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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

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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-

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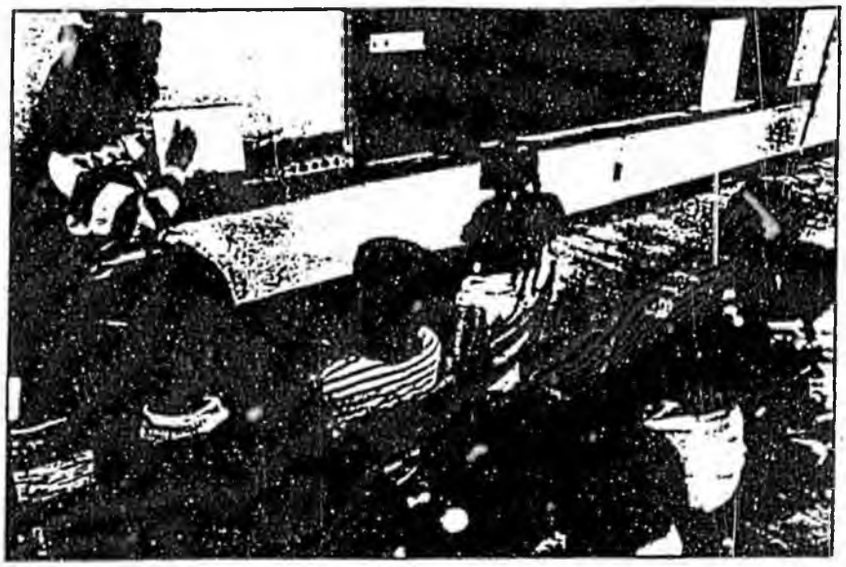

Wesley teachers are warned: "You're going to work through lunch, past 5 P.M., and on Saturdays. But you're also going to get disciplinary support, the materials you need, and all the training you require."

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.

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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

Grade Level Performance	At High School Campuses 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

Grade Level Performance	At High School Campuses 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).

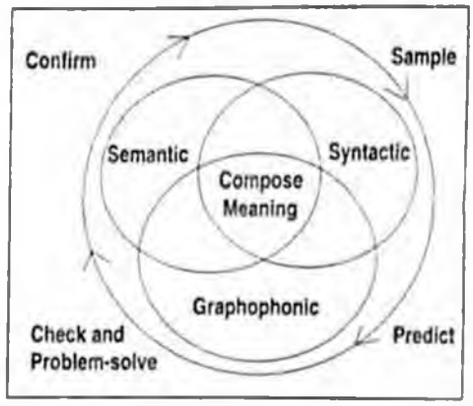

Figure 1. Place of phonics in the reading process.

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.

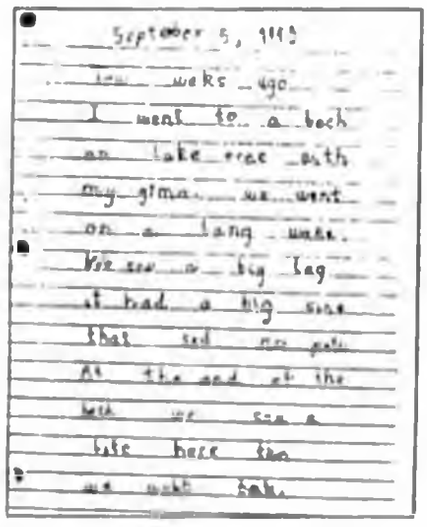

Figure 2. Child's writing showing the use of invented spelling.

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.

School Talk (ISSN 1083-2939) is a newsletter published in August, November, February, and April for the NCTE Elementary Section Steering Committee by the National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801-1096. Requests for permission to reprint should be addressed to NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801-1096.

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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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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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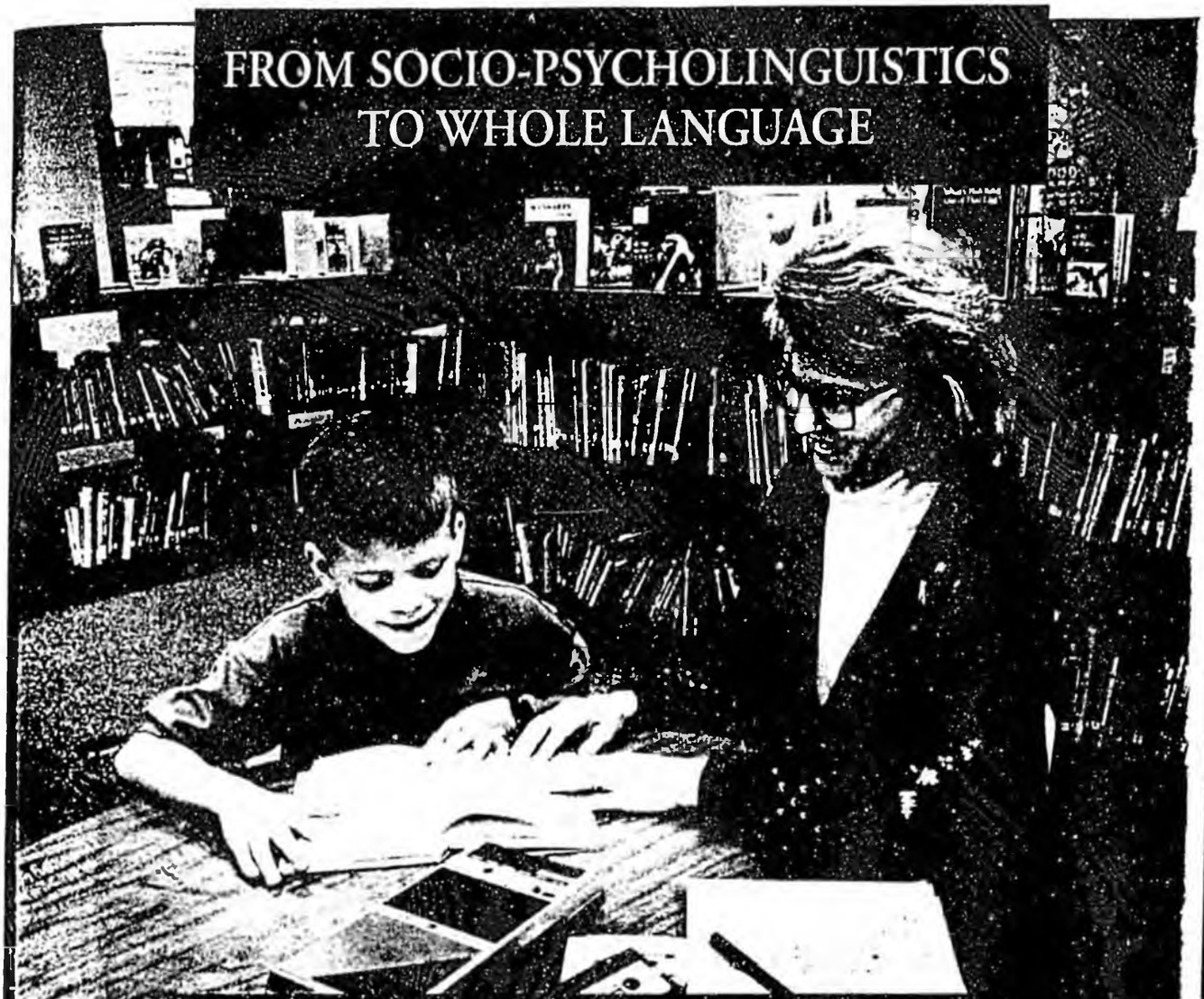
Reading Process and Practice

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.