

Submission to the
NATIONAL INQUIRY INTO THE TEACHING OF LITERACY

Focus: Some neglected factors
in teaching and learning how to read books

Summary and introduction

This submission focuses on one aspect of print literacy - the ability to read books for information, understanding and enjoyment, working out words and the writers' meaning accurately. Future citizens still need explicit skills training for print literacy. Other forms of 'literacy' require critical examination in school classes, but must not be made a cop-out from the mandate to teach reading and writing.

The teaching of reading involves more than whether teachers use phonics or Whole Language methods. 'Anything can be done badly'. This submission supports integrated methods with initial phonemic awareness, that include showing how the written language is related to the spoken language, and how to decode independently and accurately. Children differ so much in abilities and interests that a classroom should provide a variety of routes to literacy - in a planned not casual way. Its bases in research should include the findings about how skilled readers learn to read cited by the 27 researchers whose letter triggered this Inquiry.

Rather than repeat what others will surely provide, the submission identifies unnecessary barriers to literacy, and relatively neglected but critical matters. These barriers can be overlooked in focusing on what is wrong with the children themselves.

Recommendations for immediate action in removing barriers apply to classrooms, to children's early environments and care, to books themselves, and to teachers' training

Self-help in learning to read is now technologically possible with DVD, CD, VHS and the Internet, applying principles of learning commonly neglected in literacy teaching. All learners should have the right to free access to 'advance organizers' for what they are to learn, to prevent problems, and for self-help review at any time to identify and clear up gaps and confusions. Evaluation and investigation are requested for this innovative aid and as well as for an experimental prototype that has shown its potential value. Costs are minimal for materials that are re-usable, copiable and improvable. As multi-millions of dollars are spent on other schemes to tackle reading problems, this 'different' approach should not be rejected for investigation because it is simple and it makes no claim to be a panacea.

Other constructive innovations to trial include non-commercial 'Tests that Teach' for assessment, and 'Literacy Innovations' in forms of book presentations that can make them easier for learning to read.

The writing is not completely sober, so that readers find an occasional break during their serious task. After all, I am claiming that systematic methods of learning to read can be Fun without trivia. There is deliberate redundancy in repeating major points.

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Qualifications of the author. Clinical child psychologist at the Royal Children's Hospitals, Melbourne and Aberdeen and Cambridge Child Psychiatric Service; schools psychologist, primarily in Melbourne disadvantaged schools; academic in departments of Education and Psychology at Melbourne, Monash and Aberdeen Universities and Melbourne State College, involved in psychological and educational research and teacher training; a teacher in classrooms, courses and private tuition, teaching beginners, child and adult failing learners and immigrants; parent and grandparent. My work has included observing scores of classrooms using different methods in Australia, England and Scotland, over a span of fifty years. This is an unusual combination of experience and expertise. Current research on Imagination.

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1. Classroom barriers to literacy

A basis for a checklist for teachers and schools

Some common classroom barriers to print literacy could be removed at no expense. All that is needed is for teachers and the public to become aware of the barriers. Watch when a classroom is shown on television. Could you learn to read in that classroom?

Teaching is an art, a science based on theory and research, and it is also a skill, needing classroom techniques, observation and imagination - like a clever plumber or mechanic.

Each problem is easily countered with practical action

1 Classroom ways to lose interest, increase confusion and allow poor reading habits to be learned.

- **Why read?** Children from bookless homes may have no understanding from the start of why they should bother trying to learn to read, when the little books they are given cannot compete with the excitement of TV.

Action. Children also need to see older level and 'grown-up' books or magazines to browse in Prep to Junior Primary classrooms, to inspire them - including pre-1968 editions of Arthur Mee's *Children's Encyclopedia*, coffee-table books about the world with good print, science, technology, marvellous modern atlases, even illustrated company reports. "*One day you will be able to read all these.*" (Plus demonstration lessons for how to care for good books as valuable, not throwaways.)

A teacher enthusiastic about reading is the greatest enthuser for primary children too. It is an essential qualification for teaching literacy.

- **Lost children.** Children are lost and morale plummets when they have no way to catch up if they are absent, or change schools, or have not paid attention. They need books to keep, and classrooms need wall 'maps' of past and future teaching. Many problems of gaps and confusions could be prevented or cleared up if learners had access to a watch-at-home short cartoon overview DVD/video of the English writing system and what it helps to know, to watch, re-watch and enjoy in their own time. Then the great lottery in a child's life need no longer be their first years at school.
- **Squashing curiosity.** The greatest change that many children face on arriving at formal schooling is to find that no longer are they the ones who ask the questions. Small children learn by asking questions - yet from the moment they start school, the teacher may ask all the questions and the child must answer. Most children do not like this. Most children stop asking questions. (Then teachers may not know when children are getting lost until too late.) The greatest motive for children wanting to read is curiosity, 'to find out what happens'. When teachers discuss predictions about what happens in a book before children read it, to 'make it easier for them to read' - this can take away interest and curiosity to read it. Why bother? It is

fair enough to raise curiosity by asking “What do you think happens?” but the answer should be found by going straight on to read the book, not pre-empted by time-wasting guesses.

- **Wasting children’s efforts.** Children can be discouraged when all their work is on pieces of paper which then go in the bin, mocking their efforts and leaving no record to remind them of what they have done and how they are progressing.
- **Preventing bright children having chances to fast-track.** When there is no way offered for a bright child to learn to read *in the first week of school* - as many can, given a chance - they can become reluctant and rebellious students. Bright children can get fed up with slow dripping over several terms of the simple know-how that they should have been given access to quickly and systematically. I and other psychologists have met parents who claim their children can read above their age level, the teacher claims they can't read a word, and the parents are correct; the children do not connect the 'beginning reading' lessons they have at school with their home reading of books they like.
- **Risks in individual teaching.** When teachers give no classroom teaching but teach every child the same thing separately, it easily happens that some children miss out on some critical teaching, or think they have.
- **‘Many ways to teach one thing’** can be confusing and time-wasting. Activity after activity when direct application to reading would be economical and more effective. Better to have one multi-level way that teaches many things.
- **Large groups on the floor.** Small children often lose concentration and do not attend if they sit uncomfortably on the floor with craned necks, mostly unable to see the print displayed and with the teacher’s knees (or knickers) more visible than her face. Only the fidgety ones may be noticed. Teachers should ensure that if children have to be on the floor, they are all comfortable and all can see and hear without craning. A ring of low chairs is better, and cushioned benches or pit for a small group in a corner better still.
- **The classroom itself.** Children can learn under a gumtree or in a tent, but some classroom environments can be more off-putting than others. Teachers can enhance their classrooms with their own personalities and styles - children can appreciate a room that is ‘different’, like a natural history museum or with the stars on the ceiling. There is however research on ‘child-scale’ and on what encourages concentration and reduces stress. The total impression should not be bright primary colors hemming in; continually changing the scenery and furniture around allows the children no stable base, which disadvantaged children particularly may need; a roomful of clutter can mean none of it gets noticed; AHDD problems are worse with noise; children need somewhere that is their own, like a fulcrum, for their belongings, including their literacy work. Crumpling it into take-home bags is only a step to the bin.

2. Learning poor reading habits

- **‘Barking at print’ can result from poor phonics teaching.** Children with no interest in the story may end up barking at print. Children who are expected to struggle to get every word

right in sequence as they stumble through reading aloud can lose the sense of what they are reading. There are methods of 'hearing children read' and of 'paired reading' which ensure accuracy, maintain the interest and continuity of the story and avoid stressing children. All teachers and parents should know these, with video models that are tested for efficacy. Some current video models show good parent-child bonding, but not good reading. (Appendix B 'Paired Reading' How to.)

- **Inaccurate reading can result from purely Whole Language teaching.** A common practice is to ask children to predict what will happen in a story, and to guess words they do not know. Although intended to encourage learners to 'read for meaning' not just 'bark at print', it can make them into inaccurate readers, who can only read what they expect to see. (Adults can continue this habit, like sub-editors who contrive inaccurate headings to what they edit.) Children can be encouraged to have a shot at unfamiliar words, but are also helped how to get it correctly rather than allowing the errors to stand – i.e the emphasis is on helping, not punishing. 'Yes, it looks like *house* but see why it is *horse* Yes, it is a *house* but see how the word reads *cott-age*, a little house, so the story goes . . Right!'
- **Never reading the same book again, so reading is always stumbling and fluent habits do not develop.** When beginners get no practice and experience in re-reading and re-reading a book that they like, they never reach the experience of fluent reading, so that they can concentrate on the content. They retain stumbling habits in reading. Every effort should be made for every child to find books they love, to re-read often. As a schools psychologist I used to take ex-library books round disadvantaged schools for children to browse, and then each could choose individually the book they would like to 'give' to their classroom. Many children learned to read from books that they or their classmates chose - a 7-year-old reading-refuser learned from the picture titles to Bronowski's *Encyclopedia of Animals*. (A wonderful adult book for children. The whole Grade II class loved having it in their classroom.) Never re-reading is especially a problem for children from bookless homes, and 'book-shop-crawl' excursions can help them to find and choose a book they will love. They are worth the money for a Christmas treat.
- **Not being shown how to care for books.** Small children need to be shown how to care for books, look at them with respect, turn the pages gently, and treat them with even exaggerated care, so that it is a bit of an act, and is not a DO NOT imposition. When books are regarded as disposable once-onlys, they soon look tatty and are wasted.

3. Classroom barriers that especially impede disadvantaged children

- **Disruptive students** can prevent a class getting attention or teaching, and burn out potentially fine young teachers. This is a public scandal, and it is soluble. It is disgraceful to allow classrooms where teachers and children are forced to put up with so much wasted time and unhappiness at the taxpayers' expense. 'Class control' should not be the teacher's major

problem, forcing curricula into trivial 'activities' that might keep disrupters quiet. The Inquiry should make recommendations about Classrooms fit for teaching literacy.

- **Inadequate teaching of how to care, and schools giving examples of waste.** In some schools equipment continually gets lost, stolen, broken or will not work. When children from bookless homes are not shown how to care for books and materials, these are soon wrecked and go in the bin, which is bad psychologically as well as expensive. Failure in learning to care also causes problems in students' own future lives. Just scolding does not work. Children can be taught.

4. Other unintentional discouragements

- **'Activities'.** Commercial Ed-Biz does a thriving trade on 'activities' that are not evaluated as to whether they are effective, only whether children might like them, and so they are promoted as keeping the children busy. Interactive CD and computers and black-line masters are full of 'activities' which may be time-wasters, taking time away from the real literacy business of learning to read, enjoy and understand books, think about their content and to write competently. Children learn to play many games - but often not what the games are supposed to be teaching - just as most people do not remember a hand of cards they have played, only how to play the game. It becomes ridiculous when 'games' which are meant to be 'fun' become experienced by many children, especially boys, as pointless and even unpleasant tasks. 'Scrambled spelling' activities actually make children more likely to make spelling mistakes. Learners should NEVER be shown what is wrong, even to make it right, as some unlucky children will always then become confused which is correct.

