

JUST SAY 'KNOW' TO

'WHOLE LANGUAGE'

**A Parent-Teacher's Primer
to the
Politics of Reading**

**produced by the
Freedom Party of Ontario**

WHOLE LANGUAGE: A BASIS FOR LIFE-LONG LEARNING

The Primary Language Arts Program in the London Board of Education is based on the Whole Language philosophy. The basis of this philosophy lies in an understanding of how children acquire language.

- Children's language learning is supported and extended through social interaction. Children need opportunities to talk with other children and adults in order to explore ideas and understand concepts. Co-operative learning and social skills are vital to life-long learning.
- Children learn language through active involvement in authentic and meaningful experiences. They have an innate desire to question, explore and make sense of the world around them. An activity-based, child-centred curriculum that is focused on the needs and interests of the children is necessary.
- Children learn language in a holistic manner, integrating what they are learning into that which they already know. Learning is difficult when it is focused on isolated parts, somewhat like trying to put a bicycle together without knowing what a bicycle is. Language learning cannot be fragmented into isolated subject areas, but must be integrated across the curriculum.
- Children acquire language through repeated demonstrations of effective learning strategies and skills. They must have opportunities to observe, discuss and practise the strategies and skills used by proficient readers and writers. Children learn by active involvement in the reading/writing process.
- Children learn language at varying rates. The sequence of learning may be similar but not identical for all children. Time, choice and varied experiences must be provided to meet the individual needs of children.
- Risk-taking is essential to language learning. Children must be supported and encouraged as they attempt to understand the world around them. Children learn by testing out their perceptions and each child's attempts must be valued and praised.

HOW CAN PARENTS HELP?

London public school educators believe they are partners with parents in the education of children.

You can help your child succeed at school when you:

- Read to your child
- Visit the public library with your child
- Listen to your child's questions
- Play word games with your child

THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER

The role of the teacher is that of facilitator. The classroom environment is carefully structured to inspire children to explore, discover and learn. Children are encouraged to build on what they already know, to refine it and use it for further learning. Meaningful activities are planned to immerse children in oral and written language. The teacher systematically observes children, analyzing their participation and work products, and making notations. From these careful observations, the teacher assesses learning on an individual basis and plans activities and experiences that will enhance learning.



SHARED READING EXPERIENCES

Shared Reading experiences simulate the bedtime reading experience. It is a happy, secure situation that invites participation by the children and instills the belief - "I am a reader." Shared Reading materials often use enlarged print which allows every child to see the story as it is being read. The highly predictable print and lively language invite the children to read along. During Shared Reading, the teacher models strategies used by proficient readers. The teacher invites the children to make predictions about the reading material based on their personal experiences, knowledge of the author, book jacket and picture clues. During reading, the teacher points to each word, constantly directing the children's attention to the print while modelling fluent and expressive reading. The teacher encourages the children to predict upcoming events in the stories. Discussion during and after reading may focus on story elements such as setting, characters and plot. Charts and word lists developed with the children from Shared Reading experiences extend vocabulary and provide correct spelling models. The children are encouraged to include these words in their personal writing. Re-reading of favourite stories during Shared Reading and at the listening centre provides repetition which continually extends sight vocabulary. Favourite stories may be altered to provide further reading material.

"Success for Every Student"

The London Board of Education's motto, "Success for Every Student", is the basis upon which its educational programming is delivered. The philosophy of the Ministry of Education and the London Board is that successful students are self-motivated, self-directed problem solvers who have acquired a life-long love for learning. The Whole Language philosophy enhances the image of the learner while ensuring that language development is a joyful experience.

- Watch TV with your child
- Go on excursions that expand your child's experiences
- Involve your child in cooking and baking
- Provide plenty of writing and drawing tools for your child

Above: the reproductions from **A Parent's Guide to Whole Language**, distributed by the London Board of Education, provide a definition of **whole language** that is perfectly consistent with **Freedom Party's** application and criticism of the concept in its **Ontario Information Bulletin** headed: "Schools Failing Our Children!" Criticized by London Director of Education Darrel Skidmore for being an "inaccurate and unfounded" bulletin "in terms of the concept of **whole language**" (see 'Still Failing Our Children', pg. 5), **Freedom Party's** pamphlet has also come under attack from teachers' unions and other members of Ontario's tax-funded educational systems. We leave it to the reader to compare the arguments of those who favour the **whole language** approach with those who favour the **phonics** approach to teaching literacy skills.

WHAT IS 'WHOLE LANGUAGE'?

According to the London Board of Education's own definition, **whole language** is:

(1) "a basis for life-long learning." This premise excuses the fact that the **whole language** approach to teaching literacy drags on indefinitely. ("Children learn language at varying rates...") **Whole language** is really a

basis for "life-long" teaching.

(2) a "philosophy" based on "social interaction." This fact alone should make it clear that **whole language** is not a teaching technique.

(3) revealingly enough, a method of "language-learning," not a method to teach reading, writing, or spelling. Of

course, to a significant extent "language" can be acquired through "social interaction." But reading, writing, or spelling cannot. They must be objectively taught.

(4) a method that employs "repeated demonstrations" (i.e., memorization) and "risk-taking" (i.e., guesswork).

JUST SAY 'KNOW' --- TO 'WHOLE LANGUAGE'

Learn the 10 ALIBIS used to excuse the failure OF WHOLE LANGUAGE

The following is an adaptation of the ten 'alibis' for WHOLE LANGUAGE coined by author Rudolf Flesch in his excellent book Why Johnny Still Can't Read. None of them are adequate excuses for failing to teach essential, basic, PHONICS principles. Parents, taxpayers, students and teachers alike can arm themselves against the WHOLE LANGUAGE CON GAME by simply being aware of the ten alibis. After you know the alibis, you'll be able to recognize them wherever they're used --- as is the case in much of the debates and press clippings reproduced in this publication.

THE TEN ALIBIS FOR 'WHOLE LANGUAGE'

1. "Everything is Hunky-Dory":

If this were true, what's all the fuss about? The facts prove otherwise:

-17% of Ontario high school GRADUATES are illiterate (Southam Survey).

-8% of university graduates are illiterate (Southam Survey).

-11% of community college/trade school students are illiterate (Southam Survey).

-40% of Canadians have limited or non-existent reading skills (Statistics Canada) while in 1931 the illiteracy rate for the entire population was only 3.73% (1931 Census).

-The drop-out rate in Ontario is 30%.

-Canada has a growing skills shortage and unemployment rate because our schools do not target needed skills (Canadian Business, Feb/91).

2. "We do teach phonics":

According to the Toronto Star (April 18/92) article, 'Teaching Reading', "Reading conferences organized for teachers focus on whole-language instruction and rarely hold workshops on phonics or other methods. One professor working at a prestigious Canadian university was shocked to discover that teachers in his class knew only the whole language approach..."

According to Darrel Skidmore, London's Director of Education, in response to Freedom Party's Ontario Information Bulletin on Whole Language, "Whole Language very much embraces the concept of phonics..." though he has not as yet offered an explanation of where phonics fits in.

In order to appease the public many 'whole language' readers introduce some aspect of phonics and use it only as a last ditch effort to help the child to read when the 'whole

language' "method" has failed as it invariably does.

Phonics, according to Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (1973), is "A method of teaching beginners to read and pronounce words by learning the phonetic value of letters, letter groups and esp. syllables." Above all else phonics is a method and must be taught systematically. It must be the student's first reading instruction and it can not be approached in part or haphazardly.

3. "No one method is best":

Many educators like to use appeals to the parent's pride in the individuality of their child by saying that 'Children do not all learn the same way' or 'All of us are individuals and we all learn in different ways.' This "belief" (and it is nothing more than a belief) was based on a common, but incorrect, theory that children labelled 'auditory' learn differently than children labelled 'visual'. Such "beliefs" were scientifically disproven as long ago as 1967 but the "belief" continues to the detriment of our children (See Rudolf Flesch's "Why Johnny Still Can't Read" pg 86).

4. "English Isn't Phonetic":

A full 97.4% of the English language is perfectly phonetic (Flesch pg 96) and it is upon the other 2.6% that educators base this particular alibi. Instead of teaching a child how to read phonetically and to quickly pick up the few 'exceptions', 'whole language' educators expect their students to learn by sight and memory alone the tens of thousands of words in the average repertoire. Which seems more complicated or unreal to you?

5. "Word Calling Isn't Reading":

There are two fallacies with this alibi:

1) You may hear your child's teacher glibly say that "even though your child can sound out or read the word 'kangaroo' he is not necessarily comprehending it or recognizing

it as the animal 'kangaroo.'" Try not to laugh too hard when you hear this, for the teacher is being absolutely serious. The meaning of the words is everything to 'whole language' teachers so children are prohibited from simply 'sounding out' the word (word calling). Students are expected to understand and define words before whole language supporters will call it reading. Ask yourself how your child can do this without properly sounding out the word.

2) It has been repeatedly shown that a six-year-old entering grade one has a speaking and listening vocabulary of 24,000 words which grows by 5,000 words a year. There is no way that a child can memorize this many words by using the 'whole language' approach. The child has to have a method of decoding the word; breaking it down into its component sounds and sounding it out in order to read it. With phonics a child only has to learn 26 letters, 44 sounds and a 181-item phonic inventory before he or she can read anything, from the 'whole language' Dick-and-Jane readers to Shakespeare's sonnets.

6. "Your Child Isn't Ready": (Also known as "The Stall")

All of the research showing that many children take longer than others before they begin to read was done on children in 'whole language' schools. It is no surprise, therefore to see that many of the children in these studies couldn't read in grades one and two.

In any school (and preschool) that uses phonics first there is rarely a problem of children not being able to read between the ages of four to six. The alibi should read "Your child isn't ready to read yet using 'whole language'."

7. "Your Child is Disabled":

There is no doubt that there are some children who legitimately suffer from organic disorders which hamper their ability to learn how to read, however these children are rare. The vast majority of the children being

labeled 'disabled' or 'dislexic' are in fact simply victims of 'whole language'.

Special education classrooms are growing at an alarming rate, not because are children are more disabled than in the past but because our children are being subjected to a boring, ineffective approach to reading: 'whole language'.

