

# What price desegregation?

by Mary S. Jackson

(Editor Note from G. K. Hodenfield: The following article is reprinted with permission of the author from *Illiteracy in America* (excerpted in this publication November-December, 1986). Ms. Jackson is a member of the National Advisory Council on Adult Education, which published *Illiteracy in America*, and owner of Davidson Diversified Services, Davidson, Maryland.)

Obviously many gains for blacks have been realized as a result of the civil rights movement but the question is, could even greater gains have been realized if some things had been done differently? Or, could blacks have accomplished what we did in the last 31 years without the great upheaval we have experienced? Should education have been the pawn when there were so many other factors upsetting racial balance? Why was it necessary for the schools to be the battleground, and the little black children the soldiers in the vanguard of the second most violent revolution in America? In such a situation, who was the victor and where was the valor?

The price the American people paid to achieve racial balance in the schools was too great. Instead of providing an orderly process for equality in education with all deliberate speed, we bused children to hostile territories and placed them in classes without appropriate testing; devised a curriculum that was more skeletal than substantive; required clerical tasks of teachers instead of teaching techniques; and changed school administrators from academic facilitators to facility managers. School boards were forced to turn their attention to students' rights and racial composition instead of curriculum development. Schools ceased to be the obligation of the states and came under the control of federal mandates. Enormous amounts of money were expended to develop regulations and programs to monitor and evaluate the progress of integration in the schools rather than to improve academic achievement. Was federally imposed, court ordered desegregation a proper interpretation of the Constitution or an infringement of the state's responsibility, and what did it accomplish?

By now, we all know the negative educational results of integration. Teachers hastily hired and arbitrarily assigned to schools developed negative attitudes about the students' ability to learn and students fulfilled teachers' low expectations. The drop-out rate for blacks reached 50% in some areas. In short, the quality of education in the disadvantaged black neighborhoods was not only not improved, but fell far below national averages. Even the desired social outcomes — the mixing of the races — was not accomplished as "white flight" resulted in predominantly black metropolitan areas.

The situation in the North was exacerbated by the integration of all interstate travel following Dr. Martin L. King's successful boycott in Montgomery, Ala. Consequently, southern blacks migrated north where there were better educational opportunities. However, in their impoverished and illiterate state, these blacks were able to benefit little, but added to the welfare and crime rolls in overcrowded ghettos and became some of the blacks who now comprise a large percentage of the illiterates in this country.

It can be argued that many blacks educated under the segregated system — in the North more than three decades ago — were better educated than those in the integrated system of today. They had been rapidly closing the educational gap with less than one year's difference between themselves and their white counterparts. Education had not been their problem, but income was. Black college graduates could expect to earn in a lifetime only as much as whites with three years of high school education. While the educational gap was closing, the income gap was not. Black income was 56% that of the average white income in 1965. It had been 57% in 1952. Some black protest groups such as CORE and SNCC were aware of the broader picture. They were looking at the effects of desegregation, not only on schools, but on housing, jobs, and neighborhoods. They were listening to the segregated South say, "We can't get a good education," but they were also listening to the ghettoized North say, "I got an education but I still cannot find a decent job that pays decent money." Dr. Martin L. King understood that once black America obtained self-respect, its high level of illiteracy would be reduced, and economic opportunities would increase. Not all blacks favored desegregation and court-ordered busing. Realizing that the future of black America rested in the black community and that education was a key element, the Organization of Afro-American Unity believed that the Constitution clearly affirmed the rights of every American citizen but that the states were totally responsible for education. They felt that black children were being criminally short-changed by the public schools and campaigned against the integration program of the New York City Board of education because they felt it was unworkable and too expensive. They preferred schools for blacks that were controlled by the black community.

