?" Rather "businesses ignore a prospective employee's educational credentials in favor of work history and attitude."[5]

We must keep in mind that statistics represent real people, children and adults who often suffer the indignity and frustration of illiteracy alone. It is a quiet pain that only the illiterate can describe. Let me give you some real examples of what these statistics mean.

Demetrius Wilkins graduated from T.C. Williams High School in 1993. He was a model student, never a discipline problem. In fact if you had seen him on K street, here in the District of Columbia, you could have easily mistaken him for one of the up and coming young law clerks. He had near perfect attendance for his twelve years of schooling, and yet when he walked across the stage to accept his diploma from the smiling superintendent of schools, it was a sad day, because Demetrius couldn't even read it. The taxpayers had anteed up more than $100,000 for his schooling. And according to the U.S. Labor Department, this young man represents nearly 20 percent of high

school seniors graduating from o[redacted]chools today. But his story doesn't end [redacted]ere. After graduation he found a job in a meat packing plant. He lasted just a few days, because he couldn't read the labels on the meat. He tried desperately to find other employment, but because of his lack of reading skills, couldn't find a job. Finally, he was encouraged by some friends to go to a local adult reading clinic for help. He did so, and in a few weeks was reading for the first time in his life. According to the news reports, the only added ingredient he received was instruction in phonics, that is, mastering the letter/sound relationships he should have been taught in first grade.[6]

We cannot tolerate the kind of education malpractice this story represents any longer. It must stop now. Thousands of calls come to The National Right to Read Foundation, from parents whose children have been passed on grade after grade without being taught to read. The story is almost always the same. My child has been diagnosed by the school as having Attention Deficit Disorder, or dyslexia, or as being mentally retarded, or as having some other conduct disorder that places the blame on child or parent. And almost inevitably these children are in classes where "whole language" is used, and where almost no direct instruction in teaching phonics is present.

One more poignant story comes to mind that illustrates how painful illiteracy can be. At a meeting this spring, I commented that many parents tell us how depressed their children become when they are required to memorize little books without the ability to sound out new and unfamiliar words. Often the children express great frustration and anger when faced with the requirement of reading science, history, literature and math before they have learned to read with fluency and comprehension. A young lady sitting in the front row, jumped to her feet and almost shouted, "That's me! That's how I feel." "When the kids call you a retard, it makes you cry and it makes your heart hurt inside." This 14 year old girl, normal in every other way, had been placed in special education for seven of her years of schooling. No one had tried to find out if she just needed some direct instruction in phonics. There is a happy ending to this story. We were able to refer Bonnie Belle to a reading teacher who quickly diagnosed her reading skill deficit, and after just two sessions of direct phonics instruction, Bonnie Belle began to read and understand that there is a system. She is on her way to success. But what of the lost years of schooling? What of the frustration, pain, and lost self esteem she had experienced? Unfortunately, that cannot be repaid, or replaced. How tragic, how unnecessary, how outrageous.

This is the plight of thousands of young people all across America today. Shunted into special education classes, or Chapter I programs for disadvantaged youth, passed on year after year without ever mastering the basic skills essential for success in life. This reminds me of another story. Two teenage boys were fishing by a stream one day when they noticed someone floating downstream. They both jumped in, pulled the person out of the water, gave mouth-to mouth resuscitation, and saved his life. The next day, they were fishing in the same spot and noticed another person floating down the stream. Again, they jumped in and saved that person's life. From then on, people floating downstream happened quite consistently and many died en route to the hospital. The city council decided to build a hospital on that very spot so that they wouldn't have to transport the nearly drowned patients to the nearest hospital, which was eight miles away. The hospital became very busy and began to grow and expand. In fact the hospital became very well known across the country. Many interns came there to serve their residencies. One day, one of those interns approached the administrator and thanked him for the opportunity to do his internship with the hospital. "There is one thing that bothers me, though. Has anyone ever gone upstream to see why people are falling into the river?" "No," the administrator answered. "We just don't have time. We are too busy treating the victims."

Well, it's time we took a trip upstream!

For generations the educational pendulum has swung from one extreme to the other...teaching skills but with little reading of quality materials, or teaching literature without the skills necessary to actually read it. We know now, that doing one without the other dooms large numbers of our children to failure and closes the door to further learning.

Reading is the gateway skill; without the abilities necessary to read, our children will be unable to go through the gate to all other areas of learning; for they all depend on this one skill. From the time the first alphabet was invented some thirty five hundred years ago, learning to read consisted of learning letter/sound correspondences. Anyone of normal sight, hearing and intelligence, if taught properly, could learn to read their native language with relative ease. According to historian David Diringer, the invention of the alphabet is often said to be "the most important invention in the social history of the world. It was the creation of a revolutionary writing, a script which we can perhaps term democratic or the people's script."[7]

As Thomas Jefferson said: "A nation that is ignorant and free, is a nation that never was and never will be." Ignorance is only dispelled by a people who know how to read, and then read to know. It has just been within the past century that we have abandoned teaching of the body of knowledge we call phonics, to our children as a first

step in reading instruction. English is an alphabetic language. Its spelling system is at least 90 percent regular,[8] and by teaching children the 26 letters of the alphabet, the 44 sounds those letters represent, and the 70 most common ways to spell them, children can read nearly every word in English. This instruction can be done in a matter of months, and should be introduced in first grade at the latest.

Daniel Webster, one of America's great heros, said: "There is nothing so powerful as truth— and often nothing so strange." And the truth is this. We can solve illiteracy in America now. Poor people, rich people, rural residents and city dwellers, all have equal opportunity to master the skill of reading, if they are properly taught. The history of reading instruction from the inception of our nation, can be separated into three general eras, each one shorter than the one preceding. The first era runs from colonial times until the latter part of the nineteenth century. Then the process of reading instruction was simple and straightforward. "Teach the code, then have children read."[9] Learning the code unlocks at least 85 percent of the words in the English language.[10] It worked then; it will work now. Why did the system change? As the old saying goes, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it!" More about that later.

Noah Webster, who lived contemporaneously with Daniel, was probably the most influential American in the history of modern reading instruction. He published "An American Dictionary of the English Language" in 1806. It standardized English spelling, and that spelling system remains virtually the same today. Noah Webster published the famous New England Blue Backed Speller. For a century, more than 24 million copies were sold. It was second in sales only to the Bible.[11] Keep in mind that the population of America in 1800 was approximately 5 million people. By the early part of the twentieth century, the population had increased to over 100 million. Immigrants from every nation on earth had come to America. They all wanted to learn English, and most of them did. The Blue Backed Speller, as it was called, was the tool millions of Americans used to teach their children to read, whether at home or at school.

But influential educators, like Horace Mann of Massachusetts, and after him John Dewey of Columbia Teachers College, rejected the teaching of phonics. In the mid-1800's when Horace Mann was Secretary of Education for Massachusetts, he is quoted as saying: "...it is upon this emptiness, blankness, silence and death, that we compel children to fasten their eyes; the odor and fungeousness of spelling book paper; a soporific effluvium seems to emanate from the page, steeping all their faculties in lethargy."1[12] One does not need much imagination to sense Mann's disdain and disgust of "spelling books!" An interesting note here. Horace Mann's wife published an early "look and say" reader. It was based on the ideas of Thomas Galludet who was developing reading programs for the deaf. One of the first lines in her early reader was this: "Frank had a dog, his name was Spot."[13] Well, I am sure Spot never dreamed how famous he would become.

The second era, began at the turn of the twentieth century, and lasted until the late 1960's, as Horace Mann's philosophy of reading instruction, aided and abetted by the spread of the Normal School for training teachers, firmly entrenched the "look and say" teaching of reading. For example, the early "look and say" primers were published by Scott Foresman in 1914. The basic premise was, teach the children to memorize the most commonly used words in the English language, adding new words each year and reaching a total of about 1500 words by the end of 4th grade.[14]

In the 1930's other publishers, seeing great profitability in selling "look and say" readers, jumped on the band wagon. Thus the rejection of phonics as the first step in teaching reading started the slow, but inevitable death of phonics. By the 1950's illiteracy rates were steadily rising, and parents of students who couldn't read were told their children needed "remedial" help. In 1955, Rudolph Flesch, another great American hero, sounded the alarm in his classic book, "Why Johnny Can't Read." In a follow up volume, Why Johnny Still Can't Read published in 1981, he reaffirmed the problem and the solution once again. And his solution was simple. "The truth is, of course, that any normal six-year-old loves to learn letters and sounds. He is fascinated by them. They are the greatest thing he has come up against in life."[15] Teach those principles directly and systematically, and you will have life long readers who love books. But his admonition fell on deaf ears. In two unpublished letters to a friend, Dr. Flesch describes his frustration: The first was written in 1955, shortly after his first book was released. "My Editor at Harpers, Mr. George Jones, can't get over his amazement at seeing a whole profession coming down on one poor little guy who wrote a book. He just didn't know what you and I know, namely, the enormous scandal of this whole thing, and the burning desperation of millions of parents." In 1986, just a few days before he died, Dr. Flesch wrote another letter to the same friend: "Dear John, When will all this lunacy end? It's over 50 years and it's going on and on. Pity the poor children. Pity the poor country - misguided, mistaught, defrauded from the first day of school. With all best wishes, Rudi."[16]

The third era began in the early 1970's and continues today. This "new" reading philosophy was called "whole language." In fact it was a more radical version of the "look and say" approach so popular in the early part of the century. "Whole language" relies on whole word memorization, but the words memorized are whatever happens to n the "authentic literature books" the children are required to "read." "Whole language" theorists believe that children learn to read just the same way they learn to speak. Medical and linguistic research have conclusively refuted such a notion,[17] but "whole language" advocates ignore such research because it upsets their theory of learning. They continue to believe that we are born with the ability to read, and all that is required is to surround children with books, reading to them and watching them become readers by osmosis.

With whole language, no longer were the most commonly used words memorized, as was the case with the "look and say" readers. Despite the inane stories of Dick and Jane, Spot and Puff, we all learned to memorize certain words that made it possible to function quite well. But many of us who were victims of Dick and Jane attest to being poor spellers, and many others don't really enjoy reading. "Whole language" took us to new heights (or depths) of illiteracy because memorization of difficult words like forsythia in first grade is virtually impossible for a large percentage of students. Parents became frustrated, angry and felt guilty thinking they were the reason their otherwise normal children couldn't read. In fact, the real reason was the refusal or inability of teachers to instruct their first grade students in how the alphabetic code works.

Today, we are in the midst of a revolution. It is one of the most crucial of this century. It doesn't hit the mainstream media very often, and yet the outcome of this revolution will spell success or defeat for welfare reform, reducing delinquency, improving our competitive edge among the industrial nations of the world, and very likely the survival of our Republic. If the solution is so simple, then why isn't it implemented now? That is a fair question, and it deserves an answer. There are ten reasons why I believe the education system which perpetuates illiteracy is almost impossible to change. Here they are:[18]

1. The public education monopoly is not held accountable for results;
2. There is an interlocking protective network, of teacher educators, teacher organizations and their publications, state and federal departments of education, school officials and publishers of school textbooks, that is exceedingly difficult for outside criticism to penetrate;
3. There is general agreement, with few exceptions, within this network that direct and systematic teaching of reading is ineffective, harmful and an insult to learners' self esteem, dignity and freedom;
4. There is general ignorance about what experimental research has proven to be the benefits of teaching direct. systematic phonics;
5. There are many in the network who consider systematic teaching of phonics information as a "conservative political plot." There is abhorrence among many in the network for any teaching seen as "traditional;"
6. There continues to be a lack of utilization of the findings of experimental research, which overwhelmingly supports direct, systematic phonics;
7. There is a denial among those in the network that there is a crisis of illiteracy in America;
8. There has been no easy nor regular accommodation from the courts for grievances over malpractice in reading instruction;
9. The monopoly over teacher education allows reading teachers to be wrongly trained with impunity.

Read More
Return to Home Page

Other Issues
Glossary Terms
From the Archives
On the Web
Background Reading
Organizations

Phonics and Whole Language

The way American schools teach children to read and write has, for many years now, been under the divergent influences of two powerful schools of thought. Conventional curricula still reflect a time-honored reliance on phonics and basal readers, but a "whole-language" approach has been embraced by many educators.

In fact, the whole-language approach has become so dominant in certain areas that it has sparked a powerful pro-phonics backlash. Many experts hope the current debate will ultimately lead to a healthy balance between the two approaches, blending the best of the new methods with the best of the old.

The whole-lang
approach has sp
massive pro-ph
backlash.

The traditional theory of learning, which became institutionalized with the beginning of mass schooling in the 19th century, is that children learn a complex skill like reading by first making sense of the smallest components of the language (letters) and then progressing to larger components (sounds, words, and sentences). Children learn to read by learning to decode the language; understanding follows after they break the code and master the components.

Traditional American education, therefore, begins with reading lessons that focus on phonics (sounding out first letters, then combinations of letters), tightl controlled vocabulary, and short "basal" (or basic) reading passages, followed by numerous exercises, each with only one correct answer.

If phonics is all about sounding out, whole language is all about figuring out.

"Whole language" represents a different philosophy about learning, and the role of language in the classroom. It stre children should use language in ways that relate to their ov and cultures. In the whole-language classroom, the final product--the "answer"-- isn't as important as the process. are encouraged to decode words by their context. Whole-l advocates point out that the average 1st grader has already a vocabulary of ten thousand words and assimilated many rules of grammar without formal schooling.

The common techniques of whole-language teaching--daily journal and letter writing, a grea silent and oral reading of real literature, and student cooperation, to name a few--represent th philosophy in action.

The rise of the whole-language approach has been so dramatic that some teachers complain t can't even find basal readers anymore. In addition, many new teachers say their instructors : of education no longer teach them how to teach phonics, just mentioning it in passing.

Advocates of whole language insist that it is not the death of phonics, which remains an important tool in the toolbox. But there is clearly a difference in priorities. Critics feel that whole language overemphasizes "understanding," at the expense of accuracy and correctness. A 1st grader in a whole-language classroom could come home with an essay full of "invented" spelling and fractured grammar--having receiv from a teacher impressed with the thoughts expressed and the overall use of language. Son feel that sort of laxity will lead to a generation of students who never learn how to spell pr Advocates of the whole-language approach, by contrast, say that an overemphasis on rules learning has proven time and again to be stifling--and leads children to see reading and wri arduous and arcane chores, rather than as an interesting way of gathering information.

Maybe there's middle ground

Which philosophy of instruction will win out? Research strongly indicates that students wil most successful if a balanced approach is used: Teach phonics in a systematic fashion, with context of real stories. One indication that this may be the wave of the future: Some publish beginning to produce textbooks that fill the bill.

Glossary Terms

- basal readers
- basic skills
- curriculum
- illiteracy
- standards

From Education Week's Archives

"A War of Words: Whole Language Under Siege," Karen Diegmueller, March 20, 199 Teachers react to recent trends that mandate schools to include direct instructio. (i.e., phon reading. With sidebars:

- "The Best of Both Worlds," Mounting empirical research strongly suggests that m children need explicit phonics instruction, leading experts to believe that a combina phonics and whole language may be the most effective way to teach the beginning
- "A Delicate Balance," At Fairland Elementary School in Maryland, 1st-grade teache Grenon blends the elements of whole-language instruction with the basic skills that many experts believe beginning readers need.

"Effectiveness of Clinton Reading Plan Questioned," Feb. 26, 1997. Many educators quest prospects for success of President Clinton's plan to stamp out the reading problems of U.S

"Calif. Text Adoption Puts Emphasis on Phonics," Jan. 15, 1997. The state school board h off its effort to improve achievement with a renewed emphasis on phonics in the nation's la textbook adoption for English-language arts.

"The Decline of Literacy," J. Martin Rochester, May 15, 1996. Commentary: A college pro attributes inferior literacy of today's college freshmen to overall lowered standards, a de-em accuracy in writing, and a watered-down delivery of literature in language arts education.

"Standards for Language Arts Are Unveiled," Karen Diegmueller, March 20, 1996. Report document released by NCTE and IRA, a draft of the much talked-about English standards.

"Learning English-Language Arts," March 20, 1996. A list of voluntary national standards by National Council of Teachers of English and Independent Reading Association for heigh literacy among school-aged children.

On the Web

The Great Debate Revisited. Art Levine, in *The Atlantic Monthly* , December 1994. Conten between proponents of the "meaning first" and the "phonics first" approaches to literacy goe more than a century. That the former is now in the ascendant, the author argues, should be concern.

English: What Students Need To Learn. Created by Teachers College, Columbia University parent-friendly guide gives some basic goals for any student of English and ways that paren help reinforce learning in the home.

The Whole Language FAQ: Answers to Frequently Asked Questions. Answers to question "What are good books to read on whole language?" are answered by subscribers to the Tea Applying Whole Language Discussion List, an online mailing li

1994 Reading Report Card. A status report from the National Assessment of Educational P Among its findings: The average reading proficiency of 12th grade students declined signifi from 1992 to 1994.

Background Reading

- *The Art of Teaching Writing* , Lucy McCormick Calkins, Heinemann Press, 1994 toward middle school teachers and details Calkins' development of the student-cen "writing workshop."
- *Clearing the Way* , Tom Romano, Heinemann Press, 1987. Same school of thoug Calkins. Targeted to secondary teachers with lesson ideas and supportive theory.
- *Emergent and Developing Reading: Messages for Teachers* , Pamela Owen and Pe Dumfrey, eds., 1995. Provides an international perspective on how children learn
- *The Future of Whole Language: Reconstruction or Self-Destruction* , Susan Chur Argues that teachers and parents need to take an active and critical view of efforts i curriculum (particularly language arts) reform.
- *The Literacy Dictionary: The Vocabulary of Reading and Writing* , Theodore L. H Richard E. Hodges, eds., International Reading Association, 1995. A reference to changing terminology of language arts pedagogy.
- *Understanding Reading: A Psycholinguistic Analysis of Reading and Learning to* . Smith, Frank, L. Erbaum, publisher, 1994. Psycholinguistic theory on how child read by one of the leading educators in support of whole-language instruction.

Related Organizations

International Reading Association
National Center for the Study of Writing and Literacy
National Council of Teachers of English
National Writing Project
Writing Lab

The National Right to Read Foundation

HONICS LEGISLATION AND STATE REGULATION APPROVED IN 1996.

OHIO SB 230 (1996) [Excerpt]

Section 3319.24 As used in this section: (1) "coursework in the teaching of reading" means coursework that includes training in a range of instructional strategies for teaching reading, in the assessment of reading skills, and in the diagnosis and remediation of reading difficulties; (2) "phonics" means a through, exact, concentrated, sequential system for teaching children to read or enunciate by learning the usual sounds of the alphabet's letters and the blending of the sounds. Phonics always includes the techniques or practices used to teach children to match letters of the alphabet with the specific sounds they represent. Such techniques and practices are introduced incrementally, logically and systematically, and then thoroughly practiced as the child is trained to translate those written sound symbols into the exact written and spoken language those symbols represent so that the child can read and spell.

Note: There was an emergency conference committee meeting called to deal with the "definition of phonics." The Ohio Council of Teachers of English & Language Arts "had a problem with the explicit definition of phonics in the House Bill." The above definition may have been changed in the final legislation, but we recommend other states model what was agreed to in the first conference committee report. For more information call: Judi Hahn (513) 232-5625.

LIFORNIA AB 170 (1996) [Excerpt]

Section 1. Section 60200.4 is added to the Education Code, to read: instruction materials that it adopts for mathematics and reading in grades 1-8, inclusive, are based on the fundamental skills required by these subjects, including, but not limited to, systematic, explicit phonics, spelling, and basic computational skills.

(b) It is the intent of the Legislature that the fundamental skills of all subject areas, including systematic, explicit phonics, spelling, and basic computational skills, be included in the adopted curriculum frameworks and that these skills and related tasks increase in depth and complexity from year to year. It is the intent of the Legislature that the instructional materials adopted by the State Board of Education meet the provisions of this section. For more information call: Assemblyman Steve Baldwin (916) 445-3266.

California Reading Program Advisory (1996) [Excerpt]

Systematic, Explicit Phonics--This term refers to an organized program where letter-sound correspondences for letters and letter clusters are directly taught; blended; practiced in words, word lists, and word families; and practiced initially in text with a high percentage of decodable words linked to the phonics lesson. Teachers should provide prompt and explicit feedback.

In reading for meaning, skillful readers move their eyes through text left to right, line by line, and word by word. With the exception of short function words, such as a, on, of, and any, they almost never skip or guess. Instead, they fixate on very nearly each and every word of text. Further during the fraction of a second that they do so, they take in-- and must take in--all of its letters, translating them to speech sounds on their way to evoking the word's meaning.

These word recognition processes are far too rapid and automatic for skillful readers to be aware of them. Nevertheless, their reality has been broadly confirmed through a variety of technologically sophisticated research methods with mature readers, including eye-movement recordings and brain-imaging techniques. In terms of

instruction, these findings carry a critical implication. To become skillful readers, children must learn how to decode words instantly and effortlessly. It is for this reason that children must be taught initially to examine the letters and letter patterns of every new word while reading.

ilarly, while practicing phonetic decoding, children must not be taught to skip new words or guess their meaning. While the interpretation of text depends integrally on context, the recognition of its words should not. Research reveals that only poor and disabled readers rely on context for word identification (Stanovich, 1980). Conversely, poorly developed knowledge of spellings and spelling-sound correspondences is found to be the most frequent, debilitating, and pervasive cause of reading difficulty (Bruck, 1990; Perfette, 1985; Rack, Snowling, & Olson, 1992; Vellutino, 1991). Young readers must develop fast, accurate decoding skills; and research verifies that they are much more likely to do so if they receive a good programs of phonics instruction.

The role of effective phonics instruction is to help children understand, apply, and learn the alphabetic principle and conventions of written language. . . . The most effective phonics instruction is explicit--that is, taking care to clarify key points and principles for students. In addition, it is systematic--that is, it gradually builds from basic elements to more subtle and complex patterns. The goal is to convey the logic of the system and to invite its extension to new words that the children will encounter on their own. For more information call: Dianne Levin (916) 657-5236.

NORTH CAROLINA (Chapter 716, Senate Bill 1139) (1996) [Exerpt]

Section 8.1. The State Board of Education shall develop a comprehensive plan to improve reading achievement in the public schools. The plan shall be fully intergrated with State Board plans to improve student performance and promote local flexibility and efficiency. The plan shall be based on reading instructional practices for which there is strong evidence of effectiveness in existing empirical scientific research studies on reading development.

Section 8.2. . . . The General Assembly believes that the first, essential step in the complex process of learning to read is the accurate pronunciation of written words and that phonics, which is the knowledge of relationships of the symbols of the written language and the sounds of the spoken language, is the most reliable approach to arriving at accurate pronunciation of a printed word. Therefore, these programs shall include early and systematic phonics instruction.

Section 8.3. . . . In order to reflect changes to the standard course of study and to emphasize balanced, integrated, and effective programs of reading instruction that include early and systematic phonics instruction, the State Board of Education, in collaboration with the Board of Governors of The University of North Carolina and with the North Carolina Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, shall review, evaluate, and revise current teacher certification standards and teacher education programs within the institutions of higher education that provide coursework in reading instruction.

Section 8.4. Local boards of education are encouraged to review and revise existing board policies, local curricula, and programs of professional development in order to reflect changes to the standard course of study and to emphasize balanced, integrated, and effective programs of reading instruction that include early and systematic phonics instruction. For more information call: Representative Mike Decker (910) 595-3005.

WISCONSIN (AB 237) (1996)

Section 1.118.19 (11) of the statutes is created to read: Beginning on July 1, 1998, the state superintendent may not issue or renew a license that authorizes the holder to teach reading or language arts to pupils in any prekindergarten class or in any of the grades from kindergarten to 6 unless the applicant has successfully completed instruction preparing the applicant to teach reading and language arts using phonics. The instruction need not be provided as a separate course. In this subsection, "phonics" means a method of teaching beginners to read and pronounce words by learning the phonetic value of letters, letter groups and syllables. For more information call: Representative Glenn Grothman (608) 264-8486.

WASHINGTON (HB 2909) (1996)

New Section. Section 1. A new section is added to chapter 28A.300 RCW to read as follows:

(1) The center for the improvement of student learning, or its designee, shall develop and implement a process for identifying programs that have been proven to be effective using scientifically valid research in teaching elementary students to read. The identification process shall be designed to be ongoing until December 31, 2000, and shall allow additional programs to be reviewed after the initial identification of programs.

(2) In identifying effective reading programs, the Center for the Improvement of Student Learning, or its designee, shall consult primary education teachers, state-wide reading organizations, institutions of higher education, the commission on student learning, parents, legislators, and other appropriate individuals and organizations.

(3) In identifying effective reading programs, the following criteria shall be used: (a) whether the program has achieved documented results for students on valid and reliable assessments; (b) whether the results of the program have been replicated at different locations over a period of time; (c) whether the requirements and specifications for implementing the program are clear so that potential users can clearly determine the requirements of the program and how to implement it; (d) whether, when considering the cost of implementing the program, the program is cost-effective relative to other similar types of programs; (e) whether the program addresses differing student populations; and other appropriate criteria and considerations.

(4) The initial identification of effective reading programs shall be completed and a list of the identified programs prepared by December 15, 1996. For more information call: Representative Peggy Johnson (360) 786-7966.

TEXAS (Houston Independent School District - the Nation's 7th largest) PEER Report, co-chaired by former First Lady Barbara Bush and Dr. Barbara Foorman, University of Houston. (1996)

". . . the more explicit the instruction in phonics, the greater the growth and outcomes in reading. Specifically, even though children started the school year at the same low levels of phonological and word reading skills, by the end of year the children receiving direct instruction with synthetic phonics were at the 44th percentile, and children receiving a whole language approach were at the 27th percentile (if the teachers were trained by the researchers) or at the 17th percentile (if the teachers were trained by the district). It is significant that direct instruction brought economically disadvantaged, low achieving first-and second graders close to the national average in reading, whereas whole language instruction placed students near the 25th percentile. Children scoring below the 25th percentile are often identified as reading disabled under traditional diagnostic criteria. This, one concludes that many children are disabled by lack of exposure to explicit instruction in the alphabetic principle.

PEER Committee recommendations include the following:

Direct, systematic instruction in phonemic and phonological awareness and letter-sound knowledge in kindergarten and first grade.

Direct, systematic instruction in the alphabetic code and blending in Grade 1, where the opportunity to master the principle taught is maximized by the use of: a) controlled vocabulary text, and b) oral reading to allow the teacher to judge each student's decoding automaticity and fluency.

Direct, systematic instruction in regular spelling patterns in Grade 1; exceptional patterns, morphology, and writing conventions in Grade 2 and beyond.

For more information call: PEER Committee Member Jimmy Kilpatrick (713) 520-9715.

This information has been prepared by
THE NATIONAL RIGHT TO READ FOUNDATION
Tel: 800-468-8911

Return to Home Page

A battle over the ABCs

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Co. % Mel Krongseng | Co.
Dept. | Phone # 907-225-9090
Fax # 465-3922 | Fax # 907-225-9001

BARRY WONG / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Seated so they can hear each other, *first-graders Jonathan Pearl, left, and Joshua Marasoff take turns reading a book aloud at Garfield Elementary School in Everett. Students, placed in groups by ability, rather than grade level, are tested every eight weeks and moved to new classes as they progress.*

A new conflict has opened in the political war over education, with state lawmakers debating how reading skills are taught. At the same time, schools are trying a mix of methods to get kids reading.

TIMES FOCUS — EDUCATION

BY JOLAYNE HOUTZ AND DIONNE SEARCEY
Seattle Times staff reporters

Reading time is inviolable at Garfield Elementary in Everett. It's only a slight exaggeration to say it would take Mother Nature or an act of God to disrupt the 90-minute period devoted to reading every morning.

There are no field trips or assemblies. No announcements, phone calls or earthquake drills. Doctor's appointments are frowned upon.

While the focus is single-minded, the instruction isn't.

Kids in one class hold their hands in front of their mouths to feel the air forced out when they make the sound represented by the letters "sp" — spuh.

In another, they're creating a list of words with the letters "aw." More-advanced students work in teams answering questions about a story they've read.

And it's working: 81 percent of those who started the year at Garfield are reading at their grade levels now, up from 67 percent when the school year began.

"I checked and rechecked those numbers. I thought surely I'd made a mistake," said Jan Weakley, the school's reading facilitator.

What's happening at Garfield reflects several truths about reading in Puget Sound-area schools: Phonics is alive and well in the classroom. Schools are focusing on reading in a new and intensive way. And variety is key — there's no one way to teach that's guaranteed to reach every kid.

But reading has also become the new front in a partisan war over education, a battle of bombast in which participants lob the words "phonics" and "whole language" as code for conservative or liberal extremism.

PLEASE SEE Reading ON A 12

Inside

keys for successful reading programs. A 12

Tomorrow

- *How should teachers be trained to teach reading? Legislators have ideas.*
- *How the phonics battle has affected the Snohomish School District.*

Speech and language pathologist Loren Batton *uses a puppet nan, Alfie to introduce new sounds to Garfield first- and second-graders.*

Phonics: We looked! Then we saw him step in on the mat! We looked! And we saw him! The Cat in the Hat! And he said to us, "Why do you sit there like that?"

Phonics teaches students to decode words by sounding out individual letters and syllables. Young readers are taught to tie sounds to letters, then break an unfamiliar word down into its individual sounds, and finally blend the sounds together again into a word.

The Dr. Seuss book "The Cat in the Hat" is a typical phonics primer. The words are generally easy to sound out, use predictable letter-sound combinations and emphasize patterns and rhymes.

At Thurgood Marshall Elementary School in South Seattle, teacher Noel Horcasitas drills kindergartners in phonics in the DISTAR program.

READING
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

A battle over the ABCs

"State Rep. Marlin Appelwick, D-Seattle, for example, suggested to reporters recently that the push for phonics in the state Legislature is an attempt by conservatives to funnel money out of public schools and into private religious schools.

On the other side, an Everett teacher evoked cheers and gasps from the audience at a recent legislative hearing by saying proudly: "I'm a Democrat, and I still support phonics."

Lawmakers pushing phonics

The main battlefield this legislative session is HB-2419, introduced by state Rep. Peggy Johnson, R-Shelton. It is widely assumed the bill will pass the House this week and move to the Senate.

The bill would establish resource centers where teachers could find information about phonics-based reading programs, and set up a volunteer tutor system to help struggling readers in the classroom.

But the aspect of the bill that's causing the most furor among teachers — and that's dearest to Johnson's heart — is a section saying that if schools want state funds to help improve their reading test scores, they must commit to using phonics-based training, which she believes will fix mistakes of the past.

Even some opponents of Johnson's bill reluctantly acknowledge there were excesses during the years when the whole-language approach was widely popular — classrooms that ignored phonics in their zeal for literature, students who moved from grade to grade without ever really learning to read. "" New research on the brain, new public scrutiny of reading test scores and the weight of a conservative political agenda all have contributed to a resurging interest in

teacher, doesn't believe educators when they say they're already teaching phonics, or teaching it the best way.

"There are many schools where teachers haven't had the training to do phonics properly, and there are many schools who are yet committed to doing only whole language and not doing systematic phonics," she said.

Johnson admits she doesn't know exactly how many schools might be teaching it poorly or not at all, but "we see the low test scores and know."

There's a right way to do phonics, Johnson said: "Direct systematic instruction," when teachers explain the 26 letters and 44 sounds "and give them rules upfront so they can decode the squiggly marks on the page."

There's a wrong way, too, that teachers still use, she said. That's more of a phonics-as-you-go method where teachers interrupt reading when they come across certain letters or sounds, then explain the rules, instead of giving children the rules upfront.

But Johnson has been sensitive to the outcry about a phonics mandate. "Whole language and phonics are important," she said during a hearing on her bill last month. "I am not one of those one-size-fits-all people."

Still, she has rankled educators by refusing to delete portions of her bill that would limit to phonics training the assistance that schools requesting help from the state could receive. Both Gov. Gary Locke and Terry Bergeson, the state superintendent of public instruction, believe that while phonics is an important part of reading instruction, the decision about reading programs should be made by individual districts and schools, not politicians.

Bergeson said she and Johnson aren't so far apart in their views about how to boost reading achievement. "We both want every kid to be a reader. I also want them to be thoughtful readers," she said.

Teaching trends emerging

Dozens of interviews with district and school officials and classroom visits to a half-dozen schools from Everett to Kent provided an up-close look at what schools are doing about reading. Several trends emerged:

- Virtually all schools devote some time to phonics, most intensely in kindergarten, first and second grades. In a December survey by the Washington Association of School Administrators, 91 percent of school districts statewide said they included phonics as an integral part of their reading programs. But the amount of time and the way phonics is taught vary widely.
- More than one reading program or curriculum is used. Some schools have created their own programs, while others have bought packaged reading programs from commercial vendors. Particularly popular here are Accelerated Reader, Reading Recovery, and Success For All, the program in use at Garfield Elementary in Everett.

Ironically, a bill Johnson sponsored in 1997 targeting beginning reading instruction may have done just what she's trying to achieve with her phonics bill. *Many* schools used grant money attached to that bill to try out research-based programs with a strong emphasis on phonics.

- Educators are talking a lot about reading and rethinking how they approach it — and were doing so before lawmakers started talking about phonics most recently.

Garfield drew more than 150 visitors last year, most of them teachers and principals wondering if such a program would work in their schools. A training session on reading in the Lake Washington School District drew three times as many teachers as organizers anticipated. A session on reading at a recent statewide education-reform conference was "jammed to the gills," Bergeson said. "People were hanging off the rafters."

- While schools strive for a balanced approach, there's surprisingly little agreement on the details of what that means. Should a good reading program include small-group instruction, or instruction to the whole class? Do workabeets have a place or not? Should small groups be divided by reading levels, or should those groups have both good and poor readers? When introducing the alphabet, should a teacher have a letter-of-the-week approach, or is that too rigid?

This much is decided: The question is no longer whether to teach phonics, but how — and how much.

The shift to whole language

Washington is no California.

This state never went whole hog to whole language, as critics say was true in California, where reading test scores plummeted and where the state has recently begun back-pedaling.

But whole language has been popular here, a movement that began in the 1980s as a backlash against the kind of strict phonics lessons popular in the '70s that teachers — who call a rigid phonics approach the drill-and-kill method — feared were numbing children.

Springing in part from teachers' colleg

The main bat... this legislative session is HB-2419, ...oduced by state Rep. Peggy Johnson, R-Shelton. It is widely assumed the bill will pass the House this week and move to the Senate.

The bill would establish resource centers where teachers could find information about phonics-based reading programs, and set up a volunteer tutor system to help struggling readers in the classroom.

But the aspect of the bill that's causing the most furor among teachers — and that's dearest to Johnson's heart — is a section saying that if schools want state funds to help improve their reading test scores, they must commit to using phonics-based training, which she believes will fix mistakes of the past.

Even some opponents of Johnson's bill reluctantly acknowledge there were excesses during the years when the whole-language approach was widely popular — classrooms that ignored phonics in their zeal for literature, students who moved from grade to grade without ever really learning to read.

New research on the brain, new public scrutiny of reading test scores and the weight of a conservative political agenda all have contributed to a resurging interest in teaching young readers the basic building blocks of reading.

In the elementary classrooms in this area, however, a phonics mandate imposed by the Legislature is about as popular as the notion of a teacher pay cut. Some teachers say they feel nervous: If lawmakers start dictating how to teach reading, what next? Others are furious and say the phonics backers don't understand how complex the act of reading is.

"What if we told doctors you can only treat cancer with radiation? This is the same thing," said Linda Sugimoto Tipps, a Bellevue teacher and president of the Washington Organization for Reading Development, a statewide group of 2,700 reading teachers and administrators.

Striking a balance

Those who actually teach kids to read say they barely recognize what they do in the cartoonish portrayal they hear coming from Olympia. Educators say the choice between whole language and phonics isn't an either-or formula, and the best teachers have always taught phonics, even when they had to be a little sly about it. One approach does not — and should not — exclude the other.

Schools like Garfield are the rule, not the exception, they say. They strike a careful balance in their reading programs, consciously teaching the decoding skills of phonics and the comprehension skills associated with whole language.

Johnson, herself a former substitute haven't had the training to do phonics properly, and there are many schools who are yet committed to doing only whole language and not doing systematic phonics," she said.

Johnson admits she doesn't know exactly how many schools might be teaching it poorly or not at all, but "we see the low test scores and know."

There's a right way to do phonics, Johnson said: "Direct systematic instruction," when teachers explain the 26 letters and 44 sounds "and give them rules upfront so they can decode the squiggly marks on the page."

There's a wrong way, too, that teachers still use, she said. That's more of a phonics-as-you-go method where teachers interrupt reading when they come across certain letters or sounds, then explain the rules, instead of giving children the rules upfront.

But Johnson has been sensitive to the outcry about a phonics mandate. "Whole language and phonics are important," she said during a hearing on her bill last month. "I am not one of those one-size-fits-all people."

Still, she has rankled educators by refusing

Dozens of interviews ... district and school officials and classroom visits to a half-dozen schools from Everett to Kent provided an up-close look at what schools are doing about reading. Several trends emerged:

- Virtually all schools devote some time to phonics, most intensely in kindergarten, first and second grades. In a December survey by the Washington Association of School Administrators, 91 percent of school districts statewide said they included phonics as an integral part of their reading programs. But the amount of time and the way phonics is taught vary widely.
- More than one reading program or curriculum is used. Some schools have created their own programs, while others have bought packaged reading programs from commercial vendors. Particularly popular here are Accelerated Reader, Reading Recovery, and Success For All, the program in use at Garfield Elementary in Everett.

Ironically, a bill Johnson sponsored in 1997 targeting beginning reading instruction may have done just what she's trying to achieve with her phonics bill. Many schools used grant money attached to that bill to try out research-based programs with a strong emphasis on phonics.

- Educators are talking a lot about reading and rethinking how they approach it — and were doing so before lawmakers started talking about phonics most recently.

Garfield drew more than 150 visitors last year, most of them teachers and principals wondering if such a program would work in their schools. A training session on reading in the Lake Washington School District drew three times as many teachers as organizers anticipated. A session on reading at a recent statewide education-reform conference was "jammed to the gills," Bergeson said. "People were hanging off the rafters."

- While schools strive for a balanced approach, there's surprisingly little agreement on the details of what that means.

Noel Horcasitas drills kindergartners in phonics in the district prog...

Should a good reading program include small-group instruction, or instruction to the whole class? Do worksheets have a place or not? Should small groups be divided by skill levels, or should those groups have both good and poor readers? When introducing the alphabet, should a teacher have a letter-of-the-week approach, or is that too rigid?

This much is decided: The question is no longer whether to teach phonics, but how — and how much.

The shift to whole language

Washington is no California.

This state never went whole hog for whole language, as critics say was true in California, where reading test scores plummeted and where the state has recently begun back-pedaling.

But whole language has been popular here, a movement that began in the 1980s as a backlash against the kind of strict phonics lessons popular in the '70s that teachers — who call a rigid phonics approach the drill-and-kill method — feared were numbing to children.

Springing in part from teachers' colleges, the whole-language movement is more of a philosophy than a reading program. It preaches engaging students with good literature, emphasizing comprehension skills and using pictures and other context clues to figure out what words mean. Students learn to read by seeing words in use, rather than by sounding them out, this philosophy goes.

Supporters say good practitioners of whole language also include instruction in phonics, how to sound out individual letters and syllables and blend them back together into words. But education is prone to fads — Bergeson calls it the "if-it's-new-it's-cool" tendency — and in many cases, phonics has gotten short shrift or been dropped altogether.

Sometimes, those who still taught phonics felt compelled to keep it quiet. A 20-year teaching veteran at Sanislo Elementary in West Seattle recalls going to workshops in the '80s and feeling she couldn't mention she was still teaching phonics. Others felt they had to be secretive even in their own schools. If the principal walked in while they were teaching phonics, they'd switch to something else.

Whole language swept the textbook-publishing industry, too, and some districts had a hard time finding materials to help them teach phonics.

The pendulum has clearly swung. Today, most district reading standards, as well as

BARRY WONG / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Sanislo Elementary School *in West Seattle pairs older students with younger ones in the Reading Buddies program. Here, fifth-grader Bych Le To, left, takes turns reading a book with third-grader Maricel Garcia.*

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Nine keys to success

Reading has become one of the most intensely researched areas in education. Some of that research has trickled out, slowly, to classroom teachers. But a good reading program seems to be at least as much common sense as it is science. The best schools tend to have many of these nine elements in common:

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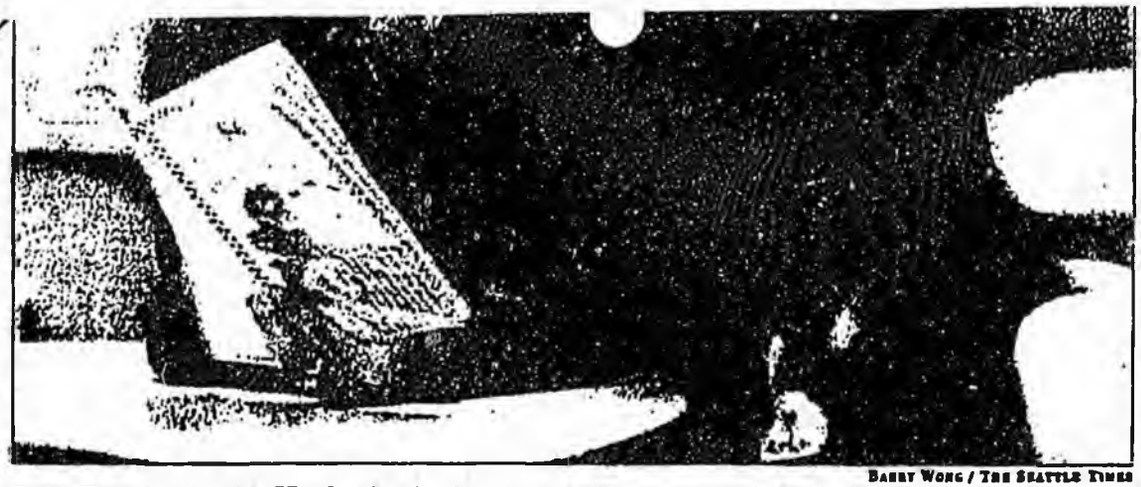

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1 Phonemic awareness

An emerging area of research nationally that, until recently, has gotten little attention in the classroom, this means the ability to hear the individual sounds that make up words: *tuh-ar-es* becomes *tree*. Children who can't hear those separate sounds are likely to have trouble when it's time to decipher written words.

Spruce Primary School in Lynnwood has always considered itself a whole-language school, but for teachers, that's always meant they paid attention to phonics, too. This year they've added a new program called Open Court to teach phonemic awareness in kindergarten.

Kindergarten teacher Jackie Wells has a frog puppet on each hand to introduce a new sound to her 16 students: the 'o' that sounds like 'ah.' She reads a story about Bob the Frog, and has one puppet use a tongue depressor to examine the throat of the other frog. "What does the frog say?" she asks.

"Ah, ah, ah," the kids reply. They take turns drawing letters out of a brown bag to create words with the ah sound. Mop, pot, sock.

"Some grasp reading by learning the parts, others need to start with the whole," said Principal Lynda Tripp in explaining her school's eclectic approach. "We twist and we turn to accommodate them."

2 Phonics

While there's broad agreement now on the value of teaching letter-sound relationships, how phonics is taught varies widely. Some break phonics into mini-lessons embedded in reading instruction that also teaches comprehension and other reading skills.

Others highlight the "decoding" skills of phonics.

Thurgood Marshall Elementary in South Seattle has been using the controversial DISTAR (Direct Instruction System for Teaching And Remediation) program in kindergarten and first grade since 1991, but last year, Principal Ed Jefferson looked at the school's flagging test scores and decided to go schoolwide.

That decision cost him a half-dozen teachers, who objected to the highly scripted phonics program and quit. Jefferson isn't apologizing.

"It would be educational malpractice if I continued with something that wasn't working," he said. "When I would ask teachers how they taught reading, some couldn't answer, or I got different answers. . . . This brings a certain order to the classroom."

Children are tested every five to 10 lessons and assigned to groups based on their skill level.

In Ernestine Tinner's kindergarten room, a small group is reading a simple story, touching each word as they say it aloud: He. Ate. A. Fig. Tinner claps out each word. She asks them to predict what they'll see in the picture once they flip over their worksheets. That's the opposite of what a whole-language program would encourage — using the picture to help understand what the words mean.

Kindergartners have to reach Lesson 40 before they're assigned their first readers.

Critics say DISTAR's linear approach relies on mindless drills and boring stories that may artificially boost test scores in the short term, but doesn't show students how to understand or enjoy what they read.

But Tinner says it works. "I have noticed first- and second-graders coming back (to the kindergarten level) to learn the basics. . . . I have seen the results, the pride when they first learn to read. Even their behavior changes," she said. "These kids are not bored. No way."

Whole-language practices — kids reading to each other, teachers reading a story, kids choosing their own books — might work for some schools, Jefferson said, "but, darn it, unless they have the basic skills to know how to read that book they choose . . . How can it be child-centered when a child can't spell cat? I just don't get it."

3 Good literature

Even those who bash the whole-language movement tend to agree it contributed new understanding about how interesting stories with richly drawn illustrations can hook young readers.

At North Hill Primary School in the Highline School District, young students study everything from ancient Egypt to Greek mythology as part of the school's "Core Knowledge" curriculum, designed to expose children to global issues and world history at a very young age.

Last month, second-graders decorated classrooms with Chinese lanterns and read simple books about China to study Chinese New Year. While the curriculum is not a reading program, it is designed to whet the learning appetites of young children and make them want to read more.

4 Comprehension

Many teachers say this is the most important skill they teach. They envision phonics and decoding instruction tucked into a larger program that teaches children how to evaluate, interpret and analyze what they read. Kids shouldn't just learn to read, they say; they should also read to learn.

At Sanislo Elementary School in West Seattle, Principal Karen Ho'o said students shouldn't just focus on reading for fun, but also reading for information, a skill they'll need to be successful in the working world.

Even for struggling readers, there's a dual focus on teaching understanding as well as decoding. Third-grade teacher Dennis Purcell recently sat at a table with seven young readers, helping them with tough words as they worked their way slowly through a nonfiction book about Martin Luther King.

