

Submission 194
EoB Inquiry

Committee Secretariat,
Standing Committee on Employment, Education &
Workplace Relations,
Parliament House,
CANBERRA. 2600.

Dear Sir/Madam,

Reference: PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY - EDUCATION OF BOYS

Please find attached a submission regarding the Federal Government's
Inquiry into the Education of Boys.

With thanks,

Yours Sincerely,



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SUBMISSION re THE EDUCATION OF BOYS

Our children enter school life expecting to learn how to "read and write".

This goal is held for them by their parents, grandparents, siblings, neighbours and society generally, as well as the teacher who receives him/her into the class.

Our children **enter** Kindergarten highly motivated to learn to read and with every expectation of being able to do so.

Yet an ever increasing number of children are experiencing failure from the very outset of their formal school life, with some being caught up in a cycle of failure even before they have left the infant school, despite additional help and specialist teaching.

The struggling reader ponders the reason for his/her failure, which only hastens his/her dive into self condemnation (there must be something wrong with me) and to avoid the pain of failure, often begins to engage in unacceptable, diversionary behaviour, which ultimately exposes ALL the children in the class to reduced instruction/learning time.

The spectrum of failure ranges from those who will finish their time in the school system as 'non-readers', to those who will finish their time in the school system underachieving, having lost the 'cutting edge' to the use of their talent.

The substance of this submission is simple and is meant to encourage the committee members to look at the very basic elements relevant to the education of children as well as the intellectual, psychological, environmental etc issues, since the strength of anything depends on its foundation.

While the contents of the submission affect all children, they have specific application concerning the education of boys who are more vulnerable to failure at the age when the reading and writing skills are being established.

FLAWED FOUNDATION

I submit that the strategies/methods currently being used in the initial stages to teach the skills relevant to the reading (decoding) and the writing (encoding) of words need to be refined as they have a common, basic, flaw which makes it unnecessarily difficult for children to learn to read and write.

THE FLAW

The fundamental flaw, the cause of great confusion, distress and failure is the use of the alphabetical names for the letter symbols .

THE SOLUTION

IT COSTS NO MONEY!!

BAN THE USE OF THE LETTER NAMES IN PRE-SCHOOLS AND FOR THE FIRST THREE YEARS OF FORMAL SCHOOLING.

TOO SIMPLE??

TO EXPLAIN

ALPHABETICAL LETTER NAMES

Most children, on entering Kindergarten, "know the alphabet", thanks to Sesame Street, pre-school experience, parents, grandparents, siblings etc.

They have repeatedly heard and recited the alphabet and so they are very familiar with the **NAMES** of the letters to the point where they can **AUTOMATICALLY PRODUCE** the letter names.

The letter names are easy to say as they are either long vowel sounds (ay, ee), syllables (dee, em) or whole words (sea, tea, Jay).

Every committee member will be able to recite the alphabet with great speed.

But the reading and writing of words is the DECODING AND ENCODING OF GROUPS OF SPEECH SOUND and since the alphabetical names of the letters ARE NOT SPEECH SOUNDS, THEY ARE NOT USED TO TEACH READING AND WRITING.

SPEECH SOUNDS OF THE LETTERS

The **SINGLE SPEECH SOUNDS** for the letters are not at all familiar to the child, since his/her experience with the use of language has, so far, been mainly confined to the discrimination of the **SOUND OF DIFFERENT WORDS** - groups of single speech sounds - **RATHER THAN SINGLE SPEECH SOUNDS.**

PRODUCING THE SINGLE SPEECH SOUND FOR THE LETTER SYMBOLS IS VERY DIFFICULT because it is not practiced; but it is vitally necessary to the beginner reader (as it is for all levels of reading) and much time and effort is spent teaching these speech sound/letter symbol relationships (a-apple, b-bird etc).

The education system uses the names of the letter symbols (alphabetical) and teaches the speech sounds of the letter symbols (phonetical) as well.

It has been assumed that the beginner reader is able to achieve the conversion of the **WELL-KNOWN ALPHABETICAL NAME** for the letter symbol to the **VERY UNFAMILIAR SPEECH SOUND** for the letter symbol without much

trouble; but I submit that it is extremely difficult for many beginner readers, perceived as impossible by some and only for the very few does it present no problem.

To illustrate this difficulty, let the committee members recite the alphabet, as quickly as possible, USING THE SINGLE SPEECH SOUNDS of the alphabet (a, b, c, d, e, f, g) keeping in mind each committee member's success and experience with the reading and writing of words and his/her experienced use of the spoken language.

This exercise is best attempted as a group, as it seems to diminish the sense of anxiety and personal failure when others fail with you.

IT'S NOT EASY, IS IT??