8. "It's the parent's fault":

Implicit in the 'whole language' approach is constant repetition and memorization. In fact, so much repetition is needed, say the educators, that the school can not possibly spend all its time on reading with the children. Whenever possible, a teacher or principal will point out how teaching is a cooperative effort or partnership between teachers and parents and that parents should read aloud to their children as often as possible until the child miraculously learns how to read. If the child has inventive spelling habits "don't correct them, he'll learn in time," say whole language educators.

Of course when Johnny ends up as one of

the 17% illiterate high school graduates it's always the parents' fault for not keeping his or her end up at home. You will never hear from the school that your child's failure to read is due to the teacher, the school or the 'whole language' program. It will undoubtedly be the parent's fault.

9. "Too Much TV":

Contrary to popular belief a child can benefit greatly from watching television. For the young child the constant repetition of commercials where a products name is shown on the screen and repeatedly spoken can actually instill some phonetic rules in him. Then there are shows like Sesame Street which has successfully taught millions of children how to read using phonics.

The excuse that too much TV has prevented your child from reading is yet another example of passing the buck by our schools and educators.

10. "We Now Teach All Children":

One of the greatest fallacies perpetrated by

our school system is that because a child is disadvantaged, belongs to a racial minority, is being abused at home, or is physically or mentally disabled then that child needs a different approach to reading, namely 'whole language.'

Darrel Skidmore, Director of the London Board of Education claims that the "shifting responsibility from home to school, where schools are expected to take on everything from feeding hungry kids to teaching them how to get along with other little human beings" must be mixed into the whole language "equation". He refers to it as "a social-responsibility vision of education." (London Free Press, June 8, 1992)

Quality Education Network President Barb Smith puts it this way, "They're saying some of the kids are in wheelchairs so let's put them all in wheelchairs." (Toronto Star, May 24, 1992)

The fact is that 'whole language' disables all children equally.

WHOLE LANGUAGE ALIASES

The following is a list of alternate terms and names used to describe the WHOLE LANGUAGE philosophy. Don't be fooled by the WHOLE LANGUAGE CON GAME. If it isn't PHONICS, BEWARE!

| | |
|--|--|
| UNIVERSAL INSTRUCTION (1823) Jean Joseph Jacotot | TOP-TO-BOTTOM |
| VISUAL METHOD (1836) Thomas H. Gallaudet | REAL BOOKS (Great Britain) |
| LOOK-AND-SAY | ALDINE METHOD |
| WHOLE WORD | SCOTT, FORESMAN METHOD (1958) Barabara C. Kelly |
| WORD METHOD | WHOLE LANGUAGE |
| SIGHT READING | PSYCHOLINGUISTICS (1960) Kenneth and Yetta Goodman |
| TOP-DOWN | ALTERNATIVE APPROACH |
| WHOLE-TO-PART | |

Accept no substitutes. If it's not phonics it's not reading.

STILL FAILING OUR CHILDREN

A Presentation on WHOLE LANGUAGE made to the London Board of Education on March 28, 1992

(The following is Freedom Party's March 28, 1992 presentation to the London Board of Education's public budget hearings, delivered by F. leader Robert Metz. Chaired by trustee Bill Brock, with concluding remarks by London Director of Education Darrel Skidmore, the following transcript has been printed verbatim from recorded broadcasts of the hearings. On March 6, 1991, Metz presented a submission to the London Board entitled Failing Our Children, which advocated more emphasis on quality of education, and less on political agendas.)

Metz: Mr. Chairman, members of the board, fellow taxpayers and citizens:

I realize that what I have to say today isn't particularly going to make me the most popular person in this room, but I hope that what I have to say will be taken in the positive spirit intended.

I'm not here to point a finger at anyone, though I have my criticisms. I'm here to point my finger at an idea, an idea that I believe to be terribly destructive, an idea that I feel is at the root of our education funding problem.

What I've learned since my recent experience as a trustee candidate during the last municipal election has convinced me beyond a doubt that many of our education dollars just might be doing more harm than good.

To get straight to the point, I was astounded by the number of parents I met and continue to meet who are deeply concerned about the fact that their children simply are not able to read, write, or spell effectively. Worse, too many people within our education system simply fail to understand or acknowledge the importance and necessity of these most basic of all skills.

So at a time when the board is asking for money from the public, I think it's vital that we examine the value of what we get for our money. I see increasing illiteracy rates, dropout rates, skills shortage and unemployment rates, with more people than ever before demanding objective standards, others escaping the system through remedial action, and of course I see never-ending requests --- year after year --- for more money to fund this education system.

Ladies and gentlemen, I believe that our schools are failing our children.

Let me assure you that this problem isn't confined or unique to London either --- or to this board. While the details of my trail of discovery are far too lengthy to discuss within this forum, I now know that at the centre of our education dilemma is a strange and inexplicable concept loosely referred to as WHOLE LANGUAGE.

Bill Brock: Mr. Metz, I would advise you or counsel you that this is a budget session...

Metz: Absolutely, sir.

Brock: ...to deal with the budget and not a philosophical debate.

Metz: I'm dealing with the philosophy of this budget...

Brock: If you continue with the philosophical debate, your presentation will cease. I wish you would address the budget as requested.

Metz: Well, that's exactly where I'm headed.

WHOLE LANGUAGE is something that you won't find a clear definition of, because everybody has a different definition and understanding of it. Because it's never been completely defined, WHOLE LANGUAGE is now being described as a philosophy, and I think that's good because that's exactly what it is.

It's part of a much greater philosophy, one that I identify as egalitarianism, not of equal rights, but of equal results. Now I know most people don't understand and don't want to talk about philosophy. So allow me to illustrate how this philosophy affects our budget and the way we spend our education tax dollars.

For example, on September 19, 1991, I attended a public meeting at Sherwood Fox public school where at the time the topic of discussion was a \$5.8 million physical expansion to the school. I mean, you couldn't help but be impressed.

From an architectural viewpoint, there was little to criticize and much to commend in a facility that featured a new gym, a resource room with glass walls and a skylight, a new large indoor playing area, the use of relocatable classroom modules, a new lunch room, new music room, new stage, a host of recreational facilities, a completely redone administration area, the addition of rooms for non-teaching staff and travelling consultants, new playgrounds, soccer fields, parking facilities, and access avenues. Every architect's dream.

In fact, it was an architect who not only presented the architectural features of the

school's addition, but who also offered the educational justifications for their existence. He was very professional. He practically had me believing that the school's expansion designs were being implemented to 'save' money and 'reduce costs.'

He went on to explain to us that there were 'so many factors' that go into designing schools, including the development of 'social skills', meeting teacher requirements, getting community input, meeting the requirements of the Ministry of Education and of building codes.

He assured us all that there is a direct relationship of student achievement and pleasant surroundings and explained that "we want to introduce children to a friendly environment. It will make them excited about going to school."

This is, of course, true to an extent, but only if all other things are considered equal. No amount of pleasant surroundings will teach a child to read, do arithmetic, or learn how to think independently if his or her intellectual needs are not being met and if the proven techniques of providing these needs are being callously abandoned in favour of an egalitarian philosophy that seeks to hide the failure of some by handicapping the success of others.

There's something decadent about a school system that places its budgetary emphasis and priorities on a host of non-educational objectives, and which stresses a 'feel-good' WHOLE LANGUAGE PHILOSOPHY environment as a means of getting children "excited to learn." But learning is exciting on its own, isn't it? --- if it's truly learning that we're talking about.

On another point of evidence, consider the startling testimony of parents who continually jam *Radio 98's* open-line talk show each time we bring private educator **Sheila Morrison** into London. Morrison is an arch-enemy of WHOLE LANGUAGE, and an enthusiastic supporter of PHONICS as the only effective means of teaching reading, writing and spelling. Evidently, a startling majority of parents agree. Like, try about 100%! In her last two open-line appearances spanning four hours

of calls taken from the public, there was not one substantial disagreement with anything she was saying...

Unidentified Trustee: Are you selling her tapes here?

Metz: ...I have audio tapes of both these shows...

Brock: Excuse me, your presentation so far has mentioned the cost of Sherwood Fox School. I would ask that you get back on the budget issues and not the philosophy that you're espousing, please.

Metz: You're obviously trying to avoid the fact that the philosophy of education in a school must predetermine the budget and the cost expended to provide that service. So to suggest to any speaker here today that they can't address what they believe is fundamental to the cost of the school system and to its budgets, I think contradicts the purpose of this meeting.

Brock: The philosophical approach could have been presented at a program committee and dealt with there on that issue.

Metz: Well, you see, the first job...

Brock: What we are dealing with here is the budget and I ask you to get back to the budget issues for 1992 that we're trying to deal with.

Metz: What you're asking me to do is to sit down, and not to speak. Is that what you'd prefer me to do, Mr. Brock?

Brock: If you are going to get back into the budget issues for 1992 sir, you have not followed the pattern that was set here by everybody else today.

Metz: I was told that I could speak on any subject that concerned the budget of this board. What you're telling me is that you believe that my points don't concern the budget of the board and therefore because you disagree with me, I don't have the right to speak at this board.

Brock: Continue.

Metz: Thank you. As I said, I could go on for hours on the issues and problems involved under the very misleading umbrella of WHOLE LANGUAGE. However, let me get on with what I think must be done about it.

I'm a realist and I have no illusions about fighting the system because the entrenched bureaucracy and enormity of the problem frankly makes that impossible. The system has to straighten itself out. But it will never do this until more and more people start going around the system and start fighting for their rights to go around the system.

That's where I think that I can help and that's where I'll be putting my efforts and I think this board should be aware of it.

'JUST SAY KNOW TO WHOLE LANGUAGE' is the first part of (Freedom Party's) campaign to make taxpayers and parents aware of the problem by beginning the process of defining the issue and offering them a direct means to correct their children's handicap.

The campaign begins this weekend in London with the delivery of thousands of information bulletins delivered to the doorsteps of London homes, and will expand to other Ontario communities during the balance of this year.

On that note, please allow me to conclude by explaining exactly why I think this issue is so important, and why I want to bring it to the attention of the public.

