

Phonics vs, the look say method



Over the past decades, the decline in the rate of literacy in America has baffled many. At least 20% of high school graduates are functionally illiterate, despite the education they receive in the public school system. As these graduates enter the world reading at an elementary level, they are unable to live a normal life, which leads to poverty and can lead to delinquency and imprisonment. This decline is not only a decline of literacy, but also a decline of independence, ingenuity, and responsibility.

The beginning of this decline can be traced back to a certain event in the history of the public school system: the introduction of the look say method in the 1930s. Ever since the look say method, or Whole Word instruction, took the place of phonics, the number of illiterate graduates has grown higher and higher. Evidence proves that the look say method is not sufficient to properly teach students how to read. Phonics is far superior to the look say method of learning to read. First of all, phonics is better than the look say method of learning to read because phonics has a firmer foundation than the look say method.

Phonics is based on rules that the child memorizes; therefore, when he has memorized these rules, he can read almost any word he sees. A small article by the Abeka reading programs shows many rules that are taught in phonics, such as the following: "When there is one vowel in a word, that vowel usually says its short sound" and "when there are two vowels in a word, the first vowel says its long sound, and second vowel is silent" ("Six Easy Steps to Reading," 1). When the child learns definite rules such as these, he is more likely to apply them because he knows that they will not change.

Sebastian Wren writes in his article “ Developing Research-based Resources for the Balanced ReadingTeacher,” he tells that “ children are explicitly taught the ‘ rules’ about the way words are written and spelled, and they are taught spelling-sound relationships. After the teacher provides an explicit lesson in a particular Phonics rule, the child is presented with a passage text that contains many words consistent with that rule. This provides the child with an opportunity to apply each Phonics rule on a variety of words in context of the passage.

The goal of the Phonics teacher, then, is to instill the children with the Phonics rules and the common spelling-sound relationships, and to teach children to apply this knowledge in sounding-out each word they encounter, making that assumption that comprehension and appreciation will be a natural consequence of accuracy” (Wren, 1). Basically, when the child is taught these rules and then given the opportunity try the rules, he will find that these rules can help him to read with ease. In contrast, the look say method has no definite rules that he can put into practice as he reads.

Phonics is better than the look say method because it has a definite set of rules that the child can apply when he reads. The look say method requires much guessing if the child does not know the word that he is trying to read. Because he has not been taught definite rules like those of the phonics method, he is unsure of how to accomplish the task of reading. In her book *The Good School*, Peg Tyre tells: ““ Instead of children being expected to learn individual letters by rote memory, then syllables, and finally words, they were given books with pictures of common objects.

Underneath each picture was its simple name. ' Kids were taught to derive meaning from words by memorizing the look of the words, or looking at the picture and guessing, or reviewing the context and extrapolating, instead of sounding them out" (96). Rather than being taught how to read using rules and hints, the children are taught to read by guessing what the word is based on the context. Samuel L. Blumenfeld explains in his book *The New Illiterates* some of what the students are taught: " He is taught the names of seventeen consonant letters and their sound values only as appear at the beginnings of words.

What phonetic value they have in the middle of words is neither considered nor discussed. The letter is taught merely as a phonetic clue to the word—one clue among several taught as word-attack skills. In fact, the child is not encouraged to use a phonetic clue until he has first exhausted context and word-form clues. If these fail him, then he is to try the phonetic clue of the initial-consonant sound" (74). Phonetic rules are not demonstrated clearly, and looking at the context to determine the word and its meaning is encouraged. However, simply guessing what the word is only makes the child unsure of himself.

Phonics and its rules are far better to teach than the look say method and its guessing. Secondly, phonics is better than the look say method because it is far easier for the child to comprehend, conquer, and enjoy. In an article entitle " Whole Language vs. Phonics," Sebastien Wren, Ph. D. says that the look say method is " nothing more than the rote memorization of every word in the English language" (" Whole Language vs. Phonics," 1). The look say

method basically requires the student to basically memorize every single English word in existence, an extremely difficult feat for a young person.

