Further Investigation into School-Induced Dyslexia Provides Irrefutable Proof of Dumbing Down

By Samuel L. Blumenfeld

In March 1992 we reported on Edward Miller's theory on the artificial inducement of dyslexia. Miller discovered that when preschoolers memorize as sight words the entire texts of such popular books as Dr. Seuss's *The Cat in the Hat* and *Green Eggs and Ham*. They develop a block against seeing the words phonetically and thus become "dyslexic." They become sight readers with a holistic reflex rather than phonetic readers with a phonetic reflex.

A sight reader looks at words holistically as ideographs and tries to recall what a word means on the basis of its total shape or its place in context. Thus, sight readers are greatly handicapped when confronting unknown multi-syllabic words, which must be sounded out in order to be decoded correctly. Miller explained that when a sight reader develops a reading speed of 30 or more words per minute, a holistic reflex is acquired which then overrides any fragmentary phonetic knowledge the reader may acquire later on. Thus, while many sight readers have a good deal of phonetic knowledge stored in their brains, that knowledge is not automatically available. It is only available when consciously brought forward. Miller, himself a dyslexic, started on his interesting trail of investigation in 1987 when he read what I had written about the Pavlov-Luria experiments in the Soviet Union on the artificial induction of behavioral disorganization. I had speculated that the same principles were at work in the creation of dyslexia among perfectly normal children in our schools. The basic principle is that you can artificially create cognitive disorganization by subjecting the student to two conflicting stimuli at the same time.

And that's what was being done in our schools by imposing an ideographic or holistic teaching technique on a phonetic-alphabetic writing system. The letters in our written words represent units of sound which, when blended, produce the spoken word the printed or written word represents. But when you teach children to look at these words holistically as units of meaning like Chinese ideographs, you create symbolic confusion, cognitive conflict, frustration and a learning breakdown commonly referred to as dyslexia, reading disability or learning disability. Also, I strongly suspect that attention deficit disorder, otherwise known as ADD, is a form of behavioral disorganization created by these holistic teaching methods which create symbolic confusion, cognitive conflict, learning blockages and great frustration.

The Miller Test

Miller was able to verify this artificial cause of dyslexia by way of a simple word identification test which dramatically shows how the student learned to look at words and how this first-learned system determines the student's reading performance. The test is composed of two sets of words: the first set consists of 260 sight words drawn from Dr. Seuss's two books, *The Cat in the Hat* and *Green Eggs and Ham*, and the second set consists of 260 equally simple words drawn from Rudolf Flesch's word lists in *Why Johnny Can't Read*. The words are arranged in alphabetical order across the page. They

include such multi-syllabic sight words as *about, another, mother, playthings, something, yellow*, while the words from Dr. Flesch's book are all at first-grade level, single syllable and phonetically regular.

In other words, for a child who is already a phonetic reader, neither set of words would pose a problem. This word identification assessment permits the tester to measure the speed at which the child reads both sets of words and observe the number of reading errors made in each section. By contrasting the speed and number of errors made in each section of the test, one can determine quite easily whether the student is a sight reader or a phonetic reader. For example, a sight reader might breeze through the sight words at high sp ed with no errors, but then slow down considerably and make many errors in the phonetic section even though the words may be easier than many of the sight word:

Dr. Seuss's Sight Words

That the words in Dr. Seuss's two books were to be read and learned as sight words was confirmed by Dr. Seuss himself in an interview he gave *Arizona* magazine published in June l981. He told the interviewer:

> They think I did it in twenty minutes. That damned *Cat in the Hat* took nine months until I was satisfied. I did it for a textbook house and they sent me a word list that was due to the Dewey Revolution in the Twenties in which they threw out phonic reading and went to word recognition, as if you're reading Chinese pictographs instead of blending sounds of different letters. I think killing phonics was one of the greatest causes of illiteracy in the country. Anyway, they had it all worked out that a healthy child at the age of four can learn so many words in a week and that's all. So there were two hundred and twenty-three words to use in this book. I read the list three times and I almost went out of my head. I said, I'll read it once more and if I can find two words that rhyme that will be the title of my book. (That's genius at work.) I found "cat" and "hat" and I said, "The title will be *The Cat in the Hat*."