The principle intended is *'I do and I understand'* - but in learning to read, the 'doing' is learning to actually read and write, not the card games or scrambled spelling. The literacy DVD I seek to have investigated has the 'activity' of understanding and immediately applying the information in the program to actually and immediately read for meaning.

- **Rebellion against what seems stupid.** Boys are more likely to fail than girls in part because girls tend to be more docile and like to please adults, even if asked to do what seems silly to them. Boys may rebel if they don't know what the work is for.
- **Self-help made impossible.** When there is no chance for learners to teach themselves.
- **When teachers are hassled** with far too many clerical and administrative responsibilities apart from teaching.
- **When learners cannot see the text** in books or flashcards that teachers hold up for them to look at, they lose concentration.

5. Specific teaching disabilities

'There are more cases of dysteachia than dyslexia.' Marcia Henry, Orton Dyslexia Society

- When teachers have no expertise or training in **public speaking**, the children can be bored, restless and uncomprehending. All trainees, and incompetent teachers too, should be helped to make their speech clear and interesting, and how to hold a class without shouting and yelling. The skills are not necessarily innate. At present, too often poor teachers may stay while given no help, or leave, when it could be a waste of potential. (Teachers should be booted out, of course, if they do not care about their subject or their pupils.)

All brilliant reading teachers that I have observed regularly read good books to children, so well that the children listen, fascinated. They read a story or a chapter every day, and children ask the questions, and can look at the book themselves whenever they want. (I often ask children to tell me stories, and in one school many of the eight-year-olds told me the story of the *Silver Sword* at great length - it was the story the teacher had been reading serially in class.)

- Remarkably few teachers have ever **seen a brilliant teacher teaching**, to help them raise their own sights. This could be remedied - even by video and TV - with many brilliant examples of different personal teaching styles.

- Many primary teachers have no **idea of the English spelling system**, and so cannot teach spelling except in lists or word by word or with 'activities'.

- Phonics and Whole Language done badly. **Anything can be done badly.**

- **Poor methods of listening to children read.** It is an art to listen so that children enjoy this attention - yet this art is not taught and children can hate 'reading out' as a trial - - so that some teachers avoid listening to oral reading in order 'not to stress the children'. Yet oral reading helps children to learn to get the sense of sentences and stories because auditory memory is the carrier for short-term memory of sequences.

- One-to-one **remedial teaching** has a bad record for lasting success unless a teacher is first-class or the learner wishes to please her. Many learners progress as long as they pushed - and slide back as soon as pushing stops. Teenagers and adults especially can dislike and fear being asked constant questions by a teacher they cannot avoid. Prevention is better than remediation. Reading Recovery is far too expensive and students still fail.

- Hassled teachers may rely too much on commercially-produced 'activities' and paperwork for the children. There is in Australia now even a move promoted from Queensland that argues that teachers should not teach at all, they should only 'facilitate'. I think this rationalises laziness.

6 'Many literacies'

'Literacy' literally means the ability to read and write letters. The word 'literacy' is used as a metaphor when it means to understand other forms of communication and meaning, and there is a need for that metaphor, but not to displace the literal meaning. The second most important 'literacy' after print literacy is '*Earth literacy*', observing the world around us - but this is often

neglected. Teaching other 'literacies' should not mean a free hand to spend time in class for poor readers to watch TV shows, or cavalier claims that print literacy is now not that important.

7. Handwriting

- Small children should be allowed to have pencils and pens that are comfortable for little hands if they like them, or handwriting habits suffer. **Large and long instruments** are clumsy to manoeuvre. Children should be helped to learn **comfortable pencil-holds** that will allow them to develop fast, smaller and comfortable handwriting. Many adults still have awkward pen-holds and cannot write easily, fast, or legibly.
 - **Posture.** Good posture encourages good handwriting and is desirable for health. A cute child on the cover of some Australian Education Union publicity material has his head on the paper and a pencil the relative thickness of a curtain rod for an adult. Sometimes children do tire and do put their heads down, but they should know how to start well, anyway. Then they might also tire less quickly.
 - **Writing without lines.** Children who cannot write straight can become seriously discouraged, yet may not allowed lines as guides (not policemen) because it 'might discourage their creativity'. At one school, a boy referred to me for his terrible handwriting among other things, showed that he could write neatly when allowed guidelines, and was so proud of his work, but the teacher refused to let him have lined paper because 'it was against school policy'. Research using double-blind methods has conclusively disproved the myth that creativity is hampered by lined paper (Burnhill P, Hartley J & Davies L, Lined paper, legibility and creativity. In J Hartley (ed) *The psychology of written communication*, 1980, pp 82-91. London: Kogan Page)
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2. *Preventing barriers to literacy in home and pre-school care*

Disadvantaged children must be given the advantages that the others have before they arrive at school. Without language skills, children can read the words but fail at comprehension, especially from Year 3 onward. Many social improvements are possible and necessary. Here the discussion is on direct improvements in literacy preparation.

Home and local environment can improve pre-school training in language, behavior, acquaintance with books and desire for learning, as well as avoiding developing unhappy, distrustful and disruptive children. Many young parents do not know how to interact

with their children. They write pathetic tales of their incompetence in the *Age* but no practical aid for them is published.

Without adequate language skills, children may learn to read words or guess but fail at comprehension, especially from Year 3 onward, as texts become more complex, with more new vocabulary that cannot be guessed. Help before school is far more inexpensive and effective than remediation efforts that after school failure has set in. What sort of help?

SOME RECOMMENDATIONS TO DEVELOP EARLY LANGUAGE SKILLS and COMPREHENSION AT HOME AND IN PRE-SCHOOL CARE

1. Radio has an advantage over television in developing children's language and listening skills. The less unsupervised TV the better because children learn to accept what seems meaningless to them because they have no way of finding the meaning. Reading requires a desire to search for meaning, which is a normal drive in young children.

Bring back and publicise radio 'Kindergarten of the Air', even if there is only the finance to replay old programs. Children can listen while doing other things or following the actions, and while a parent is with them doing housework. They learn to listen as well as being more active than TV-sitting.

Interactive Radio programs for young parents at home. Promoting and publicising suitable Help your baby websites. Bring back - or start - Stories on the Air - retelling stories from every country's heritage; these are usually at a level that children can understand and enjoy even if they do not yet know all the words.

2. TV programs and popular magazines, improved 'frig-magnet' parent advice, and 'parent parties' can promote and demonstrate:
 - Singing lullabies to babies. Lullabies develop interest and pleasure in language, as well as helping babies to sleep and soothing the parents themselves. The media can promote lullaby-singing in many ways; DVD and CDs of unaccompanied singing; beginners' reading books with lullabies; First-time parents can be given a lullaby DVD or book.
 - Talking with your baby. Here there is great ignorance. Too many parents think there is no point conversing with a baby until it can talk - which is absurd. Prams

and pushers with the handles reversed, as they used to be, enable child and adult to see and bond and talk with each other about what they see, as they enjoy travelling together, instead of the child seeming to face the world alone. Let's push for what I would call *Educational Pushers*. Again, media encouragement.

- Dummies only as a last resort when nothing else calms a child. Conversing with a child is often all they need to get the attention they are screaming for. Toddlers learning to talk are hampered by stuffing their mouths with dummies or chips.
- Telling stories to the children - including stories that adults and older sibling make up. Stories from your cultural homeland. Stories about your family and the things they did in the past. Repetition and rhythm works well, as in fairy stories and Kipling's *Just-So-Stories*.
- Reading stories to the children - with plenty of dramatic expression, looking on the page, and exaggerations that make sounds clear, such as 'Who should come along but a great big K-A-NG-A-ROO!'
- Singing in the car. As well as I-spy and other word games, telling stories with everyone adding a bit, describing things seen out of the window and so on.
- Singing games - Kindergarten of the Air and Playschool had many of these.
- More old traditional or translated songs on radio with words that children can sing. Some of the modern two-year-level kiddy-stuff in preschools etc needs to be supplemented by developing tastes for songs that are worth loving all their lives.
- Adults conversing in the children's presence - but without shouting, yelling or abuse. Children who get to hear a lot of verbal abuse learn to tune out to speech.
- Books in the home and adults who can read. Of course . .

A further advantage of these recommendations to improving language comprehension is that this sort of communication makes adult-child relations more enjoyable.

- Educational toys. Many 'educational' toys and pre-school 'educational aids' on the market are actually rather boring, lack imagination and do not inspire it. The video of a Scottish Nursery School '*Preparing to Read through play*' shows easily-made aids and games, and how children's free play with plastic alphabet letters develops at different stages, using a picture ABC base. All the children at this nursery school who could be followed up were reading within their first term at formal school.

- Pre-school care can sometimes have too short regulated periods for activities, non-stop loud radio, and even television used as a baby-sitter, with too little opportunity for children to develop sustained attention spans and completing what they are doing. Staff ratios should permit more flexibility. The need for private profit may not support the most child-centred practices, and the whole system may need reconsideration.

3. *Barriers to literacy in books for children*

Print, sizes, pictures, content, and how books are used in classrooms.

Some Literacy Innovations to promote learning to read

1. Barriers in the print

When 'sales appeal' is at the cost of easy reading for learners

In the past, attention was paid to making print easy for children to read, and the clarity of the print still adds to the popularity of books such as Dr Seuss.

Book reviewers, teachers and parents should always look at children's books, even toddlers' picture books, with one eye to how easy it would be for learners to read the print. Some children are capable of learning to read at three years old. Let them.

Print for children should be clear, beautiful and *interesting*.

- **Size.** Print for first readers should be quite large, then decrease. Many children do not need the initial large sizes, but some do, and can fail at the start if they find their first print too small for them.
- **Clarity and Distinctiveness.** Letters easily confused, particularly **bdpq**, handicap all learners at first, and some learners permanently (Yule, 1985). The original idea of sanserif **bdpq** was flawed. It was thought that the simplest sticks and circles would be easiest for children to read and write. Instead, the similarity of the letters make them too hard to distinguish and remember. The simpler the sticks and circles, the more that a page looks like a carpet pattern. It can be observed that children learn first and most easily the most distinctive letters, such as S and O. Children can have individual preferences for the fonts they like to actually read, and these are often not the same as what graphic designers choose for sales appeal. In their writing, girls particularly often show that they like their print distinctive, as with curls on c and s, and fancy descenders. Rosemary Sassoon's Sassoon font is excellent for junior primary school, as in the *Jolly Dictionary*, 2004. It links print, handwriting and cursive writing.

(Reference for letter-shapes. Yule, 1985. Unpublished research. All the children in the first two grades and the last grade of an Aberdeen primary school were given a simple test of matching one set of random scrabble-sized sanserif plastic letters with another random set. All the 21 beginners made one or more confusions with sanserif b d p q. Fewer were confused in second year, but four children were still confused in year 6. Fewer early errors were made in distinguishing serif letters in print.)

