INDEPENDENCE ISSUE PAPER
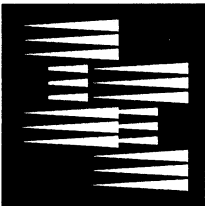
A Layman's Guide to the Great "Reading" Controversy

by Dr. Arnold Burron

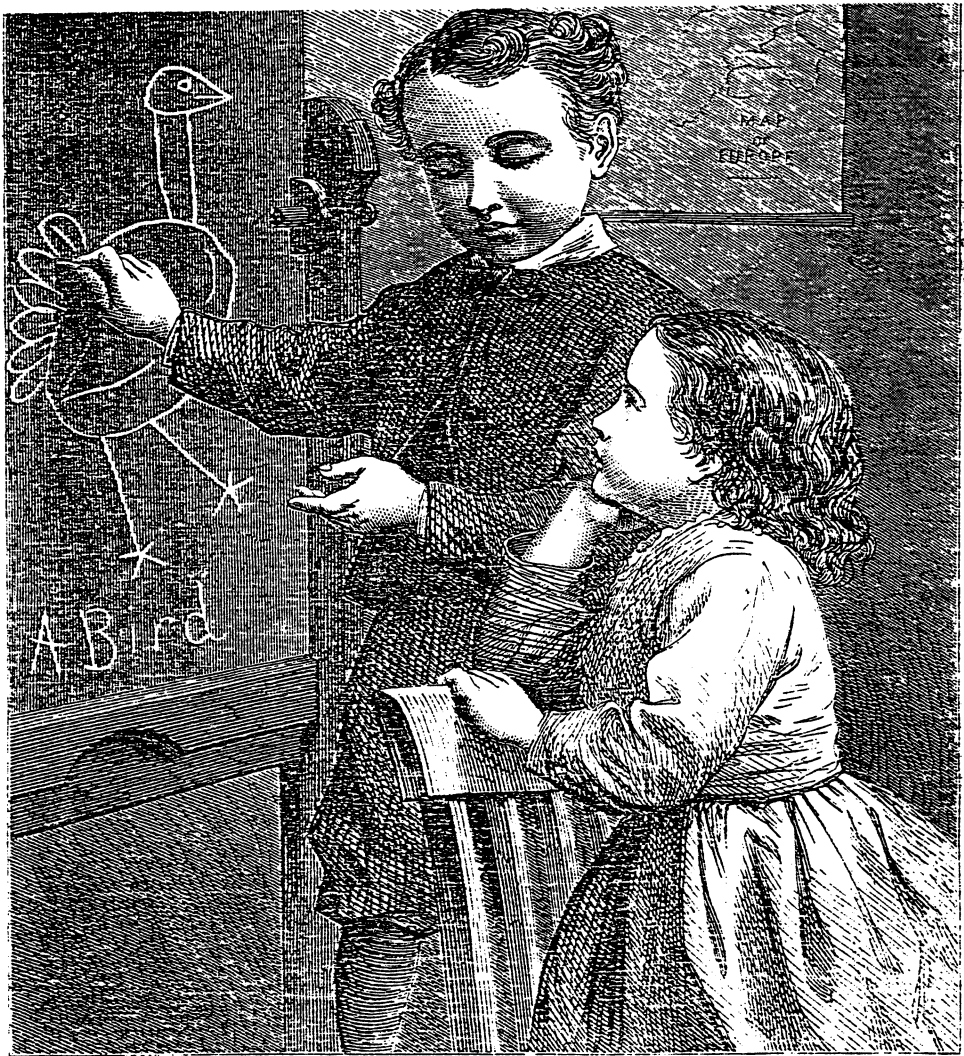# INDEPENDENCE INSTITUTE

Reading Instruction: What Works Best?

A Layman's Guide to the Great "Reading" Controversy

How Were You Taught to Read?

If you regularly read articles like this, you are probably a member of one of several generations of Americans taught to read by an approach known as the basal reader approach. If you can think back, and hear any of your teachers saying, "Take out your readers," or "Take out your workbooks," or if you can remember flash cards, taking turns reading a story orally, working on worksheets, or following the

adventures of one family, whether they were Dick, Jane, Sally, Puff, and Spot; or Jack, Janet, Penny, Tip, and Mitten, you were undoubtedly taught to read by the *basal reader approach.* And if you regularly read the daily newspaper, or popular or specialized periodicals, you are a literate citizen who can function effectively in American society. Yet, the basal reader approach, and many approaches contemporaneous with it, have increasingly been under attack by advocates of what has variously been called "The Whole Language Philosophy", "The Literature-Based Approach", or "holistic teaching of reading." Indeed, in many schools, teachers who would prefer to use basal readers in teaching beginning or intermediate reading are afraid to publicly say so, for fear that they will be disdained by their colleagues by being labeled as"old -fashioned," or "out-of-touch", or by being otherwise regarded as somehow not quite competent in the teaching of reading. This, despite the fact that millions of literate Americans learned to read with basal readers.

Why Fix It If It Isn't Broken? (And Some Other Questions)

Why, then, the controversy about beginning reading instruction? Why the emphasis, in the public schools, on so-called "whole language" teaching? Why the backlash by parents, private school patrons, and fundamental schools advocates, against whole language, manifested in the increasing popularity of a myriad of phonics-based programs, perhaps the best-known of which is "Hooked on Phonics", whose ubiquitous "1 800 ABCDEFG" commercial is known to virtually every radio and television listener in America?

These questions will be addressed in this Issue Paper. Other questions will also be explored. For example, why is there so much controversy over beginning reading instruction? What should a person know about reading in order to really understand the controversy? What, exactly, is a basal reading series, and what are its strengths and its limitations? What other approaches to beginning reading instruction have been used during the twentieth century? What are their strengths and weaknesses? Which method, unequivocally, is the best method for teaching children to read?

This *Independence Institute Issue Paper* can serve as a resource for the thoughtful taxpayer who is concerned about quality reading instruction in the public schools. Following the basic information presented here, some useful resources are identified for in-depth study of what promises to remain an issue of continuing debate on the American educational scene. In addition to the listed resources,

specialized professional periodicals can be searched using, as key words, any of the major topics discussed in this paper, such as *phonics*, *literacy,* and so forth.

Why Is There So Much Controversy Over Beginning Reading Instruction?

A Matter of Definition

Let's begin with a simple premise: Your definition of an activity determines how you will engage in the activity, or how you will teach it to others. For example, if I invite you to go skiing, and tell you that I will provide the equipment, and that you need only to dress appropriately for the lesson, it would be important for you to know whether I am thinking about water skiing, or snow skiing. Arguably, you could snow ski attired in a bathing suit, but the lesson would probably be limited in effectiveness by the factor of your limited attention span.

Much the same problem constitutes the fundamental reason for most of the controversy over beginning reading instruction. How one defines "reading" will determine, in large part, how one will go about teaching reading. A definition of reading is elusive; indeed, one "literacy" faculty of over half a dozen members, in a teacher education division at a major university, unsuccessfully attempted, in a two-hour meeting, to reach a consensus on how they would define "literacy"--a term, which, by-the-way, had replaced the term "reading", which was thought to be inadequate as a descriptor for the multitude and variety of communication tasks facing modern Americans! The professors were no doubt reflecting what the literature in reading instruction had repeatedly reported. For example, one basic textbook for teachers had this to say about a definition of reading, and how one's definition affected the teaching of reading:

> Linguists, educators, psychologists and a variety of scholars
> from other fields continue to debate the question, "What is
> reading?" There are many different theories and definitions
> available that attempt to explain and define the complex act of
> reading. What a teacher believes about the definition of reading
> directly influences how reading will be taught.1 (Cooper, p.1)

Points of Agreement

Irrespective of the continuing academic debate, "reading" has certain components which most teachers of reading and which most teachers-of-teachers of reading would recognize as being essential elements in the act of "reading"--even though the teachers and their professors would probably argue about whether the components should be called "components", "activities", "tasks", "processes", "abilities", or by some other term. In fact, the very phenomenon of their arguing about terminology is further evidence of the fact that a key factor which must be recognized in understanding the problem of the debate about reading instruction is one of definition. That factor notwithstanding, let's turn now to what goes into a working, non-academic definition of reading. Then we'll look at how one's definition will determine one's approach to teaching reading.

