

Says a retired campaigner:

Intensive phonics is the only way to go

By Mrs. Hazel Loring

I am a retired teacher, 76 years old, who taught the genuine old-fashioned phonics using New Beacon charts, flash cards, and readers in the early 1920s. I left the profession to raise a family but maintained a lively interest in methods of teaching beginners' reading, particularly when I learned of problems encountered by my neighbor's children who were being exposed to the recognition system in school.

It was in the early 1950s that I began to think seriously of the possible causes of reading failure. Following discussion about eye phenomena with a friend, Dr. J.A.J Hall, an ophthalmologist, I put my ideas in a little manuscript entitled "Monocular Intervals in Binocular Vision and Their Relationship to Reading Disability."

Dr. Hall had the paper read at a regular meeting of the Detroit Ophthalmology Society, and he sent it to a committee on vision whose membership he described as international.

My project lost its sponsor when Dr. Hall died of a heart attack. I had had only two years of college training and no prestige or academic standing. You can imagine the opposition my ideas encountered from the powerful anti-phonics people in education.

I had enrolled in Wayne State University but as a cliff-hanging encounter with cancer prevented me from completing my work for a degree. Amazingly, I recovered and had an opportunity to teach first grade at Oscoda, Mich., on a Special Certificate.

I taught first grade for 10 years and, with summer, night and correspondence courses – and at age 61 – I received my Bachelor's degree and later my Michigan Permanent Teaching Certificate.

All of my teaching experience has confirmed my belief that directional guidance, inherent in the blend phonics system, is the key to success in teaching reading.

In my first years at Oscoda a sudden influx of personnel at nearby Wurthsmith Air Force Base resulted in over-crowding of the schools and we had more than 40 first-graders in a room. This, together with the fact that I used phonics cautiously in a limited way, resulted in only fair success. As class sizes were reduced to the low 30s and I felt free to give the children intensive phonics training, the results were very gratifying. Only "recognition" textbooks were available (Houghton, Mifflin series), but I spent at least a half hour daily in formal phonics training, which I implemented in all reading classes.

At first I used the chalkboard for phonics instruction, but when I came across an overhead projector that was not being used, I found it to be an ideal phonics-teaching tool.

Three days before my retirement, I went into the school storeroom and took a set of first reader books which my children had never seen before. Each child stood in front of the class and read a full page. Only one little girl needed help, and that with just a couple words. The others read fluently, without error. Of course most of them had been reading supplementary library materials far beyond first grade.

About 10 years ago my daughter, Pat Lent, asked me to teach her how to teach phonics, and she then volunteered as a teacher at an Urban Adult Education Institute in Detroit. For the first eight years she taught as a volunteer, but her work has been so successful that she is now a paid teacher.

It was Pat who told enthusiastically of the **Reading Reform Foundation** and urged me to write to you: “Mom, they are saying the very same things that you have been talking about all these years!”

Well, now I am retired and putter around with my garden and photography, but perhaps you may be interested in the experiences of a phonics believer of more than 50 years.

You quote Janette Moss as saying she cannot understand how it became possible to make money more easily and quickly with an ineffective technique than with an effective technique (see **RRF Conference Report**, October, 1978). It is like an unbelievable nightmare, but I saw it happen. The fanaticism of the Gestaltist cult, bolstered by self-righteousness, left no room for reason or objective evaluation. A science education professor from a large Eastern University, after reading my manuscript, told me, “They won’t get you on this (pointing to my paper), they’ll get you on something else.”

Anyone who opposes the look-say method could expect to be blacklisted. I felt I was a member of an endangered species at Wayne State, but they didn’t “get” me. My first bout with cancer took me 200 miles away where teaches were scarce and results counted more than methodology.

There is no question that Gestaltists played rough, and the conflict of interest of policy-makers in Education was a disgrace. The very people who raked in royalties as authors or editors of textbooks were the very same people who dictated reading methods and selected textbooks. Theirs, of course.

