The Reading Problem: Its Roots and its Fruits

by Charles C. Walcutt

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MR. WASHBURN: Our next speaker is Dr. Charles Child Walcutt, the well-known educator and author. Professor of English at Queens College, New York. He is co-author of *Reading: Chaos and Cure*, and editor of *Tomorrow's Illiterates*, both of which books made a tremendous impression on the educational world. He is also co-editor of the Basic Reading Series of J. B. Lippincott. He will discuss some later life effects of reading failure. His speech is an adaptation of his article in *Michigan Quarterly Review*, Summer 1965.

DR. WALCUTT: Our educational philosophers, who constitute an Establishment and preside over our public schools, have been walking on their hands for over 30 years; and as anybody knows who has tried it, this means that they have been seeing a totally different world from the one seen by people who are walking on their feet. Without straining the analogy too far, we will find it very useful in understanding why two worlds of thought. In two different frames of reference, have such difficulty communicating with each other; why what seems obvious and important to one seems obviously wrong and entirely trivial to the other; and why so much exasperation is generated on both sides when communication is attempted.

The educationist Establishment has presided over all phases of learning—what should be known and how it should be taught. It has assumed a position of prestige and authority that has made it very difficult to challenge, particularly by citizens who do not speak the special language which is essential to any communication with it. And the general citizen not only cannot walk on his hands to see this new world and speak its different language—he cannot believe that it is the right world. There is a saying in New York that 116th Street, which runs between Columbia University and Teachers College, is the widest street in the country. This is no joke, and it may help us to a perspective from which we can untangle the reading problem.

We have for several years been engaged in a great debate about how reading is taught, or un-taught, in our schools. With illiteracy rampant, remedial reading an industry, and "average" high-school students everywhere unable to make sense of, say, THE NEW YORK TIMES, something is gravely the matter. The critics of the present system say that the current official method of reading instruction is wrong, that precisely it is the matter. The authorities on reading who preside over the educationist Establishment reply in many voices. Sometimes they insist that there is no reading problem, that, indeed, students today read better than they ever have before, and statistics prove it. Although this denies all the facts, it is perfectly sincere, and, as we all know to our sorrow, it works very well in debates. It puts the critic on the defensive, making him feel that his children are stupid or that he has been a Bad Father. He may be at a loss for statistics to meet so confident a position and, while he sets about gathering "scientific" data, a year or two

years of P.T.A. meetings controlled by group dynamics may frustrate him to the point where he chooses milltown for himself and a private school for his offspring.

This answer repelled criticism for years. A fascinating evidence of its success is that the British, who used to teach reading very well indeed, have within the past fifteen years adopted American methods and brought upon themselves a massive reading problem—American style—which they have proceeded to confuse with American rationalizations and remedies!—And the Danes, too, alas for them!

In America the problem is older, and the public has refused to accept the simple denial of the facts. Instead, the critics have continued to attack the current official method; and this continued and perspicuous attack has forced the educationist authorities back to a second line of defense—it too is a bold upside-down position, calculated to drive the critics crazy. What the authorities say is, "Method?—what method? We don't have any method. We use the method that we find, after elaborate scientific testing, to be best for the individual child. How can you be so ignorant as to suppose that we use any single method? Why don't you go back to <u>your</u> field of competence and leave us to ours?" This magnificent untruth—which is also sincere and innocent!—set some critics back five years, ten years; it silenced many for good; it has others grinding their teeth, for the image of a white-coated scientist objectively trying out all methods and scrupulously selecting the one that will work best for a particular Nellie Smith in Des Moines has an incalculable appeal to the American mind. Yet the reading problem remains, and grows.