The Well-Rounded Reading Program

A well-rounded program in reading instruction can be illustrated by the circle below. The circle is divided into four equal parts.
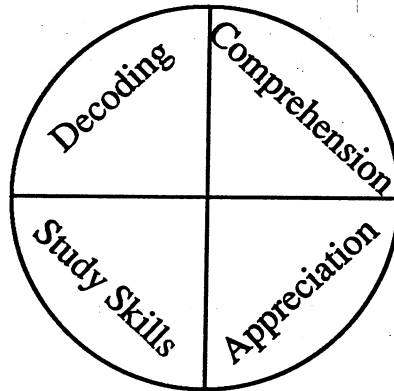
Decoding or Word Attack Skills

The first task faced by anyone in teaching reading is to teach readers how to *decode* marks on paper; that is, to express in words what the marks represent. Reading teachers call this "decoding". The skills used by readers to "decode" are called "decoding" or *"word attack"* skills. More about this later, because the debate about how to best teach "decoding" lies at the heart of the great "how to teach reading" controversy.

Comprehension Skills

Once a person can "decode", or express in words what printed text says, the person cannot be said to be "reading", as such, unless the person comprehends the words being said. Anyone reading this paper can make oral sounds represented by these symbols: "Ugga ugga boo, ugga boo, boo ugga!" The exclamation point can even help the reader "read with expression." But the act of actually reading has not taken place, because there is no comprehension of what is being articulated. So *comprehension*--understanding--is a second part of a well-rounded program of sound teaching.

Study Skills

For years, a popular saying among reading teachers was the cliché, "In the primary grades, children learn to read; in the upper grades, children read to learn." The point was that, once the fundamental decoding and comprehension skills had been mastered, *pupils* would become *students,* and students would become *scholars;* i.e., they would become increasingly independent in their use of literacy in pursuing knowledge in various academic areas. They would add to their skills in word attack and comprehension, skills known as *Reading Study Skills. Reading Study Skills* are a third component of a well-rounded program of reading instruction. (These are the skills, by the way, which are encompassed under every outcome in Outcome-Based Education which addresses what students "*will be able to do*," and they would include skills in "encoding", or writing, skills in speaking, and skills in otherwise communicating what has been learned through independent study.)

Appreciation "Skills"

While all of the academic skills identified above are being taught and practiced, a well-rounded program in teaching reading would attempt to instill in children a love of reading, also referred to as "appreciation." No responsible adult would be satisfied with producing a proficient reader who hates to read and who goes to any lengths to avoid reading and writing activities; hence, almost every approach to teaching reading has, in one way or another, attempted to be sensitive to learners' interests, or to make reading "fun." Appreciation, most teachers recognize, is "caught", rather than "taught", and one school of thought, which we will see later, places such heavy emphasis on this thesis that its adherents are convinced that what they call "quality literature" is the only vehicle suitable for beginning reading instruction, even if a vast part of a child's first reading experiences is nothing more than rote "*look-say*", or "sight word" reading--what critics call "word calling."

The Heart of the Debate

An understanding of the circle representing a well-rounded reading program is a good beginning to understanding the debate about how reading should best be taught. In the example above, about the people who embrace "appreciation" as their key focus, such a focus would lead them to this train of thought: *"Children must appreciate good literature, which means that they will have to read material harder than 'Run, Spot, run', which means that we cannot use easy-to-read materials which repeat words over and over, leading to unnatural language patterns, which means that we must find "quality" stories, which means that some of the words will be words which cannot be sounded out with regular phonic rules, (and besides, we don't want to ruin children's love of reading by deadly drills in letter sounds, followed by worksheets),which means that we will probably have to read and reread certain selections to them until they have memorized the words and can "read" them on their own, which means that our program of reading instruction must necessarily teach look-say, or "sight word" reading in the beginning stages).* The author might add, in considering this train of thought, the postscript: "Which means that, advocates of letter-sound instruction, or phonics, are going to be screaming about a lack of phonics instruction, and for a few weeks or months, depending upon when their child's teacher chooses to start teaching discreet letter sounds, they'll be right!"

A Closer Look at Decoding or Word Attack Skills

Some information in addition to the basic understanding of the circle, above, is also helpful in understanding the "how-to-teach-reading" controversy.

In changing symbols into words, there are several skills readers use. Differences of opinion about *How* these skills are taught, *When* they are taught, and to *What extent they are emphasized* contribute significantly to the debate.

1. Picture clues:

Beginning readers often use picture clues to help them decode words. For example, suppose a child pronounces the "oo" sound in "footprints" in the example below, as the sound he hears in the word "moon." A quick glance at the picture can help him correctly decode the word. Picture clues are a temporary skill, used unconsciously by beginning readers. Many pre-schoolers, without formal instruction, can read words which they initially encountered in a "Picture Clue" situation, such as "Broncos", "K-Mart, " "Target," "McDonald's," and so on.
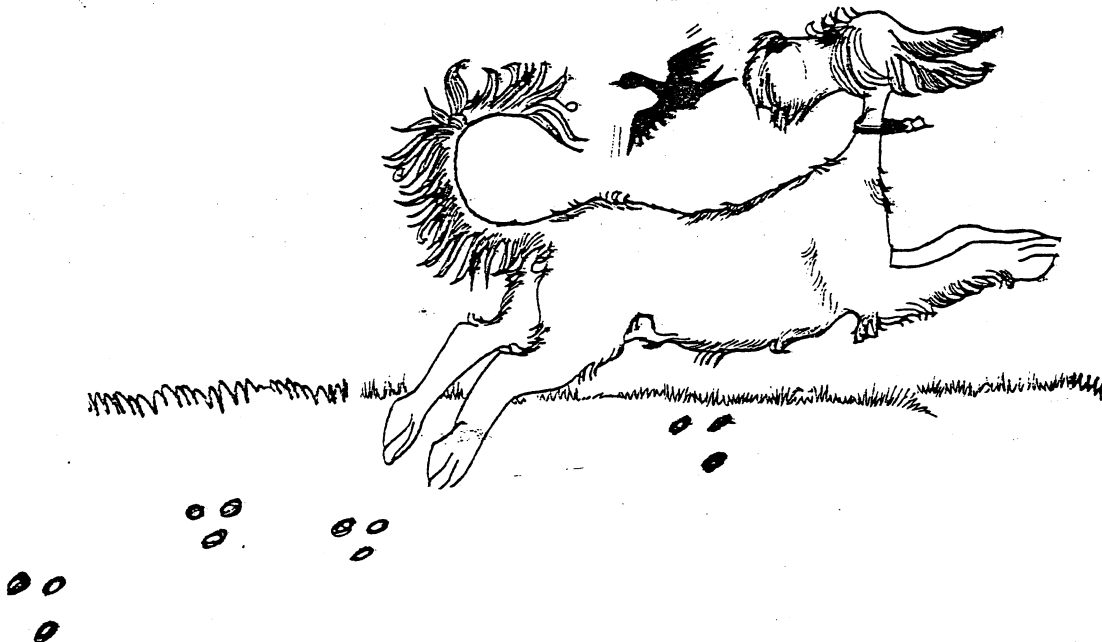
2. Context Clues:

Another way a beginning reader might verify whether what he has read is a word is to ask whether what he has said makes any sense in a sentence. For example, "footprints" would make sense in the sentence above, whereas the "nonsense" word, derived from a child's inaccurate application of letter sounds, or phonics, would not make sense. *Context clues* are also called "*syntactic and semantic cueing*"

(does it sound like language? does it make sense?) in the jargon of many reading teachers.

Context clues are sometimes very useful, as in decoding the word #$%^ in the sentence, "The presents were all arranged beneath the Christmas #$%^ ." Other times, they are only somewhat useful, as in the sentence, "The boy sailed his boat on the _____." In the first sentence, the word "tree" comes to mind immediately; in the second sentence, one might use "lake," "river," "pond," or any of several other words which make sense.

A Personal Example of How We Use Skills

Here's another example of how you might use skills. Try reading the paragraph below without making an error, or without rereading:

The boys' arrows were nearly gone, so they sat down and stopped hunting. Over at the edge of the woods, Henry was making a bow, because he had just seen the princess coming down the road. It was clear that she was very unhappy, because she had tears in her dress as well as tears in her eyes. Suddenly, the rest of the boys jumped to their feet, but not because of the princess. Does were standing at the edge of the woods, and one does not waste opportunity when hunting!

Most readers stumble over the words "bow", "tears", "tears", and "does". Letter sounds, it can be seen, are not sufficient for successful decoding. The reader must use context clues to determine which pronunciation is appropriate. Of course, had a picture accompanied the text, no decoding difficulties would have ensued!

3. Sight words:

Sight words are words recognized instantaneously, or at least, within a second or two, at sight. They require no "sounding out", no "picture clues", and no validation by context. As you are reading this *Issue Paper*, you have read almost exclusively by using "sight words", since you have repeatedly encountered the words during your life experience, and since you did not have to "sound out" any words. Contrary to popular opinion, sight words can be quite useful to a beginning reader, who would be able to read quite efficiently after mastering only a few hundred high-frequency words. Several professors of reading instruction have compiled lists of such words, and the lists, when mastered, can be of great help to children who are unable to hear differences among letter sounds, or otherwise master letter-sound associations or master other word attack skills.

