

Why Billy can't read

Where it all went wrong, top-down
All you need is common sense

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Why Billy still can't read

A failure of 1 in 4, in learning to read, for 50 years and more? How can this mess go unchallenged? This is surely the biggest scandal ever! The experts **MUST BE WRONG**. Others may study this but I have lived it, for 40 years. Today teachers keep getting the blame, while the real culprits (who mis-trained and control them) get off scot-free – central government, LEAs, universities. And of what value is an Ofsted inspection if the inspectors do not themselves understand DEcoding phonics?

We teach reading by phonics, consisting of 26 LETTERS and 44 SOUNDS. If you create a programme based (after the one-letter stage, run plastic experimental) on 44 sounds, one spelling per sound and then “alternative spellings”, **ENcoding**, this leaves out a whole DIMENSION - the logic, the way letters interact in a consistent way –the system.

Rules explain spellings, so that letters and their groupings in words make sense, and this is “the grain of the language”, the logic used in **DEcoding** phonics based on 26 letters. Teaching reading without this is like a car without a lubrication system. DEcoding **IS** the system of “systematic phonics”. You need to understand the flaws in the UK government ENcoding *Letters and Sounds*, so that you will see what is also missing from other ENcoding phonics programmes like Distar. Is this confusion at the top based on honest ignorance or (worse) is it deliberate? Government will not even discuss it with me, and the meddling goes on and on.

Take the long vowels. The simplest way to spell them is that “A vowel can say its name”, just a single letter, as in:

- (1) bacon, pastry he demon I pilot dial no, Ohio usual.
- (2) short vowels become long if there is a vowel (V) two letters later. This “magic e” is quite well-known. Look at:
rat/ rate, them/e (i) rob/e cub/e.
This system works the same for all 4 vowels.
- (3) The ending -le works the same:
table Keble title noble bugle, **but**:
rattle pebble little bottle struggle

Two other rules are:

- (1) English words do not end in q u v j i. so
- (2) Change the y to i and add ..., as in cry cried, berry berries
and again this works after all 4 vowels:
pay paid they their (i) boy boil guy guide

This rule solves what to me as a child was difficult, which spelling of their/there to use. It conforms to the i/y rule even if it is the only word that does (the ending -ey is different, as in obeyed, donkeys.) This is where you teach “ai”. “gh” is a difficult spelling. In “igh” it says long I after a consonant, 20 words: bright. After a vowel it says A, 7 words: weigh, straight. It is not reliable, and I want beginners to feel they can trust the letters to BE reliable. In “ough” it has 6 different sounds, so I keep it to near the end of my course. Some ENcoding phonics programmes leave out soft c,g rules entirely.

The rule is: “c and g say the sound in their name when followed by e,i, or y.” Exceptions, get give, This is found at p.153, Phase 5, in *Letters and Sounds*, as alternative spellings for the sounds of s,j but

with no stated rule.

I teach only two sight words: to, the. If you know the rules, they cover about 95% of our language.

There are other spellings where it is more efficient to learn the rule, as in WA. WA hardly ever sounds as in wax. It usually sounds as WO, as in want watch Washington, Watford, swamp... was. If you know a digraph like this, it unlocks scores of words, instead of learning just one word by sight because it is high-frequency. In running text, it is nearly always the low-frequency words that carry the meaning. Reading IS DEcoding. If you teach DEcoding, the pupils UNDERSTAND. You never need to decide which spelling, because in reading the spelling is "given". If you teach phonics without these rules, there is no element of 'UNDERSTANDING'. There is nothing **to** understand.

If you understand these rules, how can government tell teachers to teach long vowels as **ai ee igh oa oo** ? Why give examples of alternative spelling, such as soft c,g, without a rule to explain them? Why was it accepted - and still is- from top to bottom of the education establishment with no protest or queries (that I know of)? This is a fundamental component of learning to read. If the whole education establishment does not know all this,

something very simple has to be wrong.

It is a matter of power, power from position, authority, and power of money. When America was opening up, Rockefeller made \$millions from oil, then he wanted to polish up his image and did this by donating \$millions to medicine (hence the change from

herbs to pills, pharmaceutical firms) and to “education”, notably Teachers’ College of Columbia University, New York. He provided the massive financial support for “Progressive” ideas always for CHANGE, and socialism, introduced by Mann and Dewey.

John Dewey founded his own school in 1894. Melanie Phillips wrote in 1996 of “Dewey, the American philosopher whose ideas were the single most important influence in transforming not just the educational scene but education theory and practice in Britain he believed that high literacy was an obstacle to socialism.” The teaching of reading has been strongly influenced by ideas in America, as seen from the following dates:

Horace Mann 1796-1859

Carnegie (steel) 1835-1919

John D. Rockefeller (Standard Oil) 1839-1937

John Dewey 1859-1952

E.B. Huey 1870-1913

Carnegie’s funding helped to start many of our local libraries in Britain. Dewey supported progressive ideas of the purpose of education. The title of Huey’s 1908 book *The psychology and pedagogy of reading* is almost identical with Prof. Fred Schonell’s *The psychology and Teaching of Reading* 1945.

In 1931 the 5th Hadow Report said that **“The curriculum is to be thought of in terms of activity and experience rather than of knowledge to be acquired and facts to be stored.”**

This was quoted by Melanie Phillips in her 1996 book, *All must have prizes*, and in *The great reading disaster* 2007 (McNee and Coleman).. It was repeated in *Primary Education* 1959 HMSO and

has never been withdrawn. It simply cancels out the whole purpose of schooling! Utterly mad, but official wisdom, never challenged and still around.

In 1945 we were war-weary, looking for a Brave New World. Schonell chose the perfect moment to throw out phonics, in his book. Only 35 years later did I pay attention to this. He said that phonics is "old-fashioned, deadly drill, dull as ditchwater." It can be - anything can, but it need not be. I ENJOY teaching reading. But he had the big name, knighted! And the fifth edition of his book was printed after he died, revised by Elizabeth Goodacre. It kept the blame off teaching, by providing scapegoats: home/child/family, and also (a) a general physical immaturity, (b) personality maladjustment or emotional upset, (c) vision defect. This influential book led teachers away from phonics, until by 1970 it had pretty well vanished from teacher training. This madness, this Progressive (?) approach has affected America (from 1908 Huey), and the whole English-speaking world (except S. Africa until very recently).

