Reading: Phonics vs Whole-Language

by Mr. Charles M. Richardson
Founder/Chairman, *The Literacy Council*
March 6, 1997

WHOLE-LANGUAGE vs PHONICS EXPLAINED

Language wars are "busting out all over" to the bewilderment of observers and even some of the participants. This article will attempt to clarify the issues by walking the reader through the basic ideas and terms, some of which, unfortunately, have been grossly distorted by the "education establishment" (EE). References are given for those who would dig deeper, hopefully to shorten the explanations herein.

TERMINOLOGY/VOCABULARY

Comparing and contrasting what are perceived to be two methods of teaching reading will be a bit tricky, since whole-language (WL) claims to be a "philosophy" rather than a method of teaching reading; and phonics – sometimes regarded as a method – is really a body of knowledge which needs to be acquired in order to read and spell our alphabetic language accurately. These distinctions become important in understanding why the arguments continue: the opponents are talking past each other – almost speaking different tongues! We think we're debating methods of teaching reading, and we're really pitting a philosophy – which is not a method – against a body of knowledge – which is not a method! No wonder confusion persists! (See "No One Best Way," below)

WL is the latest embodiment of the anti-phonics side of the phonics-vs-anti-phonics war existing in some form in the U.S. since the 1830's. The anti-phonics terminology has evolved through "whole-word," "look-say," "sight-words," "meaning-emphasis," "language experience," "eclectic," "psycholinguistics" – and now "whole-language" or "literature-based." Central to the anti-phonics crusade are claims that letter-sound teaching is dull and tedious, and delays "real reading." In such wars, vocabulary is a critical weapon. When you want to control a movement, a process, a social change, you need to control the VOCABULARY of the institutions, professions and consumers involved. Thomas Sasz captures the power of this idea in his book, *The Myth of Mental Illness*, an indictment of his own profession:

"Where is the illness? In the eye of the beholder – and the power of the definer . . . Ever since Moliere, critical thinkers have known that it is difficult to treat diseases that exist; which is why "psychiatrists" prefer to treat diseases that do not exist. To cure them, all they need is control of the vocabulary, of the taxpayer' [or the insurance company's] money, and of the patient's liberty."

THE ESTABLISHMENT RE-DEFINED "READING"

There are striking parallels between Sasz's view of psychiatry and the practices of the reading "profession" and its allies. They have quietly re-defined reading in ways that not only abet empire-building but also have permitted them to gradually degrade children's reading proficiency while hiding their perfidy in a smokescreen of bewildering (to themselves sometimes!) jargon. The way "comprehension" is treated has muddied the water between the two different processes of "learning to read" (phonics), and "reading to learn" (comprehension).

From the time the Phoenicians practiced alphabetic concepts for encoding the sounds of language, communication in the Western World outstripped that of the Orient: You didn't have to memorize a separate pictorial ideograph for every meaning, all you needed was the two or three dozen connections between symbols and the language SOUNDS they represented. Reading, from then on, consisted of recovering the sounds from the groups of symbols. Then you garnered meaning, or "comprehended," to the extent that you understood the words/language that had been written down.

The above shows the path from the written symbol to understanding the message (comprehension) to be a TWO-STEP process, requiring two distinctly different kinds of knowledge. "Reading," or "decoding," is the first step. I have two different collegiate dictionaries published 30 years apart, each with several definitions of reading, but a common listing of "rendering into speech that which is written or printed" as separate from "interpreting mentally the meanings of the words." When I was growing up, "reading" you did from the Bible in Sunday School involved faithfully pronouncing a lot of words the adults could make sense from even if I could not. But I knew I could read anything I chose to because I had the key to recovering the sound from the print – the set of organized rules about vowels, consonant-blends, syllables, etc., we gather under the umbrella term "phonics."

The two-step process is evident when you read to another person; what part of the "reading-for-meaning" process are you providing? Only the SOUNDS! You do not "comprehend" for the other person (unless you provide additional interpretation), the person comprehends out of his own knowledge, vocabulary, and language sophistication. If you were ill and asked a doctor friend to read to you, it would be fine if he read from a novel or maybe an article on education. But if he started reading from a book on brain surgery you'd complain, "I don't comprehend any of that stuff!" Whereupon he might say, "I'm reading every word correctly. What's the matter with your comprehension?!"

There's many a phonics-trained third-grader who can read a medical book aloud such that his doctor-father can comprehend, though the child cannot. For such a child to comprehend the medical book, would you send him to a reading teacher for "comprehension skills" or to medical school?

Another testimony to the "two-step" nature of reading for meaning is the very existence of the Kurzweil-Xerox reading machine that will "read" a book to a blind person via optical character recognition, phonics programming, and a synthesized voice. The machine doesn't comprehend, the person comprehends. The machine "reads."

THE BIG SWITCH

In 1931, the reading "establishment" decided to change all the above by fiat, and make reading a one-step process: The "Dick and Jane" sight-word readers were born, and America was told that "phonics is out," "whole-words," "sight-words," "look-say" by whole-word memorization is the "progressive" way to teach reading. The switch was said to be to "meaning-emphasis" (as OPPOSED to SOUND emphasis), or "comprehension-oriented," whereas phonics was "mere word-calling without comprehension." Comprehension being the obvious PURPOSE of reading, it now must be inseparably INCLUDED – even for beginners – in a ONE-STEP PROCESS going directly from PRINT to MEANING without a "SOUND" intermediary step! (See "Phonics and Comprehension," below)

No matter that the beginner, practicing sentences such as, "Matt sat on a fat cat," couldn't care less about meaning: His concern is, "Did I get it right?" To avoid sound, children are encouraged (required) to remember and visually connect the configuration of every word to its meaning – just as if it were Chinese! "Reading" had been re-defined!

BACKGROUND: THEY KNEW WHAT THEY WERE DOING!

To understand the perfidy of that 1931 "big switch' (and deal with WL psycho-babble), you need to know that way back circa 1910 education leaders recognized that the two different ways of introducing children to print produce TWO DIFFERENT TYPES OF READERS – the methods impart two different ways of "looking at" words, and that those ways tend to be mutually exclusive. (Rodgers, 1981) (See "New Test Quantifies the Difference" below.)

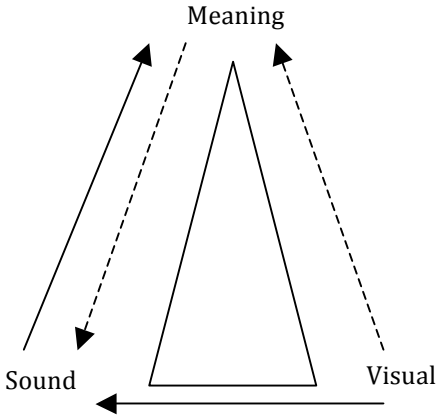
Phonic readers were called "objective" readers, as they analyze the INTERNAL structures of words for pronounceable syllables, calling each syllable as it is, assembling words therewith. Whole-word readers were called "subjective" readers, as they must scan for meaning-bearing parts of words from EXTERNAL features (length, shape, or whatever they can remember), relying on context clues to "predict" (guess). Many guesses about unfamiliar (unmemorized) words must be verified by context, re-examined and revised as necessary.

The subjective reader's comprehension suffers because his attention is divided between comprehending the passage as a whole and using the context for word identification. By contrast, the objective phonic reader can achieve virtually automatic decoding, freeing his entire conscious attention for comprehension

One of the illustrations used to aid early debates was a triangle with the corners labeled "VISUAL,' 'SOUND," and 'MEANING.' (Suzzallo, 1913) "Meaning" was at the top, "SOUND" at the bottom left corner, and "VISUAL" at the bottom right. (Rodgers, 1981)

The objective phonetic reader "traverses the triangle CLOCKWISE" from visual (print on the page), to sound, to meaning – the **two-step** process described above. Conversely, the whole-word subjective reader goes COUNTER-CLOCKWISE, directly from visual to meaning, and, if necessary, then to sound. But from visual to meaning is **one step**.

The Reading Triangle



DR. ORTON CITES THE DAMAGE

During the 1910's and 1920's decades, enough experiences of whole-word failure occurred that Dr. Samuel Orton, legator of the Orton Dyslexia Society and the first American physician to study children with reading difficulties, published (1929) an article containing the following:
"a very considerable part of my attention has . . extended over a large series of cases from many different schools . . and the observations garnered therefrom seem to bear with sufficient

directness on certain teaching methods . .the sight method of teaching reading . . the strictures do not apply to the . . sight method as a whole but only to its effect on a restricted group of children for whom . . the technique is not only not adapted but an actual obstacle to reading progress . . . the group is of considerable educational importance both because of its size and because faulty teaching methods may not only prevent the acquisition of academic education by children of average capacity but may also give rise to far reaching damage to their emotional life

". . some lag in acquiring visual memories, but I regard these as physiological variations and not pathological conditions. . . our own figures indicate that the number of children who show a significant handicap in reading is related to the teaching method . . . the specific reading disability formed an entity of much greater numerical importance than had been recognized before but that it was physiological . . . and that therefore adequate methods of teaching should correct it.