<u>Sight Word Lists</u>

One of the best-known lists of high-frequency words used in children's reading material was compiled by Edward Dolch, in 1942, and is often referred to as "The Dolch 220". Another well-known list was compiled by Edward Fry, who claims that a reader who can master "Fry's Instant Word List" can read   % of all of the words he'll encounter in his daily reading needs.

4. Phonics

Almost every literate American has heard about the word attack skill of phonics. Phonics refers to letters and the sounds they represent. The "phonics versus other methods" debate is not a new one. In 1963, Nila Banton Smith, in her classic textbook, "*Reading Instruction for Today's Children*" had this to say about phonics:

> *Phonics has been the subject of rabid criticism or enthusiastic approval off and on throughout nearly two hundred years of reading instruction. It still is not only a controversial subject, but one which is very much misunderstood, particularly by laymen.*
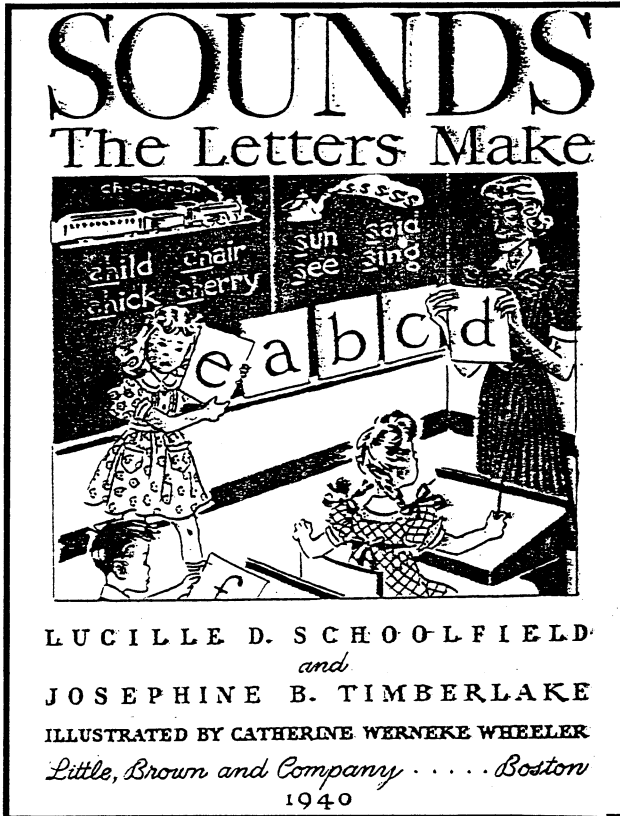>
> *Popular magazines carry articles by recognized writers and well-known individuals in fields other than reading who state that all would be well if he schools would teach by the phonics method instead of by the word method. Prominent men including some learned professors in the arts and sciences denounce "the school's word method versus phonic method" in radio, television, and forum interviews, in speeches, and discussions. (p. 187)*

Smith then uses *twenty-five pages* of text to discuss the history of phonics, differences of opinion concerning how to best teach phonics, phonic rules and their usefulness, abilities of various children in learning phonics, research on phonics, and techniques for teaching phonics! Today, over thirty years after the publication of Smith's book, the topics she discussed are still the subject of educational research and public debate. Small wonder that the topic of phonics generates so much controversy, when there are so many aspects to the topic, and so much conflicting information.

<u>Differences of Opinion About How to Teach Phonics</u>

In a nutshell, it can be said that phonics is generally taught in one of these ways, and sometimes, in a combination of these ways:

a. *Synthetic Phonics:* Teaching individual letters, and the various sounds they represent, as in the example on the reproduction of the cover page of a fifty-five year-old book. The book's basic concepts are taught in much the same way today. The first few pages are also reproduced. Pupils would learn sounds, and then attempt to blend the sounds into words.

SOUNDS
The Letters Make

L U C I L L E D. S C H O O L F I E L D
and
J O S E P H I N E B. T I M B E R L A K E
ILLUSTRATED BY CATHERINE WERNEKE WHEELER
Little, Brown and Company . . . . . Boston
1940

Ann's A

"Daddy made this funny man
To help me learn Short A," said Ann.
"I hear the sound in *Ann* and *man*
And *cat* and *cap* and *rat* and *pan.*"

Ann's A is the Short A sound.

Can you think of some other words that have this sound of A?

Artie's A

Artie's father is a farmer.
They go to market in the car.
They leave the barn at six o'clock.
How many times did you say a (r)?

Puzzle: Find all the words in the picture that have this sound of A.

Problems With Synthetic Phonics

There are several problems with synthetic phonics, not the least of which is distorted sounds made by children when letters are taught in isoloation. For example, "t" , in isolation, is sounded by a child as *"tuh".* "O" would be sounded as *"ah".* "P" would be sounded as *"puh".* The word "*top",* then, if taught by the synthetic method, would be sounded by many children as "*tuh-ah-puh"--*and would probably be pronounced correctly as "top" only if the the child encountered the word in a sentence (context clues) or if it happened to be accompanied by a picture (picture clues), or if the teacher presented it orally. (sight word).

b. Analytic Phonics: Analytic phonics begins with the teaching of sight words. Then, after pupils can read a number of sight words, a teacher might select a number of words which begin with, say, "d", and ask, "Who can tell me another word which begins with the sound you hear at the beginning of the words in the list?" and in that way, children would be taught the sound of the letter.

Problems With Phonics in General

In the sentence, "Even *though* he worked *through* phonics, he still *thought* that sounding out words was *tough,"* did you notice that there were several different sounds for the *"ough"* letter combination? One of the problems with teaching phonics is that English is not phonemic. That's why the main phonic fact most of us remember our teacher snlaying is, "That's an exception," when, for example, we pronounced the word "*island"* as "*iz-land"!* As we shall see later, the lack of a consistent sound-symbol relationship in English has spawned a variety of reading approaches, some of which, in retrospect, seem bizarre. Interestingly, though, even the most bizarre approaches have been successful with most children with whom they were used.

5. Structural Analysis

When a reader uses a familiar beginning, ending, or root word to decode an unknown word, the reader is using the word attack skill of *structural analysis.* Sometimes, an ending or a beginning added to a word changes the appearance of the word so that an immature reader does not recognize a familiar sight word. For example, a reader might know the word "*ability",* but not recognize the word "*disability."* When using this skill, the reader looks for familiar word

parts. This skill, too, has limitations, though, as, for instance, if an immature reader would read the word *"father"* as *"fat"* and *"her".*

Fuel for the Fire: How Differences of Opinion About the Definition of Reading and the Skills of Reading Have Kept the Pot Boiling

Let's add one additional log to the fire keeping the debate-pot boiling. Besides arguing about definitions, and how, when, and why skills should be taught, educators also considered three other factors in the equation:

1. What they know about *Reading* in the English language.
2. What they know about *Children and Children's interests*
3. What they know about *Learning* and Educational Psychology.

Now, let's take all of the variables--definition, different opinions about skills, and different opinions about which of the three factors above should receive the greatest amount of attention, and we'll look at what the thinking is behind some of the more common methods of teaching reading.

Methods of Teaching Reading: How Beliefs About Variables Have Led to Different Approaches

The Basal Reader Approach

We started this *Issue Paper* with a reference to what you might have heard as a child in reading class in school: "Take out your readers," or "Take out your workbooks." "Readers" and "workbooks" are the heart of the basal reader approach to teaching reading.

