

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

Elementary Bilingual and Junior High Spanish Teacher
for the Ector County ISD, Odessa, TX.

January 25, 2006

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)

(Note from Don Potter: **I am now retired** from the public school teaching. My teacher retirement has enabled me to work at a private school. I am thankful to the Ector County Independent School District where I served for 21 years for the opportunity to work with so many fine administrators, fellow teachers, and precious students. July 10, 2010.)

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.

This page last modified 2/18/06.

A Letter to the Editor

I'm glad RRF will make my little booklet available. I am really amazed and gratified at the response so far. *The Reading Informer* certainly has a wide readership – I have lost count of the number of states from which we have had requests because of the RI.

I am pleased by requests for additional copies from Michigan people, because the requests comes from those who have seen the booklet and want copies for themselves

I hope that those who have spent years of effort in developing more comprehensive phonics programs will realize that the little booklet *in no way* is intended to supplant or compete with their programs. I think of it as a “phonics-foot-in-the-door” project that can open the way for the more comprehensive programs. It is so simple and inexpensive that we can put it directly in the hands of the classroom teacher who might not otherwise have access to phonics material. It is a means of getting the first grader started in the right direction from the beginning, but it *must* be supplemented by writing, spelling, and reading, reading, reading.

The whole-word people have done their best to scare teachers away from phonics. I am delighted to see evidence that the little booklet shows the teachers that phonics is simple and easy, not a bogeyman.

Love all around to everyone,
(signed)
Hazel (Loring)

Note: This letter was added to this document on July 9, 2010. It comes from the April 1982 *Reading Informer* published by the *Reading Reform Foundation*. Hazel Loring's phonics pamphlet, *Reading Made Easy for First Grade with Blend Phonics* is available for free download from my website: www.donpotter.net. I have extensive experience using *Blend Phonics* to teach reading students from first grade through adult. Although it is very simple to teach, I have found it to be highly effective. Many parents and teachers have corresponded with me concerning their great success with Loring's method. Give it a try, and you will be impressed at how effective such a utterly uncomplicated and simple phonics approach can be. It can easily be taught in just four or five months if the teacher will dedicate 15 minutes a day to teaching the method. I can even be used in parallel with whatever reading method that you as a teacher are required to teach. Good reading methods never contradict or interfere with each other. If they conflict, then something is wrong with at least one of them. Don Potter, Odessa, TX

Another View of Hazel and her good works

(Editor's note: the following background on Hazel Logan Loring and the development of her great little booklet, "Reading Made Easy with Blend Phonics for the First Grade," is abstracted from "A Sound Road to Reading," by Michael Betzold, published in the February 13, 1983, issue of Detroit, the Sunday magazine of the Detroit Free Press.)

In the fall of 1923, Hazel Loring was hired to teach all five grades in a one-room schoolhouse in the resort town of Green Harbor, Mass. She was replacing Mrs. Murphy, who had been secretly married for two years but was only now being let go because she was pregnant. (In those days, teachers couldn't be married.) But because the new teacher at Green Harbor was green to – having taken no education classes at all in two years at Massachusetts Agricultural College – Mrs. Murphy stayed on a few months to train Miss Longan in the teaching of phonics.

The superintendent at Green Harbor had just bought a new set of phonics books. But by the time the school year was over, he was worried he would lose his job unless he ousted phonics from his classrooms. The word had come down that phonics was backwards.

"In those days, whatever was new was automatically good," recalls Mrs. Loring, her dark eyes flashing with indignation. The latest fad in the universities was Gestalt psychology. The gestaltists claimed that recognizing a chair had nothing to do with its parts.

"But a word or a sentence isn't the same thing as a chair." Loring argues, "For one thing, English is read left to right. But didn't stop the gestalt people. The 'experts' just took over. It was like a swarm of locust descending on the schools from coast to coast, and soon phonics was taboo."

Hazel left after teaching a year at Green Harbor to take a job as a governess, a decision she later regretted.

"I wish I had never given it up," she says now. "I should have stayed in my little school." Instead she married, became Hazel Loring and migrated with her husband from Vermont to Cleveland before settling in Detroit to raise their family.

In the mid-'50s, Hazel went back to school to get an education degree from Wayne State University. The atmosphere in higher education in those days was virulently anti-phonics.

"We were taught that phonics was evil. At Wayne, phonics was a bad word, says Loring...

In 1960, Loring got a job teaching first grade in Oscoda. The school used Houghton-Mifflin textbooks and basal readers based on the whole-word method, and a teacher could be fired for teaching phonics. But for the next 10 years, Loring quietly bootlegged phonics into her classroom.

"We were told at Wayne that the greatest sin was mixing the system (phonics and whole-word)." Loring chuckles, "At Oscoda I was very sinful – and very successful."

Hazel Loring wasn't alone. Bootlegging elements of phonics was common practice among experienced teachers who remembered the method from the days before it was ostracized. But younger teachers, who themselves had been taught as children to sight-read rather than sound out words, didn't know phonics....

The Michigan letters, totaling more than 300, were referred to Hazel Loring.

"I was floored. All these people wanted help," she recalled. Here I was in my late 70s. I didn't drive. How could I help people from Niles or Marquett or Kalamazoo? Then I remembered a notebook I had used when I taught phonics in Oscoda."

Loring set to work putting her notes into a clear, concise description of her method, accompanied by a thorough lesson plan. Using her own money, she sent out copies to Michigianians who had written the foundation. One copy came to the attention of Ralph Lewis, a professor at Michigan State University, who wrote Loring with the plea that “somehow we should find some way to get your material into the hands of every first-grade teacher in Michigan.