What the Establishment now talks about is the importance of "reading for meaning." They explain that "reading is a thought-getting process." The theme announced In the program of the 1963 annual meeting of the International Reading Association in Miami, attended by some 5,000 teachers—a conference that went on for three solid days, with scores of speeches and workshops—was on reading for meaning, called "reading as an intellectual experience." The opening address by the President of the Association, and more minor speeches than any single person could attend, dealt with this great theme. It was so important, they declared, that everybody in the schools should teach reading, and formal emphasis on reading should continue on into the 9th and 10th grades, instead of stopping, as it now does, with the 8th grade. A recent bulletin issued by the New York City Department of Education, setting forth the latest official doctrine on reading instruction, has a boldface manifesto on the inside of its cover that concludes with a typical outburst of eloquence:

> "Reading is a highly complex process, an expression of the total personality of the individual, and a vital facet of the language arts rather than a separate and discrete curriculum area. Mere word calling is to reading as snapping a photograph is to the painting of a beautiful picture—the one, a mechanical skill; the other, a life-giving art. Thus, all that one brings to the printed page plays a part in determining what he takes away from it." (Sequential Levels of Reading Growth in the Elementary School, New York, 1963.)

I beg the reader to study this quotation carefully; it seems so right yet is so wrong. Instead of separating the mechanical skill of reading from the understanding of language, it pours the two together so that the separate basic initial mechanical skill of reading is lost in the mixture.

The importance of reading for meaning is, surely, more obvious than the fact that we walk on our feet. It is super-super-super-obvious. Can there be any sane person in the world, capable of the simplest thought, who does not know that the purpose of reading is to get the meaning from the printed page? I have never seen or heard anyone suggest even the slightest modification of this truth, let alone contradict it.

Some fifty years ago, when the psychologists observed that the eye could take in several words in a single fixation, so rapidly that it saw those words as wholes, the reading theorists made two false extrapolations from this fact, upon which shaky foundation has since been constructed a Tower of Babble, called "scientific research," made of error piled upon error, error growing more fantastic as it mounts farther and farther away from its tilted platform. The two base errors were: 1) that seeing words at high speed, the rapid reader could not have time to see all the letters in them but only the silhouette or total shape of a word, and 2) that since good adult readers saw words as wholes, children should be taught from the beginning to see words as wholes; that is, they should be taught whole words before they were taught the letters.

The reading problem grows out of these two false extrapolations. The rapid adult reader does not see words as shapes or outlines; he sees an exact image of each word because he already has that perfect image stored in his mind. (If he sees a new word, he has to look at it a letter at a time.) Just as a pianist has to learn scales before he plays chords, so a child must learn his letters before he reads words. It is true that one can, with a diagram or colored keys, play a chord or two without any knowledge of the musical scales, but this is monkey-business that does not lead anywhere although it is relatively harmless. Beginning reading, by learning a few whole words is comparable but in fact much more harmful. The: child who does it gets a completely false idea of what reading and writing are. Seeing printed words as wholes, without knowledge of letters, he must learn that they represent meanings, whereas in fact they represent sounds. Language is sound; the sounds which are language indicated their meanings for thousands of years before writing was invented to record those sounds with visual symbols. But instead of learning that printed words are systematic representations of sounds, the poor twentieth-century victim of look-and-say reading learns them as arbitrary symbols of things and ideas. He is taught, by incredibly wearisome repetitions, fifty or a hundred words as if they were Chinese characters—ideographs.

So the child learns to look at the middle of a word first, as he would look at a face. Having no systematic way to tell printed words apart, except general shape, he begins to forget after a while. He may be able easily to tell "so" from "automobile," but he will confuse "then" and "always." His spelling will be haphazard and horrendous. How could it be other—unless this child has the artist's exceptional visual memory? Now it is true that the system does intend to get to the letters later: from second grade on, there is constant attention to them (and under the continuing pressure of criticism, there is increasing attention to them in the first grade), but the initial misconceptions may establish confusions and bad habits of looking at words from which the child will never recover. He may very well give up trying—which is why in 1963 about 25% of American draftees

were rejected for illiteracy. Above this functionally illiterate bottom there is a second third who learn to "get by" somehow but who do not read well enough to be capable of higher education. At the top, there are lots of good readers, to be sure, but they too have problems of great consequence which we shall consider, presently, in the light of the Establishment's strange emphasis on "reading for meaning."

