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96 Chermside Road
Ipswich Q. 4305.
5th December 2001.

Submission 182.1
EoB Inquiry

Ms. T. Gambaro M.P.
Federal Member for Petrie,
P.O. Box 964
Redcliffe Q. 4020.

Dear Ms. Gambaro,

Firstly - my congratulations on re-election. Not the least of my many concerns about the return of the Liberal government was the result of the inquiry into the failure of boys in the education system. For many reasons, I did not write a submission to your inquiry but I sat through the whole day of the public hearing in Brisbane. It heartened me to hear your Chairman try to get past the claims of homophobia and, maybe, even socio-economic factors. As an ex-teacher who successfully taught literacy and numeracy to children in their second year of primary school, I was most concerned that not one of the people you interviewed spoke of any of the practicalities of teaching - nor did anyone speak of the brain of the learner - especially that of the male.

There is a piece of educational history that is being, inexcusably, kept hidden. In the 1920s reading researchers discovered that the eye of an adult, accomplished reader took in groups of words in each scan. Forgetting - or, rather, ignoring - the years of practice needed to hone the skill, it was foolishly decided to train children to read by using the technique they would use as an adult. Phrase-reading was adopted, based on recognition of whole words with no training in phonics and word-building. (see Encl. 1.) This task is the equivalent of asking a child beginning to learn music to learn through the playing of whole pieces with no knowledge of notes and scales. Within a decade, the results caused great concern and Rudolf Flesch wrote "Why Johnny Can't Read." Note the gender in the title! It was the boys who were failing with the use of this method. Some time after this fiasco which persisted for a decade, the four excellent Preparatory Phonic readers

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were prepared for use in Queensland schools. Public outcry forced the change. Excellent results from both boys and girls were obtained. The two-year period they covered served as an apprenticeship for real reading which began in the third year. These books were used until 1960 with great success.

Incredibly, by the mid 1950s, the Australian Council for Educational Research published a paper scorning the Prep. readers and praising the Happy Venture readers about Dick and Dora. These were brought to Queensland from England by Professor Fred Schonell who just happened to be co-author of the series. I have a copy of that paper and, amongst other advantages that were to accrue to the child, it was promised there would be no failures. The series was based on the method of presenting whole words and reading whole sentences and texts. Once again phonics and word-building were scorned.

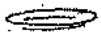
The failures were many, but this time, they were attributed, not to the method and the materials used, but to "dyslexia". In other words, the fault lay within the child and most of the failures were boys. Once again, "Johnny" couldn't read. The system persisted even though schools adopted different reading schemes and costs escalated - smaller classes, remedial teachers and the necessity for parents to help at school as well as at home. The phonic readers were never sent home - no homework for Years One and Two. Queensland has purchased programs from other states - E.L.I. (Early Literacy Inservice Course) from Victoria, First Steps from Western Australia and, from New Zealand the current Reading Recovery. None of these teaches phonics in a logical sequential, incremental way. Reading is learned through quantity rather than quality. Our boys are still failing and will continue to do so. The child who cannot de-code words automatically cannot concentrate on the message the words are conveying and so is at a disadvantage in almost every subject throughout his whole educational life.

From birth, boys are disadvantaged in the areas of sensory perception; especially in sight and hearing. Do you remember someone telling you at the hearing that "boys don't hear as well as girls"? That is not strictly true. A boy's hearing is as acute as a girl's but boys do not process the auditory

stimuli as well. From birth, boys are more likely to be colour-blind, autistic (overwhelmed by sensory stimuli), to have language-processing and/or speech problems. The list goes on – all problems concerned with processing sensory stimuli. Boys prefer, by natural inclination to mono-track (ie to look OR to listen) Girls can multi-track more easily. Unfortunately for boys, the skill of reading demands the integration of sight and sound and, as well, the brain must access the area for language and must develop a new, de-coding area. This last was emphasized recently by Oxford Professor Susan Greenfield in her six-part BBC series on the brain. Reading is the most complex skill a child will ever learn because it is wholly abstract. Groups of abstract symbols (letters) must be translated into words which are also abstracts. In teaching basic number, the good teacher proceeds from the concrete to the abstract. Five matchboxes etc are represented by the numeral 5. There is no concrete crutch to help the child read groups of letters as words. The use of pictures for words should never be encouraged for reasons I won't explain here, except to say that it encourages right hemisphere activity and reading resides in the left hemisphere. The female has a richer, thicker band of nerves connecting both hemisphere and can more readily collate the clues to reading occasionally provided by modern methods. Reading is simply not being taught - it's picked up as the child "reads". The bottom line is that boys need to know how words work and the average boy desperately needs the slow, steady instruction that a good phonics program provides – at – bat - cat - fat - hat etc. Prof. David Suzuki and others assure us that the only way the brain can cope with the complexity of the sensory input from the world is by grouping and classifying. The teaching of phonics from Day One teaches reading to the brain through grouping words according to sight and sound.