- **Spacing.** Trendy fonts for sales appeal can be quite difficult for beginners, especially when graphic designers space letters, words and lines too closely together to get a better 'sales appeal' effect. It is odd that people who argue that children learn by word-shape from the start will still give children reading books with a variety of trendy fonts, including descenders and ascenders that are too short or too long.
- **Obscuring the print.** Backgrounds which are bright colors or pictures obscure the print for learners and children with reading difficulties. They make reading slower for other children - (and, I reckon, for adults, although I have not tested this on any except myself. More testing is required.) Except for headings, print for children should never have bright backgrounds or worst of all, white on black.

IMPORTANT. The differences between print on screen and print on paper. Since book pages are now commonly designed on screen, graphic designers, teachers and all writers should be aware how print on screen, with its background of liquid crystal light, is not the same in readability as print on paper. Clear examples of this difference between the two media are white print on black background, and colored and picture backgrounds. These techniques can work well with on screens, and for labels and headings, but should not be used for blocks of regular text on paper, because some children are badly handicapped in trying to read them, and many if not most people are slowed down .

2. BARRIERS IN BOOK SIZES. 'Sales appeal' today drives publishers to print books in all sorts of shapes and sizes. However, this means that children's books cannot fit on a bookshelf without looking scruffy, and many cannot fit at all. There should be four standard sizes, so that children can be proud of their own book-collections, and be able to keep them looking good on the shelf, instead of jutting, not fitting, and falling all over the place. Librarians would also be grateful to be able to shelve books in some sort of order.

Note the popularity of series of books in the same format - eg Little Golden Books, Penguins, Everyman, etc. Children as well as adults like to collect sets.

- **Throwaway little books.** It has also seemed cheaper for schools to have sets of small once-only books. A maximum of 16 pages for a book may seem economical, but these books usually have a short life, so there can be economy in bigger books and books with firmer covers. The *old Golden Books* were beloved until the reprints became shoddy. The belief that children are intimidated by bigger books is countered by the children's feelings of achievement when they have completed a 'real book'. Classrooms can have 'pick-me-up-for-five-minutes' booklets of course, but 'real meat' should always be there to tempt. (The title of

a vy paper on this subject, '*Books fit for bookshelf*', is taken from an ad in a trading-post magazine.)

3. BARRIERS IN PICTURES

The purposes of pictures in early reading books for children are to make the books look more attractive, arouse curiosity to read the text to find out more about what the pictures are about, complement the content of the text, and give a setting for children's imagination to go further, particularly about the characters in the story. However, pictures can be mis-used, and become barriers to learning to read well.

Reading by Pictures

See Protheroe, 1992, for a demolition of current fallacies about children learning from pictures to read print.

It is also a mistake for too many introductory reading books to have one line of print on each page, under a large picture. Unless books with paragraph text are also introduced early, children develop reading habits that deter paragraph-reading strategies, and rely too much on the pictures, rather than attending to print as interesting in itself. The purpose of pictures in books is to encourage you to read the print to find out what the pictures are about - not to tell the story so there is no need to read the print. I can remember that when first learning to read I preferred the pages with a picture on them, but it was valuable practice to learn to read the interspersed pages with no pictures.

- **Pictures** should not be so crude or silly that no child wants to look at them more than once. The test of pictures is that children like to look at them again and again - there is tremendous variety in what they like, but they are rarely the sort that adults think are trendy, 'child-like', careless, or with large incomplete foregrounded figures.

4. USING BOOKS IN TEACHING LITERACY AND READING TO CHILDREN

Anything can be done badly, and sometimes books can be a neglected classroom aid.

1. Some classrooms are now throwing out books, especially reference books, because they regard the Internet as more important for creativity and imagination. '*Books are more controlling of the reader.*' This is disastrous for full literacy and connected thinking.
2. 'Wheat among the Chaff'. What books? When many children will read very few books, what choices should be available? Not 'it does not matter what they read, as long as they are reading'. Content influences children's minds - and there is so much else that can excite and interest them, and allow tastes to develop. Ambitions and ideas are lit early in childhood and teachers should not be afraid to let them have books that can fire these. There is more to a boy than delight in what is shocking.

3. There is a current excess of rather silly slim books for parents to read to children, and to try to attract children to read. The list of books recommended for the younger school children to read in the Victorian State government reading marathon has too high a proportion of books with silly titles and themes of stupid or ridiculous behaviour, without the genius of Dr Seuss. Too many books given to five-year-olds are at a mental age of two. Too many picture books to read to children have hardly any story-line, whereas even at eighteen months children can love a Once Upon a Time that can even be a serial. **Rubbishy content plus rubbishy writing** means that the booklets quickly go in the bin. What adults think is cute is often just twee. For a small child, hippopotamuses living like river-horses in a river can be as imaginatively exciting and new as a green hippopotamus on a roof. One green hippopotamus on a roof can be funny, but a whole genre like that is overdone. **Silly stories** set for reading, like 'Cowdung Custard' and 'Fairy Underpants' make many intelligent children revolt against reading - and so they can become 'bright dyslexics'. Yet authors like Paul Jennings and Morris Gleitzman have also written hilarious children's books that teach ingenuity and problem-solving without toe-curling

- **Books and magazines in the classroom and nursery-school to stimulate reading and the desire to read** should include examples of adult books and magazines (with pictures) that can give small children ideas of how wonderful it will be to be able to read them, plus other books for older children. Even company reports can show pictures of the world of industry and invention. The most disadvantaged boys used to love *National Geographic* magazines to browse, long before they could read them. Computer games may have greater attraction today, however.
- **Books that children have chosen themselves, after browsing.**
- **Every classroom should have a 1-2 volume children's encyclopedia for ready reference and browsing for general knowledge.** The old one-volume *Golden Encyclopedia* for 4-8 year-olds and Hamlyn's one volume encyclopedia for 9-12 year-olds were brilliant and beloved. Most replacements have not been as good.
- **But not too many books at a time or** children can feel overwhelmed. Book-floods can flood and even intimidate. Twenty to thirty books at a time in a classroom is enough. Occasionally some of these go back to the school-library where they can still be found, or even be given to desirous children, but the mainstays remain. (At home, children with too many books can also feel too overwhelmed to read them, unless they have been collected over time.)

Using books in the classroom

In some classrooms, books are hardly used or available except for the set texts. They are all kept in the library.

- In every classroom there should be books on a shelf for browsing, and a place for magazines. Less popular books can be exchanged every term. Books should never be restricted to the library.

- Every day in primary and junior secondary, a teacher *who can read stories well* reads a book to the class for ten minutes, there can be a five minute discussion, and afterwards the book is in the classroom for browsing. Sometimes a book can be read as a serial, sometimes a book is read-around-the-class with paired-reading for children who would like it. At another set time in the day, a poem, say from a book, can be up on a white-board or similar and the teacher can read it, or the whole class together - like a regular five-minute interval in other classwork. Afternoons are a good time. Then the book is available for all to browse, and for copying out favorites 'in best handwriting'. Children can bring their own favorites to school for these reading sessions.

- Encyclopedia in every classroom. For every topic, someone can look up the encyclopedia, as well as others looking up the Internet and library books - compare speeds sometimes. Most information will not be dated; it is apparent when it is, and it can be useful to see what was thought in the past. It is easy to cut-and-paste from the Internet; but using reference books for projects requires writing out, preferably in your own words, requiring more understanding.

- **Classics new and old**

Adults and children can recommend books they love. Children need both old and new. I have my own list of favorites but particularly recommend that these old books should be kept in print:

1. Beginners' book, suitable for English-learners too. *The EAR book*, by Al Perkins, Cat-in-the-hat beginner book. Random House 1968. ISBN 0 00 171203 9
2. *Gobble Growl Grunt*, by Peter Spier. World Books. Marvellous sounds of animals and birds to read and practice.
3. *People*, by Peter Spier, 1988, copyright held by Pan Macmillan. Former publisher: Doubleday Books for Young Readers, ISBN: 038524469X Hardcover: The World's Work | August 1980 0-385-13181-X. This classic needs reprinting. It would have an enthusiastic response from children and adults alike, the world over. Children of all ages pored over it, and its wonderful pictures encourage reading and re-reading. Every page fires the imagination with something different. In a world riven by ignorance, hatreds and cruelty, it celebrates the variety of us all, and arouses curiosity, laughter and delight.
4. *The Australia book*. Eve Pownall. Sydney: John Sands. Undated, but post WW2. An illustrated book for first talking about the pictures, and for age 8 upwards to read.
5. Arthur Mee's *Children's Encyclopedia* pre-1968 need to be updated and reprinted in their former glory -they are heritage art treasures that are still marvellous for the bright children to browse. Competitions to find something on the Internet and in the Index can end with Arthur Mee winning, and items found more quickly. I have been making a collection of Eminent Worthies who were inspired by this series. Its comprehensive groupings of topics enable a child to start with pictures, jingles,

stories and be finally reading and thinking about science, history and deep philosophy.

5. BARRIERS IN THE CONTENT OF BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

This is a contentious issue, discussed more fully in a monograph on *The Message of the Book*. Only a few remarks are made here.

- **It does not matter what children read as long as they are reading** is like saying it does not matter what they eat as long as they are eating. In its original statement it meant that children need not stick to the set texts – they should have variety to choose from. But children are learners, and they learn from and are influenced by the content of what they read. A study of ‘Books that have influenced me’ is only one indicator of the importance of content.
- **The message of the book.** Teachers can find out what children learn from the books they read, and discover how often it is not what the teachers and other adults think about the books, and the importance of socio-economic class and individual differences. Ask for a couple of lines on what they found a book (or film) told them about ‘what the world is like, and how to behave in it’. Find out why fairy stories such as *The Ugly Duckling* and *Cinderella* are so popular. (See also the *Horror Movie Character's Survival Guide, I wanne live* which has been going around the Internet since 1999. It lists 870 messages from the movies about how you should behave in order to survive. Many of these messages, once unacceptable, are no longer shocking.)
- **Gruesome and grisly.** Most children enjoy certain sorts of horror for entertainment. However, adults can inflict other sorts of horror with the argument that these are good for the children. Aries, the historian of childhood, has observed that in every generation there are adults who seem to want to make life tough for children, in one way or another. I often found ‘reluctant readers’ were in fact objecting to the books they were set – often ‘too silly’ in primary school, or ‘too grisly’ in secondary school.
- **‘Boys will like it.’** There is a current trend to label boys as having short-attention spans and restricted interests, and shaping reading materials accordingly. They can be very bound by peer pressure, true, but they want to grow up to be Men as well, and what they are presented with as Adult and what Men do is very influential. Teachers are often so scared of kitsch and sentimentality that they look at books from an adult point of view about what children would like, rather than from a developmental point of view of what tastes they can learn and develop.

There is a strong case for letting children have access to a wide range of books, old as well as new, from different cultures too, inspiring as well as entertaining, raising enthusiasm for the world of knowledge that prevents any boredom with life. I have seen a teacher so inspire a class of disadvantaged seven year olds that she could hardly get them out of the room at

playtime – they were helping each other to read Childcraft Encyclopedia laid out on the floor, and the most derelict waif of them all crying, “I don’ wanna play! I wanna work!”