It seems to be forgotten that language, as such, is much more than simply a means of communication. Most importantly, it is our tool of thinking. In addition to communicating better, the accurate use of language allows us to integrate, differentiate, measure, compare, and to think logically and consistently. It therefore follows that inaccurate language skills lead to inaccurate thinking, and inaccurate thinking invariably leads to confusion, insecurity, and a feeling that one's future is not in one's control.

That's what I think is the real tragedy behind WHOLE LANGUAGE. Canadians have become among the most insecure and defensive people on the face of this planet and they've been instilled with this attitude that they "can't make it on their own" when I think that the exact opposite is true.

In many ways, I blame the PHILOSOPHY OF WHOLE LANGUAGE behind our education system for this.

No doubt, there are those in this room who violently disagree with everything I'm saying. This I can fully understand and in fact I'm quite willing to go out of my way to accommodate such disagreement.

I leave you with an open invitation extended to any administrator, trustee, parent, teacher, student, or taxpayer in this room today. Let's talk about WHOLE LANGUAGE and what our education tax dollars are really paying for. If we really care about our kids, let's prove it by getting this issue out in the open and providing an opportunity for all to hear both sides.

You pick your experts, we'll pick our experts, and just maybe, just maybe, we can shed some much needed light on this most important of all education issues. Until then,

the very idea of asking us for more money, I think, is a bit premature. Give us as consumers...

Brock: ...Thank you Mr. Metz. Any questions?

Metz: ...the right to question the product before we have to pay for it.

Brock: Linda Freeman?

Freeman: Mr. Metz, (on) June 9 the program standing committee is discussing WHOLE LANGUAGE, and we'd certainly welcome his input and discussion there in a public forum.

Brock: Trustee Parkinson?

Parkinson: Just a question of Mr. Metz. I wondered if he could assure me then that all of my appropriate peers are literate, because I certainly came through the rote system, so I would assume that everyone in their late fifties or early sixties is literate. Can you assure me of that?

Metz: Can I assure you that anyone is literate who I don't even know? --- How could I do that?

Parkinson: I would think that you have blamed the system for illiteracy.

Brock: Thank you Mr. Metz.

Metz: Thank you.

Brock: In light of the comments that have been made, I would (open the floor) to Mr. Skidmore.

Skidmore: Thank you Mr. Chairperson. Certainly I don't want to entertain and go beyond the concept of debating as you have structured the day.

However, I would be remiss on behalf of the children of this school system, and the staff of this school system, if I simply did not point out that in terms of the pamphlet that was placed (Freedom Party's information bulletin on WHOLE LANGUAGE) on all our desks and I assume is being distributed throughout the London area, that I've got to say unequivocally the premise on which, and the assumptions on which this has been prepared in terms of the concept of WHOLE LANGUAGE is inaccurate and unfounded.

I'm not going to get into specifics, Mr. Chairperson, but I wouldn't want anybody leaving this room believing that WHOLE LANGUAGE as defined here is an accurate assumption. What bothers me the most is that this is a reflection not at all of the program of WHOLE LANGUAGE as defined by the province and certainly is not a definition of WHOLE LANGUAGE as it's defined by this board.

Very clearly, if you read the pamphlet, it's going on the assumption that there's no place for PHONICS in WHOLE LANGUAGE. Ladies and gentlemen let me unequivocally say that WHOLE LANGUAGE very much embraces the concept of PHONICS, and I don't want to enter into a debate today and I appreciate that Mr. Chairperson. On the other hand, I want to make it very clear that we will more than be prepared to respond in terms of the kinds of issues that are identified here. But I would not want anybody walking out of this room without the impression -- my distinct personal and professional impression -- that much of this here is innuendo and much of this here as expressed is not factual in terms of WHOLE LANGUAGE as defined in the City of London.

As much as I appreciate the spirit in which Mr. Metz has brought these forward -- and I understand his concerns, and as a taxpayer he has the right to have those genuine concerns -- I would be remiss on behalf of the children in this system, our program department, and the teachers in the classroom if I let anybody leave this building thinking that this represented WHOLE LANGUAGE.

I apologize for the intrusion Mr. Chairperson, but in a professional context, I could not let that go by without a comment. Thank you.

Brock: Thank you.



THE HIDDEN COSTS OF WHOLE LANGUAGE

-Robert Vaughan

(The following is a 'private' presentation to London's Board of Education made by FP secretary Robert Vaughan on March 28, 1992, shortly after the presentation made by FP leader Robert Metz. Mr. Vaughan is a resident of London, a parent, and a property taxpayer. Mr. Vaughan was also a candidate for London Board of Education trustee during the 1991 municipal elections.)

Brock: The rules are that you have five minutes and that we are addressing the 1992 budget.

Vaughan: That's right. Yes.

Brock: Thank you.

Vaughan: Mr. Chairman, members of the board: Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to speak to you this afternoon. I come before you today as a parent, a taxpayer, and a past-candidate for trustee in the last municipal election.

My concern with the present budget is primarily with the cost to taxpayers of the use of the WHOLE LANGUAGE program as a method of teaching literacy skills. The WHOLE LANGUAGE philosophy presently used by the Board of Education for the City of London is a dreadful failure and is largely to blame for our growing illiteracy and dropout problem...

Brock: Mr. Vaughan, we want to deal with the budget issues as it relates to 1992.

Vaughan: I understand that Mr. Chairman and if you would let me continue please, I will get to the budget...

Brock: Just a second... If you want to continue about WHOLE LANGUAGE, you are invited to a meeting that the program committee will have where you will be able to espouse your philosophy...

Vaughan: Well thank you very much. But it's not my philosophy, and if you'd let me continue, I'll get on with the budget.

The WHOLE LANGUAGE philosophy presently used by the Board of Education for the City of London is a dreadful failure and is largely to be blamed for our growing illiteracy and dropout problem in London's public schools -- in fact, in every school where it is used.

There has not been one piece of objective scientific evidence to support the WHOLE LANGUAGE philosophy as a means of teaching reading, writing or spelling. In fact, just the opposite has been found. There have

been tens if not hundreds of studies which have shown that WHOLE LANGUAGE is harmful to students.

These same studies have also revealed that the use of PHONICS is the best and only method for teaching anyone to read, write and spell.

There are a number of hidden costs associated with the WHOLE LANGUAGE program which are part of the reason that the price of putting a child through public education is up to three times as much as putting a child through a private education. What follows are a few of the most costly side effects of WHOLE LANGUAGE:

(1) The various teachers' unions have recognized the inadequacies of WHOLE LANGUAGE blaming them on large pupil-teacher ratios and large class sizes. To help remedy these inadequacies, the unions have successfully lobbied for reduced PTRs and class sizes, leading to the hiring of additional teachers -- and yet Johnny still can't read.

(2) Teachers' unions -- and notice that I'm distinguishing between teachers' unions and teachers (these are two complete and separate entities) -- have successfully lobbied for an increased number of so-called PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT days so that they may be brought up-to-date on new techniques to improve a program which needs to be scrapped.

(3) WHOLE LANGUAGE and the so-called CHILD-CENTERED APPROACH to education has stretched out the six-month and in some cases SIX-WEEK process of learning to read, write, and spell into a never-ending process of failures and make-work projects for teachers. This is costing us as taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars over past years in salaries.

(4) Due to WHOLE LANGUAGE there has been an increase in what have been thought of as children needing special help, when in fact these are normal children who have become bored with the whole process of learning how not to read. These children

have led school boards such as ours to hire special-educational assistants to help the regular teachers.

There are some hidden costs of WHOLE LANGUAGE that cannot have a price tag put on them: the harming of the mental and even physical health of the children who have become victims of the approach; the teachers who have been harrassed by the system who are afraid to speak out against what they know to be an inferior program; the parents who are continually blamed for the illiteracy of their children and the poor performance of their schools; or the taxpayers in the city as a whole who must work with high-school graduates, 17% of whom are functionally illiterate and 40% of whom have some difficulty of one form or another with literacy.

Aside from debating whether a school bus

should be cut here or a portable classroom should be moved now or later, efforts should be made to concentrate on issues more fundamental to the costs of education.

The plain fact is that PHONICS works. It's the simplest most cost-effective reading and writing program ever developed and while its implementation may mean the lay-off of redundant teachers, and while a few hotels may feel the pinch of not hosting yet another professional development conference, taxpayers would not have to continually fork over millions of dollars into a bad program. Parents would no longer be blamed for the inadequacies of a bad program, and most importantly, our children would be taught to read, write, and spell --- something which up to now has been foreign to them.

There are some good trustees here today, willing to make a stand and start the process

of educational reform, when it comes to implementing a strictly PHONICS reading program. But they've been intimidated --- just as I've been intimidated today --- and privately ridiculed for their efforts. They've been falsely led to believe that the Ministry has the power --- not them; that the administrators know better than they do; or that the teachers' union is too big to take on.

I'm here to tell these trustees that they not only have my support but the support of thousands of parents and teachers in this city. Trustees do have the power to implement change in this area, and they deserve every bit of encouragement. But we can't wait any longer.

Johnny's not getting any younger, and he still can't read. Mr. Chairman...

NO PHONICS IN PERTH COUNTY

At Left: Reproduced from the Perth County Board of Education Newsletter, April, 1992, Vol. 3 No. 3.

They apparently don't teach phonics in Perth County, judging by its school board's advice to parents: "When young children are learning to read... Don't ask your child to sound it out. Don't add it to a word list. Those techniques will make reading at home seem like a chore." Instead, parents are advised to "Cut out pictures that show people's expressions. Then show them to your child. Ask your child how each person feels."

Reading With Your Child Just Tell Children The Words When They Read Aloud

When young children are learning to read, they love to read out loud to show off their skill. But, often, they may run into a word they don't know. The best advice, the experts say, is for parents to simply supply the missing word.

Don't ask your child to sound it out. Don't add it to a word list. Those techniques will make reading at home seem like a chore. They can actually discourage a young reader.

The idea is to make reading at home as much fun as possible for children and parents, too.

Talking and Listening Pictures Encourage Children To Talk



Research tells us that children need practice expressing their ideas aloud. The skills they learn can make them better readers...and better writers.