The system of beginning with whole words does not work: Children who learn to read well do so in spite of the system. The proof that the system has never worked is the Tower of Babble that has grown from it by way of explanation, justification, compensation. Let us consider just a small part of it: 1. We are told that "letters have no meanings," that meaning resides in words partly but in sentences mostly. (This is a comment on language; in fact letters mean sounds, and learning to read is learning letter meanings.) 2. A program of Reading Readiness, with tons of books and workbooks, has been developed whose sole function is to defer the beginning of reading instruction anywhere from three months to a year—or more. 3. The notion of child-as-plant, with his own personal rate of growth, has been solemnly invoked to show that a particular child may not choose to begin reading till he is seven or eight or even nine—but this is perfectly all right because he will catch up at his own pace. (He won't; the child who starts at nine will never catch up to a bright child who started at six.) 4. The system of automatic promotion, according to which all children are promoted up to grade 3 without reference to achievement, has been developed to keep the illiterate tide flowing. 5. Likewise the theory that children, should not be given objective grades, but only graded according to the teacher's estimate of their social adjustment and whether they are doing as well as their own individual growth-rate would seem to promise. (How the teacher can estimate this is still a dark mystery.) 6. Another reflection of reading failure is the nation-wide campaign, which over the past forty years has been expressed in hundreds of books and articles, against considering any subject more important than another. If one child wants to learn to read while another wants to tinker with motors, that is democratic and in every way desirable in an "open" society. 7. And for a last item—Life Adjustment: the astonishing theory that a child should not be educated to the point where his desires may outrun his opportunities, lest he become dissatisfied with his lot. This is called democratic, too, but it is an evil version of fascism. Through all this Tower of Babble, from which these are only a handful of the misshapen bricks, runs the word "needs." We have to discover the child's individual needs and let him meet them, rather than determine what he ought to know and teach him. The word teaching has been eliminated from school-of-Education course titles and "Guided Learning" put in its place.

These are the typical follies of the system in its theory and the sort of damages that it causes in practice. — Except for the implications of "reading for meaning," which are more broadly significant: Suppose a child has learned eight words as configurations, and the teacher wants to teach him a ninth. One way is just to tell him what it means; but a more elaborately pedagogical way is to motivate him to figure it out for himself. So the child is presented with a sentence containing only one new word. Let's say (to give a representative, if not actual example) that the sentence is, "Today we will feed Spot in his new __." The last word is "dish." How does the child set about identifying it without knowledge of letters and their function as signs of sounds? He tries to guess, using, at this point, context and picture "clues." The teacher asks him what he thinks the word might be. He says, "in his new basket." The teacher suggests that it is not a good idea to

feed a dog in his basket because he might get it dirty—and why not look more closely at the picture? The child scrutinizes the picture and says, "in his new plate," for Spot's food is displayed clearly in a gloaming receptacle. The teacher may settle for this answer, or if she is ingenious she may say, "Well, that's a very good idea, but we don't usually say in a plate; we say on a plate. What else might it be?" So the child looks again and says, "ah. in his new bowl!" To this answer the teacher responds with warm praise: "Excellent! You have got the idea very well!" To conclude, the teacher might add a comment suggesting that the receptacle is actually a dish, but she very well might not; and it would make very little difference to the child whether she did or not. He had been encouraged to analyze and reason and discuss, and he had by this and many similar lessons been led to believe that this was the proper way to determine a new word; so even if the teacher did say something about its actually being a "dish" that Spot was eating from, the child would not realize that the word on the page was dish and only dish. The discussion, in short, would have strengthened his belief that one determines a new word by the method described.