In July 1946 I gained an (External) Upper 2nd in geography, from London University. I remained at Nottingham in its first year as a university, for my year of teacher training. What a waste of time! I trusted when J.-J. Rousseau was admired as a philosopher. Many years later I learned that he had fathered five illegitimate children, and dumped them all on the local orphanage. Some philosopher!

My first teaching job was two years at the (Quaker) Mount School, York. I was very comfortable with the Quaker ethic. Then I decided I needed to look at the world I was teaching about.

From Sept 1951 for a year I lived in Hamilton, Ontario, as a doctor's

secretary, but found the long winter unbearable. From Sept 1952-1956 I spent the happiest years of my life working at the British Embassy, Washington. My outside friends (The York Club) were Americans from St Alban's church. We did everything: dancing, skating, caving, tennis, swimming, ski-ing, sailing! I was in the church choir. In contrast, the two years I spent as a bilingual typist in Paris were the worst. The French did not like the English. And there I did not dance, ski, or anything else. I just endured.

By 1955 America was suffering poor literacy, and that year Rudolf Flesch wrote *Why Johnny Can't Read*. This sold 8 million copies and created a furore but the professionals just waited it out and carried on as before. To me then it was just news. The book sold millions. Sadly in 1981 his *Why Johnny still can't read* was printed, but sold only a few thousand copies. The publisher was making money from a look-say scheme so did not want to promote a book against look-say.

From 1956-58 I worked in N. Nigeria two years up to independence (and two years after independence).. There I met my husband.

I had trained and worked as a teacher of geography (and economics) in grammar schools. My son was born with Down's syndrome in 1961 and the doctor advised my husband not to tell me until he was 2. He was a blue baby; I did not see him for three days and was not allowed to breast-feed him. Professional advice....

Gradually I realised he was slow. When he was 2, going to New Zealand on a ship in mid-Pacific my husband told me. The ship's doctor examined him and said, Yes, he was a Down's child. He advised we put him in a "home", **forget about him** and have

another. He was a beautiful baby, infant. Professional advice!...

After a year in New Zealand, we returned home and lived in Bromley, and at age 4 Tim attended a nursery school, and merged happily. At age 5 he was equal to other children in vocabulary etc. except that he could not balance a 2-wheel bike. He had a 3-wheeler. After 3 years in an Opportunity Class (Orpington), he could read and spell 3-letter words. I was so proud of him! He had had a succession of three old lady teachers.

The LEA then sent him to an ESN (educationally sub-normal) school 5 miles away in West Wickham. The teachers, had framed certificates on the wall telling me of their "professional" qualifications. I thought Tim would go like a bomb. But he learned NOTHING in 2 years. He learned more at a Cubs evening once a week! His teachers had **no idea** how to teach him to read!

After two years I attended a parents' evening and all the children in Tim's class except Tim had a picture on the wall. I came out and sat in the car and just sobbed. Two vital years just wasted!

In desperation, and totally UNtrained, I decided to teach him myself. By the grace of God I came across *Royal Road readers*, a DEcoding programme, and together we started on Book 1 page 1.2.3-. His bus came at 8am and he was home at 5pm, too tired for much, so it had to be 7.30-8am, and on through the weekends and holidays, every day. And 18 months later he could read.

The school had not noticed. I told them and they tested him and agreed, yes he could read. But nobody asked how it had happened. From then on in 40 years I have found a **total absence of genuine professional curiosity, at all levels.** Tim has been

reading ever since. But how different his life would have been if he had attended the local school. He could not, there, have learned less but he could have made local friends!

And in teaching Tim, I too learned. My father was called George and I often wondered where that pronunciation came from. It was not until I was 49 and teaching Tim that I myself learned about soft c,g and all the other "rules".

After seeing my own son learn despite the school, I began to ask around in casual conversation, and found there were many parents of "normal" children who had failed in reading. The word "dyslexia" just began to be heard.

We then in 1972 moved to a small-holding in Norfolk. Until he was moved to a special needs school (where he learned little), for one term Tim attended the village primary school. A new teacher fresh from training arrived, and she was put in charge of the reception class, "the babies' class". The head teacher said, "She can't do much harm there." How wrong can you be? That is where it all begins for weal or woe.

At first I did not teach in a school. I learned how to milk a cow. We had 2 piglets in an enclosed space, and when we moved them outside to grass, they actually **gambolled!** I continued teaching individual pupils privately, and decided to give up teaching geography in a grammar school, and teach reading to younger ones. In 1976 the head of East Dereham Church Middle School, an older man 2 years from retirement, took me on at Easter and I taught the bottom 20 of an intake of 120. I thought my way worked but I wanted to be sure so I checked and found that my class had learned twice as much in three months of one summer term (with

sports day, day trips) as in the previous 2 terms, 7 months. From then on I have never wavered.

Government produces endless reports, but they are full of words and fail to state in a way the ordinary Joe can understand, that **1 in 4 has failed for 50 years** and more.

- 1959 "Primary Education" HMSO repeated the Hadow sentence.
- 1963 Newsom Report, "Half our future" 13-16, too late.
- 1967 Plowden report, "Children and their primary schools."
- 1972 James report, teacher training.
- 1974 Bullock Report, very influential, prestigious and confidently wrong: the chapter on "The reading process" says: **"Let us, therefore, express our conclusion at the outset in plain terms: there is no one method, medium, approach, device or philosophy that holds the key to the process of learning to read."** So Schonell made phonics taboo as being "old-fashioned, deadly drill" and having got rid of what works, Bullock then *says there is no one way that works!*
How wrong can you be?
- 1978 Warnock Report: Special education (and Baroness Warnock spoke up last year)
- 1985 Straubenzee report, "Achievement in primary schools"
- 2006 Rose Report, Teach phonics
- 2007 *Letters and Sounds*, an ENcoding phonics programme - could not be worse.
- 2009 Identifying and teaching ... dyslexia
- 2011 (June) Bew Report ...testing, accountability
- 2011 (July) Overcoming barriers to literacy (Barker) and in progress a report on training to teach phonics.

One day with me would do more good than all these!

In Dec.1980 I heard that Norfolk LEA was “unwilling to diagnose (dyslexia) if no provision can be made.” Another teacher said that I was “on dangerous ground in saying children were dyslexic.” I had not - I had asked for them to be seen for diagnosis.