"Of two communities of about the same constituent population, in one we found about two percent of the school population . . to show the specific disability, while in the second we found more than double this percentage. In the community with the lesser number, when the children did not progress by [the sight] method they were given help by the phonetic method. In the town with the larger number, no child was given any other type of training until he had learned ninety words by sight. " . . this strongly suggests that the sight method not only will not eradicate a reading disability . . but may actually produce a number of cases

"Our studies [showed] . . the effect of this unrecognized disability upon the personality and behavior of the child. Many children were referred in the belief that they were feeble-minded, others exhibited conduct disorders and undesirable personality reactions, which upon analysis appeared to be entirely secondary to the reading defect and which improved markedly when special training was instituted to overcome the reading disability.

". . the number [of children] in whom the disability exists to a sufficient degree to be a serious handicap to school performance and to wholesome personality development is of real numerical importance and . . . even those who make a spontaneous adjustment without special training, and thus learn to read, may never gain a facility in accomplishment commensurate with their ability in other lines."

(Since 1931, whenever critics cited the problems arising from the lack of phonics, the establishment has been able to "pull its wagons into a circle" and deflect the arrows from Flesch and Walcutt in the 1950's, Chall and Trace in the 1960's, Blumenfeld and Yarington in the 1970's, etc.)

A COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

How right Dr. Orton was! The "emotional damage" noted by Orton arises not only from the self-deprecation from failure but also from the "mixed signals" reaching children about identifying words. Although he did not mention "cognitive dissonance" (he was a neurologist, not a psychologist), he certainly recognized the emotional damage from mixed signals about reading. The phonic letter-sound-connective information is always subliminally present, some children using it more than others. If teachers encourage "predicting" (guessing) from context and penalize the student who starts "sounding out," a mix of those contradictory messages reacting in a child's brain says that either phonics works and he should be allowed to use it, or it doesn't work and the teacher should supply an alternate tool of equal reliability. The child is caught in an emotional squeeze of the kind that is known as a "cognitive dissonance," which has known use in "brainwashing" types of mental torture, producing emotional disturbance.

SIXTY-FIVE-PLUS YEARS LATER

Almost echoing Dr. Orton, NY pediatrician Dr. William Campbell wrote in 1996 about the predicaments of children subjected to whole-language reading. They were being referred for Ritalin for behavior problems and "Attention Deficit Disorder" (A.D.D.) labels, and were/are BEING CURED BY PHONICS tutoring (Campbell, 1996, published in previous TLC newsletter). Referring to the plight of such children in a WL environment, he wrote, "No neurological diagnosis, behavior therapy, or drugs can give the child the cognitive ability that is systematically being destroyed every day in school."

PRESENT-DAY TEACHER PROBLEMS

"But we DO teach phonics!" The question is, "Do they believe and understand it well enough to teach it competently?" What phonics a child may be taught can be nullified by teacher policies, which penalize his using it. In a whole-language school in Mahopac, NY – where they proclaimed, "But we DO teach phonics" – in the spring of 1995, a student was penalized for sounding out words by having his desk put out into the parking lot!

Since Orton's time, the intervening years of public-school teacher training opposed to phonics has led to the deficient condition of our teachers as described in an article, "The Missing Foundation in Teacher Education," by Louisa Cook Moats (Moats, 1995). She writes, ". . . graduate level teachers are typically undereducated for the very demanding task of teaching reading and spelling explicitly. . . state certification standards must be upgraded nationwide. Teachers could not . . meet the diverse needs of students who are at risk for reading/writing failure on the basis of current minimal requirements in teacher education." She goes on to describe the specific knowledge for which a group of volunteer teachers were tested and found wanting.

A similar conclusion about teacher-trainer ignorance was reached in 1988-92 research at the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice, by Michael Brunner, during studies on literacy problems of juvenile offenders and surveys of college professors of education. (Brunner, 1993) He found that 70% of what is being advocated as teacher training is contrary to educations' own best research.

NIH LEARNING-DISABILITY RESEARCH

Still more recently, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) released results of its long-term studies on learning disabilities and how reading ability develops. (NY Times, "Teaching Johnny to Read," 1-25-97) NIH found that fewer than 10 percent of teachers actually know how to teach reading to children who don't get it automatically, a fraction NIH puts at 40 percent. NIH states that both literature and phonics practice are necessary for all children, but vital for that 40 percent.

The above figure of 10 percent means that if an educator says, "We DO teach phonics," the chances are one in ten that he knows whereof he speaks, or can do it right.

BUREAUCRATIC "STONE-WALLING" of RESEARCH

At an August 1994 NIH conference on learning-disability (LD) research, evidence surfaced that political suppression of truth about the role of phonics in reading has reached new depths of infamy: The data keep showing that WL is failing children – that children need the "phonological awareness training" that good phonics programs deliver, early and intensively. And the education bureaucracy is ignoring/ rejecting the evidence! (See Foorman, 1994) Several of these superb researchers said that they felt like "outsiders," and expressed dismay that their results are not incorporated in mainstream education curricula! Their research papers are rejected by mainstream reading journals! (e.g., *The Reading Research Quarterly*) Data, which should be

in the hands of every reading teacher, have to appear instead in psychological journals, which teachers seldom read. Here is current proof that political agendas govern public education without regard for children or science.

LONG-TERM DAMAGE TO CHILDREN

It seemed for a time that, even though the two philosophies conflict, that what a child learns FIRST would become what he uses automatically: So, teaching a child phonics first should ideally have been like a shield – protecting him against damage from other methods. BUT – new evidence of WL-environment damage to phonics-taught children shows they DO SUFFER DAMAGE to their reading performance while being in a WL environment:

On Long Island, some mothers have withdrawn their children from public school upon observing that (even after solid early phonics teaching) their oral reading accuracy had deteriorated: substitutions and omissions had markedly increased.

In a North Carolina WL school, researcher Edward Miller tested 46 children twice, 2 years apart, using a new oral reading test having two selected lists totaling 520 words. During the 2-year interval, more than half the children REGRESSED IN ACCURACY! Ironically, the worst losses were among the initially BEST readers – those with 99% accuracy the first time!

NEW TEST QUANTIFIES THE DIFFERENCE!

The test used above was the *Miller Word Identification Assessment* (MWIA), a new test which can tell whether a reader tends to be "objective" or "subjective" (See "Background . ." above), whether his "reflex" in "looking at" words is a phonetic or a holistic one, an indication of what he was FIRST taught: A reflex once established is resistant to change.

Of the MWIA's two lists, one is of the high-frequency sight-words repeated ad nauseam in non-phonic reading texts, tending to be memorized – NOT decoded. The second is of alphabetically-regular one-syllable words NOT on the high-frequency list. If a person is an objective phonetic reader, he reads both lists with equal fluency. If he is a subjective whole-word reader, he slows down and makes more mistakes on the second list, even though the words are easier than many sight words, such as "could," "would,' "should," "anywhere," "somewhere," etc.

Though the test is all first-grade words, it measures an effect that is long-term, maybe permanent: In one study with high school seniors, the error count on those first- grade words was found to correlate strongly (- 0.6) with the students' verbal SAT scores! A coefficient of 0.6 is a significant correlation; the minus sign means that as word error counts INcreased, SAT scores DEcreased.

OTHER TENETS OF WHOLE-LANGUAGE

When subject to critical analysis, every single tenet of whole-language fails to be scientifically provable. Marilyn Jaeger Adams (1991) analyzes clearly the precepts of WL. She effectively skewers the arguments of the two leading WL gurus, Ken Goodman and Frank Smith: They both argue that processing individual words is neither necessary nor productive. Smith (1971) asserts that (1) decoding skills are used only to a limited extent, and only then because such methods are imposed on children; (2) the alphabetic principle is irrelevant to fluent readers; (3) such readers rely on their word knowledge and context clues and decode only as a last resort; (4) such readers do not visually process every word – perhaps not ANY word – but pick up enough detail to correct/corroborate their hypotheses about the message of the text.

Adams points out, that in the 20-odd years since Smith's first edition, that "science has consistently, firmly, and indisputably REFUTED ALL THE ABOVE HYPOTHESES." (!) (Emphasis added.) She characterizes Smith's fourth (1988) edition as "permeated with polemic

conjecture, name-calling, and . . willful misconstruals!" In his 1988 Preface (p. ix) Smith says, "Cognitive science has not led me to make radical changes in matters concerning theories of reading." Translation: "My mind is made up! Don't confuse me with facts!"

WL tenets that collect the most criticism are its "immersion" theory – that children learn to read naturally, just as they learned to speak, and "invented spelling." The immersion theory has no basis, and is soundly debunked by Liberman, (1990) as totally without foundation: The human brain is "pre-wired" for speech, every culture has oral language, but the alphabet is a man-made convention whose principles must be taught systematically. An analogy would be teaching kids to swim by pushing them off the diving board: Some will drown, and even those who make it to shore will be less able swimmers than if they had been taught effective strokes.