The *basal reader approach* can be described by identifying what might be found in a large box in which a basal reading series might be

packaged. Just as you'd find a steering wheel, a dashboard, brakes, and other common components in any automobile you purchased, regardless of the manufacturers' differences in design and in options, similarly, you would find common items in any box of basal readers shipped by any publisher, even though differences in '"design'--that is, in which skills would be taught first, second, etc.,-- would be apparent.
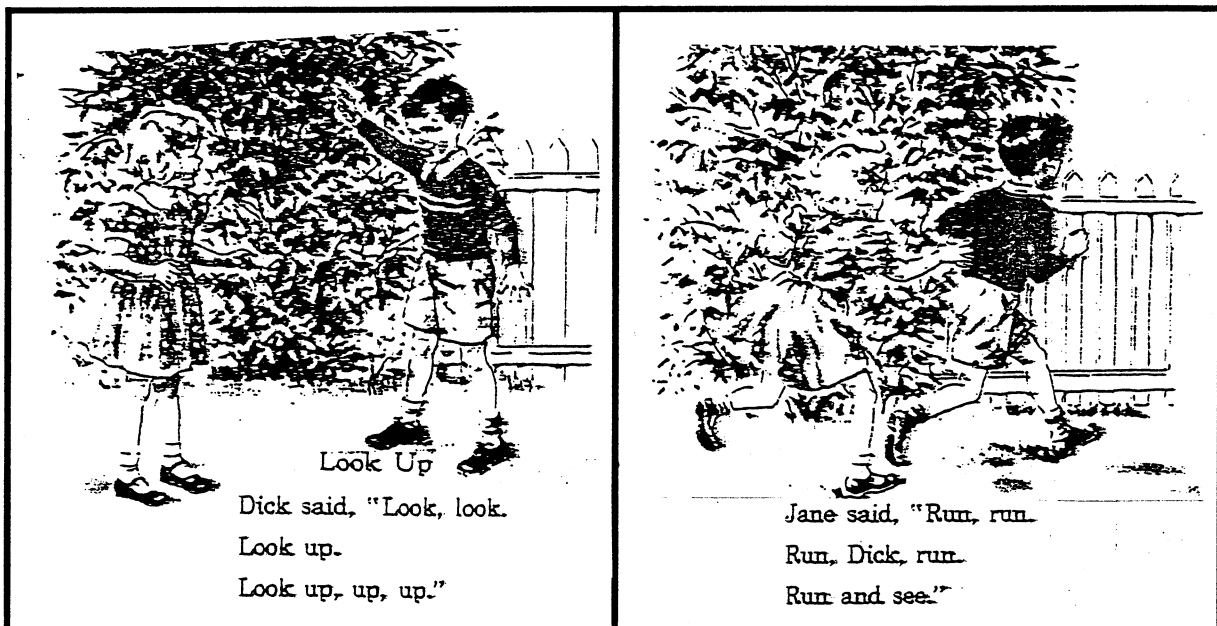
What's In A Box of Basal Readers?

Here's what would be in any box of basal readers at any particular grade level:

1. One or more *"readers"* for each child in the class. Each "reader" contains short stories, poems, puzzles, and other reading activities.

2. One or more *"workbooks"* for children, with exercises designed to reinforce one of the skill areas in the circle representing the well-rounded reading program, in the introductory part of this paper.

3. Various *supplementary materials,* such as charts, puppets, videotapes, cards, audiotapes, story books, separate worksheets, computer programs, or other materials for teaching, as well as placement tests, assessment tests, progress charts or other record-keeping materials. (As an aside, it might be noted that teachers of several decades ago used basals successfully without much supplementary paraphernalia!)

4. A *teacher's manual* for each reader, for each workbook, and for each other component in the basal reading series. The teacher's manual includes:

      a. A description of materials needed to teach a particular lesson
      b. A "scripted" presentation which tells the teacher exactly what to do and what to say, such as, *"Pass out copies of the book 'Getting Ready to Read'. Help pupils find page 32. Say to the children, 'Boys and girls, on the top of page 32 there are five pictures. Some of the pictures begin with the sound you hear at the beginning of the words 'toy,' 'top', and 'tease.' Draw a circle around each word which begins with that sound . . .".*

5.   A carefully-planned *scope and sequence* of skills--"scope", meaning "*what* is taught in this company's basal program," and "sequence" meaning "*when and in what order*" it is taught; that is, in first grade, second grade, and so on.

6. *Stories and selections* in each reader which are used as vehicles for teaching skills. For example, in one basal reading program developed in the '40s by Drs. Paul McKee, Lucille Harrison, and Annie McCowan at the then Colorado State College in Greeley, the authors advised teachers that philosophy of their basal program included beginning with sight words and pictures; controlling the presentation of words so that there would be lots of repetition and so that every word used would be a word children had already heard or said; and then teaching phonetic elements or structural analysis skills "*. . . as soon as a word is introduced which contains that phonetic element and which, therefore, can be used for introducing the element.*" (Manual for Tip and Big Book, p 7). McKee and his associates also tried to create interest-inducing stories with their controlled vocabulary, even while introducing various word attack skills. Unlike many other approaches, the basal approach attempted to incorporate, at appropriate places, *every one of the word attack skills* described above.

The best way to get the "flavor" of a basal reading approach is to look at some pages from the first story in an actual basal reader used by children in first grade, and at the pages in the teacher's manual which *accompany the basal. The pages below are from "The New Fun With Dick and Jane", (1956),* a revision of the basal reading program originally published in 1940 by Scott, Foresman and Company. The children who used these pages had already been presented with a variety of activities to get them "ready" for reading. The pages--and the readiness activities and instructions for teachers--are typical of most basal readers.

Look Up

Dick said, "Look, look.

Look up.

Look up, up, up."

Jane said, "Run, run.

Run, Dick, run.

Run and see."

"Sally laughed and quickly took off her mask. She had really fooled them! Then Sally said, *This is fun. This is fun for Sally.*" Place the two lines, one under the other, in the pocket chart. Read the first line aloud and frame the new words, *This* and *fun*, as you say them. Have children read the second line silently and orally; then have both lines read. (In the story, as in the presentation of the word, *this* refers to a general situation rather than to a specific object.)

Checking the presentation: "What might Sally say if she were having fun? Can you find the line in the pocket chart that says so? Who will find the word *fun*? Can you find it again in the pocket chart? Which word says *This*?" Have the two-line unit read aloud. "When we read the first story in our new book, we'll find out about a mystery—something that was fun for Sally."

INTERPRETING THE STORY

Guided reading: Distribute the books and help the children find the first colored page again. Then recall that the first part of the book contains several stories, all about fun for a certain person. As pupils look at the page, ask who that person is; then comment, "We don't yet know the name of the first story, do we? Let's turn the page to find out." (This guidance is desirable because story titles in the Primer appear between the first picture and the text, not on a separate page as in the Pre-Primers.)

Page 6: Call attention to the title "Look Up" and ask children to find it. "Who can read the name of our first story aloud? Now look up at the picture and tell us what you see." The discussion should bring out what Dick and Jane are doing, how they feel, and why they are excited.

Relate the story title to the fact that the children in the picture must look up to see the hat. Ask someone to read the title again and have the pupils read the first line silently to find out who talked.

It may be advisable, for the slower pupils especially, to guide the reading of these first pages line by line. As soon as possible, however, the length of the reading unit should be increased to include the complete thought unit expressed by a speaker.

After someone has told what Dick said and why he wanted Jane to look up, the entire page should be read aloud. Encourage speculation on whose hat it is and bring out the idea that whoever is wearing the hat must be very tall.

In both silent and oral reading, immediately identify troublesome words for pupils; take time later to help individual children master them.

Page 7: Develop the idea that Dick and Jane are eager to solve the mystery. Guide the silent reading of Jane's speech and ask, "What did Jane want Dick to do? Why do you suppose she wants him to run? Can you tell yet who is wearing the hat? Does anyone have a new guess? How do you think Jane feels? Who can tell us about the picture and read what Jane said to show us how excited she is?"

Page 8: Children's spontaneous comments about the picture may be summarized, "It's not one very tall person. It's one tall and one very small person, isn't it?" Youngsters who guessed that Sally would have something to do with the ending should be encouraged to tell why they expected her to be having fun. Mention the title of this unit if no one else does. "Did you think our story was going to turn out this way? Did Dick and Jane?" Point out such details as Dick's and Jane's surprised expressions, Father's smile, how Sally looks, and where she is sitting.

Identify the first speaker by asking, "What do you think Dick said when he saw Sally? Let's read to find out." Have Dick's speech read aloud before you ask, "How do you suppose Sally felt about her ride? Read what she said."

Review the story and speculate on how Sally happened to be with Father and which part she enjoyed more—the ride or fooling her brother and sister. Conclude by asking one child to read aloud everything that Sally said.

Rereading: Girls and boys easily imitate a good model, and occasionally it is helpful to illustrate the way to retell and reread a story. For example, "On a sunny day Dick and Jane were playing in the yard. It was almost time for Father to come home. They could hardly wait because they had many things to tell him. Then Dick heard someone on the sidewalk. When he looked up, he saw a man's hat sticking high above the bushes. Dick wanted Jane to see it." Here, read from the book.

Enrich the retelling of the other two pages with the guesses and comments that Dick and Jane probably made as they watched for the hat to pass the bushes. When you have finished, pupils can give their versions as they read each page. One child might pretend that she is Sally and tell what happened —how she met Father, got on his shoulders, and then fooled Dick and Jane.

EXTENDING SKILLS AND ABILITIES

Memory of word form: To develop the habit of scrutinizing words from left to right and to promote the ability to visualize word forms, write *fun* and *for* in manuscript on the chalk board and have them pronounced. Say, "Watch as I write *fun* again. This is how it looks at the beginning. [Write *f*.]

This is the middle. [Write *u*.] And this is the way the word ends. [Add *n*.]" In the same manner, have pupils note the beginning, middle, and end of the word *for*.