The head teacher retired, replaced by Mr Dodds, a younger, Progressive man, supporting M.A.C.O.S.: Man: A course of study, not teaching history, geography separately. Instead of teaching a class, my hours were cut to mornings, teaching just groups. In 1981 I had begun trying to spread my phonics.

A lecturer Charles Cripps from Cambridge University was scheduled to speak to teachers, in Norwich on 31 Jan.1981. Earlier, he telephoned to suggest that it was not worth my attending, that I should not go. I went anyway. There, he said that 75% of 8 year olds can read (a failure of 1 in 4), and 50% of 10 yr olds can spell “saucer” - So the teacher trainers KNEW of this massive failure! At the lunch break, he said that anybody who disagreed violently with what he said should spend the afternoon shopping! He is no longer at Cambridge but still lectures on spelling!

The simplest common-sense knowledge of statistics tells us that “average” is not a standard or criterion. It is merely a statistic, and average would be 100 whether the sample of 2,000 were all Einsteins or chimpanzees. It does not mean normal or possible. It is only by comparing excellence, or disaster, with “average” that the general public would see that with national achievement appalling (see above), 103.3 can still be appalling. With the old tests, we should be aiming at a national literacy level (average reading quotient)at 7+ of at least 120, or a SAT level or tests with 100 full

marks, as at least 95. And Mr Cripps must have known this.

I used to attend the public meetings of Norfolk Education Committee and hand leaflets to councillors as they entered the room. On one occasion a councillor suggested that I should put the leaflets at the place of each councillor so I did, but on entering the meeting later, I saw that they had vanished. At the end of the meeting the Director said my action had not been in accordance with protocol! – and I had done it at the suggestion of a councillor!

In 1981 the Eastern Daily Press told readers about my campaign, prefaced by a contribution from Geoff Neal, the Senior remedial advisory teacher, lauding Norfolk's "above national average" - a 7+ ARQ of 103.3 - ignoring a Suffolk school where Sue Lloyd's pupils reached 113! The councillors and Gillian Shephard accepted his confident statements lulled by the usual weasel phrase: "above national average". But national average was (and still is) **appalling**, unacceptable but accepted. I see that even then I was using the word "understanding", in my campaign.

In 1981 I took early retirement. Norfolk (or the school) was so pleased to get rid of me, they gave me two years' enhancement of pension. My husband later, a Chartered Accountant, after years of teaching accountancy successfully, about 1985 was required by Norwich City College to acquire a teaching certificate, so he and a colleague had to travel to King's Lynn (from E. Dereham) for a day a week, and at the end they both said it was a waste of time.

The British Legal Association invited me to speak at their March 1984 conference, and I spoke to a handful in a small room. In the *Solicitors' Journal* April 1984 my talk was described as a "curious interlude".

For all the 20 years I lived in Norfolk, Gillian Shephard was there, a councillor, chair of the county education committee, then M.P. and finally right at the top, Secretary of State for Education. For all that time I was giving her facts and figures but she steadily trusted the establishment. Once she wrote on an acknowledgement postcard, "You are always very specific." Indeed I was, but who bothers with facts when you have experts? She now sits in the House of Lords. In January 2011 she "introduced" Chris Husbands as Director of the Institute of Education, London.

But I do not tell lies. ***All I want is an end to this terrible scourge of needless failure in reading. It has been and is a major factor in the collapse of our culture and high government spending.***

Just one Norfolk man, Leslie Potter, a Labour councillor, supported me and raised the matter of literacy at a meeting of the county education committee. The others mocked his arithmetic and this appeared in the local paper but.... he was right. Stung by the adverse comment, that was the last time he tried to buck the system. The establishment wins, from its position, power, regardless of how many millions fail.

From 1987-1990 the shameful affair of Sussex history teachers Anthony Freeman and Chris McGovern rumbled on. They stood up for what they believed in, but the set-up in the end won and they both lost their jobs. As with me, they were left to fight their corner and the rest of the establishment did nothing to help. Something is badly wrong. In September 1989 Radio 4 ran a 4- part half-hour *Odds against*. One man said the Channel tunnel was a mistake, removing our island status. Another was against the Common Market (E.U.) My talk was to get rid of look-say and use phonics, and the title shows the attitude of the BBC.

By 1990 I was being swamped by parents asking me to teach their child to read, so in self-defence (having looked at what other books were on offer, mostly look-say, or not simple enough, and finding none in the U.K. teaching DEcoding phonics) I put together *Step by Step* and published it. That first edition sold at £2.50, since the purpose was (and still is) literacy, not profit. John Clare was the Education Editor of the Daily Telegraph from then to 2006 and in all that time he consistently recommended it as “the best”. It sold over 20,000 copies. Some now grandparents buy another new copy for their grand-children. But teachers do not read the Daily Telegraph.

In that same year 1990 Dr Martin Turner, speaking for educational psychologists of 10 LEAs, exposed the disaster of look-say. Croydon could have led the country, but instead they sacked him! This was a shameful display of ignorance and cowardice, elected councillors unwilling to challenge the establishment, and so it goes on. Here are a few quotations from his 1990 *Sponsored reading failure* booklet when the battle was between look-say and phonics:

- p.4 “The “layman”, especially the parent, is entitled to conclude that the major cause lies in the actual method of teaching reading and the books used in those methods ... responsible for the decline. That too much of these unproven and now probably failed methods are advocated by HMIs, by the education establishment, the political conditions of local government in which such havoc can be perpetrated without accountability, and the timidity of politicians in the face of “experts” need to be addressed.

- p.27 It should be apparent by now that an entire controlcentre of public education, that for reading, subsumed under

"language", has fallen prey to a corps de ballet of managers, impresarios, dispensers of favour : an unelected, unaccountable, uneducated, upwardly mobile cadre of ideologues.... Why is there no response to reasoned appeal?" *(and for 40 years I have found this brick-wall of power in Norfolk and Knowsley lacking interest in this disaster, no genuine professional curiosity that could expose massive professional failure and a simple, cheap way to fix it. But then, by now a vast remedial empire depends on the continued supply of failure. Knowsley was and is now the bottom LEA! M. McNee.)*

- p.32 The class teacher has been let down by everybody.... reception teachers must be the most important people in education.
- p.33 But actually good initial teaching of reading does entail the jettisoning of certain myths (reading readiness, linguistic development, use of books) and does require the adoption of methods which go with the grain of the language. The phonic emphasis in teaching of reading in childhood has within it a wisdom of which teachers of all persuasions may be quite unconscious.
- p.38 Elected public servants are in the unfortunate predicament of being accountable for what goes on in education without actually being responsible ... this attitude of deference to experts has had unwelcome consequences. Are there not, then, criteria by which lay politicians can evaluate the education policies for which they may be held responsible?
- p.41 Let agreement be sought (non-governmentally) that if you

really want children to learn to read, you do have to teach them.”