In the textbooks on reading instruction, the Bibles of the schools of Education, this method would be described as emphasizing "thinking in a reading situation," "the use of picture and context clues," and as a fine example of "bringing meaning to the printed page," and "reading creatively." Here, they affirm, is "reading" with the proper emphasis on reading for meaning. These are the comments and the actual language of the textbooks, and the example is in no way exaggerated. Reading is now formally defined as "bringing meaning to the printed page." I was once asked to comment, when I was speaking to a group of reading experts, on the sort of procedure described above. When I said, in effect, "There is no place for thinking at this point; the child should be helped to sound out d-i-sh and say it. Then he would know it by ear, and then would be the time to think about the meaning of the sentence. But if the child could work out the sound dish, the meaning would be obvious and there would be no need for all this 'thinking.'" — when I said this, the reading experts laughed. But it must be obvious to any rational observer that the method described gives the child a deeply mistaken idea of what reading is. This procedure, furthermore, comes after a minimum of three months have been spent teaching the child to talk confidently with his "peers," by way of developing what is called his social adjustment. When the same general approach is carried over into the reading lesson, the child's growing confidence in expressing himself is brought to bear on the discussion of a new word. He will have learned fifty or a hundred words by this method before he is introduced to the fact that the letters in the printed word control what it must be, but by this time the general procedure of discussing and "thinking in a reading situation" will have become so firmly established that it may prevail for the rest of his life. What is taught as reading is in fact guessing. Reading is decoding the print into the right sound or, in other words, getting the language from the printed page. Establishing the meaning of that language is the goal of reading, but it must come second. It is deeply wrong to discuss the meaning of the printed word "dish" until after one has determined, by letter-knowledge, that it represents the sound dish; and of course when the sound has been decoded there is no need for analysis and discussion.

We must pursue this enormity just one step further: There has been firmly established in official reading theory a virtual taboo against reading aloud, because the practice is said to cause "lip reading" or sub-vocal reading aloud. This is bad, we are told, theoreti-

cally, for two reasons: it slows down the reading, and it makes the child say the sounds without thinking about what they mean. So instead of hearing whether her children can really read the page in their lesson, the teacher is instructed to give them a number of Guided Reading Questions and to encourage them to see how fast they can get the answers to them. What follows is that the children glance rapidly down the page, put their fingers on certain words that answer the teacher's questions, and eagerly raise their hands with the answers. This is high-level stuff, for it stresses "speed and comprehension"! In fact, a quick-witted child may make high marks on his reading tests without being able to read more than half of the words and without any notion at all that good reading is not "bringing meaning to the printed page," but getting the meaning from the printed page. These habits of guessing, skipping, and skimming characterize a large proportion of the "successful" readers that one finds in college today. Not all, of course, and there is less of it in the science courses, but literary study has become a playground for irresponsible "Interpretation." I have had a great many high-school teachers in graduate English classes, and ninety per cent of them believe that there can be no single meaning of a poem; rather they insist that anybody has a right to his own interpretation and that the excellence of a poem can be determined from the variety of interpretations that it excites. Anything goes. And since anything has gone right from the first grade on, these teachers are accustomed to presiding over high-school literature classes in which close reading—the disciplined explication de texte which is the backbone of French education—is utterly unheard of. Their students go on to college perfectly confident that what counts is eager participation and that the best grades will go to students who contrive the most extraordinary interpretations of what they have, presumably, read.

I realize, of course, that a complex poem or novel can never be completely described, that the best critics will have areas of disagreement; but if the critical enterprise does not assume that its goal is to determine the full and exact meaning of a poem, no matter how difficult the task may be, no matter how much it will be confused by personal limitations, no matter how dependent it may be on fashions in taste, then we are in a state of intellectual chaos. And we are indeed.

A revolution is now going on against look-and-say reading methods. New texts are appearing. Phonics is coming back in a flooding tide. But the intellectual consequences of forty years of look-and-say reading are not going to disappear very soon. They have filtered down to the very springs of our intellectual life, corrupting the source itself, which is language. For a frightening number of people, including young writers, literary language is no longer the most accurate and disciplined language there is, but rather a sort of fantasy-producing narcotic.