Knowing "the alphabet" then, is counter-productive, since the child AUTOMATICALLY PRODUCES THE ALPHABET NAMES letters (ay, bee, sea, dee, ee, ef, gee, aitch, eye) and so has to convert EACH letter name to the appropriate speech sound (a, b, c, d, e, f,) in order to decode and/or encode , and, remembering those sounds in sequence, blend them together.

For a young child his/her very best attempts often result in anything from confusion and anxiety to compounded failure, the loss of the wonderful motivation s/he comes to school with and in being robbed of the joy that should be associated with his/her reading/writing adventure.

CHILDREN SHOULD BE CONVERTED TO EXCLUSIVELY AND AUTOMATICALLY PRODUCING THE SPEECH SOUNDS FOR THE LETTER SYMBOLS (with ALL alphabetical names for the letters being excluded) when they enter Kindergarten.

What the use of alphabetical names does, when used by 5-8 year olds, is to cause a great deal of confusion and anxiety and lead some into an ever-spiraling cycle of failure.

The LONG VOWEL SOUNDS of "ay", "ee", "ie", "oa", "you" and "are" ARE SPEECH SOUNDS, which also happen to be the names of some of the letters in the alphabet.

ALL OTHER LETTER NAMES ARE A COMBINATION OF TWO SPEECH SOUNDS or WHOLE WORDS as follows:

*** WHOLE WORDS -----bee sea gee eye Jay Kay pea queue
are tea you why double-you (two words)

*** INITIAL CONSONANT SOUND + LONG VOWEL SOUND
--- dee gee vee zee (syllables)

*** SHORT VOWEL SOUND + CONSONANT SOUND.
----ef el em en es ex (syllables)

*** AS WELL AS -----aitch

When we ask small children to convert a combination of these long vowel sounds and syllables into a meaningful word, it is a task of mammoth proportions for them.

They have only five years experience with the language and very little discrimination of SPEECH sounds i.e., the sounds of the SPOKEN word and the sounds embodied in the WRITTEN word.

Their knowledge of the alphabetical names of the letters is an absolute disadvantage, sine the encoding and decoding of the written word is accomplished BY CONVERTING SPEECH SOUNDS INTO SYMBOLS AND SYMBOLS INTO SPEECH SOUNDS.

YOU "HAVE A GO"

You can experience the difficulty of this exercise yourself.

Try saying the alphabet as fast as you can.
(I'm sure you did that very quickly and confidently.)

Now try saying the SOUNDS of the letters of the alphabet.
If you're an old infant teacher you probably did better than most
Check yourself out--- honestly.

It is much more difficult and slower and probably the cause of some degree of stress and anxiety (fear of failure???) to say the alphabet using the speech sounds for the symbols, instead of the names of the letters.

Yet, all you have done is convert the alphabetical name of the letter "dee" to the single speech sound of the letter 'd'.

As an adult you have used the language very successfully for many years for both decoding and encoding the spoken word, and even though you are of average (and probably superior) intelligence, you have just experienced anxiety and the fear of failure, trying to mentally switch from letter name to the speech sound of the letter.

This is exactly what we ask five year olds to do, and we wonder why they develop a sense of failure!!

TRY THIS !!

Here are some words written using the alphabetical names of the letters (What you hear when you "spell" a word.)

How long will it take you to decode the words.?

You might also note the degree of stress and the subsequent degree of embarrassment you feel when you attempt to do this task.

You might also have a driving desire to do it quickly, for whatever reason.

May I suggest that you time yourself?

These are three, basic sight words. To make it easier, each letter name is separated.

The words are written the way you would "spell" them.

1. "es" "you" "en"
2. "why" "ee" "es"
3. "are" "ee" "ay" "dee" "ie" "en" "gee"

Evaluate your own performance.

Which sticker would you give yourself on the reading chart?

How would you feel if you failed in your teacher's sight and got NO sticker??

NOW TRY DECODING A SENTENCE.

The words in this sentence have been separated by asterisks.

There are 13 words in this sentence.

Tea are why eye en gee * tea oa * sea oa en vee ee are tea *

ay el pea aitch ay bee ee tea eye sea ay el * en ay em ee es *

tea oa * es pea double-ee sea aitch * es oa you en dee es *

eye es * vee ee are why * dee eye double-ef eye sea you el tea. *

EYE EN DEE DOUBLE-EE DEE !!!

What sort of feelings did you experience?

Would you like to have to practice converting each letter name to a speech sound until you could do it automatically?

Would you be tempted to seek/create a distraction to save yourself?

Do you still think that small children can handle referring to letter names AND letter sounds?

If you remain unconverted, list the advantages you see in using letter names in the teaching of reading.

THE ONLY LETTER NAMES RELEVANT TO THE READING AND WRITING OF WORDS ARE THE LONG VOWEL SOUNDS - "ay", "ee", "ie", "oa", "you", "are", BECAUSE THEY ARE SPEECH SOUNDS!