Here's a good way to spark conversation at home: Look through a newspaper or magazine. Cut out pictures that show people's expressions. Then show them to your child. Ask your child how each person feels.

Then ask, "What makes you happy? Sad? Why does this picture make you feel this way?"

CONFUSION OVER WHOLE LANGUAGE REFLECTED IN MEDIA

At Right: Reproduced from the Toronto Star, April 18, 1992.

Largely a fair description of the WHOLE LANGUAGE debate, the article at right nevertheless manages to contain some incorrect information. For example, the article cites that "For years, Ontario schools relied on basal (basic) readers, with their limited vocabulary, sight readers such as Dick and Jane, or phonics, as tools to teach children to read. But over a period of some 20 years, these methods have been eliminated."

In fact, the author of the article has been misled by the series of name changes which the WHOLE LANGUAGE philosophy has undergone with the express intention of confusing the public and the media. (See 'Aliases', pg. 4.) Actually, WHOLE LANGUAGE (aka 'Sight Reading') still uses books of limited vocabulary. Although not called **Dick and Jane**, some still proudly bear labels boasting that "This book has 38 words!"

TEACHING READING

Are our schools failing the test?

By Lynne Ainsworth
TORONTO STAR

EIGHT MONTHS ago Michelle Meuleman couldn't read. Not a letter, not a word.

Like most first graders she began the school year admiring pictures in books. Four months later, the 6-year-old was reading 30-page books filled with short stories. For this Pickering youngster it's all falling into place.

But hundreds of other Ontario children haven't learned to read — even after three and four years of formal schooling.

Thirty-five years after Rudolf Flesch's book *Why Johnny Can't Read* shook the education establishment, the debate over how to teach reading rages on. In fact, it's the most contentious topic in North American education.

The debate is being fueled by a controversial method of teaching reading — called whole language instruction — in Ontario schools.

For years, Ontario schools relied on basal (basic) readers, with their limited vocabulary, sight readers such as Dick and Jane, or phonics, as tools to teach children to read.

But over a period of some 20 years, these methods have been eliminated. The replacement is whole language, originating in New Zealand and now firmly entrenched in Ontario schools.

Whole language is based on the idea that children will learn to read and write naturally given a healthy exposure to the printed word. Learning to read, advocates argue, is as natural as learning to speak. This is how Michelle is taught.

Instruction begins informally.

The teacher reads aloud to students. Gradually, children learn words by associating them with the oral language and pictures. When they come across an unfamiliar word, students are encouraged to estimate the meaning based on the context of the sentence and the picture on the page.

CASE VANDERWOLF, a psychology professor at the University of Western Ontario, says his children, ages 7 and 8, are among the growing number of students exposed to the whole language teaching method.

"My daughter finished Grade 1 and couldn't read," he says. "I was unhappy with the education she was getting so I went to the school board and complained and was met with absolute hostility."

"The research evidence is quite clear. Children learn to read more accurately and with better comprehension if their instruction begins with a systematic training in phonics," says Vanderwolf, who now sends his children to a private school.

With phonics, children learn the alphabet and letter sounds before moving on to words.

In Ontario classrooms, whole language has gradually eliminated the formal teaching of phonics, the use of limited-vocabulary readers and the "sight, say" method popularized by the Dick and Jane readers.

"Whole language was a good reaction to a bad situation," says Leslie Grant, a former teacher who now runs a private tutoring service. "There was too much rote learning and not enough emphasis on how a child learns."

But Grant believes schools have gone overboard with a child-centred classroom in which the student sets the pace of learning.

"What we see in the classroom is one extreme to the other," says Grant, owner of the Sylvan Learning Centre in Toronto, an after-school tutoring service in reading, writing and mathematics.

The results, critics argue, have been disastrous.

Pointing to the poor performance of Ontario students in provincial reading tests, Toronto psychologist Dennis Raphael describes whole language as "madness."

"The education system in Ontario has hit rock bottom," says Raphael, who teaches child development at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

Like a growing number of parents, Raphael believes phonics is the most effective way to teach the majority of children to read.

"Even if whole language is effective for some children, it doesn't work for all students," he says.

In Peterborough, a group of parents is questioning the way reading is taught.

"You look at their report cards and their averages and you have no indication there is a problem," says Peterborough parent Janice Hannah. She eventually recognized the extent of her daughter's reading problem when the Grade 4 student couldn't read some road signs.

For almost a year Peterborough Parents for Education have been fighting to bring back a more structured program to local schools, one that will include the teaching of phonics and put an end to "the guessing at words."

"We're not a back-to-basics group," Hannah says. "We don't

want our children sitting in rows, working from spellers and doing nothing but drill."

At the insistence of parents, the Peterborough County Board of Education agreed in November to test the Grade 4 class at South Monaghan Public School, the school Hannah's daughter attends. Of the 26 students in the class, 21 of whom started Grade 1 together, 12 were reading at a Grade 2 level.

Parents were stunned. "For those kids who aren't reading, (educators) are always making excuses, blaming parents for not being good mothers and fathers. We won't allow them to blame the parents or the kids any more," says Maureen Beebe, a Peterborough parent. She pulled her two children out of South Monaghan and enrolled them in a nearby separate school where she says classroom work is more traditional.

There are few supporters of phonics within the teaching profession, but that's not to say phonics is never taught in Ontario schools. The interpretation of whole language is as varied as the men and women who use it in their classrooms.

In an article for *The Reading Teacher*, Judith Newman, a professor of education at Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax, argues that whole-language teachers should incorporate phonics.

There is a "serious misunderstanding of what whole language is really about," says Newman.

Scarborough teacher Susan Murdoch agrees. When working one on one with 6-year-olds who are having difficulty reading, Murdoch says phonics is very much a part of her whole-language classroom.

So long,
Dick
and Jane

"If I see a need out there and I think it's phonics I'm going to do it," says Murdoch, who works at Cedar Drive junior school.

BUT TALES of teachers forbidden to use phonics are common among university professors who teach teachers.

"Practices are being dropped not on the basis of whether they are successful with children, but on the belief systems of teachers," says Dale Willows, special education professor at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

"In the end what we should be focusing on is the success of children, not whether you are following the accepted practices or philosophy of any particular time."

Reading conferences organized for teachers focus on whole-language instruction and rarely hold workshops on phonics or other methods.

One professor working at a prestigious Canadian university was shocked to discover that teachers in his class knew only the whole-language approach. They relied on the research of University of Arizona professor Ken Goodman, the guru of the whole-language movement.

They hadn't been exposed to the findings of Harvard education professor Jeanne Chall, whose 1967 book *Learning To Read: The Great Debate* became a bestseller.

Chall argues that learning phonics is an important first step. Once children begin to read, she says, it's no longer necessary to continue phonics instruction.

Goodman's belief that learning to read is as natural as learning to

speak doesn't wash with Willows.

Willows, whose 20-year career has been spent studying how children learn to read and write, says youngsters learn to speak without instruction, but they don't learn to read until taught.

"Many children flourish in a whole-language classroom, but we have to worry about the kids who don't have the ability to decode written words," says Willows. "I'm for good teaching and there are a variety of ways to do it."

Tired of years of reassurances from teachers that their children will catch on to reading given time, parents are now demanding action from school boards.

"For the past 20 years, children have been the victims of a system that is largely experimental," says Queensville parent Christine Rieder. "I, for one, am tired of my kids being the guinea pigs."

Rieder says both her children, Samantha, 8, and Charles, 10, floundered in school. Testing by a private school revealed that Charles — at the end of Grade 3 — was reading at a mid-Grade 1 level, she says.

"My son's self-esteem was going down, down, down. I had to do something."

Charles was pulled out of public school and for one year was taught in a small private school run by Carol Tupker, now a tutor.

With direct instruction from teachers, Charles was taught to read using phonics. By the end of Grade 4, Rieder says, her son was reading well beyond his grade level. Charles is now back in public school and "bored," says Rieder. This year it's Samantha.

Please see ARE/page D5

Are our schools failing to teach children to read?

Continued from page D1

tha's turn for private school.

Like many parents, Rieder can't afford to continue paying private school fees of \$500 a month. With each passing month her resentment grows at not being able to find the kind of education she wants for her children within the public system.

Now Rieder has gone public with her plea to the York Region Board of Education that it provide a school dedicated to teaching "basic fundamentals."

Rieder has established Parents In Action (paid membership: 100), an advocacy group for phonics. The two-month-old group has held two standing-room-only meetings of parents anxious for change.

"I thought maybe I'd get 50 people out to a meeting so we could pool our resources and fund Saturday morning phonics classes for the kids. I was stunned when 250 people showed up for the first meeting," says Rieder.

With the mobilization of parents into groups, the debate in Ontario is just heating up.

The tug-of-war between parents and teachers over whole language is a puzzle to education ministry officials.

"The perception is there is only one way to teach children and that's

simply not true," says Maurice Poirier, director of the ministry's curriculum policy development branch.

"Children learn to read in a variety of ways. The best ways are to be found with those teachers comfortable with both phonics and whole language."

The province has never mandated teaching methods, according to Poirier. He says it's up to boards and faculties of education to decide on the best teaching methods to use in the classroom.

But there's one thing both supporters and critics of whole language agree on: reading begins in the home.

"Children who grow naturally as readers... consume print as an essential part of their daily diet," says David Doake, a professor at Acadia University in Nova Scotia and author of *Reading Begins at Birth*.

"We're working against the home all the time," says Doake, an advocate of whole language. "In this television-dominated culture, if kids never see mom and dad reading it's virtually impossible to build up the immense desire to get hold of books."

But many parents say that's nonsense. Even if they do read to their kids, that doesn't take the place of classroom instruction. And the fact remains, Johnny still can't read when he's in Grade 2.



"I think you'll find my test results are a pretty good indication of your abilities as a teacher."

WHOLE LANGUAGE VERSUS PHONICS

REFERENCES

BOOKS

Daly, James. *Education Or Molasses? - A Critical Look At The Hall-Dennis Report*. Ancaster, Cromlech Press, 1969.