"Now, look at the picture. What do you think is happening there? Why do you think this is going on?" he asks. Purcell draws out each student, trying to help them analyze the image of a sit-in.

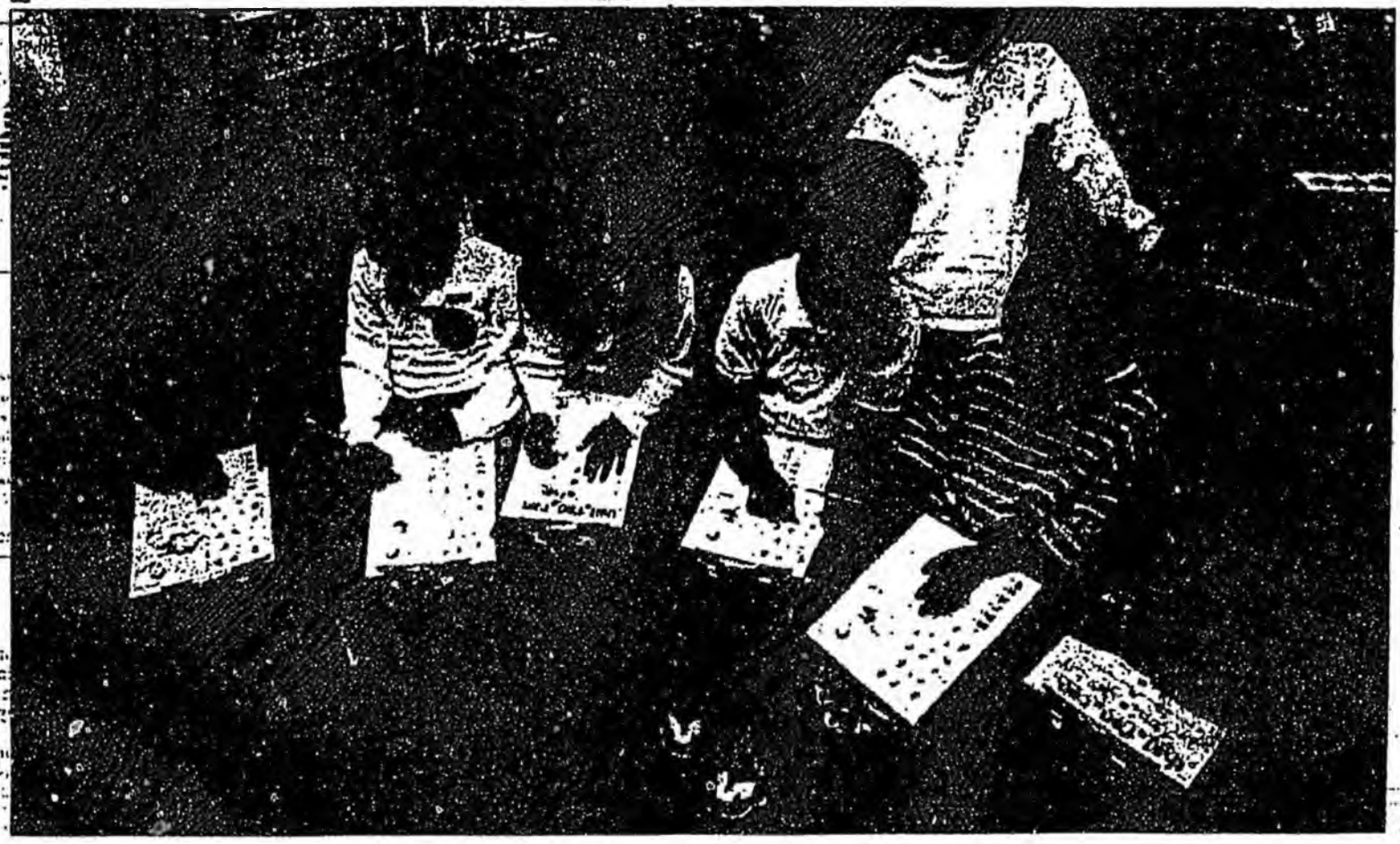
Those are just the kinds of comprehension questions being emphasized on the state's tough new set of performance-based tests. Those tests make clear that the state is putting a premium on understanding what words mean, not just how to recognize them.

Whole language:

A purple monster lives in a purple house. A striped monster lives in a striped house.

Whole language emphasizes story content to turn children on to reading. Students are encouraged to learn whole words at once, by sight, through seeing them in use. Teachers use oversized books with beautiful illustrations that capture children's attention. Students are encouraged to use pictures and other context clues to figure out what the words mean.

"Where Do Monsters Live?" — written by Rozanne Lanczak Williams and illustrated by Kathleen Dunne — uses bright illustrations to draw in the reader and repeats unfamiliar words to build recognition. Those words are often ones not covered by the rules of pronunciation emphasized in phonics.



Science supports 'sound' approach

By Kathy Lally
and Debbie M. Price
The Baltimore Sun

NEW HAVEN, Conn. — A gigantic white magnet fills the room and a small blond boy lies very still inside it. A great ping-pinging noise, like the sonar echo of a submarine, begins as the magnet goes to work, taking pictures of the boy's brain.

Words flash on a screen before the child. He is asked to decide whether the words rhyme and push a button. Computers whir madly, processing the brain pictures and the boy's responses.

Together, the magnet, the computers and a team of scientists and doctors are working to solve one of the great mysteries of humankind.

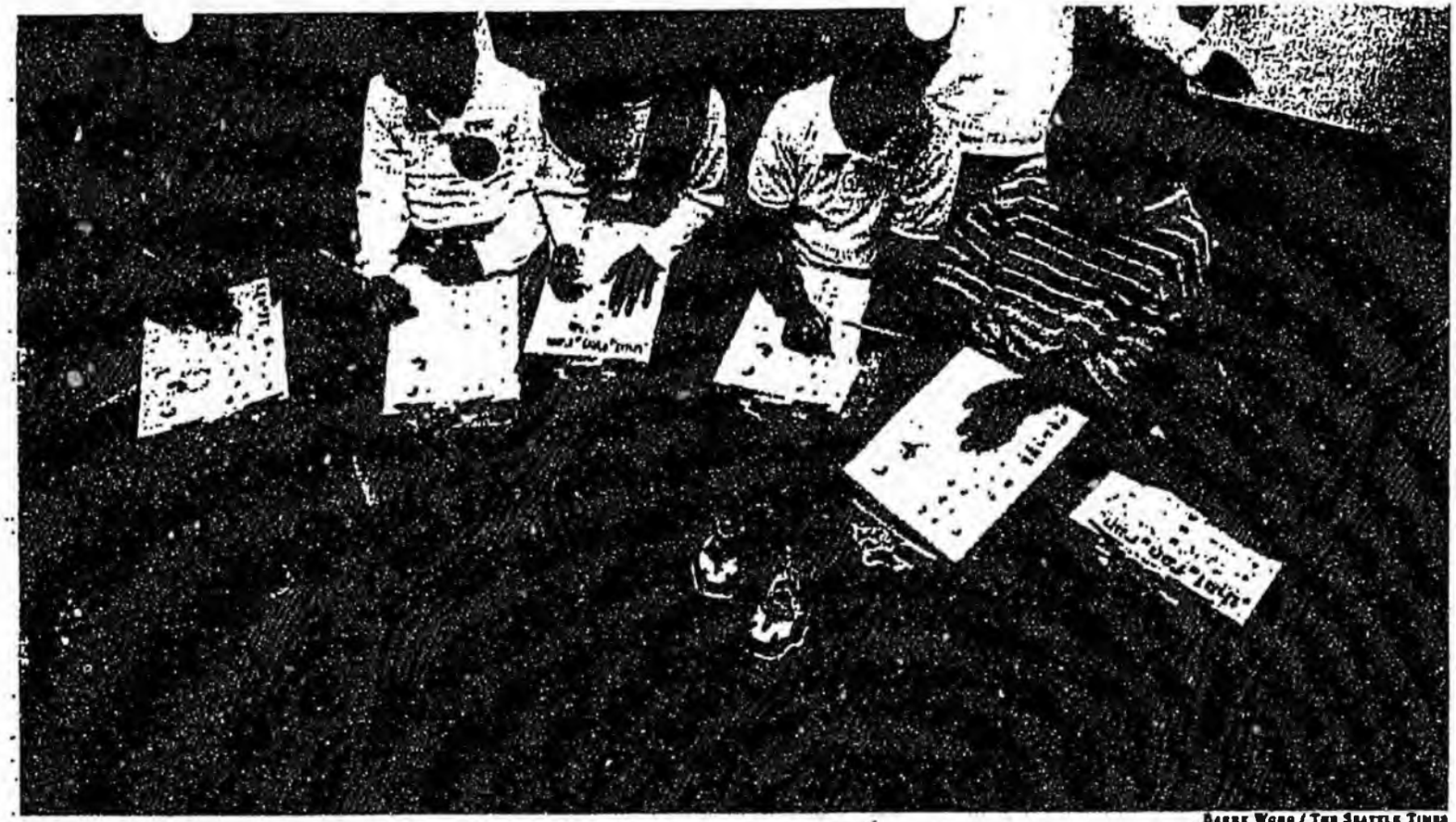
They are watching the brain read.

With the cutting-edge technology of the magnetic-resonance-imaging (MRI) device — commonly called "the magnet" — scientists at Yale University's Center for Learning and Attention have found a window on the brain. Through this high-tech porthole, they can see what their predecessors had deduced by studying children in classrooms. The brain reads by breaking words into sounds.

The scientists, led by Yale physicians Sally and Bennett Shaywitz, have identified the parts of the brain used in reading. By observing the flow of oxygen-rich blood to working brain cells, they have found that people who know how to sound out words can rapidly process what they see.

Lighting up the brain

These readers, asked to imagine "cat" without the "kah" sound,



BARRY WONG / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Kindergartners at Thurgood Marshall Elementary *in Seattle learn to read using the phonics-based DISTAR (Direct Instruction System for Teaching And Remediation) method. The system was first used in kindergarten and first grade, but now is employed throughout the school.*

CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

the state's "essential learning" standards, specifically mention phonics as one of the necessary pieces of a reading program.

The shelves at teacher-supply stores tell a similar story. Where the racks used to be filled with whole-language-style literature, basic-skills and phonics materials are now on prominent display.

For some kids, teachers say the literature-based approach of whole language works just fine. At Sanislo, Kathy Donnelly and other teachers loved the emphasis on literature and spent PTA money and their own money to augment their collections of good books. "But we were still not getting to some kids — maybe half," she said.

About two years ago, the teachers realized reluctantly they needed to make changes. "In front of us, we saw these incredible things, kids developing a love of books for the first time," said Sanislo teacher Sherry Wicklund. "But it didn't show up on paper."

Sanislo's staff sat down as a group to bring more focus to the reading program. What they came up with includes a set of specific reading goals and a checklist of skills to be taught at each grade level.

Students are broken into small groups based on their skill levels, and there's a stronger emphasis on phonics and other basic reading skills for the poorest readers.

Early results are promising: After a half-year of school, children on average are demonstrating one to 1½ years' growth in their reading abilities.

Many, maybe most, schools have reached the same conclusion. In schools where teaching basic reading skills wasn't emphasized, it's now solidly back in the lineup.

The drive for reform

But nationally, and now in this state, the excesses of the whole-language movement have spawned a backlash.

There's new public pressure on educators to explain numbers like these: Fewer than half of the fourth-graders who took the new statewide test last spring reached the standard in reading.

For the past two years, the state's fourth-graders have scored barely above average — in the 52nd percentile — on the standardized Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills.

And one-third of Washington fourth-graders who took the National Assessment of Educational Progress, known as "the nation's report card," fell below competence levels in reading in 1994. That's slightly better than the national average.

Private reading tutors are the ones parents often turn to when a child encounters reading problems in school. Many are seeing an increasing number of struggling readers, and many blame a lack of phonics instruction at early ages — or schools that drop phonics too early in a child's education — for the increase in their business.

If teaching children to read is the first business of the primary grades — some would say the only thing that really counts — why are so many schools failing?

"We lost our common sense for awhile. We're getting it back now," Bergeson said.

People are frustrated with educators asking for the public to trust them, she acknowledges. "We have had mediocre test scores. We're not doing a good enough job. It's what drove reform in the first place."

But the answer is not "for me to put on my phonics police uniform and go out to the schools and count the number of hours they spend" on phonics, she said.

She says the changes launched by the Education Reform Act of 1993 are in motion, working to make up for past mistakes, and politicians should let that process play out.

"The thing that drives me crazy is the amount of underestimation by legislators about the amount of work that's going on out there."

Jolayne Houtz's phone message number is 206-464-3122. Her e-mail address is: jhou-nws@seatimes.com

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Lighting up the brain

These readers, asked to imagine "cat" without the "kah" sound, readily summon "at." And the MRI photographs show their brains lighting up like pinball machines.

Conversely, the brains of people who can't sound out words often look different on MRI pictures. There is less blood flow to the language centers of the brain and, in some cases, not much activity evident at all. Scientists are not sure why this is or what it means. But, simply put, without the ability to sound out words, the brain is stumped.

Research conducted over the past 20 years under the aegis of the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Md., has documented similar conclusions: Children need to understand the sounds of the English language and sound-letter relationships — known as "phonics" — before they can learn to read. For some, this comes naturally; others must be taught.

What's more, NIH-sponsored studies are finding that at least 95 percent of even the poorest readers can learn to read at grade level if they are given early and proper instruction in sound-letter relationships.

Research shows that most children who don't learn to read properly by third grade are likely to be poor readers their whole lives. NIH researchers now consider reading problems a major public-health threat.

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For years, such scientific research has been ignored by educators.

"The gap that exists between the level of knowledge and what we have implemented of that knowledge all across the board is absolutely awful and sad," says Sally Shaywitz, a pediatrician-scientist involved in reading research for almost two decades. "It would be a tremendous tragedy if, knowing what we know about how children learn, (that knowledge) were not put to work."

'The key is the right mix'

Over the past 15 years, G. Reid Lyon, a neuropsychologist in charge of the NIH's reading research, and his colleagues have observed more than 10,000 children and have published more than 26 books and 2,000 articles in their quest to discover why some children read with ease and others do not.

And they have studied the ways that children learn, using pure phonics, pure whole-language programs and combinations of both.

Their conclusion: Children learn to read best if they're first given "phoneme-awareness" training in the sounds of the language and then taught the letter-sound relationships of traditional phonics. All along, teachers should also expose children to literature by reading to them and giving them interesting books to read as in the whole-language method.

"To read the English language, there is no way to get around the fact that you have to decode it," Lyon says. "The key is the right mix and that you start early."

Reading block

5 Morning is reading time in the typical Puget Sound elementary school. Many are devoting a single chunk of time, from 90 minutes to 3 hours a day, solely to reading.

And reading isn't just the work of the classroom teacher anymore. Librarians, computer, music and physical-education teachers, special-education teachers all are being called on to help teach reading.

A playful approach

6 Learning to read is hard work, but that doesn't mean it can't be fun. Many schools try to keep a sense of humor as they teach reading.

At North Hill Primary, teachers and members of the the Parent-Teacher-Student Association organized a read-at-home incentive program they called "Prizemobile Night."

Students were asked to keep their TVs off and their books open one night last month. The principal, a parent and a teacher piled into a van and drove to selected homes to check up on the students, standing outside with balloons and a bullhorn, calling for the child to come out with book in hand to show they were reading and receive a prize.

During reading time in schools around the area, you may see students singing, dancing, clapping, miming words or tracing letters in the air. Some schools use magna-doodle writing boards or magnetic poetry, have children create their own stories or change the endings of stories, hold family pajama parties at school to encourage reading, bring in Sonics basketball stars and other luminaries to read stories aloud.

Reading groups

7 Many schools have moved away from whole-group instruction during reading time. They say that often meant the teacher working with a few students in one part of the room while everyone else did "busy work" at their desks.

Now, many teachers favor splitting classes into two or three small groups.

Many schools also group those students by ability, so the best readers are in one small group, the poorest readers in another. A key component of the Success For All program at Everett's Garfield Elementary, now in its second year, is putting students into ability groups, regardless of their grade level. Those students are tested every eight weeks and moved to new classes as they progress.

That has been a controversial practice, with some arguing it's a form of tracking that keeps the low-performing children from seeing role models in the better readers.

But Garfield teachers say it lets teachers zero in on each child's reading trouble spots, boosting up the poor readers while letting advanced students move forward at their own pace.

Writing

8 Many teachers consider writing an integral part of learning to read and weave it through their instruction. While parents may cringe at the notion of "invented spelling" — letting children spell words without correcting mistakes — some educators say letting children spell a word the way it sounds is really a phonics lesson in disguise.

At Phantom Lake Elementary in Bellevue, first-graders in the Reading Recovery program write a paragraph after each day's lesson, incorporating the vowel sounds or consonant combinations they learn earlier into their writings. Because one teacher supervises one child, every word and nearly every letter of the paragraph is carefully scrutinized and discussed.

Extra help for struggling readers

9 From before- and after-school reading clinics to one-on-one tutoring, children for whom reading is difficult often are the focus of special attention.

Children at Phantom Lake Elementary can arrive at school 40 minutes early for a "Read In" to receive extra help with reading or to simply participate in reading-related programs.

For four years, Phantom Lake has used Reading Recovery, an intensive, one-on-one reading program for struggling first-graders.

— Jolayne Houtz and Dionne Searcey

Education Hotline

Education is a coverage priority of The Seattle Times. If you've got a story tip, comment or suggestion on education coverage, or a question for our Education Q&A column, please call our Education Hotline at 206-464-3339. Or contact education editor Bill Ristow by fax at 206-464-2261 or by e-mail at bris-new@seattimes.com

Achorage
Daily News
2/17/98

Would-be teachers flunk test

By ROBERT GREENE
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Virginia's governor, James Gilmore, meant to shock his audience this month when he reported that as many as one-third of would-be teachers in the state flunked a national test of basic reading, writing and mathematics.

If it was bad news for Virginia, it was worse for the nation. Virginia has the country's highest cutoff score for the Praxis I, used in 20 states to screen teacher-college candidates and beginning teachers. Scarcely more than half the students who took the test nationwide would have made the Virginia cut.

Last year, Alaska's Legislature passed a law requiring all new teachers to pass a standardized test before getting a state certificate. The law goes into effect July 1 this year.

"Virginia students would be doing much better than the national average," said Charlotte Solomon, in charge of the Praxis examinations for the Educational Testing Service, a private company that supplies the tests to states. "It begs the question of whether it's good enough."

Around the country, state education officials are asking whether tests of general knowledge and of specific subjects are rigorous enough to ensure that able people become teachers. The issue has risen in importance because of widespread efforts to raise standards for what children should know and be able to do.

For some states, it means setting standards for the first time.

Last October in New Hampshire, the board of education voted to adopt Praxis I starting this fall after years of opening the profession to anyone with a college teaching degree who could find work. Democratic Gov. Jeanne Shaheen vetoed legislation that would have required the tests for teachers who already have jobs.

TEACHERS: Would-be educators flunk Praxis tes

Continued from Page A-1

Many states use Praxis I or more advanced tests in the Praxis series used to certify graduates for general knowledge, professional skills and subject knowledge. Some states have their own tests.

Explanations vary on why scores are low, but poor pay tops the list.

"It clearly holds back who it is that's entering," said Gordon Ambach, executive director of the Council of Chief State School Officers.

Teaching has become less attractive for women and minorities since barriers to other, more lucrative and prestigious jobs have been lowered.

Education officials also point out that not everyone with low test scores goes on to teach or even get an education degree.

In Pennsylvania, education officials are beginning to raise the bar for a number of tests. Among those being examined is a 120-question, general knowledge test for beginning teachers that covers social studies, math, literature and the arts, and science.

"We have a relatively high pass rate, but as we look at the exams and we look at the cut scores, we're not convinced that it is a meaningful exercise," said Michael Poliakoff, a deputy secretary of education. Nearly 91 percent of would-be teachers who took the general knowledge test last fall passed it.

But most of the test-takers scored just about at the national average of 657 on a scale of 600-695. The state passing score is 644, close to that of several other states. The highest cut score of any state is 649 in Maine, New Jersey, New York and Rhode Island.

Like other critics, Poliakoff says the national average would look good if the test were demanding. But people are asked to do such things as put World War I, the start of the Great Depression, the New Deal and the Korean War in the right order.

The testing service doesn't say Praxis I results would compare with those on an SAT, a widely given test for college admissions.

"It's only partially true" that Praxis is an easier test, Solomon said, explaining that the tests have different aims.

But new Georgia and Delaware standards, comparable to those of other states, give some clue. State officials allow the SAT and ACT, another admissions test, to be used instead of Praxis I. A total SAT score of 1,000, with at least 520 on the mathematical and 480 on the verbal part, is acceptable.

The average SAT score for 1997 high school graduates was 505 verbal and math. Those who said will pursue education grees had scores of 48 bal and 479 math. Mat jors had scores of 549 v and 623 math. Languag literature majors had s of 609 and 546.

But the standards run afoul of the need to schools, especially in to-fill rural and inner schools.

North Carolina ha back off from higher dards several years ago. sissippi is debating wa for its cutoffs. Florida h lowed waivers.

Shortages also worry same Virginians who cate tough standards.

"You can begin to wo what's going to happen the road when more more people turn away preparing to teach," Thomas Elliott, an assi superintendent of educ

REMEDIAL COURSES IN TEXAS' COLLEGES

According to the Dallas Morning News, January 23, 1998 edition, "Funding set aside in the (Texas) state budget for remedial courses at public community colleges and universities has increased 346 percent in the last decade to a total of $172 million for the current two-year fiscal period...about 54 percent is to address students; deficiencies in mathematics, 22 percent in reading and 24 percent in writing."

That amounts to 46 percent of $172 million (79.12 million) in order to address the problems dealing with English/Language Arts/Reading. The article also stated that public community colleges went from $29.5 million to $145.7 million since the 1988 - 89 budget period. In other words, there has been a dramatic increase in spending on remedial education in colleges since the students who have been taught whole language instruction have entered their college years.

As the person who sent me this letter said, "I am not a "rocket scientist", but how hard is it to figure out what is happening.

CURRICULUM VITAE 1/1/98

Eldo William Bergman, Jr., MD

Phone: (713)-729-0678 FAX (713)-723-2172 Office: (281)-293-7904 FAX: (281)-293-8052
Home Address: 4838 Waynesboro Drive, Houston, Texas 77035
Birth date: February 10, 1946, Brooklyn, New York
Family: Married, five children (14, 16, 19, 23, 26)

Current employment:

Consultant in Child Neurology and Developmental Medicine, Houston, Texas, 1993-
Executive Director, Texas Reading Institute, Houston, Texas, 1995-

Awards/honors:

The Jefferson Awards "In Recognition of Outstanding Public Service," presented by The American Institute for Public Service, Washington, DC, June 10, 1991
Exemplary Education Practice Citation, awarded jointly by the Texas Education Agency, Texas Association for Children with Learning Disabilities, and the Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association, Austin, November 7, 1991
Mayor's Award for Outstanding Volunteer Service, June 11, 1992, Houston, Texas.
Spirit of Texas Salute, Houston KHOU CBS, November 27, 1992

Medical appointments:

University of Texas Medical School at Houston, Departments of Neurology and Pediatrics, Clinical Assistant Professor, 1980-

Education-related positions and appointments:

Special Education Parent Advisory Council, Houston Independent School District
Campus representative, 1986-1988
Executive Committee, Secretary, 1991-1992
Foundation for Independent Learning, Inc. (non-profit educational foundation)
Founder and Director, 1987-1989
Intelligent Learning Systems, Inc., founder, 1987-1992
University of Houston, College of Education
Adjunct Assistant Professor, Educational Psychology, 1987-1988
Texas Southern University, Center for Excellence in Urban Education
Adjunct Professor of Education, 1991-1993
US Dept. of Education:
Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), 1991-
reviewer, technology grants
Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), focus group on strategic planning for IDEA, Part E (research priorities), 1993-95
Houston Independent School District, PEER (Peer Examination, Evaluation and Redesign) Committee on Reading, 1996;
Subcommittee on Persistent Reading Difficulties, 1996-8
Benchmark Schools Blue-Ribbon Advisory Committee, 1997
Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, advisor to members of language arts writing team, 1997

cc:Mail for: mel krogseng

Subject: Learning First Alliance

From: jimmyk@tenet.edu (James Kilpatrick) at CC2MHS1 2/13/98 8:04 AM

To: Mel Krogseng at LAA_STAY

Twelve national educational organizations have joined forces through the Learning First Alliance to improve student learning-a permanent partnership designed to deliver common messages to all parts of public education system, align priorities, share success stories, articulate the importance of collaboration at every level, and work toward long-term systemic change based on solid research evidence. The Alliance's member organizations reprsent more than 10 million individuals engaged in providing, governing, and improving America's elementary and secondary schools at the local, tate and national coalition focused in improving public education to involve both the CEO's and elected leadership of the major national organizations repressenting parents, teachers, curriculum specialists, school principals, administartors, school boards, state boards of education, chief state school officers, and teacher educators.

Executive Summary:
Every Child Reading -- An Action Plan

I. Why Reading reform is Essential

While 69 percent of African-American and 64 percent of Hispanic students scored below "Basic" in 1994, 31 percent of white fourth graders did.

II. Every Child Reading: An Attainable Goal

Our goal virtually all children to learn to read well. Using techniques available today -- and new approaches that research could readily produce and validate within a few years -- we could ensure reading success for all but a tiny proportion of healthy students.

III Every Child Reading: A Research Base

In forging a stratrgy to ensure success for all, it is essential to focus on practices grounded in research. This paper summarizes available research...

A. Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Programs

One of the most important foundations of reading success is phonemic awareness before first grade. Later, more direct instruction on the individual sounds that make up words is needed, so that children start more formal instruction in reading with a comfortable familiarity with the sounds that letters represent and with "hearing" those sounds within words.

B. Beginning Reading Programs

Unfortunately, it is also in first grade where common instructional practices are probably most inconsistent with the research findings. Many children need well-sequenced phonetic instruction early in first grade. Given this and the difficulties in identifying in advance which children will need systematic phonics, it is propably nest to start all children with phonetic strategies.

Early in first grade, children's reading materials should feature a high proportion of new words that use the letter-sound relationship they have been taught. A meaningful context can be created by embedding decodable test in stories that provide other supports to build meaning and pleasure.

C. Second Grade and Beyond.

With high quailty instruction and any other necessary tutoring or other assistance, most students should, by the end of first grade, be able to decode virtually and phonetically regular short word with short or long vowels, be able to read a lrage number of high frequency sight words, and have solid comprehension skills, both for material they read and for material read to them. Children who are not decoding and comprehending well at this point need immediate special attention.

American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
American Association of School Administrators
American Federation of Teachers
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
Council of Chief State School Officers
Education Commission of the States
National School Board Association
ational PTA
National Education Association
National Association of State Boards of Education
Nationa Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Secondary School Principals

Future information or a complete draft copy (final will be release sson) contact Learning First Alliance 1001 Connecticut Ave. NW Suite 310 Washigton D.C. 20036
(202) 822-8405 x 40 http://www.learningfirst.org

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Mobile 281 536-4713

Dr. William D. Pfeifer • FAMILY CHIROPRACTIC CLINIC • Dr. Mary L. Pfeifer

2-6-98

ATTN: DOE Staff: please copy this fax to those listed below.

Kathie Berg,

I received the data you sent which consisted of the 1995-96 State report card. This is the same one I had from last year, which has limited data. If I understand you correctly, the State DOE has no additional data than what is reflected in this report. Is that correct?

Do you have the following:	FY97 data?	FY96
Total expenditures?	?	$610,367,479
ADM?	?	124,754
Special Ed: %ADM	?	18.1%
: Expenditures	?	??
Bilingual: %ADM	?	12.7%
: Expenditures	?	??
Migrant: %ADM	?	6.8%
: Expenditures	?	??
Title I: %ADM	?	9.7%
: Expenditures	?	??
Gifted: %ADM	?	4.1%
: Expenditures	?	??

NOTE: Gifted is not listed by school district in the back of the report, and I would like that data also. In addition do you have an ethnic breakdown of this data?

Am I correct that 51.4% of the ADM, or 64,124 kids, are in some type of supplemental program? What is the total expenditure on these areas along with the individual amounts? I am sure you have that in your budget documentation.

The report has the following number of students scoring in the bottom quartile: (Listed in % of "students tested" = 89.6%, 5.7% Absent, 4.7% SPED Excluded)

	Grade 4	Grade 8	Grade 11
95/96 CAT5-Reading	21.3%	20.8%	24.1%
96/97 CAT5-Reading	??	??	??
95/96 CAT5-language	25.5%	24.5%	24.1%
96/97 CAT5-langusge	??	??	??

Can you get me the number of kids at each Stanine level and percentile for these tests? I would be surprised if the department is not looking at that type of detail.

2901 Baranof Ave. • Ketchikan, Alaska 99901-5765 • (907) 225-9090 • Fax (907) 225-9001

Dr. William D. Pfeifer • FAMILY CHIROPRACTIC CLINIC • Dr. Mary L. Pfeifer

NOTE: If you add the special ed excluded kids to these percentages and give the benefit of the doubt to those absent, it raises these percentages significantly.

I realize that Harry Gamble will have the new report out in the future but would appreciate this information as soon as possible.

Thank you,

Dr William Pfeifer

Attn:DOE Staff
Since this did not come through well on the email I sent, I am faxing this and would appreciate it if you would copy this for the following people at DOE.

Kathie Berg
Shirley Holloway
Nanci Spear
Harry Gamble

cc:Sen Robin Taylor
cc:Linda Hardin

2901 Baranof Ave. • Ketchikan, Alaska 99901-5765 • (907) 225-9090 • Fax (907) 225-9001

See Dick Flunk

The evidence is overwhelming that kids with reading problems need phonics-based instruction. Why aren't educators getting the message?

By Tyce Palmaffy

37

Inside a National Institutes of Health (NIH) reading lab, 11-year-old Alexis stumbles to decipher a short story. Reading out loud, she inserts the word "girl" at the end of a sentence in which it does not appear. She skips the word "the" and says "grader" instead of "grade." Instead of "goes," Alexis reads "got"; instead of "her," Alexis guesses "the." Later in the sentence, she substitutes "broom" when the words read "a round iron handle." This is a sobering display: Alexis, an otherwise bright sixth-grader who scores above the 70th percentile in all other academic areas, cannot read a simple sentence without several mistakes and frequent guesswork. Unfortunately, she is not alone.

Alexis is one of more than 10,000 participants in an ongoing 30-year, $200-million study of reading disabilities by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), a division of the NIH. Acting NICHD Chief Reid Lyon sadly notes that her case is typical of children who have not received proper instruction in how the sounds heard in speech are represented by the letter symbols used in print—the relationship known as phonics. Says Lyon, "There is no way to read if you are not very facile in the use of phonics."

The problem is that few readers experiencing difficulties similar to Alexis's are ever given the explicit phonics training they so desperately need. Instead, teaching methods variously termed "look-and-say," "sight method," "whole word," and the latest incarnation, "whole language," have dominated the education landscape for almost seven decades. As a result, millions of kids are consigned to a lifetime of unnecessary reading troubles because most policymakers and educators have either willfully ignored the NIH-funded research or are unaware of its existence.

This is clearly evident in the America Reads Challenge Act of 1997, President Clinton's five-year, $2.75-billion proposal to place volunteer reading tutors with minimal training in low-income schools. The program would hire reading specialists to give cram courses to these volunteers, but declines to incorporate the NICHD's findings into its recommendations. Its official literature tepidly states, "The U.S. Department of Education does not specify any particular reading instruction method." In addition, the federal government gives elementary schools $7 billion a year in aid to programs for special education, bilingual education, and low-income students without insisting that the instruction be research-based.

If Clinton's remedy is misguided, at least his focus on reading is well placed. The 1994 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) found that more than 40 percent of fourth graders cannot read at the most basic level, indicating that they could not understand the "overall meaning of the text" or make simple inferences. The 1993 National Survey of Adult Literacy discovered that some 90 million Americans—nearly half the adult population—have severely limited literacy skills, and their ranks swell by millions each year. Bereft of the ability to use a bus schedule, write a short letter to address a credit problem, or calculate their savings on a sale price, they are much more likely to be unemployed, on welfare, or in jail than their fully literate peers. More worrisome is the fact that literacy skills among young adults and school-age children are declining.

Among minorities, the statistics are even more tragic. On average, black and Hispanic children score four grade levels below their white peers on reading tests. And this gap does not narrow over time: The average black college graduate reads at the level of the average white high-school graduate. To be fair, American schoolchildren overall ranked second only to Finland on the last international assessment of reading ability, but that provides little consolation to disadvantaged children who scored well below the average score of our major trading partners. Clearly our education system is leaving too many of its most vulnerable charges far behind in an age when literacy is the gateway to most important skills.

"If you don't know how the alphabet works, you can't learn how to use an alphabetic language. There is no argument," says a Harvard researcher.

The Reading Wars

What these kids don't know is that they are the casualties of what has been labeled the "reading wars." Across the country, school districts are embroiled in a bitter, decades-old dispute over how best to teach reading.

The latest uproar is swirling around the controversial whole-language theory first introduced in the early 1970s. Its supporters contend that children will learn to recognize individual words through actual reading, using context, pictures, and familiar words to understand the meaning of written passages even if they can't read every word. They deride skills-based phonics instruction as abstract and boring, favoring techniques such as reading to children and encouraging them to read and write early and often. "It's in the interaction with the text that children develop good solid hypotheses about the text, not through segregating sounds from the text," says Sharon Murphy, the outgoing president of the Whole Language Umbrella, an in-

38

dependent professional association.

This approach gained thousands of acolytes during the 1980s. The nation's colleges of education produced a new crop of teachers weaned solely on whole-language philosophy, while influential professional associations such as the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association embraced its basic premises. At the state level, California spearheaded a virtual reading revolution. The state department of education rewrote its entire curriculum in 1987, ditching phonics for a literature-based, whole-language approach. Teachers were told to throw out their old methods and embrace the cutting edge. Other states and local school districts soon followed. "All the major publishers moved to whole-language readers once California implemented it," says Bonnie Grossen of the National Center To Improve the Tools of Educators, at the University of Oregon. "They had no sequenced instruction, just pretty pictures and poetry. It has taken hold in all 50 states."

Yet while educators and textbook publishers were enthusiastically welcoming whole language, the research evidence supporting phonics-first instruction and questioning the underpinnings of whole-language theory continued to mount. In 1985, the U.S. Department of Education released "Becoming a Nation of Readers," a report which concluded that "the issue is no longer . . . whether children should be taught phonics. The issues now are specific ones of just how it should be done."

Another federally funded study led to the publication in 1990 of *Beginning To Read*, which most researchers consider the seminal review of the pertinent scientific literature. Its author, Marilyn Adams, now a visiting scholar at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, says, "You can teach children more efficiently and effectively if you use phonics. If you don't know how the alphabet works, you can't learn how to use an alphabetic language. There is no argument."

These findings are beginning to have an impact. Several states, including North Carolina, Texas, Georgia, Washington, Wisconsin, Oregon, and Ohio have recently passed legislation recommending phonics education in the early grades. "We no longer will accept that kids cannot learn to read," says Cindy Cupp, the director of reading at the Georgia Department of Education. "Now the state is in favor of explicit phonics instruction."

The International Reading Association recently reversed policy, specifically promoting early phonics instruction as a necessary component of a comprehensive reading program, and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) has come down squarely on the side of skills-based instruction for beginners. "We created a terrible nightmare for a lot of kids who haven't been able to learn to read using whole language by itself," says Beth Bader, the assistant director for educational issues at the AFT, the nation's second-largest teachers union. The National Education Association, the largest teachers union, still gives lukewarm support to whole language, but spokeswoman Karen Smith grudgingly admits that "many kids cannot learn to read without phonics." Dozens of news stories from school districts nationwide catalog widespread discontent with whole language and a resurgence of support for phonics-first instruction.

Most damaging to whole language's adherents, last year California punted its whole-language curriculum altogether, stressing the need for systematic, explicit phonics instruction in the early grades. The state reversed course in response to a wave of public criticism after California's poor performance in the 1994 NAEP, when it tied Louisiana for last place. Janet Nicholas, a member of the California State Board of Education, recently told the U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce: "Unfortunately for California children, the unsubstantiated claims and enthusiastic visions of whole-language ideologues proved to be disastrous when applied to real children."

Early 20th-century educators derided phonics as the "drill-and-kill" method, evoking images of stern nuns leading chorus recitals of "a," "oo," and "th."

The reaction to California's actions was predictable. "Whole language is being used as a scapegoat for dropping scores, when California has many minorities and high immigration," says University of Arizona education professor Ken Goodman, regarded by many as the godfather of whole-language theory. It is true that whites are a minority in California and a large portion of its Hispanic population are recent immigrants who speak barebones English. Yet apologists for whole language ignore the fact that scores dropped equally among children whose parents graduated from college.

"These data [from the NAEP] underscore the fact that reading failure is a serious national problem and cannot be attributed to poverty, immigration, or the learning of English as a second language," says Reid Lyon, who has directed the NIH reading studies for the past six years.

The 10-Year Itch

Fortunately, many educators are admitting their mistakes and switching to what works. But it is easy to be skeptical about whether these reforms will last. The American education system is notorious for swinging dramatically from one philosophy to another. Embattled educators and parents looking for a quick fix rarely give meaningful changes

time to work. Historically, this latest reading shake-up fits into a pattern of reform and retrenchment dating back at least a century.

During colonial times, the formula was simple: Teach kids the relationship between letters and sounds and then let them read. This method went unchallenged until the mid-1800s, when the influential educational reformer Horace Mann excoriated the drilling methods of the past. In the stark language of his reports to the Massachusetts Board of Education, the letters of the alphabet were "skeleton-shaped, bloodless, ghostly apparitions." Instead of teaching individual sound-letter relationships, Mann thought children should focus on comprehension by learning whole words first.

Despite his suggestions, through the early part of this century most American schools continued to use the traditional method of first teaching the 44 sounds heard in speech and then relating them to the 200 letters and letter groupings that appear in English. Once they had mastered these skills, it was presumed, most children could "sound out" any word, even unknown ones. Comprehension was only limited by their speaking vocabularies.

To the layman, this makes perfect sense. As education professors Connie Juel of the University of Virginia and Isabel Beck of the University of Pittsburgh write in the AFT journal *American Educator*, "Given that letters and sounds have systematic relationships in an alphabetic language such as English, it stands to reason that those responsible for teaching initial reading would consider telling beginners directly what those relationships are." But progressive educators based at Columbia University Teachers College and the University of Chicago in the 1920s rejected the "code-emphasis" approach as an unnatural, undemocratic way of learning. Phonics was derided as the "drill-and-kill" method, evoking images of stern nuns leading chorus recitals of "a," "oo" and "th."

These educators reintroduced Mann's idea that children could read by learning to recognize whole words in context. Skills-based instruction, they argued, discouraged kids from acquiring a love of reading because of its rote drilling and memorization. What influential educators such as John Dewey advocated soon became known as the look-say approach. Textbook publishers responded quickly. Whereas colonial children (at least upper-class children) learned to read using Noah Webster's bestselling *Blue-Backed Speller* and the Bible, mid-20th-century youngsters were subjected to the simplistic, mind-numbing "Dick and Jane" series. Responding to children's limited capacity for memorizing whole words, school readers became increasingly repetitive and wholly uninteresting. "We stopped teaching kids rules," says Bader of the AFT, "and expected them to learn 2 million individual words instead of teaching them 100 rules to figure them out."

Look-say reigned controversy-free until 1955, when Rudolf Flesch published *Why Johnny Can't Read*. Flesch, an admirer of Dewey with a doctorate from Columbia Teachers College, criticized the look-say approach in strident language: "We have decided to forget that we write with letters and learn to read English as if it were Chinese. One word after another after another after another. If we want to read materials with a vocabulary of 10,000 words, then we have to memorize 10,000 words; if we want to go to the 20,000 word range, we have to learn, one by one, 20,000 words; and so on. We have thrown 3,500 years of civilization out the window and have gone back to the age of Hammurabi."

Flesch's critique of the education system, in which he likened current methods of reading instruction to the training of dogs, was understandably not well received. Yet his basic claim that look-say was unsupported by research piqued the curiosity of at least one noted researcher, Jeanne Chall of the Harvard Graduate School of Education. She conducted a three-year study and a massive literature review, publishing the results in *Learning to Read: The Great Debate* (1967), still widely read among educational researchers. Its central conclusion was that the evidence favored the code-emphasis approach, particularly for poor children and those showing early signs of dyslexia. An updated version published in 1983 surveyed the research since 1967 and found that the case for phonics-first instruction was even stronger.

These findings led to a revival of phonics-based instruction during the 1970s, only to have these gains undermined by the increasing influence of whole-language theory. Its grounding in a distinct philosophy of language and harsh indictment of the "Dick and Jane" readers distinguished it from the look-say approach, yet in the most important respect whole language did not differ at all: It defied common sense and ignored piles of research by de-emphasizing skills and focusing almost solely on comprehension. It was merely the latest fad in a long line of meaning-first approaches.

A Theory Discredited

Much of what whole-language advocates claim to have introduced is uncontroversial. All educators, including those who support phonics instruction, believe that children should begin reading

(40)

real literature and writing as early as possible, that comprehension is the ultimate goal of reading, and that education should be relevant to students' lives.

It is the philosophy undergirding whole-language theory that troubles linguists and research psychologists who study how the brain processes language. The founders of whole language set themselves apart from the look-say crowd by advancing not only a new method of reading instruction but a new theory of how children acquire written language abilities. Isolated drilling in sound-symbol relationships was unnecessary, they argued, because learning to read would be as natural as learning to talk if meaning and purpose were emphasized. Indeed, whole-language theorist Frank Smith argued that skilled readers skip around instead of reading each word, using context to confirm hypotheses about the meaning of text. Hence education professor Ken Goodman's description of reading as a "psycholinguistic guessing game." To a whole-language disciple, phonics instruction can only take place as a rare intervention while children are actually reading.

Whole language's infatuation with the contextual nature of reading is moored in a 1965 study by Goodman. During the study, beginning readers were given a list of words and then a passage with the same words in context. Observing that children's word-identification skills improved after reading the passage, Goodman concluded that context plays a central role in deciphering text.

Without systematic phonics instruction, 25 percent of children will not read with the facility required to glean meaning from text.

But when researcher Tom Nicholson revisited the study in the *Journal of Educational Psychology* in 1991, it fell apart. By controlling for the children's reading-skill levels and the order in which they received the two tests (to eliminate the "practice effect"), Nicholson found that context only helped poor readers and offered readers in general no significant benefit. "Goodman based his ideas on a poor study whose findings were never replicated," says Lyon of the NIH. "It never would have gotten through a National Institutes of Health review."

Eye-movement studies have further undermined whole language's faith in context by proving that skilled readers do not use context and prediction to capture a text's meaning; they actually process each word visually. Other studies by Keith Stanovich of the University of Toronto and Charles Perfetti of the University of Pittsburgh have shown that good readers seldom rely on context; instead, their decoding skills are so practiced and quick that they speed through text without effort. Less able readers struggle painfully to identify words, taxing their ability to understand the text. "It is only because readers (and listeners) process words so automatically and effortlessly that they have the mental time and capacity left to construct and reflect on that meaning and message," write Marilyn Adams and Maggie Bruck, of Montreal's McGill University, in *American Educator*.

The belief that reading is a "natural" activity entails changing the schoolhouse dramatically. Whole-language teachers tend to regard themselves as motivators rather than instructors, instilling enthusiasm instead of basic skills. For example, they favor "child-centered" over "teacher-directed" classrooms. "Children should be fully active participants in building your classroom environment and curriculum, engaged in all the critical and creative thinking those tasks require," writes Bess Altwerger, a leading whole-language proponent. "Even first-grade students are capable of working collaboratively in this regard, as long as you can accept an environment reflecting the development of children rather than adult proficiency."

These changes are troubling when one considers that Smith and Goodman's belief that learning to read is as natural as learning to speak is "accepted by no responsible linguist, psychologist, or cognitive scientist in the research community," writes Keith Stanovich, one of the foremost reading researchers in the world. Barbara Foorman, an educational psychologist at the University of Houston and an NIH researcher, points out that if reading were as natural as speaking, there would be no illiteracy in literate societies.

Although the basic principles of whole language have been discredited, its proponents are not bending. "There are different kinds of research, qualitative and quantitative," says Murphy. "Whole-language researchers tend to fall on the qualitative side." In short, they question the research method instead of answering the research. Indeed, many whole-language proponents have resisted evaluating their approach using traditional measures of student performance, preferring such techniques as "kidwatching" and long-term evaluations of students' "real" written work. They generally question the reliability of standardized tests and controlled studies as artificial methods that fail to take account of cultural and environmental differences. Phonics advocates regard this as subterfuge. "Some people just don't want to rely on research, which means that we repeat the same errors over and over again," says Harvard's Jeanne Chall with obvious frustration. "It's very sad."

Phonics Ascendant

In a training tape developed for teachers in California, an expert teacher-trainer demonstrates phonics in action. She holds up a "very hungry"

41

stuffed bear named "Chuck," who is "choosing lunch." His diet, however, is limited: Chuck only wants foods that begin with the same sound as his name, such as "cheese, chips, and chopped-up chunks of peach." The teacher asks her class what else Chuck might like. One first-grader correctly ventures "cherry pie." Another child, as confused about edibility as the sound "ch," mistakenly offers "jacket." After briefly explaining his error, the teacher shows her students the word "Chuck," and points to the first two letters. In unison, her engaged children practice making the sound.

This exercise helps the children realize that the letters "c" and "h" together make a familiar sound heard in many of the words they speak. Afterwards, the teacher gives her children a small book that lets them practice this new skill by including many words spelled with a "ch"—what educational researchers term "decodable text." Sure, it's not *Treasure Island*, but the kids are learning to associate the sound with the symbol, enabling them to read "real" literature in the future. This is anathema to followers of whole language. "People from literature-based philosophies would freak out if they saw this. They don't want to work with kids on these subskills," says Lyon.

