

## New Readers Press

### Instructional Practices Used in *The Laubach Way to Reading*

(information provided in response to requirements of the *Adult Education and Family Literacy Act* of 1998\*)

#### Introduction

*The Laubach Way to Reading* is a comprehensive four-level *phonics-based* reading and writing program developed primarily for adults and young adults with little or no reading ability. Each level consists of a student skill book and reader, and a teacher's manual with reduced copies of the skill book pages. "*LWR*" is published by New Readers Press of Syracuse, NY. The series has been in use for over sixty years, and it is updated periodically. Over the years, *LWR* has repeatedly been shown to be a highly effective method for teaching adults to read and write.

This sheet outlines instructional practices used in *LWR*, and lists research that validates the *LWR* approach.

#### Overview of the Structure of *LWR*

Each lesson includes phonic or structural analysis of words, the reading of a story, comprehension checks, and writing practice. A "Scope and Sequence Chart" appears in each teacher's manual. It indicates where in the student book each skill is introduced and reinforced. These skills are grouped under the following areas: phonics skills (includes phonemic awareness plus letter-symbol relationships and traditional phonics), word recognition skills, comprehension skills, writing and spelling skills, and study skills.

#### Principles on Which *LWR* Lessons Are Based

Lessons are based on these principles: establishing of letter-sound relationships, learning through association, moving from the known to the unknown, introducing familiar vocabulary, using repetition, using meaningful context, including only a limited amount of new material in each lesson, fostering independence in learning, learning reading and writing together, and making lessons easy to teach.

#### The Uniqueness of the *Laubach Way to Reading*

Many reading experts have written favorably about *LWR*:

"No other reading program that I know is so carefully constructed as the *Laubach Way to Reading* series. Every major and minor step in this series is based on sound principles of learning and psychology. The reading system is like a completed jigsaw puzzle. Every letter, every word, every picture fits so well that one no longer sees the separate pieces, but rather the system as a whole picture. . . The secret of the success of the *Laubach Way to Reading* series . . . is that it has been built upon 50 years' experience in teaching reading to people in all sorts of conditions. Each revised edition of the series has been built upon the accumulated strengths of the previous editions. The methods, ideas, words, and pictures which worked were kept and refined. Building upon success and experience has made the materials more and more effective."

Walter Pauk, Professor Emeritus  
Director, Reading Research Center  
Cornell University

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\* Title II of the Workforce Investment Act

“The [LWR] materials use a combination of these three approaches [to word recognition]: phonics, sight word, and word pattern, in adult contextual materials. This may account for the popularity and success of the [LWR] materials.”

Project Upgrade:  
Working with Adults Who Have Learning  
Disabilities  
(1994 report)  
Dr. Joseph Hebert, Jr., Director

### **Comments by People in the Field**

"The Laubach Way to Reading works well with those individuals who are phonically and sequentially based learners. The tutors really love it."

Agnes Flores, Executive Director  
Corpus Christi Literacy Council  
Corpus Christi, Texas

"I've been using the *Laubach Way to Reading* for 40 years. That indicates how much I respect it. I've used it in elementary and secondary schools, and with adults. I've successfully taught junior high students to tutor elementary school students with it. Teachers say, 'That just works beautifully.' LWR is wonderful with adults. They learn really well. It breaks the code – those first five charts and stories are like magic."

Betty Frey, literacy instructor  
Tucson Adult Literacy Volunteers  
Tucson, AZ

### **Instructional Practices**

The following information is in response to instructional practices requirements of the *Adult Education and Family Literacy Act* of 1998. It describes some of the instructional practices employed by LWR.