The average child learning music must first practise five-finger and, later, two-hand exercises. S/he is not first taught pieces with sharps or flats but learns first the key of C. The teaching of phonics follows this "start small" philosophy.

The child who is asked to read "real stories" because phonic texts are considered to be stilted, meets auditory contradictions such as 'blow down' 'come home' 'good food' where the letters look alike but represent different sounds – or they meet words which sound the same but look different (need, read). The teaching of phonics parallels the vital "five-finger exercises" of reading – and it starts reading in "the key of C" with as few confusions as possible. Thus, the child began An  is on a  .

An  is on a  .

An  is <u>in</u> a  . Thus from the very first text, the brain is trained to attend only to the letters – not to remember the words or to guess from picture clues. Todays children have been known to boast, when taking home their first books, "I can read it with my eyes shut." Out of the mouths of babes indeed.

There is much more to the problem than I can explain here. I have almost completed a book discussing all the factors contributing to failure. For instance, do you know that any child may be disadvantaged by being seated in trendy groups, side-on to the board? Its all to do with the intricate "wiring" of the eyes and ears to the brain. (see Encl. 2) as well as ignoring the child's dominant eye and dominant ear.

Most of the people you interviewed in Brisbane spoke of socio-economic factors. Money doesn't teach a child to read – methods and materials do. The parents may be poor and even ignorant but any child of average intelligence should be taught at school, by the teacher. A man recently interviewed

on ABC radio spoke of his years from age three to seven in a Japanese P.O.W. camp. You can't get lower 'socio-economic' status than that! He said "My Mother (a nurse) taught me to read and to write in the sand."

Prof. Greenfield devoted an entire episode of her series to sight. We do not simply open our infant eys and SEE We build our visual system in increments. Once again, in our environment we build understanding of seeing concrete or real things. The child, faced with the task of learning to read is forced to operate in a confusingly abstract world — groups of shapes with arbitary meaning; be it '576' or 'platypus' — all should read it to derive the exact meaning. So the child, asked to commit to memory lists of ~~words~~ discrete words such as come, from, yes, red, here, she, we etc is as much at a disadvantage as you would be if asked to 'bark' those same words when shown

мрн, откáз, Да, Красная, Здесь, онá, Мы.

Some of the letters are familiar but you have no idea of their sound-value because you haven't been taught the alphabet and how words are constructed. No help is given to build this new visual/auditory system in the brain in the abstract. It's "Read first and learn later. Your parents will have to do a lot at home. (less playtime for Johnny) The OP results prove that the top boys can perform every bit as well as the girls but from OP2 down, the boys seem to be disadvantaged. If taught properly our boys should do better and statistics relating to the Scholarship examination as well as Junior and Senior pre 1970 would show this was the case, I am sure.

Every truth psychology teaches about learning in general makes a mockery of modern methods — especially for boys.

Yours faithfully

Elizabeth Clarke.

encl.

Encl. 1.

If we consider the child learning to speak - it opening up a new area in the brain for abstract learning — the child makes sounds, progresses to words - joins nouns + verbs to form first simple sentences and adds vital "connecting" words (the most abstract of all) last of all - it a, the, them, when, where etc etc. Should this we follow the child's preferred pattern in order to teach her even more complex skill of reading? The brain desperately needs to isolate sounds - build words and read simple texts before embarking on stories which present all phonic elements at once.

Encl. 1

OUTSTANDING FEATURES OF THE SERIES.

1. **Reading in phrases.** The principal aim of this series of Readers is to train the child to visualise and read groups of words in phrases, for it is generally admitted that the unit of reading should be the phrase and not the word.

2. **Marked phrases.** At the beginning of each story phrases are separated by short lines. After a little practice, the child will naturally read the phrases, and thus readily grasp the meaning of the passage. By this device, much toilsome "pattern" reading by the teacher is avoided. Throughout the text great care has been taken to write the sentences in simple phrases appropriate to the age of the pupil.

3. **Story Readers.** The books are essentially story readers, and not exercises on words. With the exception of Book I. the stories throughout are usually based on standard stories of merit. The text has been most carefully graded.