As one who attended an all-black high school, I know what many blacks sacrificed for an integrated school system. Bates High School, in Annapolis, Md., produced many outstanding black scholars, athletes and professionals. Our achievement scores were high, our graduates were accepted into colleges, and our dropout rate was practically nonexistent. We competed enthusiastically in a variety of scholastic and athletic contests. We had dedicated teachers who inspired us to excel scholastically and an administration who cared about its students. Every day we were met by our principal, and had daily prayer, gave the Pledge of Allegiance, and followed an orderly schedule of academic, commercial, or vocational classes. Although there were over 30 students in a class, we never felt overcrowded or slighted by our teachers. Our studies were structured and homework was assigned. Wall charts listed our grades and our standing in class. If there was the slightest problem, our parents had to come to school, but usually communications between home and the school was positive, as there were hardly ever discipline or behavior problems. Where there was a problem, the principal either paddled the student or restricted extra-curricular activities. We held our teachers in greatest esteem, had pride in our school, enjoyed competition, and appreciated rewards for doing well. When desegregation forced Bates to graduate its last class, 27 years of producing some of Maryland's most outstanding black citizens came to a halt. When those excellent black teachers transferred, many times they were forced to teach out of their area, to retire early, were burdened with federal clerical duties totally unrelated to teaching, or had to suffer administrators who were unqualified to fulfill their tasks. The cost of desegregation exceeded the dollar to bus students to integrate American schools. Achieving racial

balance cost us too dearly in terms of discipline, classroom decorum, scholastic achievement, and respected institutional standing in the community.

What happened at Bates High School is just one example of the price black America paid to achieve racial balance. While the price was too high for us, it was even greater for the country as a whole. For when federal intervention in the educational process supersedes the rights of states and citizens, educational chaos results, with a corresponding rise in adult illiteracy. I do not wish to demean the efforts of those attempting to achieve racial balance, but until schools are unshackled from federal regulations and states evaluate and define more clearly the role they should assume in offering educational opportunity for all, while insisting on appropriate achievement, our country will continue to suffer. The cost to achieve racial balance continues to be too dear. Black Americans do not want to see such a high price tag for their country. They care too much. Illiteracy in the black community stifles social, economic and political parity — a loss for the American society as a whole.

## Note from Internet Publisher: Donald L. Potter

July 14, 2010

I recently discovered this valuable article in the February-March 1987 *Reading Informer* published by the Reading Reform Foundation. Kathy Diehl, former Director of Research for the Reading Reform Foundation, sent me a box containing all the issues of the Reading Informer ever published. I have found them a mine of information, historical, theoretical, and practical. I have published numerous articles from that publication on my website, [www.donpotter.net](http://www.donpotter.net) and [www.blendphonics.org](http://www.blendphonics.org).

This article reminds me of extensive correspondence I had over the years with Charlie Richardson of Long Island, who taught reading and other subjects to thousands of juvenile offenders. He noticed that the whole-language (look-and-say) method cause more harm to the reading skills of African-Americans than the rest of the population. And contra wise, African-Americans seemed to flourish in reading and other academic areas when taught proper phonics.

Anyone interested in this topic will definitely want to read *Between The Rhetoric and Reality* by Gary and Frank Simpkins, Lauriat Press, Pittsburgh, PA., 2009. [www.rosedogbookstore.com](http://www.rosedogbookstore.com). “The authors focus their work on the American educational system, highlighting the question ‘Were African Americans better off before the decision of Brown vs. the Board of Education.’ Many of the details they cite, indicates alarming illiterates and high school drop out rates for disadvantaged Black and Latino students across the country.” Both authors have highly respectable academic credentials and good common sense. Their work deserves a wide reading. A “Preview” is available on [www.GoogleBook.com](http://www.GoogleBook.com). Just click on the following link.

[http://books.google.com/books?id=4gafsiUaENMC&printsec=frontcover&dq=between+rhetoric+and+reality&hl=en&ei=70czTab4BcOAlAf5c2gCg&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=7&ved=0CEAQ6AEwBg#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=4gafsiUaENMC&printsec=frontcover&dq=between+rhetoric+and+reality&hl=en&ei=70czTab4BcOAlAf5c2gCg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=7&ved=0CEAQ6AEwBg#v=onepage&q&f=false)

I would also like to mention the great work of Dr. Obadiah Williams of Cincinnati, Ohio. His book, *Early Childhood Stimulation and Parent Training for Early Education: The Exposure Quotient Method*, is the best book I have read on improving children’s lifelong academic achievement by early stimulation training. Like myself, Dr. Williams is an experienced *Alpha-Phonics* teacher. Since I was a bilingual teacher for years, most of my experience teaching phonics was with Hispanic children; therefore, I can testify to the effectiveness of intensive phonics with Spanish speaking children of recent Hispanic immigrants. Dr. Williams and I believe that *Alpha-Phonics* can prevent most reading problems for **all children**, including Black and Latino. Dr. Williams has an exciting YouTube video telling about his many years of success with *Alpha-Phonics*.