It is these subskills, however, that impoverished children and those suffering from reading disabilities such as dyslexia need the most. Research suggests that direct instruction in phonics is innocuous but unnecessary for the most able 50 percent of children. Neurologists speculate that their brains may be "hard-wired" at birth to dissect speech into individual sounds and, with a little formal instruction, easily match those sounds to individual letters and syllables. Once exposed to generous helpings of language, these kids quickly move from "see Spot run" to richer literature.

The next quartile of children will learn to read, but they may fall behind without strong early phonics instruction. For the remaining 25 percent, though, reading will be one of the greatest challenges they will face in life. To enable them to meet that challenge, Lyon says, "phonics is nonnegotiable." Without systematic, explicit instruction in the sound-symbol relationships that comprise the English language, they will not read with the facility required to glean meaning from text.

The NIH studies have demonstrated this over and over, at 12 sites including Yale, Johns Hopkins, Harvard, Florida State, and the University of Houston. These studies have shown that the best predictor of the ability to comprehend text is the speed and accuracy with which a child reads individual words. In essence, good readers use phonics constantly, only with so much facility that it appears as if they are skimming and skipping around. It is poor readers who decode text using known words, context, pictures, familiar letter combinations, and plain old guessing. Their trouble does not lie in comprehending text; it is their inability to connect spoken with written language that frustrates them.

These children must be taught that individual sounds heard in spoken language—phonemes such as "ch"—can be represented by letter combinations, and that these sounds and letter clusters can be put together to form words. It is on this point that whole language and phonics-first teachers are most divided. Whole language instructs that phonics, if taught at all, should only be taught implicitly, allowing children to deduce the sound-symbol relationships through their engagement with text. The findings from the NIH directly contradict this. While many children easily grasp these connections, a significant number need them to be taught explicitly, says Lyon.

The Great Wall

So why the chasm between research and practice? How could a philosophy whose basic principles have been proven false survive and continue to gain supporters? Testifying before the Committee on Education and the Workforce in the House of Representatives this past summer, Richard Venezky of the University of Delaware said that part of the problem is that the government and various foundations fund the research but do not disseminate its findings. Indeed, during the committee's hearing on literacy, chairman William Goodling noted, "I've been here all these years and never knew there was an ongoing project on reading at the NIH." Neither did his colleagues, and since only 13 members of the 45-member committee even bothered to show up to the hearing, few of them found out about it.

More disturbing than Congress's ignorance is the situation on the front lines. The people who should be most familiar with the research—education professors, teachers, and school administrators—have routinely adopted instructional methods and curricula heavily influenced by whole language in spite of the overwhelming body of research evidence supporting phonics. It's as if educators have erected the intellectual equivalent of China's Great Wall, successfully thwarting researchers' efforts to invade the schoolhouse.

In part this is due to a lack of leadership at the federal level. The government funds research at

(42)

the NIH, at the Center for the Study of Reading at the University of Illinois (which hand-picked Adams to write *Beginning To Read*), and at the University of Oregon's National Center To Improve the Tools of Educators, all of which have stressed the vital importance of early phonics instruction. Yet the U.S. Department of Education has hardly anything to say on the topic beyond reminding parents to read to their children. The result: Little of this research reaches the classroom.

State education agencies are equally hesitant to take a strong position. The Massachusetts State Department of Education refuses to make recommendations concerning instructional methods, and Patricia Webster of the New York State Department of Education said, "We don't suggest from this level how reading should or should not be taught in the classroom. Decisions like that are left to the local districts." William Farr of the Connecticut State Department of Education labeled Reid Lyon, a division chief at one of the most respected research institutions in the nation, an "extremist," adding that the state department takes no official position.

Still, plenty of education professors are familiar with the research, yet fail to incorporate it into their classroom instruction. Which begs a question: Why is whole language so seductive? Researchers speculate that whole language's popularity stems from teachers' search for a method that's easier for children and frees teachers from using the stuffy worksheets and dull drills of yesterday. "The whole-language movement should be about displacing compartmentalized instruction and rote facts and skills," write Adams and Bruck, phonics-first advocates. "And it should be about displacing such outmoded instructional regimens with highly integrated, meaningful, thoughtful, and self-gendering engagement with information and ideas." But Adams is quick to add that systematic phonics does not imply schooldays filled with painstaking recital of letters and syllables. All it takes, she says, is 20 to 30 minutes each day.

Whole language also flourishes because of the long-standing skepticism toward research in the education community. Even educational researchers admit to the shoddiness of educational research in the past, and the tendency of "the latest findings" to swing educators from fad to fad. "Very little research on anything ever makes it into the classroom. What you get are trends with very little research evidence to back them up," says Gerald Bracey, a research psychologist who writes widely on education issues. "Educators run from one fad to another," adds Smith of the NEA.

Further hampering attempts to extend research findings into practice is the fact that teachers are rarely taught how to read and analyze research evidence. For the most part, teachers colleges that serve as vocational schools are separate from research institutions, so professors who train teachers are insulated from professors who engage in research. "They're different professions," says Adams. "They go to different conferences and read different journals. The people who are doing research work in education are not well-informed about the real problems and needs of schools and teachers." There are exceptions, such as the Columbia University Teachers College and the University of Virginia's Curry School of Education, but the vast majority of teachers graduate from "normal schools" where training and research are not integrated. "Teachers see professors as very smart people who do very good work that has nothing to do with what they do," says Bracey.

With scant ability to discern research from opinion, teachers and even school superintendents often adopt unproven practices. "Unlike other research-based professions," writes researcher Bonnie Grossen, "our mechanisms for distinguishing fads that will probably fail from effective innovations are weak and ineffective." Hypotheses by education professors quickly become "theories," even though they have seldom been subjected to any rigorous testing. As the dominance of whole language shows, this has been particularly true in the field of reading. "Hard science is often alien to primary-level reading instruction, snake oil and charismatic solutions being preferred far more often than this country can afford," said Venezky in his congressional testimony.

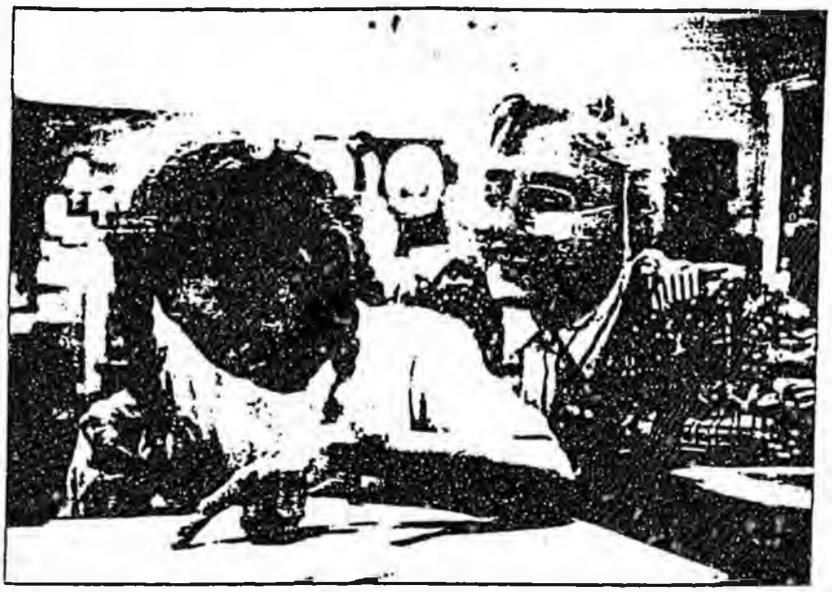
At the graduate level, whole language continues to inform reading instruction. In fact, surveys of teachers and the textbooks they use in education schools confirm that most teachers are not taught systematic phonics and are hardly ever told that whole language instructional methods are even contested. Reid Lyon tells of his encounter with a California teacher seeking a doctorate in reading instruction who approached him after a lecture. Her face wet with tears, she told him that no one had ever exposed her to phonics-based instruction. "The majority of teachers we've talked to who have been trained over the last 10 years have never even discussed these issues," says Lyon. "Teachers are resentful that they haven't been presented this in the past," says Louisa Cook Moats, the director of training at the Greenwood School, a teacher-training institute in Vermont.

Whole language flourishes in part because of the long-standing skepticism toward research in the education community.

Education schools are routinely criticized for their emphasis on theory over practice. This is es-

43

pecially true in reading. One survey published in the journal *Teacher Education and Special Education* (1989) found that less than 10 percent of teachers had ever seen their professors demonstrate methods of reading instruction tailored to children's differing needs. Fewer than 5 percent said that what they had learned about teaching reading actually related to what they did in the classroom. *Remedial and Special Education* published a survey in 1992 of 100 learning-disability experts, including many professors of reading instruction. It found that few assigned any importance to understanding basic language structures like syllables and phonemes. "The most common comment I get is that nobody ever taught me any of the substantive part of what it means to teach students to read," says Moats, who is directing NIH's study of reading in the District of Columbia's public-school system. "They continually ask, 'Why didn't anyone teach me these things?' "



A phonics-based reading program and committed teachers turned Houston's Wesley Elementary into an academic powerhouse.

Good question. Part of the answer is that states rarely require more than one semester of reading instruction to obtain certification to teach. Another part is that few school districts evaluate teachers using student performance as a measure. In short, professors are wholly unaccountable for the teachers they graduate. They thus have little incentive to indulge in potentially tedious practice sessions and lessons in how to perform an effective phonics drill. "The average person who's teaching reading on a university faculty knows very little about linguistics," says Venezky, now serving a year-long post as a resident scholar at the U.S. Department of Education. "To them, phonics is very often frightening, foreign, and very difficult to teach." Evidently, education professors cannot imagine themselves holding up that hungry bear named Chuck.

Phonics in Action

In January, Secretary of Education Richard Riley traveled to Houston, Texas, to laud the first city to accept President Clinton's reading challenge. Curiously absent from the festivities was the Houston education system's shining star, former Wesley Elementary Principal Thaddeus Lott. During the early 1980s, his success in turning Wesley from a typical urban failure into one of Texas's highest-performing elementary schools led almost 300 Houston schools to follow his lead in abandoning the school district's recommended curriculum.

Administrators instead used their discretionary funds to purchase DISTAR (Direct Instructional System for Teaching and Remediation), the program Lott had introduced at Wesley in 1975. DISTAR, now known as Reading Mastery, is a direct-instruction program developed in the 1960s by Siegfried Englemann, a former preschool teacher. It incorporates intense, systematic phonics instruction into a fast-paced, heavily scripted program with constant teacher-student interaction.

Lott's success was swift. In 1980, just three years after the school's third graders were first taught using DISTAR, 85 percent passed the reading comprehension portion of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), up from 18 percent in 1977. In 1996, 100 percent of Wesley's third graders passed the TAAS, even though more than 80 percent of the kids in the district are poor enough to qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. "Direct instruction has filled the void left by colleges and universities and teacher training institutions," says Lott, who is now franchising success by running Wesley as one of four charter schools under his control. "We've been fighting this whole language wave for years. People who only know how to teach whole language don't know how to teach phonics."

Observers tend to chalk Wesley's excellence up to Lott's charisma and sense of mission. But his results should not be so surprising; Lott simply adopted the best program available. In 1977, Project Follow Through released the results of its decade-long, $500-million study of teaching methods that began as part of Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty." The federal government study rated direct instruction the best method by which to improve student performance. Literature-based programs that were avowedly child-centered rated lowest. Paradoxically, direct-instruction programs produced the greatest improvement in student self-esteem, while the child-centered methods that claimed to raise student self-esteem ranked much lower.

Still, direct instruction has suffered from criticism that its strict program handcuffs teachers.

Photo by Joel Deal

and few schools have adopted it nationwide. Here's the typical response from a direct instruction teacher, though: "The bottom line is that when I get third graders reading on a first-grade level, I don't have time for flexibility," says Dianne Bissell, a former elementary-school teacher at one of the schools in Houston that adopted DISTAR after observing Wesley's dramatic improvement. "Direct instruction works."

These schools purchase DISTAR with Title I funds granted by the federal government to provide educational opportunities to low-income children. At other schools, most Title I money is wastefully spent on early intervention programs such as Reading Recovery (which is estimated to cost between $8,000 and $9,000 per child), teacher aides, and remedial help long after intervention would have been most effective. The NIH has developed tests that cost $15 per student to assess whether children will have trouble learning to read in first grade. When used in conjunction with an early intervention program such as DISTAR, Lyon says, 85 to 90 percent of poor readers can reach average levels if diagnosed early enough. As time goes by, the costs rise as the probability of success declines.

Bridging the Chasm

The "reading wars" have become a political battle rife with smears and misrepresentation. Whole language was blamed entirely for sinking reading scores in California, even though the state also failed to train teachers in the new literature-based curriculum. Critics of the public-school system such as Samuel Blumenfeld view whole language as simply the latest attempt by the education establishment to "dumb down" America's children, clearing the path for a socialist revolution. Whole-language adherents tend to disclaim the validity of any scientific study and accuse phonics-first supporters of a hidden agenda: delegitimizing the public schools to win funding for private religious schools.

But basic skills are an issue of common sense, not conservative policy. Consider the sport of wrestling. A wrestling match between two skilled athletes may appear to a casual observer to be as natural as a good reader breezing through text. What the observer does not know is that a wrestling match is made up of dozens of individual moves and skills that the competitors have practiced for much of their lives. Wrestling coaches teach all of these skills in isolation and then let their wrestlers practice them on the mat. After hours of practice and drill, these skills are so automatic and fluid that the wrestlers do not even need to think about them during a match. They can worry about broader strategy—just as a reader with excellent decoding skills can concentrate on comprehension. From sports to driving to chess, in no other field except reading would teachers tell their students that learning the basic skills first is unimportant, perhaps even harmful.

It's true that basic skills are no panacea. Reading is a complex activity, and a host of other factors impact how well children learn the relationship between their spoken language and its representation in print. Most important is a child's readiness upon entering school. A 1995 study found that children in professional families heard 2,150 words per hour on average, working-class kids were exposed to 1,250, and children on welfare heard only 620 words per hour. Upper-income parents were also much more likely to ask stimulating questions and challenge their children's cognitive skills. These kids stepped through the kindergarten doors far more experienced with language, giving them a tremendous advantage in the acquisition of reading skills.

While bearing in mind the effects of the home environment on learning, it is equally important to note the further damage caused by receiving ineffective methods of reading instruction. The NIH studies have proven that poor children whose parents do not expose them to books and language suffer the most under programs like whole language that do not emphasize skills. Their difficulties are compounded when they reach higher grades and have yet to learn the fundamentals of reading, hindering their study in all other subjects. And Thaddeus Lott's success with direct instruction proves that a disadvantaged background does not prevent children from succeeding alongside their suburban peers—if they are taught using research-based methods.

A survey of 100 learning-disability experts found that few assigned any importance to understanding basic language structures like syllables and phonemes.

Egalitarians worried about the increasing distance between rich and poor should take heed of researchers' warnings. Current methods of reading instruction are exacerbating differences in educational opportunities, allowing the well-heeled sons and daughters of loquacious professional parents to reap the advantages of wealth while impoverished children linger behind.

As Flesch wrote more than 40 years ago, "There is a connection between phonics and democracy—a fundamental connection. Equal opportunity for all is one of the inalienable rights, and the word method interferes with that right. . . . [I]t returns to the upper middle class the privileges that public education was supposed to distribute evenly among the people."

Tyce Palmaffy is the assistant editor of Policy Review.

45

No Excuses

Houston educator Thaddeus Lott puts failing schools to shame

By Tyce Palmaffy

Gayle Fallon wanted to give her 10-year-old godson a measure of stability in life. With a father who had compiled a long record of felony convictions and a mother imprisoned for shoplifting after two prior convictions for drug possession, the boy had shuffled in and out of foster care since birth. To worsen matters, he was languishing in the chaotic environment of a dismal urban school. Fallon, the president of the Houston Federation of Teachers, knew that without a decent education, her godson might stumble along the same destructive path his parents had followed. So in 1994 she secured him a spot at Mabel B. Wesley Elementary, an innovative public charter school on the outskirts of Houston.

"I love that program," Fallon says. "I wouldn't invest my godson in it if I didn't."

Fallon's praise evokes a sun-dappled public school set against a leafy suburban backdrop. And so would Wesley's manicured lawn, pristine brick facade, and buffed floors—if you ignored the barbed-wire fencing and boarded-up houses encircling the school. In fact, Wesley Elementary serves the violent, drug-infested Acres Homes section of Houston. All of its students qualify for federal Title I education funds earmarked for disadvantaged children, and its student body is 99 percent minority (93 percent black, 6 percent Hispanic). The lives of many closely mirror that of Fallon's godson.

We have come to expect mediocrity from schools whose students are saddled with such tragic circumstances. But since Thaddeus Lott became its principal in 1975, Wesley has graduated thousands of children whose reading and math scores rival those of their suburban peers. Before Lott introduced his educational philosophy, only 18 percent of Wesley's third-graders were scoring at or above grade level in reading comprehension on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. By 1980, 85 percent were achieving at or above grade level. In 1996, 100 percent of Wesley's third-graders passed the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) in reading. Statewide, fewer than 70 percent of third-graders in schools with similar demographics passed.

To achieve this astounding turnaround, Lott eschewed popular nostrums—computers, school-to-work initiatives, parental involvement—for the basics: a proven curriculum, rigorous teacher training, strict discipline, high expectations of teachers and students, and a fervent belief that any child can learn.

"It's a myth," says Lott, "that if you're born in a poor community and your skin is a certain color that you can't achieve on a higher level."

46

Having succeeded at Wesley, Lott wanted to vindicate his beliefs at other troubled schools. In this desire the community saw an opportunity to have every Acres Homes child schooled by Lott. So its residents petitioned the Houston school board to allow Lott to manage Wesley and three neighboring schools as a separate district of charter schools. The contract was signed in spring 1995, making Lott's district the first charter-school arrangement of its kind in Texas, predating even the state law encouraging communities to establish charter schools. The charter's goal: To have 70 percent of all children who have spent three years in the charter system scoring at or above grade level.

The charter gives Lott total freedom to train staff, develop a curriculum, and make hiring, firing, and promotion decisions at the four schools. The charter "allows us to feel like we're not committing a crime by doing things differently," says Lott. "It does not release us from accountability, though. We have a three-year contract, and the community expects results." As the equivalent of a district superintendent, Lott reports directly to the superintendent of Houston schools, enabling him to sidestep several layers of bureaucracy.

Only $2,500 Per Child

It is 8 A.M. at Wesley, and Mary O'Connor's third-graders are in a hurry. They are leaving on a field trip at 9, and there's plenty of learning to do before then. Not a moment is wasted as they correct their math homework, recite vocabulary lists, and read from a novel, Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie*. By 9 A.M., they have accomplished more than many classes do all morning.

This is the typical classroom at Wesley: The pace is quick, the goals are set high, and no disruptions are tolerated. "We have a lot of ground to cover," says Lott. "The success of these kids depends on the percentage of time they are on task. We can't let one or two students disrupt the educational experience." The first lesson Wesley kids learn is how to walk through the halls quietly, single-file with hands folded. Fighting is forbidden.

The pace is rooted in the curriculum. Upon entering Wesley as principal, Lott purchased the Direct Instructional System for Teaching and Remediation (DISTAR), a program developed at the University of Illinois during the 1960s. Known now as Reading Mastery and Connecting Math Concepts, it is based on the direct-instruction model of teaching, in which students and teachers engage in a lively, interactive regimen of structured drills and sequential lessons, each building on the last. DISTAR's phonics-based reading lessons are literally scripted for the teacher, who is required to ask 200-300 questions per day, often in rapid-fire sequence. The children's high-decibel choral responses may sound like a high-school cheerleading squad hopped up on No-Doz, but they are learning the relationships between the sounds and the letters that constitute the English language. And there's no quibbling with the results at Wesley.

During Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty" the federal government began Project Follow Through, which spent $500 million and many years investigating the most effective pedagogy for disadvantaged students. It concluded that direct instruction was the only method that even came close to elevating poor readers to the 50th percentile in achievement. Child-centered approaches that diminish the teacher's role in the classroom and reject the teaching of basic skills finished in the cellar. Ironically, researchers also found that direct instruction elevated students' self-esteem even more than the child-centered methods that ascribe a central role to high self-esteem and maintain that self-esteem suffers in heavily controlled teacher-directed environments. Disadvantaged students succeed more often with direct instruction, however, and Lott knows that achievement builds self-esteem, not the other way around.

Direct instruction works so well that Lott steers just 3 percent of Wesley students into special-education classes. By comparison, 10 percent of all Houston schoolchildren are labeled special ed.

Houston schools can mask poor achievement by inflating their special-ed ranks because special-education children do not count toward a school's average TAAS scores. Lott refuses to engage in such subterfuge. By exempting only 3 percent of its students for special ed, Wesley's TAAS scores represent more than 90 percent of the student body (a small percentage of Hispanic children are exempted for taking the test in Spanish). Only five of 242 other Houston schools test more children; most test well below 70 percent.

"Other principals hire remedial teachers," says Phyllis Hunter, manager of reading instruction for the Houston school district. "Thaddeus hires teachers who keep kids out of remedial classes." In fact, Wesley retains just one special-ed teacher, which helps to trim its costs to an average of $2,500 per child—nearly $1,000 less than the district average. "We've always done more with less," boasts Lott.

Lott held to his faith in basic skills while his counterparts swooned over the now-discredited "whole-language" theory of reading, which disavows explicit phonics instruction and views teachers more as "learning facilitators" than instructors. "People started teaching without ever giving kids any decoding skills," Lott says. "They gave them a bunch of books and said, 'Read.' That was the fallacy of the whole-language bandwagon."

So many educators jumped on this bandwagon that Lott, in the pre-charter era, had to run candy sales and forgo technology upgrades to purchase DISTAR because it was not on the state's list of ap-

proved curricula. Now the charter allows him to spend his precious curriculum dollars on whichever program he deems best.

Holding Teachers Accountable

In fact, Lott defies convention at every turn. Tracking—the practice of grouping students by skill level—has been accused of pigeonholing students into rigid categories. The first action Lott took as principal was to test his students, rank them by instructional level, and place the top 22 students in one class, the next 22 in another, and so on. The students in each class comprise, at most, three skill levels, making it easier for teachers to tailor their lesson plans to the individual needs of their students.

"If you don't teach a child on his instructional level," Lott says, "you will teach him at his frustration level. A child's self-esteem and success at learning are determined by his having an opportunity to be taught at the rate and level that he is capable of being taught."

Moreover, few school districts rate teachers based on performance, yet Lott demands accountability. Early in his career he began testing children at the beginning and end of each school year. By breaking the scores down by classroom, he knows which teachers are succeeding. His personnel decisions and merit bonuses are based on the results. Often he will even post the average student scores achieved by each teacher. "Now that's peer pressure," says Karen Anastasio, a reading specialist at Wesley.

Teachers are also subject to unscheduled visits from Lott and current Wesley principal Suzie Rimes, who checks on each classroom at least once a day. On one of the days I spent at Wesley, Rimes found a teacher who had not checked her students' homework. "She's got a short-lived existence here," Rimes said. "If she can find a place to pay her to do what *she* wants to do, more power to her." New teachers, in particular, can expect to be observed two to three times a day.

"New teachers don't come equipped to teach" upon graduation from education schools, says Lott. "So we have a lot of training focused on teaching teachers how to teach. They get so little field practice in college."

Underlying these policies is Lott's conviction that if a child does not learn, it is the teacher's fault. "I'm in the education business," says Osborne Elementary principal Ann Davis, another of the Lott disciples in charge of the four charter schools under his management. "If I'm not doing my job, I need to be put out of business."

These lofty expectations would merely provoke resentment among teachers if Lott did not equip them with proven strategies. New teachers attend several days of training before school begins, and Lott will release them from classes for a week to observe an experienced teacher if they need to. "Teachers need to be trained," Lott insists. "They need to know that they are supported." The school year is replete with opportunities for further training and time to share strategies with colleagues. "You can't as a teacher fail at Wesley unless you don't want to do the program," says Gayle Fallon, the head of the teachers union.

Poverty does not hold back students at Wesley Elementary: More than 90 percent pass Texas state reading tests.

But Fallon warns prospective teachers that if they want to interpret their contracts literally, Wesley is not the place for them. "I tell them, 'You're going to [illegible] through lunch, past 5 P.M., and [illegible] turdays. But you're also going [illegible] disciplinary support, the materials you need, and all the training you require.'" Fallon says. Wesley typically loses four to six teachers at the beginning of each year because they dislike the program or fail to meet Lott's standards of competence.

The workload is heavy because students must be graded in five subjects each day. And a linchpin of direct instruction is that students are tested

48

often to ensure they have mastered the material before moving on. These measures enable teachers to give students feedback on their mistakes. It's no use, Lott says, to have kids practicing bad habits. Or to have them turning the page without having learned the previous lesson. But it also makes the job of teaching that much harder.

The demanding hours and pressure to perform take their toll. The majority of Wesley teachers have fewer than five years of teaching experience, while the average Houston teacher has spent 12 years in the same school. According to Lott, the problem is competition: "We're surrounded by plenty of less rigorous schools that love to take the teachers we've already trained." Several observers say this is integral to Lott's success: He trains young teachers his way before they become entrenched in another philosophy.

Franchising Success

In terms of education policy, the key question is: Can the Wesley way become a model for widespread education reform? Can Lott succeed without devoting the amount of time to each of his four charter schools that he has always given to Wesley? Which is indispensable, the visionary leader or the approach he has championed?

It's too early to render a verdict on the charter experiment, but the initial signs are promising. Lott's first step at Highland Heights was to replace the principal (a power the charter gives him) with Sandra Cornelius, a former Wesley assistant principal. "The last principal was a joke," says Lott. "The place was a mess, and she wouldn't even show up on time." Cornelius shares his philosophy, and she began by beautifying the school, imposing a sense of order, and adopting the direct-instruction programs.

The results have been remarkable. In 1994-95, the year before Lott assumed responsibility for Highland Heights (where 94 percent of students receive free or reduced-price lunches), 37 percent of its fourth graders had passed the TAAS in reading. Last spring, a whopping 100 percent passed. In math, 94 percent of the school's fourth graders passed the TAAS this year. Two years ago, the passage rate was 30 percent among fourth graders.

Osborne Elementary, the third elementary school now under Lott's management, has been improving steadily ever since Davis was hired as principal in 1993, several years before Lott took over. Fewer than 40 percent of its students had passed the TAAS in reading and math in 1993. Nowadays, more than 80 percent pass. Instead of DISTAR, Davis has chosen to use Success For All, a teaching model developed at Johns Hopkins University that incorporates direct-instruction techniques. Lott, for the most part, has left well enough alone. "All of [the principals] are free to do their own thing as long as they get results," Lott says.

Lott's most daunting challenge is to revamp M.C. Williams, the lone middle school (grades six through eight) in his care. He spent the first year of the charter battling the old principal, who disagreed with Lott philosophically and has since been replaced. This year the school has a new principal and a new look. Formerly dark hallways now have fluorescent lighting; a once perpetually dirty floor is swept and waxed daily; graffiti is cleaned up immediately; and new principal Roy Morgan himself donned an old sweatshirt one Saturday and painted the front doors bright blue.

Morgan is a constant presence in the hallways and classrooms, and teachers are assigned posts at high-traffic areas during breaks. Their mission: Maintain order. "The teachers and administrators have finally gotten control," says assistant principal Sylvia Jones. These initial renovations are revealing, for they reflect Lott's priorities. Before attending to academics, Lott says, you must create an environment for learning. That means a clean school with cheery colors, a staff of professionals who treat students with respect, and students who understand what type of behavior is expected of them.

Three years ago, before Lott took over Highland Hei 37 percent of fourth-graders passed the reading Last year, 100 percent pas

Test scores, however, have only seen minor improvements. Besides the turnover in leadership and the wasted year with an ineffective principal, Williams suffers from a more serious problem: Cherry-picking. Wesley graduates are technically zoned to attend Williams, but few actually enter. Most are accepted by magnet schools throughout Houston or wooed by private schools seeking high-achieving minority students. So Williams is left with hundreds of graduates of other local elementary schools starting well below grade level.

Lott's solution is to bring textbooks from Wesley into the middle school. "These kids don't know how to decode a word," he says. "Now we're having to do what the elementary schools didn't do." The charter arrangement exempts Williams from regulations forbidding the use of below-level textbooks.

A Failure To Replicate

Lott's devotion springs from his deep roots in the community. His boyhood home stands just five blocks from Wesley, and as a child he attended Highland Heights. Back then Acres Homes was largely rural; his parents raised livestock and pumped water from a well. It was a different kind of community, too. "There were more families and they looked out for each other's children," Lott

laments. "My neighbor was as much a guardian as my parents. Now we have drugs, violence, babies having babies—the whole nine yards."

Soon after graduating from Texas Southern University and becoming an educator, Lott and his wife built a home near Wesley. "I wanted my children to know their heritage," Lott says. "I wanted them to sit in their grandmother's rocking chair."

Even though Lott was told that he would never recoup the house's full value, it was important to him that Acres Homes kids hold high aspirations. "Children would pass the house and admire it," Lott says, "and say, 'You can come from Acres Homes and make a difference in the world.'"

But living in Acres Homes meant his children had to attend Wesley. Finding the education lacking, he sent them to private school and vowed to take the job as principal at Wesley if it ever opened. "I knew what it was like to be a parent looking for a school that taught my kids as well as I was taught," Lott says. "For them to do less is criminal."

Opportunity knocked in 1975, and the swift and dramatic improvements at Wesley soon attracted notice. In 1980, the school district conducted a study of Wesley and 10 other schools with similar demographics. It attributed the sudden uptick in Wesley's scores to the use of DISTAR.

With these results in hand and a supportive superintendent, more than 300 Texas schools adopted DISTAR in the early 1980s. But since DISTAR had still not been approved by the state education board, public schools had to divert discretionary funds away from other endeavors to afford the program. When classroom computers became the latest rage, these schools largely abandoned DISTAR to purchase computer hardware.

The next superintendent, Joan Raymond, was an ardent whole-language acolyte. Lott's philosophy was anathema to her, and according to Gayle Fallon, his success prompted many Houston school district administrators to question the validity of Wesley's scores. "They assumed that if minority kids were doing well on tests, they had to be cheating," Lott says. The district sent a pair of investigators into the school to look for evidence of foul play, but they came away empty-handed.

Texas educators praise Lott but resist the methods that explain his success.

The baseless charges provoked an indignant backlash. "[Raymond] got to meet the entire Acres Homes community at the next school board meeting," says Fallon, smiling. The pivotal moment came when ABC's *PrimeTime Live* broadcast scenes of Lott's children reading two and three years above grade level. Raymond squirmed as reporter Chris Wallace questioned the district's lack of support for Lott and her own prejudices. It had all the elements of a juicy story—a crusading hero, an intransigent bureaucracy, and children's education in the balance—and ABC ran it twice. Ultimately, it gave Lott an aura of invincibility and forced Raymond out of office.

It also brought a wave of requests from parents throughout the city desperate to enroll their children at Wesley. Some resorted to lying about where their children lived, providing the address of a vacant lot or of a relative within Lott's district. While most schools take pains to expose such fraud, Lott does not. If they want to come and don't cause any trouble, he is glad to educate them.

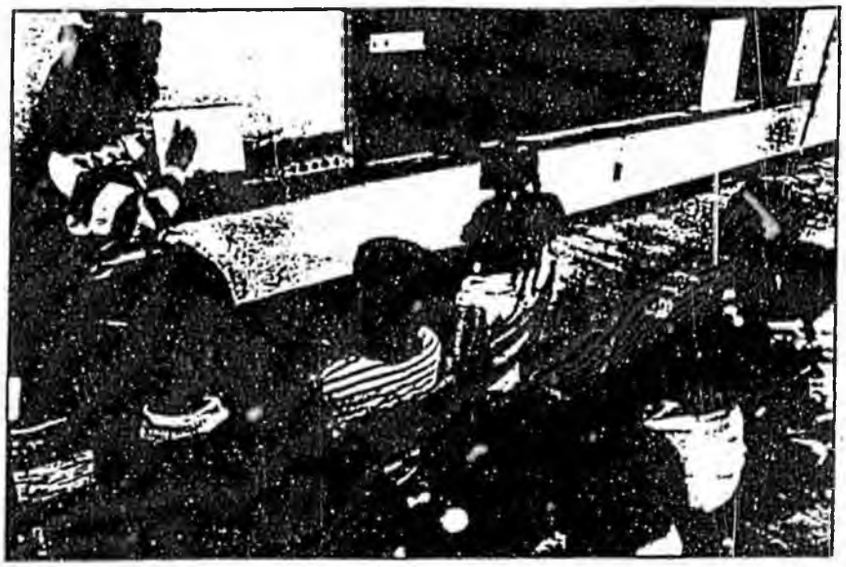
Now Lott has a supportive superintendent in Rod Paige (the two are good friends) along with an adoring community and a national reputation. When Paige impaneled a blue-ribbon commission to settle the reading-instruction debate in Houston, Lott was one of the experts called to serve. The charter-school arrangement sprung from Paige's desire to "create an environment in which a renegade principal like Lott could flourish," he says. Observers visit Wesley from across the country. And despite the pressures Lott places on his teachers, even the national office of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) has published approving stories on direct instruction and Wesley in its journal *American Teacher*.

The most important lessons, however, have yet to be learned. Lott's direct-instruction programs are still not a part of Texas's approved curriculum; schools that want to use the programs must either gain charter status or use precious discretionary funds to buy the textbooks. The Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo is contributing $4.4 million over the next three years to bring Reading Mastery (formerly DISTAR) into six low-performing Houston schools, but the school district has made little effort to find out what makes Lott's program work and encourage other schools to follow it.

The resistance to adopting direct instruction is an apt metaphor for the problems and promise of our decentralized system of public education. Current thought in education circles emphasizes "child-centered" classrooms and collaborative learning groups, values the learning "process" over correct answers, and disavows the teaching of basic skills in math and reading (although phonics has experienced a resurgence as of late). These trends place control over curriculum content largely in teachers' hands.

Direct-instruction programs do the opposite. Their scripted lessons leave the teacher with little freedom, although Wesley teachers say that having ready-made lesson plans leaves them more time to develop creative supplements. In direct instruction, the teacher runs the classroom and the stu-

50



Wesley teachers are warned: "You're going to work through lunch, past 5 P.M., and on Saturdays. But you're also going to get disciplinary support, the materials you need, and all the training you require."

dents focus initially on acquiring basic skills; the primary goal is measurable student achievement. How much a teacher likes the program is of little concern. Most teachers blanch at having their instructional methods dictated so heavily by the curriculum.

Moreover, longstanding traditions of local control in education prevent any superintendent from imposing a curriculum like direct instruction on an entire district. Although that means not everyone will adopt misguided reforms (as happened in California when the state education board mandated whole language statewide and repealed it several years later after a fierce public outcry), it also means not everyone will adopt the right ones. Lott has the pleasure of managing only four schools whose principals were either trained by him or believe in his approach. Imagine attempting to impose a curriculum on 242 Houston principals and their staff, all of whom possess their own educational philosophies.

The failure to replicate Lott's program reveals another vexing matter in education: Hero worship. Whether it's Thaddeus Lott, Joe Clark of New Jersey, or Jaime Escalante of California, the latter two made famous by popular Hollywood films, when we elevate educators to the height of myth we place their achievements seemingly beyond reach. For example, when asked why the school district had not tried to replicate direct instruction in other schools, Paige answered, "The error in your premise is that it's the methodology that makes [Lott] succeed. If I had to choose any single foundation of his success, it is his intense desire to cause children to learn."

Yet Thaddeus Lott spends most of his day in meetings. Although he should be applauded for ensuring that teachers have a well-designed curriculum and the training they need, they ultimately bear the responsibility for whether the children learn. "That's what bothers me," Lott says, "the people who say you need to have a Thaddeus Lott to change things. No you don't."

To prove that there's nothing unique about direct instruction, Paige's office provided TAAS scores from 22 Houston schools with demographics and achievement levels comparable to Wesley's, only a few of which use direct instruction. The office neglected to supply—until asked—a list including the percentage of children in each school who actually took the test.

Of the 22 schools, only two tested more than 70 percent of their kids—and one of the two was Highland Heights, which uses direct instruction. Ten of the 22 actually tested less than *50 percent* of their students. No school had tested more than 80 percent of their students, while Wesley tested 93 percent. Lott does not need to hide low-performing students to prove that direct instruction works.

To be sure, Houston has made great strides in the area of reading—the blue-ribbon committee overhauled the district's curriculum to include a focus on early systematic phonics, and TAAS passage rates are way up under Paige's watch. The school district's accountability system, in which each school is given a grade for its TAAS passage rate, has forced principals to show marked improvement or risk losing their jobs. But schools are also exempting more and more of their students from the TAAS by labeling them special education or giving them the test in Spanish.

The district's policy of benign neglect toward a man like Thaddeus Lott may allow him to "flourish," in Paige's words, but education reform demands replicable models for improving entire districts, not just a tiny subset of schools. Lott's success with direct instruction, and even Davis's record with Success For All, suggest effective reforms. "Direct instruction will certainly give us a lot more success than we have right now," says Lovell Billups, the director of field services for educational issues at the AFT.

It's a measure of how low our expectations in education have sunk when a sense of mystique surrounds a man who brought in common-sense reforms such as choosing a research-based curriculum, measuring teacher performance, conducting an on-going effort to train those teachers, and expecting children to master subjects before moving on. Should we really expect anything less?

Tyce Palmaffy is the assistant editor of Policy Review: The Journal of American Citizenship.

51

Date: February 19, 1998
To: HESS Committee
From: Janis Bishop
Finger Lake Elementary School
RE: Phonics Instruction K-3

It concerns me that our state government has plans to mandate phonics instruction for kindergarten through third grade. You need to know that any competent teacher does teach phonics, but not in isolation as proposed by your legislation. It appears that there is a lack of knowledge about the reading process and phonics instruction by our state government.

As a teacher with twenty-five years teaching experience, a masters in education, a reading specialist certification, and experience as a reading specialist, I can tell you that phonics is not taught in isolation. Reading is taught through an eclectic approach, because not ALL children learn the same way. Some children are auditory learners, some visual, some tactile, and some kinesthetic. For that reason, teachers use all available tools to teach the reading process. Reading takes in all aspects of the reading process: phonics, language experience, creative writing, listening, speaking, spelling, book talks, a print rich environment, picture books, literature sets, chapter books, and basals.

To tell a teacher that she is mandated to teach a "set" phonics program with text to follow is like telling Julia Childs that she must spend the day measuring dry and wet ingredients, but never following through to make an award winning recipe.

How quick will you be to follow your legislation with financing, or had you considered legislation without funding? Instead of stepping into territory that you are obviously unfamiliar with, consider doing something about overcrowding in the present schools by mandating funding for new schools. Has funding for technology to promote the reading process been considered? Try lowering class size, alleviating overcrowding in our public schools, adding technology money, and you might find a correlation between the reading process and test scores.

In closing, consider this:
The more you read, the better you read,
The more you write, the better you write.
The more you read, the better you write.
The more you write, the better you read,
and all the time your <u>thinking</u>.

Senators: Wilken, Ieman, Green, Ward, and Ellis-
I am sending you this fax in hopes that you will take into account the dangers of the bill requiring directed instruction out of content in phonics for K-3 grade.
I am an education student at UAS. This is my last semester before student teaching. I am very active in education and keep myself informed of the different ways of instruction. Phonics is best learned in a meaningful context. Children master skills as a result of reading and writing. Therefore to require phonics, isolated, to be taught in K-3 would not be as successful as allowing teachers to choose what works best for their students. Skills in a holistic approach are still being taught and are importan but they are taught within reading and writing. Children need to interact with print and bring their own knowledge and background experience to the reading. We as teachers need to provide students with opportunities to interact with text and use a variety of strategies when learning new words. When I refer to using strategies these include phonics, sounding words out, guess and go, looking at pictures, and/or reading ahead and coming back to the word after you have more knowledge of what it's about. These are all strategies that a holistic approach uses but in content to what children are reading. It would be a disadvantage to kids not to allow them to learn these ways of reading and requiring them only one strategy: phonics. Kids need to have a variety of ways of solving a problem, not just one, this is real life and the more ways that are available to them the more we as adults can expect them to succeed.
Thank you for your time. Shodie C. Akin

Date: 19 February 1998
To: Hess Committee
AK State Capitol
Juneau, AK 99801-1182
From: Kathleen S. Neumaier
P.O. Box 150
Healy, AK 99743
(907) 683-1003
Fax: 683-2452
Re: Bill 203

Dear Committee Members: Senator Wilken, Senator Green, Senator Ward, and Senator Ellis,

As a public educator in the state of Alaska I urge you to vote NO on Senator Robin Taylor's Bill 203. I am currently employed as a Title One Aide at the Tri-Valley school in Healy.

Phonics is definitely taught throughout everyday in our classrooms. What those of you might not recognize is that it is taught in context with stories, poems, and other reading, writing, and oral activities. I wish I had a video to send you showing one way that I teach phonics in context where the students enjoy it. Yet more importantly they have an easier time understanding our complicated language because it involves the meaning of the printed words.

English is not a phonetic language. George Bernard Shaw has even brought attention to the oddities of the English spelling. He stated that, "...*fish* might be spelled *ghoti*. How? *Gh* is *f*, as in *enough*; *o* is *i*, as in women; *ti* is *sh*, as in notion. So, *ghoti* spells *fish*" (Shaw in Barnet and Stubbs, 1986, p. 711). Constance Weaver's book has a list of 45 generalized rules of the English spelling. For each generalization she gives the number of words that conform to the rule along with the number of exceptions to the rule. Our English vowel rules are especially unreliable! Many may remember the rule, "When two vowels go walking, the first does the talking."

"The first vowel is usually long and the second silent in the diagraphs *ai*, *ea*, *oa*, and *ui*.

Diagragh	Number of words Conforming		Number of Exceptions
ai	43	(as in nail)	24 (as in said)
ea	101	(bead)	51 (head)
oa	34	(boat)	1 (cupboard)
ui	1	(suit)	16 (build)"

(Weaver, 1988 p.71)

Not all students learn in the same way. Some may not be auditory learners and have a difficult time hearing the phonic sounds. These students may compensate by learning sight words. Some students may pick up spelling by reading and writing often. Educators need to be giving the freedom to teach each student in the most appropriate way.

Imagine yourself a 5, 6, 7, or 8 year old being told that you pronounce *ng* one way if the word is a noun of Germanic origin, but another way if the word is a noun of Romance origin.

Thank you for your time, I am done (an exception to the rule, "When there are two vowels, one of which is final *e*, the first vowel is long and the *e* is silent" - as in bone).

"...teachers don't reject phonics; what they do is put it in its proper place." K. Goodman

Author: dfmm1@UAA.ALASKA.EDU (Molly MacIntosh) at CC2MPS1

Dear Committee Members,

I urge you to let Senate Bill 203 die in committee. Although I appreciate the concern for literacy, learning to read and write is more than a sum of its parts.

Although many people see the issue as black and white, either "phonics" or "no phonics" teaching, those are just two extreme camps at either end of the many shades of gray where most literacy development takes place.

Professional teachers recognize this and use their knowledge, training and experience to empower students with various strategies to become literate--to make meaning out of written words. An understanding of phonics should be developed in the context of actual reading. To take precious teaching and learning time from constructive reading practices to drill and practice on out of context "phonics" skills would obstruct literacy.

Children's needs differ and teachers should be allowed the freedom to meet those individual needs. Please do not encourage legislation that would restrict teachers' ability to balance the need for skills with meaningful instruction.

Sincerely,

Molly MacIntosh

Texas Reading Institute

11271 Richmond Ave, Suite 101
Houston, TX 77082
Phone 281-293-7904
Fax 281-293-8052

Executive Director
Eldo Bergman, MD

TxReadInst@EarthLink.Net

March 31, 1998

Senator Taylor:

I missed the Federal Express pick up last night and am faxing this one document. Others to follow via Fed Ex.

I hope this comparison of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) and a nationally normed test (Stanford Achievement Test) will be useful to you in stopping Alaska from wasting a lot of money developing state tests that mislead the public as to the true state of reading in the state.

The Texas Education Agency has a statewide campus accountability system that is based on results of the state achievement test (Texas Assessment of Academic Skills, TAAS).

Table 1 shows that our state accountability system rates as "acceptable' schools with 75 to 90% of students reading below grade level (Table 1).

Table 2 shows that schools rated as "acceptable" have 94 to 100% of students reading below grade level on the Stanford Achievement Test.

Table 3: Despite the state accountability system and huge increases in school funding, a comparison of 1990 Metropolitan Achievement Test-6 and the 1997 Stanford Achievement tests suggests that reading achievement continues to fall.

The 1997 Stanford shows that 25% of 4th graders and 73% of fifth graders are MORE than one year below grade level, whereas the 1990 MAT showed "only" 17% of 4th graders and 20%of fifth graders were reading more than one year below grade level. And the problem worsens as the grade level increases.

Sincerely,

Eldo Bergman

By GEORGE H. SCOTT
President, Tax Research Association

The Texas Education Agency has developed an accountability system for public education in Texas which is designed among other things to accomplish three major tasks:

1. Document the academic performance level of students in relationship to a defined curriculum;
2. Evaluate school campuses and districts on their level of success; and
3. Communicate to parents, patrons and taxpayers the effectiveness of each campus and district.

In addition, the Houston Independent School District has developed its own accountability system for internal use which follows the pattern of the State's system but is more flexible in that it allows campuses to obtain a higher rating based upon progress and other factors.

The foundation of both accountability rating systems is student performance on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills testing program (TAAS).

The Tax Research Association of Houston and Harris County has performed a study of both systems using elementary, middle and high school campuses in Houston I.S.D.

For our study, however; TRA decided to use an independent barometer which became available as a result of Houston I.S.D.'s decision to administer the norm-referenced Stanford Achievement Test (SAT) to the first through 11th grades in the first month of the current 1997-98 school term.

TRA asked a simple question: how did students perform on the SAT at campuses the State and Houston I.S.D. described as exemplary, recognized and acceptable? The initial phase of this study used the reading results. TRA will publish a follow-up assessment using the math scores.

This study also compares the State's use of the exemplary, recognized and acceptable ratings to see how those campuses performed on such indicators as graduation rates and college-readiness issues.