Researcher Keith Stanovich (1993) says: That direct instruction in alphabetic coding facilitates early reading instruction is one of the most well-established conclusions in all of behavioral science . . . Conversely, the idea that learning to read is just like learning to speak is accepted by no responsible linguist, psychologist, or cognitive scientist in the research community.

"Invented spelling" is another unproven fad flying in the face of experience that says what a child learns first is hard to undo. There is no research supporting it, and copious observation and theory against it.

OUTRIGHT LIES

Then there are the outright lies, like the claim that New Zealand is the most literate country due to WL. New Zealand HAD a high literacy rate 30 years ago – BEFORE WL! Today their newspapers and magazines are as full as ours of complaints that children cannot read and spell. The June 1993 issue of a prominent New Zealand magazine, *NORTH AND SOUTH*, carried a long and detailed article entitled "Our Illiteracy," by Jenny Chamberlain, who characterizes their linguistic plight as "a ball and chain dragging down the performance of a nation."

PHONICS AND COMPREHENSION

The claims that phonics degrades comprehension have been shown to be false by Dr. Jeanne Chall (1967, 1983) and others. The "establishment" muddied the water still more during the 1970's with research on comprehension that failed to show decoding as a factor in comprehension. Chall (1992) took the establishment to task for the way the research subjects were selected: they were all good decoders! The establishment "cooked the books" to prevent the need for better decoding (phonics) to show in the test data! She also points out that WL's "good literature based" claim is deceptive because phonics programs generally have a greater depth of literature – AND THE CHILDREN CAN READ IT! (For good literature, take a look at the Spalding reading list.)

Closer to home, Suffolk County's ASTOR literacy program for youth on probation teaches only phonics – but measures comprehension as a yardstick of progress. And the clients are gaining.

If whole language is all that great, why do its advocates find it expedient to lie?

"NO ONE BEST WAY"

To cover for their shortfall in real insight and scientific integrity, WL gurus have a favorite cliché: "There's no ONE best way to teach reading!" That sounds so erudite, with its snobbish implication that the process is so involved that none but professionals can possibly grasp its alleged complexities. But when you look back at how they have re-defined reading – being anti-phonics – you can see the way WL people use the cliché muddies the water of discussion to the point of being outright deceptive.

To the typical parent, "READING" EQUALS PHONICS – the recovery of SOUND from print – practiced to automaticity!! And yes, there are a lot of good ways to teach PHONICS so that it can be reasonably said that there is no ONE best way to teach it, and the consumer gets lured into agreeing with the cliché. BUT – here is where the deception enters – when an advocate of WL or any other non-phonic system says there's no one best way, he/she opens the flood gates to psycho-linguistic predicting (guessing), structural analysis (judging the length and shape of the word), substituting, skipping, memorizing words or parts, bringing one's own meaning to the task, etc., a view according all those non-reliable guessing games the same status as accurate decoding, a distortion which falls somewhere between a half-truth and an outright lie! We're talking two different meanings of the term "reading!

Try explaining the above distinction to an unwary parent or school-board member (who might not be a phonetic reader himself), or a teacher-product of a WL training school! Also ask yourself if you would be comfortable using a doctor, lawyer, tax advisor or airline pilot who reads by context-guessing! What will tomorrow's professionals be like?

RESULTS FROM THE FIELD

The principal of Barclay Elementary, an inner city school in Baltimore, fought hard to remove WL and import the phonics-based program used in the prestigious (private) Calvert School nearby. With the Calvert curriculum in place for four years, test scores have soared from the 30th to 60th percentiles, and special-education "referrals" have gone down by three quarters!

Former Assistant Secretary of Education Diane Ravitch visited Barclay last May. Writing in her *News & Views* publication, she raved about the inspirational academic accomplishments and learning atmosphere she saw, then took a journalistic step back and said, "What struck me is that everything going on here is the direct opposite of conventional wisdom in schools of education!"

The above is consistent with NY experience reflected in a 1/13/97 NY Times editorial, "Betrayed in the Classroom: Learning Disabled – or Curriculum Disabled." It quoted an experienced private-school director as being "incensed by the whole-language system of reading," and affirming that children who experience difficulty thereunder are not "learning-disabled," but rather "curriculum-disabled!"

A "BALANCE" Of PHONICS AND WHOLE-LANGUAGE?

Referring to the discussions about the two types of readers and "cognitive dissonance," above, phonics teaches and demands the skills for accurate identification of each word, with well over 100 studies as proof of effect. Conversely, WL teaches just the opposite: "Predicting" (guessing) is encouraged as opposed to "sounding out," "Pony" is allowed if the print says "horse;" "house" can pass for "home," etc; use of context clues, substitutions, etc., relegating accurate decoding to a last resort! All with NO BACKUP RESEARCH!!! Think what such distortions can do to a science passage, or a math problem! The trail of emotional problems and attention deficit diagnoses speaks loudly. What's this "balance" illusion?

Given the above findings on teacher deficiencies, literature or no, if WL advocates are in charge of a district's reading instruction, the likelihood of a child receiving adequate reading instruction is virtually zero! Even if "mixing" or "balancing" were possible, the evidence casts serious doubt on the system's judgment of what constitutes "balance." Can I interest anyone in a "balanced" nutrition program of equal amounts of vitamin C and arsenic?

Another WL philosophy is that children should not be subject to any reading tests or evaluation except teacher observation -- and of course by the one who's doing the teaching! This explains why teachers love WL, but does it give a warm feeling of accountability?

READING RECOVERY (TM)

The "remedial" program by this name is a product of the same thinking as whole-language. It has been misrepresented and oversold. A new report, "Reading Recovery: The Claims vs The Facts," is available from the *National Center to Improve the Tools of Educators* (Grossen, 1996).

FOLLOW THE MONEY TRAIL

"The Beginning Reading Instruction Study" is the title of a 1993 U.S. Department of Education report examining the phonics content of the fifty most widely used reading systems, AND their cost-per-student (Stein, 1993). The costs vary over a 100-to-1 range with the phonics books being consistently the cheapest. On page 120 is the statement, ". . many programs provide handsome books with beautiful illustrations for the children to read, but fail to provide the instruction that will permit them to read the words in the books."

The increasingly expensive special reading books have made billions for publishers, who founded the *International Reading Association*, the controlling organization since 1956. With all the special-education materials and "dumbed-down" science and history texts you see that everybody on the inside has found a money tree. But millions of children have been relegated to the academic scrap heap, labeled with some sort of disability.

SUMMARY: WHOLE-LANGUAGE (WL) MUST GO!

Every facet/tenet of WL fails every test of validity or effectiveness. It damages children, even good readers, and promotes ideas that are false/unproven. Since WL is anti-science, co-existence with any science- based program is illusory. Its literature choices violate children's decoding ability, so "trial & error" take over. Would you let your child learn street-crossing by trial & error? We must let science decide. (Stanovich, 1993-4)

Reading References

Adams, Marilyn J.,, "Why Not Phonics and Whole Language," *All Language and the Creation of Literacy*, Orton Dyslexia Soc, Balt., MD, 1991

Blumenfeld, Samuel L., *The New Illiterates, and How To Keep Your Child From Becoming One*, Paradigm, Boise, ID, 1988, ISBN 0-941995-05-04

Brunner, Michael S., *Retarding America - The Imprisonment of Potential*, Halcyon House, 1993

Campbell, James, M.D., "Medical Professionals Can't Cure What Ails Many School Children," *THE VALLEY NEWS*, Fulton,, NY, March, 28,, 1996

Cannell, John Jacob, *How Public Educators Cheat on Standardized Achievement Tests*, Friends for Education, Missoula, MT, 1988

Chall, Jeanne S., *Learning to Read - The Great Debate*, 1967, & Updtd. Ed'n, McGraw-Hill, 1983

Chall, Jeanne S., "The New Reading Debates: Evidence from Science, Art, & Ideology," *Teachers Col. Record*, Columbia U, Winter, 1992

Coles, Gerald S., "The Learning Disability Test Battery - Empirical and Social Issues," *Harvard Educational Review*, August,, 1978

Flesch, Rudolf, *Why Johnny Can't Read*, Harper & Row,, 1955

Flesch, Rudolf, *Why Johnny STILL Can't Read*, Harper & Row, 1981

Foorman, Barbara R., (a participant in the 1994 NIH conference), "Research on 'The Great Debate' over Code-oriented vs Whole-Language Approaches to Reading Instruction," University of Texas, Houston, TX 77204-5874, in press. Current research on WL vs phonics; challenge to WL community to abide by empirical proof;

Kramer, Rita, *Ed School Follies*, The Free Press,, 1991

Grossen, Bonnie, & Coulter, Gail,, "Reading Recovery: The Claims Versus the Facts," (Draft) Nat'l Ctr. to Improve the Tools of Educators, U. of OR,, 1996 14. Liberman, I.Y., and Liberman, A.M., "Whole Language vs. Code Emphasis: Underlying Assumptions and their Implications for Reading Instruction," *Annals of Dyslexia*, Orton Dyslexia Society, 1990, an elegant debunking of WL theory & philosophy

Moats, Louisa C., "The Missing Foundation in Teacher Education,"" *American Educator*, Summer, 1995