Thus, even Dr. Seuss knew that "killing phonics" was a cause of illiteracy in America. The textbook publisher had wanted the preschoolers to learn a sight vocabulary so that by the time the children were ready to enter school they would be able to read the sight words in their look-say pre-primers and primers and thus impress their parents with how well they were learning to read in their kindergartens and first grades.

All of which strongly suggests that parents should teach their preschoolers to read phonetically before giving them the Dr. Seuss books to read. Otherwise, by memorizing a sight vocabulary, their children will be well on their way to developing a holistic reflex, which will cause dyslexia. In January l990 Miller obtained permission to administer his test to 68 students at the Ronda-Clingman Elementary School, a rural public school with an enrollment of about 600 in Wilkes County, North Carolina. Of the 68 students, 26 were second-graders, 25 were fourth-graders, and 23 students were from different grades in a Title One compensatory program. (Of the latter, 6 were from grades two and four and are counted among those tested in their respective classes.)

The results were shocking. Of, the 26 second-graders, only 4 could be considered good phonetic readers. They read the 520 words at an average of more than 70 words per minute, with 99% accuracy. Twelve were automatic holistic (sight) readers and therefore already educationally dyslexic, and 10 were in a state of reading limbo, that is, they hadn't yet developed automaticity in either word-identification mode (indicated by a reading speed of 30 or more words per minute) and could either become fluent phonetic readers or handicapped sight readers, depending on how they were taught to read in the next few months.

Educational Dyslexia

Miller's definition of educational dyslexia is quite specific an inability to correctly identify 99 percent of the 520 words on the Miller test at a minimum speed of 30 words per minute. Obviously, as in any handicapping condition, educational dyslexia can range from mild to severe.

Why so technical a definition? Because that is what the scientific community demands. In fact, Miller, for the first time, provides a definition of educational dyslexia which satisfies the need to measure dyslexia in quantitative terms that can by duplicated anywhere by any researcher using the same testing instrument in the manner Miller prescribes.

Of the 25 fourth-graders, only 7 were phonetic readers and 16 were holistic, that is, educationally dyslexic. None of the students were in an indeterminate or limbo state. In other words, they had all developed the degree of automaticity their word-viewing mode to establish a conditioned reflex. Of the 18 holistic readers, only 3 made less than 10 errors in the phonetic part of the test, while 15 made from 10 to 74 errors, confirming that educational dyslexia can range from mild to severe.

72 Percent At Risk

If this fourth-grade class was typical of fourth-grade classes throughout North Carolina, this meant that 72% of all students in the public schools of that state would emerge at the end of their school careers mildly to severely educationally dyslexic, a condition that would seriously hamper them throughout life.

Of the 23 students in Title One, 4 were—to Miller's great surprise—good phonetic readers, 12 were holistic, and 7 were in limbo. Of the latter, 4 were in first grade, indicating that their reading instruction was leading them into educational dyslexia. The 4 first-graders were given the short form of the test, and 5 of the second graders were also given the short form because of very poor reading ability.

To sum up the results, of the 68 children tested 53 were already educationally dyslexic or in a state of reading limbo. This meant that 53 out of 68 students were at risk. What about the 15 phonetic readers, 4 of whom were in Title One? How had they learned to read phonetically despite the fact that the school's instruction was holistic? Perhaps they had learned to read phonetically at home before going to school, or could figure out the phonetic system by themselves, or were actually taught enough phonics in the school by a knowledgeable teacher. Obviously, more research was necessary to test out these hypotheses.

In any case, they had learned to look at words phonetically, and that saved them from becoming dyslexic. Another interesting question: what were 4 good phonetic readers doing in Title One? We have yet to know the answer.

Comparing Schools

In January 1991, Miller gained permission to test 62 students at Dade Christian, a private school in Miami, Florida. The school, with an enrollment of about 1,000, is racially mixed, with many children from Spanish-speaking families.

Of the 62 students tested, 19 were second-graders, 26 fourth-grader and 17 placed for testing in a special group from second and third grades because of unexplained reading difficulties, it was not known at the time of the testing how these children had acquired their reading problems. They may have been transfers from the public schools.

Of the 19 second-graders, 9 were excellent phonetic readers, 8 were mildly holistic, and 2 were in limbo. Of the 17 children in the special group, 16 were educationally dyslexic and 1 was in limbo. The 16 read the phonetic half of the test at an average rate of 21 words per minute, with 74% accuracy. But they read the holistic half at 50 words per minute, with 93% accuracy. Of the 26 fourth graders, 22 were phonetic readers, and only 4 were educationally dyslexic. The phonetic readers read the 520 words at an average speed of 75 words per minute, with 99.5% accuracy.