In 1987 Nick Seaton and friends set up the Campaign for Real Education.

Nov. 30 1992 I talked with Baroness Blatch, described in her 2009 obituary as a “steely Tory minister”, when she was Education Minister under Mrs. Thatcher, but she said “I agree with you, but what can I do when all here say the opposite?” Again, one person no matter how high-up in rank cannot defeat The Blob (This is the education establishment: the Dept for Education, teacher training in universities, LEAs, and Ofsted, and the politicians who blindly support them) . One just gets overwhelmed. So it has to be nationwide, at all levels, at the same time, a simple statement that 1 in 4 failing for decades is not accepted. So sack the lot.

1992, 1994 At this time Sir Peter Newsam was Director of the Institute of Education, London. He twice invited me to talk to the whole cohort, 200 students, and I now realise this was very courageous. After the second talk, the first question was, “How can we follow your advice when it runs counter to all we hear here?” Jeni Riley is still professor there.

In 2011 I wrote to the new Director, Chris Husbands, with a copy of the DVD and the table of Southmead results, but because government approves of what the Institute does, he chooses to support that rather than a few facts from a nobody (me). But if the London Institute chooses to see itself as the flagship of teacher training, then it has to accept the lion’s share of the blame for this massive 1-in-4 failure for half a century. Likewise, Liverpool JM. makes no challenge to government.

In 1994 Tim and I moved to the N.W. for family reasons. I chose Knowsley because it was then bottom of the league tables. My dream was to have Knowsley rise to the top and lead the country back to literacy. I did not then know that the M.P. was Eddie O'Hara, himself a former teacher trainer.

I visited Southmead school (Whiston) and talked to Mike Dalton, the head teacher, and agreed to teach "the two worst readers". Mr Dalton saw their improvement but they left that school. He then arranged for Gill Downey to teach my way for Y1, and she stayed with them for another year, Y2, and at year-end the 7+ ARQ (average reading quotient) was an **outstanding 119!** 70% of the children were on free meals, "poor"! It was even featured on the BBC TV *Just One Chance* Nov.1997. I have it on DVD if you wish to see it. You would think the LEA would latch on to this and proudly lead the whole country, but the opposite happened and continues this day. Why did Ms Downey STOP that kind of teaching (despite the head teacher) and still works for the LEA?

Why did the BBC not tell viewers that the common factor of Mrs J. Chew teaching an 8 yr old struggler in leafy Surrey and Ms Downey teaching a class in a poor area was that they both were teaching just my *Step by Step* - DEcoding phonics, cheap, effective? Why was I not included in the audience quizzed by Carol Vorderman? Another 30 seconds of airtime could have led the country back to literacy in 1997. Was this omission deliberate?

ARQ (average reading quotient) is based on the Bell curve with 100 mid-point like I.Q. and is far more informative on school achievement than the current SATs, where 100 is full marks and seems to be easily attained, but conceals excellence.

Sue Lloyd teaching in a Lowestoft First School, a working-class catchment area, improved the 7+ ARQ from Suffolk county average (98 to 103) from 102 in 1976 to her best-ever 113 in 1981, teaching i.t.a. Norfolk with its best-ever 103.3 swanked that Norfolk children were cleverer than the rest – but the national average was then and still is appalling – 1 in 4 failing.

Holland House, Edgware	7+ 140, now down to 135
Tunbridge Wells, i.t.a.	7+ 120 (3 years)
Southmead	7+ 119 (2 years)
“	(2-½ terms) 5+ 116

Study this and you can see that three years based on *Step by Step* would give a national average ARQ of a good 120, **20 points on any scale better** than we have had this last 50 years. It is now free at www.phonics4free.org.

In 1997 Melanie Phillips' book, *All must have prizes* was published and got quite a bit of attention, but the establishment, as usual, just waited it out.

About that time Baroness Cox was holding occasional meetings about education, in the House of Lords, and at one of these I was talking about a booklet I had written exposing the literacy mess, and that it had been refused by 40 publishers. Out of the blue, a voice behind me said, "I will rewrite it for you" and from then on Professor Alice Coleman (my age) has been my friend, and has re-written my book, adding endless research. *The Great Reading Disaster: Reclaiming our educational birthright* was published in November 2007 just after the horrible Rose Report of March 2007 - *Letters and Sounds*. This book, like Chris Woodhead's two books,

should be on the students' reading list, but is it?

Will Knowsley councillors still be willing to be beguiled by the LEA saying Knowsley is "above national average", this weasel phrase, now (2012) that Knowsley is the bottom LEA? Can the bottom be above national average, arithmetically? Throughout the land education is wrecked in reception class by lack of DEcoding phonics. It is futile and unfair for politicians to expect secondary teachers to put right the lack of literacy for 6 years, half our school life.

This is the worst scandal ever, a thousand times worse than the News of the World hacking, and it still goes on, still protected by the establishment, Ofsted, DfE, universities, LEAs. If a city is bombed you can SEE the destruction, and it is re-built in 10-20 years, but the harm done to infants for lack of good phonics is invisible, for life, and the victims try their best to conceal it. And philanthropists wanting to "help" try to divert attention to football etc,"activities and experience" rather than (in prisons for instance) providing a full, brisk, daily phonics programme of (say) 7 weeks.

Two years ago a 19 yr old man came to me, who had had 12 years of Knowsley's "special education". He could just blend t-e-n into "ten", and walked behind his mother, head down. Soon he was walking with head up, and then came on his own. He completed *Step by Step* in 2 months and could read (slowly).