Intensive phonics programs that can be used successfully with anyone regardless of ethnicity can be found for free download on my website, [www.donpotter.net](http://www.donpotter.net)

An inadvertently deleted paragraph was restored to the article on January 16, 2011.

## **Information Concerning Dr. Obadiah Williams and His Method**

**From [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).**

In this book, small though it may be, Dr. Obadiah Williams presents an uncomplicated, inexpensive method for stimulating cognitive development in very young children. This simple method works – it produces children who are cognitively and intrinsically prepared to learn and to enjoy learning in the regular classroom when they enter school. Here the reader will find the foundations for the program, the tools for establishing such a program, an explanation of operating methods, and a curriculum guide.

An Alabama native, Dr. Obadiah Williams has lived in Cincinnati, Ohio, for more than forty years. His educational program has been operational for eighteen years. He has earned bachelor's degrees in education and in theology from Anderson College, an M.Ed. from Xavier University, and a Ph.D. from Miami University of Ohio. Himself a father of six children, Dr. Williams has been a teacher, guidance counselor, and then an administrator in Ohio's public schools, where he witnessed firsthand the disturbing trends that led him to investigate ways to help young children develop the cognitive skills and motivation they need for success in school and in life.

Dr. Obadiah Williams is the president and program director of O.W. Motivational, Inc.

His book is published by [www.dorrancepublishing.com](http://www.dorrancepublishing.com).

## Addendum

### WHOLE-LANGUAGE CAUSES DYSLEXIA!

Friday, August 13, 2004

Charles M. Richardson The LITERACY COUNCIL

A Matrix of Proof & Remedy

#### Introduction

The matrix of proof – “connecting the dots” - draws upon the National Reading Panel report (2000), brain research at UCLA and Yale, and data from a new testing tool that quantifies the damage to children’s reading that manifests as a “whole-word dyslexia” (WWD) (though the education system does not yet recognize it as such). The matrix extends further to explain the so-called “black under-achievement dilemma,” the successes of children of color in schools with good phonics programs, and the puzzling uniqueness of gains by African-American children observed in research on voucher-transfer effects on inner-city children (Howell, et al, September, 2000). Once WWD is recognized, logical remedies are deducible.

The term “Whole-Language” (WL) includes its stepchildren: *Reading Recovery* (TM), so-called “balanced literacy,” psycholinguistic guessing, and others emphasizing philosophies of word identification other than sound recovery by alphabetic strategies commonly called phonics.

**DOT 1** Neurologists have known for more than a century that certain areas of the left side of the human brain are critically involved in interpreting the sequences of sounds we call language and which, if damaged or defective, result in reading impairment. They have also known that areas of the right brain deal in pictures, e.g., recognition of human faces, and which if damaged, can result in one’s failure to recognize a loved one even though he can read or speak her name appropriately.

**DOT 2** The last six pages (2-133-8) of the National Reading Panel’s Phonics Subgroup report pondered agonizingly over consistent evidence that delaying the teaching of phonics until children were in second grade stunted their reading growth compared with that of children given systematic phonics in kindergarten and first grade. Though no alternate K - 1 curriculum specifics were given, the assumption that it was usually whole-language is supported by the section’s very last sentence: “It may be that children do better when a year of systematic phonics instruction precedes a year of whole language instruction than when the reverse is the case.” That sentence leaps off the page as a grudging admission that WL appears as a factor in the depressed reading performances of thousands of children alluded to in the data.

**DOT 3** Dr. Jeffrey Schwartz at UCLA has written a book, *The Mind and the Brain* about “neuroplasticity,” the ability of the human brain to “re-wire itself” in response to training, behavioral conditioning, practice, or even concentrated thought. Using PET scans, he observed specific re-shaping of brain areas involved in critical decision points during the recovery of obsessive-compulsive-disorder patients.