“Publish or perish” may be acceptable if the publication is restricted to non-profit professional journals, but it is an ugly situation when educational concepts are dictated, not by a search for truth in a spirit of academic freedom but by the edicts of publishers and the amount of royalties that will accrue to faculty members who use their university prestige for commercial purposes.

I realize that decent, well-intentioned educators who felt the need to augment their limited salaries were caught in the web – “everybody” was doing it. But it was wrong.

Congratulations to the **Reading Reform Foundation** on your campaign to restore common sense teaching in the schools. Your forthright stance is courageous and admirable. The opposition you encounter is entrenched and formidable, but you are right, and **you will win out**.

I’m a humble person, far from affluent, and I sometimes wonder for what purpose I have survived my on-going fight against cancer, but it feels mighty good to be able to cheer you on in your good work against the legacy of illiteracy that has been bequeathed to our children by the self-anointed, highly organized, cultist Gestaltists whose bullying tactics have dominated the reading scene for more than 50 years.

Another Letter from Hazel Logan Loring in the Same Publication
[Hod's Podge]

We were delighted to get a letter from Mrs. Hazel Loring of Birmingham, Mich., and to be able to share with you in these pages. Just before we went to press, we received a second letter, one which we believe raises an excellent point for further discussion. Speaking of a **RRF** publication, **The Reading Crisis**, Mrs. Loring says, in part:

“It mentions that Dr. Jean S. Chall in her very fine book, **Learning to Read: The Great Debate**, divides reading methods into two groups: the ‘code-emphasis’ group and the ‘meaning-emphasis’ group. This could lead to the false assumption that intensive phonics fails to emphasize meaning.

“I know that in the past, anti-phonics people like to create the impression that they alone taught comprehension and that the intensive phonics method failed to do so. I question if one can ‘teach comprehension,’ but surely it is possible to create a situation where the exercise of comprehension is encouraged. I suppose that conceivably, a child could be taught to read lists of words without comprehension of their meaning...but that is not the way I taught my first-graders, and I doubt if it is a common practice...”

Mrs. Loring concluded her letter: “Because in years past I have heard so many claims by look-say people in regard to their ability to teach comprehension, when, in fact, in many cases they fail to even teach reading, I simply had to unburden myself.

“With the kindest regards and cheers for the work you are doing...”

“I must dispute Mrs. Loring on that last sentence. With her first letter to the **RRF**, she sent a very nice financial contribution, it’s “we” not “you,” Mrs. Loring.

Note: G. K. Hodenfield was the editor of this issue of *The Reading Informer*.

[Hodenfield was “Associated Press’ national education writer before getting angry because he couldn’t write what he wanted to about what he was learning about the reading problem and its cause. He quit and went to work at Indiana University.” He co-authored , with Kathryn Diehl, *Johnny STILL Can’t Read But You Can Teach Him at Home*, AP, 1976. (Per. letter from Kathryn Diehl, 2/15/06.)]

Note from Internet Publisher – Donald L. Potter

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This article by Mrs. Hazel Loring was published in *The Reading Informer*, Volume 6, Number 3 – February, 1979. *The Reading Informer* a publication of the **Reading Reform Foundation**. Their motto was: OUR SOLE AIM: TO RESTORE INTENSIVE PHONICS TO THE TEACHING OF READING THROUGHOUT THE NATION. This is also the purpose of the Education Page of my website: www.donpotter.net. Mrs. Loring's *Reading Made Easy for First Grade with Blend Phonics* is available for free download from my web site. A special word of thanks goes to Mrs. Kathy Diehl, former Research Director for the **Reading Reform Foundation**, for sending me a box of *The Reading Informer* magazine and her book, *Johnny Still Can't Read But You Can Teach Him at Home*.

Many thanks to Robert Sweet for making me aware of Loring's method in an article he wrote in 1997 which is still available on the *National Right to Read Foundation* (NRRF) web site.