Point to *fun*; ask pupils to look at it carefully and then to close their eyes and try to see this word in their minds. Repeat with *for*. Erase the words and say, "Close your eyes again and try to see each word as I say it. Can you see the word *fun*? Can you see how it begins? how it ends? Can you see the word *for*?" After pupils open their eyes, write *f* and recall that both *fun* and *for* begin this way. Next write an *o* after the *f*: "Which word looks like this in the middle?" Complete *for* when the correct answer is given. Then write *n*. "Which word ends like this? [Complete *fun*.]" Continue with *and, see, said*; point out that *and* ends like *said* and that *see* and *said* begin alike.

Place the word cards *fun, for,* and *funny* on the chalk ledge. After children have looked carefully at the words, have them close their eyes. Remove *fun* and ask which word was removed. Repeat with *and, see,* and *said*.

Pupils who had difficulty with the "Visual Scrutiny" section of the new Basic Reading Test for the Pre-Primers will profit from frequent practice of this kind. They may also need special attention during the introduction of new vocabulary for succeeding stories as well as during the development of exercises and Think-and-Do Book pages which involve scrutiny of word forms and association of meaning with printed forms.

Using meaning clues: To develop ability to use meaning clues as a check on visual scrutiny of word forms and to strengthen the understanding that a sentence is a meaning unit, write these sentences on the board or place them in the pocket chart, one at a time.

This is _____ for Sally.	Look _____ and see funny Sally.
fun run	is up
Jane _____ "Look up, Dick."	Run and _____ Father.
and said	see said
Run and look _____ Father.	"See _____," said Dick.
fun for	Sally funny

Have the first sentence and the words below it read silently. Ask, "Which of these words [point to *fun* and *run*] fits into this sentence? Let's draw a line under that word." Have the complete sentence read aloud. Continue with the remaining sentences.

This exercise provides background for page 2 of the *Think-and-Do Book*, which further strengthens use of context clues as an aid to word recognition.

Developing phonetic skills: This exercise is designed to strengthen auditory perception of rhyme. Pronounce the words *fun* and *run* and have pupils say them. Ask, "Do these words rhyme? Can you think of other words that rhyme with *fun* and *run*?" Continue, "I am going to say a sentence. Listen for the word in it that rhymes with *Jane*. *Jane played in the rain.* What word rhymes with *Jane*?" Repeat with *Jane has a candy cane. Jane saw the train.* Continue with other sentences using such words as *look, book, cook; up, cup, pup; Dick, stick, kick; said, bed, red; see, knee, me.*

"Rhyme Time," the first of the Filmstrips for Practice in Phonetic Skills designed for use with The New Basic Readers, can be used effectively at this time with the entire class. (See the Key Sheet for detailed directions.)

Meeting individual needs: The auditory training suggested in the *Guidebook* for The New Basic Pre-Primers promotes the ability to recognize both simple rhyming elements in words and the sound of initial consonants. Pupils who need additional practice or who have not had this previous training in auditory perception of rhyme may profit from the following procedures:

1. Pronounce *fun* and *run*; ask, "Do *fun* and *run* sound alike at the end?" Continue with other pairs of rhyming and nonrhyming words.

2. Pronounce such groups of words as *moon, spoon, fork* and ask pupils to tell which words rhyme.

3. Reteach the exercises for developing "Auditory perception of rhyme" that are indexed on page 256 of the Pre-Primer *Guidebook*. Other exercises of this kind may be found on pages 139-140 of *On Their Own in Reading.*[1]

Think-and-Do Book: Use pages 1 and 2. For a general discussion of the use of the *Think-and-Do Book*, see pages 47-48 of this *Guidebook* and the inside front cover of the workbook. Suggestions for introducing each page appear on the page itself and in the Teacher's Notes at the end of the workbook.

EXTENDING INTERESTS

Art activities: "How do you think you would look if you were given a ride on someone's shoulders? Can you draw a picture to show us?" Comment on individual efforts so that children know that their paintings are being noticed. As Natalie Cole emphasizes in *The Arts in the Classroom,*[2] the best guidance is "Do it your own way!"

[1] *On Their Own in Reading,* by William S. Gray (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1948).
[2] *The Arts in the Classroom,* by Natalie Cole (New York: The John Day Company, 1940).

Why Did Basal Readers Lose Favor With Teachers?

First, it should be pointed out that basal readers did not lose favor with all teachers. In fact, many teachers continue to use basals with enthusiasm and confidence. A variety of reasons have been offered by critics of basals, reasons which include the following:

1. Stories were boring for children because of controlled vocabulary. As a result, their subsequent writing would be stilted and unnatural.
3. Instructions for teachers were stifling, and did not allow for teacher creativity.
4. There was no provision for individual differences; all children did all pages in workbooks and stories.
5. There was not enough reading of good literature.
6. Attempts to make basals interesting to an increasingly diverse student populations without dating content by references to temporarily popular activities or personalities (e.g., Ninja Turtles) resulted in some major blunders. For example, many parents were deeply disturbed by the "Impressions" basal series' story selections. Critics charged that content emphasized what the authors probably surmised would interest children--the occult, and tails of witches and the supernatural.

The Real Reason for the Demise of Basals

The author of this *Issue Paper* has encountered the aforementioned criticisms repeatedly over the past two decades, both in print and orally. However, it has been his experience that not one of the preceding criticisms is valid. The first criticism has been negated by the author's own experience--a five-year-old's request for thirteen successive readings of the adventures of a mischievous dog named

"Tip" in the McKee basal reader--nine pages of *"Tip, here Tip, come here,"* and similar sentences--all in the same sitting!

Social Engineering

The real reason for repeated attacks on the basal reader, in the author's opinion, is the one cited in a recent Associated Press article by Martha Slud, who asserted, "The books went out of print after criticism that the white, middle class family lacked ethnic diversity and perpetuated gender stereotypes." (Rocky Mountain News, August 11, 1994). To be sure, the Dick and Jane readers of the forties were reflective of a lost social homogeneity, as witnessed by these words from the introduction to "The New Fun With Dick and Jane" (1956 ed.):

> *"Youngsters who use The New Basic Readers enjoy the sense of belonging to Dick, Jane, and Sally's family and circle of friends. As they live vicariously with these book children, they share the warmth and understanding of wholesome social relationships. Gradually they integrate the book children's character traits and activities into their own life experiences."*

Recent revisions of basal readers have addressed the criticism that the books were not reflective of contemporary American society; however, many seasoned teachers now assert, with some validity, that basals are used for social engineering, and that story content has suffered as a result.

Other reasons for Basals' Loss of Popularity

Another possible reason for the decline in popularity of basal readers was postulated by a notable reading authority, the late Dr. Nicholas Glaser, a former national officer of the International Reading Association, who was well acquainted with the "network" of high visibility "reading" professionals. Glaser was convinced that the decline in popularity of basal readers was due, in large part, to biased decisions on the part of editors of educational journals, who emphasized articles extolling the virtues of the Whole Language philosophy, and who rejected articles supportive of structured approaches. Glaser asserted that such bias created the *illusion* of a massive movement in the educational community away from the structured approaches, such as the basal, toward the Whole Language movement. Fearful of being left out, many educators, it can be reasonably inferred, jumped on the bandwagon and embraced the "latest" notion being promulgated. One can only speculate as to why such decisions were made, if, indeed, Glaser's hypothesis was valid.

What's Good About the Basal Reader Approach?

Having taught close to fifteen thousand teacher education candidates at the University of Northern Colorado and elsewhere, many of whom have kept in contact over the course of their teaching experience, the writer of this paper can unequivocally state that the major strength of the basal reader approach is that it provides a *planned, carefully thought-out, systematic, sequential skill development program in successive stages,* and that even neophyte teachers can use it without undue stress. An additional strength of most basals is that they do not unduly emphasize any particular reading skill; there is enough variety in skill development that a judicious teacher can select material to fit individual children. As in teaching any skill to any person, however, there is no one way that is *The Best Way* to teach reading for every child.

Other Structured Approaches

The basal reader approach attempted to address a variety of elements in laying out a systematic approach to teaching: What the authors believed about *children*--their interests, needs, and abilities-constituted one basis for decision-making about content and methods used in basals. What they believed about the *psychology of learning* was another factor upon which decisions were predicated; for example, repetition of words was a key factor in rote learning. And what they believed about the *teaching of reading in English* was a third factor determining what went into basals. The fact that English was not phonemic was responsible for the presentation of a variety of word attack or decoding skills in teaching beginning reading, since most basal authors did not wish to control story content, in order that only one sound of a letter such as, say, short *"a"*, would be encountered by beginning readers. Other structured approaches, however, were not as equally balanced in considering what was known about children, about learning, or about the teaching of reading. We turn, now, to a brief introduction to those approaches.