4. **Abundance of reading matter.** The type throughout the series is bold and clear, but every inch of available space has been utilised so as to provide an abundance of reading matter in each book.

5. **Illustrations specially drawn for children.** All the illustrations have been specially drawn for children by John Macfarlane. Each picture is described by a short phrase taken from the appropriate passage in the text, and, where possible, unusual words have been included in these phrases, in order that they can be learned in their proper setting before the actual reading lesson takes place.

6. **The illustrations provide an epitome of each story**, and will be found of immense value for "talks" both before and after the reading lesson.

7. **Illustrations separated from the text.** In order that the child's attention shall not be distracted from the printed page, the illustrations have been placed on a separate page at the beginning of each story.

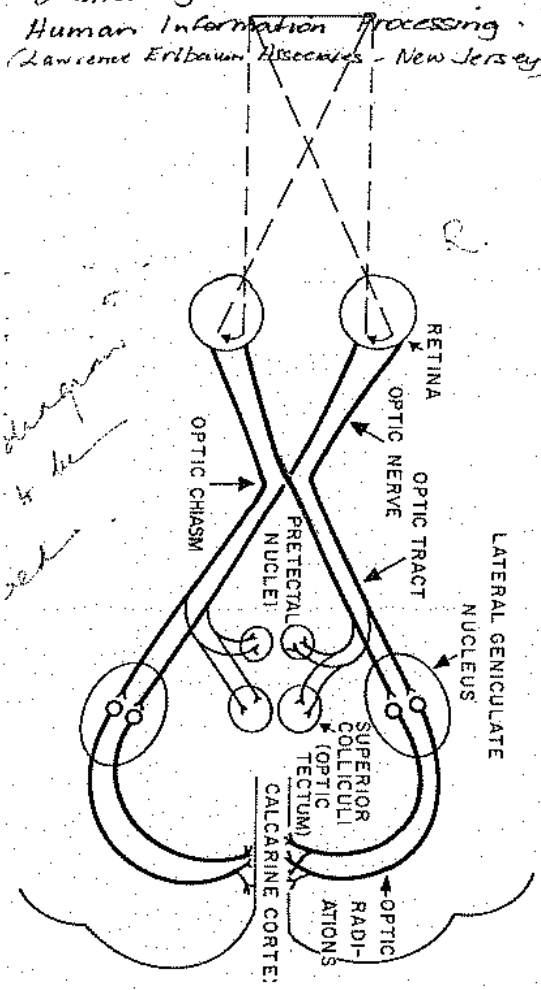
8. **There are no rhymes and jingles**, for such matter is quickly learned by heart and affords little test of reading ability.

9. **The numbering of the pages is bold and clear.**

BOOK II.

This reading book contains twelve stories (some in two parts), each of which is illustrated by pictures simply drawn in bright artistic colours in which children delight. The phrases describing the pictures are facsimiles of those used in the text. A preliminary chat about the pictures will give the key to the reading lesson, and enable the child to learn certain more difficult words.

Encl. 2. Source:
Handbook of Learning and Cognitive Processes. 1978.
Edited by W.K. ESTES. Vol. 5.
Human Information Processing.
(Lawrence Erlbaum Associates - New Jersey)



The "wiring" of the eyes – direct (frontal) vision of the right eye is connected to the left hemisphere. It is vital that the child receives reading stimuli to this hemisphere. Every child should sit front-on to the board to facilitate this.
The ears are "wired" so that stimuli from the right ear go to the left hemisphere and v. versa. Seating is important, especially for boys

discovered in the brain, concepts discussed above receive additional suppo[illegible]t is widely accepted that the right hemisphere is more efficient for wholistic and spatial processing (Levy, 1974), while the left hemisphere is specialized for linguistic or analytic processing. In agreement with this view, reaction times on name-match trials are faster if visual letters are presented to the left hemisphere (right visual field) than if presented to the right hemisphere. The reverse holds

true for physical-match trials (Cohen, 1972; Geffen, Bradshaw, & Nettleton, 1972).

Similarly, processing speeds and accuracy are generally greater for linguistic material if presented to the right ear (predominant connection to left hemisphere) in a dichotic-listening task, while efficiency is better on the left ear for stimuli requiring no phonetic analysis (Kimura, 1967). Using evoked potential methods, Wood (1975) showed that there was a difference between left and right hemisphere sites when subjects classified stimuli along a linguistic dimension (place of articulation), while no such differences were found for these same stimuli