In other words, while 72% of the students in the public schools of North Carolina were becoming educationally dyslexic, only 16% in the private school in Florida were becoming educationally dyslexic. The public schools in North Carolina were using a holistic reading instruction program, while the private school in Florida was using an alphabetic-phonics program.

Miller's tests prove beyond a doubt that the kind of dyslexia that afflicts millions of children in American public schools is the direct result of the teaching methods being used, and that the only way to prevent educational dyslexia is to teach children to read by intensive, systematic phonics so that they develop the necessary phonetic reflex.

The Follow Up

But the most significant and sensational data was to come two years later. In April 1992, Miller obtained permission to retest the same students at Ronda-Clingman he had tested in 1990 using the same first-grade test. Fifty-one of the original 68 students were available for retesting.

The results showed that none of the students who were holistic readers in 1990 had become phonetic readers in the interim. Most of them were able to read these first-grade words faster, and their accuracy had increased in the phonetic part of the test. But more than half of the dyslexic students miscalled some of the very same sight words they had read correctly in l990. One student who, as a fourth-grader, had made a total of 12 errors in 1990 made 29 errors in 1992 as a sixth-grader on the identical test. In other words, this student read better in the 4th grade than in the 6th grade! In fact, 17 out of the 27 sixth graders did better in 1990 as fourth graders than they did two years later on the same first-grade test!

Proof of Dumbing Down

And nowhere was the dumbing down process more obvious than among the good phonetic readers of the second and third grades of 1990 who were now in the fourth and sixth grades. Of the l3 students who had achieved the best scores in 1990, nine made more errors on the very same test in 1992. One student who had made only 2 errors as a fourth grader in 1990 made 18 two years later as a sixth grader. Whereas he had missed no sight words in 1990, he missed 8 in 1992. And whereas he had missed only 2 of the phonetic words in 1990, he missed 10 in 1992. Obviously, whatever was being taught at Ronda-Clingman was not advancing the academic skills of the students. On the contrary, many of the students had regressed.

The data also showed that 28 of the 51 students tested missed more of the sight words in 1992 than in 1990, indicating that there was a limit on how many sight words an individual could retain in memory. Apparently, the dyslexic will retain only those sight words that are frequently seen. In other words, low frequency words learned by sight are often forgotten.

At Dade Christian, Miller retested only the 24 students who did not do well in 1991. The results showed that these students learned to read faster and more accurately but were unable to completely overcome their reading handicap. They had not made the cognitive switch needed to become phonetic readers.

Spelling Helps Reading

Another important phenomenon Miller observed through his testing is that even the worst of the educationally dyslexic readers has a good deal of phonetic knowledge which he or she can only tap through conscious effort.

Miller obtained this data by having the children go back and spell the words they missed. Almost always they were able to reread the words correctly after spelling them. Obviously, there was enough phonetic information in the spelling alone that enabled the student to experience the word as a phonetic entity. The problem for the sight reader was that the holistic reflex overrode and thereby suppressed whatever phonetic knowledge the reader may have had. In fact, it was the holistic reflex which was causing the block against the phonetic experience. Miller concluded that the only way to remove the block was to substitute the holistic reflex with a phonetic reflex.

He calls this process making a “cognitive switch.” In trying to find a way to help dyslexics make the cognitive switch. Miller came up with an ingenious but very simple idea. He thought, why not take a text, block out all of the high-frequency sight words, and leave only those words which required a conscious use of phonetic knowledge much of which the reader already had. By exercising that phonetic ability until it became automatic, the sight reader could make the cognitive switch, that is, erase the holistic reflex and replace it with a phonetic reflex.

The Sight Word Eliminator

The result of this idea is the Miller *Sight Word Eliminator*, an invention that can help turn a dyslexic sight reader into a proficient phonetic reader in a matter of weeks or months depending on the frequency and intensity of the retraining. Presently, Miller is working on a remediation system which includes a phonetic teaching component (*Blumenfeld's Alpha-Phonics*) to help the student develop the needed phonetic reflex.