The lost potential for half a century is a tragedy beyond our grasp. The wrong training, followed by hard-working, well-meaning teachers, goes on and on and became self-perpetuating. Today teachers still get the blame, and the guilty teacher-trainers are never challenged. It has crippled millions and still there is nowhere

to turn. The police, Press, NHS have an Independent Complaints Commission and there is something for carers but in education there is **nowhere to turn**. It is specifically excluded from the brief of the Ombudsman. And government still throws money at it! Another £3,000 per school = £60m is evidence that government does not know what to do. And teachers are now forbidden from putting adverse comments on school reports. Children leave school thinking the world owes them a living, “human rights” - “a wildly over-entitled social model” (well-chosen words by Max Hastings, Daily Mail).

When I came to Knowsley in 1994, the Director was Peter Wylie. Did he accept the supposed wisdom of Ann Tregenza who at that time was making her name with “real books”? She left, replaced by Janet Woods who was promoted to a regional job. Her boss, Steve Munby, wrote to me that he would support anything I did in schools here, so why was I never able to penetrate schools? He, too, was promoted to head the College of Leadership, Nottingham. He tells me that teaching reading has no part in the agenda on offer there.

Then Alison Green became the literacy adviser under Damian Green. I talked to them, and Ms Green visited me for an afternoon, but I failed to convince her of the need for change or the merits of phonics, Southmead success notwithstanding.

When Blair took over, education funding was at £30bn a year. The 2012 budget gives £91bn to education. A colossal £125 billion had been set aside for new school buildings. One here, Christ the King, cost £25m. Two rows of houses had to be demolished to accommodate it; but two years later it closed due to lack of support. What secondary schools need is a literate intake (at no cost), not these dead buildings like vast, rectangular shoe-boxes,

not a curve in sight. I talked to the deputy head of one near me and he understood what I said, but when it came to taking action without prior approval of the LEA, enthusiasm quailed.

So vast expenditure funding harmful teaching goes on and on year after year, and plays a big part in today's social, cultural and economic deficit.

The 2006 Rose Report did say "Teach phonics" and the 2007 *Letters and Sounds* cost us £2.46m. If I had been on the team that created it, I would have said, "We do not need this. *Step by step* is better and costs £5." Now I would say, "Use www.phonics4free.org." Government advertises *Letters and Sounds* as high quality, **systematic** phonics, but it has put the system of phonics through the shredder.

Phonics is made of 26 letters and 44 sounds. *Letters and Sounds* starts with 44 sounds, gives one spelling per sound – **ENcoding**, then "alternative spellings", and no rules until the END. The first spellings for long vowels, **ai ee igh oa oo**, a horrible jumble, are what woke me up to the two versions. The better one is **DEcoding** starting with 26 letters, and how they work, how they interact consistently to make new sounds.

Since received wisdom has failed us massively for half a century, we should DROP all the expensive "range of other strategies", graded readers, flash cards, "high frequency words", initial sight vocabulary, Reading Recovery, Catch Up, mix of methods, "suit the method to the child") and do the OPPOSITE - for free. Instead of decline, we would get the OPPOSITE – improvement, 20 points of potential nationwide waiting to be activated, released.

The opposite is DEcoding starting with 26 letters and teaching the whole class the rules, how letters interact together in a consistent way. This is based on common sense and needs no training. It contains an element of UNDERSTANDING which is a vital component, a **dimension** lacking in ENcoding. It is used with success in New Zealand, Hong Kong, Burma, Singapore, Venezuela... I understand government is currently (2012) busy creating yet another report on training and have issued a new spelling test! DEcoding phonics works for any age 3-adult, dyslexic or not, and needs no training. There is a new test: we NEED the OLD tests.

I did think even poor phonics would improve things, but ENcoding phonics is not teacher-friendly, because the teachers just teach; there is no UNDERSTANDING of what they are teaching. If teachers had been given a DEcoding programme, they would be saying, "Why did nobody tell us this?" Instead we see a TES headline, "Phonics knocked off its perch." I think this is due both to the poor *Letters and Sounds* and also the failure to get rid of the other "range of strategies" so that phonics has itself become just another strategy now.

Keeping these strategies is part of the idea that because "All children are different", they can expect to be taught different ways, and this is not so. There is one alphabet, and one way to teach all children, of any age, adults and dyslexics.. Getting rid of the "range of other strategies" means discarding decades of teacher training and later teacher "development" (brainwashing), Baker days, T.D.A. the whole bundle of received wisdom supported by a massive, powerful establishment.

Chris Woodhead, Chief Inspector of Ofsted 1994-2000, wrote in

Class war p.165, 2002, "**So: standards will rise when The Blob is finally wrestled to the ground**" ...and p.173: "If the DfES were to be slimmed down radically and LEAs in their present form **abolished**, we would not only save billions of pounds of tax-money..." and that we should "phase out all university teacher training". In 2009 in his "A desolation of learning", he wrote of "a heavily policed thought world". It is also a closed world.

Last year 2011 both the director of my LEA Knowsley and the DfE have said they will not respond to any more emails on the subject of literacy. My M.P., Shaun Woodward, consulted both of them and says he is "content" and "The matter is now closed" (with a failure of 1 in 4??) All I ask is **one hour** of his time. The DfE seems to see itself as answering questions, one- way traffic only, and again **there is no genuine professional curiosity anywhere** as to the long-running failure, 1 in 4 and Knowsley the bottom LEA. Power is used to stifle my efforts, since they cannot sack me.

In 1995, to see what was being taught, I took a City & Guilds course and the tutor Marj Sommerfield realised I could help. She asked if I would take a day of the next session. I agreed but heard no more. It seems her superior turned it down. More recently a lecturer at Liverpool John Moores university asked me the same, and I agreed, but again ... end of story. M. Gove and N. Gibb declare their passion for better education, but then hand over POWER (and tax-money) to the same Blob.

At the 2011 conference of the Reading Reform Foundation (which I started in 1989) Nick Gibb, the keynote speaker, began by thanking "people like Ruth Miskin, Jennifer Chew, Sue Lloyd, Debbie Hepplewhite and others" that he had "worked with over the last five years." (All I need is just one hour of his time.) Then he said,

“We already know how to tackle reading failure.” That statement should be writ across the sky in flaming letters. If they really did, they would know how to get it right in the first place! He ended by saying schools would get another £3,000 each for “resources” We are in a severe financial crisis and still government hands out more needless tax-money. He trusts four ladies, three of whom have their ENcoding phonics published and the fourth was on the team creating *Letters and Sounds*.