The article " Whole Word Versus Phonics" tells that " only the smartest Chinese can memorize 20, 000 of their ideograms, but Whole Word promoters expect you to memorize 50, 000 to 10, 000 English words. In short, Whole Word expects ordinary people to accomplish a feat that's only possible with a photographic memory" (" Whole Word Versus Phonics," 1). A young student can hardly expect to conquer reading this way. Memorizing that many words is absolutely ludicrous when one could read them if they knew the simple rules of phonics. Phonics is especially needed with someone who may be slow at learning.

Blumenfeld writes it in his book NEA: Trojan Horse in American Education: " Slow learners in particular found look-say ' overwhelmingly difficult. ' That would explain why before look-say was adopted slow learners learned to read without great difficulty via the alphabetic phonics method" (118). The phonics method is far easier than the look say method to understand for any person. Progress with the phonics method is far more rapid than that of the look say method. The article " Whole Word Versus Phonics says : " Phonics, it is claimed, can teach almost all children to read by the end of first grade.

The reading may be slow and halting at first, but in a few years the child is able to read ordinary books for amusement or education" (" Whole Word Versus Phonics," 1). This is vastly more rapid than the look say method. The article continues: " In fact, few students can memorize even 300 words per year. This difficulty is confirmed all over the Internet by lists of sight words that have third grade students learning simple one-syllable words such as:

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bring, clean, cut, done, draw, drink, eight, fall, far, full, got, grow, hold, hot, hurt, if, and keep” (“ Whole Word Versus Phonics,” 1).

Students learning phonics would have conquered these words in the first grade, if not sooner. The progress of the look say method is significantly slower than that of the phonics method. Phonics is more entertaining for the child, whereas the look say method becomes dull and monotonous. Learning phonics is more interesting for the child because they are able to use the rules themselves and apply it to the words themselves. However, the look say method is very repetitious. Blumenfeld writes the following about his research in his book *The New Illiterates*: “ Oh is repeated 138 times and see 176.

Repetitions of these two words alone must equal the entire wordage of the first Pre-Primer. What a slow, tedious, monotonous way to learn two words! ” (43). The look say method is dull and monotonous to the point of being just unnecessary. The children who are taught this method become extremely averse to reading because the way that they were taught is so tedious and uninteresting. Phonics is better than the look say method because it easier for the child to comprehend, conquer, and enjoy.

Finally, the phonics method produces a larger number of competent, literate students than that of the look say method. Phonics gives the students a sense of definite understanding and accomplishment that can encourage them to make something of themselves. Because they feel confident, they will want to show the world what they can do. However, the reading students that the look say method produces do not feel as confident. The disappointment that this child will feel because he cannot read is acute.

In his book *NEA: Trojan Horse in American Education*, Samuel L. Blumenfeld cites an article by Dr. Samuel T. Orton: “ Faulty teaching methods may not only prevent the acquisition of academic education by children of average capacity but may also give rise to far reaching damage to their emotional life” (111). The look say method could not only cause the child to be a poor reader but also harm the child’s confidence. However, the phonics method gives the child a desire to use this ability to make a name for himself.

Students who cannot read well are less likely to be productive in their living. In her book *The Good School: How Smart Parents Get Their Kids the Education They Deserve*, Peg Tyre tells of some research on the outcome of learning the look say method: “ Seventy-four percent of struggling third-grade readers still struggle in ninth grade, which in turn makes it hard to graduate from high school. Those who do manage to press on—and who manage to graduate from high school—often find that their dreams of succeeding in higher education are frustratingly elusive.

It won’t surprise you to know that kids who struggle in reading grow up to be adults who struggle to hold on to steady work—they are more likely to experience periods of prolonged unemployment, require welfare services, and are more likely to end up in jail” (94). Learning the look say method has wrought horrible effects on the lives of many students in terms of their future. Because these students were taught how to read using the look say method and therefore do not read well, they are most likely not going to live productively. Phonics is far better than the look say method of learning to read.

Evidence proves that the look say method is not teaching students how to read properly. The public school claims that they teach children how to read exceptionally well; however, if that is the case, these students who graduate should be reading at high levels. But as more and more functionally illiterate students graduate, they find it extremely difficult to live the lives they had always dreamed for themselves because they cannot read well. This inability to read leads to many of the problems that are in society today, such as unemployment, negligence, and dependence on the government.