Through his tests Miller has also developed a means of measuring an individual's phonetic knowledge and a scale that measures the severity of the dyslexic's handicap. Just as a physician can measure a fever with a thermometer on a scale of 98.7 to 108, Miller has devised a way of measuring the severity of the dyslexic condition on a scale of 1 to 100, based on the number of words miscalled on the phonetic portion of the word identification assessment.

The scale is applied only to students who have developed a holistic reflex. A score of 1 would indicate a very mild reading handicap while a score of 100 would indicate an extremely severe case of educational dyslexia. A score of 8 or 10 may indicate a slight reading problem for a second grader, but for a sixth grader it would represent a more serious handicap since the measuring instrument is a first-grade test. Of the 51 students tested at Ronda-Clingman in 1992, 13 had no handicap, 17 showed handicaps from 8 to 13, and 20 students had handicaps from 21 to 100.

Edward Miller has gone to great lengths to bring his findings to the attention of the government education and research departments. Thus far, his letters and phone calls to top officials have been to no avail. However, he intends to continue his research and the development of his wholly original remediation system which promises to provide dyslexics and functional illiterates with a fast, efficient way to cure their disability. There can be no doubt that Miller's more recent findings not only confirm the validity of his reading assessment methods, but are providing irrefutable evidence that the reading instruction methods being used in the public schools are causing far greater academic damage among even the brightest students than any of us could have imagined.

Vickie's Story

Perhaps the best way to end this report is to tell the story of Vickie Reid and her third-grade son, Travis, who had been attending Ronda-Clingman where Vickie had been a substitute teacher. Vickie had become concerned with her son's reading problem when he began coming home crying because he had to read. She says:

"This went on for several weeks. Finally, it stopped and I thought things were okay. Later in the year he began going to his room and crying for no reason. When I asked what was wrong, he did not know. This happened usually on a weekly basis. As a parent I was distraught. I prayed for understanding."

And Vickie got it when she was asked to help Miller in his testing at Ronda-Clingman. After three days of testing the students and marking the papers, Vickie began to realize that there was a severe reading problem at Ronda-Clingman. She took a copy of the test home and tested her son, a second-grader. It was obvious that he had a reading problem. He was a sight reader and when he came to a word he had not memorized, he simply called it anything. She wondered how he had gotten that way. Her older son had learned to read

very well at Ronda-Clingman, and Travis had learned phonics in kindergarten as a four-year-old. But apparently his phonetic skill had not reached automatic speed and was being replaced by a holistic view of words.

"My son," she relates, "had started out on the right track with intensive phonics, but a few miles down the road had been switched to holistic sight reading or a mixture of both and after three years was totally confused and hated school or anything that had to do with reading."

Vickie immediately removed her son from Ronda-Clingman and put him in a Christian school in Statesville where they teach intensive phonics. She says: "He has made great improvement, loves school, and hasn't cried once because he had a reading assignment. At the present time, my children are not being affected by these holistic programs. However, I have come to know and love lots of children at Ronda-Clingman who are truly, in my opinion, being ruined, because their parents are not as fortunate as I in finding out there was a problem and then working on the cure."

Vickie's story sums up why Ed Miller's work is so important. He is the only researcher in America who, without the help of any government agency or private grant, has proven that dyslexia is being artificially created in our public schools to the great detriment of American children. The question is: why are those in positions of responsibility so reluctant to even consider, let alone investigate, the possibility that it is the teaching methods that are causing such widespread dyslexia and not something intrinsically wrong with the children. If there is something wrong with the children, then why are there so many more defective children in the public schools than in the private ones? The honesty and integrity of our educators and federally funded researchers will be sorely tested in the years ahead as they seriously consider Miller's findings and react to them.

This concludes Mr. Bumenfeld's second report on Mr. Edward Miller's work on sight-word induced dyslexia. The following article is from the same edition of the August 1993, The Blumenfeld Education Letter. It is included in this document because it makes some reference to Mr. Miller's work.

Scientists Believe Dyslexia May Be Genetically Inherited

According to scientific researchers, more evidence has been found suggesting that dyslexia may be inherited. Researchers have long been investigating a genetic link to the learning disability, experienced by 3% to 15% of the population. Its best-known characteristic, it is said, is the reversing of letters. Two studies out Saturday in The Lancet medical journal report on several families with dyslexia. In analyzing the families' DNA, researchers working separately in Miami and Germany found that the families pass on a common area on chromosome 1 that may hold a dyslexia-linked gene. "They're good preliminary data to initiate further studies," says geneticist Mark Rabin, University of Miami School of Medicine. "It's at least something to go on, to point us in the right direction."