We need to learn again that language is our best hope for understanding one another, and for understanding ourselves, as clearly as possible. To do so, we must begin at the very beginning and work with the discipline of fact. Letters stand for sounds; sounds stand for meanings; words basically have specific meanings that must be established before we may usefully speculate on how they modify one another, or what they mean, in literal, or symbolic, or metaphorical context. We need to learn again to read with care, and to care about our language and our reading.

MR. WASHBURN: Your enlightening address shows how lucky we are to have you as the New York Chairman of our Foundation.

Note from Internet Publisher: Donald L. Potter

December 25, 2008

I would like to thank Kathy Deihl of Lima, Ohio, for sending me two boxes *of Reading Informers* and *Reading Reform Foundation Conference Reports*. I consider it an honor to be able to publish select articles and speeches from the materials she sent me.

Dr. Walcutt's phonics program, *Through the Phonics Barrier,* can be downloaded for free from my web site, www.donpotter.net. I have included all the teacher material as well as an mp3 audio file for students. The audio makes the program completely self-teaching.

On the next page is the "Scope and Sequence" of Dr. Walcutt's 1963 *Lippencott Basic Reading* for first grade. You will notice it is a comprehensive phonics program. Geraldine Rodgers demonstrated the effectiveness of Dr. Walcutt's program in her 1979 book (revised 2005) *Why Jacques, Johann and Jan Can Read*. Here are Miss Rodgers' perceptive comments:

"The Lippencott Code 10 (Miss Rodgers' Code 10 meant pure phonics with no sight-word instruction.) material, which the publishers calls phonics-linguistic, was in use in two schools I visited. The Lippencott Grade One program consists of four books, Books A, B, C, and D. In "A Message to the Teacher from the Authors," in Book E of the *Teacher's Edition of Lippincott's Basic Reading*, Philadelphia, 1970, written by Glenn McCracken and Charles C. Walcutt, they state: "

> "…the fundamental strength of BASIC READING is in the synthetic development of word analysis skills. The lists of Basic Phonemes and Phoneme-Grapheme Relationships which appear at the end of the Grade One readers illustrate the comprehensive manner in which major English sound-spellings are presented. Each lesson in the Grade One books presents a new linguistic element followed by poems or stories in which the linguistic element appears. Rigid control of the introduction of these linguistic elements is practiced. The pupil is therefore able to attach successfully new words containing previously taught linguistic elements. As the pupil progresses, he meets minor sound-spelling patterns and irregular sound-spellings."

Miss Rodgers continues, "Yet the vocabularies of the American sight-word basal readers, and even in other American school books, are rigidly controlled, and have been so controlled since about 1930. In contrast, the first-grade Lippencott program introduces more than 2,000 words at the first-grade level, compared to sight-word basal readers, some of which introduce as few as 325 words in first grade. Furthermore, at second grade and above, new words are introduced in the Lippencott readers at a rate far in excess of the introduction of new words in the sight word basal readers at second grade and above. Children learn the pronunciation of these new words from their phonics skills, and the meaning of the new words just as they do in conversation – from the context of the material. The gap between Lippencott students and sight-word students, therefore, in vocabulary growth – in real vocabulary growth, which means learning the meaning of new words, and not just the ability to pronounce printed words already in a child's vocabulary – becomes enormous before those students reach high school."

Miss Rodgers concludes, "It is exceedingly unfortunate that most American students since 1930 have been taught by the sight-word method, not the phonics method as used by the Lippencott readers, and so most American students have never reached the vocabulary level of which they had been potentially capable. But suppressing such vocabulary grown in American children, the sight-word method has effectively lowered the nation's functioning verbal intelligence, because test scores on vocabulary knowledge and tests scores on intelligence correlate so closely that the two are essentially equal." (120-121)