Flesch, Rudolf. *Why Johnny Can't Read - And What You Can Do About It*. New York, Harper & Row, 1955

Flesch, Rudolf. *Why Johnny Still Can't Read - A New Look At The Scandal Of Our Schools*. New York, Harper and Row, 1981.

Hall, E.M., Dennis, L.A. et al. *Living And Learning - The Report of the Provincial Committee on Aims and Objectives of Education in the Schools of Ontario*. Toronto, The Newton Publishing Company, 1968.

Phillips, Charles E. *The Development of Education in Canada*. Toronto, W. J. Gage and Co. Ltd., 1957.

A Parent's Guide To Whole Language. The Board of Education for the City of London, 1991.

ARTICLES AND ESSAYS

Editorial. *The Writing on the Wall*. London, England, The Sunday Times, Sept. 9, 1990.

Groff, Patrick. *What the Application of Phonics Does*. Reading and Literacy Institute of Alberta Newsletter, Jan., 1990.

Groff, Patrick. *True And False About Whole Language*. Reading And Literacy Institute of Alberta Newsletter, Vol. 2 No. 2, 1991.

Haswell, James T. *The Dangers of Whole Language - What Research Says*. Reading and Literacy Institute of Alberta.

Haswell, James T. *Acquisition of Literacy - Part I - Research on Context and Word Reading Strategies*. Reading and Literacy Institute of Alberta, Vol 2 No. 2, 1991.

Kline, Carl L. *Teaching Disabilities*. Reading and Literacy Institute of Alberta Newsletter, Jan., 1990.

Lightfoot, Liz. *Failed On All Counts*. Article, The Mail On Sunday (London, England), April 14, 1991, Page 1.

Nikiforuk, Andrew. *Untitled article*, Globe & Mail (Toronto), Oct. 11, 1991.

Piekoff, Leonard. *The American School - Why Johnny Can't Think*. Voice of Reason - Essays in Objectivist Thought by Ayn Rand. New York, Penguin Group, 1990.

Academic Child Abuse. International Institute for Advocacy for School Children. Barbara Bateman, Chair.

Vanderwolf, Case. *Teaching Methods in Elementary School: A Brief Review of the Evidence*, Orbit, 1991, 22: 20-22

Wearing, Sara-Jane. *School System 'Inept and Wasteful' - Get Back To The Basics*. Article, The Sunday Sun (Toronto), Jan. 8, 1989.

Weir, Ruth. *Philosophy, Cultural Beliefs, and Literacy*. The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Interchange, Vol. 21 No. 4, pp 24-32.

OTHER SOURCES

Freedman, Joe. *So Much Less Than They Could Be*. Alberta Home and School Address given April 12, 1991.

Morrison, Sheila. *Radio '98 Open-Line Show*, March 26, 1992

Morrison, Sheila. *Address to The London - Middlesex Taxpayers' Coalition*, Oct. 28, 1991.

Ostry, Sylvia. *Canadian Competitiveness and Human Resources*. Lecture presented by David Lavin Associates, Inc. (Toronto), 1991.

Vanderwolf, Case. *Annotated Bibliography on Class Size and Student Achievement*. Personal communication, 1991.

Parents tell horror stories of poor work

One parent's fight sparks revolt over school system

We are a group of parents and teachers in Waterloo Region (in Ontario) concerned about the effect that "child-centred" learning is having on our children's academic achievement.

By Susan Walker
TORONTO STAR

Malkin Dare, a Waterloo mother of two, placed that classified ad in a newspaper and innocently touched off a parents' revolt.

Initially, Dare received about 20 letters. Around the same time, she and some other Waterloo parents formed Parents for Learning, a group that soon grew to 250 energetic skeptics of the school sys-

tem. They were mothers and fathers who felt their children have not been taught basic language and mathematical skills at school. They wanted the schools to pull back from "child-centred learning" — the current teaching philosophy that emphasizes students, not teachers, should set the pace of learning in the classroom.

This May, a year later, in a rented space in an Etobicoke school, Dare convened the first official meeting of the province-wide Organization for Quality Education.

The 60 people who came each represented hundreds of angry parents like Dare: They came from Peterborough, Richmond Hill, Etobicoke and from local groups across southern Ontario. Today Dare estimates provincewide membership in such groups is in the tens of thousands.

They have sprung up faster than a new lawn in an April rain.

The parents don't all want exactly the same things, but they all think the schools, particularly elementary schools, are not serving their children well.

But not only parents belong to Dare's group. Quietly, several disgruntled teachers, who believe that the changes in the education system have left them powerless, have also aligned themselves with the organization.

Their critics accuse them of wanting to turn back the clock, because their demands include things like teaching reading through phonics, bringing back drill work in mathematics and returning to more class segregation of the bright and the not-so-bright, the well-behaved and the not-so-well-behaved.

Ross Parry, communications director of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, says trustees believe schools are delivering the basics that are needed in the nineties.

"The 'basics' is a concept that is changing rapidly and today would include computer skills, for instance," he said.

But Dare is disenchanted with the whole philosophy of teaching:

**'I got a phonics workbook.
Within six weeks he was reading.'**

"Kids are supposed to absorb (knowledge) as a whole as opposed to being taught it. Kids are supposed to learn when they are ready. It doesn't work for my son and it doesn't work for some other kids either."

Many educators might take issue with Dare's description of the current teaching theory. But the 6,000 or 7,000 Ontario parents who've gone to hear guest speakers like Ontario Studies in Education professor Mark Holmes or consultant Dennis Raphael, proponents of back-to-basics education, share Dare's sentiments.

Dare's inquiry into education began a couple of years ago when she had an interview with her son's Grade 2 teacher.

"It was near the end of the year and the teacher told me 'He doesn't have any word-attack skills.'"

What that meant to Dare, a former teacher, was that her son had nearly completed two years of school without learning to read. Dare decided to take the traditional, phonetic approach: Teach the sounds made by different letter combinations. Dare disagrees with the "whole-language method" that downplays the understanding of single words or syllables and gets kids immersed in the flow of a whole story first.

Dare said it might work for some kids, but it was no good for her son.

"I got a phonics workbook and started to work with him. Within six weeks he was reading."

Since Dare and her friends got to work, stores in Kitchener-Waterloo are selling phonics books, which are rare in many school libraries. A local music school is offering a course in phonics, and Dare communicates with 500 like-minded parents through a newsletter called Quality Education Forum.

The first issue gives the names and phone numbers of 21 regional contact people, all the way from Windsor to Durham Region.

Under Quality Education's oak tree emblem, a glossy brochure describes the organization's aim: "improving outcomes in publicly funded schools." The membership application invites cheques of \$10 for a family and \$100 for a corporation.

Quality Education members, says the brochure, feel that "too many of our children are learning far less than they should about writing, grammar, spelling, mathematics, geography, history and science."

This may come as news to the parents and educators of prize-winning mathematics and creative writing students in Ontario, but it is a view that is gathering adherents by the day.

The organization has five goals that boil down to:

- ☐ Give parents power over their children's schools.
- ☐ Establish province-wide skill standards for every grade.
- ☐ Set a step-by-step course of study for every subject.
- ☐ Test regularly, board-wide and province-wide, in every subject.
- ☐ Distribute information about effective teaching methods, especially to teachers.

David Clandfield, a policy adviser to Education Minister Tony Silipo, says parents have a right to ask for province-wide standards and for regulation. Where the ministry and the parents disagree is in the way this should be achieved.

"Our difficulty is that they tend to want to do this (testing) using itemized and standardized tests that break things down into little bits of information and multiple-choice questions," says Clandfield, a University of Toronto professor.

The ministry is staying on its course, despite the lobbying from the Quality Education group.

Even Dare concedes that so far, at least at her local board, her group has had "zero" impact. At most school boards, she says, "we're viewed as just a small, radical, vocal group."

"We know we can't make changes all by ourselves," said Dare after the meeting in Etobicoke. "But we also know there's a lot of unfocused anger out there."

Not all of it is unfocused. This winter in York Region, the Quality Education Network got off to

a rolling start with public meetings in Markham and Richmond Hill that attracted 300 or 400 parents a night.

President Barb Smith, mother of three children, a 2-year-old, a 4-year-old, and a son in Grade 6, says it was "the lack of standards" that forced her to act.

"My son was coming home with a straight-A report card."

But, according to Smith he couldn't write comprehensibly.

"It became very evident that our system was lacking standards and accountability," she says, now grateful that her son was later identified as slightly learning-disabled.

She is more blunt than Dare about her fears for the school system:

"They're saying some of the kids are in wheelchairs so let's put them all in wheelchairs."

At the York Region meeting this spring, in a lavish community centre in Markham, nearly 300 parents filled the hall to listen to two speakers.

One was David Hogg, self-styled math crusader. He reported on the design of the 1991 international math tests. He lamented the sorry state of math education in Toronto.

Ontario's grim performance, claimed Hogg, was even worse than the results indicated.

"They had a tendency to look at the results much more favorably than I wanted," said Hogg of his colleagues on a ministry-appointed evaluation panel.

The other speaker was teacher Jim Garrow, head of special education at a new alternative

school in York Region, Woodbridge College, where students wear uniforms and sign a contract to observe school policies on behavior and homework. It's the kind of school that many quality-of-education parents want in their own neighborhoods.

Woodbridge, he claimed, was only elitist in a fundamental sense: "We have a right to expel kids."

The York Region parents didn't just come to listen.

"My frustrations with the education system began about five years ago when my eldest son was in Grade 4," said a father in the back.

"What's wrong with this system?" he asked. "There hasn't been one evening when I haven't had to sit down with my boys to help them."

Loud applause from the other audience members greeted this remark.

An anonymous teacher added his observations: "Something's wrong somewhere. So many of us, so many educators want to get back to the system we grew up with. Uniforms, respect, commitment; what we were brought up with."

As the time ran out, parents throughout the room were volunteering horror stories about classes of 39 students, work that came home full of errors, handwriting you could hardly read.

The group endorsed a point-by-point plan for improving mathematics instruction and fired it off to the education ministry.

Silipo acknowledged the letter, but his office declined the group's invitation to speak.

**'Many teachers are feeling upset
and extremely powerless'**

As the meeting broke up, dozens flocked to the stage to sign forms and pay their \$10 entrance fee for the York Region Quality Education Network.