Today’s professionals have the power and are in a position of control, but politicians will not spend ONE HOUR to UNDERSTAND a very simple matter! Since the DfE will not change, the only way is to close it down, and massively to cut LEA funding, and save at least **£50bn a year**. That would give common sense a chance, and improvement. Left to themselves, teachers still DO have common sense.

The easy path for politicians seems to be to trust the experts. In a perfect world, that should be fine, but not with 1 in 4 failing. I have written to the current mayor of Knowsley, Christine O’Hare, and I ended by asking, “Whose side are you on?” I have not yet had a reply. Whose side is your mayor on?

I have sent a DVD of the Nov.1997 BBC TV programme *Just One Chance* to over 100 people with influence but none so far has exposed the damage of the DfE and LEAs. Chris Woodhead truly wrote in *Class war* p.102: “*Nothing and nobody.. could dent the self-confidence and complacency of the educational establishment.*” HMI should have blown the whistle and they did not.. In 2009 (“A desolation of learning”) he wrote that education is “a heavily policed thought world”. He urges a return to “the traditional concept of education.”

I could list the scores of people in key positions, politicians, journalists, professors, who have a bit or a lot of clout. Last June I tried John Humphrys; six months later he replied saying how busy he is! And no mention of reading failure, **the biggest scandal ever!** So much for Mastermind! Either they consult the establishment Blob and trust them, or they feel that all the experts can't be wrong, and common sense just fades away. But with such a level of failure, **the experts MUST BE WRONG.**

M. Gove is officially top man. In 2009 he acknowledged that "Tom Burkard has done more than anyone living in the fight against illiteracy in this country" so clearly Dr Burkard has access to M. Gove, and so I expect M. Gove will believe it when Tom says, "In truth, at least 20% of all children will have considerable trouble learning to read no matter what method is used." Tom is a Research fellow for the Centre for Policy Studies. I taught Tom's 6-year-old son in 1990, and I believe only the blind, stone-deaf, severe dyslexics, severe Down's etc. should fail - 1% or 2%, with a corresponding drop in government funding of, say, £50bn a year. But I cannot reach M. Gove. I try to email him and my email is deflected to the DfE, who then have control. Does Mr Gove not realise that his first need is input from groups like the Campaign for Real Education, and myself? He must free not just schools but himself and Mr Gibb!

Doctors take the Hippocratic oath: "First do no harm". Untold, uncountable harm has been done to millions for life by many thousands of hard-working, well-meaning teachers under the thumb of the establishment DfE, LEAs, universities, anything official). Evidently, no matter how eminent (such as head of Ofsted), it seems just one person cannot defeat this monster.

When the appointment of Sir Michael Wilshaw was announced in October 2011, I wrote to him. Ofsted replied that they would withhold it until January 1st when he took up his appointment. I have now had a letter 15th February and again 23rd from the Strategy Director of Ofsted, saying "The matter is now closed." I wonder what his job description is! So the "elders of the tribe", DfE, LEAs, Ofsted, Universities and my M.P. Shaun Woodward all say the matter is closed - and 1 in 4 can't read! They are responsible but, evidently, not accountable.

I asked to talk to a primary inspector, but this was just not "appropriate". How can inspectors of primary schools usefully "inspect" if they themselves do not understand the need for DEcoding phonics?

I know Ministers and such get more letters than they can read, but are important letters stopped from reaching him? Should Mr. Gove and Sir Michael take with them their own staff, to allow important letters to get through to the top?

*So we need hundreds of teachers, students, dyslexics, thousands of parents, masses of journalists, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, M.P.s, taxpayers, to **unite in saying that 1 in 4 failing in a basic ability (for 50 years) is needless and unacceptable, and throw out today's powerful establishment, The Blob. Bring in common sense for free, bring in literacy for free via www.phonics4free.org***

Since 1931 (Hadow) education has been suffocated by a powerful empire of bogus, harmful professionals. Unless Michael Gove and his team "finally wrestle to the ground" The Blob, the same officials will control the same failure - 1 in 4 for 50 years and more.

Will government withdraw the Hadow 1931 and Bullock 1974 reports?

I do not think Sir Michael Wilshaw is aware of this. How can we reach him? This is The Blob that Sir Chris Woodhead wants to “finally wrestle to the ground”. We must hope, therefore, that teachers, taxpayers, parents, prison officers, journalists will unite to let common sense prevail over this fortress of powerful, well-funded ignorance.

Poor education is costing us over £50bn a year. Please read Sir Chris's *Class war* 2002, he said it ten years ago and nobody took any notice. I am a nobody but he was a Chief Inspector!

Phonics for Billy and Betty

Keep it simple. Trust your common sense.

by Mona McNee

See www.phonics4free.org

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Phonics for Billy and Betty

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Keep it simple. Trust your common sense.

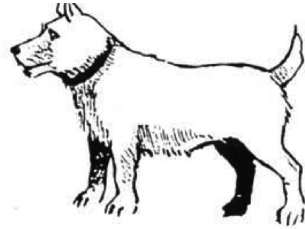
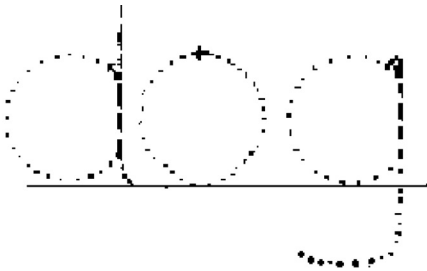
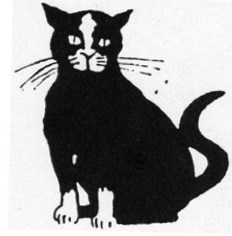
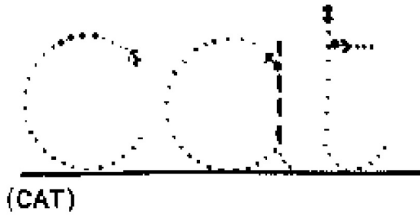
For infants, when they can talk (“Milk, Mummy?”) and hold a pencil, they are ready.

Most children are ready by their 4th birthday if not before. First we teach 26 letters. First teach **cat, dog**. Teach letters in words, to establish the left- right direction for blending. These 6 letters contain five that begin with the counter-clockwise movement of a “c” and this gets the “d” firmly established, and thus prevents b/d confusion (for dyslexics).

What to teach...