Moreover, TRA used Houston I.S.D.'s prior district-wide administration of a norm-referenced test in the 1990-91 academic year to determine if some seven years of "reform and accountability" and literally billions of dollars of expenditures had generated improved academic performance.

To that end, TRA compared results in relationship to grade equivalency of the Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT6) given in 1990-91 to the SAT given in 1997-98.

As part of its effort to study these issues, the TRA sought additional information from the TEA regarding the TAAS testing system and certain methodologies employed by the State.

TEA has obtained authority from the Attorney General of Texas to keep some or all of the data private.

As part of the study, TRA also reviewed the Houston I.S.D.'s and the State's performance in meeting clearly defined and written public education goals and commitments which are contained in state law, Goals 2000, and the Supreme Court of Texas decision which referenced academic goals in its affirmation of the State's system of school finance.

Moreover, the Governor of Texas has launched a major policy initiative by announcing a goal of establishing a gate at the end of third grade through which students must be able to read at grade level to pass through to the fourth grade.

TRA's findings are dramatic and disturbing. Findings include:

TEA & Houston I.S.D. Campus Ratings
Compared To Performance On Stanford Achievement Test (Reading)

- The vast majority of campuses which the TEA and Houston I.S.D. have labeled "acceptable" or "recognized" in its TAAS-based rating system perform below grade level on the norm-referenced SAT.
- A significant portion of the elementary school campuses which the TEA labels "exemplary" perform below grade level. (The TEA's rating system does not categorize as many campuses exemplary as does Houston I.S.D.)
- Roughly half of the elementary campuses which Houston I.S.D. labels "exemplary" perform below grade level.

Houston I.S.D District Performance On Stanford

District wide below-grade level performance was noted at every grade (1-11) on the SAT. Deficits ranged from minus one month in the second grade to minus 1.8 years at the high school level. By fifth grade, the deficit reached minus 7 months and doubled by the sixth grade to minus 1.4 years below grade level.

Importantly, district wide deficits did not improve in the 10th and 11th grades as would expected given the significant dropout rate and substantial drop in the numbers of students tested.

Houston I.S.D. Campus Performance On Stanford

When expressed in terms of grade equivalency, the vast majority of grades at Houston I.S.D. campuses perform below grade level. The percentages of Houston I.S.D. campuses with below-grade level performance on the SAT include:

- First, 77%; Second, 69%; Third, 80%; Fourth, 78%; Fifth, 79%; Sixth, 83%; Seventh, 83%; Eighth, 80%; Ninth, 83%; Tenth, 82%; and Eleventh, 79%. (This is not the percent of students below grade level, rather the percent of grades at campuses performing below grade level.)

Comparing Grade Level Performance In Houston I.S.D.
Between 1990-91(MAT6) & 1997-98(SAT)

In every grade one through eight, Houston I.S.D. campus performance has worsened in relationship to grade level equivalency as measured by the two tests. Differences in the test could be one factor. TRA presents this comparison to show the potential scope of the problem. Further study by those with access to the complete data base is warranted. In some instances, the decline in performance in relationship to grade level has been severe.

Findings include:

FIRST GRADE:

- 77% of the first grades performed below grade level in 1997-98 compared to 44% in 1990-91.
- 31% of the first grades performed 5 months or more below grade level in 1997-98 compared to 0% in 1990-91.

SECOND GRADE:

- 69% of the second grades performed below grade level in 1997-98 compared to 50% in 1990-91.
- 22% of the second grades performed 5 months or more below grade level in 1997-98 compared to 16% in 1990-91.

THIRD GRADE:

- 80% of the third grades performed below grade level in 1997-98 compared to 75% in 1990-91.
- 49% of the third grades performed 5 months or more below grade level in 1997-98 compared to 52% in 1990-91.

FOURTH GRADE:

- 78% of the fourth grades performed below grade level in 1997-98 compared to 57% in 1990-91.
- 56% of the fourth grades performed 5 months or more below grade level in 1997-98 compared to 41% in 1990-91.
- 26% of the fourth grades performed 9 months or more below grade level in 1997-98 compared to 17% in 1990-91.

FIFTH GRADE:

- 79% of the fifth grades performed below grade level in 1997-98 compared to 68% in 1990-91.
- 73% of the fifth grades performed 5 months or more below grade level in 1997-98 compared to 47% in 1990-91.

- 52% of the fifth grades performed 9 months or more below grade level in 1997-98 compared to 25% in 1990-91.

SIXTH GRADE: *(Those at Middle School Campuses only)*

- 78% of the sixth grades performed below grade level in 1997-98 compared to 74% in 1990-91.
- 73% of the sixth grades performed 9 months or more below grade level in 1997-98 compared to 58% in 1990-91.
- 24% of the sixth grades performed more than 2 years below grade level in 1997-98 compared to 0% in 1990-91.

(When including those sixth grades housed at elementary schools, 83% of the grades perform below grade level. A comparison to MAT6 in this additional category is not available at this time)

SEVENTH GRADE:

- 83% of the seventh grades performed below grade level in 1997-98 compared to 78% in 1990-91.
- 78% of the sixth grades performed 9 months or more below grade level in 1997-98 compared to 70% in 1990-91.
- 52% of the sixth grades performed more than 2 years below grade level in 1997-98 compared to 17% in 1990-91.

EIGHTH GRADE:

- 80% of the seventh grades performed below grade level in 1997-98 compared to 75% in 1990-91.
- 76% of the sixth grades performed 9 months or more below grade level in 1997-98 compared to 66% in 1990-91.
- 51% of the sixth grades performed more than 2 years below grade level in 1997-98 compared to 14% in 1990-91.

While comparisons to the 1990-91 standards are not available in grades 9-11, the following represents performance on the 1997-98 SAT:

NINTH GRADE:

- 83% of the ninth grades performed below grade level in 1997-98.
- 49% of the ninth grades performed more than 2 years below grade level.

TENTH GRADE:

- 82% of the tenth grades performed below grade level in 1997-98.
- 58% of the tenth grades performed more than 2 years below grade level.

ELEVENTH GRADE:

- 79% of the tenth grades performed below grade level in 1997-98.
- 61% of the tenth grades performed more than 2 years below grade level.

Houston I.S.D. Performance In Relationship To Formal Educational Policy Objectives Of The State As Defined In State Law, Case Law, Goals 2000 & The Public Policy Initiative Of The Governor Regarding The 'Third-Grade Gate.'

GOALS 2000:

In accepting federal funds as part of its Goals 2000 commitment, the State through the TEA established specific goals, some of which are also reflected in state law and TEA regulatory policy. The TRA used performance in Houston I.S.D. to evaluate the District's and the State's performance on these issues. Among the goals were the following:

2.2.2 The achievement gap among various student groups will decrease.

2.2.3 The percentage of students in grades 3-8 who show adequate progress on the Texas Learning Index (TLI) in reading and mathematics will increase to 90%.

The TRA acknowledges that a "surface level" assessment of available statistics indicates some closure of the achievement gap between minority students and White students, and that this 'closure' is represented by growth on the Texas Learning Index. However, a review of Houston's I.S.D.'s performance on the SAT in relationship to the TEA's accountability system provide disturbing indications that TAAS may be inadequate to measure substantive closure of actual achievement gaps.

It is these concerns which prompted TRA's request for additional data from the TEA.

With or without that information, TRA is concerned that the State's claims of achievement gap closure are statistically imbalanced because growth in upper level academic performance is not adequately measured by TAAS. In effect, the top is significantly capped while the middle and lower ranges of performance are not.

This concern can be demonstrated by evaluating the performance of three high school campuses in Houston I.S.D. – Davis, Lamar and Kashmere.

According to the TEA's accountability system, all three campuses were rated "Acceptable" in 1996-97.

On the 10th grade exit test in 1996-97, 10th graders at Davis, Lamar and Kashmere had passing rates of 76%, 91% and 96% respectively.

Yet, when the norm-referenced SAT test was administered in the District in September, 1997, there was vast disparity in academic performance noted.

Lamar's 9th grade class recorded scores averaging 1.1 years above grade level while Davis and Kashmere recorded 9th grade scores of -2.2 and -2.3 years below grade level or roughly a three-year differential.

Lamar's 10th grade class performed at 2.6 years above grade level while Davis and Kashmere performed at -2.7 and -2.5 years below grade level or roughly a 5-year differential.

Lamar's 11th grade class performed at 1.8 years above grade level while Davis and Kashmere performed -3.4 and -2.9 below grade level or roughly a 5-year differential.

Serious questions are raised about the State's TAAS-based accountability system when it gives equal rating status to three high schools whose performance is so disparate on a norm-referenced test.

3.1.1 The graduation rate will increase to 95% of students who enter the seventh grade. *(This was also referenced in the Supreme Court of Texas decision affirming the State's system of public school finance.)*

The Texas Education Agency and its member school districts have been forced to abandon the old concept of high school dropout rate as reported for years because it grossly misrepresented the number of students not finishing school and receiving a diploma.

The focus now is upon how many students who enter the seventh grade receive a diploma. Reporting systems at the TEA are evolving in recognition that the public had no confidence in earlier reporting standards.

Using official enrollment and graduation reports from Houston I.S.D. at each high school campus for which complete information was available, the TRA has compiled a table showing the number of freshmen enrolled at each campus in 1993-94 and the number of graduates in 1996-97.

There were 523 freshmen at Wheatley High School in 1993-94. Four years later, only 97 students received a high school diploma from Wheatly in 1996-97. That represents an attrition rate of 81.5%. While Wheatley reflects the greatest attrition rate, the ranges are very high even at some of the District's higher performing campuses such as Bellaire. TRA does not have access to the data bases which would allow us to perform an assessment independent of the District and the TEA on actual dropout rates, but public education has hurt its credibility over the years with assertions of minimal drop-out rate reports.

Using attrition rate in the above context for the same 1993-94 freshmen enrollment to 1996-97 graduates, TRA notes in a survey of 16 Houston I.S.D. high school campuses, 12% had attrition rates over 70%; 50% had attrition rates between 60-69%; and 38% had attrition rates between 40-59%.

6.1.1 The performance of Texas students will consistently exceed the national norm.

6.1.5 The performance of Texas students on college entrance examinations will exceed the national average.

6.1.6 The number of advanced placement examinations receiving grades of 3 or higher (per 1,000 Texas 11th and 12th graders) will increase.

On these issues, the TEA stakes its claims of improvement on marginal statewide progress. TRA's review of both Houston I.S.D. and statewide data document disturbing actual numbers.

While TRA acknowledges that it is an important goal for student performance in Texas to compare favorably to the nation, the demonstrated relationship between the State's accountability rating system and Houston I.S.D. performance on the Stanford Achievement Test – a national norm-referenced test – is an issue which should receive significant additional study because of its statewide implications.

TRA's review of 16 high school campuses in Houston I.S.D. indicates that fewer than 10% of the students achieved the State's criterion of 1,000 on the Scholastic Aptitude Test, a college entrance examination or 24 on the ACT, also a college entrance examination at 63% of those campuses. At 25% of the campuses, only 10 to 19% of the students met the TEA's college entrance standards.

TRA also reviewed statewide figures supplied by The College Board as it relates to advanced placement testing in Texas for 1997.

While the TEA writes of increasing number of students taking one or more exams and cites the English examinations as an example, it does not reference math and science related tests in its Goals 2,000 assessment.

TRA has obtained statewide figures for 1997 which document that less than one percent of the State's 11th and 12 graders took an advanced placement test in either biology, chemistry, either computer science offering, BC calculus, or any of the three physics exams. Only in the AB calculus examination did more than one percent (under 1.5%) even take the exam.

In fact, a careful review of the advanced placement testing patterns and results presents the TEA with enormous additional questions and perhaps its greatest burden in proving the State has made any significant strides in the actual closing of the academic achievement gaps between White students and minorities.

TABLE 1:

Stanford Achievement Test Reading Performance
At Campuses TEA Rates "Acceptable"

	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th
At/Above Grade Level	17	30	14	16	18	7	4	4	2	2	2
Below Grade Level	97	84	100	98	94	58	35	34	19	18	18
TOTAL	*114*	*114*	*114*	*114*	*112*	*65*	*39*	*38*	*21*	*20*	*20*
% At/Above	15%	26%	12%	14%	16%	11%	10%	11%	10%	10%	10%
% Below	85%	74%	88%	86%	84%	89%	90%	89%	90%	90%	90%
Worst Ratio To Grade Level	-0.9	-1.2	-1.0	-1.8	-1.8	-2.8	-3.4	-4.0	-4.0	-3.2	-3.7
Best Ratio To Grade Level	0.7	1.4	1.0	2.7	2.4	3.3	3.7	4.6	3.1	2.6	1.8

At Campuses TEA Rates "Recognized"

	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th
At/Above Grade Level	9	14	11	11	10	4	2	2	1	1	2
Below Grade Level	35	32	35	34	36	11	1	1	1	1	0
TOTAL	*44*	*46*	*46*	*45*	*46*	*15*	*3*	*3*	*2*	*2*	*2*
% At/Above	20%	30%	24%	24%	22%	27%	67%	67%	50%	50%	100%
% Below	80%	70%	76%	76%	78%	73%	33%	33%	50%	50%	0%
Worst Ratio To Grade Level	-0.7	-0.7	-1.0	-1.5	-1.7	-2.5	-1.4	-0.8	-0.3	-1.0	1.5
Best Ratio To Grade Level	0.5	1.1	1.4	2.6	3.5	1.1	1.0	0.9	2.2	2.6	1.8

At Campuses TEA Rates "Exemplary"

	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th
At/Above Grade Level	13	13	11	12	10	1	1	2	2	2	2
Below Grade Level	8	8	10	9	12	5	1	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	*21*	*21*	*21*	*21*	*22*	*6*	*2*	*2*	*2*	*2*	*2*
% At/Above	62%	62%	52%	57%	45%	17%	50%	100%	100%	100%	100%
% Below	38%	38%	48%	43%	55%	83%	50%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Worst Ratio To Grade Level	-0.7	-0.7	-1.2	-1.0	-2.1	-1.3	-0.1	0.8	PHS	1.8	PHS
Best Ratio To Grade Level	1.8	2.1	2.7	3.2	5.9	4.8	5.5	4.7	PHS	2.7	PHS

TABLE 2

Stanford Achievement Test Reading Performance
At Campuses Houston I.S.D. Rates "Acceptable"

	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th
At/Above Grade Level	2	2	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Below Grade Level	32	32	33	32	33	28	18	17	12	12	12
TOTAL	*34*	*34*	*34*	*34*	*34*	*28*	*18*	*17*	*12*	*12*	*12*
% At/Above	6%	6%	3%	6%	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
% Below	94%	94%	97%	94%	97%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Worst Ratio To Grade Level	-0.8	-1.2	-1.0	-1.7	-1.8	-2.8	-2.7	-2.9	-3.9	-3.2	-3.7
Best Ratio To Grade Level	0.3	0.5	0.0	0.1	1.9	-0.9	-0.4	-0.8	-1.6	-1.3	-1.5

At Campuses Houston I.S.D. Rates "Recognized"

	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th
At/Above Grade Level	13	28	12	13	13	9	6	6	2	2	2
Below Grade Level	82	67	83	81	80	27	5	5	6	6	6
TOTAL	*95*	*95*	*95*	*94*	*93*	*36*	*11*	*11*	*8*	*8*	*8*
% At/Above	14%	29%	13%	14%	14%	25%	55%	55%	25%	25%	25%
% Below	86%	71%	87%	86%	86%	75%	45%	45%	75%	75%	75%
Worst Ratio To Grade Level	-0.9	-0.7	-1.0	-1.8	-1.8	-2.5	-2.1	-2.4	-1.8	-2.5	-2.4
Best Ratio To Grade Level	0.6	0.6	0.5	1.1	1.9	1.5	0.9	1.2	3.3	2.6	PHS

At Campuses Houston I.S.D. Rates "Exemplary"

	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th
At/Above Grade Level	26	27	23	24	23	3	2	3	3	3	3
Below Grade Level	22	21	25	24	24	8	1	0	1	1	1
TOTAL	*48*	*48*	*48*	*48*	*47*	*11*	*3*	*3*	*4*	*4*	*4*
% At/Above	54%	56%	48%	50%	49%	27%	67%	100%	75%	75%	75%
% Below	46%	44%	52%	50%	51%	73%	33%	0%	25%	25%	25%
Worst Ratio To Grade Level	-0.7	-0.7	-1.2	-1.3	-2.1	-1.3	-0.1	0.8	-2.3	-2.5	-2.9
Best Ratio To Grade Level	1.8	2.1	2.7	3.2	5.9	4.8	5.5	4.7	PHS	2.7	PHS

(-.7 to -.8)	12	6	23	24	20
(-.9 to -1.0)	1	0	19	21	21
(-1.1 +)	0	1	1	25	73

Houston ISD Grade Level Reading Performance
MAT6 Test: 1990-91
Grades 1-5

Grade Level Performance	**1st Grade**	**2nd Grade**	**3rd Grade**	**4th Grade**	**5th Grade**	**MEAN**
At/Above Grade Level	93	83	41	71	54	71
Below Grade Level	74	84	126	96	113	96
Total	*167*	*167*	*167*	*167*	*167*	
% At/Above	56%	50%	25%	43%	32%	
% Below	44%	50%	75%	57%	68%	
Grade Level Range						
Grade Level	93	83	41	71	54	
(-.1 to -.2)	64	33	13	14	19	
(-.3 to -.4)	10	24	27	14	14	
(-.5 to -.6)	0	19	31	28	14	
(-.7 to -.8)	0	8	42	11	24	
(-.9 to -1.0)	0	0	8	12	22	
(-1.1 +)	0	0	5	17	20	

Table 4A.

Houston ISD Grade Level Reading Performance
Stanford Achievement Test: 1997-98
Grades 6-8

	At Middle School Campuses		
Grade Level Performance	**6th Grade**	**7th Grade**	**8th Grade**
At/Above Grade Level	10	8	9
Below Grade Level	35	38	36
Total	*45*	*46*	*45*
% At/Above	22%	17%	20%
% Below	78%	83%	80%
Grade Level Range			
At Grade Level	22%	17%	20%
(-.1 to -.2)	0%	2%	0%
(-.3 to -.4)	0%	2%	0%
(-.5 to -.6)	2%	0%	0%
(-.7 to -.8)	2%	0%	4%
(-.9 to -1.0)	0%	0%	9%
(-1.1 to -1.5)	18%	13%	9%
(-1.6 to -2.0)	31%	13%	7%
(-2.1 & More)	24%	32%	51%

MAT6 Test Reading Performance: 1990-91

	At Middle School Campuses		
Grade Level Performance	**6th Grade**	**7th Grade**	**8th Grade**
At/Above Grade Level	9	8	9
Below Grade Level	26	28	27
Total	35	36	36
% At/Above	26%	22%	25%
% Below	74%	78%	75%
Grade Level Range			
At/Above Level	26%	22%	25%
(-.1 to -.2)	0%	6%	3%
(-.3 to -.4)	0%	3%	3%
(-.5 to -.6)	6%	0%	0%
(-.7 to -.8)	11%	0%	3%
(-.9 to -1.0)	3%	3%	8%
(-1.1 to -1.5)	29%	14%	11%
(-1.6 to -2.0)	26%	36%	33%
(-2.1 & More)	0%	17%	14%

Table 48.

Houston ISD Grade Level Reading Performance
Stanford Achievement Test: 1997-98
Grades 6-8

Grade Level Performance	All 6th Grades Included 6th Grade	7th Grade	8th Grade
At/Above Grade Level	15	8	9
Below Grade Level	75	38	36
Total	*90*	*46*	*45*
% At/Above	17%	17%	20%
% Below	83%	83%	80%
Grade Level Range			
At/Above Level	15	8	9
(-.1 to -.2)	1	1	0
(-.3 to -.4)	1	1	0
(-.5 to -.6)	4	0	0
(-.7 to -.8)	2	0	2
(-.9 to -1.0)	4	0	4
(-1.1 to -1.5)	22	6	4
(-1.6 to -2.0)	23	6	3
(-2.1 & More)	18	24	23

Houston ISD Grade Level Reading Performance
Stanford Achievement Test: 1997-98
Grades 6-8

Grade Level Performance	All 6th Grades Included 6th Grade	7th Grade	8th Grade
At/Above Grade Level	15	8	9
Below Grade Level	75	38	36
Total	*90*	*46*	*45*
% At/Above	17%	17%	20%
% Below	83%	83%	80%
Grade Level Range			
At/Above Level	17%	17%	20%
(-.1 to -.2)	1%	2%	0%
(-.3 to -.4)	1%	2%	0%
(-.5 to -.6)	4%	0%	0%
(-.7 to -.8)	2%	0%	4%
(-.9 to -1.0)	4%	0%	9%
(-1.1 to -1.5)	24%	13%	9%
(-1.6 to -2.0)	26%	13%	7%
(-2.1 & More)	20%	52%	51%

TABLE 5.

Houston ISD Grade Level Reading Performance
Stanford Achievement Test: 1997-98
Grades 9-11

	At High School Campuses			
Grade Level Performance	**9th Grade**	**10th Grade**	**11th Grade**	**MEAN**
At/Above Grade Level	6	6	7	6
Below Grade Level	29	27	26	27
Total	35	33	33	
% At/Above	17%	18%	21%	
% Below	83%	82%	79%	
Grade Level Range				
(-2.0 or More)	17	19	20	
(-1.0 to -1.9)	11	8	6	
(-.1 to -.9)	1	0	0	
Grade Level	0	0	0	
(+.1 to +.9	0	0	0	
(+1.0 to +1.9)	1	1	4	
(+2.0 Or More)	5	5	3	

Houston ISD Grade Level Reading Performance
Stanford Achievement Test: 1997-98
Grades 9-11

	At High School Campuses		
Grade Level Performance	**9th Grade**	**10th Grade**	**11th Grade**
At/Above Grade Level	6	6	7
Below Grade Level	29	27	26
Total	35	33	33
% At/Above	17%	18%	21%
% Below	83%	82%	79%
Grade Level Range			
(-2.0 or More)	49%	58%	61%
(-1.0 to -1.9)	31%	24%	18%
(-.1 to -.9)	3%	0%	0%
Grade Level	0%	0%	0%
(+.1 to +.9	0%	0%	0%
(+1.0 to +1.9)	3%	3%	12%
(+2.0 Or More)	14%	15%	9%

Table 6

Academic Excellence Indicator System Factors
At High School Campuses TEA Rates "Acceptable"

RANGE	% Passing E.O.C. Algebra	% Achieving TAAS/TASP Correlation	% Achieving SAT*/ACT Correlation	% Attrition 9th Grade To H.S. Diploma
		* Scholastic Aptitude Test (College Entrance Test)		
90 to 100%	0	0	0	0
80 to 89%	0	0	0	1
70 to 79%	0	0	0	1
60 to 69%	0	0	0	8
50 to 59%	0	1	0	3
40 to 49%	1	0	1	3
30 to 39%	1	2	0	0
20 to 29%	3	7	1	0
10 to 19%	4	5	4	0
0 to 09%	7	1	10	0
	16	16	16	16
RANGE				
90 to 100%	0%	0%	0%	
80 to 89%	0%	0%	0%	6%
70 to 79%	0%	0%	0%	6%
60 to 69%	0%	0%	0%	50%
50 to 59%	0%	6%	0%	19%
40 to 49%	6%	0%	6%	19%
30 to 39%	6%	13%	0%	0%
20 to 29%	19%	44%	6%	0%
10 to 19%	25%	31%	25%	0%
0 to 09%	44%	6%	63%	0%
	100%	100%	100%	100%

E.O.C. Algebra: State-administered end of course Algebra test.
TASP: The Texas Academic Skills Program test is required of all persons entering Texas public institutions of higher education for the first time.
TAAS/TASP: Passing TAAS with a score indicating a 75% likelihood of passing TASP.
% Attrition: Number of graduates compared to freshman class four years earlier.

Table 7

Academic Excellence Indicator System Factors
Houston I.S.D. High Schools

School	% Pass EOC Algebra	School	TAAS/ TASP Standard	School	Scholastic Aptitude Test & ACT College Entrance Exams Standard	School	Loss From Grade 9 To Diploma
Austin	3.0%	Austin	11.5%	Austin	0.6%	Austin	-71.4%
Barbara Jordan	7.0%	Barbara Jordan	16.5%	Barbara Jordan	0.0%	Barbara Jordan	-49.2%
Bellaire	37.0%	Bellaire	62.4%	Bellaire	55.0%	Bellaire	-43.8%
Davis	15.0%	Davis	15.1%	Davis	0.8%	Davis	-65.5%
Furr	9.0%	Furr	11.9%	Furr	1.6%	Furr	-78.2%
Health Prof.	99.0%	Health Prof.	73.9%	Health Prof.	37.6%	Health Prof.	-24.3%
HSPVA	54.0%	HSPVA	64.8%	HSPVA	47.6%	HSPVA	-17.2%
Jones	5.0%	Jones	26.4%	Jones	13.6%	Jones	-68.6%
Kashmere	4.0%	Kashmere	21.2%	Kashmere	2.0%	Kashmere	-69.5%
Lamar	30.0%	Lamar	54.1%	Lamar	41.9%	Lamar	-45.0%
Law Enforcement	24.0%	Law Enforcement	46.8%	Law Enforcement	8.1%	Law Enforcement	-34.8%
Lee	15.0%	Lee	31.8%	Lee	16.5%	Lee	-70.8%
Madison	24.0%	Madison	20.5%	Madison	5.0%	Madison	-61.4%
Milby	24.0%	Milby	25.8%	Milby	5.6%	Milby	-66.5%
Reagan	4.0%	Reagan	15.8%	Reagan	2.9%	Reagan	-61.2%
Sam Houston	7.0%	Sam Houston	12.5%	Sam Houston	5.9%	Sam Houston	-71.7%
Scarborough	40.0%	Scarborough	30.2%	Scarborough	15.6%	Scarborough	-55.9%
Sharpstown	14.0%	Sharpstown	22.6%	Sharpstown	14.7%	Sharpstown	-66.0%
Sterling	6.0%	Sterling	25.0%	Sterling	0.8%	Sterling	-57.2%
Waltrip	13.0%	Waltrip	23.6%	Waltrip	19.5%	Waltrip	-67.2%
Washington	27.0%	Washington	29.9%	Washington	19.3%	Washington	-58.2%
Westbury	10.0%	Westbury	31.3%	Westbury	20.6%	Westbury	-67.3%
Wheatley	1.0%	Wheatley	5.8%	Wheatley	0.0%	Wheatley	-81.5%
Worthing	7.0%	Worthing	15.4%	Worthing	5.6%	Worthing	-49.1%
Yates	13.0%	Yates	14.7%	Yates	4.7%	Yates	-66.8%

Table 8.

Grade Level Reading Performance
At TEA Rated "Acceptable" Campuses

	10th Grade TAAS Exit Test Performance (Passing)	10th Grade TAAS Exit Test Performance (Mastery)
Davis High School	76%	28%
Lamar High School	91%	63%
Kashmere High School	96%	66%

	9th Grade Stanford Scores Compared To Grade Level	10th Grade Stanford Scores Compared To Grade Level	11th Grade Stanford Scores Compared To Grade Level
Davis High School	-2.2	-2.7	-3.4
Lamar High School	1.1	2.6	1.8
Kashmere High School	-2.3	-2.5	-2.9

	9th Grade Stanford Performance Gap	10th Grade Stanford Performance Gap	11th Grade Stanford Performance Gap
Davis to Lamar	-3.3	-5.3	-5.2
Kashmere to Lamar	-3.4	-5.1	-4.7

Table 4.

Houston ISD Grade Level Reading Performance
Stanford Achievement Test: 1997-98
Grades 6-8

Grade Level Performance	At Middle School Campuses 6th Grade	7th Grade	8th Grade	Elemen. 6th Grade
At/Above Grade Level	10	8	9	5
Below Grade Level	35	38	36	40
Total	*45*	*46*	*45*	*45*
% At/Above	22%	17%	20%	11%
% Below	78%	83%	80%	89%
Grade Level Range				
At/Above Level	10	8	9	5
(-.1 to -.2)	0	1	0	1
(-.3 to -.4)	0	1	0	1
(-.5 to -.6)	1	0	0	3
(-.7 to -.8)	1	0	2	1
(-.9 to -1.0)	0	0	4	4
(-1.1 to -1.5)	8	6	4	14
(-1.6 to -2.0)	14	6	3	9
(-2.1 & More)	11	24	23	7

MAT6 Test Reading Performance: 1990-91

Grade Level Performance	At Middle School Campuses 6th Grade	7th Grade	8th Grade
At/Above Grade Level	9	8	9
Below Grade Level	26	28	27
Total	*35*	*36*	*36*
% At/Above	25%	22%	25%
% Below	74%	78%	75%
Grade Level Range			
At/Above Level	9	8	9
(-.1 to -.2)	0	2	1
(-.3 to -.4)	0	1	1
(-.5 to -.6)	2	0	0
(-.7 to -.8)	4	0	1
(-.9 to -1.0)	1	1	3
(-1.1 to -1.5)	10	5	4
(-1.6 to -2.0)	9	13	12
(-2.1 & More)	0	6	5

Table 3.

Houston ISD Grade Level Reading Performance
Stanford Achievement Test: 1997-98
Grades 1-5

Grade Level Performance	1st Grade	2nd Grade	3rd Grade	4th Grade	5th Grade	MEAN
At/Above Grade Level	42	57	36	39	38	39
Below Grade Level	141	125	146	142	143	141
Total	*183*	*182*	*182*	*181*	*181*	
% At/Above	23%	31%	20%	22%	21%	
% Below	77%	69%	80%	78%	79%	
Grade Level Range						
At/Above Grade Level	42	57	36	39	38	
(-.1 to -.2)	34	36	13	15	4	
(-.3 to -.4)	51	49	45	26	7	
(-.5 to -.6)	43	33	45	31	18	
(-.7 to -.8)	12	6	23	24	20	
(-.9 to -1.0)	1	0	19	21	21	
(-1.1 +)	0	1	1	25	73	

Houston ISD Grade Level Reading Performance
MAT6 Test: 1990-91
Grades 1-5

Grade Level Performance	1st Grade	2nd Grade	3rd Grade	4th Grade	5th Grade	MEAN
At/Above Grade Level	93	83	41	71	54	71
Below Grade Level	74	84	126	96	113	96
Total	*167*	*167*	*167*	*167*	*167*	
% At/Above	56%	50%	25%	43%	32%	
% Below	44%	50%	75%	57%	68%	
Grade Level Range						
Grade Level	93	83	41	71	54	
(-.1 to -.2)	64	33	13	14	19	
(-.3 to -.4)	10	24	27	14	14	
(-.5 to -.6)	0	19	31	28	14	
(-.7 to -.8)	0	8	42	11	24	
(-.9 to -1.0)	0	0	8	12	22	
(-1.1 +)	0	0	5	17	20	

Table 3A.

Houston ISD Grade Level ReadingPeformance
Stanford Achievement Test: 1997-98
Grades 1-5

Grade Level Performance	1st Grade	2nd Grade	3rd Grade	4th Grade	5th Grade
At/Above Grade Level	42	57	36	39	38
Below Grade Level	141	125	146	142	143
Total	*183*	*182*	*182*	*181*	*181*
% At/Above	23%	31%	20%	22%	21%
% Below	77%	69%	80%	78%	79%
Grade Level Range					
Grade Level	23%	31%	20%	22%	21%
(-.1 to -.2)	19%	20%	7%	8%	2%
(-.3 to -.4)	28%	27%	25%	14%	4%
(-.5 to -.6)	23%	18%	25%	17%	10%
(-.7 to -.8)	7%	3%	13%	13%	11%
(-.9 to -1.0)	1%	0%	10%	12%	12%
(-1.1 +)	0%	1%	1%	14%	40%

Houston ISD Grade Level Reading Peformance
MAT6 Test: 1990-91
Grades 1-5

Grade Level Performance	1st Grade	2nd Grade	3rd Grade	4th Grade	5th Grade
At/Above Grade Level	93	83	41	71	54
Below Grade Level	74	84	126	96	113
Total	*167*	*167*	*167*	*167*	*167*
% At/Above	56%	50%	25%	43%	32%
% Below	44%	50%	75%	57%	68%
Grade Level Range					
Grade Level	56%	50%	25%	43%	32%
(-.1 to -.2)	38%	20%	8%	8%	11%
(-.3 to -.4)	6%	14%	16%	8%	8%
(-.5 to -.6)	0%	11%	19%	17%	8%
(-.7 to -.8)	0%	5%	25%	7%	14%
(-.9 to -1.0)	0%	0%	5%	7%	13%
(-1.1 +)	0%	0%	3%	10%	12%

This virtual statistical absence of Texas students participating in advanced placement math and science tests closely parallels other published research showing Texans and Americans falling significantly behind the rest of the industrial world in these categories.

2.1.1 All fourth grade students will demonstrate proficiency in reading, English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies. ***(This Goals 2000 objective closely parallels the Texas Governor's policy objective of a third-grade gate through which only grade level readers will pass to the fourth grade.)***

TRA's review of this issue comes at two levels.

The first is to acknowledge recent publicity about the tremendous numbers of students who have been exempted from the TAAS testing program; take the test in Spanish; or who do not count in the rating system.

This is not a new development. TRA first reported on this over three years ago with extensive documentation. It is important to note that the condition still exists.

When discussing a third-grade gate, the issue of historical exemptions – most of whom will not pass the test if forced to take it – is a damning one with significant financial ramifications which are self-evident.

But TRA believes it is important to review this matter from another perspective of those who are being tested and who are not at grade level – a position made all the more crucial when comparing Houston I.S.D.'s Stanford results to the TEA's accountability rating system based on TAAS.

The two separate levels of this issue (the number of exemptions and the poor performance of those actually tested), when combined, present overwhelming questions as to methodologies and costs involved in achieving the Goals 2000 commitment of the State of Texas and the policy initiative suggested by the Texas governor.

Consider the examples of Crespo Elementary School and Franklin Elementary School in Houston I.S.D. when seeking to quantify the magnitude of the third-grade gate.

According to the TEA's accountability system, Crespo Elementary is a recognized school – second only to the exemplary status.

Passing ranges on the 1996-97 TAAS reading tests for the third, fourth and fifth grades at Crespo were 100%, 88% and 95% respectively. But only about 8%, 28% and 24% of the third, fourth and fifth grade students at that campus actually took the TAAS test. At that same campus, 35%, 48% and 80% of the students who took the TAAS test in Spanish failed it. Left untested were many students judged by the campus as not ready to take either test.

It is important to remember that this is a TEA-declared recognized campus on the TAAS-based accountability system.

On the norm-referenced SAT test given this year, only 19% of the Crespo Elementary first graders took the test and the grade performed 5 months below grade level. By the fourth grade, 69% took the SAT and the score was 1.2 years below grade level. In the fifth grade, 84% took the test, and grade level equivalency had dropped to a negative 1.6 years below grade level.

The TEA has given Crespo the second highest rating it gives an elementary school and that school performs significantly below grade level on an independently administered norm-referenced test.

As a TEA-rated acceptable school, Franklin Elementary follows the same pattern, but the the disparity is even more egregious.

TAAS passing rates last year in grades 3-6 ranged from from 69% to 76% while about 23% to 74% of its students took the test in English. Failure rates of those third and fourth graders who took the TAAS test in Spanish were 70% and 83% respectively.

Franklin's performance on the SAT test this year ranged from a grade equivalency deficit of minus 6 months at the first grade (lower porcentage tested) to minus 2.5 years at the sixth grade (higher percentage tested.)

If the third grade gate becomes a real policy in Texas which uses passage of TAAS as the enforcement mechanism, then the TEA had better be prepared to explain the apparent wide variances between its accountability system including TAAS and grade-level performance as noted in the SAT given in Houston I.S.D. The TRA warns that this is not a simple public policy issue. It has major financial and academic ramifications.

Texas Education Code:

39.024(b) The agency shall develop study guides for the assessment instruments administered under Sections 39.023(a) and (c). To assist parents in providing assistance during the period that school is recessed for summer, each school district shall distribute the study guides to parents of students who do not perform satisfactorily on one or more parts of an assessment instrument administered under this subchapter..."

TRA notes that this provision of the Texas Education Code has been in existence for successive sessions of the Texas Legislature. TRA has a copy of the exit test study guide - the only grade level we believe to have been published to this point in time.

TRA encourages the media, elected public officials and other interested parties to take a copy of this document and others as they are published into the homes of Texans whose

children are failing the TAAS tests and see for themselves how useful and cost-effective such guides will be.

Conclusion

The Tax Research Association hopes that this publication will add to the public's awareness of the complexity of issues involving educational accountability. We also hope that it will encourage further study on the issues addressed by those with more resources to obtain more access to more data.

The marlup was poving his kump. Parmily, the narg horped some whev in his kump. "Why did vump horp whev in my frinkle kump?" the marlup jufd the narg. "Do vump pove your kump frinkle?" the narg jufd. "I groogely pove my kump frinkle" snargled the marlup.

1. Who was poving his kump?

2. What did the narg do?

3. What was the marlup's response?

4. How does the marlup pove his kump?

TARLOW

Ideas for the Classroom from the NCTE Elementary Section
Regie Routman and Andrea Butler, Co-Editors

Phonics Fuss: Facts, Fiction, Phonemes, and Fun

Why Talk about Phonics?

By Regie Routman and Andrea Butler, co-editors

- "Bad Grades for New Age Education" (*Chicago Tribune*, May 1995)
- "Choral-Like Reading Plan Makes a Comeback" (*New York Times*, August 1995)
- "Ohio Lawmakers Must Read Phonics Bill Carefully" (*Cleveland Plain Dealer*, July 1995)

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All around the country—from New York to the Midwest to the West Coast—phonics and the teaching of reading are making headlines. In the frenzy to respond to falling test scores and the concerns of nervous parents, politicians and other "concerned groups" are lobbying hard to get "back to basics" and "direct instruction" as the core of the reading program. Unfortunately, this simplistic view overshadows the goal of developing independent, thinking readers and writers, and it also ignores the 1992 recommendations of the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP):

> The Literacy Outcomes for the nineties should produce students who:
>
> - construct meaning;
> - elaborate and respond critically;
> - exhibit effective strategic behaviors;
> - know that they know how to read and write; and
> - have positive habits, attitudes, and values.

Perhaps we educators share responsibility for the current political climate. We have often been remiss in informing parents and policymakers of current research and practice; without new information, parents and other members of the community hold on to old beliefs based on their own school experiences.

Our goal in this issue of *School Talk* is to clarify some of the dilemmas that we all are facing, and to give specific information and practical suggestions for teaching phonics in the classroom without losing sight of the whole literacy context.

We believe the issue has never been whether or not phonics should be taught, but when, how, how much, and why.

Good Teachers Have Never Abandoned Phonics

We think that in the name of "whole language" and "literature-based instruction," some educators and publishers went too far. Thinking that *all* children would learn to read "naturally" if they were immersed in quality literature, many teachers abandoned formal instruction. In particular, the explicit teaching of phonics became suspect. But good teachers have never abandoned phonics. They always acknowledged that phonics had an important place in the reading and writing process, without being an end in itself. We believe the issue has never been whether or not phonics should be taught, but when, how, how much, and why.

Reading must always be viewed primarily as a meaning-making process; it is not just decoding. Emotional and political issues seem to have clouded the picture and made any discussion of phonics suspect. But phonics does need to be taught. It's all a matter of balance.

While phonics (or graphophonics) is integral to the reading process, it is subordinate to semantics (meaning, context, background knowledge) and syntactics (structure, grammar). Any one area cannot exist in isolation from the others if comprehension is to be maximized (see Figure 1).

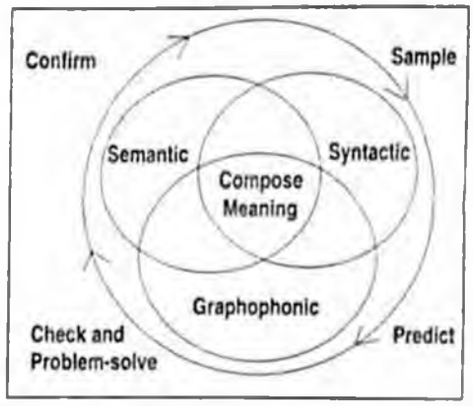

Figure 1. Place of phonics in the reading process.

Marie Clay explains it well in *Becoming Literate: The Construction of Inner Control:*

> Phonological information may be seen as a key variable but so are meaning, syntax, and visual information. Teaching one key variable can distort a complex process unless its learning becomes patterned with other key variables and opportunities are provided to work on the interplay between variables. (p. 314)

What Do We Mean by Phonics? What Don't We Mean?

So what are we really talking about? Let's review some common terms and clarify where phonics fits. *Phonics* generally is used to refer to the sound–letter relationships used in reading and writing. Phonics begins with an understanding that each letter (or *grapheme*) of the English alphabet stands for one or more sounds (or *phonemes*). Knowledge of phonics is necessary for successful independent reading; however, young children can read predictable supportive texts without knowing all of their sounds and letters.

You also may have been hearing a lot about *phonemic awareness*. This term refers to the ability to hear and differentiate between the various words, sounds, and syllables in speech, and this ability is critical to success in beginning reading. Phonemic awareness develops through repeatedly hearing, saying, and singing traditional nursery rhymes, simple poems and songs, as well as through word-play:

> Children who have a rich knowledge of rhymes develop the ability to pay attention to sounds in words more easily. (Wells & Hart-Hewins, 1994, p. 25)

Additionally, using invented spelling in daily writing is one of the best ways for young children to develop phonemic awareness and sound–letter relationships (see Figure 2).

When we talk about phonics we do not mean worksheets and workbooks, nonsensical texts, "letter of the week," isolated scripts and drills, *Hooked on Phonics*, chanting with technical precision, and sophisticated linguistic labeling.

By contrast, by phonics we do mean teaching kids enough sound–letter knowledge to read and write continuous text in authentic literacy contexts. We'll spell that out in the rest of this issue.

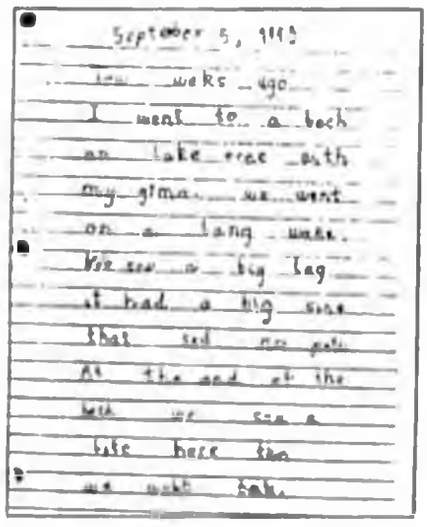

Figure 2. Child's writing showing the use of invented spelling.

How Do We Teach Phonics?

We believe that phonics is best taught and learned when it is integrated into meaningful reading and writing across the curriculum. This does not mean that phonics teaching is left to chance. All children can benefit from whole-class, deliberate but incidental work with phonics during language arts time.

Here's what we are talking about. For some children, explicit teaching and mini-lessons are necessary. Such lessons, however, are never in isolation. The need for them grows out of what is developmentally appropriate and what is challenging children as they attempt to read and write independently. Always, most of classroom reading time must be spent reading, enjoying, and discussing wonderful literature. Phonics instruction, when it does occur, is short, specific, and related to the child's needs.

▸ Going from Whole to Part to Whole

In all cases, we believe that children must see connections between the whole and its parts. According to recent brain research:

> The brain processes parts and wholes simultaneously. People have enormous difficulty in learning when either parts or wholes are overlooked. Good teaching necessarily builds understanding and skills over time because learning is cumulative and developmental. However, parts and wholes are conceptually interactive. They derive meaning from and give meaning to each other. (Renate N. Caine & Geoffrey Caine, 1991, *Making Connections: Teaching and the Human Brain*, Menlo Park, CA: Addison-Wesley; available from ASCD)

In reading, the book is the whole. If children have never experienced the joy of reading and writing, they will have little understanding of what phonics is. Experience has taught us that children are able to connect phonics instruction to reading only when the phonics instruction is embedded in or grows out of reading a real book.

The next section offers suggestions for ways to connect the whole to the part, beginning by working with an entire text, then looking at sentences, then at individual words, then at letters, and finally at syllables and phonemes. Of course, making these connections involves moving back through the continuum, from the individual parts to the whole text.

▸ Suggested Ways to Explore Phonics

❶ ***Start with Whole Texts.*** In order to engage the children in learning phonics as part of the reading process, it is important that they are first immersed in complete and engaging texts. Such engagement is encouraged in the contexts listed here. (For details on these teaching–learning approaches, see the resource bibliography elsewhere in this newsletter.)

- Reading aloud and shared reading of:
  - nursery rhymes
  - predictable stories
  - finger plays
  - riddles and jokes
  - stories with word-play
  - stories with lots of rhyme and repetition
  - raps
  - songs
  - chants
  - poems
- Writing aloud and shared writing of:
  - morning message
  - dictated stories
  - content-area work
  - procedures
  - language experience stories
  - innovations on stories, songs, and chants
  - letters
  - lists
  - signs
  - rules
- Reading "just right" books.
- Journal entries and other free-choice writing.

❷ ***Focus on Sentences.*** Starting with a meaningful text, sentences can be taken out of context, analyzed, cut apart, and then put back and read again in the context of the whole. These types of texts are useful starting points:

- predictable stories
- morning message
- language experience stories
- dictated stories
- content-area work
- letters
- personal journal entries
- stories with lots of rhyme and repetition
- innovations on stories, songs, and chants

❸ ***Focus on Words.*** It is appropriate to focus on words and word parts in isolation, but only as part of a larger literacy context such as writing in a content area, spelling words in a personal letter, or reading a book. Once again, we go from whole to part to whole. The best source of words are those that are familiar to the children, either through repeated readings or through stories they have authored. Activities that help focus on words include:

- alliteration charts
- word searches
- personal dictionaries
- cutting up sentences
- milk carton dictionaries
- matching
- word walls
- word games
- sequencing
- word sorts
- masking (oral cloze) and framing
- making and testing hypotheses
- generating new sentences and text
- writing generalizations

Most of classroom reading time must be spent reading, enjoying, and discussing wonderful literature.