5. Designing books to aid learning to read. Some ideas

‘Little flap’ books have good-sized print, and flaps when key words are introduced for the first few times, so that children can lift the flaps to see a picture illustrating the word – for example, in a fairy story, Hansel, Gretel, cottage, witch, birds, path, forest, etc. This can be combined with the other way round, lifting the picture to see the word, to make the text look more attractive. Some books like that have been on the market.

Turnabout Books for adult and child have alternative sentences easy and complex, so the child can have a good story and learn to read the more complex text too.

Multilevel Books have three levels of difficulty on the one page – a very simple line that may go with a small picture, medium difficulty, and complex – so that in a mixed ability class, everyone can be reading something, learning to read ahead, or be helped by a clue from the easier lines. Nobody is seen to be behind the others with a baby book.

Spelling Crib Books get around the problem of unpredictable spellings by a range of ways to clarify word structure and make print interesting in itself. *‘Look at the word!’* And there are ways to look at it. A mock-up booklet *The Months*, shows a different sort of crib for each month.

Fast-track Books begin very easy, and each page is more advanced, so an ambitious child is stimulated to progress rapidly. Heinemann has Maths workbooks like that, in which each page begins with simple sums and ends with quite hard ones, at the deep end.

4. *Why so many teachers hate phonics*

And what can be done

The saying ‘As easy as ABC’ implies that it is easy to learn to read using alphabetic principles of sound-letter relationships to work out unfamiliar words.

Why then, do so many teachers still hate teaching ‘phonics’? In the 1970s and 1980s I observed the joy with which teachers abandoned teaching phonics for the easy-going ‘Whole Language’, and today many still dig their heels in against teaching it again, or taking any systematic approach, or permitting any assessment of whether their pupils can read words. (See ch 5, on ideologies and teacher-training.) Teachers who disliked the ‘factory learning’ of tables and rows of sums, even though these are matters of reason, disliked even more the drills of spellings that were not.

But when teachers did continue to assess reading, schools that had gone completely over to Whole Language could return to a phonics start. In Scotland, an Aberdeen school called me in when they found that all except a few who had home assistance could read no more than a half-a-dozen sight words, instead of their traditional expectation that all Year 2 children would be well started in reading. A dramatic and successful change in practices then ensured all children could learn and integrate a variety of strategies for accurate and enjoyable reading.

But I also found in Aberdeen that while even disturbed children taught by the old phonics methods could all read, very many did not like reading. At the children's hospital in Melbourne, it was a fair bet that a child referred for psychiatric or behavioral problems would also have reading problems.

i. WHY HATE PHONICS?

1. Teachers and pupils find it tedious. The answer (See ii) is how to make it not tedious.
2. Unless phonics is taught well, many children do not cotton on to the basic phonemic awareness needed to hear sounds in words and understand how they blend into words. They fail.
3. 'Barking at print' describes children stumbling through decoding, and continually stopped for corrections, so they do not make sense of what they read. Or if not corrected, still not accurate. But there are ways to ensure reading reaches the meaning, and to correct so that it is seen as helping, not humiliating.
4. Children resist phonics that is not taught well and they refuse to rote-learn, if it is not immediately turned to account in reading. It is common for reluctant and failing learners to be pushed to learn something one day, and to have forgotten it the next day. Individual remedial teaching can push them into progress, but as soon as the help stops, they roll back again - unless they have also been hooked into liking to read.
5. Children often think they are stupid and lose morale when they are not informed that some spellings of words can be a bit funny and you have to fudge. They try to apply phonics - and the result does not make sense.
6. Teachers (and their college teachers) often do not understand English spelling anyway, and the teachers in the classroom tend to rely on commercial edbiz publishing and computer exercises and games to supply the phonics 'activities'.
7. It is much pleasanter to teach reading by talking. See *MyRead*, Australian principles for the teaching of reading, which includes chatty ways to talk about sound-symbol relationships at a late stage of the Whole Language approach. (Appendix 5A)
(http://www.myread.org/guide_phonemic.htm)

Sympathetic teacher educators find ways to argue that the assessment of reading does not need to include whether children can read words accurately. The fact that readers commonly

reconstruct the meaning of texts that they read, is construed to mean that this is a good thing, rather than showing up the importance of accuracy to try to discover the writers' intentions.

8. 'Facilitating', the current buzz-word, is more pleasant and easy-going than direct systematic instruction, if you are not an inspiring teacher who can speak well. This can also overlook the fact that some children get 'facilitated' easily; others do not.

9. To teach something systematically does require practice in its delivery. The current feature in schools of constant curriculum change makes it hard for teachers to develop and to practise to excellence a consistent and successful way of teaching phonics. Every year everything is different, and every syllabus may be a pilot syllabus that is never repeated to fluency.

ii. MAKING PHONICS INTERESTING AND 'WORTH THE WORK'

1. Pre-school preparation for 'phonemic awareness' - being able to hear sounds in words - is a preparation for relating letters to sounds in words, and linking the spoken and written languages. I do not think all children can sound out letters unless they can hear those sounds in words, even if only as the initial onset. Disadvantaged children need what the other children are given before the age of five, which enable them to 'intuit' and 'discover' what may not be taught explicitly. Bullock 1975 and other Reading reports often emphasise that the child comes to 'intuit' or 'discover' - but overlook that there are the children who do not. See Section 2.

Home barriers, and vy's Scottish video, *'Preparing to read through play'*.

2. Teacher-training to observe successful teachers' instructing in phonics, videos of their own teaching, and understanding of the English spelling system and how to cope with its problems.

3. Self-help for learners. Teachers can without realising it guard the gates of learning, so that those who could learn faster are held back, and those who have gaps and confusions have no way of helping themselves.

a) Independent learning opportunities from the very first day.

The first day of school is often disappointing for children who think the great day is going to be the gate for LEARNING, and yet they just 'muck around'. And they can then get the idea to just muck around for the future. Instead, along with the play, on their first day at school children should be shown wonderful books and told that during the year they are going to learn about reading them. And they are given the first step of 'How to', that the letters in the ABC frieze on the wall can show you sounds in words - sounds like SSss for snake. And they start to learn the ABC chart as a mnemonic. As long as a start begins on the first day and the children take home something in print, like their own names, the rest of the day can be anything - but should include training in how to have clean hands and turn the pages very carefully in looking at the wonderful books in the classroom, which range from baby's books to children's encyclopedia and adult books and magazines.

'Multilevel' teaching and learning is possible, so that the 'Early Starters' can get ahead, the 'Steady Goers' make their way, and the 'Catcher Uppers' who are not yet developmentally

ready to read, can still each day see their progress towards it, and have the respect of the class. The 'Catcher-Uppers' can see on the wall pictures of other 'Catcher-Uppers, who also made a slow start, even if they themselves may turn out to be not be exactly Churchills or Einsteins. The Early Starters and Steady Goers also see exemplars of their own learning progress too, to feel they too have a great tradition to follow.

Cumulatively, everything that is taught remains on the walls and in A4 'books' for the children, so they can always find out where they may be getting lost or have missed out.

Further detail is available about integrating phonics with enjoyable reading, requiring few of the usual clerical activities needed for those children who dislike them. For example, Consumer-Oriented-Literacy-Acquisition aids, which combine phonic strategies with Whole-Word and Language Experience in Reading what you want to read.(Yule, 1980).

b) Another plug for the watch-at-home literacy overview *ABC GO!*

Learners should be able to help themselves in learning to read and in clearing up gaps and confusions, now the technology of multimedia is available to show them sound-symbol relationships and how the writing system operates. A video/DVD/or CD such as '*ABC GO! HELP YOURSELF TO READ AND SPELL OR FIND OUT WHERE YOU GOT STUCK*' should be freely available for all families, from libraries, schools, downloadable from the web, that gives an overview of the English writing system in 30 minutes using cartoon graphics and animated text, starting from scratch, and gives clues for reading and spelling. Children and adults can watch and re-watch as they like until it is allfamiliar and they can apply it as they like.

This aid uses principles of learning that may not be easily applied in a classroom:

- i. An overview of what is ahead.
 - ii. Chunking learning together makes it faster to learn. - the ABC song to learn the alphabet, the ABC picture-chart, charts of vowel-sounds
 - iii. 'Discovery learning' can be direct cognitive understanding, not just through activities or answering questions or tangible manipulation.
 - iv. 'Activities' to get learning going ('I do and I understand') can be cognitive application to actually reading, and clerical 'activities' may not be necessary. Joining in sounds, words and songs on the screen can be more useful activity for learning than games and other 'activities' where the game may be learned rather than the content supposedly taught.
 - v. Learning need not be strictly sequential, but 'organic' - picking up what links first to what is known already - this is what happens in learning to talk. In the DVD '*ABC GO!*' which is only 30 minutes, learners will vary tremendously in what they pick up first, and gradually integrate with re-viewing and/or integrating it with what they encounter in classrooms and personal reading. Some of it can be picked up without really noticing, and then come in useful when the relevant learning is required in the classroom. Aha! I know what this is about.
- Classrooms can be too unaccommodating to individual differences when they have a set program in which each item must be mastered before the next can be tackled.

vi. Overlearning is essential in acquiring a skill, and the short DVD 'ABC GO!' is designed for over-learning. Overlearning means learning more thoroughly than is needed at the time to remember something; it will be remembered permanently. Repetition is the commonest method for overlearning.

vii. Where am I stuck? Often learners and teachers do not know. ABC GO! can identify such difficulties, and if it does not resolve them, the learner does know where there is a problem to take to the teacher.

This aid can be constantly improved, and different versions can be made to target different needs and abilities, including a version, 'DREAMTIME DILLYBAG' for indigenous learners, incorporating their culture.

4. Research. The principles of self-help learning to complement class or course learning should be investigated separately from the experimental version already made. This too should be investigated for how it may help different learners and how it could be improved - because it is so cheap, accessible and easy to use.

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5. Recommendations to improve teacher training

a. Teacher training institutions

b. Commercial Edbiz

That this inquiry can achieve anything positive may be problematic. Many vested interests benefit from literacy being difficult to acquire, and these would need alternative occupations in useful jobs – and many useful jobs are waiting, if only they could be paid for. There are strong competing ideologies among the educational establishment. Opposing ideas and those

putting them forward can be misrepresented and misinterpreted in many different ways. These problems of course are familiar in other fields, and can sometimes be overcome.

a. Improvements in Teacher training institutions

Universities and colleges must not be censored. The bastions of opposition to systematic training in the teaching of reading cannot be sacked. However, how can it be ensured that teacher-trainees receive the most competent possible practical training in teaching how to read books? Some of the following recommendations may be more immediately feasible than others.