National Right to Read Foundation., 1-800-468-8911

National Investor's Business Daily, "Getting Schools Back on Course," Edit'l, Sep. 15, 1995

Orton, Samuel T., A.M., M.D., "The 'Sight Reading' Method of Teaching Reading as a Source of Reading Disability," *Journal of Educational Psychology*, February, 1929

Ravitch, Diane, "A Curriculum to Copy," *Network News & Views*, May, 1996

Rodgers, Geraldine E., *The Case for the Prosecution - In the trial of silent reading "comprehension" tests, charged with the destruction of America's schools*, Lyndhurst, NJ, 1981

Shanker, Albert, "A Baltimore Success Story," NY Times, Aug. 20,, 1995

Smith, Frank, *UNDERSTANDING READING*, 4th Ed., L. Erlbaum, NJ, 1988

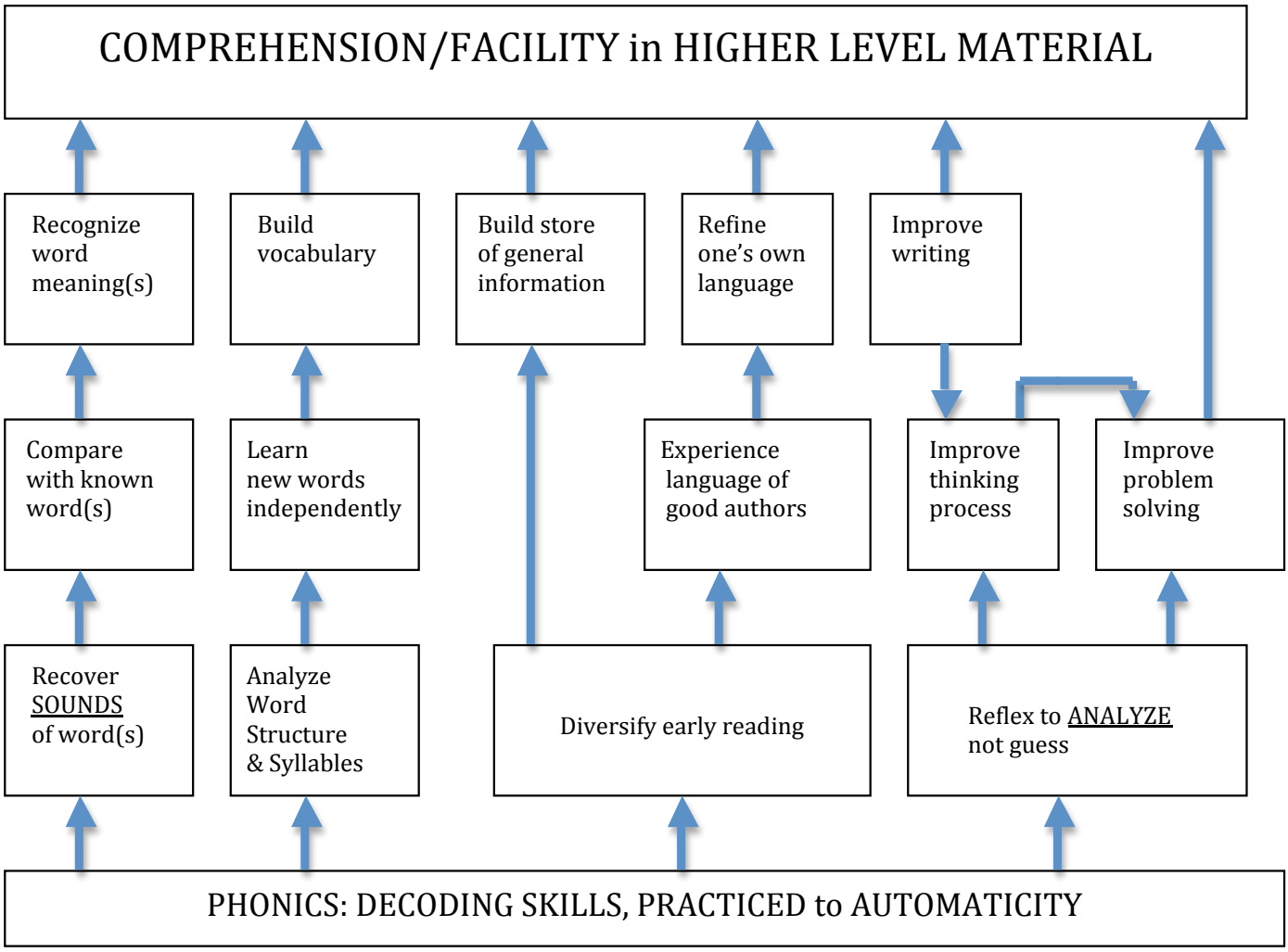
Spalding Education Foundation, 5930 W. Green-way, Ste. 4, Glendale, AZ 85306, 602-547-2656,

Spalding, Romalda, *The Writing Road to Reading*, 4th ed., Wm. Morrow, NY, 1990.

Stanovich, Keith E., "Romance and Reality," *The Reading Teacher*, December, 1993/Jan'94, an incisive examination of research showing the vital role of phonological awareness from studying phonics, and the lack of scientific basis for WL or the "LD" classification.

Stein, Ph.D., Marcy, *The Beginning Reading Instruction Study*, 1993, U.S. GPO Stock # 065-000-00575-1
Suzzallo, Henry, "Reading, Teaching Beginners," A CYCLOPEDIA of EDUCATION, F. Monroe, Ed, Columbia U., , 1913
Terman, S., & Walcutt, Chas. C., *Reading: Chaos and Cure*, McGraw Hill, 1958
Trace, Arthur, *Reading Without Dick & Jane*, Regenry, Chicago, 1965
Yarington, David J., *The Great American Reading Machine*, Hayden,, 1978.

Appendix A



THE FOUNDATIONS of LITERACY

CHARLIE M. RICHARDSON, 3/20/84

Appendix B

(Preliminary Manual)
The Miller Word-Identification Assessment
Edward Miller, 1991

Introduction (By Charlie M. Richardson)

The purpose of the *Miller Word-Identification Assessment* (MWIA) is to discover how a person "looks at" printed words, or the extent to which he/she is reading with the whole-word memorization or a phonetic decoding strategy.

The person is asked to read two lists (called "Holistic" and "Phonetic") of words which, though different, are all easy enough that a Phonetic-decoding reader will exhibit substantially equal fluency in both lists. However, for the whole-word trained reader one list (the Holistic list) will be significantly easier, it being composed of high-frequency words found in most basal-reader school texts and in children's books such as *The Cat in the Hat* and *Green Eggs and Ham*. The drop in fluency and accuracy as the person proceeds from the Holistic List to the Phonetic list indicates the degree to which he/she has become "dyslexic," that is, having dysfunctional reading, by having learned to view words as whole pictorial configurations rather than sound-decodable syllables where sequences of letters represent the order of sounds to be pronounced. The latter process is, of course, what has historically been called "sounding-out", or "decoding," by alphabetic principles often called "phonics."

CAUTION: Although this test may lead to a student's being judged "dyslexic," it is NOT an intelligence test, NOT a psychological test, NOT a medical test. It is an *educational* test yielding insight as to how a student has learned to "look at" words in print. Since the Holistic list contains 15 multi-syllable words and 18 having irregularities and/or "silent" letters, and the Phonetic list contains only one-syllable alphabetically-regular words, differences in fluency/accuracy are NOT explainable via biological factors, and must therefore be learned behaviors.

By way of background, psychiatrist Hilda Mosse (*The Complete Handbook of Children's Reading Disorders*, Riggs Institute) identified a category of "sociogenic reading disorders caused by establishment and practice of wrong reflexes." She pointed out that a "conditioned reflex" emplaced in the brain by whatever is learned *first* as a reading strategy is highly resistant to change thereafter. Similarly, teacher-researcher Geraldine Rodgers (*The Case for the Prosecution, 1981*)[1] identifies two categories of readers, "subjective" and "objective," confirming Oskar Messmer's 1903 research, described by Edmund Burke Huey in his 1908 *The Psychology and Pedagogy of Reading*. The "subjective" readers are the holistic readers who guess unfamiliar words from context and/or parts of meaning-bearing words, and have difficulty with the new material. By contrast, "objective" readers are those who have learned syllable decoding to automaticity, leaving their intellects free to concentrate on the text meaning. Thus it has been known for many years that phonics skills learned AFTER a whole-word reflex has been acquired tend NOT to be used automatically. Rodgers found similar patterns of differences in students learning to read in four other languages other than English. I observed this effect in my own practice during the 1970's, but did not understand its nature.

[1] *The Hidden Story,* AuthorHouse.com, 1998

Test Description

The MWIA has two levels, each being a pair of lists: Holistic I & Phonetic I; Holistic II & Phonetic II, all contained on four pages (attached), identical for both student and teacher/examiner. The first page contains the Level I Holistic and Phonetic lists; the second page a 150-word article titled "Vote;" the third and fourth pages contain respectively the Holistic II and Phonetic II lists. A fifth page is an optional Summary Sheet for recording student data and all test scores and analyses. The level I is for young or relatively beginner-level readers. The Holistic I list has 50 words from Dr. Seuss' *The Cat in the Hat*, a book composed of sight-words supplied by an educational publisher. The Phonetic I list is 50 phonetically regular words of one syllable taken from Rudolf Flesch's 1955 *Why Johnny Can't Read and what you can do about it*.