With the help of Lewis, family members, and a \$2,500 donation from Reading Reform Foundation President Bettina Rubicam, Hazel Loring published her first book at the age of 79.

Most people advised her to sell the book, but she insisted that the book be distributed free because she is a strict believer that teachers should not profit from book sales. The Logan Institute was formed as a non-profit organization and a mailing list of first-grade teachers in the state was obtained. In the first month of 1982, 5,000 of them received in the mail, unannounced, a copy of “Blend Phonics.”

Hazel Loring says she doesn’t want publicity and doesn’t want to get involved in the controversy about phonics.

I don’t want teachers and parents polarized any further, she says. “The only way I can help children is to quietly provide information which can help the teachers. I’m trying to give the teachers the know-how that I and other experienced teachers from the old days had, so that they can teach phonics without making waves.” ...

The copyright on “Blend Phonics” is unique. “Unlimited reproduction for solely educational purposes is encouraged,” it says. “However, reproduction for profit may not be made of any part of this publication.”

“I want to stay away from all this dog-eat-dog, high-powered selling situation of textbooks,” explains Loring. “My booklet is simple. It is written by a teacher who knows how busy first-grade teachers are. This is a teacher talking to other teachers. You can use this book with any textbook.”

Hazel Loring doesn’t know how many teachers are using her book. The letters have been enthusiastic, and efforts are underway in New York, California, Australia, and elsewhere to reproduce the booklet and distribute it. The Logan Institute has run out of copies. (The booklet is available for \$1 for postage and handling from the **Reading Reform Foundation**, 7054 E Indian School Road, Scottsdale, Ari. 85251.)

“It lifts my spirits to get letters,” admits Loring, who rarely leaves the house or stays too far from her oxygen supply. She has had an ulcer, and her heart still gives her some trouble. “I wondered whether anyone would use it.”

How would she feel if all the first-grade teachers in the country had a copy of her book?

“Then I could die happy,” she says with a wistful smile on her face.

Note from Internet Publisher: Donald L. Potter

July 9, 2010

I typed this article from the May-June, 1983 *Reading Reformer* that Kathy Diehl of Lima, OH sent me earlier this year. Kathy was the Research Director for the RRF and possesses a rich knowledge of the RRF and its mission and history. I am grateful to Kathy for providing me with a full set of Reading Informers and RRF Conference Reports. It is most interesting reading these copies from her personal archives, especially since they are richly annotated in her highly legible cursive. I feel honored that Mrs. Diehl helped both Rudolf Flesch and myself in our research. I believe the phonics method Loring started with in 1923 was probably the Beacon Reading Method by Faussett. A careful inspection of that program shows that her Blend Phonics and the Beacon Method of presenting phonics are virtually identical. It is sometimes called body-coda (ba-t) blending as contrasted with onset-rime (b-at). The Beacon Reading program can be found on Google Book. Loring passed away on April 15, 1983.

RRF Notice of Hazel Logan Loring's Passing (1903-1983)

Hazel Logan Loring, 80, whose warm and vibrant personality hid her steely determination, died peacefully in her sleep April 15, 1983 after a lengthy illness.

Hazel fought the trials and tribulations of ill heart with unfailing good cheer. She had three operations, congestive heart failure, and an ulcer, but you'd never guess when you met this chipper little grandmother with the snow white hair, the flashing eyes, the beaming smile, and the heart filled full of love for all mankind.

Hazel joined the **Reading Reform Foundation** in 1978 saying, as so many do, "It is wonderful to find a group of people who believe as I do." She attended her first **RRF** Conference in Princeton in 1979. At the Champaign Conference in 1980 she was awarded an **RRF** certificate for "Dedication to Literacy" and announced as Michigan State Chairman of the **RRF**

At the Toronto Conference, last year, Hazel was announced as winner of the *1982 Watson Washburn Memorial Award for Excellence in Education*, especially for her great little booklet, **Reading Made Easy With Blend Phonics for the First Grade**. She was unable to attend the Toronto Conference because of her illness.

A story on her background and how she came to write her little booklet will be found elsewhere in these pages.

We all have lost a dear friend, but we may be thankful that Hazel lived long enough to see the tremendous fruits of her labors. We all should be so fortunate.

(Note from Don Potter, July 9, 2010: I retyped this Notice from the front page of the 1983 edition of *The Reading Informer*, Vol. 10, No 4, May-June.)

The following is the cover letter that was included with each copy of Hazel Loring's booklet sent free of charge to more than 5,000 Michigan teachers. (*Reading Informer*, March 1982)

Dear First Grade Teacher:

This booklet is sent to you free of charge by the non-profit Logan Institute for Educational Excellence, thanks to the generous contribution of Mrs. Raymond Rubicam, who has unselfishly devoted many years to the purpose of improving the teaching of reading and of combating illiteracy. It was Mrs. Rubicam who inspired me to write about my work in teaching reading to a first grade classroom. When Dr. Ralph W. Lewis read my description of the method that I had used, he commented that we should find some way to get it into the hands of every first grade teacher in Michigan. And here it is.

Please read the little booklet and try it out. It will take very little time and cost nothing. Simply allot half an hour each day for about four months in which to teach blend phonics to your children and thus provide them the important ingredient that too often is missing from reading programs, namely, directional training.

Except for this half hour, use materials of your choice, as you ordinarily would do. There is no need to disrupt the program to which you are accustomed though, of course, I am sure you will find it useful to utilize blend phonics techniques while attacking new words in oral reading, spelling, and writing. Your own judgment will dictate to what extent you make use of this tool during the school day.

Please try it. It can make all the difference for those children who might otherwise fail. I found this to be true in my classes. With best wishes for a successful school year.

Sincerely,
(signed)
Hazel Logan Loring