1.1. Recommendations for coping with ideological positions

- A firm statement from the Inquiry that regardless of whatever other forms of literacy are included in syllabuses, government funding requires that all students become fluent readers of books and competent writers of non-fiction prose, unless individual problems prevent this.
- **Reading Technicians.** Where a teacher-training institution has no staff able or willing to give practical training in reading with accuracy, based on the findings of research, Reading Technicians are to be employed. Reading Technicians need not have academic training. Their qualifications are that they are enthusiastic readers themselves; can keep a class interested and attentive; undertake a short course of 2 weeks to teach learners the basic skills, including phonics to decode words accurately, and how to try to work out the authors' intentions in what they read; and they have had experience in helping children to read - eg as teachers, parents, grandparents or teacher aides. There are no age limits.
- Where teachers in schools are not willing to teach reading as a practical skill from the beginning, Reading Technicians supply the gap.
- **Assessment** must include ways of finding out whether pupils can decode words accurately, and can understand what they read at their estimated mental age level. Suggestions for this are made in section 8.
- **The Reading Wars.** A public debate about philosophies of literacy at every teacher-training institution annually, open to the public, together with an exhibition of materials. At present mafias of the nicest people, and politicising and implicit censorships even in publications and at conferences, can hinder the pursuit of truth.

1.2 Other problems in improving teacher-training institutions

It should be possible for teacher-trainer academics to gain renown simply by being great teachers. Some examples are still remembered for their influence.. Pressures to survive by publishing original work lead to much second-rate publication, and drumming up some original line may be at the cost of what is already worth while. Good practices that exist already are forgotten or are later recycled.

- Useless contributions to ‘the literature’ can be made by lecturers who must survive somehow, and do it by a) inventing a new tack, however dotty or b) writing in abstruse and impenetrable language or c) using a template to churn out dozens of short papers, where it would have been more useful to put them all together in one piece. It is fairly simple to identify and condemn b) and recognise c) although a) should not get a knee-jerk rejection or acceptance. When bumph is produced, it can often be identifiable as it is commonly written in obscure or fuzzy language (cf Don Watson’s *Weasel Words*, 2004) and/or it is full of pseudo-erudition by peppered references to trite opinions that are not actual research e.g ‘Children are not as old as adults,’ (Duckweed & Pondlife, 2003).
- Academics who are incompetent for teacher-training. Surely there is no place in education for academics who say that if school students are motivated hard enough to want to read, they will learn without specific help, or that it is ‘harking back to a bygone age’ to want to ‘bring back text literacy’ (ie printed books) because hypertext is the way to go, because ‘books are more controlling of the reader’. Who can encourage primary teachers to believe such things as ‘*But if a child sounded out the word STOP, it would not be able to understand what STOP meant.*’ Who say that teachers should not teach or instruct but just ‘facilitate’, and should not even be called teachers - a Queensland idea - yet everywhere else in life direct instruction is one way that people seek to learn - even by University lectures condemning teaching. These academics should spend a vacation unpaid working with some organization involved with unemployable youth. Working directly in adult literacy is unlikely to make them think because they would not meet the people who cannot or won’t read in their social context.
- Research. Encourage postgraduates and staff in action research on helping people to read, including how the adult public can read better. ‘*What is defective in failing learners*’ should have fewer grants than ‘*How to improve the task they are set*’ so that they can succeed despite handicaps. That is, human engineering. Innovations in literacy both commercial and from academic or school sources should receive objective testing, which is published including full detail about subjects and findings, and other sources of evidence. Findings just that ‘children like it’ and ‘it keeps them busy’ are not good enough; demonstrated progress is required. These tests, carried out with liaison with the innovators to ensure conditions are appropriate, will help schools in assessing the commercial advertising that pours in to them. Innovations with a basis in research-based theory and findings should not be rejected untested out of hand for Innovations grants because ‘*they are not in line with current thinking*’, i.e. they are innovations. The record of Federal literacy grants, including grants for innovations, is that far too often they have been awarded merely to one off applications of existing approaches in other locations. For example, in International Literacy Year, grants of \$3000 were awarded to clowns and to

balloons but there was not even an inquiry about a series of applications for \$3000 to help make the innovative research-based 'Help Yourself to Read' video with cartoon graphics which a media firm was willing to make labor-free for costs only.

- The problem of awarding passes to full-fee paying students who have not been given sufficient good teaching to be able to pass fairly, laps even at the walls of Education establishments. This is already starting to be counter-productive in reputation.

1.3 Practical training for teachers and teacher-trainers

- A first priority is that all teachers and Education lecturers are trained in public speaking, so that they are as good as TV presenters, they do not bore listeners, and they have 'presence' in the classroom that assures attention. These are three major ways to keep order and be able to teach undisrupted lessons, and to inspire and to entertain. Yelling and screaming only add to hassle and stress.
- Videos available and on TV of a range of styles of brilliant teachers teaching, for teacher trainees and lecturers who have never experienced brilliant teaching.
- All lecturers maintain experience in practical school teaching themselves, by a full term every two years spent teaching fulltime in a classroom, with full association in the school staffroom. Brave ones are encouraged to let their students be observers. That, more than shorter sorties into schools, however regular, will help them to realise what teacher-trainees need to know and to understand.
- Graduate trainees for secondary teaching should be given an experience module as teacher-aides in primary schools, with the only assessment requirement a small project of their own choice. When this was an elective at Monash Faculty of Education, it was tremendously popular with teachers, who also learned from their aides, and with the children, and with the students who often reported this as their most valuable experience during training. It was infuriating that the curriculum was changed so that this elective was made impossible.

Primary school trainees could also have an experience module as teacher aides in the first year of secondary school. Experience as aides would be no bad thing for post-graduate researchers too. Teacher unions that are bloody-minded about this form of triple-benefit for education should be publicly exposed.

- Continued contact between lecturers and students in their first two years out teaching – with 'informal mentoring' arranged for each graduating student before leaving the institution. This can benefit lecturers too. *'I know the theory but I dont know how to apply it,'* is a common cry of new and in-service teachers. There should be a way for these teachers to send back to the lecturers who have let them down, so that lecturers realise their responsibility to use all methods possible to bridge that gap between ideas and action.
- History of education to include biographies of inspiring teachers - for example, Tait of Victoria, E H Rowe, a great and inspiring teacher in a little country school in Talbot, some rural Scottish dominies who inspired generations, and the probably apocryphal NSW

Goldfields teacher William Quintilianas McCombe, described in the memoirs of Police Superintendent Martin Brennan (1839--1912), who himself is genuine, with an entry in the ADB.

- Students are encouraged to 'read with' young friends and relations, eg in babysitting, so they can see 'what works' with different children.
- Teachers who do not like reading themselves or do not read well or think the internet solves all can have practical courses on The Uses of Literacy and improving their own reading to the point of enjoyment.
- Graduating teachers are NEVER placed first in a classroom that will be hard to control. They must have at least a term with freedom to practice teaching, so they have confidence and skill enough to cope when they are thrown into jungles.

Improving teacher training

b. Commercial Edbiz

Many teaching practices in classrooms do not come from the training or theory that teachers have received at colleges or Universities. They come from commercial firms, some with the blessing of the Curriculum Corporation or State departments, and others through publishers' reps and advertising.

On the one hand, where official instructions can be laid upon publishers' firms, the instructions themselves may not be the best possible. For example, when I inquired why publishers were putting out what I regarded as poorly formatted and designed reading booklets for Years 2-3, I was told that they were obeying laid-down guidelines they had to agree to. (Was this correct?)

On the other hand, to survive, commercial publishers must promote regular and extensive materials for literacy and English, with continually new updates - which may not be as good as what they supersede. The companies with the most impressive advertising and reps can win out over companies that are publishing more effective materials.

Publishers' stands at teacher conferences should be excellent places for comparisons and reviews, but the fact is that only a small proportion of teachers actually look at, let alone examine carefully what is displayed - there is too much else to do and too many people to talk with. And these teachers are only the small proportion able and interested to attend the conferences, or go to special seminars and workshops on materials and methods run by their associations.

With competition, in theory the best should win out and there should be continual improvement, but a recommended collection and exhibition of materials and methods - say at the State libraries, accessible to all the public - would show that over

the years there has been a trend towards sales appeal rather than user appeal, and More rather than Keep it Simple. Many remedial pupils freak out at the piles of resources they see piled up to teach them.

Government and teacher associations do publish reviews of these materials, but even these are not sufficiently compared to ensure that 'the best' wins out. Appraisals by busy teachers understandably tend to be 'the children liked it' rather than scientific assessment to see if it really promoted literacy in the short or long-term.

□□□□ Teachers for many reasons can easily relegate the business of decision and what to teach to the instructions set out for them in the materials they buy.

For example, a nice wee set of flimsy picture booklets of a few pages for pre-reading has a page at the back of questions for teachers to ask the wee ones about the pictures and the words that are read to them! If anything can make worse the pervasive tendency for early schooling to establish to children that it is Teachers who ask the questions, it is when the Teachers get their questions out of books.

Research could easily establish the fact that for many if not most children, when stories and verses have printed questions to answer at the end, the stories and verses are immediately made less than fun.

There is a series of workbooks about fairy stories to teach comprehension! With comprehension exercises about the stories!!!

- Black line masters. Where is the research that shows whether learners remember anything from doing exercises on A4 sheets of paper, not of the best quality to write well on, to fill in words and phrases, and then the whole lot gets chucked out, sometimes after a period of getting scrunched and tattered in a schoolbag?
- Games, activities and computer exercises in their basic format can be just the old routines put on a screen with more pictures. How much research has investigated whether pupils would learn to read faster if each direct learning was immediately applied to reading or writing connected text? -to songs for example, as less likely to suffer from looking at their word structures while reading.
- 'Keeping the children busy' is a very common publishers' push for their materials, and can even be the heading for their stands. This is revealing; it shows that some teachers can be at a loss about how to keep their less interested students under control, or even how to fill in the day. Children go home -"What have you learnt in school today?" "Nothing." Research and findings on this issue are important.
- There are many forms of publishing to help learning to read that cannot be tried out because the initial costs are too risky, including some that proved their worth but then were overtaken by new fashions. It is difficult to organize schools to test in, since these understandably have to be protected from constant meddlers. Yet innovations could more often be made topics for postgraduates' investigations, and their findings not kept shut inside their theses. See for example, Appendix 9A, a Handbook of

Literacy Innovations, containing descriptions of Multi-level books, Fast-Track books, Turnabout Books, etc. and even Spelling-Crib books.)

- Teachers' need for novelty can be a major reason why children's school reading books change so rapidly, regardless of quality – teachers get fed up with hearing children reading the same old stuff. When teachers are taught how to concentrate on the individual children, and on improving their own personal teaching, there can be less experience of boredom in using the same materials another year.

Commercial materials, especially electronic, make up quite a high proportion of school costs, especially when they are renewed every year. It could be different if the books the children used one year were so much loved by them that they wanted to keep them, and that was why more books had to be bought the next year. There are also great differences in costs for schools where children are well taught in care for materials, and where they are not. Research and findings on this issue of recurring costs of commercial materials and the reasons for them are important.

Conclusion. Education can be mistaken when it goes authoritarian and bureaucratic, and it often has been. Teachers need freedom of choice of books and materials for what suits their own teaching styles and the characteristics of the children they teach. Progress requires innovations to be possible. On the other hand, the present situation is too chaotic, and Gresham's Law often seems to be working, pushing standards downmarket and encouraging waste. This includes waste of lives of too many people trying to keep the market going. (What would happen to jobs if Learning to Read did become 'easy as ABC?')