Procedure

A. Decide whether you will start at Level I, or Level II, based upon your judgment of the student. Young or low-level students might be able to do only Level I; secondary or adult students usually start at Level II. Prepare a teacher's copy of the test by writing the student's name in the spaces of the sheet you will be using. The student will be timed as he reads each list, so you will need a stopwatch or equivalent timing device. The student works from an unmarked copy of the test; it may be useful to set aside copies in (non-glare) plastic page protectors. Arrange the student comfortably seated at a desk or table with a copy of the test face down or with the first row covered. Arrange yourself where the student cannot see if, how, or when you are marking your copy. (If you are recording the test, arrange a microphone in as non-threatening a position as possible, preferably a small clip-on lavaliere microphone clipped to the front of the student's clothing.) To help the student keep his place, provide a short ruler or file card as a line guide if he seems to need it; or let him use his finger or place a light pencil mark at the beginning of each row as he starts it.

B. Say to the student: "We are going to ask you to read words from two lists. You probably know some of them already. Read all the words across in each row, then the next, and so on. Say each word carefully as you can; accuracy is the most important thing, so do not hurry even though I will be timing you. This is NOT a speed test; we just need to see how long it takes you to read the words." If he has questions, answer them as best you can; then say, "Please turn over the paper and begin." [Point wherever you are starting.]

C. Point as needed to where the student should begin. Help him align his line guide if necessary. Start your timer as the student says the first word. Listen carefully (if not taping), and underline on the teacher's copy each word that the student mis-calls or double-calls. (Notice if his "double-calls" are first holistic, or the reverse.) Stop your timer when he says the last word in the Holistic section. Enter the timer reading in minutes and second by the word "TIME." Reset your timer. (Writing the student's responses over the misread words can reveal valuable insights into the student's word processing strategies – suggested by Donald L. Potter of Odessa, TX.)

D. Repeat C for the Phonetic List. After doing the Phonetic list, in the phonetic section only, revisiting the words (at least 5 – 10 if not all) that were missed/underlined, point to each in turn, and ask the student to:

1. Spell the word aloud while looking at it, and then,
2. Say the word again.

If he now calls the word correctly, draw a circle around it in your copy. If he still mis-pronounces the word, put /slashes/.

E. If the student took more than 100 seconds on both Level I lists, go no further. If he had read either list in less than 100 seconds, proceed with Level II, using the same procedures as above.

F. After giving the Phonetic II section, have the student spell and retry missed words as in D, above. Note: For a young student or one who struggled with Level II lists, it may be too much to re-try all the missed words. Revisit only enough to support the computing of a sensible correction basis, say 5 – 10. Record the number revisited in the second blank space after "Spell-corrected." Make the "Phonic Efficiency" computation as the number corrected divided by the number revisited, converted to a percentage.

G. If the student read the Phonetic II list well, have him read the "Vote" article. Underline the mis-called or skipped words, and if possible indicate any substitutions or additions. Record time and errors where indicated.

H. Tell the student he did great things even if he only followed directions!

Scoring

Count the underlined words (including circled) words in each section; write the count on the line "Err." Convert the "times" from minutes & seconds to total seconds. Convert total seconds to word-per-minute (WPM), calculating per the formula below:

For Level I (50-word) test, compute WPM by dividing total seconds into 3000: WPM = (50 X 60)/(TIME in SECONDS) = 3000/TIME; e.g., for a time of 150 seconds, the speed would be 3000 divided by 150 or 20 WPM. (Round to the nearest whole number.)

For Level II (210 word) sections, WPM is 12600 divided by total seconds: WPM = (210 X 60)/(TIME in seconds) = 12600/TIME; e.g., for a time of 200 seconds, the speed would be 12600 divided by 200 or 63 WPM.

For the "VOTE" articles, WPM is 9000 divided by Total Seconds.

For the Phonetic Sections, count the words that are *circled* and enter the count in the space after "Spell-Corrected." Divide this count by number of words underlined, revisited per the NOTE in Part F, above. Express the results as a percentage, i.e., multiply by 100. This is the "Phonetic Efficiency" indicator, the student's ability to decode words phonetically once his attention has been directed to the spelling.

Compute "percent of slow-downs" as: 100 X (Holistic WPM – Phonetic WPM)/Holistic WPM, and record in the space indicated. In Level II, it is convenient to transcribe the Holistic scores on to the Phonetic page where indicated, so as to have all data on one page.

Interpretation/Discussion

If the student reads at 30 WPM or more (50 words in 100 seconds or less; or 210 words in 420 seconds or less), he is using an "automatic" system, whatever it is.

Observe the percent slow-down between the corresponding Holistic and Phonetic lists. If the student has first learned a non-phonetic word identification system as a principal strategy, he may be "running on automatic" in the Holistic list, but unable to do so, and significantly (15% or more) slower in the Phonetic list. (Students have been found who slow down more than 50%.)

Compare the numbers of errors between corresponding Holistic and Phonetic lists. If the student is a whole-word reader, his accuracy will suffer on the Phonetic lists. Students whose strategy is holistic have been known to make over 10 times as many errors on the Phonetic as on the Holistic list. Look at the pattern of "double-called" words. The student with the non-phonetic or holistic strategy calls the word non-phonetically *first*, never the other way around.

The spell-and-re-try steps, note that where the student correctly calls certain words *only after his attention is directed to their spelling*, this indicates the existence of TWO knowledge systems relevant to identification of words. The two knowledge systems are mutually exclusive, and the student cannot deny either one by conscious effort. This is a condition known to psychologist as "cognitive dissonances," which has been known to lead to emotional disturbance and trauma.

The holistic, or shape-recognition, a way of perceiving visual stimuli relies mainly on the RIGHT brain hemisphere for processing as simultaneous or "parallel" data. Conversely, the phonetic way of decoding letters and syllables is in *serial* order uses mainly the LEFT brain hemisphere, which is a "serial processor," and which has been found generally to be more involved in language activities – appropriately, as language is inherently serial data.

Also, since the two eyes map mirror-symmetrical images in the two brain hemispheres, an instructional emphasis on "right-brain reading" may account for the increased tendency for reversals and transpositions among non-phonetically-taught students.

If the student's total accuracy is 96% (a *total* of less than 10 errors) in the combined Phonetic sections, his automatic system is phonetically based and will guard him against becoming educationally dyslexic. Such a student will read both kinds of word lists at substantially the same speed, and the newspaper articles in two minutes or less with no substantive errors.

A student who reads ONLY the Holistic list well is a "disabled" or "dyslexic" reader, and will need intensive re-training to re-condition his automatic reflex. Success is uncertain unless the student is highly motivated. Obviously, the earlier the intervention, the more favorable the prognosis.

The acquired-dyslexic condition has been found to be language-specific; that is, an English-dyslexic reader can acquire a phonetic-based reflex in a second (or additional language) as long as efforts are made to get the student to look at the words analytically instead of holistically. Perhaps the most important results of this test is that we may better understand the problems associated with learning to read, and begin to examine reading programs in terms of the reading reflexes they produce in their students,

Educational Engineering, Charles M. Richardson, September 27. 1995. Retyped 4/19/03 by Donald L. Potter for publication on the Education Page of the www.donpotter.net web site. Thanks to Geraldine Rodgers for sending corrections, 9/2/03. Published on the web, 7/22/04.

The Miller Word-Identification Assessment (MWIA)

SUMMARY SHEET

Edward Miller, 1991

Name _____ M (__)/F (__) Age ___ Grade ___ Test Date ___

School _____ City/State _____

Level I

Holistic WPM ____ Phonetic WPM ____ Difference ____

Difference _____/Holistic WPM _____ x 100 = _____% of Slow-down

Holistic Errors ____ Phonetic Errors ____ Difference ____

Ratio of Phonic Errors _____/Holistic errors _____ = _____

Phonetic Corrected ____ out of ____ attempted = ____% Phonic Efficiency

Level II

Holistic WPM ____ Phonetic WPM ____ Difference ____

Difference _____/Holistic WPM _____ x 100 = _____% of Slow-down

Holistic Errors ____ Phonetic Errors ____ Difference ____

Ratio of Phonic Errors _____/Holistic errors _____ = _____

Phonetic Corrected ____ out of ____ attempted = ____% Phonic Efficiency

Tested by _____
Scored by _____

61TesSum.1, September 27, 1995

"Vote I" Article: WPM _____ Errors _____
"Vote II" Article WPM_____ Errors _____

K – 1 School _____ City/State/District _____
Method/Program _____
Publisher _____

Comments:

Name _____ M (__)/F(__) Age _____ Grade _____ Test Date _____

Holistic – I Time ____:____" = (_____ Sec)\3000 = _____ WPM_____ Err. _____

Sam	am	and	anywhere	a	are	box	be
boat	could	car	do	dark	eggs	eat	fox
green	goat	good	ham	here	house	I	in
if	like	let	mouse	me	may	not	on
or	rain	say	see	so	that	them	there
they	tree	train	the	try	thank	would	will
with	you						

Phonetic – I Time _____'_____" = (_____Sec)\3000 = _____ WPM

Err _____ Spell-Cor _____/_____ Phon Eff _____% Slow-Down _____%

Ben	nip	map	tag	job	met	sip	mix
pad	lock	wig	pass	hot	rack	jet	kid
pack	Tom	luck	neck	pick	cut	deck	kick
duck	fuzz	mud	hack	sick	men	hunt	rash
pest	land	tank	rush	mash	rest	tent	food
bulk	dust	desk	wax	ask	gulps	ponds	hump
lamp	belt						

Name: _____ M (___)/F(___) Age ____ Grade ____ Test Date _____

Holistic – II Time _____'_____" = (_____ Sec\12,600 = _____ WPM

Errors: _____ Phonic Spelling _____ Errors _____ % _____

about	a	after	all	always	and	another	are	as
at	away	back	bad	ball	be	bent	bet	big
bit	books	book	bow	box	bump	but	cat	cake
came	can	call	come	cold	could	cup	day	dear
deep	did	dish	do	down	dots	fall	fan	fast
fear	fell	find	fish	fox	for	fun	funny	fly
from	game	get	go	good	got	gown	hat	hall
hands	had	have	he	head	hear	her	here	hit
high	him	hold	hook	hop	house	how	I	if
in	is	it	jump	kick	kind	kite	kites	know
last	like	lit	little	lots	looked	let	look	made
make	man	mat	me	mess	milk	mind	mother	my
near	net	new	no	not	now	nothing	of	oh
one	out	on	our	pat	pack	pink	pick	plop
play	pot	put	rake	ran	red	rid	said	Sally
sat	say	saw	sad	see	shake	shame	she	sank
sit	should	show	ship	shook	shut	shine	so	some
step	sunny	sun	stop	string	stand	take	tall	tame
tail	tall	tell	things	this	those	the	that	there
then	these	they	thump	them	their	tip	top	today
toy	too	to	two	tricks	us	up	wall	want
way	was	we	wet	went	wish	with	what	when
why	will	wood	would	yellow	yet	yes	you	yours
open	something	playthings						

Name: _____ M (__)/F(__) Age ___ Grade ___ Test Date _____

Phonetic – II Time _____'_____" = (_____ Sec\ 12,600) = _____ WPM

Errors _____ Spell-Corrected _____/_____ Phonics Efficiency ____% Slow-Down _____%

dig	pass	men	mass	fuss	fill	Jill	Ned	beg
jam	Ann	Nat	win	gas	yell	wig	mud	rob
Tim	pan	rip	mug	pad	fig	dog	Ted	den
nod	bed	set	web	hug	lid	rib	nap	muff
fog	mill	sell	sob	pup	well	Gus	ten	tap
moss	dad	hop	Dan	map	pet	hen	sip	jazz
bit	hum	fib	doll	Ed	bib	jet	hip	kept
ring	notch	crack	thrash	test	chink	glad	pond	slot
tax	stub	fins	whisk	melt	clap	prompt	thrill	step
chunk	mush	trip	clip	ask	brat	bangs	masks	frog
drink	block	punch	strap	mend	monk	bugs	ash	grunt
camp	sand	gang	ink	spit	cuffs	much	mink	sled
dress	wept	scat	switch	chick	wax	sing	hunt	chop
branch	hills	facts	lend	hops	mist	shrub	gulps	drift
snag	quench	sketch	patch	moth	slip	grip	hints	damp
flint	lifts	dash	strip	crib	nest	long	brink	lumps
cloud	storm	reap	moist	broil	curl	thaw	charm	peach
found	lord	bound	stir	foil	leaf	birch	squeal	or
fort	chart	proud	lark	jar	ground	veal	roof	brawl
Ma	launch	Roy	girl	beast	drawn	torn	down	our
hound	talk	soot	spout	ouch	how	street	draw	farm
cork	bar	fir	Paul	coo	pout	spook	sheep	wheat
cool	boost	sweet	beam	loin	paw	chirp	shark	crook
clamp	flap	hand						

Grade: _____ Boy or Girl _____ Age _____

Date _____ Time ____' ____" (_____Sec)/9000 = _____ WPM

Errors _____

Vote I

One last time: vote

Please vote for the people who are going to run the school. Go and vote.

If today is Tuesday and you have not voted, please go vote now.

This vote is important. It is not important because the people running for office send you lots of material to get your vote. It is not important because there are a lot of people running for office. It is not important because they are spending a lot of money to get the job. It is important because you need to make sure that the best people get elected. You want good people over the schools. Your job as a voter is to vote.

It is bad when people do not vote. It is your job to make sure that good people run the schools. We do not want bad people running the schools. Please help us now. Please.

(150 words, 14 sentences, 10.4 words per sentence, 3.9 characters per word, Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level 4.2)
Written by Donald L. Potter 5/12/03.

Grade: _____ Boy or Girl _____ Age _____

Date _____ Time ____’ ____” (_____Sec)/9000 = _____ WPM

Errors _____

Vote II

One last time: vote.

The board of education election and the party primary election is tomorrow. Make sure you vote.

For some readers of this newspaper, it may already be Tuesday when you find time to read this far. If any registered voter reading this hasn’t voted, drop everything and go to the polls.

This election is an important one. Not because of the volume of promotional material, or the number of candidates, or the amount of money spent, but because of the solemn responsibility voters bear to select the best people available to carry out serious duties of government.

It is perhaps the most vital component of our national heritage, the democratic challenge to elect our government. What a shame it is when governing bodies are chosen by a minority of the voters. Make sure this election is a valid reflection of public will. Do your part. Go vote.

(150 words, 12 sentences, 12.5 words per sentence, 4.6 characters per word, Flesch-Kincaid Reading Level 8.3.)

Appendix C

Another Report from Charlie Richardson
Published before June 1998

A. THE NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL REPORT

The recent "study" (Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children) reported by a 17-member committee of the National Research Council (NRC) is a red herring, a Trojan horse, not reflective of the genuine research about to be reported by the National Institutes of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD). The 390-page report is a blatant exercise in "damage control" by the whole-language-entrenched reading establishment, to pre-empt attention from the NICHD report (the REAL research) scheduled for April release.

The assertion that "no single method is the answer" is to muddy the water of debate over ways to teach phonics, and seeks to give equal status to the politically correct whole-language (WL) fanatics of the kind that put a child's desk out in a Mahopac (NY) school parking lot as a penalty for sounding out words! And that was in a school that proclaimed itself a WL school, but also claimed, "But we DO teach phonics!" Phonics advocates are sometimes dubbed "fanatics" by the WL gurus, and their predecessors in Dick & Jane and psycholinguistic guessing games, for the unpardonable sin of sticking tenaciously to that which not only rests on valid theory but also has a track record of working! By "working" I mean successfully teaching 99% of its students to read, when properly applied, with less than 1% fallout into amorphous, victim-blaming stigmas such as "learning-disabled" (LD).

The alleged "committee" came out of nowhere, its existence unreported in literature concerning recent research. It is composed of a small percentage of bona-fide researchers that are participating in the NICHD effort – the REAL largest study – also some of the most notorious "look-and-guess" advocates on the WL bandwagon.

"Spin"

The public presentations about the NRC report boil down to the old lies that "phonics is dull drill" and "WL is creative and a relaxed way of learning to read," but you need to "mix the two in some sort of balance." This is a clear message to practicing educators to keep the status quo, no matter how many children are failing. In the same vein, the report advocates the acceptance of "invented spelling" and more bi-lingual education, despite California's traumatic learning experiences with such.

The "Authentic" Literature Sham

The "rich literature creates interest" claim of WL advocates rings hollow in the presence of the rich and "authentic" reading lists of the strong, multi-sensory phonics programs, such as Spalding (*The Writing Road to Reading),* and the genuine joy derived because students can REALLY read them. A glaring omission from the report's "Reading Check-list" is the consistent use of "decodable text" as is emphasized by NICHD. That is, a child should be given books or stories to read ONLY if he has been taught how to decode ALL the words therein and to deal with whatever "rich literature" regardless of whether or not it is readable by the student! If the student asks how to read a certain word, he may be told how, or he may be told to substitute a word of his own, or guess by the context around it.

Such a rationale, unfortunately, limits a student's scope to reading what he already knows about; new or unfamiliar material (science, math problems) poses unreasonable guessing challenges, so that he tires and loses interest. He can become very frustrated if he really wants to learn more about science, but can't guess correctly when he's in uncharted (for him) territory.

And what fun is it if you can't tell whether the detective is on a *trail* or a *trial*, whether the mayor was angry at the police being *uniformed* or *uninformed*, whether it said the relationship of two events was *causal* or *casual*, whether the poet on the beach felt a great *calm* or a great *clam*, whether the fishing boat had a load of *carp* or *crap*, whether the workman went to town looking for a *board* or a *broad*!