Sound-Spelling Sequence in Grade 1
Walcutt-McCracken Phonic/Linguistic Method

Pre-Primer	Primer	Reader 1-1	Reader 1-2
ă	är	sh	long u
ĕ	êr	ch, tch	long ue
ĭ	ed /ĕd/	th	long ui
ŏ	w	wh	ew, eau
ŭ	ow (cow)	qu	aw, au
m	l	x	ph as f
n	ll	y	hard ch
r	b	z	ch as sh
s	le	ng	wr, kn
d	k	-ing	silent b
nd	ck	-ed (t,d,ed)	silent l
t	magic e	er as er	silent g
st, nd	a (care)	ar as er	silent gh
hard g	long a	ir/or/ur as er	gh as f
p	long e, ee	-y, -ay	ea as short e
dr, gr	ēa	-ey	ea as long a
sp, mp	ai	soft c	ear
hard c	long i, ie	soft g	ie as long e
h	ir	dg, dge	ei as long e
f	long o	-tion, -sion	eigh as long a
	ore, or	oo (cook)	ey as long a
	oa, oe	oo (food)	ough
	j	ow (snow)	
	v	ow (cow)	
		ou	
		oi, oy	

Basic Sounds of the English Language

Unvoiced Consonants		Voiced Consonants	
f	fat	b	bat
h	hat	d	dig
k (c)	kit cat	g	get
p	pan	j (dg)	jet edge
s	set	l	lad
t	ten	m	man
ch (tch)	chin match	n	net
sh	ship	ng	sing
th	thin	r	ran
wh	when	th	then
		v	van
		w	wet
		y	yes
		z	zoo
		zh	measure

Pure Vowels		Diphthongs	
a	bat	a	hate
a	father barn	ou – ow	out cow
a	ball saw water	oi – oy	soil boy
a	chair dare wear	i	time
e	best	o	go
e	Pete theme	u	use mute few
i	sit		
o	got		
u	cut		
u	put book		
u	boot		
a	above		
er	cedar here third wood burn		

Bettina Rubicam and Dr. Charles Walcutt

Concerning Context Clues and Meaning Emphasis

Professor Charles. C. Walcutt Graduate Professor of English,
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(Regarding Context Clues): coming upon a new word in print, the good adult reader makes stab at sounding it out, and a millisecond later he tries to deduce its meaning from the context. In this second phase, he may discover that it's a word he knows by ear, although at first he did not recognize it in print. The child who has been properly trained will respond in exactly the same way. He will, of course be doing this much more frequently than the adult because he is coming upon "new" words much more often in his reading. He know hundreds and hundreds of words that he has not seen in print…The child repeatedly has the pleasure of decoding a new word and, after a millisecond of puzzlement, discovering that, yes it's a word he knows by ear. This process does **not** involve looking at a picture or guessing the sound **from** the meaning, but the decoding skill is richly assisted by attention to meaning…

(Regarding meaning emphasis): The whole-word child may be exclusively concerned with meaning. He will be obsessively engaged in meaning because he is using it for two purposes: (1) to get at the word itself (the sound) and (2) to get the meaning of the passage.

Let us consider how this happens. Our child has this sentence, in which the new word is **cane:** "Jane's father has a new *cane*." The child thinks about the sentence, looks at the picture, and reads it as, "Jane's father has a new *stick*." Or he might say "*walking stick*." He has thought about the sentence, looked at the picture, as he has been taught to do, and comes up with a reasonable **guess –** which is what he has been programmed to do; that is, **think** about the sentence, the picture, and the situation. He says "walking stick," and certainly gets the meaning, but he has not got the actual word on the page, and is not using the techniques of word-attack that he should be developing at this stage in his education. Rather, he is absorbing some false notions and some bad habits.

The false notion that a printed word stands for meaning – that is, an object, action or idea – whereas in fact, what is "means" is a sound (which in turn means its referent). This false notion creates a bad habit of guessing the new word from context and/or picture, rather than looking at the printed word and first get its sound.

Readers who continue to do this are retarded or crippled readers. They are the poor readers who constantly make the "miscues" upon which Kenneth Goodman has built an empire of misinformation. Goodman insists that it is proper and natural for a good reader to guess ahead of the word on the page, thereby regularly coming up with "readings" that may be thoughtful but are, in fact, inaccurate. This is no way to read, and we should not pretend that it is, for such pretension is merely a way of defending the system of reading instruction that made us a nation with more illiterates than any other advanced country in the modern world.