Linguistic Approaches

Linguistic approaches can be presented in a variety of formats, including a package which is similar to a basal, in that they will have all of the elements of a basal, with one significant difference. They will emphasize *the careful control of letter-sound presentation,* so that

only one sound of a letter will be presented until it is thoroughly mastered. For example, only the short sound, say, of the letter *"a"* will be presented, and in the early stages, children will read stories such as *"Pat is a cat. Pat the fat cat sat on a mat."* If a word such as *"the"* has to be used, it is introduced as a sight word. Linguistic approaches do not isolate sounds; therefore, "word families" made up of similar-appearing words are used to introduce children to sounds. Children would not say, *"muh-a-nah"* for *"m"-"a"-"n"*. Many children have been successfully taught to read using linguistically-based materials, even though critics would argue that the selections to be read are artificial and unmotivating.

Phonic Approaches

Any approach which would be called a "Phonic Approach", particularly by critics on the traditionalist right of the political spectrum, would be characterized by the use of *synthetic phonics*--teaching letter sounds and blending them together to make words--rather than analytic phonics, described earlier in this *Issue Paper.* Proponents of synthetic phonics predicated their approach on the basis of what they believed about reading--that letters represented sounds, and that if one could learn the sounds, one could read. Less important was what was of interest to children, or what was motivating to children, at least in the early stages of instruction. Often, the attempt has been made to do what linguistic approaches do, viz, to control the presentation of sounds so that only one sound of a letter is presented. Therefore, in a controlled synthetic phonics approach, the sentence, *"Again, father ate almost a loaf of bread,"* would not be encountered, since there are so many variants of the sound of *"a"*. You can, no doubt, see why synthetic phonics approaches pose problems. When letter-sound association is controlled, "stories" such as the one beginning with these two pages from the *J and J Language Readers,* published by Sopris West Publishers (outlet for the National Diffusion Network) are the result:

Thin Thad is the chap that can fix things. The kids think Thad is rad. He has a shop with kits, sacks, rags, fans, pads, lids, mops, bats, and pans.

Sid ran to Thin Thad. "Thad! Thad! I was in math. Miss Pitt got a whiff of gas. Miss Pit thinks that chips are in the gas tank!" *(Unit 11, Book 2, pages 3 and 4).*

Teaching Rules of Phonics: A Good Alternative to Thin Thad and Pat the Fat Cat?

The alternative to stories like Thin Thad (or the next in the series, *Chick's Fish Shack)* is to intersperse phonics instruction with sight-word presentation, or to memorize lists of rules concerning when generalizations apply or do not apply. But then an additional problem emerges. In one landmark study by Theodore Clymer, entitled *"The Utility of Phonic Generalizations in the Primary Grades",* forty-five phonic generalizations were analyzed to determine the per cent of the time that they applied to typical words which might be encountered by primary readers. A sample generalization--Clymer did not want to call them "rules"--is "In the phoneme *ie* the *i* is silent and the *e* has a long sound." (This sample, incidentally, applied only 17 percent of the time in the words encountered in four different basal reading programs). Clymer found percentages of utility ranging from 0% to 100%, concluding, in his study, that, among other things, *" . . . many generalizations which are commonly taught are of limited value."* *(Reading Research Revisited, p. 119).*

Synthetic phonics approaches, despite their limitations, have been successfully used to teach many children how to read. Many children have also successfully learned phonic rules or generalizations, and have applied them without difficulty in learning how to read.
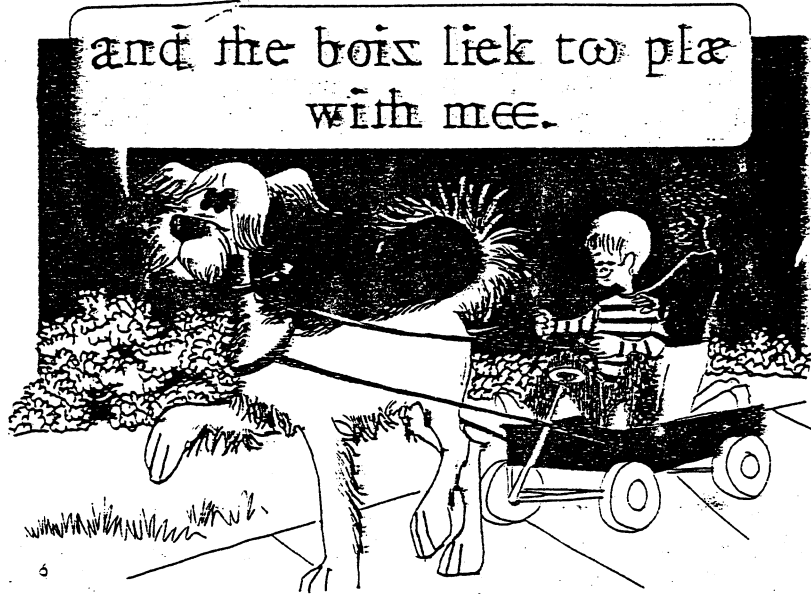
Some Other Alternatives

Augmented Approaches:

Many educators who believed in teaching letter sounds, but who wanted to avoid "Pat the fat cat" or "Thin Thad", as well as to avoid the arduous memorization of phonic generalizations, proposed approaches which used synthetic phonics, but which *added something to* various letters to make their sounds recognizable. Thus, short *a* in a word might always be colored green, long *a* would be colored a different color, and so on. The alphabet would be *augmented* in some way so that changes in letter sounds would be recognizable by the use of color, diacritical marks, or other devices. One program, in fact, was called "Words in Color." (One can already hear the critics raising the specter of color-blind learners!)

One of the best-known, widely used, and often criticized approaches which utilized an augmented alphabet was The Initial Teaching Alphabet approach, or i/t/a, in vogue in the United States during the

1960s. A reproduction of the i/t/a chart will serve to illustrate the theory underlying it and other augmented approaches.

The Initial Teaching Alphabet

A READING PROGRAM OF THE EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL OF AMERICA

© 1963

How Augmented Alphabets Are Used

Children learned to read books printed in i/t/a, or in approaches such as "Words in Color", and then, after acquiring some measure of fluency in word-calling, they would have to make a transition to the normal alphabet, or traditional orthography. Augmented alphabet proponents believed that interesting stories could be created because there was no need to control letter sound association-- reading could be purely phonetic. They also argued that children would be able to write with greater creativity as well, since they would

always know how to spell any word they could sound out. It is not difficult to identify the allegations of the critics: they were concerned about children's spelling accuracy, and they were taken aback by the strange appearance of their children's reading materials!

I/t/a proponents based their approach on what they knew about reading, primarily, and attempted to respond to difficulties in using phonics in learning to read in English. They also based their approach, in part, on what they knew about children, and assumed that it would be easier to address children's interests if they could create stories which did not have to use controlled vocabulary, as was done in linguistic or basal approaches.

Although materials using Augmented Alphabets look strange, the same conclusion can be made about this method of instruction as has been reached about other methods of instruction: Many children have been taught to be successful readers through the use of augmented approaches.

Language Experience Approach

A concern about learning theory constituted the major emphasis of the *Language Experience Approach,* which has been around for decades, and which is still in use today. The assumption was that children would learn what was of *interest* to them, that they would learn best what was *familiar* to them, and that they would become personally involved in what was *important* to them. Thus, the basic premises of an approach called the *Language Experience Approach* emerged:

> *What a child can think about, he can talk about.*
> *What a child can talk about, he can write, or he can have written for him.*
> *What can be written, can be read.*

The Language Experience Approach would follow this procedure:
A group of pupils would share a common experience, such as a trip to the zoo. They would then return to the classroom and dictate their experiences to the teacher. The teacher would transcribe the experiences on a large chart, saying each word, phrase, and sentence as she transcribed it. The various elements of the story would be read and reread by the teacher, the pupils, the teacher and the pupils, individual pupils, and so on, until all of the words were committed to rote memory. This *look-say* approach would build a

bank of *sight words,* until finally the teacher would select a number of words which had common characteristics, and then begin to teach letter-sounds using an *analytic phonic* approach. Other experiences would be used to develop still other stories, with further additions to the "bank" of sight words. Some teachers would then select various words from the "bank", and create new sentences, introducing new words by helping children use *context clues* and beginning letter sounds *(phonics)* to decode the strange printed words. Obviously, critics of the Language Experience Approach emerged. Children would not learn word attack skills, they asserted. The approach was "Look-say", and devoid of phonics, they declared. No new vocabulary would ever be learned, and no enriching vicarious experiences would be encountered, because children would be reading only about their own limited experiences.

Despite the limitations of the Language Experience Approach, many children became successful readers through this method of instruction. In many instances, the Language Experience Approach was used to introduce basal readers. In other instances, it was used to introduce children to enough words to enable them to read simple library books, so that yet another approach, the *Individualized Approach,* could be used.