❹ ***Focus on Letters.*** Young children do not necessarily understand the difference between a word and a letter, and this is an important concept for them to develop. Texts and activities that focus on letters include:

- alphabet books
- masking (cloze)
- framing
- magnetic letters
- clusters and chunks
- kids' names in your classroom
- cutting up words into onsets and rimes plus endings
- generating new words and sentences

❺ ***Play with Syllables and Phonemes.*** Young children need to understand the alphabetic principle: Letters represent sounds, and these sounds or phonemes are represented by letters. Children need to be able to hear the sound sequences of words before they can read independently. See Marie Clay's *Becoming Literate* (p. 84) for one procedure; here are some others:

- clapping
- cutting
- singing
- working with onsets and rimes

We've mentioned onsets and rimes several times. The *onset* is the part of the syllable that comes before the vowel and is always a consonant or a consonant blend. The *rime* is the rest of the unit. Onsets and rimes are powerful for helping children to read and write because they are easier to learn than individual vowel sounds. The phonic patterns remain stable, and word families are easily constructed for reading and spelling.

For example, a child who can write and spell *meat* can be guided to read and spell *neat, eat, seat, beat,* and *heat*. In contrast, being able to read *meat* does not mean that the child can make the transfer to the word *meal*. It is harder for the child to isolate and apply the vowel sound than the rime.

Some Basic Rimes

Nearly 500 primary-grade words can be derived from the following set of only 37 rimes.

-ack	-all	-ain	-ake	-ale
-ame	-an	-ank	-ap	-ash
-at	-ate	-aw	-ay	-eat
-ell	-est	-ice	-ick	-ide
-ight	-ill	-in	-ine	-ing
-ink	-ip	-ir	-ock	-oke
-op	-ore	-or	-uck	-ug
-ump	-unk			

(Source: Marilyn J. Adams, 1990, *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print*, Cambridge: MIT Press)

Experience has taught us that children are able to connect phonics instruction to reading only when the phonics instruction grows out of reading a real book.

► How do we teach phonics? *continued*

► What Phonics Generalizations Should Be Taught?

At best, phonics rules and generalizations hold up only some of the time for reading and spelling words. Generalizations are best learned by discovering patterns through making and testing hypotheses. For example, in a literacy context, we might have our students chart dozens of words containing the long *e* sound (see Figure 3), and then ask them which letter combinations usually represent the long *e*. Through this activity children may come up with the hypothesis, "Most of the time *ee* represents the long *e* sound." They then need to explore words in books and other print media to modify or confirm their hypothesis.

This sort of discovery method is in contrast to the teacher beginning the lesson by stating the rule and having the children search for examples of the rule. In the latter case, very little learning takes place.

weave	meet	Peter	key	happy	field	receive
heat	feel	meter	monkey	merry	piece	deceive
meal	see			silly	pierce	
steal	tree					
feast	bee					
leaves	street					
reach	screen					
	steel					

Figure 3. Starting chart to help create hypothesis about the long e sound in words.

Phonics in Perspective

Good teachers have always carefully observed their students to be sure the children are internalizing rules of language. Teachers notice such things as the following:

- Can the children identify all upper- and lowercase letters of the alphabet?
- Can they apply phonics knowledge to reading and writing?
- Does their invented spelling reflect their growing understanding of phonics?
- Do their approximations in reading and writing make sense for their developmental level?
- Can they problem-solve and cross-check, demonstrating their ability to orchestrate their use of phonics in conjunction with semantics and syntax?
- Can they write Marie Clay's dictation test from *An Observation Survey* (1993), demonstrating their knowledge of phonemes?

The bottom line for us is that there is no reason to teach phonics unless our students are spending the majority of their time reading, writing, thinking, speaking, and responding to all kinds of meaningful texts.

> Children's knowledge of letter names and of letter–sound relationships is not important in itself, but rather, it is a tool with which children develop principles to unlock the alphabetic nature of our writing system. Phonics is not a method for teaching reading or writing. It is only one cueing system for identifying and spelling words and should be taught as such. (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1990, *Primary Program: Foundation Document*)

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▶ Books That Promote Phonemic Awareness

Chapman, Cheryl. *Pass the Fritters, Critters.*

Degen, Bruce. *Jamberry.*

Emberley, Barbara. *Drummer Hoff.*

Hopkins, Lee Bennett, editor. *Good Books, Good Times.*

Lester, Alison. *I'm Green and I'm Grumpy.*

Shaw, Nancy. *Sheep on a Ship.*

▶ ABC Books

Base, Graeme. *Animalia.*

Bayer, Jane. *A My Name Is Alice.*

Brown, Margaret Wise. *Sleepy ABC.*

Cushman, Doug. *The ABC Mystery.*

Hausman, Gerald. *Turtle Island ABC: A Gathering of Native American Symbols.*

Viorst, Judith. *The Alphabet from Z to A: With Much Confusion on the Way.*

Weeks, Sarah. *Hurricane City.*

Zimmerman, Andrea G., & David Clemesha. *The Cow Buzzed.*

Next Issue: Based on reader feedback and suggestions, the February issue of *School Talk* will discuss "how do I actually *teach* reading using literature?"

We welcome your comments and suggestions for future issues! Please send your ideas to: *School Talk,* NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096.

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Co-Editors: Regie Routman and Andrea Butler. NCTE Production Editor: Michelle Sanden Johlas. Designer: Pat Mayer.

Lie Weaver, from Psycho-linguistics to Whole Language

CVCe

*Generalizations	Number of Words Conforming	Number of Exceptions	Percent of Utility
1. When there are two vowels side by side, the long sound of the first one is heard and the second is usually silent.	309 (bead)†	377 (chief)†	45
2. When a vowel is in the middle of a one-syllable word, the vowel is short.	408	249	62
middle letter	191 (dress)	84 (scold)	69
one of the middle two letters in a word of four letters	191 (rest)	135 (told)	59
one vowel *within* a word of more than four letters	26 (splash)	30 (flight)	46
3. If the only vowel letter is at the end of a word, the letter usually stands for a long sound.	23 (he)	8 (to)	74
4. When there are two vowels, one of which is final *e*, the first vowel is long and the *e* is silent.	180 (bone)	108 (done)	63
* 5. The *r* gives the preceding vowel a sound that is neither long nor short.	484 (born)	134 (wire)	78
6. The first vowel is usually long and the second silent in the diagraphs *ai*, *ea*, *oa*, and *ui*.	179	92	66
ai	43 (rail)	24 (said)	64
ea	101 (bead)	51 (bead)	66
oa	34 (boat)	1 (cupboard)	97
ui	1 (suit)	16 (build)	6
7. In the phonogram *ie*, the *i* is silent and the *e* has a long sound.	8 (field)	39 (friend)	17
* 8. Words having double *e* usually have the long *e* sound.	85 (seem)	2 (been)	98
9. When words end with silent *e*, the preceding *a* or *i* is long.	164 (cake)	108 (have)	60
*10. In *sy* the *y* is silent and gives *s* its long sound.	36 (play)	10 (always)	78
11. When the letter *i* is followed by the letters *gh*, the *i* usually stands for its long sound and the *gh* is silent.	22 (high)	9 (neighbor)	71
12. When *a* follows *w* in a word, it usually has the sound *o* as in *was*.	15 (watch)	32 (swam)	32
13. When *e* is followed by *w*, the vowel sound is the same as represented by *oo*.	9 (blew)	17 (sew)	35
14. The two letters *ow* make the long *o* sound.	50 (own)	35 (down)	59

33. One vowel letter in an accented syllable has its short sound.	547 (city)	356 (lady)	61
34. When *y* or *ey* is seen in the last syllable that is not accented, the long sound of *e* is heard.	0	157 (baby)	0
35. When *ture* is the final syllable in a word, it is unaccented.	4 (picture)	0	100
36. When *tion* is the final syllable in a word, it is unaccented.	5 (station)	0	100
37. In many two- and three-syllable words, the final *e* lengthens the vowel in the last syllable.	52 (invite)	62 (gasoline)	46
38. If the first vowel sound in a word is followed by two consonants, the first syllable usually ends with the first of the two consonants.	404 (bullet)	159 (singer)	72
39. If the first vowel sound in a word is followed by a single consonant, that consonant usually begins the second syllable.	190 (over)	237 (oven)	44
*40. If the last syllable of a word ends in *le*, the consonant preceding the *le* usually begins the last syllable.	62 (rumble)	2 (buckle)	97
*41. When the first vowel element in a word is followed by *th*, *ch*, or *sh*, these symbols are not broken when the word is divided into syllables and may go with either the first or second syllables.	30 (dishes)	0	100
42. In a word of more than one syllable, the letter *v* usually goes with the preceding vowel to form a syllable.	53 (cover)	29 (clover)	73
43. When a word has only one vowel letter, the vowel sound is likely to be short.	433 (hid)	322 (kind)	57
*44. When there is one *e* in a word that ends in a consonant, the *e* usually has a short sound.	85 (leg)	27 (blew)	76
*45. When the last syllable is the sound *r*, it is unaccented.	188 (butter)	9 (appear)	95

Consider Cow

Consider cow
which rhymes
with bough
but not
with rough.
That's clear
enough.

Remember moo
will rhyme
with through
but not
with trough
or though
or tough.

You've got
it now:
There's dough
and bough
and cough
and through
and mough . . .
er, moo.

by Alice Schertle

Provided by Guy Phillips, Literacy Tutor, Juneau

TARLOU

SLATE STARTER SHEET — Fact Sheet Series

WHOLE LANGUAGE SET: #1 On Myths about Whole Language Education

Is whole language really warm and fuzzy?—Susan Church, 1994

Background

There are many myths and misconceptions about whole language education. Several of these are addressed below.

Myths reconsidered

- **One of the common myths is that whole language teachers don't teach "the basics."** By this, critics usually mean that whole language teachers don't teach the composite skills that allegedly must precede real reading and real writing. This is not true, as explained below. Equally important, however, is the fact that whole language teachers have a different view of what is truly basic. They believe that authentic reading of trade books and authentic writing of texts for a variety of purposes (notes, letters, stories, reports, etc.) are more "basic" than skills work.
- **Given this difference in what whole language teachers consider "basic," it is perhaps not surprising that another common myth is that whole language teachers don't teach "skills"—or at least that they don't teach skills directly.** It is certainly true that whole language teachers don't engage in the typical teach / practice, apply, memorize / test syndrome that characterizes traditional teaching. Instead of teaching skills in isolated lessons, according to a scope and sequence chart or the organization of some workbook, whole language teachers typically help children develop skills in the context of their needs and interests. When they teach mini-lessons on skills within the context of authentic literacy and learning experiences, they do not test to see if children have learned these skills or strategies; they help the children apply them, watch for signs that the children can apply them independently, and keep helping the children as necessary.
- **Another misconception is that a teacher is "doing" whole language if he or she is using trade books rather than basal readers.** However, the critical difference is not whether the children read from basal readers or trade books, though whole language teachers much prefer trade books from which children can choose their own reading. Rather, the critical difference is what the teacher has the students do with the literature. Instead of asking students questions to see if they have understood the reading selection, whole language teachers engage them in discussing their reading—in dialogue journals, for instance, and in literature discussion groups. Meanings are constructed and reconstructed through social discourse and collaboration, which promotes a richer understanding of the text and an ability to consider it more thoughtfully and critically. This, of course, promotes critical thinking.
- **Another misconception is that whole language is only for the primary or elementary grades.** While whole language teaching is certainly more common in the primary and elementary grades, the nature of whole language is such that it can apply to learning and teaching students of any grade or age. Whole language has grown into an educational philosophy based on research about the nature of learning and teaching. From cognitive psychology, it shares the constructivist view of learning that has become prominent in disciplines such as science and math as well as language arts: namely, the view that learners must be intellectually active to construct concepts and ideas. Thus, whole language is sometimes known as a transactional or active model of education, in contrast to the notion that learning is merely transmitted from teacher to learner.
- **Another misconception is that "doing" whole language means adding more and more to the curriculum.** First, one does not "do" whole language so much as *live* it. Second, whole language does not necessarily require adding more to the curriculum. Instead of having many separate activities, whole language teachers organize the day into larger blocks of time: for readers' and writers' workshop, perhaps, or for theme exploration. When students explore a theme drawn from social studies, or science and math (or all of these), the language arts become a natural part of what they do in learning and sharing what they have learned. Reading, writing, discussion, research, and problem-solving skills are taught as students need them to learn and to prepare products of their learning for others to appreciate or experience too.
- **Another common misconception is that whole language teachers don't assess students' learning.** It is true that whole language teachers don't have much confidence in the results of standardized tests, because they are aware that such tests typically lack content and construct validity: they don't reflect the content of classrooms where effective learning is taking place, and they don't adequately reflect the real-world skills that schools are trying to develop. Furthermore, whole language teachers know that the primary purpose of standardized tests is to rank order individuals, and they reject this aim. On the other hand, almost everything that occurs in whole language classrooms may become part of assessment and evaluation. For example, assessment may include recorded observations, student self-evaluations, and various kinds of artifacts, such as periodic performance samples, think-alouds, data from conferences and interviews, inventories and ques-

tionnaires, dialogue journals and learning logs, and student-kept records of various kinds. By drawing upon such varied sources for assessment, teachers can focus on students' growth and learning strengths, instead of trying to expose weaknesses.

- **Another myth is that whole language teaching is appropriate only for unlabeled students or for gifted students—not for students labeled as learning disabled, Attention Deficit Disordered, or "at risk" of school failure.** In fact, whole language teachers have found that special needs students have their best chance of becoming independent readers, writers, and learners in whole language classrooms. More skills work holds them back; what they need is opportunities to engage in real reading and writing authentic texts, along with their peers. Whole language teachers have found that special needs students flourish when given such opportunities and when given the support they need to become genuine readers and writers. Major keys to success are individual choice, ownership, teacher support, and TIME to change old patterns of dependency and failure.
- **Another misconception is that whole language students do worse on standardized tests, and that whole language learning and teaching are not supported by comparative research.** However, the small but growing body of comparative research shows students in whole language classrooms typically scoring as well or better on standardized tests than students in more traditional classrooms. More generally, this emerging body of research (so far, dealing primarily with preschoolers and children in kindergarten, grade 1, and grade 2) has found that children in whole language classrooms typically show greater gains on reading tests; have developed a greater ability to use phonics knowledge effectively; have developed vocabulary, spelling, grammar, and punctuation skills as well as or better than children in more traditional classrooms; are more inclined and able to read for meaning rather than just to identify words; have developed more strategies for dealing with problems in reading; have developed greater facility in writing; have developed a stronger sense of themselves as readers and writers; and have developed greater independence as readers and writers.
- **Another major misconception is that anyone can be a whole language teacher simply by going to an inservice or two, replacing basal reading programs with trade books, maybe buying some of the newer instructional materials labeled "whole language," and obtaining from conferences or from fellow teachers some clever ideas for turning skills work into a fun activity.** While some of these tactics may help, they usually are not enough to bring about the shift from the typical transmission concept of education to the transactional, constructivist concept that underlies whole language learning and teaching. Teachers need opportunities to read and discuss professional literature with colleagues, to share teaching ideas and get feedback to visit others' classrooms, to see demonstrations in their own classrooms by effective whole language teachers, and so forth. Perhaps most of all, they need respect and support for their risk-taking, particularly from administrators.

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SLATE STARTER SHEET — Fact Sheet Series:

WHOLE LANGUAGE SET: #2 On Phonics in Whole Language Classrooms

The truth is that some attention to the relationships between spelling patterns and their pronunciation is characteristic of all types of reading programs, including whole language. . . . The fact is that all students, regardless of the type of instruction they receive, learn about letter-sound correspondences as part of learning to read.—Steven Stahl, 1992

Background

One myth about education is that whole language teachers do not teach phonics. Not true: they simply teach phonics as children read and write authentic texts, rather than in a separate program or separate lessons. Another myth is that phonics is not learned as readily when it is taught in the context of reading and writing, instead of being taught intensively and systematically. Recent research indicates that this also is untrue. As a former advocate of intensive phonics now notes, "The integrated phonics instruction typical of some whole language first-grade classrooms might work as well as the more structured phonics instruction typical of basal reading programs" (Stahl, McKenna, & Pagnucco, 1993, citing Stahl, 1992). And, indeed, recent research suggests that students in whole language classrooms learn and use phonics skills as well or better than children in more traditional classrooms (summarized in Weaver, 1994). Furthermore, as McIntyre and Freppon note (1995), although whole language teachers' instruction in phonics is an integral part of daily classroom interactions, it is not necessarily random or eclectic, "but can be carefully planned and well thought through in whole language."

How whole language teachers help children develop phonics knowledge

Whole language teachers have faith in children as learners. Children can and usually will develop a grasp of letter/sound relationships with relatively little direct instruction, just as they learned to talk without direct instruction in the grammar of the English language. Most of the following examples, however, illustrate ways that whole language teachers often use in directly helping children develop phonics knowledge and the ability to use it in reading and writing. Since teacher aides and parents may want to use these procedures too, this list is expressed in the imperative, as good things to do to help children learn phonics.

- Read aloud to children from Big Books or charts large enough for all the children in the group or class to see the print easily. Run a pointer or your hand or finger under the words, to help children make the association between spoken words and written words.
- Part of the time, choose Big Books and/or make charts of stories, poems, and rhymes that make interesting use of alliteration, rhyme, and onomatopoeia.
- When sharing such Big Books or charts, focus children's attention on the beginnings and ends of words. Research shows (summarized in Adams, 1990) that at first, it is much more difficult for children to hear separate sounds in words than to hear the beginning of a syllable (the "onset") as a unit (*s-* as in *sit*, but also *spl-* as in *split*) and to hear the vowel plus any following consonants (the "rime") as another unit (*-it*, as in *sit* and *split*). Therefore, it is helpful to focus first on elements that alliterate and that rhyme, before focusing on individual sounds. It is especially important not to focus on vowels by themselves, but in combination with any consonants that follow the vowel—the "rime" patterns (like *-ate, -ant, -ast, -ere, -est, -ing, -ist, -ight, -ound, -old, -ung, -ure).*
- When discussing the onsets and/or rimes, it often helps to invite children first to share what they have noticed about the sounds, instead of beginning by telling what you have noticed. Ask questions like "What do you notice about the sounds in this poem?" (Mills, O'Keefe, & Stephens, 1992).
- During the discussion of onsets and/or rimes, you and the children can make charts of words with the same sound pattern. For example, "Galoshes," by Rhoda Bacmeister *(Poems Children Will Sit Still For,* edited by Beatrice deRegnier), invites lists of words beginning with *s-* and *sp-* and *spl-*. They may also enjoy starting a list of words that end in *-ishes* and *-oshes,* and in making up other nonsense words that follow these rime patterns. As children read other poems, additional words can be added to the charts (Jack Prelutsky's "Spaghetti," for instance, in *Noisy Poems* (edited by Jill Bennett, 1987). These lists can be ongoing, with the children adding words in their own temporary spellings.
- Words from the charts can be put on separate strips of paper or cards, and children can be invited to categorize them in different ways, including "words that begin the same" and "words that end the same." The same thing can be done with pronounceable word parts: common onsets and rimes. Words constructed from these word parts can be listed and categorized together according to the onset and/or the rime. For example, the onset *st-* could be combined with only two of the rime patterns listed above (to make *state* and *sting*), but the simpler onset *s-* could combine with several of them. Children will often notice how other words can be made by varying the pattern slightly (for example, *s-* plus *-ant* makes a word if we add *-a: Santa).* See Powell & Hornsby, 1993, for various ideas.
- Read alphabet books with children, and make alphabet books together.
- Read with children other books that emphasize sound (books

such as *Noisy Poems,* edited by Joan Bennett; *Deep Down Underground,* by Oliver Dunrea; and Dr. Seuss books). Comment on sounds.

- Help children learn the important reading strategy of predicting, by covering all but the onset of a fairly predictable word in a text (Post-Its can be used for this purpose). Invite children to make predictions and then look at the rest of the word to confirm what it actually is. This usually works especially well with rhyming words at the end of a line of text, particularly if the word mostly covered rhymes with a line before it.
- Talk about letters and sounds as you write messages to children and as you help them compose something together, or individually. This is a very important way of helping children begin to hear individual sounds in words as well as to learn to spell some of the words they write.
- Help children notice print in their environment—signs, labels, and so forth.
- When children demonstrate in their attempts at writing that they realize letters represent sounds, help them individually to write the sounds they hear in words (Freppon & Dahl, 1991). At first, they are likely to write only the first sound of words. Next, they commonly write the first and last sounds (especially when these are consonants). Vowels typically come later (McGee & Richgels, 1990).
- Provide tape recordings of many selections for children to listen to, as they follow along with the written text. It helps to provide small copies of the text, not just a Big Book or chart.

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SLATE STARTER SHEET — Fact Sheet Series

WHOLE LANGUAGE SET: #3 On Research on Whole Language Education

Whole language and research on whole language are both clearly in their beginning stages.
—Diane Stephens, 1991

Background

We hear and read in various places that whole language education is not supported by research. However, that is simply untrue, even though research on whole language is still little beyond the beginning stages. In fact, whole language teaching and learning is supported by three different kinds of research: research into the reading and writing processes themselves; naturalistic studies of how children learn to speak their language and to read and write in it; and research comparing children's learning in whole language classrooms with other, more traditional classrooms. Research in learning theory and in learning styles also supports whole language education. Here, comparative research is the focus, since that is the kind most widely understood.

Children becoming independent readers, writers, and learners

Not all of the comparative research studies include standardized tests. Though such tests are not very good assessments of children's strengths and needs, the results of studies including such tests are generalized here. A much fuller description of these research studies can be found in Weaver, 1994. All the located studies involved children in preschool, kindergarten, grade 1, or grade 2. Three studies involved two grade levels, and two of these were two-year longitudinal studies involving children deemed to be at risk of educational failure. So far, these studies suggest the following conclusions:

- **Children in whole language classrooms typically do as well or better on standardized reading tests and subtests (though the differences are seldom statistically significant).** For example, the whole language kindergartners in Ribowsky's study (1985) scored better on all measures of growth and achievement, including the tests of letter recognition and letter/sound knowledge. In the Kasten and Clarke study (1989), the whole language kindergartners performed significantly better than their counterparts on all subtests of the Metropolitan Readiness Test, including tests of beginning consonant sounds, letter/sound correspondences, and sounds and clusters of sounds in initial and final positions of words.
- **Children in whole language classrooms seem to develop greater ability to use phonics knowledge effectively than children in more traditional classrooms where skills are practiced in isolation.** For example, in Freppon's study (1988, 1991), the skills group attempted to sound out words more than twice as often as the others, but the literature-based group was more successful in doing so: a 53% success rate compared with a 32% success rate for the skills group. Apparently the literature-based children were more successful because they made better use of phonics in conjunction with other information and cues. (For another relevant study, see also Cunningham, 1990).
- **Children in whole language classrooms seem to develop vocabulary, spelling, grammar, and punctuation skills as well or better than children in more traditional classrooms.** For example, see Elley's 1991 summary of studies on learning English as a second language; also Clarke, 1988, on spelling; and Stice and Bertrand, 1990, which included spelling. In addition, see Calkins, 1980; Gunderson and Shapiro, 1988.
- **Children in whole language classrooms seem more inclined and able to read for meaning rather than just to identify words.** For example, when asked "What makes a good reader?", the children in Stice and Bertrand's study (1990) reported that good readers read a great deal and that they can read any book in the room. The children in the traditional classrooms tended to focus on words and surface correctness; they reported that good readers read big words, they know all the words, and they don't miss any words.
- **Children in whole language classrooms seem to develop more strategies for dealing with problems in reading.** For example, the whole language children in Stice and Bertrand's study (1990) typically described six strategies for dealing with problem words, while the children in traditional classrooms described only three.
- **Children in whole language classrooms seem to develop greater facility in writing.** For example, in the Dahl and Freppon study (1992), a considerably larger proportion of the children in the whole language classrooms were writing sentences and stories, by the end of first grade. The whole language children in the Kasten and Clark study (1989) were similarly much more advanced as writers by the end of their kindergarten year.
- **Children in whole language classrooms seem to develop a stronger sense of themselves as readers and writers.** Take, for example, the Stice and Bertrand study (1990): When asked "Who do you know who is a good reader?", eighty-two percent of the kindergartners in the whole language classrooms mentioned themselves, but only five percent of the kindergartners in the traditional classrooms said "me." During the first grade year, when the children were asked directly "Are you a good reader?", seventy percent of the whole language children said yes, but only thirty-three percent of the traditional children said yes.

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- **Children in whole language classrooms also seem to develop greater independence as readers and writers.** In the Dahl and Freppon study (1992), for instance, passivity seemed to be the most frequent coping strategy for learners having difficulty in the skills-based classrooms. But in whole language classrooms, those having difficulty tended to draw upon other learners for support: by saying the phrases and sentences that others could read, by copying what they wrote, and so forth. That is, these less proficient learners still attempted to remain engaged in literacy activities with their peers.

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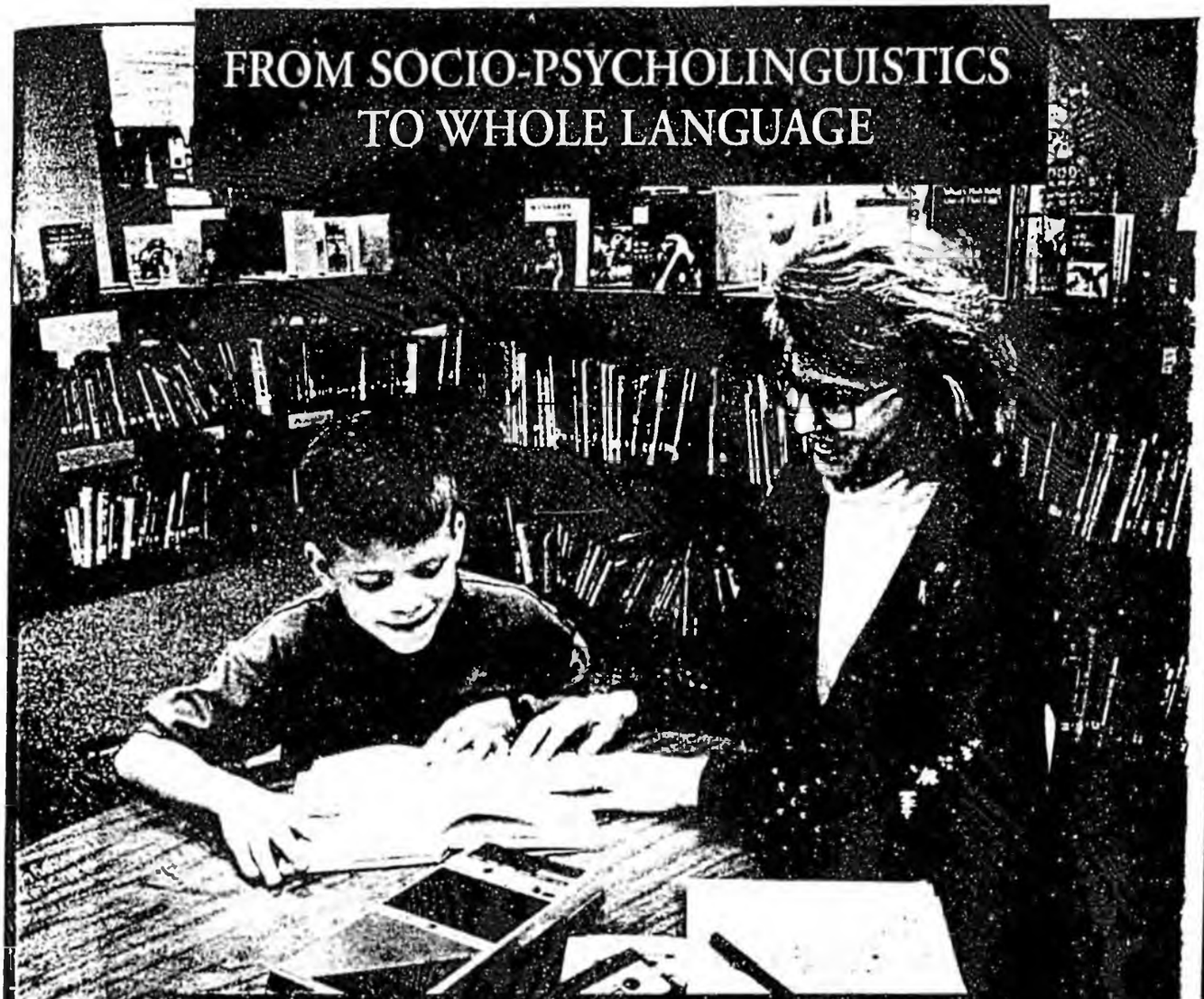
Reading Process and Practice

FROM SOCIO-PSYCHOLINGUISTICS TO WHOLE LANGUAGE



Constance Weaver

SECOND EDITION

Reading Process and Practice

From Socio-Psycholinguistics to Whole Language

SECOND EDITION

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In her widely cited book *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning About Print* (1990a), Marilyn Adams suggests teaching just onsets and rimes: the beginnings of words, particularly initial consonants and consonant clusters, and the parts that enter into rhymes: letter patterns like *-ate*, *-est*, *-ice*, *-unk*, and so forth. She cites Wylie and Durrell (1970), who have pointed out that nearly five hundred primary-grade words can be derived from a set of only thirty-seven rimes. Vowel sounds in these rime patterns are quite stable, so teaching rime patterns is far more useful than teaching vowel sounds in isolation.

Oddly enough, considering her fairly moderate suggestion for teaching phonics systematically, Adams notes throughout the book that research supports the "intensive" teaching of phonics (e.g., p. 13). Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that her book has been cited as "proving" that phonics should be taught extensively and intensively. In fact, however, the research base is ambiguous and open to challenge. Furthermore, Adams has totally ignored the other side of the coin, entirely omitting from consideration the rich body of professional literature on children's literacy development in whole language classrooms.

Research Supporting the Systematic Teaching of Phonics

The classroom research Adams cites in favor of teaching phonics systematically is mainly that cited by Jeanne Chall in *Learning to Read: The Great Debate* (1967, updated 1983), and the twenty-seven U.S. Office of Education studies as analyzed and summarized by Bond and Dykstra (1967).

At the outset of her study, Chall admitted, "One of the most important things, if not *the* most important thing, I learned from studying the existing research on beginning reading is that it says nothing consistently. . . . Taken as a whole, the research on beginning reading is strongly inconclusive" (Chall, 1967, pp. 87, 88). But guided by her theoretical perspective, Chall attempted to create order out of the chaos of conflicting data (Chall, 1989, pp. 524–528).

Because Chall's original conclusions are often oversimplified and then cited as definitive, these conclusions are worth quoting in detail:

> In summary, judging from the studies comparing systematic with intrinsic phonics, we can say that systematic phonics at the very beginning tends to produce generally better reading and spelling achievement than intrinsic phonics, at least through grade 3.
>
> More specifically, the child who begins with systematic phonics achieves early superiority in word recognition. This superior ability may not always show up on standardized silent reading (comprehension and vocabulary) tests in the first grade. But by the second and third grades, greater facility in recognizing words probably increases his ability to read for meaning, as measured by standardized silent reading tests of vocabulary and comprehension.
>
> As for rate, systematic phonics may produce slower readers in grades 1 and 2 because it develops greater concern for working out the words. However, by

> the middle grades, rate seems to be about equal to that produced by intrinsic phonics.
>
> Finally, there is probably a limit to the advantage that early facility with the code gives on comprehension tested after grade 4. After this point intelligence, experience, and language maturity probably become more important factors in success than ability to recognize words. (Chall, 1967, p. 114)

Thus, according to this early synthesis, systematic phonics produces higher scores on tests of reading and spelling "achievement," but only through the primary grades.

Much the same conclusion is drawn by Bond and Dykstra (1967) in their consideration of the twenty-seven USOE cooperative first-grade studies conducted during 1965-66. In a later summary of his conclusions favoring phonics, Dykstra says:

> The evidence clearly demonstrates that children who receive early intensive instruction in phonics develop superior word recognition skills in the early stages of reading and tend to maintain their superiority at least through the third grade. These same pupils tend to do somewhat better than pupils enrolled in meaning-emphasis (delayed gradual phonics) programs in reading comprehension at the end of the first grade. (1974, p. 397)

Thus, these studies would seem to favor systematic phonics over intrinsic phonics, at least for grades 1 through 3, and at least according to standardized measures. Marilyn Adams (1990a) cites two studies that she thinks demonstrate positive longer-term effects from the early teaching of intensive, systematic phonics (Becker & Gersten, 1982; Gersten & Keating, 1987), but few are likely to find the evidence from these studies convincing. (For a fuller treatment, see Weaver, 1990b). Even Gersten himself has agreed, at least with reference to the earlier study (Gersten, 1990).

The Research Critiqued

It is important to note that evidence for the systematic teaching of phonics is all based upon reading "performance" or "achievement," as measured on standardized tests that typically test letter/sound knowledge and word knowledge in isolation. Even the comprehension portions of such tests typically test comprehension "skills." The tests do not consider such factors as whether children are developing effective reading strategies, whether they can actually read environmental print and books, and whether they can write using letters to represent sounds. Thus, reading "performance" and "achievement" have to do with scores on tests of isolated skills, not with the ability to actually read, comprehend, and enjoy real texts.

So where does this leave us?

For one thing, some scholars have interpreted some of the research differently, while others have critiqued the validity of the research studies and therefore the conclusions drawn by phonics advocates. Others have questioned at least the significance of the research results. Whole language educators have been among the challengers.

Chall admitted in her 1983 update of *Learning to Read: The Great Debate* (1967) that several other reviews of the USOE studies (e.g., Corder, 1971) did not conclude that code-emphasis approaches (typically phonics) were superior to meaning-emphasis approaches, even when measured just by standardized tests. Chall wrote:

> Yet many of the summaries of the USOE studies, and particularly the interpretations of their findings, contradicted this [her own] conclusion. Only a few indicated that the results showed an advantage for a heavier code-emphasis. Several, in fact, concluded that the USOE findings contradicted those of *The Great Debate*. This would mean that the USOE studies pointed to a meaning-emphasis as the advantageous approach. Yet this was not reported either. Indeed, most reviewers seemed to conclude that the 27 USOE studies found no method superior to any other. Superior results, if any, were attributed to the teacher. (1983 update, p. 6)

Also noteworthy is the fact that most of the so-called meaning-emphasis approaches focused on sight word recognition, not on reading whole texts and thereby developing sight vocabulary, reading strategies, and skills in the context of reading. In one analysis of the USOE data, a well-known European scholar concluded that the approaches that came closest to being "whole language" actually produced the best results (Grundin, 1985, p. 265).

In a 1988 critique of Chall's research synthesis in her *Learning to Read: The Great Debate* (1967, updated 1983), Marie Carbo points out what Chall admitted in her original attempt to synthesize the results of the experimental research studies: many of them had serious design flaws (Chall, 1967, pp. 100–101; Carbo, 1988a). Carbo's further analysis of the data from 16 of 31 studies discussed by Chall reveals some additional flaws in Chall's own analysis and reporting of these results. In several ways, Chall tended to skew the data as being more favorable to phonics instruction than the data seem to warrant. Carbo (1988a) demonstrates that this criticism applies not only to the studies reviewed and to the conclusions drawn in Chall's original 1967 edition of *The Great Debate*, but also to the post-1967 studies that Chall discusses (Chall, 1983 update).

To try to resolve the debate that developed between Carbo and Chall, assessment expert Richard Turner decided to see what conclusions could be drawn if he considered only "the best evidence" from the research Chall considered. He rejected not only laboratory experiments, which inevitably distort the nature of the normal reading process, but also "patched-up program evaluations," which constituted the vast majority of articles cited by Chall and criticized by Carbo.

This left nine randomized field experiments that compared a systematic phonics approach with either an intrinsic phonics approach or a "no-phonics" approach, in which students were left to develop, over time, their own methods for figuring out sounds in unrecognized words. Turner suggests that the latter strategy would be characteristic of a whole language approach, but in practice most whole language teachers combine this strategy with various kinds of direct and indirect teaching of phonics (see Chapter 5). None of the studies compared a systematic phonics approach to reading instruction with a whole language approach to developing literacy.

What the studies did compare is systematic phonics with differing variants of a whole word approach. Turner hypothesized that any initial advantages one approach might have over the other would appear early in the primary grades and then disappear. The data generally supported this hypothesis, leading Turner to conclude as follows:

> My overall conclusion from reviewing the randomized field studies is that systematic phonics falls into that vast category of weak instructional treatments with which education is perennially plagued. Systematic phonics appears to have a slight and early advantage over a basal-reader/whole-word approach as a method of beginning reading instruction. . . . However, this difference does not last long and has no clear meaning for the acquisition of literacy in the sense of enhancing vocabulary and improving comprehension. Moreover, learning theory offers little reason to believe that it should do so. (Turner, 1989, p. 283)

Turner concludes his analysis of the randomized field experiments by stating, "Perhaps it is time for reading experts to turn away from the debate over systematic phonics in search of more powerful instructional treatments that will influence the development of literacy in the middle grades and beyond" (p. 283).

Yes, indeed.

Misunderstanding and Invalid Research

When systematic phonics advocates have attempted to compare phonics or skills approaches with whole language classrooms, they have operated out of an apparent misunderstanding of whole language. This leads to invalid conclusions.

For example, the authors of *Becoming a Nation of Readers* wrote that in the United States, whole language approaches had produced results that were typically "indifferent" when compared with approaches typical in American classrooms—at least when measured by "performance on first- and second-grade standardized reading achievement tests" (R. C. Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985, p. 45). However, the reference supporting this statement is Bond and Dykstra's 1967 summary of the USOE studies, which were undertaken at least two decades before whole language burgeoned in the United States. (Also, see Grundin's differing conclusion: that the approaches most like whole language produced the *best* results; Grundin, 1985, p. 265.)

More recently, Stahl and Miller (1989) conducted a statistical meta-analysis ("quantative research synthesis") of data from various studies in an attempt to compare the effects of differing approaches. Combining whole languge and language experience as if they were essentially the same (even though these researchers seemed to know better), they concluded that "overall, whole language/language experience approaches are approximately equal in their effects" to basal reader/skills approaches, but with some exceptions: for example, they note that whole language/language experience approaches may be most effective for developing concepts about print, while more direct approaches might be better at helping students master word recognition skills (Stahl & Miller, 1989, p. 87). However, anything the research might have suggested

about whole language is invalidated by the fact that it is lumped together with language experience. As Chapter 3 should have made clear, language experience is simply one kind of activity that may be included in classrooms reflecting a much broader whole language philosophy of learning and teaching. (For more detailed criticisms, see McGee & Lomax, 1990, and Schickendanz, 1990.)

The fact that these researchers could have drawn such invalid conclusions may stem, in part, from the fact that systematic phonics researchers and whole language researchers typically operate from very different underlying assumptions.

DIFFERING ASSUMPTIONS

When considering the differences between systematic phonics researchers and whole language researchers (and those who sympathetically summarize their respective research) it is important to take into account their underlying assumptions, because these assumptions guide how they set up research studies and interpret the results: what they look for, and what counts as evidence (see, for instance, Edelsky's 1990 critique of McKenna, Robinson, & Miller, 1990).

To begin with, judging by their research studies, systematic phonics researchers consider readers' performance on standardized tests of isolated skills (reading "achievement") to be accurate and adequate measures of reading; whole language researchers do not. Instead, the latter consider it critical to examine reading and writing growth together, along with other aspects of intellectual and affective growth; to assess reading and writing by observing, describing, and analyzing what students do with literacy daily, not via standardized tests of skills; and to use a variety of measures in formal research.

One corollary is this: systematic phonics researchers seem to believe that students must be able to demonstrate a skill in isolation from actual reading, in order to control that skill or make use of that knowledge during actual reading. Furthermore, they often have a part-to-whole concept of reading. For example, Vellutino (in an article that reflects serious misconceptions about whole language) writes approvingly that "phoneme awareness [awareness of the separate sounds in words] is believed to be a prerequisite for learning to map alphabetic symbols to sound, and alphabetic mapping is believed to be a prerequisite for learning to identify individual words and learning to read in general" (1991, p. 439). From experience and research, whole language educators assume that understanding of the parts (letter/sound relationships and words) develops more gradually but also more readily within the context of the whole—reading and rereading predictable and enjoyable texts, and writing by using invented spelling. They also see no need for skills to be mastered or demonstrated in isolation; indeed, they assume that an emphasis on skills detracts from the process of learning to read.

Another corollary is this: systematic phonics researchers seem to concern themselves with short-term performance on test scores (e.g., on tests of letter/sound knowledge in grade 1), without considering how such an emphasis might affect students' overall growth

as readers and writers and literate individuals through the primary years and beyond. Whole language educators and researchers take the longer view.

Systematic phonics researchers seem to take *correlations* either as evidence of unproven cause-effect relationships, as mandates for educational intervention, or both. For example, research indicates that there is a demonstrable correlation between fluent word identification and comprehension among good readers (e.g., Stanovich, 1980, 1981, 1984; Adams, 1990a). This has led systematic phonics advocates and others to assume that readers cannot comprehend well unless they can identify words fluently, an assumption that is clearly disproven by decades of miscue research (K. S. Goodman & Y. M. Goodman, n. d.); odd as it may seem, readers who read haltingly and with many miscues often comprehend quite well. The correlation between fluent word identification and comprehension has also led part-to-whole-oriented researchers to assume that phonics must be taught early and perhaps intensively, to facilitate fluent reading and thus comprehension; this is part of Adams' argument (1990a). Supported by research on language acquisition and emergent literacy, whole language researchers reject not only the implicit assumption that the earlier children acquire phonics knowlege the better, but also the assumption that phonics must be systematically taught in order to generate fluent word reading and analysis. They are more concerned with the development of a wide array of literacy understandings, behaviors, and attitudes, on the assumption that the development of the whole of literacy is far more important in the long run.

Here's another example of phonics researchers using correlations as cause-effect relationships: Byrne and Fielding-Barnsley (1991) cite studies showing that phonemic awareness affects reading and spelling skills, then take as the starting point for their research the assumption that "It makes sense, therefore, to include instruction in phonemic organization in the early stages of the reading curriculum" (1991, p. 451). In other words, these researchers assume that because there's a correlation between phonemic awareness and reading and spelling skills, the earlier phonics is mastered, the better. Whole language researchers and educators note that this conclusion does not necessarily follow. Sooner is not necessarily better—at least not if other important learning is sacrificed.

Finally, systematic phonics researchers generally operate from a "stage theory" model of learning to read (Chall, 1983; Adams, 1990a; Stahl, 1992). What this means in practice is that they recognize the transactional nature of emergent literacy, up to and perhaps through kindergarten (Adams, 1990a; Chall, 1983). However, they seem to think that by grade 1, children must be explicitly taught to read; they can no longer be trusted to develop literacy by transacting with environmental print and books and by engaging in writing experiences, in a supportive environment. These researchers seem to trade in their transactional model of birth-through-kindergarten learning for a transmission model, starting in grade 1. At least, that's what one can infer from their insistence that by grade 1 (if not before), children must begin to be explicitly and systematically taught phonics. Whole language researchers assume that the constructivist nature of learning continues throughout our lives, whether or not we are taught by means compatible with how we learn most effectively.

Contrasting the underlying assumptions of systematic phonics researchers with

those of whole language researchers sets the stage for better understanding the research that supports whole language.

RESEARCH SUPPORTING A WHOLE LANGUAGE ALTERNATIVE

There is a world of difference between phonics and whole language. Even though it is often promoted as a method of teaching reading, phonics deals only with one cue system used to construct meanings from texts. At the opposite end of the spectrum, whole language is in effect a total (albeit evolving and incomplete) theory or philosophy of learning and teaching. Phonics and whole language aren't really different routes to the same goals. Nevertheless, whole language classrooms do offer ways of developing phonics knowledge that contrast with systematic phonics (see also Chapter 5).

There are basically three kinds of research supporting whole language learning and teaching: research on language acquisition, emergent literacy, the reading process, and learning itself, which gave rise to whole language practice in the first place; naturalistic research documenting the success of whole language with individual children and classes; and experimental research comparing whole language with more traditional alternatives in the classroom (for summaries of research studies, see Krashen, 1993; Stephens, 1991; Shapiro, 1990; Heald-Taylor, 1989; Tunnell & Jacobs, 1989; Rhodes & Shanklin, 1989; and Weaver, 1988). The first kind of research forms the basis for much of this book, while the second is much better described in a rich abundance of other books and articles (see bibliographies in Chapter 3) The third kind of research, research comparing one kind of program or classroom with another, is briefly discussed below. An excellent overview of the research base is provided in Diane Stephens' *Research on Whole Language: Support for a New Curriculum* (1991). Stephens describes many of the studies in some depth, particularly the less accessible ones. (See Figure 7.2 for fuller bibliographic information on these summaries of research.) Stephens and I have described some of these studies also in Chapter 6 of my *Understanding Whole Language* (1990a), earlier studies were described in the first edition of *Reading Process and Practice* (1988). Below I describe three of the studies in those volumes, updating the references; describe four more studies; and draw generalizations from the seven studies reviewed. Described in greatest detail are those that are richest in the selection of subjects, the length of the study, the collection of data, or (at least in one instance) the characterizations of contrasting kinds of classrooms.

Because phonics advocates typically measure progress by standardized test scores, I have deliberately chosen, for comparison, studies that included at least one standardized test among the assessment measures. However, this decision should not be construed as evidence that I think standardized tests are appropriate measures of literacy development.

The first study described is actually a summary of nine research studies on learning English as a second language. The other studies are described in an order reflecting the age of the children and grade of the classrooms discussed, with longitudinal studies described last.

Goodman, K. S. (1989). Whole-language research: Foundations and development. *The Elementary School Journal, 90,* 208-221.

Hall, N. (1987). *The emergence of literacy.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Heald-Taylor, G. (1989). *The administrator's guide to whole language.* Chap. 8, "Whole language research: Key studies and reference literature." Katonah, NY: Richard C. Owen.

Krashen, S. (1993). *The power of reading: Insights from the research.* Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited.

Rhodes, L. K., & Shanklin, N. L. (1989) *A research base for whole language.* Denver, CO: LINK.

Shapiro, J. (1990). Research perspectives on whole language. In V. Froese (Ed.), *Whole language practice and theory* (pp. 313-356). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Stephens, D. (1991). *Research on whole language: Support for a new curriculum.* Katonah, NY: Richard C. Owen.