The York Region group continues to grow. "We average one new member a day," said Smith recently.

This summer network volunteers will be setting up booths at local summer festivals.

A soft-spoken mathematics teacher, Marty Cugelman, was also at the Markham meeting. He'd spoken with some other teachers and they soon declared themselves the Quality Education Network Educators Committee.

At a small gathering around Cugelman's kitchen table in Richmond Hill not long ago, the plans of a teacher-activist group were taking shape.

"Many teachers are feeling upset and extremely powerless," says Cugelman. Cugelman and his colleagues have written a 33-point position paper — in even stronger language than the parents' materials — that proposes massive changes to curriculum and a return to traditional methods and discipline.

"We've been contacted by many teachers, but most don't want to leave their names. They're just afraid," says Cugelman, who is not sure how many teachers may be among the network's members.

The teachers' complaints are many and various, from discipline (not enough) to de-streaming (a mistake).

Under "New Canadians," the paper suggests that "these students are placed in the regular classroom with insufficient preparation, they further add to the task of the teacher who is trying to cope with bright students, average students, weak students, incompetent students and learning disabled students."

"I'm teaching much less now than I ever could before," says Cugelman, a little wearily. "My skills are weaker than ever. I can't believe how little gets accomplished in class."

Harry Bowes, chairperson of the York Region school board, knows of the Quality Education Network, but not of its president.

"I don't know Barb Smith. She has never contacted me."

Bowes agrees with the need for more alternative schools in the region. But he defends the board's record on testing and says that teachers "have quite a flexible approach" to reading.

But Bowes is listening. And who wouldn't? At their current rate of growth, Quality Education groups will have sprung up in another 20 or 30 communities by this fall when school reopens.



"real books" = "whole language"

The writing on the wall

TWO reports appeared on Friday to add to the increasing evidence that we are breeding a nation of illiterates. A survey of 400,000 children in eight English local education authorities revealed that the number of seven-year-olds who cannot read has risen by 50% in the past five years. The proportion of children who cannot read simple words (such as bat, mat and cat) has risen from 10% to 15%.

Yet on the same day it was also reported that a Cambridge classics graduate who wanted to teach reading in primary schools and who has been marking O-level English literature papers for 12 years (and A-level classics for two) had been repeatedly rejected for teacher training because she was "too old-fashioned". One college, however, advised her, if she really wanted to work in a school, to look for a job as a playground assistant or dinner lady. Those whom the gods would destroy, they first send mad, then put in charge of our education system.

Martin Turner, an educational psychologist, says in his survey of reading failure that "there is now clear evidence that hundreds of thousands of British schoolchildren... are subject to a sharply downward trend in reading attainment at seven or eight... the downturn in reading standards is unprecedented in modern

educational history". He is in no doubt where the blame lies: modern teaching methods that have spread through our state schools since the 1960s, such as the American "real books" technique, which is based on the absurd idea that children cannot be taught to read (though past generations seemed to have been taught pretty well) but can only pick it up spontaneously if they are allowed to choose books that interest them; and the look-and-say method, by which children learn to read by recognising the shapes of words (not the individual letters), as if they were Chinese characters, rather than old-fashioned phonics, which involves spelling out each word's sounds (the way most readers of this sentence were taught).

Annis Garfield, the rejected Cambridge classics graduate and a 42-year-old mother, prefers the phonetic approach: "Too many teachers are resorting to the glib and superficial rhetoric of fashionable thinking," she says. "I favour the traditional phonetic method of teaching English, not the fashionable way of memorising the shape of words." That could explain why she was spurned by five centres of higher education in her efforts to take a postgraduate certificate of education. You might think that Mrs Garfield was exactly the sort of woman the government wants to

encourage into teaching: mature, a mother with young children, university-educated and already with experience in schools as an examiner and governor of the local comprehensive. But the system did not rate her.

Her five rejections are so astounding that it is worth naming the whole roll of dishonour: Oxford Polytechnic, Loughborough University and Westminster Training College (Oxford) all implied she was too old-fashioned in her attitudes to teaching; Nene College in Northampton also said no, and suggested the dinner lady alternative; but the interview at Warwick University was most revealing of all. When asked what she would teach in a secondary school English literature class, she replied Keats and Coleridge, then Austen and Shakespeare. But her denim-clad interviewer complained that they would not appeal to pupils and asked instead for a list of suitable modern American authors and ethnic minority literature.

Such anecdotes give a flavour of the malaise at the heart of our state education system. But the true extent of the problem is hard to ascertain because of the conspiracy of silence that afflicts the education Establishment whenever anybody tries to assess standards. Mr Turner's survey is based on leaked data; most local education

authorities do not make public the results of tests to measure standards. Perhaps they are too ashamed to do so. Mr Turner claims that even Tory-controlled education authorities "have been sitting secretly on desperately unfavourable downward trends in reading attainment". John MacGregor, the secretary of state for education, has admitted that even his department's own inspectors have difficulty prising any information about the testing of standards from education authorities; some simply deny that they do such testing.

Of course, in a sane world, independent examiners would regularly test the reading ability of every child. The individual results would go confidentially to the parents; and the class-by-class results would be published to reveal bad teachers and bad schools. That, however, would be strongly opposed by the education Establishment of teaching unions and bureaucrats who believe that the education system should be run for their benefit and that incompetence should not be penalised. But then the education Establishment has bitterly fought against most of the government's attempts to raise standards, give parents a better choice within the state system and encourage teachers to foster excellence rather than mediocrity.

Now it is thwarting the government's reforms by implementing them half-heartedly, or not at all. That is a tragedy, especially since the reforms do not go nearly far enough.

Our schools are failing the nation. The hope used to be that the quality of the state system would be raised so much that private schools would cease to have any special cachet. That is how it should be. But instead the state system has deteriorated so much that even parents of modest means are turning to the private sector, often at great financial sacrifice. That leaves the state system even more deprived. As a result we are creating a system of educational apartheid that is socially divisive and educational madness.

No real progress can be made so long as the people who currently run our education system remain in charge. We need to sweep away the bureaucracies and teaching unions (both are part of the problem, not the solution), by devolving the decisions and the resources to the schools themselves, which would then be free to compete for pupils however they liked. Parents would make their choices, and that, in turn, would reinforce good schools and drive out the bad. The writing is on the wall for our schools; if we do not act now, there might soon be nobody able to read it.

EDUCATION

Andrew Nikiforuk relates how four questions exposed a teaching fad's shortcomings

AST spring, Matthew Becke became a revolutionary and asked the Peterborough County Board of Education in Central Ontario four subversive questions. The queries all pertained to her son and several other children reading and writing below their grade level.

The Grade 3 and 4 students had been unwitting guinea pigs of a new educational fad called activity-centred learning. Little direct teaching takes place in this method. Children merely discover math in sandboxes and stories in books, travelling from one fun centre to another like corporate executives on holiday.

Mrs Becke and a brave group called Parents For Education had some concerns about this fad and the absence of a curriculum in their children's school. They innocently asked their incendiary questions at a meeting with the superintendent and principal of South Monaghan Public School on May 22. Here they are:

What are our children learning?
How will they learn it?

When will they learn it?
How will you know, the teacher know and the parent know that the child has learned it?

In response, Mrs Becke and company received a long talk on early child development theory, and a copy of *The Formative Years*, an outdated government guideline that reads like a hippie treatise on free education. They also heard the classic four brushoffs: Parents worry too much; we are the professionals; schools are not how you remember them; and every child develops in his own good time. Be patient, Johnny will blossom.

When Mrs Becke asked how long she had to wait for Johnny to blossom, the educators didn't answer. When schools become gardens, it's hard to tell who will blossom when.

But the educators did promise research on the fertility of the learning centres and said they would "work hard on something." They also said they welcomed "parent participation," especially if the parents asked their questions nicely.

Last month, Mrs Becke asked the four questions again at a meeting with the school board's director of education and superintendent of curriculum.

She was told that only the Education Ministry could answer her skill-testing questions. At another meeting, board administrators told Parents For Education (Mrs Becke couldn't attend — you know, hostile body language) that the board would look into a curriculum for junior education. The superintendent might take a year.

Then the director of education (who confessed that she can't spell and said it didn't mean you couldn't become a success — and she's right) decided to provide a one-day symposium on Oct. 19 for parents to "listen and discuss the nature of primary and junior education" in Ontario. The symposium will include a free lunch and talks from education experts about research on "active learning" and Ontario's child-centred curriculum.

Mrs Becke, of course, is not impressed. She says she didn't want a circus, just answers to her four questions. She doesn't want the activity centres stopped or changed, just good teaching for children whom the fad had failed. "We are asking for common-sense education. If there is problem, let's solve it. If it takes some instruction and systematic phonics, what's the big deal?"

The big deal is Mrs Becke's steadfastness. In fact, the board now considers the 35-year-old mother of three *prima non grata*. She can't even talk to a teacher without the director present. Educators have accused her of "harassing" teachers with questions and "upsetting" the children. The director has also warned Mrs Becke that she might have to take the well-being of her staff and school into consideration — jargon for a lawsuit.

At the beginning of the school year, Mrs Becke put two of her sons into a nearby separate school. Its staff is more concerned about teaching than gardening.

Despite her outlaw status, Mrs Becke plans to attend the symposium along with other members of Parents For Education. They are hoping to hear answers to their four questions.

Sixteen of the public school children who can't read or write well will soon receive some phonics instruction. There is still no curriculum for children in Grades 1, 2 and 3.

And the director of education, the one who says she can't spell (but that doesn't mean you can't be a success and she's right), will soon become an assistant deputy education minister.

Andrew Nikiforuk is a magazine writer and former teacher.

EDUCATION

Language learning battle lines drawn

Critics of the whole language approach want the more traditional phonics method used in schools.

By Kelley Teahen
The London Free Press

At first glance, it's a fight about how to teach little children to read.

But with closer examination, the brouhaha surrounding whole language education is nothing less than a titanic clash of political and philosophical wills.

The latest skirmish has surfaced at the London board of education, where some parents and at least one political party are giving the board failing grades for how it teaches children to read, write and spell. A special public meeting on the issue is coming up Tuesday night.