Previous research linked dyslexia to chromosome 15. The Miami researchers tried confirming that, but their evidence pointed elsewhere. They continue trying to narrow the search for the gene, in hopes that the link becomes more statistically significant. They're seeking more dyslexic families, too. Should a certain gene, or genes, for dyslexia be found, people with the disability could be identified early. Once dyslexics are diagnosed and get help, "they do incredibly well," Rabin says. "The problem is they don't get into the programs soon enough." (*USA Today*, 7/16/93)

Comment:

The federal government has spent, and continues to spend, millions of dollars to find the genetic causes of dyslexia. Naturally, many of the researchers working on these lucrative projects will find their livelihoods threatened by Ed Miller's research. It is interesting to note than not a dime has been spent by the government to investigate the possibility that dyslexia is caused by the teaching methods used in the schools, even though there is more than enough evidence to support that possibility.

The intellectual and moral corruption that is now so widespread throughout the scientific research establishment is the result of the federal millions that now finance most of it. It poses a very serious problem for those whose sole interest is finding the truth. Before the government got involved in scientific research, discoveries were made by individual scientists who sacrificed their own resources to be able to pursue their studies. Today, billions are spent by the government to find cures for cancer, AIDS, heart disease, etc. But no cures are being found. Why? Because a cure means the end of government funding.

In the old days, scientists worked to find a cure so that they could not only help humanity but also reap the financial rewards of their work. Today, the government money is the reward for most researchers, and finding a cure will only end the reward since any cure found by government research falls into the public domain. That is why pharmaceutical companies fund their own research, so that they can reap the rewards that come with their discoveries.

Ed Miller has financed his own research with his own retirement money. And he has been able to do more with his very limited resources to find the cause and cure of dyslexia than the entire government research establishment with its millions of dollars and hundreds of researchers. That is why the federal budget is what it is today, an endless political spending spree driven by greed, arrogance, and outright fraud.

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Mr. Blumenfeld's statement that the Phonics List words are all first-grade words is true from the viewpoint of a phonics teacher, not a sight-word teacher. There are many words on the Phonics List that would not be used in the typical first grade primers or readers because they are such low frequency. First grade basal readers typically avoid low frequency words since it is considered undesirable to water down the vocabulary with words the students will not be encountering very frequently. Also, there are some words on the Phonetic List that are rather high frequency in children's literature. Mr. Miller did completely steer clear of any Dolch List words for his Phonics List, which is commendable; but to really know how frequent many of the words would appear in a first-grade reading program would require consulting one of the computer-based frequency counts. Mr. Miller's List has admirably served the its purpose, but might be improved (and made even more difficult) by eliminating the high frequency children's words from the Phonics List

I got a copy of this report in about 2002 from Mr. Charlie Richardson. I did not publish it because I had not seen good phonics students regress in their reading. Since that time, I have had the opportunity to test students longitudinally. I have not seen very much of this, but I have seen enough to know that Mr. Miller was correct in his observation that some students who were free of artificially induced whole-word dyslexia in first-grade can develop some degree of artificially induced dyslexia later. I have further been able to speculate on the reason that this happens. Hopefully it is unintentional. Much of the reading material in the lower grades was produce on "the sight-word plan" (look-and-say) with a lot of repetition of sight-words and a restricted vocabulary. The phonics students who are confined to reading this kind of literature will lack opportunities to read very many new words and thereby fail to practice and reinforce their phonics habit. Atrophy of the phonics reflex can take place in such a circumstance. The secret to continued reading improvement is to review phonics through at least the third grade and make sure the students are reading challenging books that will expand their vocabulary and offer them opportunities to exercise and strengthen their phonics decoding skills. A good spelling and handwriting program will go a long way in preventing this dumbing down.

Students who have regressed in their phonics reflex and developed whole-word dyslexia (guessing from context) can quickly recover and reinforce their phonics reflex by practicing reading the words in Rudolf Flesch's 72 Phonics Exercises in *Why Johnny Can't Read*. My *Webster's Spelling Book Method for Teaching Reading and Spelling* is superior program for reversing the guessing habit. Mr. Blumenfeld's *Alpha-Phonics,* when taught according to the supplied "Teacher's Instructions," is also highly effective. Mr. Blumenfeld does not teach any sight-word memorization, but he does teach irregular words such as "was" with their spelling families. Spelling and cursive handwriting are used throughout the instruction. There are no distracting pictures or games.