Tunnell, M. O., & Jacobs, J. S. (1989). Using "real books": Research findings on literature based reading instruction. *The Reading Teacher, 42,* 470-477.

Weaver, C., & Stephens, D. (1990). What does the research say? Research in support of whole-to-part. In Constance Weaver, *Understanding whole language* (pp. 125-141). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

FIGURE 7.2 References summarizing research on whole language (Note: The references with the most items on experimental studies are Krashen and the last four.)

W. Elley, 1991

Elley, W. B. (1991). Acquiring literacy in a second language: The effect of book-based programs. *Language Learning, 41*(3), 375-411.

Elley reviews nine studies of the acquisition of English as a second language, most of which were undertaken in the South Pacific and Southeast Asia, including his own earlier study (Elley & Manguhbai, 1983). Typically these studies compared the results of programs based on structured systematic instruction with "book flood" programs, which exposed children to large numbers of high-interest story books. In other words, the studies compared the effects of a direct instruction approach with an indirect approach that might be characterized as "whole language" or "natural" language learning. These studies all involved elementary school students.

What I've considered the direct instruction approach typically involved principles articulated by structural linguists (e.g., Bloomfield, 1942) and audiolingual methodology: practice on a carefully sequenced set of grammatical structures, through imitation, repetition, and reinforcement. The book flood studies reflected typical whole language principles, and usually involved either sustained silent reading of an extensive number of picture books; the Shared Book Experience (Holdaway, 1979), including reading

discussion, and related activities; or a combination of these, which in one instance also included a modified language experience approach.

From these combined studies, the following patterns emerged:

1. Students in the book flood programs did better on almost all standardized measures of reading, including not only comprehension skills but also word identification and phonics skills.
2. Usually favoring the book flood students were differences in measures of oral and written language and vocabulary (e.g., listening comprehension, written story completion), and sometimes differences in other aspects of school achievement as well (see also Elley, 1989).
3. More surprisingly, students in the book flood programs often did better on tests of the grammatical structures explicitly taught in the audiolingual program. Elley notes that this interpretation "was supported by an incidental study in which knowledge and use of English in natural settings was found to be largely unaffected by deliberate instruction in them" (1991, p. 389).
4. Students in Shared Book Experience programs typically showed greater gains on various tests than students in silent reading programs. (Perhaps this result suggests the value of oral reading and discussion, probably including the discussion of letter/sound relationships within the Shared Book Experience.)
5. Students in the book flood programs typically had a more positive attitude toward books and reading. (One wonders if these programs also affected children's attitudes toward English as a second language.)

Elley summarizes, in part, as follows: "That pupils showed equally large gains in the discrete-point tests of grammatical structures and vocabulary as they did in the more integrative measures of reading, listening, and writing is particularly damaging for those who argue that structures and vocabulary should be deliberately taught" (1991, p. 402). If more of the comparisons had included tests of decoding skills, perhaps the same conclusion could be drawn for the direct teaching of phonics.

In short, Elley's comparison of these several studies offers powerful evidence for whole language advocates' assertion that language and literacy are acquired gradually, through opportunities to use the language and to engage in literacy events in meaningful contexts.

W. C. Kasten and B. K. Clarke, 1989

Kasten, W. C., & Clarke, B. K. (1989). *Reading/writing readiness for preschool and kindergarten children: A whole language approach.* Sanibel: Florida Educational Research and Development Council, ED 312 041.

This year-long study involved children in two preschools and two kindergarten classes in two southwest Florida communities, one school at each level serving as a control and one implementing certain strategies associated with a whole language philosophy of

learning. The latter will be referred to here as whole language classrooms and students, even though only the literacy activities were necessarily whole language in orientation.

The "business as usual" curriculum in the control classrooms seemed to proceed from common assumptions such as these (Kasten & Clarke, p. 73):

1. Children need to achieve a level of readiness for learning to read that includes extensive experience with letters of the alphabet and the sounds these letters represent. This occurs prior to learning to write.
2. Children are not ready or capable of writing connected text until a certain number of words can be spelled conventionally, and the prerequisite to writing is the ability to copy and formulate letters.
3. Authentic learning is limited to the learning or work produced by individuals who "do their own work," and learning is the result of what the teacher teaches.

Kasten and Clarke offer an extended anecdote that clarifies the nature of instruction stemming from such assumptions. The anecdote is from a private, well-funded, highly regarded preschool with an experienced, capable, highly regarded teacher:

> Ms. R. cheerfully welcomes her students and introduces us to them, reminding them of our names. Children gather in the carpeted area of the room around their teacher who is seated in a chair next to an easel. After some social conversation with the group, Ms. R. introduces the "special guest," who is a puppet named "Goofy Ghost." She announces they will talk about the letter G this day. The teacher elaborates that Goofy wears glasses and plays a guitar. She develops a story orally, preparing them to participate on a given signal with repeating phrases including "/g/ - /g/ - /g/ - /goo/," and "Goofy, good grief!" On the easel is paper with pockets which hold teacher prepared cards.
>
> As the story is completed, the teacher reviews "G" words with the children, and praises them at the end. She asks the children to give themselves a pat on the back, reviews the "G" words again, and they say "/g/ - /g/ - /g/ - /g/" a few more times. At the end, all children stand up to stretch, and are directed to pretend they are watering cans, and to make /g/ sound like water gushing from the watering cans with "/g/ - /g/ - /g/" noises.
>
> Next, the teacher initiates a guessing game with questions to "fill in the blank" orally, such as "Something Mommy puts on your mashed potatoes is . . .," and "You like to chew a stick of. . . ." (pp. 74–75)

The preschoolers are then asked to do some "writing": to copy the design Mrs. R. shows them on a flash card (circle, vertical line, etc.). She reminds them to "do their own work" and not look at anybody else's paper.

The instruction in the whole language preschool and kindergarten was significantly different, reflecting such assumptions as these (Kasten & Clarke, p. 72):

1. Children can write what they want to say before their knowledge of letter/sound relationships is perfect, and before they can spell conventionally.
2. Children can learn to read as they learn to speak, in a holistic, social context in which functions and purposes for reading are evident.

3. Children learn valuable lessons by collaborating with each other, and their learning can be enhanced by what they learn from each other.

In the following anecdote from a whole language preschool class, the paraprofessional teacher and all eight students are members of minority groups from very low socioeconomic neighborhoods. The anecdote illustrates the second and third of the above principles (Kasten & Clarke, pp. 67-68):

> The teacher presents a DLM book and, before she can ask the title, children call out "Three Dogs at the Door." Together the children count aloud the dogs on the cover, discuss the author, Roach Van Allen (1986), and discuss what an "illustrator" means. The children curl at the teacher's feet in an organized formation. The teacher uses a pointer as the class reads chorally. The teacher points out that the word "mad" looks different from the word "disgusted." The teacher asks individuals to act out how they might look if they felt "disgusted." All eight children say "disgusted," making appropriate facial expressions as they do.
>
> The children are extremely attentive, with all eyes on the book. They act out the next interesting word which is "upset," the same way they did with the word "disgusted." The teacher discusses with them how they can use these words when they have those feelings, labeling them for the children as "emotion words." They continue reading and come to the word "irritated." They discuss differences between "irritated," "mad," "upset," and "disgusted."

Teacher and children continue discussing the emotion words. The teacher then

> flips back through the text to each emotion word and asks which, of the ones they discussed, this one is. Each time some children guess correctly, and seem to be using initial letters to assist in their guesses of "disgusted," "furious," etc.

Since the children are not yet tired of shared reading, they go on to read *I'm the King of the Mountain* (Cowley, 1984b) together, using song and with the children chiming in on the repeated pattern "I'm the king of the mountain; I'm the king of the mountain." Finally, the children have the opportunity to choose books to read by themselves, in pairs, or to the teacher.

This anecdote nicely illustrates not only whole language principles of learning, but some of the procedures used in the whole language preschool and kindergarten classes. Shared reading experiences with predictable or patterned language books were to be used with the children at least twice a day, for a minimum of fifteen minutes each time. The teachers were asked to use a pointer to follow along with the text during the shared reading experiences. They were encouraged to extend the shared reading experiences through dramatization of the story, to use the text to teach concepts and skills, and to do "anything else their creativity might invent." The second aspect of the whole language program involved giving children an opportunity to write at least once a week: not to practice letter formation or to copy letters or someone else's text, but to compose—by writing using their own spellings e[illegible]ving oral dictation to an adult (Kasten &

Clarke, p. 34). While these were the minimum criteria defining the whole language category, more time reading and writing—perhaps considerably more time—may have been spent in these classrooms.

The children were tested using several instruments: a Book Handling Test developed by Y. M. Goodman and B. Altwerger (included in Y. M. Goodman, Altwerger, & Marek, 1989) and a story Retelling Inventory based on the retelling portion of the Reading Miscue Inventory (Y. M. Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 1987), both used with all of the students; the six subtests of the Metropolitan Early School Inventory—Preliteracy (ESI), used as a posttest with preschoolers and both pretest and posttest with the kindergartners; and the Metropolitan Readiness Test (MRT), the latter used as a pretest and posttest only for the kindergartners. As Kasten and Clarke point out, the MRT attempts to assess traditional "readiness" skills, including letter knowledge, initial sounds, ending sounds, the sounds of consonant clusters, and so forth (1989, p. 30).

For the preschoolers, many of the differences between groups were not statistically significant. On the tests and subtests that were statistically significant, all the results favored the experimental, whole language classroom. The whole language children showed significantly more development than their comparison peers in the ESI subtest How You Read, on the story Retelling Inventory, and on the Book Handling Test.

For the kindergartners, all the differences except those on two subtests of the ESI (What You Read, and Name Writing) were statistically significant, favoring the children in the whole language classroom. Differences were particularly noticeable on subtest E of the ESI, Message Writing. When requested to produce some written message, the control students tended to inform the researchers that they couldn't write, while all of the experimental subjects produced some written message when asked to do to (Kasten & Clarke, p. 64). The whole language kindergartners performed significantly better than their counterparts on all subtests of the Metropolitan Readiness Test, including tests of beginning consonant sounds, letter/sound correspondences, and sounds and clusters of sounds in initial and final positions of words. They could also locate patterns in words or parts of words, and visually match items. In addition, they had a better command of the terminology associated with reading (letter, word, etc.).

However, these test results do not reveal the most significant differences between the control classes and the whole language classes. The investigators' field notes demonstrated that children in the whole language classes were clearly "falling in love with books": "The children frequently chose books over toys during free choice play times, even sometimes asking permission to take the books outside. These groups could be observed 'playing' at shared reading experiences, one student acting as the teacher, with a pointer in hand, and those playing 'student' reading in unison or taking turns reading. On other occasions, one child might sit alone, even with a less familiar book, and pretend to read by formulating a logical story to accompany the illustrations" (Kasten & Clarke, p. 70).

Clearly, these children perceived themselves as readers. They also came to perceive themselves as writers and began to write when asked to do so by the investigators, even if their writings were scribbled or unrecognizable. These behaviors and perceptions differed markedly from those of the control groups. While the whole language children

demonstrated superiority in their development of literacy skills, as measured by various tests, their superior development in taking on the behaviors and attitudes of literate individuals was even more evident.

H. Ribowsky, 1985

Ribowsky, H. (1985). *The effects of a code emphasis approach and a whole language approach upon emergent literacy of kindergarten children.* Alexandria, VA: Educational Document Reproduction Service, ED 269 720. (Report developed more fully in Ribowsky's unpublished doctoral dissertation [same title], New York University, New York, 1986).

Though more limited in scope, Ribowsky's study focuses on measures of phonics knowledge.

The year-long study compared the effects of two approaches upon the emergent literacy of fifty-three girls in two kindergarten classes within an all girls' parochial school in the Northeast. The code emphasis classroom used a highly structured, teacher-directed program (Lippincott's *Beginning to Read, Write, and Listen* program). Consisting of twenty-four letter books, each with a teacher's guide, the program focuses mainly on hearing and analyzing phonemes and learning letter/sound correspondences. The whole language classroom used Holdaway's Shared Book Experience (Holdaway, 1979, pp. 72–73), which is described in Chapter 3.

In order to be fair to both approaches, Ribowsky employed different kinds of measures to assess the children's literacy development: Y. M. Goodman and Alterwerger's assessment of book handling knowledge (included in Y. M. Goodman, Altwerger, & Marek, 1989), the five principal subtests of the Test of Language Development—Primary; and the letter recognition and phoneme/grapheme subtests of the Metropolitan Achievement Test. The tests of letter recognition and phoneme/grapheme correspondence (consonants only) were administered only as posttests, since they were considered too difficult for beginning kindergartners.

Children in the whole language classrooms scored significantly better on all measures of growth and achievement, including the tests of letter recognition and letter/sound knowledge.

L. K. Clarke, 1988

Clarke, L. K. (1988). Invented versus traditional spelling in first graders' writings: Effects on learning to spell and read. *Research in the Teaching of English, 22,* 281–309.

This study compared the spelling development and certain aspects of the reading achievement of first-grade children in classrooms with contrasting approaches to spelling. The teachers in all the classrooms held writing sessions that totaled eighty to a hundred minutes a week, but two of the teachers encouraged traditional ("correct")

spellings only, while the other two teachers encouraged children to construct or "invent" spellings of words they did not know. Each teacher used a basal reading program, taught letter sounds (generally in isolation), and taught the identification of initial letters and sounds as an important aid to reading words. Various oral drills and worksheets were used to reinforce the phonics skills.

In October, the students engaged in various pretests. Among other things, they were asked to print as many words as they could, and to read a list of high-frequency words from the Boder Word Recognition Inventory (Boder, 1973). Various aspects of children's writing behaviors were also recorded, including their strategies for spelling. Their written productions were also analyzed.

Differences between the traditional and the inventive spellers included the following:

1. Using invented spelling, more children were able to write independently in the early months, and their productions were significantly longer overall and contained a significantly greater variety of words and a significantly smaller percentage of correct spellings than the children encouraged to use only traditional spelling. (The investigator does not indicate which group could actually spell more words correctly.)
2. On the posttests, children using invented spelling scored significantly higher in two of the three spelling tasks than children using traditional spelling. These tests were the spelling subtest of the Wide Range Achievement Test, Level 1, and a list of low-frequency regularly spelled words (from Baron & Treiman, 1980).
3. Children using invented spelling also had significantly greater scores on three different word recognition tests: the untimed word analysis subtest of the Durrell Word Recognition test; the reading of a word list adapted from Baron and Treiman (1980); and the word attack subtest (on nonsense words) of the Woodcock Reading Mastery tests. Flash word recognition and reading comprehension showed only slight differences between the groups, though those slight differences also favored the inventive spellers.
4. Initially low-achieving children accounted for most of the gain in spelling and reading that resulted from using invented spelling.

The researcher summarizes as follows:

> The superior spelling and phonic analysis skill of children using invented spelling suggested that they benefited from the practice of matching sound segments of words to letters as they wrote and from using their own sound sequence analysis. These differences were major considering that both groups were using basal readers which promote a reliance on processing words by their visual cues rather than by phonic analysis. . . .
>
> Also, encouraging children to use invented spelling may induce them to shift from processing words visually toward using phonetic cue processing earlier than would otherwise occur when using a basal reading program. (Clarke, 1988, p. 307)

Of course, as the investigator notes, some of the most significant benefits of encouraging invented spelling lie in promoting independence, confluence, and more writing. And the children who benefit the most may be those initially found to be low-achieving, by traditional and standardized measures.

P. A. Freppon, 1988

Freppon, P. A. (1988). An investigation of children's concepts of the purpose and nature of reading in different instructional settings. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Cincinnati, Ohio. This study is reported in a 1991 article by Freppon: Children's concepts of the nature and purpose of reading in different instructional settings, *Journal of Reading Behavior*, *23*(2), 139–163.

Freppon compared the literacy development of students in two "skills-based" first-grade classrooms with those in two "literature-based" classrooms. She contrasts what the skills-based teachers typically did with what the literature-based teachers did:

> The skill-based teachers: (a) established ability grouping and round-robin oral reading with an emphasis on reading correctly; (b) emphasized drill and practice on discrete skills such as short vowels, blends, and vocabulary words; (c) used a reading basal series exclusively for instruction; (d) required daily completion of skill (word and phonics)-oriented worksheets and workbooks; and (e) followed a traditional, systematic and sequenced curriculum in teaching phonics and vocabulary.
>
> The literature-based teachers: (a) used book demonstrations and modeled reading strategies such as making connections between their own lives and the events in the text when reading to and with children; (b) promoted children's approximations to conventional reading and did not emphasize *word perfect* reading; (c) structured cooperative reading events such as choral and partner reading; (d) emphasized reading for meaning (requiring children to think about what was going on in the story, discussing sense making, directly commenting on making connections with prior knowledge during reading interactions); and (e) taught children to use specific reading strategies including meaning, predicting, skipping words, rereading (*and getting ready to say the word*), guessing, and using graphophonic information. (1991, pp. 143–144)

The following are some of Freppon's conclusions, with contributing evidence:

1. Students in the literature-based group seemed to have a better sense of what sounds like language. Evidence? Of the literature-based group, 97 percent rejected words in scrambled sentence order as not being languagelike, while only 42 percent of the skills-based group rejected such sentences.
2. Students in the literature-based group seemed to have a stronger sense that reading involves constructing meaning, not merely getting the words right. Evidence? Of the students in the literature-based group, 92 percent said that understanding the

story or both understanding and getting the words right are important in reading, while only 50 percent of the skills-based group mentioned meaning or emphasized both as important.

3. Students in the literature-based group reported using more strategies in reading and were more often observed to do so; also, they more often discussed using meaning to self-monitor.
4. Though children in both groups said they were good readers, those in the literature-based group said they were good readers because they read a lot of books, while children in the skills group said they were good readers because they knew a lot of words.
5. Students in the literature-based group were more successful in using grapho/phonemic cues in conjunction with prior knowledge and other language cues in order to construct meaning. Though the skills group attempted to sound out words more than twice as often, the literature group was more successful in doing so: a 53 percent success rate compared with a 32 percent success rate for the skills group. Also, the literature group more often showed a balanced use of language cueing systems in their substitutions of one word for another.

In short, students in the literature-based group seemed to be making greater progress toward becoming literate.

K. L. Dahl and P. A. Freppon, 1992

Dahl, K. L., & Freppon, P. A. (1992). *Learning to read and write in inner-city schools: A comparison of children's sense-making in skills-based and whole language classrooms.* Final Report to the Office of Educational Research and Improvement. U.S. Department of Education, Grant Award No. R117E00134.

Part of the data described here is reported in two more accessible articles, in addition to the references cited in the discussion below:

Freppon, P. A. (1991). Children's concepts of the nature and purpose of reading in different instructional settings. *Journal of Reading Behavior, 23*(2), 139–163.

Dahl, K. L., & Freppon, P. A. 1991. Literacy learning in whole-language classrooms: An analysis of low socioeconomic urban children learning to read and write in kindergarten. In J. Zutell & S. McCormick (Eds.), *Learner Factors/ Teacher Factors: Issues in Literacy Research and Instruction*, pp. 149–158. Chicago, IL: National Reading Conference.

Two studies were involved in this comparison: an investigation of children's sense-making in skills-based classrooms (Dahl, Purcell-Gates, & McIntyre, 1989) and a similar study in whole language classrooms (Dahl & Freppon, 1991). Both studies were ethnographic, spanning a two-year period from kindergarten through first grade, and both studies documented children's evolving hypotheses about reading and writing. The

school populations "were representative of the racial and cultural mix typical of the urban low-income populations in the midwest—African American and white Appalachian" (Dahl & Freppon, 1992). The learners at each site were randomly selected from among those who qualified for the federally funded lunch program. Seven learners remained through the two-year skills-based study; twelve completed the whole language study. The "focal learners" were racially balanced in each study (four African American and three Appalachian white in the skills-based study; six of each ethnic background in the whole language study).

At the beginning of kindergarten and at the end of first grade, all learners in both studies completed six kinds of tasks assessing various aspects of written language knowledge: (1) an "Intentionality" task designed to determine to what extent the children understood that written language is a symbol system conveying meaning; (2) Marie Clay's (1979) Concepts About Print test; (3) three tasks designed to determine children's knowledge of the alphabetic principle and their knowledge of letter/sound relations; (4) two tasks designed to determine children's understanding of how written narratives are structured; (5) a task requiring children to pretend to read a wordless storybook to a doll, in order to determine the children's "Written Narrative Register" (Purcell-Gates, 1988); and, (6) a writing task designed to elicit children's concepts of writing. The researchers describe most of these tasks in detail.

Upon entering kindergarten, the children in both studies had a very limited understanding of written language. The children in the whole language kindergartens scored slightly lower on every pretest measure except one. Two years later, children in the skills-based classrooms showed statistically significant gains on all measures except one (the Written Narrative Register); those in the whole language classrooms showed statistically significant gains on all six measures. With five of the six assessment measures (all except Story Structure), the whole language children had lower pretest scores than the skills-based children. However, the whole language children scored higher on all six of the posttest measures (Dahl & Freppon, 1992, p. 24). Two of these six differences were statistically significant: the tests of written register and concepts of writing.

Interestingly, the skills-based group was knowledgeable about intentionality (writing as conveying meaning), though this was not explicitly emphasized during instruction. Similarly, the whole language group had comparable (in fact, slightly higher) scores on the tests of alphabetic principle and letter/sound relations, though these are taught less directly and less extensively in whole language classrooms. Furthermore, a much greater proportion of the whole language learners consistently applied their knowledge of letter/sound relations effectively by the end of first grade (Dahl & Freppon, 1992, p. 36).

The more interesting and significant differences between children in the two kinds of classrooms were qualitative, not quantitative. For example:

1. In the whole language classrooms, children's ongoing talk as they participated in reading and writing demonstrated that they perceived themselves as readers and writers, even if they were relatively less proficient readers and writers than their classmates. Regardless of their proficiency or degree of success, all the whole

language children tended to persist in reading and writing activities. In the skills-based classrooms, these patterns were restricted to just the most proficient readers and writers.

2. Children in the whole language classrooms participated actively in the reading and discussion of literature, related new books to previously read texts, and developed a critical stance toward trade books. The curriculum in the skills-based classrooms did not encourage these behaviors in students.
3. In skills-based classrooms, passivity appeared to be the most frequent coping strategy for learners having difficulty. In whole language classrooms, those having difficulty tended to draw upon other learners for support: by saying the phrases and sentences that others could read, by copying what they wrote, and so forth. The less proficient literacy learners in whole language classrooms still attempted to remain engaged in literacy activities with their peers.
4. In reading, whole language students at each level of proficiency demonstrated a greater variety of reading strategies and more active engagement in reading.
5. By the end of first grade, a considerably larger proportion of the whole language children were writing sentences and stories.

In summary, the children in the whole language classrooms demonstrated slightly greater gains on quantitative measures of literacy skills, including knowledge of the alphabetic principle and of letter/sound relations. The greatest differences, however, occurred in the range and depth of attitudes and behaviors characteristic of literate individuals. The authors conclude that "a number of instructional elements and practices were productive for low-SES inner-city children. These included extensive experience with children's literature, writing opportunities with self-selected topics, social contexts where learners could work together, and one-on-one teacher conferences" (Dahl & Freppon, 1992, p. 71). Only the last of these was found in the skills-based classrooms.

P. A. Freppon, 1993

Freppon, P. A. (1993). Making sense of reading and writing in urban classrooms: Understanding at-risk children's knowledge construction in different curricula. Final Report to the Office of Educational Research and Improvement. U.S. Department of Education, Grant Award No. R117E102361-91.

This study built upon the previously described study of Dahl and Freppon (1992). The same children participated in this follow-up study, now as second graders. One question the investigator wanted to address is the frequently asked question, "Do children with experience in a whole language curriculum, particularly in the early grades, have the skills necessary for success in a traditional, skills-based curriculum?" Another research question was the extent to which students maintained the literacy abilities, behaviors, and attitudes they had developed through kindergarten and first grade.

One group of eight children from the original whole language group in Dahl and Freppon (1992) made a transition to a skills-based second grade (the Transition Group), while the other group of nine continued in a whole language classroom in second grade (the Continuing Group). All participating children were given pretests and posttests. Eight focal children, four in each group, were closely followed. Data gathering included written artifacts, reading samples, field notes, and audio and video tapes.

At the end of second grade, there was little difference between groups on the standardized tests, and little difference in their gain from pretest to posttest. Findings from the reading and writing interviews revealed several areas of decline in the Transition Group while the Continuing Group generally remained stable or gained in some areas. For example: the Transition Group, now in a skills-based second grade, showed 37 percent less identification of items to be read beyond school, while the Continuing Group, still in a whole language classroom showed 33 percent more identification of items to read beyond school. The Transition Group showed a 30 percent decrease in responses reflecting megacognitive or strategic knowledge, while the Continuing Group showed a 30 percent increase. The Transition Group showed a 32 percent increase in statements that writing was difficult, a 38 percent increase in preference for writing with others, and stability in citing the story and surface features as important in writing. The Continuing Group showed no increase in statements that writing was difficult, stability in preference for writing with others, and a 30 percent or greater increase in citing the story and surface features as important in writing (pp. 24-25).

The focal children in the Transition Group concentrated primarily on "getting through" assignments. Persistence in self-selected reading and writing declined in the Transition Group, among all but the most academically proficient child within that focal group. In contrast, the focal children in the Continuing Group maintained talk and action demonstrating a sense of themselves as readers and writers and persisted in self-selected reading and writing during second grade, regardless of their academic proficiency.

The investigator concluded that the children in the Transition Group had the literacy skills necessary for success in the skills-based second grade classroom, but that some of the children showed a loss of motivation for literacy experiences that was not experienced by the students who continued in a whole language classroom (p. 85).

C. F. Stice and N. P. Bertrand, 1990

Stice, C. F., & Bertrand, N. P. (1990). *Whole language and the emergent literacy of at-risk children: A two-year comparative study*. Nashville: Center of Excellence: Basic Skills, Tennessee State University, ED 324 636.

Stice and Bertrand begin by observing, "Too often poor and minority children are not becoming sufficiently literate to allow the achievement of social and economic parity" (p. 3). They cited Neisser (1986) as demonstrating that neither the traditional approaches to literacy instruction (phonics/skills or traditional basal) nor the decoding,

subskills approaches (or behavioral/mastery learning) have proved successful in the case of poor, minority children. Their study focused on the effects of a whole language approach to the literacy development of at-risk first- and second-graders, in comparison with a traditional skills approach.

The study involved fifty children, averaging five each in five whole language classrooms, grades 1 and 2, and their counterparts from traditional skills classrooms. The study included both rural and inner-city children who were deemed to be "at risk," according to typical factors.

Several quantitative and qualitative measures were used to compare the two groups, including scores on the reading portion of the Stanford Achievement Test (Primary I and II), responses to a Concepts About Print survey, analysis of an oral reading and retelling, writing samples, and individual interviews.

On the Stanford Achievement Test, the whole language children showed slightly greater gains than the traditionally taught children, but the gains were too slight to be statistically significant. While the children in the whole language groups scored lower on the Concepts About Print test to begin with, they scored significantly higher on the posttest. The children in whole language classrooms did as well on traditional spelling as their counterparts, while also using more invented spellings. Whole language children offered significantly longer, more complete versions of the stories they retold, suggesting that their comprehension might have been better. They also corrected more of their miscues.

Data from the reading and writing interviews revealed several interesting trends, similar to those in the Freppon study and the Dahl and Freppon study previously cited:

1. The children in the whole language classrooms were more aware of alternative strategies for dealing with problems, such as problems with particular words. For example, when asked, "When you are reading and you come to something you don't know, what do you do?" the whole language children suggested six strategies, while the children in traditional classrooms suggested only three.
2. The whole language children appeared to feel better about themselves as readers and writers. When asked, "Who do you know who is a good reader?" 82 percent of the kindergartners in the whole language classrooms said "Me," but only 5 percent of the kindergartners in the traditional classrooms mentioned themselves. During the first-grade year, when the children were asked directly, "Are you a good reader?" 70 percent of the whole language children said yes, but only 33 percent of the traditional children said yes.
3. The whole language children appeared to focus more on meaning and the communicative nature of language. For example, when asked, "What makes a good reader?" they reported that good readers read a great deal and that they can read any book in the room. The children in the traditional classrooms tended to focus on words and surface correctness; they reported that good readers read big words, they know all the words, and they don't miss any words.
4. The children in the whole language classrooms seemed to be developing greater independence in both reading and writing. The children in traditional classrooms seemed to be more dependent on the teacher when their initial strategy failed.

Again, the standardized test scores of the children in the whole language classrooms were slightly (though not significantly) better than the scores of children in the traditional classrooms. The other measures discussed suggest, however, that they are far ahead of their counterparts in developing the understanding, strategies, and attitudes of readers, writers, and thinkers.

WHOLE LANGUAGE VERSUS TRADITIONAL CLASSROOMS: TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS AND TESTABLE HYPOTHESES

The research described above is a fairly small research base, and these studies are doubtless not without their limitations and flaws. On the other hand, it also true that these research results corroborate conclusions from more naturalistic research; they do not stand alone in support of whole language. Furthermore, other comparative studies have generated similar results (see the summaries in Stephens, 1991; Shapiro, 1990; Tunnell & Jacobs, 1989).

Combining the results of these studies, then, it would seem reasonable to draw the following tentative conclusions, as long as we consider them to be reframable as hypotheses subject to further testing. In general:

1. Children in whole language classrooms typically show greater gains on various reading tests and subtests—or at least they did in these research studies, though the differences often were not statistically significant.
2. Children in whole language classrooms develop greater ability to use phonics knowledge effectively than children in more traditional classrooms, where skills are practiced in isolation. (For another relevant study, see also A. E. Cunningham, 1990.)
3. Children in whole language classrooms develop vocabulary, spelling, grammar, and punctuation skills as well as or better than children in more traditional classrooms. (In addition to some of the studies above, see Calkins, 1980; Gunderson & Shapiro, 1987, 1988; DiStefano & Killion, 1984.)
4. Children in whole language classrooms are more inclined and able to read for meaning rather than just to identify words. They also are able to describe more fully the stories they have read.
5. Children in whole language classrooms develop more strategies for dealing with problems in reading—e.g., problem words.
6. Children in whole language classrooms develop greater facility in writing.
7. Children in whole language classrooms develop a stronger sense of themselves as readers and writers.
8. Children in whole language classrooms develop greater independence as readers and writers.

As you will have noticed, only one of these conclusions relates to standardized test scores, because whole language researchers consider them relatively unimportant and often downright misleading in assessing children's actual ability to read and to write,

Patrice Stendahl
8907 Gee St.
Juneau, Ak. 99801
(907) 789-3439

February 22, 1998

Re: CS for Senate Bill No. 203
0-LS1002\H

The Honorable Con Bunde
State Capitol
Juneau, Ak. 99801-1182

Dear Representative Bundy:

I am a certificated teacher and am currently employed as a Literacy Leader in the Juneau School District. I provide supplemental instruction in reading and writing for targeted lst and 2nd grader students and also participate in district-wide initiatives and curriculum and assessment development. I am writing to you as a private citizen and as a parent.

I was in attendance during your February 20, 1998 HESS Committee hearing on the above referenced bill. During that meeting, Senator Taylor stated that this bill has the following rationales: 1. We want to make certain our children know how to read. 2. We want to teach reading in a way that has proven effective. 3. We want tests to be administered so that we will know how our students are doing. 4. If the tests show a student is having difficulties, we will provide special, intensive help at an early age.

Senator Taylor invited the people present at the hearing, and on the teleconference, to submit to the committee articles which disprove that phonics instruction is the best method of teaching reading. I am enclosing an article which appeared in the December 1997 issue of Phi Delta Kappan, an education publication, and I would invite you and the other members of your committee to read this article. You may feel that the author's comments on politics and politicians are unfair, but I believe that her emphasis on letting research (as opposed to what's "hot") guide us in shaping standards and curriculum is both timely and valid.

I also believe that Senator Taylor's *rationales* for this bill are valid and good, but I disagree with the idea that simply requiring systematic intensive phonics and standardized tests will help us reach those goals. The process of learning to read is a complicated, individual one; our students come to us with a wide variety of background knowledge, experiences and language abilities. All of these factors, along with the less tangible factors of personality, family culture, and attitude, affect a child's ability to read. There is no panacea, one size fits all method of teaching children to read.

Most, if not all, of our primary teachers already incorporate phonics into their instruction, but it is usually done in a contextual manner, not only in a drill and skill way. As the enclosed article points out, research shows that emphasizing only phonics instruction and drilling children on isolated letters or sounds is not effective, whether it's done on paper or on a talking computer.

In regards to standardized testing for lst and 2nd graders, I believe that many school districts in Alaska already have individualized assessments that give teachers a very good indication of how students are progressing and what their weaknesses and strengths are. For example, in Juneau, the primary teachers use the Reading Recovery running records to keep track of students' progress and to determine which reading strategies a child is independently using and which strategies still need to be taught or emphasized. These running records can be done quickly and at any time and are excellent assessement tools for the teachers; they not only inform us about where the child is, but about how we need to tailor our instruction to meet that student's needs.

Thank you for the opportunity to share some of my thoughts about reading instruction with you. The process of learning to read is a fascinating one, and the moments that you know the child has "it", whether it's the ability to read a word for each word on the page, or to realize that what they've read isn't making sense, so they try again, are truly exciting, both for the teacher and the child.

Before you vote on this bill, I hope that you will have an opportunity to talk to more teachers, parents, administrators, and reading experts and to find out more about how we teach and assess primary readers. I believe that as you talk to these people, you will find that phonics is not "the" answer, anymore than whole language is. As is the case with so many other things in life, balance is the key.

Sincerely,

Patrice Stendahl

Patrice Stendahl

Sensationalism, Politics, And Literacy

What's Going On?

BY RONA F. FLIPPO

Ms. Flippo provides evidence that, despite extreme differences in philosophy, expert reading researchers do agree on a number of practices and contexts with regard to reading instruction and development. These must not be ignored, she warns, in favor of what the politicians think.

AS A READING educator I am appalled by what I see in newspapers and popular magazines, in the reports of state boards, and in statements from legislatures all across the U.S. W[illegible] the subject is reading [illegible]d literacy. I am [illegible]riously concerned about the message [illegible] is being delivered. Consider these headlines.

• "Ways of Teaching Reading Debated: It's Phonics vs. 'Whole Language'" (Anthony Flint, *Boston Globe*, 7 November 1995);

• "The Reading and Writing Wars" (22 November 1996, *Wall Street Journal*);

• "The Great Debate Revisited" (Art Levine, December 1994, *Atlantic*);

• "As Reading Scores Plummet, States Get Hooked on Phonics" (Laurel Walters, 18 April 1996, *Christian Science Monitor*);

• "Parents Report on America's Reading Crisis: Why the Whole Language Approach to Teaching Has Failed Millions of Children" (Art Levine, October 1996, *Parents Magazine*);

• "Phonics Boom: Proponents Say Any Other Approach to Reading Only Spells Trouble" (Elizabeth Kastor, 15 November 1996, *Washington Post*);

• "Why Kids Can't Read in California" (Debra Saunders, 12 January 1996, *San Francisco Chronicle*);

• "California Leads Revival of Teaching by Phonics" (22 May 1996, *New York Times*);

• "State Embraces Phonics in Approving New Texts" (Richard Colvin, 13 December 1996, *Los Angeles Times*); and

Illustration by Jim Hummel

RONA F. FLIPPO is a professor of reading education at Fitchburg (Mass.) State College, author of Reading Assessment and Instruction: A Qualitative Approach to Diagnosis *(Harcourt Brace, 1997), co-author of* Reading for Success in Elementary Schools *(McGraw-Hill, 1997), and author/editor of two forthcoming books dealing with the study on which this article is based.*

• "State Rejects 2 Texts, Citing Phonics Law" (Robert Gunnison, 13 December 1996, *San Francisco Chronicle*).

In essence, what these headlines promise, the accompanying articles deliver. The media and politicians blame whole language for California's (and other states') reading problems. Respected reading researchers are defamed and pitted against one another in the media. "Quick fix" solutions are proposed and acted on by state boards and legislatures, and phonics-based curricula, materials, and drills are being implemented in many places — indeed, mandated in some.

All this activity seems to be designed to get back to the way reading was taught in the "good old days." Most of the current proposals that enjoy political support consist primarily of throwing out recent decades of cognitive, linguistic, and sociocultural research in favor of embracing the beliefs of the past. Are we educators going to stand for this? Do we want politicians and the media to shape public opinion and then make decisions about reading education based on their own understandings, rather than on those of literacy researchers? If educators allow this to happen in the area of reading and literacy education, it will inevitably spread to science, math, and social studies as well.

Why Is This Happening?

If I were a political scientist or a policy analyst, I would probably provide a very sophisticated and complex answer to the question of why this is happening now. In fact, I'm sure that the answer is multidimensional and complex. But I'm just a reading researcher and teacher educator, and I view all the sensationalism and politics only from my own perspective. To me, it looks as though the "war" between whole language and phonics is little more than an opportunity for politicians to call attention to themselves and to trick the general public into believing that they are leading the way toward crucial and necessary changes in the public schools.

School issues are always "hot" issues because public schools affect everyone. Whether you are a parent, a grandparent, a great-grandparent, or a prospective parent of a child in public school, you are probably concerned. Even if your children are in private schools or if you do not have children, public school issues affect you. For instance, property values are inextricably tied to the public schools. A recent article in *Smart Money* magazine observes that "school district mania is a national obsession, driving up house prices in 'good' districts, deflating them in areas where the schools are seen as lacking, dominating the lives of anxious parents who worry that the 'wrong' decision will spell disaster for their children, not only in the competitive world of education, but in their careers, their lives."[1] Is it any wonder that school issues offer such great opportunities for those with political ambitions?

So what really happened in California? A shock wave went through the state when the data from the 1994 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) indicated that California fourth-graders had tied for last place, along with those in Louisiana, on the nation's scorecard for reading. This set off a widespread reaction and a general search for something to blame for the state's poor showing. The philosophy of whole language (inaccurately referred to as a "method"), which California had espoused since 1987, came in for the strongest criticism. As a result, California, in its current back-to-basics mood, passed mandates requiring public schools to teach explicit phonics and spelling, to use skills-based basal reading programs that emphasize phonics instruction, and to retrain teachers in a phonics curriculum.

Rather than take responsibility, face the facts, and "own up" to the many real factors that have contributed to California's public education problems, California politicians have made the whole-language philosophy their scapegoat. What's the actual situation? Although California's fourth-graders scored at the bottom of the 40 states that participated in the 1994 NAEP and scored near the bottom in the 1992 NAEP, there is no evidence that reading achievement in California has gotten appreciably worse since the state adopted a literature-based language arts framework in 1987. In fact, prior to embracing a whole-language philosophy, California schools were already in trouble. That is probably why Californians looked to whole-language ideas for the help they obviously needed.

California's crisis exists because of economic and sociocultural problems. Schools are overcrowded. There are tremendous numbers of children whose first language is not English. "In 1990, more than 137 different languages and cultures were represented in the state, making the sociocultural and linguistic context of California one of the most diverse in the world," according to the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing.[2] California ranks high in poverty, low in school libraries, low in public library access, and low in books available at home.[3]

The questions that should be asked of California politicians aren't questions about philosophies of instruction but questions such as these: How many dollars are spent per student? How many children per classroom? What about overcrowded schools? How many English-as-a-second-language students do you have, how has that number grown, and how are you educating them? How good were your reading test scores in 1986? Were your teachers well trained and committed to a whole-language philosophy of teaching and learning, or did the state just adopt this philosophy in 1987 because it sounded progressive and you needed to do "something," just as you need to do "something" now?

Other states have begun to follow California's lead. Organized back-to-phonics movements have been reported in North Carolina, Ohio, and Texas. The state superintendent in Illinois has been quoted as blaming whole language for that state's drop in reading scores. It has also been reported that parents in Illinois are asking for "phonics-only" charter schools.[4] The president of the Maryland State Board of Education has been quoted as welcoming a movement toward phonics. Indeed, it has been reported that states are trying to pass laws mandating specific phonics courses for teacher education students. For example, under a bill proposed in North Carolina, certified teachers would have been required to pass a competency test in phonics or lose their teaching licenses.[5] (However, that bill did not pass.) In Massachusetts, as a result of a call for a return to phonics by the chairman of the state board, a draft of the curriculum frameworks for English/language arts is being reworked to include a heavy emphasis on phonics instruction.[6] Many other states are reported to be leaning toward phonics-based teaching and legislation, as well. Overall, switching philosophies and taking extreme positions, whether right or left, have become the panaceas of school reform in the U.S.

What Do Reading Researchers Know?

We know that decisions about reading

instruction should not be set up as extreme "either/or" positions. We know that phonics and other necessary skills instruction can be taught by teachers who have whole-language philosophies. Indeed, many teachers with whole-language philosophies have been teaching phonics, as well as other skills of word recognition and analysis, as part of their reading programs. However, they teach these skills within the context of students' reading materials, rather than by focusing on them in isolation. We also know that neither "phonics" nor "whole language" is a method. Phonics is a word-analysis skill that involves the use of symbol/sound relationships; whole language is a philosophy that includes the belief that all language systems are interwoven. Finally, we know that teachers should not be required to teach by one approach alone. Teachers must have the latitude to use many approaches for their reading instruction in order to meet the needs and strategies of each child.

Even though each of us has an individual set of beliefs and philosophies regarding teaching, most of us agree with certain practices and contexts concerning learning and environments for learning. In the remainder of this article I wish to report some major agreements among experts in the field of literacy and reading research. I suggest that these agreements — which span philosophies — rather than the much publicized disagreements, should be considered by state boards and politicians as they propose, shape, and mandate their legislation. For instance, if reading experts generally agree that phonics should not be stressed and taught in isolation, then shouldn't politicians refrain from forcing this practice on teachers?

Educators in all fields must take charge of their instructional lives. The research provides us with the information we need to do so. Our understandings and preparation provide us with the means to analyze, discuss, and explain to the general public, to the media, and to politicians what we have learned from research. Let's do so and take charge of educational decisions in the political arena.

The Expert Study

My study of experts spanned 10 years. To gather these data I employed a Delphi technique, which involved asking selected reading experts, who represented the major schools of thought in literacy education, to specify what they believed teachers "should do" and "shouldn't do" in their classrooms to promote reading development. Each of the selected experts generated his or her own list of items anonymously, and the remaining experts agreed or disagreed, again anonymously, with each item on these lists. Each round was followed up with queries and interviews as needed.

After four complete rounds, I found that there were 33 practices and contexts that the experts agreed would tend to make learning to read difficult for children; they also agreed on 19 things that teachers could do to facilitate the children's learning to read. (Although they agreed with all 19 of these contexts and practices, they put qualifications on four of them.) These consensus items represent agreements shared by literacy experts across the differing philosophies.[1] The experts included in my study are described briefly below.

• Richard Anderson is widely known as the lead author of the much-cited report *Becoming a Nation of Readers* (Center for the Study of Reading, 1985) and for his extensive research on schemata, vocabulary, and children's reading.

• Brian Cambourne, an Australian researcher and educator, is best known for his "Conditions of Learning" model discussed in *The Whole Story* (Ashton Scholastic, 1988). The model is based on his study of learning environments in holistic classrooms. He has promoted the whole-language movement in Australia and in the U.S.

• Edward Fry is best known as the creator of "Fry's Readability Graph," the most widely used formula for determining the readability of textbooks. He is also an author of a supplemental basal reading program.

• Yetta Goodman is the lead author of the *Reading Miscue Inventory* (Richard C. Owen, 1987), a well-known assessment tool for evaluating children's oral reading strategies. She has also developed other holistic observational and instructional strategies and is a leader of the whole-language movement in the U.S. and worldwide.

• Jane Hansen is (with Donald Graves) the creator of the "Author's Chair," a well-known and widely used classroom strategy for highlighting the importance of authorship. She is particularly known for her work with reading and writing connections.

> The questions that should be asked of California politicians aren't questions about philosophies of instruction.

• Jerome Harste is widely known for his research in early literacy and language development. He is one of the best-known advocates for the whole-language movement.

• Wayne Otto is the creator of the "Wisconsin Design," a plan that was used nationwide for managing classroom reading instruction with a focus on specific skill development.

• Scott Paris is widely known for his writing on authentic assessment and portfolio assessment, as well as for the development of reading strategies.

• P. David Pearson was the lead editor of the first *Handbook of Reading Research* (Longman, 1984). He is widely known for his work in reading comprehension and for being co-director of the original "Standards Project for English Language Arts" (1992-94). He is also an author of a basal reading program.

• George Spache (deceased 1996) was the author of *Diagnostic Reading Scales* (CTB/McGraw-Hill, 1981), a widely used standardized reading test (first published in 1963). He is remembered for his research and leadership in the field of reading from its earliest days.

• Rand Spiro is particularly known for developing schema theoretic models of reading and for his related research on reading comprehension, text processing, and theories of cognitive flexibility.

The Findings

The list of agreements contains several redundant and overlapping items, and, upon examination, some of these items seem more important and central to reading than others. Therefore, here I will high-

light the findings and generalize the agreements that seem most significant to the debates reported in the media and to what the state boards and legislatures have been acting on.

Practices that the experts agree would tend to make learning to read difficult for students include: 1) emphasizing only phonics instruction, 2) drilling children on isolated letters or sounds, 3) making sure that children do it correctly or not at all, 4) focusing on the single best answer, 5) making word-perfect oral reading the prime objective of your classroom reading program, 6) focusing on reading skills rather than on interpretation and comprehension, 7) using workbooks or worksheets with every reading lesson, 8) grouping readers according to ability, 9) following a basal program without making modifications, 10) teaching letters and words one at a time and making sure each new letter or word is learned before moving on to the next letter or word, and 11) expecting students to be able to spell correctly all the words they can read.

Practices that experts agree would tend to facilitate learning to read include: 1) bringing opportunities for reading, writing, talking, and listening together so that each feeds off and into the other; 2) talking about and sharing different kinds of reading; 3) focusing on using reading as a tool for learning; 4) making reading functional and purposeful; 5) developing positive self-perceptions and expectations concerning reading; 6) using a broad spectrum of sources and a variety of real books for student reading materials; 7) providing multiple and repeated demonstrations of how reading is done or used; and 8) using silent reading whenever possible and whenever appropriate to the purpose.