This is a programme of DEcoding based on 26 letters with rules. It is the opposite of ENcoding based on 44 sounds and now government policy (Letters and Sounds).

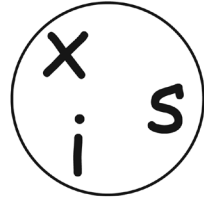
This is a skeleton outline of a DEcoding phonics programme, with examples of the games, worksheets etc. It needs no training, no funding, just a willingness to drop the “range of other strategies” that evidently have not worked. Practice is kept to single words or short phrases until the pupil can read slowly and (for strugglers) has finally stopped guessing. I leave it to the parent/teacher to provide games etc. as you go along, as from **www.phonics4free.org**



What not to do is as important as **what to do**. Books are the end-game. We can read to children, but we start their learning with letters>words>books. I do not use graded readers, flash cards, sight words. I start from the smallest and build from that, from a foundation. Learning high-frequency words is a throw-back to look-say. Starting with letters may seem slower to start, but in the end is safer. And both teacher and taught **understand** how letters work, the logic of phonics. This goes “with the grain of the language”. In other words, forget all that has been taken for granted as “normal” in teaching reading this last 50 years - guessing, graded readers, “reading books”, onset-and-rime, flash cards, “real books”, (and caused such failure) and do the opposite!

Beginning this way establishes confidence in the letters, self-confidence, “reading” seen as something enjoyable and interesting. The sessions can be as long or short as the learner wishes. A few minutes every day is better than a long time once a week.

SIX



(r, n, m: these letters all start with the same action, down-up.)

run



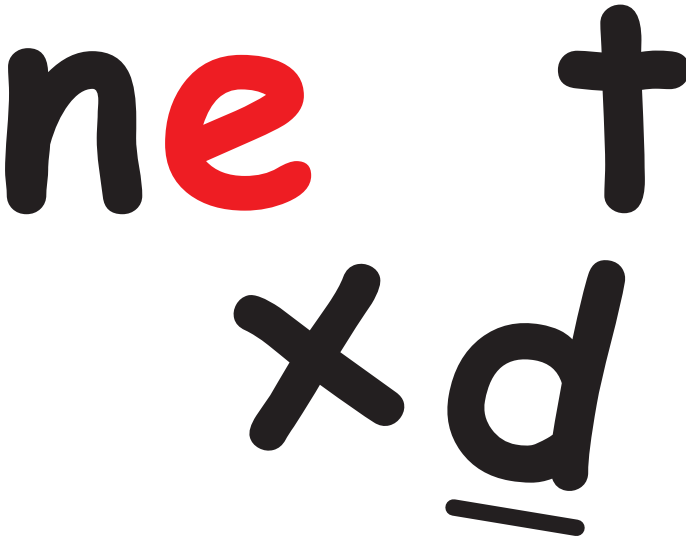
men



Jug



l k h b all start tall with a down-stroke.



The alphabet has 26 letters. There are 19 consonants, 5 main vowels, and w,y which are both consonant and vowel. Make small cards a bit bigger than a postage stamp, one for each letter. Write one letter on each, consonants in black, vowels in red and y,w in black and red. bdh are tall; only d “goes up” tall. For f,t they start just above the line, so that the cross-bar is exactly on the top guide-line.

y

First we learn the consonant y, at the beginning of a syllable. So far the words have short vowels, but (less common) vowels can also be "long", say their name, as in:

pastry me I dial no Tesco mutual

yo-yo yes

There are no 3-letter words with a q. It starts like "c" with the anti-clockwise movement. But there should now be lots of practice playing about with letters and short vowels. You can make a bingo with 16 words. You can make a noughts & crosses type OXO box.

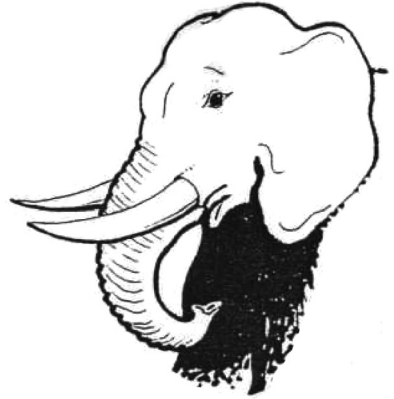
hat

c	h	n
f	a	t
r	m	p

Even with 3 letters there are scores of words.

Then move on to 4-letter words like **jump hand left**, with the games: bingo, s/ladders, Pairs, and written words.

Draw a line from the word to its picture, then write the word.



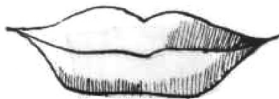
lips

frog

tusk

wing

club



Lesson 3 is just longer **words**, for practice in sounding out:
twist picnic blend hospital Betsy copy drink
family hundred pyramid penguin umbrella.

If there is a consonant sound twice, you only say it once:
mall bell pill doll pull; cliff cuff; pack neck pick rock duck



This is the first third of learning to read: short vowels, 26 letters, handwriting and blending.

Lesson 4

There are long and short vowels.

Vowels can say their name long, as in:-

bacon he I pilot no Ohio usual.

Make the games; download them from **www.phonics4free.org**

The rest of the programme is learning how letters work together, in a consistent way, to give new spellings.

Lesson 5

oo as in moon, book

ee as in meet, tree

sh as in:- ship push

th as in think, this, the. Th can be voiced as in the, them, these. Touch the throat and feel the tremble, vibration; or unvoiced as in path, think.

ch sounds like a sneeze: rich much duchess.

It often follows a t: catch fetch ditch Scotch Dutch.

Pupils need to learn only two “sight words”: **to, the** where the pronunciation does not quite match the letters. At the end of the programme pupils then take irregular words in their stride.

“ng” is very common as in “hoping” but also in song, rung, hang and so on. The sound comes from the top of the nose.

Lesson 6

Any vowels or vowel groups change the sound if followed (modified) by r. AR as in car, OR as in fork.

ER IR UR all give the same sound, but -er is the most common.

Hammer faster hotter better firm burn

Lesson 7

You can also make a vowel “long” by adding an e after, or next-but-one after. This is often called “magic e”.

A : map, but Mae make gate spade

E : red but these complete concrete Crete

I : tie, rip but ripe time wine side

O : toe rob but robe, cone, rose impose

U : cue tub but tube, cube, flute, immune.

Doubling

The vowel before a double consonant is short. This is found in comparative and superlative words.