There must be solutions to these problems. It is important that the problems are set out so everyone is aware of them. Research must be made well known, about what types of materials work and what do not, for the different purposes in education, and for different characteristics of students. The State Library Public Exhibition idea, covering literacy materials right back to settlement or earlier, would be useful.

Investment in personnel and resources must be more usefully distributed than it is now.

6. Self-help in learning to read, for beginners and for failing learners

Is it possible? and why it is resisted.

'ABC GO! Help yourself to read and spell, or find out where you got stuck'

A good deal of the debates in the 'Reading Wars' still assumes that children are like

jugs - use the right methods and the jugs can be filled. Actually, children are human.

In Scandinavia in places where children are expected to arrive at school aged seven already able to read, this readiness for further learning does not reduce jobs for teachers - it just enables them to do what teachers do best for learners - inspiring them and opening up to them worlds of knowledge and opportunity. The fewer literacy cripples, the more education is possible.

Not so long ago, teachers opposed parents' involvement in helping their children to read. Now they welcome it. Not so long ago, in Scotland, nursery schools for the disadvantaged were forbidden to let the children have anything that might help prepare them for literacy, such as an ABC frieze or plastic letters, as a reaction from an earlier fashion, to pressure them too early - a fashion that could easily return.

But can children or adults help themselves in learning to read?

In the past, exceptional individuals have managed to put clues together and teach themselves, but now audio-visual media can link the spoken and written languages and open the possibility for anybody

An experimental prototype for '*Help yourself to read, or find out where you got stuck*', use cartoon graphics and animated text to demonstrate to all learners what successful learners have managed to twig for themselves or been taught by excellent teachers. For we must face the fact that not all teachers are excellent and not all classrooms give teachers a chance to teach or children to learn. A child's first teacher is the third biggest pot-luck in its life, after genes and early environment.

What do learners need to know in order to help themselves to read, or find out where they got stuck?

Answer. An overview of the English writing system and how to cope with it and a demonstration of *how* to work out words and read for meaning.

This can be very simple. After all, five-year-olds can start reading independently in a week, given motivation for the effort and given basic clues about the alphabetic system and that adults can use tricky spellings, so you have to fudge.

In 1957 MD Vernon's research concluded that the basic cause of reading difficulties is confusion. This is still so, as I found out when children were sent to me as a child psychologist for assessment as 'dyslexics' and 'reading failers'. So often gaps and confusions were the basic problem and quite often these could be solved simply and sometimes dramatically. The 30 minutes experimental DVD covers all the points where learners so often missed out.

How can learners 'teach themselves'? Personal experiences may make this more interesting.

'Discovery learning' was right in the idea that learners learn best when they do the learning themselves in their own way without being pushed. But it annoys children

when they are told to go and discover and they know that the teachers know the answers and could save time by telling them. They would like to discover what the teachers know, as a short-cut to finding out more. With a literacy video that is watched again and again, learners can discover what they need to find out, and can then go to teachers for explanations of specific points that they do not understand - instead of not knowing what they do not know.

'Organic learning'. Informal learning tends to be 'organic', growing from what is known already - for example, how babies learn to talk, how boys learn to operate computers, and what people learn from reading. School learning tends to be step-by-step, which is also important. The two should go together. A DVD or video watched and re-watched gives a chance to pick out to learn organically from where you are already. You do not have to learn or even clearly understand each step one after the other, the first time around. It can be a fast tour. This is a point that some educators find it hard to understand, in criticising the concept of the program.

Activities and games. Learning to read is made slower than it need be when too much school time is taken up with 'reading' activities, games and worksheets that are not directly leading into reading text. Whole Language can be slow for many children who have to remember every new word as a whole. Many children forget one day what they 'learnt' the day before - just as most adults forget a hand of bridge but only remember how to play the game. Each piece of information in the 'ABC GO!' should be immediately applied to reading books - from hearing speech sounds in talk and songs, recognising letters and combinations of letters, working out simple words, recognising very common words, checking out the nature of the spelling, recognising imported words and Latin roots, segmenting long words, and reading for meaning. READING (and writing) are the activities directly applying the DVD/VHS, instead of another game or quiz. Teachers have criticised this as not being 'interactive' but it is as interactive as learning to read can be.

Chunking learning. A 30-minute DVD that can be watched in 6-minute parts, but also as whole, which summarises and 'chunks' learning so that it is coherent. George Miller's 7 ± 2 paradigm of memory is relevant to the importance of 'chunking' what you learn. You can remember 7 letters ± 2 . You can remember seven words, which contain far more letters. You can remember seven phrases, which contain still more letters, or seven lines of rhyme, which contain more still. I used to study material that had to be known well by summarising and-resummarising my notes three times until they were summed up on a slip of paper no bigger than a shopping list. They worked like the labels on a filing cabinet in my memory - I could open any drawer or file that I wanted any time, and the memories came up like fish in a fishing net.

Advance organizers The importance of having some idea, however hazy, of what you are supposed to be learning and its final goal. Someone who has ridden in a car can learn to drive one more easily than someone who has not. Someone who reads the

table of contents of a difficult book then understands it more easily as they read.

Motivation. Many bright students who fail to learn to read, especially if they do not have home advantages, have not seen the point of the lessons, and just dig in their heels. I have often seen myself mirrored when children refuse to succeed at some literacy task they thought was futile.

Freedom. Many individuals do not like others looking over their shoulder, or have learnt to dislike it. They refuse to keep going to courses or will not or cannot attend. Many remedial pupils make progress as long as the tutor is pushing - when she stops they roll back, because they have not learned how to make the effort themselves.

Ego defence. Much apparently self-defeating behaviour results from trying to defend a fragile ego. For example, rather than fail, someone may refuse even to try, or fail deliberately as if to reassure themselves that if they tried they could do it. Boys particularly can be so tuned to succeed that what they can't do well, they will find their success in doing badly. 'I don't care.' 'It's all silly.' Many children feel humiliated at being constantly asked questions and get stressed. I think the galvanic skin response test should be a standard part of reading tests for those not doing well, so you can see how much anxiety and feelings of stress play a part in their failure.

Many learners find it hard to learn in a social situation for different reasons. Something they can take and watch as they like at home takes them out of the dynamics of a social situation (as personal tutoring can do, too, when the child gets on well with the tutor and does not feel even more under someone's thumb, but does not do when it lowers self-esteem still further). That is why the DVD/video is liable to be NO GOOD AT ALL if students have to sit and watch it as a group. Even teachers and educators are affected by the social situation if watching in a group, even watching as a pair, they will be more likely to make criticisms to show, unconsciously, I think, that they are one-up, rather than be free to look for the real value it might be if presentation were improved. Watching by themselves can allow that freedom.

Conditioned responses. Another good reading test is just to observe. When a child starts reading aloud quite well for the first few words or phrases and then starts stumbling and gets worse and worse, then that is a sign of avoidance conditioning kicking in, and a conditioned stress response flaring up. A solution for this is to come at learning to read from a completely different and surprising angle - sometimes this is a different teacher (I have used this tack with success) or a different approach (like gymnastics and crawling or funny ICT practices) that takes the heat off the child to actually read. A DVD/video you can watch at home can be something surprising and different too.

Social pressure against learning. In many disadvantaged schools, children dare not do well in school. I have often been asked to see a student deemed to be stupid or disruptive, and it has turned out that he (almost always he) is actually bright, but has to pretend to be otherwise in order to avoid persecution. (The solution to this is for a

whole class to gain honor and privileges when any of them do well academically - as they gain honour when any of them shine at sport.)

No labeling or feeling of being tested. Being labelled 'dyslexic' can be a relief for child as well as for parents. Eric Berne's 'Wooden Leg' Game lets you off the hook. You can't be expected to succeed.

Incidental learning. Time and again it is observed that children pick up what they are not directly focused on. This happens in mixed-age classrooms, and it also happens when children are playing and TV is on and they look up now and then. The DVD/video can be on, and the children playing - and it can be surprising what even young children have absorbed without registering it until they apply the learning later.

Keep it simple, stupid. The KISS principle. It can be easily assumed that the most expensive, wonderful and advanced technology and multimedia are the way to go to teach literacy, so that something as simple as a cartoon video must surely be useless. An aboriginal teacher and I had hoped to produce for \$20,000 an indigenous literacy video called 'Dreamtime Dillybag', using aboriginal culture and indigenous assistance, which could even sell to tourists at the Aboriginal Dance Band site under the Harbour Bridge at the Olympic Games. But it aroused no interest because the government had already spent \$375,000 on a multimedia program for aboriginal literacy, which among other useful things, showed you how to shop in a supermarket if you were diabetic, or, if your boat was dirty and needed repair, how to apply to get \$5000 for a new boat - but did not show you how to read a single word.

Learners deserve the best. A vision for this project is that it be a work of art in itself, 'good enough to win an award at Cannes'. The current assumption in graphic design for anything to do with literacy is almost always 'make it kiddie-stuff', or for teenagers, make it funky and trendy, outdateable in the next moment.

Ideologies can blinker and prevent openness to innovation. It is not yet taken for granted that anyone setting out to learn to read, or having problems in learning, could as a matter of course have access to watch a half hour video or CD or DVD that gives an overview of the whole reading business starting from scratch. Something copiable free from any disk or downloaded freely from the Internet.

Why not? Why is such a cheap and simple means of access 'not in line with current thinking', as educators explain when they dismiss the very idea, or reject the possibility of investigation?

The first reason is ideological - that that is not the right way to go about learning to read - but there are so many ideologies about the right way to go about learning to read that who is to assert without trialing whether such a video is no good for anyone, when there are already evaluations that show that it can be very helpful..

The answer to the claim is scientific testing, but that has not happened either.

The Whole Language theory of reading currently prevailing has a base on the fact that most people do not read fast and accurately - instead, they reconstruct from their own minds what they manage to see in the text, instead of trying to find out what the author is trying to say. But one of the big reasons for this is that they have learnt poor reading strategies in the first place, which prevent them from being able to read both fast and accurately.

'*Authoritarian and undemocratic*' was the immediate response by return mail of one adult literacy organization to an earlier experimental version. The video is actually very democratic because it puts control of the learning in the hands of the learner - where what when why - with no-one looking over their shoulder and no fear of social ignominy - because a video can be taken home '*Here children, I've brought you something to watch*' and the parent can watch the letters of the alphabet changing into picture shapes and back again or Latin roots feeling no-one can be thinking they are silly. It is learning under the learners' control.

Slogans followed without thinking which need to be challenged. For example, learning must be by doing, by interaction,(see earlier). - Fair enough but not when it means everything to be learnt or studied requires activities and little tests, even ruining Shakespeare. The assumption is that Computer-Aided learning must be Interactive to involve the learner. Fair enough, but in a half hour video that overviews how to learn to read, the interaction is between the knowledge presented, and the mind of the viewer applying it to actually reading texts that mean something, that the learner makes the decisions about.