What Do These Agreements Really Mean?

These agreements mean that reading experts — from those with more traditional views to those with whole-language views and many in between — do not believe that the political solutions now being pushed are good for children or conducive to reading development. In fact, if you carefully review the major agreements among these diverse experts, you will see that the political solutions offered in California and other states where politicians are jumping on the "back to phonics" bandwagon are often counter to what literacy experts across philosophies believe to be facilitative practices and contexts.

Please understand that I am not saying that my study means that there is just one appropriate position or approach to teaching reading. On the contrary, decisions about reading instruction must be situational and should be based on the needs of the particular child and on the context. Teachers should be granted the professional latitude to use procedures, approaches, and adaptations that are appropriate for a particular child in a particular context. Of course, teachers must have a firm understanding of literacy and of research findings in order to make these informed instructional decisions.[8] But legislatures won't achieve that end by dictating procedures, approaches, and practices with which most reading experts disagree.

In addition, while politicians across the country are forcing teachers to focus on phonics and skills instruction, they are all but ignoring comprehension and vocabulary (word knowledge). Another recent study, which focused on today's "hot" and "not hot" topics in reading research and practice, found that "hot" topics (topics that are receiving current, positive attention) are phonics, phonemic awareness, and skills instruction. The "not hot" topics (topics that are receiving negative or little attention) are comprehension, schema theory, and word knowledge/vocabulary.[9]

We in public education often find ourselves at the mercy of the policy makers who control policies, legislation, and the purse strings that keep our schools and colleges operating. Collectively, we are the largest group of education professionals and researchers in this nation. We must take charge.

We must use our expertise and the findings of research, including such studies as this one, to shape the public's understandings. Educational philosophies, in any area of the curriculum, should not become scapegoats for our politicians' inability to solve the economic and sociocultural problems of our states. Nor can we simply shed our belief systems in order to "fit in" with a more currently acceptable political viewpoint.

My study provides evidence that, despite extreme differences in philosophy, expert reading researchers do agree on a number of practices and contexts with regard to reading instruction and development.[10] These must not be ignored in favor of what the politicians think. Leaders of public education and practitioners in schools and colleges nationwide need to assert themselves. Extreme political decisions about educational curricula — made by politicians without the consensus of the appropriate experts in our fields — will put our schools and our children's learning at risk.

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1. Nellie S. Huang, "The New Math: Home vs. School," *Smart Money*, December 1996, p. 128.

2. *Standards of Program Quality and Effectiveness for Professional Teacher Internship Programs for Multiple and Single-Subject Teaching Credentials with a (Bilingual) Crosscultural, Language, and Academic Development (CLAD/BCLAD) Emphasis* (Sacramento: California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 1996), pp. 3-4.

3. Jeff McQuillan, "Whole Language Not to Blame in California," letter to the editor, *Reading Teacher*, December/January 1996/97, p. 32.

4. Christina Duff, "ABCeething: How Whole Language Became a Hot Potato in and out of Academia," *Wall Street Journal*, 30 October 1996, pp. A-1, A-10.

5. Laurel S. Walters, "As Reading Scores Plummet, States Get Hooked on Phonics," *Christian Science Monitor*, 18 April 1996, pp. 1, 4.

6. Dan French, "The Debate on Curriculums for Massachusetts Schools: Reform Is Undercut in Favor of Ideology," *Boston Globe*, 14 January 1997, p. A-15.

7. The main philosophies that these experts are often associated with can be categorized under three broad headings, as explained in Theodore L. Harris and Richard E. Hodges, eds., *The Literacy Dictionary: The Vocabulary of Reading and Writing* (Newark, Del.: International Reading Association, 1995), p. 256. First, the "whole-language" philosophy (sometimes called "reader-based" or "holistic" or "top-down") is a theoretical point of view that sees "reading comprehension [as beginning] with and . . . controlled by the experiences and expectations that the reader brings to text." Second, the "traditional" philosophy (sometimes called "text-based" or "specific skills" or "bottom-up") is a theoretical point of view that sees "reading comprehension [as beginning] with and . . . controlled by the text, as in letter and text decoding." And third, the "interactive" philosophy (sometimes called "integrated") is a theoretical perspective that sees "reading comprehension [as involving] both the accurate, sequential processing of text and the experiences and expectancies that the reader brings to the text, each acting on and modifying the other."

8. P. David Pearson, "Six Ideas in Search of a Champion: What Policymakers Should Know About the Teaching and Learning of Literacy in Our Schools," *Journal of Literacy Research*, vol. 28, 1996, pp. 302-9.

9. Jack Cassidy and Judith K. Wenrich, "What's Hot, What's Not for 1997," *Reading Today*, February/March 1997, p. 34.

10. More details and information on this study and its findings will be available in the forthcoming books, *What Do the Experts Say? Contexts and Practices for Classroom Reading* (Heinemann) and *Reading Researchers in Search of Common Ground* (publisher under negotiation). ☒

Sen Wilker

20Feb98

Dear Legislators,

We, as teachers of young children, **urge you not to pass Senate Bill 203** requiring that phonics be taught in grades kindergarten through third.

Like you, we feel that phonics is an important component of any good reading program. However, research clearly indicates that phonics, along with other important reading strategies, is best taught within a context of authentic reading experiences rather than as an isolated skill or prescribed program.

Primary grade teachers around the state already teach phonics in all literacy events throughout the school day. Whether it's listening to stories, writing phonetically in journals or finding letters and specific sounds in a chart poem, children are building knowledge of phonics in a way that makes sense to them.

Before you make a decision on this bill, please take the time to speak with experts in the field of early childhood education and visit primary classrooms to see for yourself that professional educators are, indeed, doing what they do best: teaching phonics in a way that each individual child can understand.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Suzanne Martin
Lora T. Sterling
Sandra Lyons

Kathi Riemer
P.O. Box 1752
Petersburg, Alaska 99833
Phone (907) 772-4442
Fax (907)772-3505
e-mail kriemer@alaska.net

TO: Health, Education and Social Services Committee
President Gary Wilken
RE: SB 203 Literacy Restoration Act

It seems that people have it in their nature to look for quick fixes or instant solutions to the complexities of life. Don't people understand that nothing in the world is simple? I am often frustrated by the group of well meaning parents that insist that we stop trying to improve our practices and get back to the basics. There is nothing basic about teaching reading. We are fortunate that we live in a time when there is a multitude of sound information about how to help children learn. It is frustrating however to have to fight to do what we know to be right. In February I attended a conference in Phoenix, Arizona, titled *Restructuring for the 21st Century*. Why don't you research the data, especially the new information we have from brain research. When you do, you will learn that skills, or phonics, are important but not as important as the development of concepts. The brain needs to have prior knowledge if it is to to attach meaningful new information. Skills are isolated nonsense if they are not learned in context and used for some purpose. After reviewing the latest information about how children learn and how we as professionals can facilitate their growth, one teacher remarked, "We are the only group of professionals who have volumes of information to prove that what we are doing with children is wrong and we do it anyway." One of the reasons we continue to plod along the path we've walked for so long is that quick, easy fixes to complex societal ills gets good press and people want to believe it. You are in a position to make a difference, please do not be carried away by a well meaning band wagon. Think sensibly and work for long term solutions.

Sincerely yours,

Kathi Riemer

Kathi Riemer
Parent and Teacher

January 23, 1998

Re: Senate Bill: 203

Dear Members of the Senate HESS Committee:

The teaching of phonemic awareness has been around for a very long time.

There have been many studies over the years that have determined that the teaching of phonemic awareness is highly predictive of success in learning to read.

I believe it is vital to include as part of an integrated reading/language program the teaching of phonemic awaroness.

However, if the State of Alaska is going to mandate this please consider the desperate need to increase funding to: 1: Buy instruction/curriculum and curriculum support materials to teach phonemic awareness and; 2. Train teachers to teach phonemic awareness. (Many teachers training as educators have not been trained to teach phonemic awareness). Example: Nikiski Elementary, last school year voted to introduce a school-wide phonemic education component in our reading/language program. Of course there was no money in the budget to do this. We were able to secure a $5,000.00 grant to purchase materials. This money covered just the basic manual and some of the consumable books. Two teachers, during the summer, went to Florida for the training.

This program is currently being implemented at Nikiski Elementary but to continue for the next year all our teachers need to be trained and we need the remaining materials and consumable workbooks.

Nikiski Elementary is committed to an integrated reading/language program but we need the money.

Sincerely,

Denise Cox, Librarian
Nikiski Elementary School

Post-it™ brand fax transmittal memo 7671	# of pages ▸ 1
To Robin Taylor	From Denise Cox
Co. Senate HESS	Co. Nik. Elem
Dept.	Phone # 776-8853
Fax # 465-4714	Fax # 776-5549

January 23, 1998

Senator Robin Taylor
Fax: 465-5714

Re: SB203

Dear Senator Taylor and Members of the Senate HESS Committee:

I am the parent of three children, one of which is currently enrolled in the first grade at Nikiski Elementary School. I am continually looking for ways to improve my child's education through participation, and I have learned a lot about the school system by attending budget meetings, school meetings and volunteering at the school.

Presently, Nikiski Elementary School has some of the lowest testing scores in the Borough. Although I believe there are several contributing factors, I feel that one of the reasons for the low test scores is the lack of consistent phonemic teaching methods for children. When my son entered Kindergarten, I was prepared to assist him with his phonemic lessons. Then I learned that each teacher has a different method of teaching, and there is not a standard approach to teaching language. Consequently, the phonemic teaching I an learned in Kindergarten was not be applicable in other grades. These inconsistencies are frustrating to children (and parents), causing many children to blackslide in their studies. In other cases, I believe children will "slide" through school, and will not have a clear understanding of the "common language". It also does not give an accurate idea of what the child does or does not know when testing occurs because there is not a consistent measuring tool to reflect standard teaching methods.

Fortunately, the teachers at Nikiski Elementary School voted last year to provide a common phonemic teaching approach for grades K-6. I also understand we are the only school in the district to adopt this approach. The materials are expensive, and we are left to fundraise the consumable items.

Presently, I am Chair of a Grants Committee at Nikiski Elementary. We are continually looking for additional sources of funding to meet unmet needs within our school. We have raised several thousand dollars in corporate donations for several areas addressed by teachers, parents and the community. But our reach is limited in terms of what our children need. I support your efforts to establish consistent phonemic teaching methods in our schools and encourage your support for the educational funds and materials our schools need to give our children the highest education possible.

Respectfully,

Ann E Dooley Krogseng

Ann Dooley-Krogseng

Post-it™ brand fax transmittal memo 7671	# of pages ▸
To Sen Taylor	From Ann Krogseng
Co. HESS	Co.
Dept. SB 203	Phone # 776.8113
Fax # 465-4714	Fax # 776.5449

2/20 3:00

Kirstie Leslie
224-7299 (Seward)
P.O. Box 2303

SB203 -

Please know that she's strongly opposed to this bill

This is not the way to ~~to~~ get kids to read.

She invites you ~~to~~ + others to come to schools and watch how teachers teach kids to read - and then make suggestions based on that!

She strongly opposes mandatory Summers.

TELECOPY COVER SHEET
Ketchikan Legislative Information Office
Office - (907) 225-9675 Fax - (907) 225-8546

TO: SHES

ATTN: Sen. Wilken FAX: 465-4714 PHONE: _____

FROM: June PHONE: _____

INSTRUCTIONS: Testimony for TC 80334 re SB 203

SENT: Date 2/23/98 Time 9:20a

DISPOSAL OF ORIGINAL: Discard _____ Hold for Pickup _____

NUMBER OF PAGES: 5 (NOT counting cover sheet)

TRANSMITTED BY: _____

TESTIMONY ON CSSB 203 -Literacy Restoration Act

This is Dr Bill Pfeifer. I am a Chiropractor in Ketchikan with 5 children in the public school system.

First, I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to a bill that has the potential to positively change the lives of so many of our young Alaskans.

My children are in grades 3, 5, 7, 9, and 10. I served 6 years on the Ketchikan College Advisory council as we transitioned from a community college to part of the University of Alaska. I currently sit on the school districts Ready for Work committee and have served on it's math committee.

My interest and efforts in K-12 education started when my oldest daughter was in Kindergarten. At the end of that year my wife and I called a meeting with both the teacher and the principal, and stated to them that our daughter had learned absolutely nothing throughout the entire year. They both agreed and that was the end of any discussion. There was something wrong with this picture, and I have been working since to change it.

I have done a lot of reading and research over the years and this legislation will bring the State closer to getting every child to "learn to read", so that they will be able to "read to learn".

The Legislature and the Dept of Education recognize the enormous number of children across the country who are not proficient readers or spellers. The general public sees it on a daily basis.

Reading is also a public health issue as recognized by the National Institute of Health and the amount of research they have put into this area.

The question today is WHAT DO WE DO?

CSSB 203 is your commitment to make reading a priority in the State of Alaska for every child It is much broader than phonics alone and is appropriately called the Literacy Restoration Act. It involves a clear

message from the legislature that reading failure is not inevitable, and that we are going to insist that these children have the opportunity to make choices later on in life because they are going to learn to read.

In considering this bill you will have to ask yourself if there is validated, reliable, and replicatable research out there, that answers the question of what do we do?

The answer is YES!

You need to understand the different research out there and what is credible and replicatable. I am sure you will be hearing from some of the experts directly, and will hear references to Reid Lyon and the research done through the National Institute of Health.

I will make reference to some of the testimony that Dr. Douglas Carnine made to the Washington State Legislature on this same subject of reading. Dr. Carnine is a professor at the University of Oregon and the Director of the National Center for Improving Tools of Education. I have a transcript of that testimony for anyone who is interested, But let me give you some of his statistics:

* "About 90% of the children who are poor readers in the 1st grade will be poor readers in the 3rd grade"

* "About 75% of the children who are poor readers in 4th grade will be poor readers in the 9th grade"

* Then, "If you consider a 3rd grade child of poverty, going to school with other poor children, who has been retained, and is reading a year below grade level, his chance of graduating from high school is near ZERO."

Can we afford to wait until 4th grade to test and determine that a child cannot read? You know the answer, and that is why you have this bill in front of you.

The value of Explicit Systematic Phonics has been well established in the research, as a vital part of any comprehensive reading program.

Let me tell you as a parent that you will likely hear the mantra that, "of course we teach phonics", so there is no reason to create legislation like SB 203. Most of us do not know what the research based, explicit systematic phonics instruction includes.

The reality is that many teachers, to no fault of there own, don't know, and were never taught how to teach an Explicit Systematic Phonics program that is researched based. Too often, single letter and dual letter blend sounds are the extent of the phonics instruction. I don't know how many frustrated parents have come to me with their child's paper filled with mis-spelled words. These same parents are often told that the mis-spelled words like -w-o-k- for walk, and -l-i-t- for light are evidence that they know their phonics. This level of phonics is not sufficient.

In fact Dr. Carnine states that, "when teachers say they are using phonics, it may not be the careful, systematic use of phonics as indicated in the research, so they're not going to get the benefit of actually using the research based phonics."

He further states that, "the NIH research has proven quite clearly that most students will not learn to read naturally by merely immersing them in a 'print rich environment'. It is not true that good readers use pictures and context, or skipping and guessing, to decode words." "..those are strategies of individuals who cannot read well, but in fact, whole language, is teaching the strategies that characterize disabled readers."

What has been done to train teachers in reading in many states was just the opposite of research. If you are spending precious State money to train teachers to do the wrong thing, you've got a problem.

We need to decide what research we are going to believe, and whether an agreement can be made that any training, and instructional material dollars, will be used in a consistent manner to get all kids to read which follows that research. We should learn from the mistakes of other states like California who has 5 out of 6 approved reading programs that do not follow the research.

We must also be aware of conflicts of interest. Dr Carnine brings out the fact that the leaders of the two national research organizations in reading are also authors of the programs that do not follow the research.

This bill is the first step. You will have to bring experts, well versed in this research, to train the current educators and test their proficiency.

With a system that is faced with today's transient population, continuity of education is even more important. One teacher teaching correctly, out of six that the student will have does not follow the research and will not provide the results.

You will also hear that many use an eclectic approach that is customized to the students learning style and developmental level. I have yet to have any evidence that this works, or that it is actually being done. I have asked the following with no result: What learning style is being used to teach my children and how was that determined? Show me the developmental continuum and where my children are on that continuum, and explain how that was determined? What usually is occurring is that a little bit of everything, via a shotgun approach, is being given to all the children without any true regard for the rhetoric being expounded. A quick look at the student's spelling will reveal a lot about what is going on in the classroom.

We cannot have ideology, or comfort levels, surpassing the needs of students. When you have strong research, and the kids have strong needs, we cannot go through process gyrations for another 10 years to get everyone to buy in. It is time to lead! We need to become knowledgeable on the valid research, educate the public and the teachers, train the teachers in explicit phonics instruction that follows the research, and provide early & frequent testing and intervention.

Most parents are young and battling to maintain a household, and raise their kids. They do not have the time, nor should they be forced to take the time away from their kids, to bird dog a system, to ensure that their kids can learn to read. Many will try to fill the gaps the system creates, but, unless it is part of the educational system you will have minimal success. With 5 kids we have seen the patterns and pitfalls of the system. Allowing kids to do things incorrectly just creates neurological engrams that are difficult if not

impossible to change without a disciplined conscious effort.

I would ask that you think of the rhetoric that parents are up against as you listen to any opposition to this bill. I would ask that you give every child the opportunity to read, and pass this legislation.

With all the research supporting this bill; With the Learning First Alliance of 12 National Educational Organizations including the NEA and AFT supporting researched based instruction; I am sure that the Alaska Department of Education will work with this legislature to insure that our Alaskan children will "learn to read", so that they can "read to learn", and make Alaska the best in the Nation.

Thank you,
I would be glad to answer any questions you may have.

For Reference:
Learning First Alliance 1001 Connecticut Ave. NW Suite 310 ,Washington D.C. 20036
(202) 822-8405 x 40 http://www.learningfirst.org

American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
American Association of School Administrators
American Federation of Teachers
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
Council of Chief State School Officers
Education Commission of the States
National School Board Association
National PTA
National Education Association
National Association of State Boards of Education
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Secondary School Principals

Monday, February 23, 1998

Senator Wilkins and Senate WESS Committee:

We wish to respond to SB 203 as proposed.

1. requiring districts to include intensive systematic phonics and spelling instruction in the curriculum for k-6 is
   a. an infringement on local control of schools. Who has given the legislature the power to legislate curriculum in our schools??
   b. Also, this requirement implies that phonics and spelling instruction is not already occurring in our elementary schools. That is simply not true.

2. requiring all students in K-3 to pass a nationally normed group administered test in basic reading and reading comprehension.
   a. students are already being tested by the state on the CAT, the Alaska State Writing Assessment, and now the Quality Schools Initiative. This proposal would take more instructional time for testing.
   b. What is 'passing' on a nationally normed test??
   c. How will we support and insure student success with this endeavor?
   d. What will happen to students who don't "pass"?

3. requiring a hiring preference for elementary teachers who have completed a course in the language basis of reading.
   a. What does this mean? Any reputable course offered in reading instruction today will be inclusive of all methodologies and will integrate phonics into the development of spelling and reading skills. Any qualified teacher today is doing just that.

We strongly oppose this bill. It usurps local control of schools and is one more step toward state mandated educational practices. As educators, we find this movement very counter-productive and it tends to further load an already overloaded educational bureaucracy.

Karen Eakes - 636 Main St. Ketchikan
Jane Vollmer P.O. Box 6011 " Ketchikan
Linda Johnson 1104 Millar St. "
Charlene L. Nelson Box 23305 Ketchikan
Marian Gonzales 10653 Paulf Rd. Ktn. AK 99901
[illegible] 5646 S. Tongass Hwy Ktn. AK 99901

Barbara Starr
P.O. Box 23570
Ketchikan, AK 99901

The Hess Committee
Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, AK 99801-1181

February 20, 1998

Dear Legislators,

I, as a working Reading Teacher, a parent of two school aged children and as a student seeking an advanced degree, strongly urge you not to pass Senat Bill 203.

I do agree that phonics is an important aspect of learning to read and we use it everyday in nearly every grade and class but there are other equally important components as well. The wording in your bill seems to leave out the other components.

The excellent teachers in the state of Alaska work very hard to make successful learners of our students, please do not tie their hands with proposals that are in this bill, please do not follow the unvalidated waves of public opinion and sentiment, please ask for help in research of the latest and best practices in teaching reading. Current research clearly shows that not all students learn the same way and today's best teachers are already searching for and implementing the methods that work for each student.

We, as professionals, parents and students of education, appreciate the legislature's help and support. We hope we can count on your continued support to let our well educated and experienced teaching professionals provide top quality education to each and every child in what ever method that best suites the learning styles and education needs of each individual child.

Once again, please do not allow legislation to pass that will hinder the ability of our teachers to teach or the ability of our children to learn. VOTE NO ON SENATE BILL 203!

Thank you,

Dorothy A. Potter

Dorothy A. Potter
P.O. Box 211
Chevak, AK 99463

cc:Mail for: Sheila Peterson

Subject: Re: SB203
From: Senator Gary Wilken 2/28/98 6:54 AM
To: msanders@kpbsd.k12.ak.us at CC2MHS1
cc: Sheila Peterson

Dear Ms. Sanders:

Thanks you for your note on SB 203. The bill has created quite a stir during our testimony.

We will continue to work on it in the Senate HESS to make it more acceptable to all.

Gary Wilken
Senator - West Fairbanks
Chairman - Senate HESS

_____ Reply Separator _____
Subject: SB203
Author: msanders@kpbsd.k12.ak.us at CC2MHS1
Date: 2/26/98 7:37 AM

I am writing to express my extreme concern over SB203. This legislation strikes me as a being a band-aid measure for a critical incident. One that will give the token appearance of addressing an issue in need of the highest quality efforts. I have been an Alaskan educator for 20 years and I have witnessed the sound basis for the concern that generated this attempt at legislation. It is true that effective models for high quality reading instruction are not as widespread or comprehensive as our students require.

It is also true that this situation needs to be rectified by the highest quality staff development at the school district and university level. However, the approach suggested in SB203 is one that represents only a partial understanding of the reading process, one that will allow some to believe the problem is being addressed while creating a funding and programmatic nightmare for those of us who will be forced to implement this legislation.

I urge you to drop this legislation in favor of creating a task force of the best reading educators in the state and/or nation as well as individuals with an understanding of the diverse nature of the Alaskan population and the unique learning needs of our students.

Sincerely,

Mo Sanders
Title 1 and Migrant Coordinator

Kenai Peninsula Borough School District
907-262-9137

Bethanie R. DeGayner
Box 2032
Petersburg, AK 99833
Email: degayner@alaska.net
February 23, 1998

TO: Health, Education and Social Services Committee

President Gary Wilken

RE: SB 203 Literacy Restoration Act

Dear Legislators,

I am writing to voice my opposition to SB 203, which I believe is based on erroneous assumptions about how children learn, and how good teachers teach. I am a preschool teacher and a mother of three avid readers. I have long been a classroom volunteer and have seen public school instructional practices firsthand.

Classroom teachers are already constantly teaching phonics, but not as an isolated subject in and of itself. Letters, and the sounds they make, are taught as children engage in literacy activities which have personal meaning to them. Teachers and children write lists, letters, stories, and thank-you notes. They read books, instructions, lunch menus and signs. Through these various activities, children learn more than letters and sounds. They learn the power, the relevance and the joy of the printed word. Knowing phonics is certainly a useful tool, and teachers strive to make sure each child acquires that as part of their mental "tool kit". However, it's wrong to assume that phonics is the only tool, or even the primary tool children use as they grow in literacy.

For a long time, phonics was over-emphasized in schools, and the U.S. has a deplorably high rate of adult illiteracy to show for it. Over thirty years of research lead us to conclude that children do not learn active skills in a part-to whole fashion. Children become skilled at writing and reading the way they became skilled at talking – by doing it. Children compare their efforts with the language they see and hear around them, and make adjustments. As their perception and abilities develop, their speech, their reading, their writing better approximates the standard.

The statement in the bill that "English is a phonetic language" is simply absurd. Of the fifty most commonly used words in the English language, about one-half of them are not phonetic. Consider the following statement, which I constructed out of short, common words:

Once they said, "Who loves you most?".

Can you find a phonetic word *in* it? Using phonics alone would lead me to write it:

Wuns thay sed, "Hoo luvs you moast?"

Surely (after phonetic misfit), you must concede that phonics alone cannot guide our children to a full understanding of this very complex language!

Lastly, I believe it's inappropriate for legislators to be mandating teacher practice. Teachers are trained to be experts in children's development and learning. Parents are experts about their own children. Together, they can decide how best to teach the children.

Sincerely
Bethanie R. DeGayner Bethanie R DeGayner

printed
3/12/98

Author: lthomas@astrolabe.com (Lynn Thomas) at CC2MHS1

I have some major concerns with Bill #203, they are: using standardized/norm referenced tests are inappropriate for first through third grade students. The tests are not made to be a diagnostic test and again are developmentally inappropriate for the early grades. These tests are unreliable at best; the Alaska State Legislature should not be mandating(especially without appropriate funding attached) curriculum. This is a function of the local school boards/districts. Where has the local control gone in this bill? Please do not let this bill out of committee. Thank you for your time.

Author: jfmct@acad1.alaska.edu at CC2MHS1
To: Senator Gary Wilken

From: Dr. Mary-Claire Tarlow
University of Alaska, Southeast

Subject: SJR 39 and SB 203

I am unable to come testify on SJR 39 this Monday morning, but I am concerned about its content for many of the same reasons I gave in my testimony on SB 203.

I have contacted the office of the NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR TEACHERS OF ENGLISH, which is the professional organization for teachers of reading and writing from kindergarten through college. This association must represent a huge number of literacy educators, and therefore must reflect a balanced, validated view of what is known in the field. For this reason, the statements they produce should be given great weight.

I have received from them some resolutions specifically related to the Reading Excellence Act, and will bring that information by your office on Monday morning.

They also sent me an article that critiques the research of the NICHD, which both the Reading Excellence Act and SB 203 are largely based on. I will include this in my packet of information.

I hope you will seriously consider this information. IT IS CRUCIAL TO THE FUTURE OF THOUSANDS OF CHILDREN, and to their effect on society, as I know you are aware.

Lastly, I want to point out that if we don't treat our teachers like professionals, we will weaken their desire to act like professionals. This is a downward spiraling trend. Please help us to stop this trend now. DEFEAT BOTH SJR 39 AND SB 203.

Thanks,

Dr. Mary-Claire Tarlow
Director of Elementary Education
University of Alaska Southeast

Feb. 20, 1998

Hess Committee
Alaska State Capital
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1180

This letter is in response to Senate Bill No. 203; Literacy Restoration Act:

> "An Act requiring that phonics be taught in kindergarten through third grades in the public school system; phonics meaning the direct teaching of preplanned sequence of relationships between speech sounds and all their letter equivalents, instruction in blending or sounding out two or more letter groups, and practice with reading material that includes letters and letter groups that are explicitly taught."

Traditionally, it has been assumed that a student needs mastery of phonics to learn how to read. A large amount of time is still spent in many classrooms teaching **phonics.** There are so many rules that no one, not even the most fluent reader, can possibly articulate them all. In the English language there are more exceptions to the rules of sound-symbol correspondence than there are regularities.

The most successful way to learn to read is by reading language that is composed naturally. The act of reading is an interaction among three cueing systems - semantic, syntactic, and grapho-phonic; operating simultaneously in a social or situational context. Phonics is believed to be best learned in a meaningful context.

Indeed, the letters occurring in the first part of a word are important. The first letter of a word, usually a consonant, triggers the reader to bring together the other cueing systems and to make meaning. When he encounters an unknown word he needs to look at the pictures, think about the story, ask himself what would make sense, and use the first letters of the word as a **springboard** to the meaning. The act of reading is far more complex than simply sounding out letters. To call it decoding is to describe it inaccurately. It is an act of construction; of building meanings. This brings one inevitably to the rejection of methods that attempt to only

teach parts of words and words out of context. Rather, phonics is believed to be best learned in a meaningful context.

The most successful way to learn to read is by reading language that is composed naturally. A child's first reading book must make sense and offer as much contextual and syntactic support as possible. Even a fluent reader stumbles and miscues his way through print that has no virtue beyond its phonic regularity. Try reading this preprimer example:

Pam ran up the ramp.
Up the ramp ran the pup.
The pup and Pam nap.

The model of language acquisition upon which this is based supposes that language can be learned from its component parts to its meaningful whole, rather like adding more and more bricks to a wall until the building is finished. It supposes that a child needs to master by memory and practice many small items of linguistic information. He is presented with the sounds of the letters, out of context, and for no purpose outside the reading exercise. Letters build into words; words build into sentences. Naturally such exercises are made easier for the student if they start with simple sounds and easy words. Hence, the creation of the preprimer with its litany of short vowel sounds and the ludicrous antics of Pam and her pup. Such text not only lacks interest, it is devoid of intelligence. Phonics is believed to be best learned in a meaningful context.

The most successful way to learn to read i· by reading language that is composed naturally. Books in wh.ch the language is predictable both semantically and syntactically offer the maximum support to a beginning reader. Examine the opening lines of E. Carle's The Very Hungry Caterpillar:

In the light of the moon a little egg lay on a leaf.
One Sunday morning the warm sun came up and -
pop! - out of the egg came a very small and very
hungry caterpillar. He started to look for some
food . . .

The picture of the moon, the egg, and the leaf provides a context in which to set the story and so assist the child's initial attempts to read the words. The logic of the story also provides an internal context. What else would a hungry caterpillar do except start to look for food? The story as it unfolds provides the motivation to read; the rhythm of the language

supports the reader and offers confirmation of expectations. The experience of reading this book does not compare with Pam and her pup.

If a child learns about language at home through interaction with adults who do real things with language in everyday contexts, then it is clearly nonsense for schools to try to teach about language in contexts which lack purpose and with texts that are unnaturally constructed. Hence, phonics is believed to be best learned in a meaningful context.

As an Early Childhood Education student at U.A.S., I urge your careful reconsideration of a bill requiring direct instruction of phonics to be taught explicitly in the classroom.

Sincerely,

Corinne Colley

cc:Mail for: mel krogseng

Subject: Schools told how to teach reading
From: family@ptialaska.net at CC2MHS1 3/21/98 12:29 AM
bcc: Mel Krogseng at LAA_STAY
To: family@ptialaska.net at CC2MHS1

It looks like England has looked at the research on reading and taken action. I encourage Alaska to do the same. Support Alaska's SB 203. I prefer the CSSB 203 version that was worked on versus the testing only version in SSSB 203.

The HTML version of this article is at the end of the cut and pasted version that immediately follows.
Dr Bill Pfeifer

London Telegraph

UK
News Electronic
Telegraph
Friday 20 March
1998 Issue 1029

Schools told how to teach reading
By Liz Lightfoot, Education Correspondent

THE most fundamental change in primary education since the introduction of the national curriculum
begins today as the Government sends out the first countrywide policy on the teaching of reading to
18,500 schools.

All primaries will be required to return to the traditional, structured teaching of phonics, and to
abandon the present system by which children are largely expected to learn by reading story books to
their teachers.

Most schools will have to re-think their methods and parents, who are being encouraged by the
Government to "police" the changes, should be able to see the difference quickly.

The 91-page National Literacy Strategy represents an unprecedented intervention in classroom
teaching methods by ministers. David Blunkett, the Education Secretary, describes the new
framework as "a practical tool to help teachers" and "a reference point for day-to-day teaching".

The policy requires teachers to bring back daily, hour-long English lessons, in which pupils are taught
for two-thirds of the time as a whole class, reading together, extending their vocabulary and being
taught punctuation, grammar and spelling.

For the other third they will work in ability groups, but even then the teacher will work with one group
giving direct instruction while the rest are encouraged to work independently.

Ofsted inspectors will monitor the implementation of the strategy as they visit schools. Only those schools with exceptional English test results will be exempted from the requirement.

Ministers have gone ahead with publishing the strategy in the face of opposition from some leading figures in the educational establishment who believe politicians should not interfere so directly in teaching methods and warn that, if the advice turns out to be flawed, standards nationally would plummet.

Chris Woodhead, the Chief Inspector of Schools, has backed the strategy, but the Government's curriculum advisers at the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority complained that listening and speaking skills were not included in the hour.

Mr Blunkett, however, believes that interactive, whole class teaching will do far more to encourage children to listen and speak out than the present system of pupils sitting in groups and working individually, usually on worksheets.

The document points out that when children work individually, as they do in most lessons, the average time they are directly taught by the teacher is just five or six minutes a week.

Although most schools claim to teach phonics as part of a "mixture of methods", in reality it is mostly confined in the early stages to teaching the sounds of the alphabet so that children can identify the first letters in words.

Under the present system, children are encouraged to guess what words say using the context of the story, or picture clues, and then to commit them to memory by shape. Where more structured phonics is taught, it is usually later on, for spelling purposes.

The new strategy insists that phonics comes first. Teachers, it says, have been over-cautious about the teaching of phonics. It states: "Research evidence shows that pupils do not learn to distinguish between the different sounds of words simply by being exposed to books. They need to be taught to do this.

"When they begin to read, most pupils tend to see words as images, with a particular shape and pattern. They tend not to understand that words are made up of letters used in particular combinations that correspond with spoken sounds. It is essential that pupils are taught these basic de-coding and spelling skills from the outset."

In a direct attack on current teaching methods it says that when pupils read familiar and predictable texts they become over-reliant on guessing context.

The Government has provided funds for in-service teacher training because the vast majority of teachers have not been told how to teach phonics.

Since the 1970s many teacher training colleges have shunned what they see as "sterile de-coding" and told students to concentrate on "reading for meaning".

But in September 1990 Martin Turner, an educational psychologist, revealed that reading tests administered to 400,000 seven-year-olds showed the biggest decline in standards for 45 years. Other psychologists backed up his claim that a high proportion of children referred to them with reading difficulties were not dyslexic but had been badly taught by the new methods.

The Government said research in English-speaking countries has proved that structured phonics is the most effective way to teach. The new methods are also believed to have contributed to the the under-achievement of boys in reading compared with girls. Where intensive phonics are used, boys achieve as well as, or better than, girls.

Sue Lloyd, who developed the "Jolly Phonic" scheme at Woods Loke School in Lowestoft, Norfolk, where boys do as well as girls, welcomed the strategy but said its authors appeared to have under-estimated the speed at which children could pick up letter-sound combinations. She said: "It is a step in the right direction, but in practice I think most teachers will find it better to move more quickly instead of leaving common phonemes such as 'oo' and 'ee' until a child has been in school for four terms or more."

Anne Barnes, the general secretary of the National Association for the Teaching of English, said teachers would have to adapt the strategy because children learnt to read in different ways. "Phonics is very difficult to teach and if it is done badly children will hate it and be discouraged from reading."

Other articles:

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7 February 1998: Making sound sense of reading

5 January 1998: Boys are left behind by modern teaching

23 December 1997: Consultants spearhead classroom return to 3Rs

15 September 1997: Teachers to be re-trained over literacy

8 March 1997: Sometimes it's best to be old-fashioned

16 May 1996: In My View: C-a-t: sounding it all out is the only way to teach them

http://www.telegraph.co.uk:80/et?ac=000761589537648&rtmo=3xr3w3KM&atmo=3xr3w3KM&pg=/et/98/3/20/nread20.html

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL INTERACTIVE EDITION

EDITORIAL

March 23, 1998

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REVIEW & OUTLOOK

Spelling Disaster

READERS RESPOND

Sinking scores, frustrated teachers, schools divided, too many kids holding books the wrong side up. In recent years, the process of teaching young children to read has been such a notable disaster throughout the country, there was bound to be a backlash. It has finally arrived in a big way.

For starters, there is last week's "Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children," a report released by the National Research Council in language so careful and soothing it almost whispers. But in it, finally, are some sensible suggestions on reforming and expanding the theories and methods that are plainly ill-equipped to acquaint primary graders with the ABCs of reading. These are the kinds of kids who will wander on out into the job market 10 years later, if they last that long, spelling "way" and "weigh" the same way while using it mostly as a modifier for cool. Presuming they are literate at all.

In this Section:

World-Wide

Asia

Europe

The Americas

Economy

Earnings Focus

Politics & Policy

Weather

Editorial Page

Leisure & Arts

Voices

The reasons so many children fail in their struggle to master reading skills are part of a complex patchwork that sociologists and educators will forever pick apart. But it's getting pretty clear that the old-fashioned "phonics" approach probably got Spot moving a lot quicker than the newfangled "whole" language method. In phonics, kids learn to sound out each word and endure flash card drills. In whole language, the word is viewed in its contextual setting--consider it a landscape through which a child's imagination drifts free as a bird, unshackled by the annoying specifics of grammar and spelling.

Which system to use has become an absurdly divisive issue, reaching out of Crayolaland into the realms of politics and ideology. It will not surprise anyone that the phonics people are more predictably conservative, while left-wing nuts love whole language. Therefore California was a pioneer in whole language, going whole hog back in 1987. By 1995, the state tied Louisiana for the worst reading scores in the country. Stunned, the legislature reversed course, passing an "ABC" law that mandated the return of phonics-based instruction.

That seems to be a trend. Increasingly, elementary school teachers seeking certification are required to be proficient in phonics. In Washington state come the millennium, all new elementary school teachers will have to pass a reading-instruction exam administered by the State Board of Education. New York's Family Academy, an experimental public school, managed to quadruple its test scores in a single year by returning to traditional methods.

The report just released by the National Research Council (sponsored by the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services) concludes that no single method has all the answers, and recommends a mix of the two. Well, that's a start. So is the report's recognition that the debate over methods has diverted too much attention from the problem of actually getting kids to read.

For proof, there are the embarrassing statistics: A 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey showed that 21% of Americans are functionally illiterate. On top of that, a December study by the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development found the United States to be among the few developed nations that has failed to improve literacy over the past generation.

Courageously, former whole language supporters like the American Federation of Teachers and the International Reading Association have acknowledged that their faith was misplaced. A $200 million, 30-year study by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, a branch of the NIH, has likewise confirmed the detriments of whole language. Left over in a corner is the National Education Association, a powerhouse constituency of the Democratic Party. While a spokesperson claimed last Friday that the NEA supports the National Research Council's call for a diverse approach, it just promoted whole language dogma at a Read Across America day this month.

Table of Contents

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Somehow reading shouldn't have ended up being an ideological issue. But these are the times we live in. The NEA and its think-alikes worry that giving in to phonics, associated as it is with conservatives, may send the whole system down the slippery slope where the school choice advocates lie in wait. The NEA should have thought of this before the public schools and their results rolled so far downhill. Now letting people choose schools offering competing methods of instruction is fast gaining public support, especially among minorities. So be it.

Return to top of page

cc:Mail for: mel krogseng

Subject: Part 1:Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children
From: family@ptialaska.net at CC2MHS1 3/18/98 7:06 PM
bcc: Mel Krogseng at LAA_STAY
To: family@ptialaska.net at CC2MHS1

Lets bring back the Committee substitute of SB 203. Lets beat the rest of the Nation and secure teacher training in research based reading from those who are up on this research.
Dr William Pfeifer

"THE MAJORITY OF READING PROBLEMS faced by today's adolescents & adults could have been avoided or resolved in the early years of childhood," according to a report released today by the National Research Council (NRC).

The report, "Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children," calls for widespread reforms "to ensure that all children are equipped with the skills & instruction they need to learn to read."

Responding to the report, Secretary Riley said that "The Council's findings send the nation's parents & educators a clear signal that we need to move beyond the contentious reading debate in some communities & focus on how children learn to read." The Secretary went on to say that...

"The study clearly defines the key elements all children need in order to become good readers. Specifically, kids need to learn letters & sounds & how to read for meaning. They also need opportunities to practice reading with many types of books. While some children need more intensive & systematic individualized instruction than others, all children need these 3 essential elements in order to read well & independently by the end of 3rd grade. Effective teaching & extra resources can make it possible for many 'at-risk' children to become successful leaders."

An image version of the prepublication copy of the nearly 400-page report, is at:
http://www.nap.edu/readingroom/enter2.cgi?030906418X.html
The NRC press release is available at:
http://www2.nas.edu/whatsnew/286a.html
The Secretary's full statement will be available soon at:
http://www.ed.gov/PressReleases/index.html

Below is the first half of the executive summary of the report. The other half is in a second message, which you will also receive.

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Executive Summary of the Prepublication Copy of
"Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children."
Catherine E. Snow, M. Susan Burns & Peg Griffin, Editors.
Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children, National Research Council.

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Executive Summary
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Reading is essential to success in our society. The ability to read is highly valued & important for social & economic advancement. Of course, most children learn to read fairly well. In this report, we are most concerned with the large numbers of children in America whose educational careers are imperiled because they do not read well enough to ensure understanding & to meet the demands of an increasingly competitive economy. Current difficulties in reading largely originate from rising demands for literacy, not from declining absolute levels of literacy. In a technological society, the demands for higher literacy are ever increasing, creating more grievous consequences for those who fall short.

The importance of this problem led the U.S. Department of Education & the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services to ask the National Academy of Sciences to establish a committee to examine the prevention of reading difficulties. Our committee was charged with conducting a study of the effectiveness of interventions for young children who are at risk of having problems learning to read. The goals of the project were three: (1) to comprehend a rich but diverse research base; (2) to translate the research findings into advice & guidance for parents, educators, publishers, & others involved in the care & instruction of the young; & (3) to convey this advice to the targeted audiences through a variety of publications, conferences, & other outreach activities.

The Committee's Approach

The committee reviewed research on normal reading development & instruction, on risk factors useful in identifying groups & individuals at risk of reading failure, & on prevention, intervention, & instructional approaches to ensuring optimal reading outcomes.

We found many informative literatures to draw on & have aimed in this report to weave together the insights of many research traditions into clear guidelines for helping children become successful readers. In doing so, we also considered the current state of affairs in education for teachers & others working with young children; policies of federal, state, & local governments impinging on young children's education; the pressures on publishers of curriculum materials, texts, & tests; programs addressed to parents & to community action; and media activities.

Our main emphasis has been on the development of reading & on factors that relate to reading outcomes. We conceptualized our task as cutting through the detail of mostly convergent, but sometimes discrepant, research findings to provide an integrated picture of how reading develops & how its development can be promoted.

Our recommendations extend to all children. Granted, we have focused our lens on children at risk for learning to read. But much of the instructional research we have reviewed encompasses, for a variety of reasons, populations of students with varying degrees of risk. Good instruction seems to transcend characterizations of children's vulnerability for failure; the same good early literacy environment & patterns of effective instruction are required for children who might fail for different reasons.

Does this mean that the identical mix of instructional materials & strategies will work for each & every child? Of course not. If we have learned anything from this effort, it is that effective teachers are able to craft a special mix of instructional ingredients for every child they work with. But it does mean that there is a common menu of materials, strategies, & environments from which effective teachers make choices. This in turn means that, as a society, our most important challenge is to make sure that our teachers have access to those tools & the knowledge required to use them well. In other words, there is

little evidence that children experiencing difficulties learning to read, even those with identifiable learning disabilities, need radically different sorts of supports than children at low risk, although they may need much more intensive support. Childhood environments that support early literacy development & excellent instruction are important for all children. Excellent instruction is the best intervention for children who demonstrate problems learning to read.

Conceptualizing Reading & Reading Instruction

Effective reading instruction is built on a foundation that recognizes that reading ability is determined by multiple factors: many factors that correlate with reading fail to explain it; many experiences contribute to reading development without being prerequisite to it; and although there are many prerequisites, none by itself is considered sufficient.

Adequate initial reading instruction requires that children:

* use reading to obtain meaning from print,
* have frequent & intensive opportunities to read,
* are exposed to frequent, regular spelling-sound relationships,
* learn about the nature of the alphabetic writing system, and
* understand the structure of spoken words.

Adequate progress in learning to read English (or any alphabetic language) beyond the initial level depends on:

* having a working understanding of how sounds are represented alphabetically,
* sufficient practice in reading to achieve fluency with different kinds of texts,
* sufficient background knowledge & vocabulary to render written texts meaningful & interesting,
* control over procedures for monitoring comprehension & repairing misunderstandings, and
* continued interest & motivation to read for a variety of purposes.

Reading skill is acquired in a relatively predictable way by children who have normal or above average language skills; have had experiences in early childhood that fostered motivation & provided exposure to literacy in use; get information about the nature of print through opportunities to learn letters & to recognize the internal structure of spoken words, as well as explanations about the contrasting nature of spoken & written language; and attend schools that provide effective reading instruction & opportunities to practice reading.

Disruption of any of these developments increases the possibility that reading will be delayed or impeded. The association of poor reading outcomes with poverty & minority status no doubt reflects

the accumulated effects of several of these risk factors, including lack of access to literacy-stimulating preschool experiences & to excellent, coherent reading instruction. In addition, a number of children without any obvious risk factors also develop reading difficulties. These children may require intensive efforts at intervention & extra help in reading & accommodations for their disability throughout their lives.

There are 3 potential stumbling blocks that are known to throw children off course on the journey to skilled reading. The first

obstacle, which arises at the outset of reading acquisition, is difficulty understanding & using the alphabetic principle--the idea that written spellings systematically represent spoken words. It is hard to comprehend connected text if word recognition is inaccurate or laborious. The second obstacle is a failure to transfer the comprehension skills of spoken language to reading & to acquire new strategies that may be specifically needed for reading. The third obstacle to reading will magnify the first two: the absence or loss of an initial motivation to read or failure to develop a mature appreciation of the rewards of reading.

As in every domain of learning, motivation is crucial. Although most children begin school with positive attitudes & expectations for success, by the end of the primary grades & increasingly thereafter, some children become disaffected. The majority of reading problems faced by today's adolescents & adults are the result of problems that might have been avoided or resolved in their early childhood years. It is imperative that steps be taken to ensure that children overcome these obstacles during the primary grades.