See rip ripper but ripe riper

hop hopper hopping, but hope, hoping.

In hoping you have the VCV pattern (vowel consonant vowel), as in magic e, a very common example of this.

Lesson 8 - le

The ending -le works the same as “magic e”. “-le can jump back over one consonant to make the vowel long, but if there are 2 consonants before -le, the first vowel is short:

table Keble rifle noble bugle

But: rattle pebble little bottle struggle

twinkle uncle

Lesson 9 i/y -ly. Adverb is adjective + -ly.

English words do not end in q u v j or i. So... at, the end of a word, “Change the y to i and add...”

This applies both to long and short i/y and to any part of speech, noun, verb etc.

See: **cry cried berry berries.**

The vowel y can be long or short: my happy

It also works the same after the other 4 vowels:

pay paid they their (i) boy boil Guy guide

“said” seems a strange spelling, but the spelling is regular. It is the pronunciation that is different: pay paid.

Lesson 10 ea

This digraph has two common sounds, as in cream and head, Try ēē. If that doesn't give a real word, try ě.

In just 3 words ea says "ay": steak break great,
but followed by r the sound changes as in:

bear pear wear tear (4 words)

earn learn early pearl yearn hearse etc.

and in 2 words says AR: heart hearth

Lesson 11 ou/ow au.aw

W, like y, is both vowel and consonant, a vowel at the end of a syllable and consonant at the beginning. Ow aw can be anywhere but ou au cannot be at the end of English words.

(exceptions: you, thou)

So:

ou: cloud but cow pound shower trousers

ow: throw snow yellow borrow.

au: autumn Paul gaunt laundry because August automatic ...

aw: awful awkward paw outlaw flaw straw

Lesson 12 Soft c,g

When followed by e i or y, c and g say the sound in their name (s,j). Exceptions: get give.

ce: centre face success necessary princess

ci: city cite accident scissors face dance

cy: Nancy cycle cylinder

In contrast note: cat kettle kitten cot cut Kyle

ge: page bandage agent village sponge

gi: Magic tragic giant ginger digital

gy: biology Egypt gymnastics energy

But: Jack joke jump just.

Lesson 13 gh

Words with this came from Scandinavia, and the natives here found their sound difficult, so kept the spelling and gave various sounds. In many words the “gh” has Gone Home (silent); igh says long i after a consonant. “night” has 3 sounds, 5 letters. But the “igh” after a vowel says A: weigh, straight.

“ough” has 6 sounds, as in cough, trough (off)
 enough rough tough (uff)
 plough bough (ow)
 through (oo)
 dough although (oh)
 thorough (u as in cup).

Lesson 14 (Various) Wa as in wax is rare.

WA and QUA sound like wo and quo:

wash wasp swamp want swan swallow

quarrel quality squash quantity

and modified by a following r:

warm warning swarm reward backwards quart quartz

Question words begin with wh:

who which when where what why whence

whither which

AL often sounds like aw: all ball call small salt alder walk talk halt
bald scald also always almost

WOR sounds like wer: word world worm work worth worse worst

Words from French: the "ine" ending sounds like een:

machine, marine, magazine.

-que sounds like k: cheque unique antique

-gue ends in the g sound: catalogue league vague vogue

rogue

Words of Greek origin: ph sounds as f: elephant dolphin

telephone phonics

ch sounds as k: school echo Christmas

Some letters are silent: k in kn: know knee knock

Silent g: gnash sign (but signal) gnome

W in wr: wrong wrist wrap write

At the end, b is silent in -mb: thumb climb dumb

N is silent in hymn autumn solemn column but is sounded if in a longer adjective: hymnal columnar.

Silent h: hour honest honour ghost

Lesson 15 -tion

-ti can say sh: patient essential inertia

on can say un: onion London done front

Put them together as an ending -tion and it says -shun: action attention invention addition inspection.

If the word ends in a-tion, the a is long:

station administration population duration sensation.

The ending -ture sounds like cher: future picture puncture

When the root word ends in t, the ending is -ssion:
omit omission permit permission.

If the root word ends in -ess the ending is -ession:
progress progression express expression.

ie says long I (pie, cried) but can say EE: field grief piece.

ei says ee in: ceiling receive deceit receipt
but appears also in:
foreign leisure and other irregular words.

Many English words start with be- re- or de. This is a short syllable, and in "begin" the emphasis is on the second syllable.
Try also: behind because belong become.,
re: remind refresh rely result
de: defy defend desire deny declare

How to teach...

The teaching is the same for individuals or a class, dyslexic or not, any age. The pupils will be taught as a whole class, no groups. The learning is based on playing about with letters. The pupils will have (hopefully) individual desks, set in rows and will all face the blackboard (whiteboard). For each lesson they will start with a worksheet, pencil, paper and eraser. There will be no talking. Questions will be encouraged for anything the pupils do not understand.

Asking a question is a sign of intelligence, not ignorance!
The hour will begin with a 2-minute recap of the previous subject-matter.

The new learning will be explained with a brief Q&A. The children or adults will then complete the worksheet. This time gives the teacher time to check on individuals and perhaps spend more time with slower learners. As individuals complete

the worksheet, they can be given an "Is it?" booklet to work with until a neighbour is ready to play a game for two (s/ladders, pairs). The pupil first uses the "Is it?" book to read, from front to back, then in reverse to spell, from back to front.

About once a week the class will play bingo, and each child will have a different card. The teacher does have to make 30 different cards, but if plasticised they last for ever, and thereafter the lesson preparation is almost nil. Each pupil will have 16 blank cover-up cards to use for any bingo game.

The atmosphere must be positive. Avoid saying (negatively), "That's wrong" but do not let mistakes pass. Say, "You need one more letter" or "Sound it out again". Find something to praise.

The learning will take place in class, no homework. The teacher is spared the time-consuming Running Reading Record.

Large-print ungraded storybooks like Trog, or the Shorty books, can be introduced after Lesson 13, after the class has learned soft c,g .

All children will progress regardless of home background.

At the end of any lesson, all children will have the basics to proceed to the next lesson. The fast learners will have had more practice.

The final third is practice practice for fluency - reading... reading!

Lack of DEcoding phonics, and the use of look-say has given us a failure rate of 1 in 4 for 50 years. The flawed teaching is still supported by DfT, LEAs, Ofsted and my M.P.!

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Notes.