I have published three paperback books based on Mrs. Hazel Loring's 1980 *Blend Phonics*. They have proven highly effective in preventing and curing the whole word guessing habit.

1. *Reading Made Easy with Blend Phonics for First Grade*.
2. *Blend Phonics Lessons and Stories*.
3. *Blend Phonics Timed Fluency Drills*.

Below is the *Fry's Chart* so you can see the process of determining grade levels and understand better the potential retarding effect that limiting word length can have on student progress.

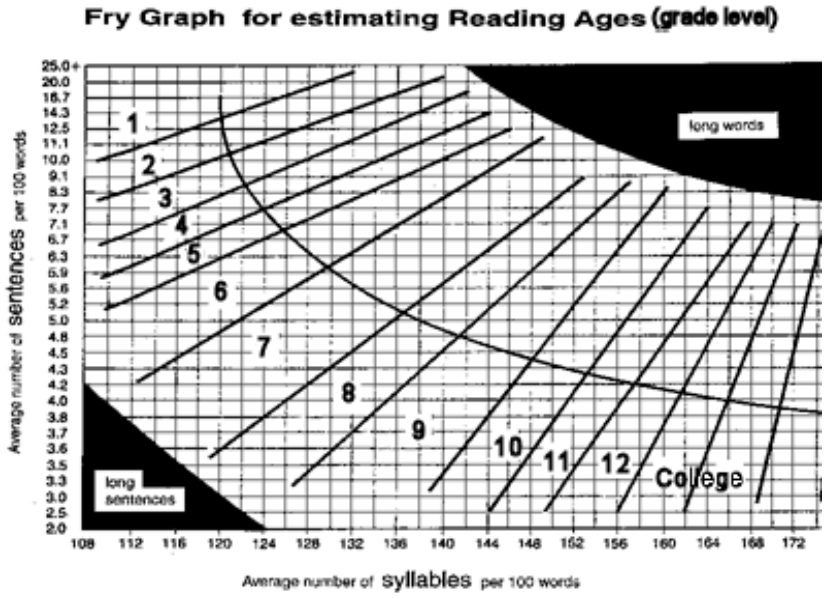
Fry's Readability Graph and Directions

Directions for Use

- Randomly select three 100-word passages from a book or an article.
- Plot the average number of syllables and the average number of sentences per 100 words on the graph to determine the grade level of the material.
- Choose more passages per book if great variability is observed and conclude that the book has uneven readability.
- Few books will fall into the solid black area, but when they do, grade level scores are invalid.

Additional Directions for Working Readability Graph

- Randomly select three sample passages and count exactly 100 words beginning with the beginning of a sentence. Don't count numbers. Do count proper nouns.
- Count the number of sentences in the hundred words, estimating length of the fraction of the last sentence to the nearest 1/10th.
- Count the total number of syllables in the 100-word passage. If you don't have a hand counter available, an easy way is to simply put a mark above every syllable over one in each word, then, when you get to the end of the passage, count the number of marks and add 100.
- Enter graph with average sentence length and number of syllables; plot dot where the two lines intersect. Area where dot is plotted will give you the approximate grade level.
- If a great deal of variability is found, putting more sample counts into the average is desirable.



Notice that longer words and sentences raise the grade level; and conversely, shorter words and sentences lower the grade levels. When you couple this with the fact that the stories are purposefully limited largely to high-frequency sight-words, it is easy to see that the students' phonetic skills will not get much practice with new words. This has the effect of both holding kids to lower reading levels and eroding their phonics skills through disuse. This is closely related to the "high-frequency word effect" mentioned below.