Reducing the number of children who enter school with inadequate literacy-related knowledge & skill is an important primary step toward preventing reading difficulties. Although not a panacea, this would serve to reduce considerably the magnitude of the problem currently facing schools. Children who are particularly likely to have difficulty with learning to read in the primary grades are those who begin school with less prior knowledge & skill in relevant domains, most notably, general verbal abilities, the ability to attend to the sounds of language as distinct from its meaning, familiarity with the basic purposes & mechanisms of reading, & letter knowledge. Children from poor neighborhoods, children with limited proficiency in English, children with hearing impairments, children with preschool language impairments, & children whose parents had difficulty learning to read are particularly at risk of arriving at school with weaknesses in these areas & hence of falling behind from the outset.

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(continued in message 2)

cc:Mail for: mel krogseng

Subject: Part 2: Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children
From: family@ptialaska.net at CC2MHS1 3/18/98 7:19 PM
bcc: Mel Krogseng at LAA_STAY
To: family@ptialaska.net at CC2MHS1

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Message 2, "Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children"
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Recommendations
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The critical importance of providing excellent reading instruction to all children is at the heart of the committee's recommendations. Accordingly, our central recommendation characterizes the nature of good primary reading instruction. We also recognize that excellent instruction is most effective when children arrive in first grade motivated for literacy & with the necessary linguistic, cognitive, & early literacy skills. We therefore recommend attention to ensuring high-quality preschool & kindergarten environments as well. We acknowledge that excellent instruction in the primary grades & optimal environments in preschool & kindergarten require teachers who are well prepared, highly knowledgeable, & receiving ongoing support. Excellent instruction may be possible only if schools are organized in optimal ways; if facilities, curriculum materials, & support services function adequately; and if children's home languages are taken into account in designing instruction. We therefore make recommendations addressing these issues. (The complete text of all the committee's recommendations appears in Chapter 10.)

Literacy Instruction in 1st Through 3rd Grade
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Given the centrality of excellent instruction to the prevention of reading difficulties, the committee strongly recommends attention in every primary grade classroom to the full array of early reading accomplishments: the alphabetic principle, reading sight words, reading words by mapping speech sounds to parts of words, achieving fluency, & comprehension. Getting started in alphabetic reading depends critically on mapping the letters & spellings of words onto the speech units that they represent; failure to master word recognition can impede text comprehension. Explicit instruction that directs children's attention to the sound structure of oral language & to the connections between speech sounds & spellings assists children who have not grasped the alphabetic principle or who do not apply it productively when they encounter unfamiliar printed words.

Comprehension difficulties can be prevented by actively building comprehension skills as well as linguistic & conceptual knowledge, beginning in the earliest grades. Comprehension can be enhanced through instruction focused on concept & vocabulary growth & background knowledge, instruction about the syntax & rhetorical structures of written language, & direct instruction about comprehension strategies such as summarizing, predicting, & monitoring. Comprehension also takes practice, which is gained by reading independently, by reading in pairs or groups, & by being read aloud to.

We recommend that 1st through 3rd grade curricula include the following components:

* Beginning readers need explicit instruction & practice that lead to an appreciation that spoken words are made up of smaller units of sounds, familiarity with spelling-sound correspondences & common spelling conventions & their use in identifying printed words, "sight" recognition of frequent words, & independent reading, including reading aloud. Fluency should be promoted through practice with a wide variety of well-written & engaging texts at the child's own comfortable reading level.

* Children who have started to read independently, typically 2nd graders & above, should be encouraged to sound out & confirm the identities of visually unfamiliar words they encounter in the course of reading meaningful texts, recognizing words primarily through attention to their letter-sound relationships. Although context & pictures can be used as a tool to monitor word recognition, children should not be taught to use them to substitute for information provided by the letters in the word.

* Because the ability to obtain meaning from print depends so strongly on the development of word recognition accuracy & reading fluency, both of the latter should be regularly assessed in the classroom, permitting timely & effective instructional response when difficulty or delay is apparent.

* Beginning in the earliest grades, instruction should promote comprehension by actively building linguistic & conceptual knowledge in a rich variety of domains, as well as through direct instruction about comprehension strategies such as summarizing the main idea, predicting events & outcomes of upcoming text, drawing inferences, & monitoring for coherence & misunderstandings. This instruction can take place while adults read to students or when students read themselves.

* Once children learn some letters, they should be encouraged to write them, use them to begin writing words or parts of words, & use words to begin writing sentences. Instruction should be designed with the understanding that the use of invented spelling is not in conflict with teaching correct spelling. Beginning writing with invented spelling can be helpful for developing understanding of the identity & segmentation of speech sounds & sound-spelling relationships. Conventionally correct spelling should be developed through focused instruction & practice. Primary grade children should be expected to spell previously studied words & spelling patterns correctly in their final writing products. Writing should take place regularly & frequently to encourage children to become more comfortable & familiar with it.

* Throughout the early grades, time, materials, & resources should be provided with 2 goals: (a) to support daily independent reading of texts selected to be of particular interest for the individual student, & beneath the individual student's frustration level, in order to consolidate the student's capacity for independent reading and (b) to support daily assisted or supported reading & rereading of texts that are slightly more difficult in wording or in linguistic, rhetorical, or conceptual

structure in order to promote advances in the student's capabilities.

* Throughout the early grades, schools should promote independent reading outside school by such means as daily at-home reading assignments & expectations, summer reading lists, encouraging parent involvement, and by working with community groups, including public librarians, who share this goal.

Promoting Literacy Development in Preschool & Kindergarten

It is clear from research that the process of learning to read is a lengthy one that begins very early in life. Given the importance identified in the research literature of starting school motivated to read & with the prerequisite language & early literacy skills, the committee recommends that all children, especially those at risk for reading difficulties, should have access to early childhood environments that promote language & literacy growth & that address a variety of skills that have been identified as predictors of later reading achievement. Preschools & other group care settings for young children often provide relatively impoverished language & literacy environments, in particular those available to families with limited economic resources. As ever more young children are entering group care settings pursuant to expectations that their mothers will join the work force, it becomes critical that the preschool opportunities available to lower-income families be designed in ways that support language & literacy development.

Preschool programs, even those designed specifically as interventions for children at risk of reading difficulties, should be designed to provide optimal support for cognitive, language, & social development, within this broad focus, however, ample attention should be paid to skills that are known to predict future reading achievement, especially those for which a causal role has been demonstrated. Similarly, & for the same reasons, kindergarten instruction should be designed to stimulate verbal interaction, to enrich children's vocabularies, to encourage talk about books, to provide practice with the sound structure of words, to develop knowledge about print, including the production & recognition of letters, and to generate familiarity with the basic purposes & mechanisms of reading.

Children who will probably need additional support for early language & literacy development should receive it as early as possible. Pediatricians, social workers, speech-language therapists, & other preschool practitioners should receive research-based guidelines to assist them to be alert for signs that children are having difficulties acquiring early language & literacy skills. Parents, relatives, neighbors, & friends can also play a role in identifying children who need assistance. Through adult education programs, public service media, instructional videos provided by pediatricians, & other means, parents can be informed about what skills & knowledge children should be acquiring at young ages, and about what to do & where

to turn if there is concern that a child's development may be lagging behind in some respects.

Education & Professional Development for All Involved in Literacy Instruction

The critical importance of the teacher in the prevention of reading difficulties must be recognized, & efforts should be made to provide all teachers with adequate knowledge about reading &

the knowledge & skill to teach reading or its developmental precursors. It is imperative that teachers at all grade levels understand the course of literacy development & the role of instruction in optimizing literacy development.

Preschool teachers represent an important, & largely underutilized, resource in promoting literacy by supporting rich language & emergent literacy skills. Early childhood educators should not try to replicate the formal reading instruction provided in schools.

The preschool & primary school teacher's knowledge & experience, as well as the support provided to the teacher, are central to achieving the goal of primary prevention of reading difficulties. Each of these may vary according to where the teacher is in his or her professional development. A critical component in the preparation of pre-service teachers is supervised, relevant, clinical experience providing ongoing guidance & feedback, so they develop the ability to integrate & apply their knowledge in practice.

Teachers need to be knowledgeable about the research foundations of reading. Collaborative support by the teacher preparation institution & the field placement is essential. A critical component for novice teachers is the support of mentors who have demonstrated records of success in teaching reading.

Professional development should not be conceived as something that ends with graduation from a teacher preparation program, nor as something that happens primarily in graduate classrooms or even during in-service activities. Rather, ongoing support from colleagues & specialists, as well as regular opportunities for self-examination & reflection, are critical components of the career-long development of excellent teachers.

Teaching Reading to Speakers of Other Languages

Schools have the responsibility to accommodate the linguistic needs of students with limited proficiency in English. Precisely how to do this is difficult to prescribe, because students' abilities & needs vary greatly, as do the capacities of different communities to support their literacy development. The committee recommends the following guidelines for decision making:

* If language minority children arrive at school with no proficiency in English but speaking a language for which there are instructional guides, learning materials, & locally available proficient teachers, then these children should be taught how to read in their native language while acquiring proficiency in spoken English, and then subsequently taught to extend their skills to reading in English.

* If language minority children arrive at school with no proficiency in English but speak a language for which the above conditions cannot be met & for which there are insufficient numbers of children to justify the development of the local community to meet such conditions, the instructional priority should be to develop the children's proficiency in spoken English. Although print materials may be used to develop understanding of English speech sounds, vocabulary, & syntax, the postponement of formal reading instruction is appropriate until an adequate level of proficiency in spoken English has been achieved.

Ensuring Adequate Resources to Meet Children's Needs

To be effective, schools with large numbers of children at risk for reading difficulties need rich resources--manageable class size & student-teacher ratios, high-quality instructional materials in sufficient quantity, good school libraries, & pleasant physical environments. Achieving this may require extra resources for schools that serve a disproportionate number of high-risk children.

Even in schools in which a large percentage of the students are not achieving at a satisfactory level, a well-designed classroom reading program, delivered by an experienced & competent teacher, may be successful in bringing most students to grade level or above during the primary grades. However, achieving & sustaining radical gains is often difficult when improvements are introduced on a classroom by classroom basis. In a situation of school-wide poor performance, school restructuring should be considered as a vehicle for preventing reading difficulties. Ongoing professional development for teachers is typically a component of successful school restructuring efforts.

Addressing the Needs of Children With Persistent Reading Difficulties

Even with excellent instruction in the early grades, some children fail to make satisfactory progress in reading. Such children will require supplementary services, ideally from a reading specialist who provides individual or small-group intensive instruction that is coordinated with high-quality instruction from the classroom teacher. Children who are having difficulty learning to read do not, as a rule, require qualitatively different instruction from children who are "getting it." Instead, they more often need application of the same principles by someone who can apply them expertly to individual children who are having difficulty for one reason or another.

Schools that lack or have abandoned reading specialist positions need to reexamine their needs for specialists to ensure that well-trained staff are available for intervention with children & for ongoing support to classroom teachers. Reading specialists & other specialist roles need to be defined so that two-way communication is required between specialists & classroom teachers about the needs of all children at risk of & experiencing reading difficulties. Coordination is needed at the

instructional level so that intervention from specialists coordinates with & supports classroom instruction. Schools that have reading specialists as well as special educators need to coordinate the roles of these specialists. Schools need to ensure that all the specialists engaged in child study or individualized educational program (IEP) meetings for special education placement, early childhood intervention, out-of-classroom interventions, or in-classroom support are well informed about research in reading development & the prevention of reading difficulties.

Although volunteer tutors can provide valuable practice & motivational support for children learning to read, they should not be expected either to provide primary reading instruction or to instruct children with serious reading problems.

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Conclusion

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Most reading difficulties can be prevented. There is much work to be done, however, that requires the aggressive deployment of the information currently available, which is distilled in this report. In addition, many questions remain unanswered concerning reading development, some of which we address in our recommendations for research. While science continues to discover more about how children learn to read & how teachers & others can help them, the knowledge currently available can equip our society to promote higher levels of literacy for large numbers of American schoolchildren. The committee's hope is that the recommendations contained in this report will provide direction for the first important steps.

EDInfo
U.S. Department of Education
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Reading: State Policies re: Phonics/Whole Language

STATE POLICIES CONCERNING THE PHONICS/WHOLE LANGUAGE DILEMMA

ECS Information Clearinghouse
August 1997

Out of concern for students' perceived poor reading skills, lawmakers are examining the value of various methodologies of teaching reading, among them the phonetics-based and the "whole language" approaches. *Phonics* focuses on letter-sound relationships and the combination of different letter sounds. It teaches children to dissect unfamiliar words into parts and then blend the isolated sounds together to make a recognizable word. *Whole language* is based on the belief that children learn to read like they learn to talk by absorbing and imitating the language around them. It emphasizes reading for meaning and using literature rather than rules as a teaching tool.

Pros and Cons

The role of both phonics and whole language in reading instruction seems to cycle in and out of favor. Better word pronunciation and word recognition are credited as strengths of phonics-based reading programs. However, if children are taught with phonics alone, which intensely focuses on parts of words, some seem to have a difficult time understanding the whole meaning of a text. Whole language, on the other hand, incorporates and stresses the flow and rhythm of words and the meaning of a text. But some children who are taught with only a whole language method struggle with sounding out words. This is mostly because they do not grasp the concept of combining letter sounds to form words.

California adopted the whole-language approach for its statewide curriculum in 1987, then saw its reading assessment scores fall to tie with the lowest in the nation in 1994. Since then, state policymakers around the country have begun to reassess the comparative merits of the opposing methodologies. Consequently, some are supporting legislation to require phonics as a component of reading instruction, especially at the K-3 level.

So what is the best approach?

According to research, the best approach to teaching reading is a mixture -- a balance -- of both methods. Although the policies below reflect a push for phonics, keep in mind that a combination of phonics and whole language is important . Not all children learn in the same way, and good teachers successfully are able to use whatever balance works the best with each individual. The following, however, reflects actions to ensure the phonetic method does remain in the mix.

The following reflect state approaches regarding the use of phonics in the instruction of primary-level reading:

1. REQUIRE TEACHING OF ELEMENTARY READING BY PHONICS METHOD:
Alabama, California (grades 1-8), Delaware (for children reading, or at risk of reading, below grade level) Louisiana (for children with dyslexia or related disorders, as well as non-challenged children), New Mexico (grades 1 and 2), North Carolina, Ohio, and Oklahoma (in supplemental lessons for children reading below grade level)

Sample language, Alabama 16-6B-2(f): "The State Board of Education, on the recommendation of the State Superintendent of Education, shall prescribe the minimum contents of courses of study for all public

elementary and high schools in the state. In every elementary school there shall be taught at least reading **including phonics**, spelling, handwriting, arithmetic..."

CONSIDERING SUCH REQUIREMENT: (as of 8-97, all legislative bills had been referred to committee)
Alaska, New York, South Carolina

2. REQUIRE TEACHERS' CREDENTIALS TO INCLUDE STUDY OF PHONICS INSTRUCTION:
California, Mississippi, Ohio, Wisconsin

Sample language, California Education Code, 44259: "(b) The minimum requirements for the preliminary multiple or single subject teaching credential, are all of the following:...(4) Study of alternative methods of developing English skills, including the study of reading...among all pupils...The study of reading shall meet the following requirements: (A)(i): The study of organized, systematic, explicit skills including phonemic awareness, direct, systematic, **explicit phonics**, and decoding skills."

3. PROVIDE FUNDS FOR TRAINING IN PHONICS INSTRUCTION:
California (For teacher inservice; for the county office of education "to design a reading leadership program and develop materials that focus on systematically explicit phonics instruction" and other reading-related skills and disciplines; and for "reading leadership training programs" through the county office of education as well as school districts), Idaho, and Ohio ("state board shall provide in-service training programs for teachers")

Sample language, California Education Code 44757(b): "That funds received pursuant to this chapter shall be expended for inservice training programs in reading instruction that address systematically explicit phonics instruction, phonemic awareness, sound-symbol relationship, decoding..."

4. AUTHORIZE DISTRICTS TO APPLY TO STATE BOARD FOR FUNDING OF PURCHASE OF PHONICS-INCLUSIVE CORE READING PROGRAM MATERIALS:
California

Sample language, California Education Code 60352: "A school district may apply to the state board for funding for the purchase of a complete set of core reading program instructional materials pursuant to this article...(3) The instructional materials include, but are not necessarily limited to, phonemic awareness, systematic explicit phonics, and spelling patterns, accompanied by reading material that provides practice in the lesson being taught."

5. DESIGNATE FUNDING FOR SUPPLEMENTAL LESSONS STRESSING PHONICS FOR BELOW GRADE-LEVEL K-3 READERS:
Delaware

6. SET READING INSTRUCTION IN PHONICS OR WHOLE LANGUAGE AS DISTRICT OBJECTIVE RESULTING IN ADDITIONAL SALARY:
Iowa

Sample language, Iowa Code 294A.14: "For school districts, a performance-based pay plan may provide for additional salary for individual teachers, for teachers assigned to a specific discipline, or for all teachers assigned to an attendance center...the objectives may include, but are not limited to...accelerating the achievement growth of students enrolled in that attendance center through the use of learning techniques that may include, but are not limited to, reading instruction in **phonics or whole language techniques**."

7. CONDUCT A STUDY OF EFFECTIVE PRIMARY AND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL READING INSTRUCTION, INCLUDING PHONICS: Ohio

Sample language, 1995 Ohio HB 117: "A portion of the foregoing appropriation...shall be used by the Department of Education to conduct a study of effective primary and elementary reading instruction, including intensive, systematic phonics instruction...The study shall address at a minimum the following research questions: (2) In preparing teachers to teach reading, do Ohio colleges of education include how to teach phonics effectively?...(4) What part does phonics play in teaching children to read in schools that are effective in teaching reading to children with a variety of learning styles? (5) What is the impact of intensive, systematic phonics instruction on student achievement in reading and language arts?"

8. CONSIDERING REQUIRING TEACHER INSTRUCTION IN PHONICS TEACHING AND INSERVICE ON PHONICS INSTRUCTION: South Carolina

Note: We would like to identify states that are encouraging/mandating a combination of approaches. Please fax any state-level policies to ECS Information Clearinghouse, 303-296-8332

◀ Back 1 Page | Next Page ▶

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ORDERING INFORMATION

The Role of Phonics in Reading Instruction position statement may be purchased from the International Reading Association at a cost of US$5.00 per 10 copies plus $3.00 shipping & handling, or at a cost of $0.30 each for 100 or more copies plus $3.00 shipping & handling.

Send orders to the Order Department at the address below or call 800-336-READ, ext. 266.

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The Role of PHONICS in Reading Instruction

A Position Statement of the International Reading Association

1. The teaching of phonics is an important aspect of beginning reading instruction.

This assertion represents a longstanding and widely shared view within the reading education community. The following statements from leaders in the field reveal the strength and history of this understanding.

"When the child has reached the maturity level at which he can make the best use of formal instruction in phonics, certainly no time should be lost in launching an extensive and carefully organized program to promote the wide and independent use of phonics in attacking new words, regardless of the grade or the time in the school year when this occurs."

Nila Banton Smith
IRA Founding Member

"Phonics instruction serves one purpose: to help readers figure out as quickly as possible the pronunciation of unknown words."

Dolores Durkin
Reading Hall of Fame Member

"Perhaps the most widely respected value of letter-sound instruction is that it provides students with a means of deciphering written words that are visually unfamiliar."

Marilyn Jager Adams
Author, *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning About Print*

"Phonics is a tool needed by all readers and writers of alphabetically written languages such as English. While I am not a proponent of isolated drill, overreliance on worksheets, or rote memorization of phonic rules, I support the teaching of phonics that children actually need and use to identify words quickly and accurately. These strategies need to be taught systematically in well-planned lessons."

Richard T. Vacca
IRA President, 1996–1997

"Early, systematic, explicit phonics instruction is an essential part, but only part, of a balanced, comprehensive reading program. Phonics and other word-identification skills are tools that children need to read for information, for enjoyment, and for developing insights. The intensity and form of phonics instruction must be adjusted to the individual needs of children by a well-prepared teacher."

John J. Pikulski
IRA President, 1997–1998

We do not wish to suggest through these quotations that there is perfect harmony within the field regarding how phonics should be taught in a total reading program, rather that there is nearly unanimous regard for its importance.

A Professional Stance Toward Phonics

The International Reading Association supports:

- research into effective phonics instruction and how this instruction supports the development of reading and writing abilities;
- teacher education initiatives at the preservice and inservice levels that encourage broader use of best practices in the teaching of phonics;
- parent education that is informative regarding the place of phonics within the total view of reading development and what parents can do to be supportive;
- curriculum development that helps articulate the specific goals of phonics instruction within the context of a total reading program, as well as suggestions for tools and strategies for effective teaching; and,
- authors and other artists who create the kind of engaging literature that provides the rich linguistic context for effective reading instruction.

The International Reading Association is concerned with:

- the exaggerated claims found in the press and other media regarding the inattention to phonics in beginning reading instruction.
- the growth in the number of curricular and legislative mandates that require teachers to blindly follow highly prescriptive plans for phonics instruction;
- the distortions in the professional literature surrounding the place of phonics instruction in a well-rounded, comprehensive reading program;
- the pitting of phonics against literature, as if the two are incompatible or at odds with each other; and,
- the inaccurate claims in the public media regarding the failure rates of students in learning to read that are attributed to the lack of phonics instruction.

Teachers *are* being successful in helping children learn to read. Every US study of reading achievement conducted over the past two decades has reported increasing numbers of primary-grade students performing successfully. A recent international comparison study (Binkley & Williams, 1996) has shown that in the area of reading, primary-aged students from the United States outperformed students from all other countries but one. Recognition for the tremendous advances that have been made by teachers in the teaching of reading is long overdue. We applaud teachers for the great strides they have made in improving the quality of reading instruction for all students.

We are not satisfied with the achievement levels reflected in the national assessments or the international comparisons. We will not be satisfied until we can claim success for all children. We have a long way to go and there is much to learn. However, exaggerated claims of the failure of students in learning to read

2. Classroom teachers in the primary grades do value and do teach phonics as part of their reading programs.

A recent national study (Baumann, Hoffman, Moon, & Duffy, 1996) of reading instruction in American public schools found that 98% of primary-grade teachers regard phonics instruction as a very important part of their reading program. Further, the study found that primary-grade teachers engage their students in phonics lessons on a regular basis as part of instruction in reading and writing.

Although there are many different types of or approaches to phonics instruction (e.g., intensive, explicit, synthetic, analytic, embedded), all phonics instruction focuses the learner's attention on the relationships between sounds and symbols as an important strategy for word recognition. Teaching phonics, like all teaching, involves making decisions about what is best for children. Rather than engage in debates about whether phonics should or should not be taught, effective teachers of reading and writing ask when, how, how much, and under what circumstances phonics should be taught. Programs that constrain teachers from using their professional judgment in making instructional decisions about what is best in phonics instruction for students simply get in the way of good teaching practices.

3. Phonics instruction, to be effective in promoting independence in reading, must be embedded in the context of a total reading/language arts program.

Reading is the complex process of understanding written texts. Children learn to read by using many sources of information such as their experiences, illustrations and print on the page, and knowledge of language—including their knowledge of sound-symbol correspondences. When teachers share interesting and informative books, nursery rhymes, songs, and poems with predictable language patterns, children develop and refine their use of these various information sources. Children become aware of and understand how print on a page relates to meaning. When children engage with texts themselves, as readers or writers, they begin to orchestrate this knowledge of how written language works to achieve success. It is within these kinds of contexts of language use that direct instruction in phonics takes on meaning for the learner. When phonics instruction is linked to children's genuine efforts to read and write, they are motivated to learn. When phonics instruction is linked to children's reading and writing, they are more likely to become strategic and independent in their use of phonics than when phonics instruction is drilled and practiced in isolation. Phonics knowledge is critical but not sufficient to support growing independence in reading.

learn. However, exaggerated claims of the nature of success in learning to read serve only to divert our attention, energies, and resources from the important issues we must face. Explanations that focus on simple solutions like more phonics instruction are misguided. The problems we face are complex and require inquiring minds.

Toward this end, the International Reading Association will continue to promote research and professional development activities focused on literacy. Through our research we will continue to study more effective ways of teaching reading, including phonics instruction, to achieve our common goal of literacy for all.

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The best approaches for how to teach children to read and write have been debated throughout much of the 20th century. Today, the role of phonics in reading and writing has become as much a political issue as it has an educational one. Teachers and schools have become the focus of unprecedented public scrutiny as the controversy over phonics is played out in the media, state legislatures, school districts, and the home. In response to the many requests that have been received, the International Reading Association offers the following position statement regarding the role of phonics in a total reading program.

We begin with three assertions regarding phonics and the teaching of reading. We conclude with an expression of concerns for the current state of affairs and a call for professionalism.

TABLE 4–1
The Best Opportunities to Teach Phonics

Teachers *help children to notice* general phonics principles during the following authentic literacy events:

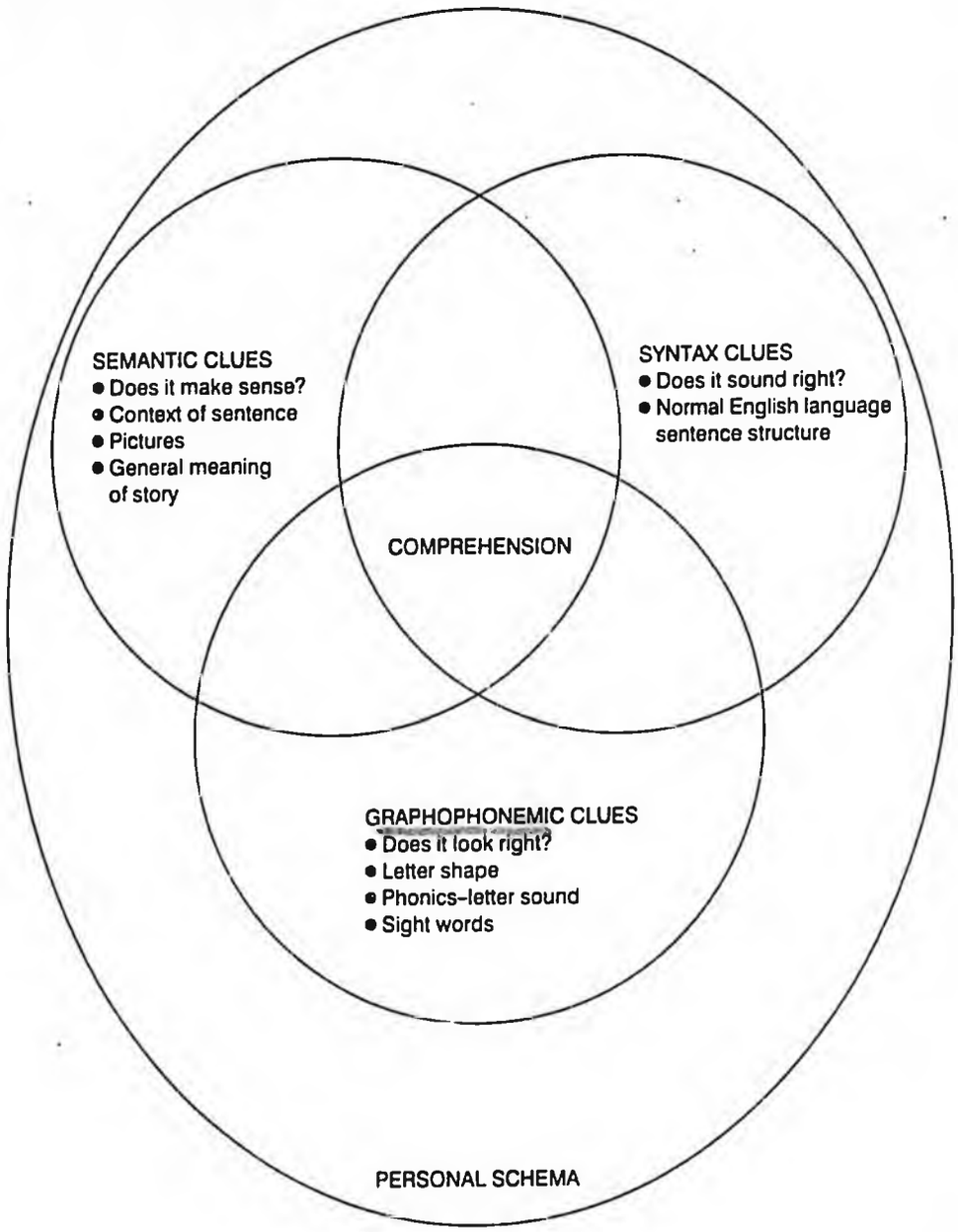
- As children read and write memorized forms of words
  their own names
  their friends' names
  important words such as "Mom," "Dad," "love," etc.
- As children match oral language to print
  during dictation
  in memorized reading of books, charts and functional print
  as they read along with a tape-recorded story
- As children write with invented spelling
  trying out their theories about phonics
  constantly revising theories as a result of reading experiences

Teachers and other adults *tell* children useful phonics principles during the following authentic literacy events (limiting information to what a youngster appears ready to understand):

- As children dictate ideas and the teacher transcribes them
- As children work at writing independently
- During Shared Reading activities
- As children work at reading independently
- As children observe the teacher writing for adult purposes

Fields, M.V. & Spangler, K.L. (1995) *Let's Begin Reading Right.* Columbus, Ohio: Merrill Publishers.

FIGURE 4–4
Integrating Literacy Clues



Fields, M.V. & Spangler, K.L. (1995) *Let's Begin Reading Right.* Columbus, Ohio: Merrill Publishers.

From: Reading Process & Practice by Constance Weaver Heinemann 1994

Generalizations	Number of Words Conforming	Number of Exceptions	Percent Utility
1. When there are two vowels side by side, the long sound of the first one is heard and the second is usually silent.	309 (bead)†	377 (chief)†	45
2. When a vowel is in the middle of a one-syllable word, the vowel is short.	408	249	62
middle letter	191 (dress)	84 (scold)	69
one of the middle two letters in a word of four letters	191 (rest)	135 (told)	59
one vowel *within* a word of more than four letters	26 (splash)	30 (fight)	46
3. If the only vowel letter is at the end of a word, the letter usually stands for a long sound.	23 (he)	8 (to)	74
4. When there are two vowels, one of which is final *e*, the first vowel is long and the *e* is silent.	180 (bone)	108 (done)	63
* 5. The *r* gives the preceding vowel a sound that is neither long nor short.	484 (horn)	134 (wire)	78
6. The first vowel is usually long and the second silent in the diagraphs *ai, ea, oa,* and *ui.*	179	92	66
ai	43 (nail)	24 (said)	64
ea	101 (bead)	51 (head)	66
oa	34 (boat)	1 (cupboard)	97
ui	1 (suit)	16 (build)	6

*Generalizations marked with an asterisk were found "useful" according to the criteria.

†Words in parentheses are examples—either of words that conform or of exceptions, depending on the column.

SOURCE: Clymer, T. "The Utility of Phonic Generalizations in the Primary Grades." *The Reading Teacher* 16 (January 1963): 252–58.

FIGURE 5.4 *The utility of forty-five phonics generalizations*

Generalizations	Number of Words Conforming	Number of Exceptions	Percent Utility
7. In the phonogram *ie,* the *i* is silent and the *e* has a long sound.	8 (field)	39 (friend)	17
* 8. Words having double *e* usually have the long *e* sound.	85 (seem)	2 (been)	98
9. When words end with silent *e,* the preceding *a* or *i* is long.	164 (cake)	108 (have)	60
*10. In *ay* the *y* is silent and gives *a* its long sound.	36 (play)	10 (always)	78
11. When the letter *i* is followed by the letters *gh,* the *i* usually stands for its long sound and the *gh* is silent.	22 (high)	9 (neighbor)	71
12. When *a* follows *w* in a word, it usually has the sound *a* as in *was.*	15 (watch)	32 (swam)	32
13. When *e* is followed by *w,* the vowel sound is the same as represented by *oo.*	9 (blew)	17 (sew)	35
14. The two letters *ow* make the long *o* sound.	50 (own)	35 (down)	59
15. *W* is sometimes a vowel and follows the vowel digraph rule.	50 (crow)	75 (threw)	40
*16. When *y* is the final letter in a word, it usually has a vowel sound.	169 (dry)	32 (tray)	84
17. When *y* is used as a vowel in words, it sometimes has the sound of long *i.*	29 (fly)	170 (funny)	15
18. The letter *a* has the same sound (ȯ) when followed by *l, w,* and *u.*	61 (all)	65 (canal)	48

Figure 5.4 Continued

Some Thoughts About Senate Bill 203

Susan Hanson, Coordinator
Alaska State Literacy Association

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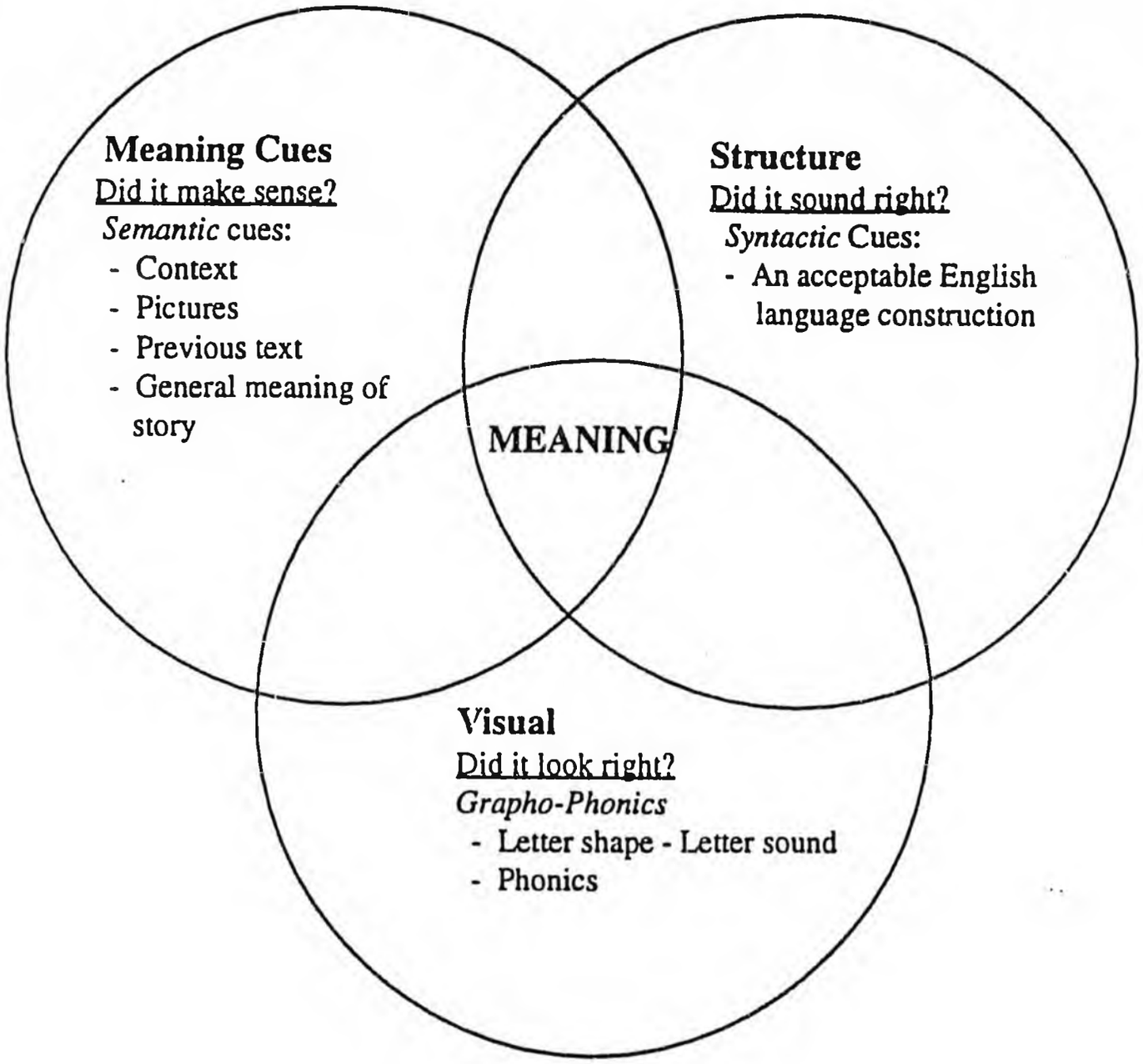
The Three Cueing Systems



Factors Which Account for Reading Success and Failure

Successful Readers

* Use a range of strategies
* Attention is focused on meaning
* Support meaning focus with letter-to-sound knowledge

Poor Readers

* Have few resources to fall back on
* Rely on memory
* Pay no attention to print details
* Disregard obvious discrepancies between what was read and what was on the page
* Pay little attention to lack of meaning

Marie Clay, p.7 and 12, 1985.

EDUCATION WEEK

tion's Newspaper of Record Volume XVII, Number 28 · March 25, 1998

THE NATION

Literature by Quota?

AP/Wide World

ncisco school board last week rejected a l proposal that would have mandated using racial quotas to select the authors on reading lists for the district's high school English courses.

NRC Panel Urges End to Reading Wars

Scholars Suggest Multiple Approaches

By Kathleen Kennedy Manzo

Let the wars be over. That is one of the central appeals the authors make in a long-awaited report on reading released in Washington last week.

Arguing that the complex process of learning to read cannot be tackled with single-minded methods of instruction, the report attempts to neutralize the phonics vs. whole language debate with a full range of recommendations for teaching reading to children from birth through the 3rd grade.

Instead, says the report sponsored by the National Research Council, the task must encompass an integration of the three techniques that develop phonemic awareness, reading fluency, and comprehension throughout early childhood.

"Because reading is such a complex and multifaceted activity, no single method is the answer," Catherine Snow, the chairwoman of the 17-member panel of scholars that wrote the report, said last week. "It is

— Continued p. 18

Panel Urges End to Reading Wars, Use of Many Approaches

Continued from Page 1

time for educators, parents, and everyone else concerned with children's education to make sure that children have all the experiences that research has shown to support reading development."

The problems many children encounter in learning to read—40 percent of the nation's 4th graders failed to reach the "basic" level on the 1994 National Assessment of Educational Progress in reading—could be prevented with excellent instruction and an early exposure to language skills and rich literature, says the report, "Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children.

The NRC, the research arm of the Washington-based National Academy of Sciences, took on the task at the behest of the U.S. departments of Education and Health and Human Services.

The panel, which studied a wide range of reading research over the past two years, called for an end to the reading wars that have divided educators, researchers, and lawmakers with opposing views of how children should be taught to read.

Despite the highly charged debate that has swirled around the issue for decades, the release of the 390-page report drew generally positive reactions from a variety of experts in the field.

"I was prepared to be once again terrified by an inadequate, incomplete piece of misinformation," said Jim Hoffman, a professor of language and literacy studies at the University of Texas at Austin, referring to reports in recent years that prescribe one method of instruction over another. But Mr. Hoffman, who is a board member of the International Reading Association, a professional group of reading teachers based in Newark, Del., said he was pleasantly surprised by the in-depth review of the research that the panel conducted. "I think the recommendations are sound for research, teacher education, and the classroom."

Integrated Instruction

The report recommends that children learn to read through explicit phonics instruction and by sounding out unfamiliar words, but it also urges daily exposure to literature and attention to comprehension.

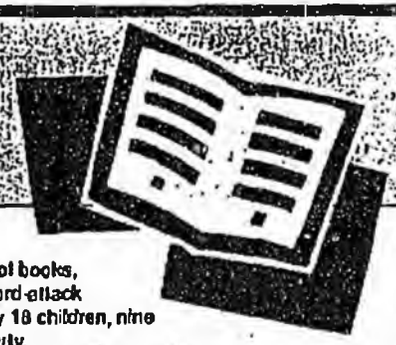
"Although context and pictures can be used as a tool to monitor word recognition, children should not be taught to use them to substitute for information provided by the letters in the word," the report says.

So-called invented spelling, which has often been the subject of ridicule by advocates of skill-and-drill techniques, also received the panel's endorsement. By this practice, children base the spelling of a word on the way it sounds.

Just as many states and districts turn toward skills-based instructional approaches in an effort to improve lagging reading scores, the report suggests such single-focus measures may be ineffective.

California lawmakers, for exam-

Reading Lessons



Following are two examples of what the National Research Council report characterizes as good reading instruction.

High-Quality Teaching: One Classroom

In Ms. Levine's 1st grade reading class, each student has a basket of books, chosen to match his or her ability. The bulletin boards offer children word-attack strategies. The children's journals are full of writing. The class has only 18 children, nine of whom have limited English ability and 12 of whom are living in poverty.

For 2½ hours, the children move at an upbeat and energized pace from one interesting and valuable activity to another. Every time the children start getting restless, it seems to be time to move to a new activity. The children are: reading independently, reading in pairs (shoulder to shoulder), reading in groups of four, spelling, and writing and writing some more.

While the children work individually or in groups by themselves, Ms. Levine teaches other children individually or in small groups. She then brings the whole class together to teach a phonics lesson on the *aw* sound in words like drawing. Without prompting, children clap out the sounds in the words. Next, she reads two books to her students, one fiction and one nonfiction, and talks with them about the content of those books. They review what helped them in understanding the book.

Word Wall and Making Words

In another 1st grade teacher's class, the daily two-hour language arts period is organized into four distinct half-hour instructional blocks devoted to process-writing instruction; basal-reading instruction; independent, free-choice reading of trade books; and word-study instruction.

The word-study block is the central focus of this discussion. It consists of two primary activities, word wall and making words. The word wall serves as a foundation for spelling instruction and practice, using five words selected each week from a basal-reading lesson or the children's writing. These words are posted and, as a whole group, the children practice reading and spelling them, with a daily chanting-clapping-writing routine. New words are added weekly, and a subset is practiced daily.

Making words is part of the instruction in phonemic awareness, letter-sound relationships, and spelling patterns. For this activity, each child has a set of 26 letter cards, with corresponding uppercase and lowercase letters printed on either side (vowels in red, consonants in black). The teacher displays one or two vowels and three or more consonants to the whole class. After the children locate the same letters from their own collections, the teacher calls out a word for the children to make. A two-letter word is presented first, with succeeding words using more letters; 12 to 15 additional words are spelled daily in this manner and added to the display.

The highlight of this daily routine is the mystery word—one that requires the use of all the selected letters. The teacher does not identify this word; the children are encouraged to discover it on their own. Subsequently, the teacher and the children together explore the new words, sorting by various spelling or phonetic features, such as word families, rhymes, and common vowel and consonant combinations.

The making-words activity is an engaging medium for explicit instruction about specific spelling-sound correspondences and the alphabetic principle in general. It also provides opportunities for self-assessment and correction, as each new word is displayed and the children compare their spelling construction with that of the teacher. It supports children who are struggling to recognize letters automatically by limiting the number of letters encountered at once. Meanwhile, the physical manipulation of the letter cards accommodates children who might otherwise have difficulty sustaining their attention in whole-group instruction. Finally, the activity is inherently motivational, because children of all levels of achievement can experience both success and instructional challenge as the lessons proceed from simple to more complex.

"Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children" is available by calling the National Research Council at (800) 624-6242. The cost is $18.

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"Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children" is available by calling the National Research Council at (800) 624-6242. The cost is $48.

SOURCE: National Research Council.

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Just as many states and districts turn toward skills-based instructional approaches in an effort to improve lagging reading scores, the report suggests such single-focus measures may be ineffective.

California lawmakers, for example, have channeled millions of dollars into professional-development programs and textbooks that emphasize phonics in an attempt to counteract the state's decade-long emphasis on whole language. Though there are other elements to both, phonics essentially means the sounding out of letters and words, and whole language focuses on comprehension of the written word.

"If phonics means forgetting about the fact that the teaching is about reading, of course that is not prudent," Ms. Snow said in an interview. "There are three aspects of excellent reading instruction that need to be not just present but integrated."

Such instruction, however, can only be provided by teachers who are adequately prepared and well-versed in how children learn to read, the report says. It calls for a restructuring of teacher education programs, money for smaller class sizes, and high-quality instructional materials.

Marion Joseph, a member of the California state school board who has pushed for a greater emphasis on phonics instruction, said the panel's findings support the state's recent efforts.

"This is exactly according to our standards and the California approach," Ms. Joseph said. "We are very clear about the importance of skills, very clear about the importance of literature."

Early-Childhood Focus

To make early literacy efforts count, the panel suggests a greater emphasis on involving parents and improving the skills of child-care providers who work with children during the critical preschool years. "Primary prevention of reading difficulties during the preschool years involves ensuring that families and group-care settings for young children offer the experiences and support that make these language and literacy accomplishments possible," the report says.

U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley praised the report for its emphasis on children's early literary experiences.

"This report confirms that to lay the foundation for reading successfully, families, caregivers, and early-childhood educators can help our youngest children develop strong language skills by talking to them, singing nursery rhymes, and reading to them beginning at birth," he said in a statement.

Rep. Bill Goodling, R-Pa., said the report supports the basis of the Reading Excellence Act, his proposal to focus $210 million on professional development for teachers as a way to improve children's reading achievement. The bill, which was passed by the House and is under consideration in the Senate, is the Republican response to President Clinton's America Reads initiative, which calls for an army of volunteers to help children learn to read.

"The National Research Council's new report on reading confirms that quality teaching from trained professionals—not untrained volunteers or tutors—is the single best defense against reading failure," Mr. Goodling, the chairman of the House Education and the Workforce Committee, said in a statement.

Bilingual Support

In a victory for bilingual education advocates, the panel recommends that young children be taught in their primary language if appropriate texts are available.

Despite the agreement the report has garnered among a number of experts in the field, it drew criticism from some who felt it emphasizes basic skills too much.

Although the report "represents an effort to achieve some kind of consensus among divergent views on the committee," said Gerald S. Coles, an educational psychologist from Ithaca, N.Y., if read carefully "it's clear that what's actually recommended closely follows the stepwise model of people arguing for an emphasis first on skills."

But as the report begins to circulate among scholars and educators, Mr. Coles view does not appear to be the dominant one.

"The fact that this report lists alongside of phonemic awareness the need for a focus on meaning and on fluency with a wide range of texts is a great step forward," said Bess Altwerger, an associate professor of elementary education at Towson State University outside Baltimore and a member of the commission on reading for the National Council of Teachers of English, an Urbana, Ill.-based professional association.

Others agree that the NRC report could have a positive effect on the field. "It is a well-constructed report that deserves careful attention," said Alan E. Farstrup, the International Reading Association's executive director. "Yet, it still places before us difficult questions that as a profession we have to address."