The Individualized Reading Approach

Teachers who felt confined by structured approaches--approaches which specified which skills should be taught in which sequence, or who rejected pure phonic approaches, stilted language, augmented alphabets, or limited vicarious experiences of Language Experience focused their attention on *learning theory* as a basis for an approach called *Individualized Reading.* This approach was predicated upon the premise of *"seeking, self-selection, and self-pacing"*; that is, that a child would be likely to make the most progress if he could seek his own book, select what he wanted to read, and read it at his own pace. Thus, the theory went, individualization, and, hence, success, would be guaranteed.

Individualized Reading classrooms were characterized by well-stocked classroom libraries with materials representative of a broad range of difficulty and a broad variety of topics. Children would spend a great deal of time reading by themselves, periodically meeting with the teacher--in some instances for as little as eight to ten minutes per week--to discuss their reading, to answer comprehension questions, and to receive instruction from the teacher on whichever skill the teacher perceived was in need of formal reinforcement or

introduction. Obviously, this approach required a great deal of record-keeping and a sound knowledge of reading instruction on the part of the teacher. There was no scope and sequence of skills to follow, no scripted lesson plans for a teacher to use, no manuals, no prepared placement tests, no specialized instructional materials: only library books and teacher ingenuity and professional knowledge.

Critics of individualized reading were especially concerned about a lack of structure. Children would not be adequately taught word attack or decoding skills if there was no planned program, it was asserted, and they would not learn how to become independent readers. Lazy children would pick only "easy" books, declared concerned parents, and as a result they would never progress past very rudimentary levels of reading ability.

Many of the criticisms of individualized reading were valid. Nevertheless, the same observation was made about Individualized Reading programs as was made about every other program: Many children learned how to become successful readers in classrooms in which Individualized Reading was used.

The Whole Language or Literature-Based Approach

During the mid 1980s, controversy erupted over the use of an approach--its advocates called it a "philosophy"--variously called *Whole Language, Literature-Based, or Holistic.* A succinct definition of this method, which is a variation of the Individualized Approach described above, was provided by Mark A. Clark:

> "Whole language" classrooms have recently been implemented as the latest in a series of attempts at improving literacy development in the school. "Whole language" is a term which is used to refer to reading and writing instruction which utilizes complete texts in communicative situations, as contrasted with focused skills practice or the use of "phonics" or isolated language drill . . . Teachers in such classrooms emphasize the use of "real" texts (i.e., newspapers, children's books, school memos, notes to and from home, etc.) for the teaching of reading rather than basal readers . . . They reason that children do better when they are attempting to understand something they have chosen to read, rather than when they are trying to make sense of a book which the teacher has chosen for them.

Clark describes a typical day in the whole language-based classroom. Activities

> might include work in personal journals, small-group discussion of current events, "quiet time" for reading, "show-and-tell", conferences with the teacher or a parent volunteer on recently read or written books, a brief "lecture" by the teacher on "story leads" followed by individual work on short stories. (Clark, M.A., originally cited in "Language Arts, 64, 384-396,)Burron and Claybaugh, Basic Concepts in Reading Instruction).

Whole Language teachers faced the same problem as teachers using any other approach; viz, they had to teach children how to read at least a few words, so that children could read on their own. How they did it was up to them. Some teachers used Language Experience stories to pave the way. Other teachers read so-called "Predictable" books--books written in a pattern, such as,

I'm as quick as a cricket
I'm as slow as a snail
I'm as big as a whale, etc.,

with each page illustrated with a picture clue, so that students, after having words repeatedly read to them, could use a combination of rote look-say, picture clues, and context clues, to "decode", or "say", words they had not previously been exposed to. An additional element of the Whole Language method is that children are given many and varied writing opportunities which cross subject-matter boundaries--and, they are allowed the freedom to use "invented spelling" without penalty. It is theorized-- based on Whole Language proponents' belief that children learn best in an atmosphere which builds "self-esteem" (which means that their compositions should not be "defaced" by the teacher's red marking pencil)--that invented spelling encourages creative expression. Creative expression, the theory continues, manifested in creative reading, listening, speaking and writing tasks, coupled with repeated exposure to "good literature", will have a positive result. It will establish an opportunity for broadening the curriculum by providing reading and writing opportunities in every subject, and it will, in fact, erase artificial boundaries among subjects.

Criticisms of the Whole Language Philosophy

Remember the criticisms of augmented approaches? Children would become poor spellers. Remember the criticisms of the Language Experience Approach and Individualized Reading? Children would learn only sight words, and look-say reading would limit their independence. There was no plan of instruction--no scope and sequence of skills; teaching of skills would be extemporaneous, off-the-cuff, hit-or-miss (mostly "miss", according to the harshest critics), and children would not become proficient readers. 'Sound familiar? To these criticisms of Whole Language was added an additional criticism, which emerged as a part of the "culture war" raging across America: Traditionalists are concerned that various special interest groups will select library books and other materials which promote their political/social agendas. (Remember New York's "Rainbow Curriculum", and the now-infamous _"Daddy's Roommate," "Heather Has Two Mommies",_ and _"Gloria Goes to Gay Pride"?_ See "A Personal Note" at the end of this _Issue Paper._

Despite the criticisms of the Whole Language Approach, many of which are valid, what can be asserted about every other approach can also be stated with confidence about the Whole Language Approach. Many children who have been taught to be successful readers have been taught with this approach

Computer-Assisted Approaches

There is nothing mysterious about computer-assisted approaches, other than the fact of their non-traditional packaging. Good computer-assisted approaches should include all of the elements presented in the circle diagram with which this *Issue Paper* began. Regardless of how sophisticated an approach is, or how wonderful the sound effects, animation, color, or other special effects, all computerized approaches are limited to the teaching of decoding or word attack through an emphasis upon one or more of the skills discussed under the heading of *"Decoding or Word Attack Skills"*.

One of the first computer-assisted approaches, which was later adapted in print form, was the McGraw-Hill "Sullivan Programmed Reading Series" (1963), which employed "programmed" elements, such as moving from the simple to the complex, going from the known to the unknown, presenting work in small steps, using "frames", and providing positive reinforcement for accurate responses, but the core of the program was controlled letter-sound association reflective of elements of a "word-family" approach. Generally, computerized programs have the advantage of being able to provide immediate reinforcement of accurate responses; however, they have been criticized because of the possibility of limited teacher-pupil personal interaction and limited group sharing with peers.

Again, what is true of other approaches is also true of computer-assisted reading instruction. Many children have become successful readers as a result of being systematically instructed with the help of computers.

Summary:

At this point in this *Issue Paper,* you have probably formulated your own ideas concerning which philosophy you think you would be comfortable with. The various approaches to teaching reading can be grouped, roughly, into one of three schools of thought about how reading should best be taught. These schools of thought have been

eloquently summarized by Thomas Gunning, and cannot be improved upon by further synopsis here. Gunning says:

On the one end [of a continuum] are those who espouse a subskills or bottom-up approach, and on the other end are those who advocate a holistic, top-down whole-language approach. In between are the interactionists. . . . In the bottom-up approach, children literally start at the bottom and work their way up. First, they learn the names and shapes of the letters of the alphabet. Then they learn consonant sounds, followed by simple and then more complex vowel correspondences. Many basal series and supplementary materials are tied into a subskills approach, as are approaches that employ a management system. [Placement tests, record-keeping, teacher instructions, etc.] . . . [These] procedures are intended to make learning to read easier by breaking complex tasks into their component skills.

. . . A top-down approach . . . starts at the top and works downward. . . . a student learning to read would first memorize a whole story and later learn to deal with individual words. Phonics might not be taught until after the student has begun to learn to read. . . . Learning to read is seen as being similar to learning to speak; it is holistic and natural through immersion. Subskills are not taught because it is felt they fragment the process and make learning to read more abstract and difficult.

. . . Most practitioners tend to be more pragmatic than either [group], and borrow practices from both ends of the continuum. They teach skills directly, especially in the beginning, but they don't overdo it . . . They also provide plenty of opportunities for students to experience the holistic nature of reading and writing by having them read whole books and write for realistic purposes. (pp. 8,9).

Conclusion

"So what's the best way to teach reading?" is a question the author can almost hear some readers asking. To be sure, it would be nice to be able to grab hold of *The Answer* and solve the problem of illiteracy in America. The purpose of this Issue Paper, however, is to provide the discerning reader with enough foundational information to draw appropriate inferences on his own, chief of which inferences shall be explicitly expressed in this aphorism:

> ***When the only tool you have is a hammer, every problem begins to look like a nail.*** (Source unknown).