Robert W. Sweet, Jr. Co-Founder and Former President of *The National Right to Read Foundation* wrote this stirring recommendation for *Reading Made Easy in First Grade with Blend Phonics*, in his 1997 article, "The Century of Miseducation of American Teachers:" "An effective answer to illiteracy ... Let me offer a less costly, and more effective answer. I have here a twenty-five page booklet called *Blend Phonics* written by Hazel Loring, a master teacher born in 1902, who taught under both the "whole word" and phonics systems. The legacy she has left us is powerful. Within the pages of this little booklet is the cure of illiteracy as we begin the twenty-first century. ... If every pre-service reading teacher, every reading supervisor, every kindergarten, first- and second-grade teacher in America had the information contained in Hazel Loring's 25-page booklet and taught it this fall, there would be such a dramatic decrease in illiteracy in this country that the national media would be forced to take note."

If Hazel Loring's *Reading Made Easy in First-Grade with Blend Phonics* were in the hands of every kindergarten, first- and second-grade teacher in America, *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) and *Reading First* would become **a true reality** rather than just **a hopeful slogan**. (Don Potter)

Article by Kathryn Diehl on Loring's *Blend Phonics*
The Barbara M. Morris Report
May 1983

The *Detroit Free Press* (2/13/83) printed a long featured article, "A Sound Road To Reading." As far as anyone knows, this is the first time the facts about good teaching reading ability have been printed in the Detroit news media. The article was about Hazel Loring, an elderly retired teacher, and her little booklet for teachers, "Reading Made Easy with Blend Phonics for the First-Grade." This was sent free to 5000 Michigan first-grade teachers last year. The article quotes admiring teachers who determinedly use this phonics method, saying their basal reading series "doesn't teach enough phonics" or they are "disgusted" with the failure it produces.

The Loring title alone is revealing to most teachers. Mrs. Loring began teaching before the sight word books were printed, and then watched the old standard phonics method forced out of the schools. "It was like a swarm of locust descending on the schools from coast to coast, and soon phonics was taboo." She went right on teaching it secretly, of course.

"Blend phonics" is a very helpful term, to try to combat the false theory that the big basal series today teach through phonics. For what they do *not* do is teach the children to *use* the letters sounds by blending them from left to right to figure out the printed words. Some big publishers have even stolen the term "intensive phonics" (coined years ago by Sr. Monica Foltzer to describe her real phonics method), and apply it to their skimpy "phonics." If we begin to call for "**blend phonics**" **methods**, they'll have a harder time to invent an Orwellian "redefinition" of that specific term, since blending and sounding out words is the **essential thing** they carefully avoid teaching. It is also necessary to show many teaches that "**first grade**" **is the time to teach children independent reading through phonics**, not spread out over three years and more, as they've been trained.

ANYONE CAN ARRANGE TO PRINT MRS. LORING'S BOOKLET AND DISTRIBUTE IT, AS LONG AS IT ISN'T SOLD. She refuses to sell them, considering that the big money that changes hands in the sales of the sight word basal programs is the corrupting reason they remain a virtual monopoly in the schools. She would "die happy," if every first grade teacher had a free copy of her booklet, to help them make up for the flaws in the programs most must use.

An organization or group of businessmen frightened about the effect of illiteracy on the U.S. economy could contact Mrs. Loring to ask approval to print it - - as long as they do not sell, but *give* them to teachers. They would have to bypass the curriculum and reading supervisors, and school superintendents, in many districts, sending the booklets directly to the teachers to ensure they receive them. A couple of million copies of this tiny treasure, in the hands of every K-12 teacher in the schools, would bring about a revival of grassroots literacy within a year. Many teachers at last would understand why their school's adopted commercial programs produce poor reading, and what to do about it.

I appreciate Mrs. Diehl for sending me the above article. Her idea of printing a "couple million copies of this tiny treasure" may seem a bit ambitious. Nevertheless, with its publication as a free e-book on my web site, www.donpotter.net, there is nothing to prevent it from reaching every classroom in America, or the entire English speaking world for that matter.

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