In the last two years, similar clashes have occurred in the Middlesex County board of education and the London and Middlesex County Roman Catholic school board. Other pockets of concern have surfaced around Southwestern

Ontario, especially in Elgin County.

This time, the political edge is out in the open. Anti-whole language talk flowed freely from taxpayer coalition candidates during the 1991 trustee elections. The latest push comes in a flyer distributed this spring by the Freedom Party of Canada.

The flyer, with the headline Schools Failing Our Children!, argues that the phonics system of teaching reading is superior to the whole language system now used in schools. So far, 20,000 copies have been distributed.

Robert Metz, president of the Freedom party, says parents should have a choice in how their children are educated. Offer classes using both methods and let parents choose, he says. He and Craig Stevens, who follows education

See **BATTLE LINES** page B2 ▶

TEACHING METHODS

WHOLE LANGUAGE

- ☐ **Called whole-to-part approach, or top-to-bottom way of teaching language:** When children learn to speak, they hear adults speaking fluently and catch on first by recognizing simple words, then learning to speak them. They learn how to put words together correctly through trial and error. Whole language teaches reading and writing skills in the same way: The children are immersed in written words — through story hours and shared reading — and then encouraged to express themselves as best they can, with correct use learned and achieved over time.
- ☐ **Supporters' arguments:** They say whole language is the best of all teaching worlds. "Whole language is precisely that — dealing with all elements of communications. Whole language is not a particular approach, and phonics, spelling and vocabulary are part of the whole," said Darrel Skidmore, director, London board of education.
- ☐ **Detractors' arguments:** They say the method leaves many children able to read only words they have memorized, rather than being able to sound out new words. Spelling and grammar are ignored in favor of "expressiveness" and children aren't given the discipline required to master language literacy.

PHONICS METHOD

- ☐ **Called bottom-to-top, or part-to-whole approach:** Children learn the sound of letters, then sound out words, learn grammar rules and then progress to reading and writing sentences. Children learn to read from "readers," made up of stories using words that clearly follow phonics rules.
- ☐ **Supporters' arguments:** They call it "teacher-proof" (because step-by-step instructions are prescribed in textbooks), disciplined, and a system where progress is easily measurable.
- ☐ **Detractors' arguments:** They say phonics may teach the sound of words but not meanings. A child isn't encouraged to write or develop a love of books and reading because they aren't allowed to write sentences until they have learned how to spell each word.

THE POLITICS OF WHOLE LANGUAGE

Above and At Right: "Nothing less that a titanic clash of political wills" is how London Free Press reporter **Kelley Teahen** accurately describes the **WHOLE LANGUAGE** debate. Unfortunately, the article is one-sided and inaccurate with its false implication, through negative association, that **PHONICS** is part of a **right-wing** philosophy. In stark contrast, no political label is attached to **WHOLE LANGUAGE**, which can clearly and objectively tied to the **left-wing** philosophy of **egalitarianism** (see 'Still Failing Our Children', pg. 5) — a philosophy aggressively being implemented by both Ontario's left-wing socialist NDP government and by left-wing teacher's unions.

In fact, the perception accurately described by Case Vanderwolf that **PHONICS** is "simply one aspect of right-wing political views," is a purely **left-wing** perception fueled by its simplistic premise that if something isn't "left-wing", it must be "right-wing."

BATTLE LINES: Debate part of two larger issues

▶ From page B1

issues for the London-Middlesex Taxpayers' Coalition, believe the whole language method has been pushed because ideally it requires small class sizes — which means hiring more teachers.

"Whole language instruction being used in schools today has become politicized," Stevens will admit after much prodding.

A 1990 paper by University of Western Ontario psychology professor C. H. Vanderwolf points out that support for phonics is seen "as simply one aspect of right-wing political views," a perception he says shouldn't keep schools from using phonics, which he believes is the best method of language instruction.

QUALITY: On the opposite side are professional educators like Darrel Skidmore, the London board of education's director.

"The whole language debate is one small element of two much larger issues," he says. "The first is the whole issue of quality assurance. People feel they're paying a lot of dollars for education and, therefore, they want assurance they're getting good value for the dollar."

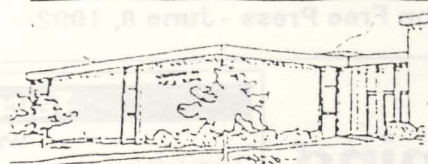
The second, he says, is the comparison issue: how a child

If You Go

- ☐ **What:** Program committee meeting on whole language.
- ☐ **Where:** London board of education office, 1250 Dundas St. E.
- ☐ **When:** Tuesday, 7 p.m.
- ☐ **Who:** The public is invited to make presentations or simply attend. If you wish to make a presentation, call the executive secretary's office, 452-2145, to register.

compares with his classmates; how a school compares with the rest of the board; how the board compares to the province, to other provinces and to schools around the world.

Mix into the equation the shifting responsibility from home to school, where schools are expected to take on everything from feeding hungry kids to teaching them how to get along with other little human beings, responsibilities once left exclusively to the home, and you have the final political picture: a social-responsibility vision of education, where every child must be encouraged, versus the best-academic-bang-for-our-buck supporters.



W. S. F. NEWS

WHOLE LANGUAGE ALIBIS AND ALIASES IN ACTION

Reprinted on these pages is a detailed criticism of Freedom Party's Ontario Information Bulletin on WHOLE LANGUAGE written by the principal and distributed by school children of Sherwood Fox Public School in London to all homes in the school's surrounding neighbourhoods -- much to the anger and surprise of many parents.

FP's pamphlet is not 'an attack on the educational system in Ontario'. It is an attack on the WHOLE LANGUAGE philosophy and a defence of PHONICS.

The WHOLE LANGUAGE philosophy has its roots in Canada dating as far back as 1860, though the term WHOLE LANGUAGE is a more recent alias. (See The Development of Education in Canada in reference list. See also, ALIASES, pg. 4)

'Outrageous statements against WHOLE LANGUAGE'? 'Unwarranted claims about PHONICS'? See testimonies of parents, professionals, and many teachers in reproduced news articles.

WHOLE LANGUAGE 'most definitely INCLUDES phonics'? See alibi #2.

Do parents send their children to school to learn how to 'listen, speak, and view' (something which comes naturally) or to learn how to read, write, and spell (something which must be taught)?

See Alibi #4. Ask yourself which would take longer: (1) learning a finite number of rules for reading, or (2) memorizing the shape and appearance of 24,000 words, the vocabulary of an average six-year-old?

See Alibis #2 and #3.

If it's true that many teachers 'floundered as they tried to combine several different 'programs' for teaching' language skills, why do so many WHOLE LANGUAGE supporters claim that 'no one method is best' and that 'we do teach phonics'? See Alibis #2 and #3

1992 April 24

Vol. 4 No. 6

Page 1

From the Principal's Desk.....

I recently received a copy of a Bulletin published by a political group (Freedom Party of Ontario) that was distributed to homes in this area. Since it is an attack on the educational system in Ontario, I feel obliged to give a response to parents through this Newsletter.

There are a number of statements made about illiteracy with the implication that the "whole language" approach to teaching reading and writing is a leading cause of illiteracy in the adult population. Since the whole language approach to teaching reading and writing skills in the Primary Grades (JK - Grade 3) has only been widely adopted throughout Ontario in the last six to ten years it cannot be responsible for adult illiteracy! The first groups of children taught by this primary grade methodology are still in elementary school!

In the bulletin there are some outrageous statements made condemning whole language and some unwarranted claims about the value of a phonics approach. First of all, I take exception to the comparison as if they were two opposite approaches to the same thing. Teaching reading through a primarily phonetic base only addresses one aspect of a language program. Writing (which incorporates spelling), listening, speaking and viewing also must be taught before a student will have the language skills to apply in learning whatever subject. The whole language approach is so named because it incorporates all these strands of language and most definitely INCLUDES phonics when teaching children to read and spell.

The PHONETIC APPROACH to teaching beginning readers is generally described as first teaching each letter or combination of letters (th, sh, ea, oa, ght, etc.) that makes the sounds (or PHONICS) which allows a child to decode or "read" when the letters are strung together in words and sentences. However, given the complexity of the English language, learning all the rules and their exceptions, can be a very long process. Furthermore, being able to decode or "read" any word that is presented is no guarantee that the person is a good speller nor that there is any comprehension of what has been read.

An ALTERNATIVE APPROACH for beginning readers is to build upon a child's initial interest in reading and writing through story-telling and group-reading of interesting and amusing books. Simultaneously, while developing the interest in reading, the children are introduced to the sounds (PHONICS) and letter combinations that when written down in a consistent fashion (correct spelling) allows others to read one's own stories.

It used to be that publishers dictated, through the books they sold to teachers/schools, how young children were taught to read (often as an isolated strand of the language program). Inexperienced teachers often followed the publisher's advice on how to teach language skills and many floundered as they tried to combine several different "programs" for teaching reading, writing, spelling, listening and speaking.

After several false starts in the 1970's there came a groundswell of opinion in the 1980's from experienced Primary Grade teachers that a Language Program should allow a teacher to use a variety of teaching techniques that would maximize the students' learning and, most importantly, INTEREST IN LEARNING ALL THE STRANDS OF LANGUAGE SKILLS -reading, writing (including spelling), listening, speaking and viewing.

Of course, no teaching approach is perfect; none can be guaranteed to be delivered in the most expert way; no learning is instantaneous, nor will all students be successful by a predicted point in time. These claims have never been made for the whole language approach and I doubt they can reputably be made for any teaching technique.

The most significant change that has occurred in the primary grades or the so-called "whole language classrooms" in recent years, is the emphasis on diversity of teaching techniques within a cohesive program incorporating all the language strands. This allows for individual student progress so that the fast learners are not restricted in their opportunities to learn, nor are the slower learners out-paced or ignored as was too commonly the practice in the past.

No claim that any 'teaching approach is perfect' has been made. However, the scientific evidence clearly indicates that PHONICS is the best method of all -- when it comes to teaching reading, writing, and spelling. Obviously, phonics has little value when it comes to teaching the natural skills of 'listening, speaking, and viewing.'