What works best for one child may not work best for another. What works best for one teacher may not work best for another. Which approach is "best" depends upon many variables. Research in reading instruction must be considered in light of the information below.

What is "best" is contingent upon:

1.   *Philosophy:* Which aspect of a well-rounded reading program is most valued by a given group of constituents, and on which part of the "philosophy" continuum, described above, one feels most comfortable.

2.   *Learner Characteristics:* Important variables, such as the background of experience of the learner, would influence the method selected. For example, a child who has poor oral language ability will be hampered in his ability to use context clues or to comprehend what he's reading if the speech patterns represented in his books are foreign to him. Other characteristics, such as the motivational level, the IQ, the PQ (Perseverance Quotient) of the learner, his interest in the material, his learning style, and other, similar, variables are important. How acute is his ability to discriminate among letter sounds? Can he hear differences, say, between the sounds of *b, d,* and *t*? Is it easier for him to differentiate between whole words, such as *boy* and *dog,* than it is to see the difference between *b* and *d*?

4.   The ability level and professional knowledge possessed by the teacher, and a host of other factors.

Recommendations:

It is the position of this *Issue Paper* that good programs of reading instruction would include all of the elements of a well-rounded reading program depicted in the circle diagram. They would take into account individual differences among learners. The writer has successfully used, with beginning readers of different ages and different abilities and learning characteristics, the basal reader approach, language experience, programmed reading, synthetic phonics, word families, and individualized reading, as well as methods incorporating elements of all of these approaches. Good programs would include some planned instructional aids for teachers. Indeed, recent versions of Literature-Based, or Whole-Language programs are now including much of the structure and teaching suggestions found in basal reading programs--the probable reason being a response to the criticism that systematic, planned teaching, and an awareness of individual differences among teachers and learners, regardless of which approach is used, are key contributors to success in learning to read.

However . . . the following recommendations are strongly asserted:

1. A requirement of every teacher-education program should be that teachers of reading be taught each of the approaches described in this paper--even if only the rudiments of the methods are taught. Academic freedom of "literacy" professors notwithstanding, it is the position of this paper that certain information is fundamental to preparing teachers to be able to individualize instruction to meet individual pupils' needs. (Indeed, at the University of Northern Colorado, a required course, taken by all elementary education candidates and taught well into the 1980s, was the course "Approaches to Reading Instruction.") As early as 1971, Robert C. Aukerman, in the first edition of his oustanding book, "Approaches to Beginning Reading", asserted that, "Lack of even an elementary basic understanding of the various approaches to beginning reading is so widespread that it has severely limited dialog between teachers using different methods." (p. 487). More important than "dialog" is the ability of a teacher to select a method appropriate for a given child.

2. Teachers who elect to use non-structured approaches, such as Whole-Language, Individualized Reading, or Language Experience to teach reading should be required to pass a test of basic knowledge of decoding (word attack) skills. (Resources such as *Phonics in Proper Perspective*, by Arthur Heilman [Columbus, Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company], 1989, or *Phonics for the Teacher of Reading,* by M.A. Hull, [Columbus, Ohio, 1985] present, in considerable detail, information on not only what to teach, but information on how to teach phonics. In addition, other resources, such as most of the books listed in the bibliography of this paper, include whole sections devoted to a variety of methods of teaching *other important word attack skills.* This recommendation will be immediately attacked by various academicians as "draconian" or as a gross impingement upon academic freedom; nevertheless, the author vigorously defends the recommendation. At public school information seminars conducted by the author across the United States, the most frequently-encountered concern articulated by parents and teachers alike was that children taught in non-structured programs were not receiving adequate skills instruction. Further, perhaps this recommendation, if implemented, would provide the impetus for many teachers who prefer structured programs, but who have been professionally intimidated into acquiescing to using non-structured programs, to speak out for their beliefs.

3. Teachers should not be afraid to use "old" materials to teach reading. Dick, Jane, and Sally, as well as Jack, Janet, and Penny--characters from 1940s basals, can still be story characters appreciated by all children. It is we who plant into children's minds that they cannot identify with this or that person or group depicted in a

story. Were that contention true, none of us could ever have escaped vicariously to other times and other places through the pages of good books! Further, the fundamental principles of reading instruction articulated in the teacher's manuals of yesteryear are still as solid today as they were when they were used to teach past generations of Americans to read. Basals of the seventies and eighties introduced new characters and new stories, but the underlying principles of instruction remained constant.

4. Whichever approach is used, children should be encouraged to "read, read, read" and to "write, write, write." If the approach used is heavily "bottom up"--as in programs emphasizing letter-sound association which result in more "lead-time" before children start to read on their own-- teachers and volunteers should read good books of a variety of genres to children. If the approach used is less structured, but presented within the confines of controlled vocabulary, again, it should be supplemented with good books. And adults should not be afraid of reading material to children which is "over their heads!" A good poem, short story, or book, read well, engages children with the mere sound of the language. (After all, how many two-year-olds, who love to be read nursery rhymes, can explain the content of the rhymes?)

Pupils and students should be provided with a variety of opportunities to produce written work. Beginning readers can dictate compositions, and can be helped by volunteer classroom aides to transcribe their spoken words. Complete thoughts and "classroom-appropriate" language should be insisted upon in the classroom.

5. The counsel of experienced teachers and interested laypeople should be sought. Retired teachers should be recruited for volunteer work with a variety of pupils. The great tragedy of America is that her most wise and experienced people are ignored, or, even worse, ridiculed, when, in fact, they bring not only knowledge and intelligence to the solving of problems, they bring wisdom and understanding as well.

Thoughts for the Future: A Personal Note

What happens in the public schools of the United States of America is of deep concern to the writer--I shall switch here to first person personal pronoun, because my concern is personal, as well as professional.

I am not so much concerned about the *mechanics* of the teaching of reading as I am about the *substance* of what American pupils and

students will read. I am confident that the method of instruction chosen by a particular teacher should address all of the variables identified in this paper; personal experience over a span of three decades of working with children and with teachers of reading--not the equivocally-stated results of "research" or the strident allegations of tunnel-visioned proponents of "*The* One Method" --has led me to this conclusion.

What should be of much deeper concern to the American people is *what* their children are reading. For years, traditionalists have concentrated their efforts on the wrong front, in my opinion, and we have been outflanked by our adversaries. What do I mean by that statement? Well, the battle for the minds of American children, we have assumed, has been fought in so-called "Social Studies" classes. Proof of the validity of that assertion was unequivocally established by Greg Cunningham's outstanding study, *"Blowing the Whistle on Global Education"*, published by the Independence Institute, and supervised by Tom Tancredo, the then U.S. Department of Education Secretary's Regional Representative, Region VIII. Traditionalists responded to the Cunningham Report by increasing their vigilance in reviewing social studies curricula. But all the while, a conflagration was raging elsewhere in the schools, its presence attested to by periodic flares of allegations of censorship--in the seemingly benign confines of school libraries and classroom library shelves, and in the pages of trade books and basal readers.

Throughout the first decades of this century, basal readers and other instructional materials contained stories, poems, and other literature which was inspirational, timeless, and inculcative of commitment to honesty, decency, modesty, and love of country. Gradually, such content disappeared, replaced by writing which was alleged to be "neutral", or "sensitive to diversity." It remained for library materials to provide the substance of what Traditionalist Americans would call "solid reading material." Increasingly, what Americans embraced in common has been supplanted by attention to "multiculturalism". Today's graduates of teacher-education programs have been steeped in the philosophy that diversity, multicultural sensitivity, and tolerance are of vital importance, and they have been presented with bibliographies of materials which promulgate the values of multiculturalists.

Values such as honesty, integrity, hard work, frugality, and perseverance have taken second place to the chief value promulgated in the public school system--America's new god--Tolerance. The author is especially concerned few teacher education students are aware of much outstanding children's

literature published by various evangelical publishing houses--literature in which a sectarian message is incidental, but which is supportive of traditional values. Not only are teacher-education candidates not aware of authors such as Janet Oke, or series such as the "Mandy" series, they have not even heard of the publishing companies, such as Bethany House, Tyndale, and others, who have published literally millions of copies of books for young readers!

Although social studies curricula and social studies textbooks--replete with revisionist history and various other biases--still bear watching, I am convinced that even more significant is the influence of school library books in shaping the minds of future generations of Americans. Indeed, if presented with the choice of selecting materials for the teaching of social studies, or the option of exercising authority over the selection of library materials, I would choose the latter without hesitation.

These personal thoughts are added as a postscript, in part to emphasize one message of this *Issue Paper*. Traditionalists should spend less time worrying about methods of *how* children are taught to read, for most children will learn to read regardless of which method is used, if teachers attempt to pick a method which fits their pupil. The real issue which deserves more time is the issue of what children are being given to read during and after they have acquired basic decoding independence.

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