A second slogan is 'a thousand ways to learn one thing'. It would be hard to find another educational slogan that causes so much wasted time in classrooms. Let us rather have one thing that can teach a thousand things, so that interest is maintained as more and more levels and more facets are discovered in it. Or a middle way between.

A third slogan is that a picture is worth a thousand words, and using cartoon graphics to demonstrate reading and spelling shows the value of this for demonstrating *how to*. However, pictures still do not replace literacy; word still convey forms of knowledge and thinking that pictures cannot

The experimental DVD/VHS/CD *ABC GO! Help yourself to read and spell* is not the only way that may be devised to apply the principles set out above, to help learners to avoid failure, and failing learners to catch up and clear up their confusions. The learning principles on which it is based have not commonly been applied to learning literacy. Their application also should be investigated in action research.

42.1-3: 187-203.

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7. Multimedia and learning print literacy in the classroom

Evidence from observation, journals of ICT Education Victoria, ALEA and research literature

Multimedia, including computers and the Internet are helpful in learning to read and write, particularly multi-media aids to reading, word-processing for writing, and sources for information and models. However, educational fashions can go to extremes, and the following warnings are needed:

- Children's time in front of screens should be limited.
- Life and the images on the screen are different. Images can have the greater influence.
- The differences between print on screen and print on paper. What looks good on one may not be as readable on the other. (See 3. Barriers in Print)
- Class-time can become too distracted into learning how to put spin into presentations, as if every child had a future in advertising. The form of a child's project can take far more time than the content or the quality of the writing, or public speaking in presentation.

Example: A child typed in a ten-line poem about a unicorn, in about ten minutes. Ten hours was then spent in dressing it up on screen, and finding and inserting a ClipArt unicorn. The final product showed that all she had found out about unicorns was that they were horses with horns. The teacher did not help children to correct grammar, spelling or mistaken ideas about unicorns in case it damaged their self-esteem)

- Power-Point presentations can look great, but can take much time, and at the expense of being able to write a reasoned report with connected sentences. Even a teachers' conference (IFTE 2003) presented some final reports as snappy Power Point slogans, at the cost of informed critical and constructive reasoning and detailed recommendations.
- Much time can be taken learning applications and techniques which soon become obsolete. Once the basic capacity is acquired to deal with electronic technology and software, classroom practice is not essential for specifics. In any case, it is often remarked that when it comes to computers and the Internet, most children learn much more from each other and out of the classroom than they do from lessons.
- Students and teachers should know the differences between bits of information (so easily found and cut-and-pasted on the internet), knowledge (often better found in books) and wisdom, which requires both of these plus experience and reflection. Classes should experiment in finding the same materials on the web and

in classroom encyclopedia.

- The internet and hypertext can be claimed to 'give complete freedom' to children and their imagination while 'books are more controlling of the reader'. This glib belief uttered and re-uttered by at least one University lecturer, needs to be checked - for example, looking at the long-term quality of imagination, writing and invention derived from hypertext etc and from reading B.O.O.K.s, bodies of organized knowledge.
- Computer games can be addictive and some internet explorations need to be monitored by teachers. It is sad to see children even on holidays playing computer games non-stop rather than all the other things that holidays give freedom to do.
- Reliability of internet information must be assessed by learners, as with other sources. This can sometimes be more difficult.
- Classrooms have enjoyable and fruitful experiences using multimedia for cooperative group work, planning, story boarding, filming, editing, and presentation. But in all this activity, the essential need for fluent print literacy extending to books must not be overlooked or relegated.
- There are commercial programs to teach literacy that are so time-consuming in their structured lessons that time to learn to read books and stories is reduced.

Conclusion: Computers and the Internet can be good servants, but very expensive and time-consuming masters. Hands-on teachers are still needed. Fluency in reading complete books is an essential skill that gives permanent access to knowledge and pleasures without requiring a computer or other electronics in working order. Reading books is more valuable to develop a good writing style of one's own than any amount of chatting or cut-and-pasting from the Internet, or, dare we test it, classes in Creative Writing.

References on uses of multimedia and computers for literacy in classrooms are readily available. See, for example, issues of *Practically Primary*, such as vol 8.1.2003, and 'Using interactive multimedia to help children become independent readers', Grace Oakley, in vol 7.3.39-42, 2002. Discussions of practical difficulties in classrooms are rarer (as in a recent humorous article I have mislaid.) See also the overview of the writing system - the 30 min. DVD/CD/video, *Help yourself to read and spell or find out where you got stuck*' as a program for individual use.

8. Assessing progress in reading

Assessment can go to extremes in hassling teachers and children. For example, the Curriculum Corporation document for Primary English, *Assessing as you go*, 1997, provides ten photocopiable student assessment sheets for each level of primary

schooling, six to ten often complex items per page so that in a class of say twenty, the English teacher would be assessing and filling in 2000 items per year of personal judgement, not even scores. Some official and commercial programs have even more time-consuming schedules. Simpler perhaps to use these forms just to realise what the course must cover, and to be aware of how some learners may be falling behind. Other assessments that test the children like examinations, can be quite stressful, and disregard children's variability.

On the other hand, the claim that reading progress is not assessable can cover a multitude of hidden problems.

Simple objective assessments:

- For writing, spelling and handwriting, keep examples of each child's work together to show progress. These records help the children's own revision and morale raising, and help teachers to keep the individual characteristics of children in mind more easily than by check-marks in boxes, and are evidence to show parents and other external inquirers.
- For reading, records of books read and re-read, with children's comments as appropriate, can also be useful in reminding them about what they have read. Fluency requires re-reading.

Oral reading has often been required in ways that have traumatised some children for life, yet it is invaluable for learning to read, and also for public speaking, an essential skill for every citizen. A good teacher is able to encourage children to read aloud with courage and growing confidence, using 'reading to', paired reading, and reading round the class, with, as need be, pairs to help the weaker readers, pre-preparation, and rehearsals. e.g. 'Turnabout' stories and play-readings with every child taking a part. There are excellent 'early reading' plays around; and for all its amateur weaknesses, it is an excellent way towards imbibing Shakespeare for life, to complement seeing real theatre and taking part in stage plays.

'Tests that teach' can help children too to see their progress. See the booklet, enclosed as Appendix 8A.

1. A test of silent reading. 1987. Assessing children's silent reading. *Educational Research* National Foundation for Educational Research, U. K. 29 .3. 192-196. This is a 'cheer-up' test because even if the learner can only recognise the word 'the', the page marked with what they can read will still look quite impressive.
2. Checklist for literacy. What it helps to know in learning to read and spell. Even adults are held up by some simple gap, such as two letters can make one sound.
3. An Ultimate Comprehension Test
4. Dyslexia Phobia Test
5. A Phonics Skills Test, with a Beautiful Princess

6. A Spelling ABC which is different from a Spelling Bee
- 7 Exploring Spelling Structure
8. The Sixteen Word Spelling Test
9. A Maths syllabus wall chart for Primary One as a prototype for a literacy syllabus
10. What is the Message of the Book?
11. A Literacy Test for Books in Primary School
12. Test the Print and Pictures in Learners' Books

The novelty of some of these 'tests that teach' adds to their enjoyability. They are more useful forms of fun than some activities and games. After all, the pursuit of learning is wired in to us, like instincts for food and sex, and experiences in school should not squash it.

9. Research that is needed

Without being as cynical as the cartoon of a publisher's office, "*How naive of you, Mr Meredith, coming here with a reading system that works,*" there is still a feeling of awe that over fifty years there have been hundreds of thousands of research publications on learning to read, thousands on spelling, and thousands of books discussing reading from all angles and theories. Looking at the titles without actually reading them can give you some idea of the scope and fashions. And yet book literacy still struggles in a world that has become increasingly geared to the image rather than the word.

In many ways, the needed research has been done about learning to read and the abilities to do so. There have been hundreds if not thousands of little experiments in schools and laboratories. There have been big schemes like Head Start and medium schemes like the Literacy Hour. The recently concluded UK Parliamentary Inquiry into reading has considered scores of reports.

I think we should pay more attention to the barriers to print literacy that are identified in this submission.

Action-research and literature reviews can pull together findings on each neglected topic - for example, on, say, parents singing lullabies - and that look carefully at 'sales appeal' programs and the products that guide teachers at every programmed step, like putting on magic slippers (For a recent example, *The Collins Big Cat Guided Readers*. 2004. HarperCollins <http://www.collinsbigcat.com/>)

The innovations for which this submission seeks research attention are especially directed at preventing problems - the critical points in time when learners need to be inspired with motivation for the effort of learning to read, and given more help than they have at present in what this requires. 'The penny has dropped!' say teachers when once a child 'gets the idea'. It should not be so hit or miss an achievement.

10. Some neglected references on the teaching of literacy

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- Protheroe, Pamela. 1992. *Vexed texts: how children's picture books promote illiteracy.* Sussex: The Book Guild.
- Watts, A F. 1944. *The language and mental development of children: an essay on educational psychology.* London: George Harrap. This is one of my favorite books on reading - learned, practical, thoughtful, wide-ranging, humane, amazingly comprehensive and indeed a well-written 'essay'.

SOME RELEVANT REFERENCES ON LITERACY - Valerie Yule

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Appendix 1A Paired reading

The Gradual-Transfer method for
learning to read with interesting books or articles
that are beyond a learner's immediate reading ability

Anything can be done badly. 'Reading with' young children and 'listening to children's reading' can both be stressful experiences for the children, who feel as if they are being tested.

One almost universal practice is to correct children as they go along, or to give them a word which they then repeat, and then continue, with the storyline broken.

One reaction to that has been not to correct children at all and let them guess - not too far wrong is close enough.

Another alternative is 'reading with' in a way that involves NO repetition of words or breaks in the storyline.

1. One recommendation for 'listening to children reading' is to let the children read over to themselves first what they are then going to be asked to read to you, and ask for help with difficult words before they are asked to read the meaningful text.

2. Paired reading can be done badly, or it can be done so well that you not only encourage learners to enjoy reading, but they are learning to read independently and accurately?

The 'Gradual Transfer' method of reading together begins with the adult doing most of the reading, and ends, sometimes dramatically in as little as a fortnight, with the learner doing most of the reading of books at their mental-age level, not miles below.

The story-books must be books that the individual student chooses - quite apart from any attraction of the cover and the pictures. You can start with different sorts of

book to see what a student discovers that they really like. Often they want to read a book or film that they know about.

AIMS: • To develop fast reading strategies and automatic accurate word recognition, with phonics back-up thru familiarity with other lessons such as the Literacy DVD/CD/VHS *ABC GO! Help yourself to read and spell.*

- To enjoy the experience of reading a story or non-fiction together, without pause for disruptions. It is reading for meaning all the time
- Learning to enjoy books, especially the one you are reading.

In this account, L is the learner, and to be gender-neutral, pronouns are plural (pending new vocabulary for the English language.)

1. SELF-TEST if students have had any reading instruction already. To know where L is in reading, they mark in bright colour the words known already on one paragraph or page of any old text. This gives learners a comforting picture of how much they actually can read, even if it is only 'the', because it recurs so often! DO NOT test whether L can really read the words. This task is for L's benefit, and L is not to be discomfited in any way.