**DOT 4** At Yale University Medical Center a research team led by Dr. Sally Shaywitz has employed functional MRI scans to observe brain activity (blood-flow) in patients during reading activities requiring minimal or more complex decoding effort: The easy parts asked if two simple words were in “same or different” categories, the more sophisticated tasks demanded judging the rhyming of differently-spelled non-word syllables, e.g., [LEAT] vs. [JETE]. The 70 patients in the study were tracked for over 15 years, and classified approximately one-third each of “non-impaired” (NI) readers, “accuracy improved” (AI) who had received significant remediation, and “perpetually-poor readers” (PPR) who appeared to have no genetic impairment but were educationally disadvantaged, or “environmentally influenced” in developing ineffective reading strategies.

Another task given outside the MRI magnet required pronouncing words from two lists, one of high-frequency (familiar) and the other of low-frequency (less familiar) words. As in the MRI tasks, data on accuracy and response times were recorded. Unfortunately, only the accuracy data were published for the word lists, and showed decreased accuracy on the less familiar words (more decoding required). In all cases, the PPR group accuracies and speeds were below those of the NI and AI groups. The PPR group’s brain activity is of particular interest because of the excess blood flow in areas of the right brain normally used for memory, and which appeared to interfere with the language processing of the left brain.

Starting to “connect the dots,” we ask, “How did the PPR group learn to utilize their right brain - the memory region?” We look to the twin strands of **DOT 2**, the NRP report of children starting to memorize whole words (as if they were pictures) before phonics, and **DOT 3**, the UCLA findings that brains re-wire themselves according to usage concentrations. We see the strong likelihood of a causal connection, but we need data more focused on quantifying these subtle relationships.

**DOT 5** Enter the *Miller Word Identification Assessment* (MWIA), a new testing tool that measures relative tendencies of a person to view words as memorized wholes (right-brain), vs. decodable syllables (left-brain). The MWIA is a 1980’s creation of Edward Miller, a retired administrator and math teacher in North Carolina (himself somewhat dyslexic, but a genius!). It is an early embodiment of the Shaywitz team’s high/low frequency word list technique, implemented in two levels: Level I with 50 words on each list and Level II with 210 words on each list.

The Level II's high-frequency (HF) list is essentially the vocabulary of THE CAT IN THE HAT, which Dr. Seuss claims was written under contract to an educational publisher who supplied a list of 220 words and requested a children's book using them exclusively! The HF list of Level I is the vocabulary of GREEN EGGS and HAM. Both low-frequency (LF) lists are one-syllable, phonetically-regular (no silent letters or irregularities) words, drawn from the practice lists in WHY JOHNNY CAN'T READ (Flesch, 1955).

Administering the MWIA involves keeping track of time and errors as the student reads first HF and then LF lists. A decoding left-brain reader handles both lists equally, sometimes speeding up a little on the LF list because the words are intrinsically easier: By contrast, THE CAT IN THE HAT has over two dozen words that are multi-syllable (another, anything) or irregular (could, should, would).

A right-brain-whole-word reader, however, slows down and makes more mistakes on the LF list: sometimes major - 50% or more, and errors doubling or quadrupling. And most of the errors are "look-alikes!" An additional step, on the LF list only, is to re-visit a sampling of the mis-called words, point to each and say, "Spell this aloud and try it again." Four out of five times he now says it correctly, even blurting out the word without spelling it. It needs to be asked, "If he knew how to decode it, why didn't he say it right the first time when he was "running on automatic?" Since the LF words are intrinsically the easier list, it has to be a learned behavior, learned earlier; his brain re-wired with a conditioned reflex to read with his right-brain's picture-taking sites.

### **The African-American Predicament**

Unexpected, but very consistent, are findings that slow-downs and error counts for African-Americans with WWD are roughly twice as severe as those for Caucasians. The phenomenon was discovered by Miller in North Carolina, and persists in my NY data, showing that phonics-first teaching is more crucial for African-American children than for other ethnic groups. There are both anecdotal and recorded data that African-Americans succeed well in schools stressing phonics.

Though we do not understand the "WHY's," MWIA data are consistent enough to guide attacking the so-called "black under-achievement problem" via initial systematic phonics, plus other remedies, below. Research on inner-city populations on academic gains related to voucher-transfers from public to non-public schools has raised questions that the research teams cannot yet answer:

The team of Howell, Wolf, Peterson, and Campbell is at a loss to explain why African-American children make significantly higher gains than other ethnicities. Their initial report (September, 2000) was described in EDUCATION WEEK, 2/7/01, "In Defense of Our Voucher Research."