Emotional Disturbance

Further, when a student is sometimes told to sound out every word, and other times to put in his own word and take a guess, he gets conflicting messages. Psychology defines such a conflict as a "cognitive dissonance," which can produce emotional disturbance! Dr. Samuel Orton's famous 1929 article, "Whole-word Teaching as a Source of Reading Disability," noted the emotional disturbances in children who were forced to memorize words without being taught alphabet principles.

Accuracy: the Crucial Success Factor

This brings us to the other glaring omission in NRC's "check list:" The NICHD study, of which I have a draft copy, emphasizes that accurate word identification – every single word, that is – is the most crucial factor in developing fluent, comprehensive reading. Such rigor is derided as "fanaticism" by WL gurus, who believe children "bring their own meaning" to text, and should "predict" unknown words from context.

Nix the Mix!

To "mix/balance the two methods" is a deceptive message, a house built on sand (Biblically speaking!). Phonics is not a method but rather a body of knowledge a child must acquire in order to relate print to his spoken language to the level of accurate automaticity. (Phonics advocates will agree that there is more than one way to bring that about.) Whole language (WL) is not a method either but, by contrast, is a philosophy that says that no structured knowledge, no method, exists! How can you mix two "methods" if neither is really a method, and one is a philosophy that denies the existence of the other?!! If WL gurus are left largely in charge, as at present, children will continue to fail and be stigmatized as LD, A.D.D etc., and our costs in special and remedial education will continue to escalate. To continue such practice is institutionalized psychological child-abuse!

New Test Quantifies the Dilemma

It has been known in the reading fraternity since 1910 that it makes a real and lasting difference whether a person is FIRST taught phonics, or sight words. Recent work with a new word-identification test quantifies the degree of disability imparted by whole-word-whole-language teaching. It can tell whether a child is using the right way to identify words. The problem appears worse for black children – and we don't yet know why – as their errors and "slow-downs" show up as more severe than those of other ethnic groups. The data being found does, however, offer the only explanation thus far for the over- representation of black children in remedial classes in schools where WL reigns. (Descriptive letter from EDUCATION WEEK being sent separately.)
The draft of the forthcoming NICHD report is co-authored by Doctors G. Reid Lyon, the director of the studies, and Jack Fletcher, a pediatric researcher from Houston. It's full title is not yet finalized, but look for those names. (The study was published in June 1998, D. P.)
Charles M. Richardson, B.S., M.S., P.E.

Appendix E

WHOLE-LANGUAGE CAUSES DYSLEXIA!
A Matrix of Proof & Remedy
by Charles M. Richardson
Friday, August 13, 2004

Introduction

The matrix of proof – "connecting the dots" - draws upon the National Reading Panel report (2000), brain research at UCLA and Yale, and data from a new testing tool that quantifies the damage to children's reading that manifests as a "whole-word dyslexia" (WWD) (though the education system does not yet recognize it as such). The matrix extends further to explain the so-called "black under-achievement dilemma," the successes of children of color in schools stressing phonics, and the puzzling uniqueness of gains by African-American children observed in research on voucher-transfer effects on inner-city children (Howell, et al, September, 2000). Once WWD is recognized, logical remedies are deducible.
The term "Whole-Language" (WL) includes its stepchildren: Reading Recovery (TM), so-called "balanced literacy,' psycholinguistic guessing, and others emphasizing philosophies of word identification other than sound recovery by alphabetic strategies commonly called phonics.

DOT 1 Neurologists have known for more than a century that certain areas of the left side of the human brain are critically involved in interpreting the sequences of sounds we call language and which, if damaged or defective, result in reading impairment. They have also known that areas of the right brain deal in pictures, e.g., recognition of human faces, and which if damaged, can result in one's failure to recognize a loved one even though he can read or speak her name appropriately.

DOT 2 The last six pages (2-133-8) of the National Reading Panel's Phonics Subgroup report pondered agonizingly over consistent evidence that delaying the teaching of phonics until children were in second grade stunted their reading growth compared with that of children given systematic phonics in kindergarten and first grade. Though no alternate K - 1 curriculum specifics were given, the assumption that it was usually whole-language is supported by the section's very last sentence: "It may be that children do better when a year of systematic phonics instruction precedes a year of whole language instruction than when the reverse is the case." That sentence leaps off the page as a grudging admission that WL appears as a factor in the depressed reading performances of thousands of children alluded to in the data.

DOT 3 Dr. Jeffrey Schwartz at UCLA has written a book, THE MIND and the BRAIN, about "neuroplasticity," the ability of the human brain to "re-wire itself" in response to training, behavioral conditioning, practice, or even concentrated thought. Using PET scans, he observed specific re-shaping of brain areas involved in critical decision points during the recovery of obsessive-compulsive-disorder patients.

DOT 4 At Yale University Medical Center a research team led by Dr. Sally Shaywitz has employed functional MRI scans to observe brain activity (blood- flow) in patients during reading activities requiring minimal or more complex decoding effort: The easy parts asked if two simple words were in "same or different" categories, the more sophisticated tasks demanded judging the rhyming of differently-spelled non-word syllables, e.g., [LEAT] vs [JETE]. The 70 patients in the study were tracked for over 15 years, and classified approximately one-third each of "non-impaired" (NI) readers, 'accuracy improved" (AI) who had received significant remediation, and

“perpetually-poor readers” (PPR) who appeared to have no genetic impairment but were educationally disadvantaged, or "environmentally influenced" in developing ineffective reading strategies.

Another task given outside the MRI magnet required pronouncing words from two lists, one of high-frequency (familiar) and the other of low-frequency (less familiar) words. As in the MRI tasks, data on accuracy and response times were recorded. Unfortunately, only the accuracy data were published for the word lists, and showed decreased accuracy on the less familiar words (more decoding required). In all cases, the PPR group accuracies and speeds were below those of the NI and AI groups. The PPR group’s brain activity is of particular interest because of the excess blood flow in areas of the right brain normally used for memory, and which appeared to interfere with the language processing of the left brain.

Starting to “connect the dots,” we ask, “How did the PPR group learn to utilize their right brain - the memory region?” We look to the twin strands of DOT 2, the NRP report of children starting to memorize whole words (as if they were pictures) before phonics, and DOT 3, the UCLA findings that brains re-wire themselves according to usage concentrations. We see the strong likelihood of a causal connection, but we need data more focused on quantifying these subtle relationships.

DOT 5 Enter the Miller Word Identification Assessment (MWIA), a new testing tool that measures relative tendencies of a person to view words as memorized wholes (right-brain), vs decodable syllables (left-brain). The MWIA is a 1980’s creation of Edward Miller, a retired administrator and math teacher in North Carolina (himself somewhat dyslexic, but a genius!). It is an early embodiment of the Shaywitz team’s high/low frequency word list technique, implemented in two levels: Level I with 50 words on each list and Level II with 210 words on each list.

The Level II’s high-frequency (HF) list is essentially the vocabulary of THE CAT IN THE HAT, which Dr. Seuss claims was written under contract to an educational publisher who supplied a list of 220 words and requested a children’s book using them exclusively! The HF list of Level I is the vocabulary of GREEN EGGS and HAM. Both low-frequency (LF) lists are one-syllable, phonetically-regular (no silent letters or irregularities) words, mostly drawn from the practice lists in WHY JOHNNY CAN’T READ (Flesch, 1955).

Administering the MWIA involves keeping track of time and errors as the student reads first HF and then LF lists. A decoding left-brain reader handles both lists equally, sometimes speeding up a little on the LF list because the words are intrinsically easier: By contrast, The CAT IN THE HAT has over two dozen words that are multi-syllable (another, anything) or irregular (could, should, would).

A right-brain-whole-word reader, however, slows down and makes more mistakes on the LF list: sometimes major - 50% or more, and errors doubling or quadrupling. And most of the errors are “look-alikes!” An additional step, on the LF list only, is to re-visit a sampling of the mis-called words, point to each and say, “Spell this aloud and try it again.” Four out of five times he now says it correctly, even blurting out the word without spelling it. It needs to be asked, “If he knew how to decode it, why didn’t he say it right the first time when he was “running on automatic?” Since the LF words are intrinsically the easier list, it has to be a learned behavior, learned earlier; his brain re-wired with a conditioned reflex to read with his right-brain’s picture-taking sites.

The African-American Predicament

Unexpected, but very consistent, are findings that slow-downs and error counts for African-Americans with WWD are roughly twice as severe as those for Caucasians. The phenomenon was discovered by Miller in North Carolina, and persists in my NY data, showing that phonics-first teaching is more crucial for African-American children than for other ethnic groups. There are both anecdotal and recorded data that African-Americans succeed well in schools stressing phonics.

Though we do not understand the "WHY's," MWIA data are consistent enough to guide attacking the so-called "black under-achievement problem" via initial systematic phonics, plus other remedies, below. Research on inner-city populations on academic gains related to voucher-transfers from public to non-public schools has raised questions that the research teams cannot yet answer: The team of Howell, Wolf, Peterson, and Campbell is at a loss to explain why African-American children make significantly higher gains than other ethnicities. Their initial report (September, 2000) was described in EDUCATION WEEK, 2/7/01, "In Defense of Our Voucher Research."