2. WHAT TO READ - Anything L would like, with decent print for a student to read and that L can look at again any time on her own. If L wants to try an encyclopedia or science fiction or a car manual, or religious scriptures or politics or novel or book or a film - Good. Or *TinTin* or *Asterix* or Harry Potter, or Dr Seuss, or a C S Lewis Narnia story or Teletubbies or a government form or rocket science.

3 USING THE 'GRADUAL TRANSFER' method.

- a. Ensure that L knows basic letter-sounds.
- b. NEVER BREAK the actual storyline, because the story is the reason for reading. If there is a hesitation, read the full sentence again as a recap and go on naturally.
- c. After a paragraph, L can ask questions and you can explain/discuss words or ideas, but if the storyline is clear, don't bother unless L asks. L MUST FEEL IN CONTROL. You never chat away - you may be boring.
- d.. Never read when L doesn't want to. *At the first sign of tiring L need read no more - you continue reading the story a sentence or a few seconds more, as uninterrupted story-reading to raise interest, before the session stops.*
- e. L looks after the book, to have a shot at reading privately any time, (and marks with pencil any difficult words to ask you any time, e.g. at the next session).
- f. You read with flair and drama, to make it interesting. Sound some key words slowly, dramatically, so sounds are clear.
- g. Do this every day for two weeks, if possible, and L will probably be off and running. Ten to 20 minutes is best at first. Other readers also can be shown the

method, to help L continue when you are not there. (Break of a week or weeks between sessions makes progress slower.)

III. THE READING SEQUENCE for a book or magazine with plenty of text Both readers use pointing devices, such as a biro-end or pencil.

Page 1. L LEARNS TO READ THE NAME OF THE MAIN CHARACTER or subject. You read, dramatically, running your biro-end under the lines so L can follow. Read the name of the main character with especial emphasis on the sounds in it. Point at the main character's name, on the second and later times it appear, to see if L can 'read' it. L points at it if he/she cannot read it quickly given initial letter-sound clue. In that case, you read the name and go on, without disrupting the story, except when L has a question about what is happening or the meaning of words, at the end of a paragraph. Then recap and continue. See if L can start to recognise the name of the main character.

Page 2. L READS THE NAMES OF OTHER CHARACTERS OR TOPICS You pause at other characters' names, the second time they appear. Soon this can include all main character's names. If L hesitates, you may recap the phrase or line if necessary to ensure storyline is kept. Sometimes after a paragraph, a comment as an aside may be made on some particularly silly spelling, and how it is silly. When L points at a word, you just go straight on without losing the sense. *L must never repeat a word you give, or the sense of the storyline can be lost.* Repetition is a tactical mistake often made when learners are reading to a teacher, so the sense is lost.

Page 3. L READS OTHER WORDS THAT RECUR OFTEN Later, you read and pause with pointer at some recurring easy words. L can have a shot, starting with sounding the first letter, but if L points at the word, you give it immediately, sounding it out a bit slowly, with emphasis on initial letter, and you go straight on without recapping and losing the storyline.

Page 4 on. L HAS A SHOT AT READING A WHOLE SENTENCE. When L can read more and more words, suggest having a shot at a whole sentence, with L pointing at any words L wants you to fill in, and you do at once, so that the storyline continues uninterrupted. Move on to sentence by sentence turnabout, with L pointing to any words in their sentence they want A to read for them.

CHAPTER 2. L HAS A SHOT AT READING A PARAGRAPH. Now you read a chapter together each session. Sometimes L tries reading a paragraph, pointing to any words for you to read, which you immediately supply without a pause. Or L goes back to just filling in words while you read, for a while, as a rest for L.

AFTER 3-4 WEEKS L CHECKS UP ON PROGRESS, and can mark with a different color the same paragraph again that was marked at the beginning.

Adapt as appropriate.

Appendix 2A

Preparing to read through play Demonstrated in a Scottish Nursery School

The value of children's free play in nursery school to prepare to learn to read.

'Preparing to read through play' is a 30 minutes video that anyone can copy. It was made in a Scottish nursery school in the 1980s. It shows innovative shoe-string kinesthetic materials that anyone can make or copy for individual free play, as well as group songs etc, which all developed interest in reading books and understanding how to do it, and phonic awareness in language. It shows play that develops grapho-motor skills, concepts, vocabulary, observation and general knowledge. Features of the playroom familiarise children with aspects of literacy, arouse motivation to read and develop confidence that they will be able to learn. All the children I could follow up were reading and enjoying reading in their first term at primary school.

However, at the time it was not in line with current thinking to have anything about literacy in pre-schools, whether free play or not. Nobody would look at the video, except for one teacher at a large international conference on reading attended by 1500 delegates. I returned to Australia, the nursery school was closed by financial cuts, and its teacher died.

THE FIRST PART OF THE VIDEO shows how this free play was part of other imaginative play at the nursery school.

A SECOND SECTION DEMONSTRATES DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES in the way that children aged two to four play with plastic alphabet letters and develop phonemic awareness.

Appendix 5A Some ideological barriers to testing literacy innovations

that seek improved ways to learn about phonics in learning to read

1. Extracts illustrating the 'explicit guidance' approach to phonics guidance given to teachers of the Middle Years in schooling, in introducing students to phonic principles not provided earlier. From the officially produced program *MyRead*,

approved by the Curriculum Corporation, http://www.myread.org/guide_phonemic.htm

<Using Phonemic Awareness strategies to talk about how words are written will give your students an understanding of the principles of the linguistic system. *It will enable them to make an educated guess in the first place, which can then be confirmed, or used as a basis for expanding their understanding about how words are written.* (My italics) . . .

Teacher modelled learning: * Familiarise students with how words are made up of a sequence of sounds, eg 'We're going to look more closely at how some words in the text are written'. *Choose words from the one sound, one letter group. Say the word, then say it again slowly with a slight separation between the sounds. Highlight word on overhead and comment how each sound is written by a particular letter, eg 'in 'was', the 'w' sound is written by the letter 'w', the 'o' sound is written by the letter 'a', and the 'z' sound is written by the letter 's' '.

Student supported/independent learning: * Choose other words from this group and support students as they say the word with a slight separation between the sounds, locate the word in the text and comment on how the sounds are written.

* Help students identify similarities and differences in how some sounds are written, eg other words where the 'o' sound is written by the letter 'a' (what, watch, swan).

Teacher modelled learning: Choose words where a sound is written by more than one letter. Say the word, then say it again slowly with a slight separation between the sounds. Highlight word on overhead and comment how each sound is written by particular letters, eg 'in 'cheap', the 'ch' is written 'c' 'h', 'ea' is written 'e' 'a', and 'p' is written by letter 'p'.

Student supported/independent learning: * Choose other words from this group and support students as they say the word with a slight separation between the sounds, locate the word in the text and comment on how the sounds are written.

* Help students identify similarities and differences in how some sounds are written, eg the different ways of writing the same sound in 'her' and 'work'. Encourage students to make collections of words according to different sound groups. >

Comment: In the 'old days' this phonics teaching was for the 5-7-year-olds. How timely is it to postpone it to the Middle Years of schooling?

2. The Victorian State Council of the Australian Literacy Educators Association: ' We define reading as critical social practice and therefore believe that it involves the active construction of concepts and ideas in relation to a text, rather than passive information reception and decoding (Luke, 1994). We believe that the complexity of reading and the dynamics of

teaching ensure that there is no simple formula or package of answers which will teach all children to read. It is the teacher who is able to draw on a repertoire of strategies to meet the diverse needs of their students. Through careful and strategic planning of learning experiences and student-teacher interactions, teachers consider the cultural and linguistic resources that individual students bring to reading. It is through this carefully planned and strategic scaffolding that teachers support students with developing control over a range of reading practices that enable them to engage with text as effective readers for the 21st century.' 21st December 2004

A major reason for developing the DVD program is that not all teachers actually do this, and many children can be very unlucky. Of course a repertoire of strategies is good, but it should include being able to work out new words from their letters and sounds.

3. Adult Literacy has tended to take the view 'Nobody can decide what another person needs to know to learn to read. The (adult) learner tells the tutor what he or she wants to learn, and then they negotiate together how to learn it.' (1993)

My observation is that usually adult learners usually do not know what they need to learn in order to negotiate, and consequently there can be serious gaps in what they decide to study.

Appendix 6A Self-help and teachers' aid

Further information on the content and concepts of an innovative half-hour DVD overview of the writing system.

*'Help yourself to read and spell,
or find out where you got stuck'
Experimental Version 10, 2005*

30 minutes self-help DVD/VHS/CD overview of the English writing system

INSTRUCTIONS FOR LEARNERS

- 1 WATCH as you like, when you like. START where you like, using the buttons.
2. JOIN IN saying the sounds and words, and singing.
3. PRACTISE ON A BOOK or with PLASTIC LETTERS
4. DO THE CHECKLIST to see what you know already and what you find out.
5. WATCH AGAIN parts that are not clear, until they are clear. Now you know what aid you need from teachers.

CONTENTS of the Literacy Overview

Part 1. HOW TO HEAR SOUNDS IN WORDS. *For Age 3 upward, and everyone with dyslexic problems or complete non-readers, regardless of age.*

Part 2. HOW LETTERS RELATE TO SOUNDS - the ABC song, letters morph into pictures and back to letters, upper and lower case, digraphs, different fonts and letter shapes *For Age 3 upwards and everyone with dyslexic problems or complete non-readers.* Even adults aged 45 in literacy classes may find they did not the 26 letteres.

Part 3. LETTERS IN WORDS. *How to read unfamiliar words, onsets and rimes in words, consonants and the 19+ vowel sounds, blending sounds, building up words, some common spelling patterns. A song contains the easiest sounds to hear, teaches observation of the structure of words, and its repetition helps beginners develop fluency in reading for meaning. For age 4 upwards, and everyone with dyslexic problems or needing basic help with reading and spelling skills, regardless of age.*

Part 4. SPELLING AND HOW TO COPE WITH IT. The 68 most common words in a sing-song contain nearly half the words in everyday text. Why spelling has problems and *how* to cope with it, where spellings come from, *how* to read long words by taking them to bits, common and less common spelling patterns. Clues to tackle learning spelling. *For age 5 upwards, and everyone with dyslexic problems or needing help with spelling or reading.*

Part 5. READING WHATEVER YOU WANT TO READ. *How to put strategies and clues together to read for meaning. How beginning readers develop fast reading skills by first practising accuracy and self-correction, until skills become automatic For age 6 upwards, and everyone needing help with reading accurately, regardless of age.*

Cartoon graphics, animated text and songs, starting from scratch, are 'advance-organizers' for learners, to prevent confusion, and to clear up gaps and confusions for those who have problems. Its content is based on all the gaps and confusions of learners who have been referred to me for diagnoses of possible dyslexia. The emphases throughout are on *Understanding* and *How To*.

PLANNED. A comic book of content, and reading songs and legends of all nations. Eventually many versions can be made, targeted to different needs and abilities

End of Appendices