It is generally known that non-public schools tend to have stronger phonics programs than do public schools. That assumption, taken together with the MWIA data, explains the Howell team's quandary. Also, the late Albert Shanker's column of August 20, 1995, describes an inner-city school adopting a phonics-based curriculum, resulting in what Mr. Shanker termed a "Baltimore Success Story: Not only did achievement scores soar, but special-ed referrals went DOWN by a factor of 4! Phonics matters crucially for African-American children!

## **Remedies**

Prevention of WWD is, of course, the best remedy. Review those patterns in **DOT 2**, the NRP report, showing that phonics taught EARLY launches the left-brain using its sound language processing to best long-term advantage. After a whole-sight-word beginning, re-programming the brain for automatic decoding is sabotaged by the ubiquitous presence of those 220 words which Dr. Seuss' educational publisher knew to be the most frequent in our language, making up 50 percent of all English running text. They keep reinforcing the wrong reading behavior.

Ed Miller has devised a "Sight-Word Eliminator" (SWE) to eliminate those words temporarily from a student's reading environment: He modified a typical American novel, painstakingly blanking out the sight-220 throughout. (Edward Miller's SWE is not available at the present time. Mr. Miller also used the 72 Phonics Exercises from Rudolf Flech's 1955 *Why Johnny Can't Read and what you can do about it.*)

Exercising with such a text forces the student to decode every word, simple behavior modification (brain re-wiring). Of the hundred or so children that Miller has worked with, the best-documented is a class of 25 fourth graders who, in only ten weeks, made substantial improvement in reading accuracy; most also increased in speed using the SWE plus other materials. (The "other materials" was Rudolf's Flesch's Exercises.)

The MWIA Level I is a simple 5-minute procedure enabling schools (or parents) to learn what their reading programs are really producing. A more-detailed article with the MWIA Level I and graphs of the above-described data is available. (Also an MWIA set with the Level II)

## Closing note from Don Potter

### Concerning Mr. Richardson's Article

Mr. Richardson passed away in 2008. His insights into the causes of black underachievement in reading need to be better known **so that underachievement can be turned in to high achievement.**

Mr. Richardson highly recommended Hazel Loring's 1980 *Reading Made Easy with Blend Phonics for First Grade*. It is available on my website for free: [www.donpotter.net](http://www.donpotter.net) and [www.blendphonics.org](http://www.blendphonics.org). A special reader has been designed to help students quickly and effectively overcome their artificially induced whole-word dyslexia. It consists of over 2,000 words specially organized by phonics patterns, with the words of similar shape grouped together. Students are removed from their whole word-guessing environment and taught straight phonics until they are able to overcome the guessing habit.

Mr. Miller drew heavily on the theoretical work of Mr. Samuel L. Blumenfeld. I have used the *Blumenfeld Alpha-Phonics Literacy System* with many students - including black males - to overcome artificially induced whole-word dyslexia and become good readers. Mr. Miller also recommended the *Blumenfeld System*. Mr. Blumenfeld's 1973 masterpiece of research, *The New Illiterates: and how to keep your child from becoming one* is must reading for anyone who cares about the state of reading in America. I have published several of his essays on my website, all of which are well worth careful reading.

Mr. Richardson drew heavily on the research of Miss Geraldine Rodgers. It was by reading her book, *The Hidden Story: How America's Present-Day Reading Disabilities Grew Out of the Underhanded Meddling of America's First Experimental Psychologist, Young William James, in the 1870's Under the Cover of the Powerful Agassiz Clique* that I came to understand the two kinds of reading and how the high frequency word effect made the defective guessing method possible. Miss Rodgers explanation of how two completely opposite systems of teaching reading ("from the meaning" or "from the sounds") produced two completely opposite types of readers ("Subjective" readers guessing from a context base of memorized sight-words or "Objective" reader reading accurately and automatically from the sounds represented by the letters.). Her books and articles are required reading for anyone who wants to get to the bottom of the true causes of illiteracy in America.