Reading specialists such as Goodman and the whole amazing new school of psycho-linguistics are prisoners inside the tower of research whose foundation blocks are "reading for meaning," thinking in a reading situation" and "comprehension skills." What rests on this foundation to complete the tower, is a structure of verbal extrapolations referring to the mythic foundations.

Mastery of our alphabetic system can be achieved only with constant attention to meaning. But if we use meaning to **guess** the sound, we are not really learning to read and we shall be word-guessers for the rest of our lives – rioting in miscues, missing crucial words in a passage, and jumping to false conclusion halfway through an easy sentence.

The New York Times

April 12, 1989

Charles Walcutt, 80, A Reading Educator

Dr. Charles C. Walcutt, a professor of English who campaigned against the "look-say" method of teaching reading and urged a return to basic education, died of amyotropic lateral sclerosis, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease, yesterday at his home in Great Neck. L.I. He was 80 years old. Dr. Walcutt, who was long associated with the Reading Reform Foundation, became concerned about what he saw as the misteaching of reading in the 1940's. He feared such teaching would lead to growing functional illiteracy.

He was the co-author of Basic *Reading*, a series of elementary-school texts published by J. B. Lippincott in 1963, and of critical studies, including *Reading: Chaos and Cure*, written with his sister Sibyl Terman in 1958, and *Tomorrow's Illiterates* (1961).

Dr. Walcutt taught American literature at several universities before joining the Queens College faculty in 1951. He also taught at the City University Graduate Center until five years ago.

He was born in Montclair, N.J. Dr. Walcutt was a Phi Beta Kappa alumnus of the University of Arizona and received a master's and doctorate at the University of Michigan.

Surviving are his wife, the former Jeanne Faucon; a son, Philip, of Boston; a daughter, Margaret Goldstein of Caldwell, N.J., and two sisters, Alice Somers of Houston and Constance Mitchell of Summit, N.J.

Link to Walcutt's 1958 *Reading: Chaos and Cure*.

https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.112020/page/n1

You can borrow Tomorrow's Illiterates

https://archive.org/details/tomorrowsilliter00walc/page/n7

Note from Internet Publisher: Donald L. Potter

July 10, 2010

This "abstract" was taken from the January 1983 edition of *The Reading Informer,* published by the *Reading Reform Foundation*. I am not sure who prepared the "abstract." I assume it was most likely the editor, G. K. Hodenfield.

I have greatly benefited from the work of Professor Walcutt over the years. He published a simple, yet powerful, little phonics program called, *Through the Phonics Barrier.* It is available for free on my website, www.donpotter.net. Dr. Walcutt and Glen McCracken, were the writers of the Lippincott 1963 *Basic Reading* program, which enabled many of that generation to learn to read well without guessing. It would be a great blessing if someone would republish that method or something like it, as there is no basal phonics program even close to its effectiveness available today.

Anyone who started teaching in the mid 1980's or early 1990's will recall **with me** that we were instructed in Ken Goodman's "Miscue Analysis." This was tied in with "The Three Cueing Systems" chart, which we received at many of our workshops. We were taught that phonetic (grapho-phonemic) clues were the least used and should be deemphasized in teaching. We were warned that phonics was dangers because it would produce mere word-callers who would inevitably struggle to get the meaning of a passage. As it turned out, Walcutt was correct in calling it an "Empire of Misinformation."

Here is the link to *Through the Phonics Barrier*.

http://donpotter.net/learn_english/through_the_phonics_barrier.html

Here is a detailed study of the 1963 edition of *Basic Reading*. *Basic Reading* ranks as one of the premier phonics based reading programs in the history of reading in America.

http://donpotter.net/pdf/phonic_lingusticmethod.pdf

This document last edited on 12/2/12 and 6/9/19.