It is generally known that non-public schools tend to have stronger phonics programs than do public schools. That assumption, taken together with the MWIA data, explains the Howell team's quandary. Also, the late Albert Shanker's column of August 20, 1995, describes an inner-city school adopting a phonics-based curriculum, resulting in what Mr. Shanker termed a "Baltimore Success Story:" Not only did achievement scores soar, but special-ed referrals went DOWN by a factor of 4! Phonics matters crucially for African- American children!

Remedies

Prevention of WWD is, of course, the best remedy. Review those patterns in DOT 2, the NRP report, showing that phonics taught EARLY launches the left brain using its sound language processing to best long-term advantage. After a whole-sight-word beginning, re-programming the brain for automatic decoding is sabotaged by the ubiquitous presence of those 220 words which Dr. Seuss' educational publisher knew to be the most frequent in our language, making up 50 percent of all English running text. They keep reinforcing the wrong reading behavior.

Ed Miller has devised a "Sight-Word Eliminator" (SWE) to eliminate those words temporarily from a student's reading environment: He modified a typical American novel, painstakingly blanking out the 220 sight-words throughout. Exercising with such a text forces the student to decode every word, simple behavior modification (brain re-wiring). Of the hundred or so children that Miller has worked with, the best-documented is a class of 25 fourth graders who, in only ten weeks, made substantial improvement in reading accuracy; most also increased in speed using the SWE plus other materials.

The MWIA Level I is a simple 5-minute procedure enabling schools (or parents) to learn what their reading programs are really producing. A more- detailed article with the MWIA Level I and graphs of the above-described data is available. (Also an MWIA set with the Level II)

Appendix D

Additional Information on Mr. Richardson from Various Sources on the Internet

Resume of Charles M. Richardson, B.S., M.S., P.E.

Published on: 11/13/2000

Charles M. Richardson holds a B.S. in Electrical Engineering from Worcester Polytechnic Institute and an M.S. in Secondary Education from C.W. Post College. He was for 15 years owner-director of the Learning Foundations tutoring center in Hauppauge and in Dix Hills, testing, prescribing, and administering individualized instruction for over 2700 students of all ages. He also served as Adjunct Professor of Special Education and Reading at C.W. Post. His experience includes 31 years of engineering at Raytheon and Unisys (Sperry) in radar systems, or various components thereof, including government engineering liaison work and electronic test instrument sales.

He was a founding (and now honorary) trustee of the Reading Reform Foundation of NY. He is the originator and technical consultant for the ASTOR Literacy Program for youth on probation in Suffolk County jointly with the American Red Cross Communtiy Service Unit (Hauppauge). Presently he serves on the Education Committee of the Long Island Association (LIA), the Pre-College Education Committee of the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers (IEEE), and is curriculum chairman for the Empire State Taskforce for Excellence in Educational Methods (ESTEEM) and for Long Islanders for Educational Reform (LIFER). He was awarded a citation for outstanding contributions to education by the NY State Society of Professional Engineers in 1993, and similarly by the Engineers Joint Committee for Long Island in 1996. He is a member of the Orton Dyslexia Society, the All-County Taxpayers Association, and chairman & founder of The Literacy Council and of Educational Engineering, a consulting and tutoring firm in Huntington Station, NY. He is a Licensed Professional Engineer and holds teaching certificates in Elementary Education, Special Education, and Secondary Mathematics, Physics, and General Science.

To whom it may concern:

I seek to improve the quality of public education while reducing its costs by stimulating public discussion with education professionals and the business community on issues such as literacy, learning-disabilities, testing, self-esteem, values, outcome-based education, etc., and their effects on educational costs.

I speak out on educational issues of concern to parents, business people, civic organizations, and conscientious educators. Having been in two professions (one of which is scientific), I offer an alternative perspective to provide “the other side of the story” with respect to information emanating from the education bureaucracy, much of which has a psychologically deceptive “spin.”

Charles M. Richardson holds a B.S. in Electrical Engineering from Worcester Polytechnic Institute and an M.S. in Secondary Education from C.W. Post College. He was for 15 years owner-director of the *Learning Foundations* tutoring center in Hauppauge and in Dix Hills, testing, prescribing, and administering individualized instruction for over 2700 students of all ages. He also served as Adjunct Professor of Special Education and Reading at C.W. Post. His experience includes 31 years of engineering at Raytheon and Unisys (Sperry) in radar systems, or various components thereof, including government engineering liaison work and electronic test instrument sales.

He was a founding (and now honorary) trustee of the *Reading Reform Foundation of NY*. He is the originator and technical consultant for the *ASTOR Literacy Program* for youth on probation in Suffolk County jointly with the American Red Cross Community Service Unit (Hauppauge). Presently he serves on the Education Committee of the Long Island Association (LIA) and the Pre-College Education Committee of the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers (IEEE). He was awarded a citation for outstanding contributions to education by the NY State Society of Professional Engineers in 1993, and similarly in 1996 by the Engineers Joint Committee for Long Island. In 1998, he was presented with the LI Distinguished Leadership Award, by Long Island Business News. He is a member of the Orton Dyslexia Society, the All-County Taxpayers Association, and chairman & founder of The Literacy Council and of Educational Engineering, a consulting and tutoring firm in Huntington Station, NY. He is a Licensed Professional Engineer and holds teaching certificates in Elementary Education, Special Education, and Secondary Mathematics, Physics, and General Science.

The information on this page was taken from http://www.longisland.li/tlc.htm

Quotes from an Interview with Ken Cerini

Published on 1/14/2005

“Examination of education records of youth in the community-service program disclosed virtually all to be special education students,” said Charlie Richardson, Founder and Chairman of TLC.”Children who don’t read fall behind in school, become frustrated and angry, and frequently develop serious anti-social behaviors. In 1995, seeing many adjudicated teens with reading levels below 5th grade led to the inception of the ASTOR project that helps these kids change their lives.” Richardson was joined by Helen Meyer, Director of the ASTOR Literacy Project in an interview with Ken Cerini.

...

Richardson: TLC is a non-profit organization founded in 1992 whose mission is to be a consumer-advocacy voice in education.

...

Richardson: ASTOR stands for “A Sentence TO Read,” TLC’s flagship project.

...

Richardson: Phonics is a body of knowledge of the alphabet as a “code” of connections between print and the sounds of language.

...

Richardson: Studies at Yale University Medical Center show poor readers with excess blood flow in the right side of the brain, which is the part used for dealing with pictures not language.

...

Richardson: It’s a two-step process.

...

Chairman: Charles M. Richardson

Notes from Internet Publisher: Donald L. Potter

June 20, 2009

My Experience. I first read the lead article back in about 2000. I started corresponding with Mr. Richardson at that time about my work in teaching phonics in public schools. Charlie provided me with a copy of the *Miller Word Identification Assessment,* which I began to use in late 2001. He also introduced me to Miss Geraldine Rodgers who has since become my mentor and confidant. I heartily recommend all her books and essays for anyone who wants to get the **real facts** on the history and psychology of teaching beginning reading.

Appendix A: "The Foundation for Reading" chart was presented by Mr. Richardson on March 20, 1986 in the government document, "Oversight on Illiteracy in the United States.

Appendix B: *The Miller Word Identification Assessment* is included so that readers can see for themselves the assessment to which Mr. Richardson was referring. I have given over 300 of these assessments since 2001 to all kinds of readers, good and poor. The really good readers were always free of artificially induced whole-word dyslexia, whereas the poor readers always had it. I have found that the best way to help these defective readers was to remove them from their whole-word guessing environment and do straight phonics drills with several programs I have found highly effective; such as: Hazel Loring's 1980 *Reading Made Easy in First Grade with Blend Phonics* (Charlie sent a copy.), Rudolf Flesch's *Phonics Exercises* in his 1955 *Why Johnny Can't Read* and what you can do about it, Sam Blumenfeld's *Alpha-Phonics*, Dolores Hiskes' Phonics Pathways, the 1936 Hegge-Kirk-Kirk *Remedial Reading Drills*, and Noah Webster's 1824 and 1908 *Spelling Books*. Once the students have overcome their guessing habit they will be ready to start reading with automated decoding and vastly improved comprehension.

Appendix C: Is a short article found.

Appendix D: This short essay was one of Charlie's finest productions. It represents the in short compass and crystal clear clarity the results of his many year of research and teaching.

Appendix E: I added Biographical Information: I have added some biographical information at the end of this document. I will be delighted to add any information about Charlie that I can obtain. I am sure the thousands of students that he will remember with deep appreciation just how much Charlie helped them to overcome their problems with reading and become productive members of society.

Mr. Richardson passed away in April 2008. The Literacy Council (TLC) board voted to disband the organization after his death. I deeply treasure the years of correspondence in which Charlie shared with me the rich fruits of his years of research and teaching.

Be sure and visit www.donpotter.net for more information on reading and phonics.

Last edited 6/22/09, July 11, 2010.