Teacher, reading researcher, and author Geraldine Rodgers in her book *The Hidden Story* has pointed out the importance of understanding the "**High-Frequency Word Effect**:"

> Nevertheless, very few high-frequency words do account for so very much of running text: about 300 covering 75%, 1,000 covering 90%, and 3,000 to 9,000 covering 98%. The rest of those half million words in English only turn up in the remaining 2% of running text. Yet, even with such enormously limited ability as the recognition of only 300 or so of the commonest words, it is possible to read at least 75% of most texts. If such a "crippled reader" is intelligent, perhaps 90% of such texts can be read accurately by context-guessing from the initial consonant sounds of the unknown words (phony phonics in action!), and 90% accuracy is above frustration level. (75)
>
> **The high-frequency-word effect**, which is the fact that the greatest part of any selection is expressed by a very small number of words, is the thing that made the deaf-mute method possible in the first place. The deaf-mute-method could never have been possible except for that high-frequency-word effect. (75)

The amazing thing about the "high-frequency word effect" is that it enabled educators to develop a reading method that bypasses the English phonetic code. Many students by means of this defective method are often able to pass grade level tests in comprehension for their grade level. The downside is that students develop a holistic way of looking at words rather than a phonetic reflex. They are severely handicapped when faced with the task of reading new words outside the sight-words they have been trained to recognize as wholes. They often confuse simple words that have the same shape such as: *trap* for *tap*, *truck* for *tuck*, l*unch* for *launch*, *grape* for *gape*, *frog* for *fog*, *squirrel* for *squeal*, *lion* for *loin*, *sang* for *snag*, *bib* for *did*, *kit* for *kite*, *trash* for *thrash*, *did* for *bib*, etc. The holistic reflex not only limits the students reading levels, it also creates a **blockage** against learning to read words phonetically and independently.

I teach my students what I call, "Mr. Potter's Secret of Reading: **Look at all the letters the right way, and no guessing**." That simple admonition repeated over and over is of tremendous help in enabling the students to overcome their whole word guessing habit.

Educators use so called "leveled readers" because they believe that reading the same sight-words over and over leads to higher levels of fluency and better comprehension. They seem unaware that restricting vocabulary exposure will also restrict vocabulary grown. Just as serious as restricting vocabulary, the sight-word readers can serve to limit student's experience decoding words phonetically and thereby lead to atrophy of the phonics reflex.

I was unaware of this when I was raising my children. They were always reading books far above their grade level. My oldest daughter read *Ben Hur* in the original, *The Hobbit*, and all three volumes of *The Lord of the Rings* in third grade! I did not think much about it because I myself was reading a lot of library books by second grade. She learned to read with the *Economy Phonetic Keys to Reading* program at a private school. My other children learned with the old *Open Court* program, which dispensed entirely with controlled vocabulary texts once the *Foundation Program* was completed in the first half of first-grade. These programs are no longer available; and as far as I know, nothing has replaced them. When I taught elementary bilingual classes in public schools, I had a few first-grade teachers complain when I sent second-grade English readers home with my first-grade bilingual students. I was told that it was inappropriate to send home a second-grade reader for first-graders. The interesting thing was that my students had finished both first-grade readers and were reading the second-grade readers quite well. I didn't realize that the schools avoided having kids read above their age grade level. The leveled reader approach is not so bad if the students are allowed to rapidly proceed on to whatever level they are able to read comfortably. This is not a criticism of the great children's literature available today, but rather of limiting a child's advance because of artificial grade level considerations.

It should be noted also that leveled readers are inappropriate for beginning readers on other grounds. Louisa Moats expresses this quite well in her essay, "Whole-Language High Jinks."

> "Leveled" books are a series of short paperbacks that are supposed to increase in difficulty with each advancing level. Difficulty, however, is defined in many of these series by the amount of verbiage on a page and the number of new words introduced, not by the difficulty of the language in the texts or the relationship between what has been taught and what students are then supposed to read.
>
> Leveled books cannot be the basis for a systematic, explicit approach to beginning reading instruction. **With each advancing level, students encounter many untaught phonic patterns and words. Lacking the tools to decode the books, students become ever more reliant on memorization and guesswork, unless they are lucky enough to intuit the print code from exposure or incidental teaching**. Leveled books are fine for students who can read them but are not helpful as the central tool of instruction for children at risk. (Emphasis mine)

In conclusion: Professor William C. McMahon of Danbury State College, speaking at the Fourth Annual Reading Reform Conference in August 5, 1965, stated the situation perfectly when he said,

> I can continue to connect each symptom to its cause in basal reader methodology, but the examples I have given will suffice. My point is this: The fact of the matter is that the child who is suffering from "severe reading disability" has not failed to learn. On the contrary, he has learned exactly what he has been taught and he has become a reading cripple as a consequence.