'...no learning is instantaneous...' This should not be an excuse to stretch a six-month teaching process into an indefinite 'life-long' 'facilitating' process.

The last paragraph on this page uses Alibi #3 (No one method is best) and Alibi #10 (We now teach all children).

2.

I have pondered on the reasons for a political party launching an attack on the teaching strategies commonly used in the primary grades. Saving money appears to be one reason. The bulletin cites that Teachers' Unions use whole language as an excuse to demand smaller class size. The implication is that if the whole language approach were not in place the Primary classes could be much larger and our children could be educated more cheaply, thus saving tax-payers' money.

In response to this, I must say that long before "whole language" was part of the Primary teachers' vocabulary there has been a demand for lower class sizes and it has been recognized by the Education Ministries of all the major political parties that money spent (more teachers) on smaller PRIMARY class sizes saves money that has proven necessary, in the past, to spend on remedial classes or social-services programs at a later age level.

Reading the bulletin, it might be inferred by the uninitiated that whole language is a teaching strategy employed throughout the ten years of compulsory schooling or, if not, that what is taught to students in grades 4 through 12 is irrelevant to the level of literacy in school leavers. Since learning is a continual process, surely the entire continuum needs to be studied for possible causes of failure?

The Bulletin claims that whole language requires individual supervision of students - leaving the rest of the class unsupervised. Absolute nonsense! The whole language approach in the primary grades does allow the teacher to provide more individualized instruction and evaluation of progress. Consequently, more detailed reporting to parents on students' strengths and weaknesses, is possible, as they progress through the program. This is not at all the same as individual supervision while others are unsupervised or wasting time! Any person who remains unsure of the distinction should take advantage of the opportunity to visit classrooms during Education Week's Schools Open House, May 4 - 7.

Returning to the bulletin's citation of "startling facts" on the illiteracy rate of high school graduates, I question the validity of the statistics quoted. Not everyone wants to respond to random surveys and people may be inclined to brush off the surveyor with "don't know" rather than take an impromptu reading test. Others may be high school or University graduates from non-English speaking countries but as immigrants to Canada may not qualify as literate in the English language. There are many reasons to question the statement about illiterate school graduates.

The drop out rate is quoted as approaching 30% - what does this mean? Is this statistic true for Ontario - all parts of Ontario? Is it an increasing rate? Does it mean that dropping out of school is always a bad thing? Does it mean that students who leave school without a diploma never return to an educational setting? Obviously this is not so, given the increasing number of adults in their twenties and thirties going to adult education classes to obtain high school credits. There are approximately 2000 adult students now attending G. A. Wheable Centre for Adult Education. Of these 2000 adult students, about one quarter of them are New Canadians. What is the cause of high school drop-outs? The Radwanski Report in the 1980's offered some reasons that led to suggestions for the restructuring of the secondary school programming that has yet to be fully implemented.

Adult illiteracy and high school drop-outs have long been cause for concern. People from many walks of life and educators argue over the accuracy of quoted statistics, the causes and possible remedies. Laying the blame is not a positive contribution to the debate - but clearly the blame cannot be laid at the door of whole language since the problems have been in existence for so long.

Today's drop-outs and illiterate adults were most likely taught (or not) to read and write in those "good old days" when teachers taught the basics in the old-fashioned ways to those large classes, before all the fancy "extras" were introduced to crowd out the curriculum and before teaching became an enviable "soft option" to the real world of work!

Yes, indeed, they were the "good old days" or were they?

JM TheLark

Why would a political party (Freedom Party) launch "an attack on teaching strategies"? True, "saving money" is one reason --- saving children is another.

If it is considered politically incorrect for Freedom Party to get involved in the classroom, why is there no objection made to the fact that "it has been recognized by the Education Ministries of all the major political parties that money spent (more teachers)... saves money"?

Given that well over 20% of the provincial budget and over 50% of municipal taxes go to fund education, would it not be remiss for any political party not to get involved?

Remedial schools and classes are a growing phenomenon --- mainly due to WHOLE LANGUAGE --- not one to be relegated to "the past".

According to the London Board of Education's own definition (see pg. 2), WHOLE LANGUAGE is a "life-long learning philosophy", not a "teaching process" that ends in Grade 12. Should the "entire continuum... be studied for possible causes of failure"? Absolutely! But this falls outside the parameters of the immediate WHOLE LANGUAGE debate.

"... leaving the rest of the class unsupervised" is "absolute nonsense"? See *Why Johnny Can't Read* by Rudolf Flesch. "...visit classrooms during Education Week..."? Better still, visit the classroom when they least expect you.

"I question the validity of the statistics quoted..." which include Statistics Canada, Southam Survey, Canadian Business --- and which are backed up by the testimonies of parents, students, and teachers. Whose statistics would be considered 'valid'? Why? See Alibi #1, "Everything is Hunky Dory."

"Laying the blame is not a positive contribution to the debate ---"? Without identifying the problem, how can any workable solutions be found? Both WHOLE LANGUAGE (under a set of aliases) and the "problems" of illiteracy have gone hand-in-hand throughout Canada's educational history. Throughout this history, the supporters of WHOLE LANGUAGE have consistently laid the blame for illiteracy on a host of unrelated causes. See Alibis #6, #7, #8, #9.

"What is the cause of high-school dropouts?" Surveys reveal that boredom is the main cause of dropouts --- and the cause of boredom is repetition, a critical component of the WHOLE LANGUAGE philosophy. Moreover, the Radwanski Report contains many recommendations that would be supported by Freedom Party.

EDUCATION

Parents want more learning, less theory

They feel their concerns about the effectiveness of the whole language teaching method are not being taken seriously.

By Kelley Teahen
The London Free Press

In "child-centred" learning, of which language instruction is a part, children are encouraged to move at their own pace. They learn more by experience and experimenting than by direct instruction. The emphasis is on encouragement rather than marks, failure and star-to-dummy ranking of classmates.

"In the old method, teacher talks, students listen," says Bob Andrews, program superintendent for the London board of education. "Now, students do and teacher helps."

When talking about whole language, both sides cite experts, statistics, defenders, successes and the other side's failures, but both sides agree on one thing: Many parents without a political axe to grind are upset with current language education and up to now, their concerns haven't been taken seriously enough.

"For the board, it's one-way

communication," says parent Bonnie Cumming, who finds educators won't listen to complaints because they believe parents' grievances are born from ignorance, not legitimate analysis of their children's learning capabilities.

"They say, we'll tell you, give you a pamphlet, give you a video (about whole language). But first, they have to listen to what parents are trying to tell them."

Often, she says, teachers point out that parents don't see what's going on in the classroom. "If that's the case, I say the schools don't know what's going on around the dining room table. They talk to me about my son's 'love of reading.' Where do they get this idea? He won't read at home; he wants to play road hockey."

APOLOGETIC: Darrel Skidmore, education director, apologizes for any leave-it-to-the-professionals attitudes parents may have encountered. "No one should ever

be saying parents aren't smart enough to understand. That's totally inappropriate."

Cumming's worries started when her second child, now in Grade 5, wasn't reading very well in Grade 4.

"They told me, 'it will come, we don't want to push him and destroy his love of learning.' But don't you believe the child needs the carrot put a little farther away from the nose? Some kids, if you don't continually challenge them, will do only what they think they can get away with."

Parents like her, she says, "see good in both approaches to language. We want a better marriage."

David Ennis, program supervisor at the London board of education, agrees. "Whole language philosophy allows for mobility. Some people don't believe it, but it's true. Some children are highly analytic, rule-driven, they like lots of direction and structure. We can offer that. Other children, however, are dysfunctional with that approach."

A teacher, Ennis says, "needs to diagnose what the child needs — whole to part, or part to whole — and then use the most effective method."

Wonderful in theory, says Cumming, but there are two big problems. "How can a teacher with 30 kids do that? I'd like to sit down with teachers and talk to them about this."

The second, she says, is the pervasive feeling that any teacher who tries to use more traditional language methods will be disciplined or scolded for not sticking with the whole-to-part approach.

NO CORRECTIONS: For instance, a teaching assistant who responded to a home and school survey of parent attitudes wrote that she isn't allowed to correct spelling mistakes in the classroom, says Cumming.

Skidmore says the board has three tasks: "We have to communicate what whole language is, then we have to put measures in place to see whether or not it's being effectively implemented by teachers in the classroom, and, third, we have to evaluate if it's effective for children."

To that end, the board is working at establishing "essential learning" targets for all areas, including language, which will clearly outline "what an average youngster should legitimately be able to do by certain ages."

Above: The description of "child-centered learning", though meant to sound appealing to the emotions of parents and the public, is actually a perfect indictment of the educational philosophy pervading our public school system. The statements by our educators are clear examples of their abdication of their responsibilities to instruct, direct, teach, and educate our children. The idea that the children can "teach themselves" with high-priced teachers acting as "helpers" is fundamentally unsound.

JUST SAY 'KNOW' TO WHOLE LANGUAGE

Number 1: June 1992, is published by the Freedom Party of Ontario, a fully-registered Ontario political party.

FREEDOM PARTY OF ONTARIO

Freedom Party of Ontario is a fully-registered Ontario political party. Contributions are tax-creditable. Statement of Principle: Freedom Party is founded on the principle that: *Every individual, in the peaceful pursuit of personal fulfillment, has an absolute right to his or her own life, liberty, and property.* Platform: that the purpose of governments is to protect individual freedom of choice, not to restrict it. Annual Membership & Support Level: \$25 minimum (tax-creditable); Provincial Executive: Ontario President: Robert Metz; Vice-president, Ontario: Lloyd Walker; Ontario Secretary: Robert Vaughan; Chief Financial Officer: Patti Plant; Executive Officers: Barry Malcolm, Barry Fitzgerald; Party Leader: Robert Metz.

TO ORDER ADDITIONAL COPIES, or simply to request more information on Freedom Party please call or write:

FREEDOM PARTY OF ONTARIO, P.O. Box 2214, Stn. 'A', LONDON, Ontario N6A 4E3; Phone: (519) 433-8612; OFFICES: 364 Richmond Street, 3rd Floor, LONDON, Ontario, N6A 3C3.