

Sold a Story by Emily Hanford: My Notes

Link: <https://features.apmreports.org/sold-a-story/>

Phonics: Phonics is a method of teaching people to read by correlating sounds with letters or groups of letters in an alphabetic writing system. The principle was first presented by John Hart in 1570. It seems fair to call phonics the traditional, or original approach to teaching and learning how to read. Or, at least, phonics was the typical approach used to teach and learn reading in the 1800's.

Orthographic mapping: The process that all successful readers use to become fluent readers. Through orthographic mapping, students use the oral language processing part of their brain to map (connect) the sounds of words they already know (the phonemes) to the letters in a word (the spellings). When you hear and sound out words, you store the words better in your brain and become a better reader. Phonics helps achieve orthographic mapping.

The Reading Wars: Throughout the 1900's played out the Reading Wars, or, in other words, the debate between whether phonics or the whole-word, or whole-language approach should be used to teach reading.

Noah Webster: Known for his dictionary, Noah Webster can be considered a father of American English. He felt that students in the USA should not be learning from English textbooks from Britain and instead should be learning from textbooks that used English in an "American way," which led to him writing and publishing his books. Noah Webster believed in the use of phonics.

Horace Mann: A politician and educational reformer who lived from 1796-1859 and believed, contrary to Webster, in the whole language approach to learning how to read.

Whole language: A philosophy of reading and baseless, discredited educational method that encourages students to learn to read by focusing on entire, or whole, words and their meaning within context, rather than decoding the sounds and spelling of words (like phonics does).

Three-Cueing Approach: An approach to foundational skills instruction that involves the use of three different types of instructional cues: 1) Semantic (gaining meaning from context and sentence-level cues), syntactic or grammatical features, and grapho-phonetic (spelling patterns). The method directs teachers to prompt students who aren't able to read a word to first think about what would make sense (meaning). Then, ask, "What would fit here—A noun, a verb, an adjective...?" This is the grammar and syntax question. Finally, if the student is still unable to guess or infer the word correctly, the last prompt is to look at the first letter and perhaps sound out the rest of the word. The central belief in the three-cueing model is the belief that readers do not need to read every letter in a word, or every word in a sentence. Instead, they rely on prediction and semantic context to extract meaning. The three-cueing approach aligns with the whole language approach.

Two assertions by the podcast:

- 1. The problem with the cueing approach is that it teaches students to gloss over words, which results in the students never learning the words and then not being able to actually read.*
- 2. Students need direct instruction to learn how to decode words.*

Marie Clay: A researcher and theorist from New Zealand who believed in and advocated for the whole language approach.

Guided Reading: An approach to teaching reading developed by Marie Clay and others in New Zealand in the 1960's during which the teacher guides, or scaffolds, their students through a text as they read, talk, and think their way through it.

Reading Recovery: A reading intervention program developed by Marie Clay for at-risk students that used the whole language approach. It was adopted by all New Zealand schools in the 1980's and spread worldwide.

The Whole Book Approach: A co-constructive storytime model rather than a performance-based one. It is a way of reading with children rather than reading to them. This read-aloud model encourages learners to gather clues from illustrations. Readers become active participants as they look closely at artwork from cover to cover. They learn to use their schema, or cognitive framework, to make sense of and organize information. The Whole Book Approach is not necessarily discredited, but is mentioned in the podcast, as you can see how it is related to Lucy Calkins and her vision described below.

Lucy Calkins: An education entrepreneur and curriculum writer who championed the cueing approach. She believed that reading should be made to look fun and pretty, that students can naturally learn to read, and that teachers are coaches who help students unlock their potential. Calkins' methods rejected phonics and were not based on research. Lucy Calkins founded the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project at Columbia University in 1981. She became revered by teachers throughout the United States.

Columbia University Teachers College: A project that operated at Columbia University and featured and promoted Lucy Calkins' curriculum, influenced teachers nationwide, and spread Calkins' methods throughout the United States. The Teachers College operated from 1981 to 2023, influencing reading education in the United States for over 40 years.

Units of Study: Lucy Calkins' curriculum that at one point was used by 25% of the 67,000 elementary schools in the United States. The podcast said that Units of Study's lack of effectiveness was disguised by the fact that it was being used in high performing districts with rich families who were supplementing the lack of reading education at home with tutors.

Irene Fountas: An American whole language theorist who teaches at Lesley University in Cambridge, MA as the Marie M. Clay Endowed Chair for Early Literacy and Reading Recovery.

Gay Su Pinnell: An American educational theorist and professor emerita at the School of Teaching and Learning at Ohio State University.

Fountas & Pinnell reading levels: A proprietary system of reading levels developed in the 1990's by Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell that place texts into levels based on various criteria, such as word count, number of words, high-frequency words, sentence length, sentence complexity, word repetitions, illustration support, etc. The podcast asserts that Fountas and Pinnell created a flawed benchmark system because it is based on Clay's cueing system and doesn't account for the variations in exposure to vocabulary across cultures in the United States. The podcast also asserts that students learn to "level up" by memorizing books instead of developing reading skills.

Neil Bush: George W. Bush's younger brother who couldn't read as a child.

Reading First, part 1: A federal education program in the United States mandated under the No Child Left Behind Act passed in 2001 by President George W. Bush. Due to his brother Neil's reading struggles as a child, Bush had a personal connection to the Reading First cause. Reading First emphasized a more

structured, teacher-fronted, phonics based method to teaching and learning how to read where a teacher would often be seen directly leading the class in the reading of a text and teaching the students how to decode the sounds and letters of words. This method contrasted the picture of classrooms who used the guided reading method, where students would be “cozied up” in their own corners of the room, reading books independently at their respective levels, while teachers would coach them through their books. This was why President Bush was at and addressed the nation from an elementary school on September 11, 2001 after the terrorist attacks—He was there to observe a reading lesson that was being taught in accordance with the new Reading First methodologies.

Heinemann Publishing: A publishing company whose authors include Lucy Calkins, Irene Fountas, and Gay Su Pinnell, and that has published books that include methods of teaching and learning how to read that have been proven to not work. The podcast quotes Heinemann Publishing as saying that they promote a “beautiful reading approach.”

Reading First, part 2: Teachers across the United States react negatively to George Bush’s Reading First program. Many teachers stand with Lucy Calkins and the reading methods from her that they have learned to love. Many teachers, who traditionally through their unions are aligned with Democrats, also don’t like that the Reading First initiative is coming from George W. Bush, a Republican. Heinemann Publishing backs the teachers, criticizing the federal government and saying to leave teachers alone. By 2007, the budget for Reading First was completely eliminated.

As of 2023, more than 50% of fourth grade students in the United States cannot demonstrate proficiency on reading exams.

To show how much money has been made off America’s reading epidemic, in episode 5 around the 13:00 minute mark, the podcast cites these figures:

- *From 2010-2020, Heinemann Publishing made \$1.6 million.*
- *Gay Su Pinnell Education Foundation has donated \$9.8 million, much of which went to Ohio State University to support reading recovery and Pinnell’s methods.*
- *Gay Su Pinnell drives a Maserati.*
- *Irene Fountas purchased her current home for \$3.1 million.*
- *Fountas owns or co-owns seven properties.*
- *Lucy Calkins LLC is worth \$23 million*

The map on this Web page shows the school districts around the country that use Heinemann materials:

<https://www.apmreports.org/story/2022/11/10/heinemann-sales-by-school-district>

Related article:

<https://slate.com/human-interest/2023/10/reading-phonics-literacy-calkins-curriculum-public-school.html>