#### *Phonemic and Phonological Awareness*

*Phonological awareness* is an understanding of language at the spoken, not the written level. Proficiency at phonological awareness predicts success with reading and writing. Blanche Podhajski (1998) states: "Individuals with strong phonological awareness know that sentences can be broken down into words, words can be divided into syllables, and syllables can be separated into sounds." *Phonemic awareness* (a part of phonological awareness) is a person's awareness of individual sounds (phonemes) within spoken words, and the ability to manipulate those sounds. For example, a person with good phonemic awareness recognizes that in the word *fish*, the first sound is /f/. The *Laubach Way to Reading*, through its diagnostic inventory and the series itself, is very strong in phonological awareness.

LWR's *Diagnostic Inventory* is used to assess incoming students. It includes several assessments of the learner's segmentation skills. For example, the learner demonstrates his/her level of phonological awareness by indicating how many words are in a spoken sentence, dividing a spoken word into the first sound in the word and the sound made by the remaining letters, etc.

In the LWR series itself, phonemic awareness instruction is integrated into each lesson rather than being taught in isolation. The work on phonemic awareness occurs primarily in what is called the

“Skills Practice” section of each lesson. These sections are found in the teacher’s manuals. Some of the activities in these sections include identifying beginning sounds, identifying ending sounds, and identifying vowel sounds.

### *Importance of Phonemic and Phonological Awareness*

Many authors/researchers have discussed the importance of phonemic/phonological awareness. For example:

- Research being conducted with funding from NICHD (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development) has shown that lack of awareness of phonemes is the most powerful determinant of failure in learning to read (Lyon & Alexander, 1996).
- According to Smith et al. (1995), it is the ability to appreciate how spoken language is constructed that explains the significant differences between good readers and poor readers.
- Bruck (1992) shows that, for people with dyslexia, persisting phonological awareness deficits are a key stumbling block to the acquisition of fluent word recognition skills throughout the lifespan.
- According to Shaywitz et al. (1992), 80-90% of school children with poor reading skills display poor phonological processing ability. Also, Knight (1998) says that children do not outgrow their poor reading skills. Instead, they become adults with poor phonological processing ability.
- According to Foorman et al. (1998), lack of phonemic awareness is a major obstacle to learning to read, and they therefore suggest providing disabled readers with highly structured programs which directly teach phonemic awareness.

### *Systematic Phonics*

A systematic phonics program teaches letter-sound relationships (i.e., it has to do with decoding *written* language, as opposed to phonological awareness, which has to do with sounds in the *spoken* language). The *Laubach Way to Reading* is the classic phonics-based curriculum for adults. The phonics work begins with single consonants and progresses to short vowels, long vowels and finally to vowel sounds such as /au/ and /oo/ and consonants sounds that have more than one spelling. The “Scope and Sequence Chart” in each *LWR Teacher’s Manual* begins with a section that lists the phonics skills taught in that book. It shows what lesson the skill is introduced in and where it is reinforced in later lessons.

### *Importance of Systematic Phonics*

Below are a few examples of research regarding the importance of systematic phonics instruction:

- There is a large body of research [Adams (1990); Chall (1996); Dykstra (1968); and others] that shows that early and systematic phonics instruction is more effective than phonics instruction that comes later and is less systematic.
- According to research cited in Stahl, Duffy-Hester, and Stahl (1998), a good phonics program should include one or more of the following tasks: rhyming, word-to-word matching tasks, sound-to-word matching tasks, initial (or final) sounds, segmentation (breaking a word up into sounds), blending, deletion and manipulation.
- M. J. Adams (1990), reviews the literature in *Beginning to Read*, and concludes that all successful phonics programs provide a great deal of practice in reading words containing the letter-sound relationships that are taught. Programs should provide practice in reading words in isolation, reading words in stories, and writing words.

- According to Jane Fell Greene (1998), “87% of written English is phonologically predictable. Moreover, if the letter-sound code (phonics) is *not* taught, all reliable studies concur that poor readers and nonreaders will not become fluent readers.”

### Fluency

Fluency is the ability to read text without stopping to decode words and to read the words in meaningful units (i.e., grouping them by phrases, etc. so that the student doesn’t read word by word). A student who reads text fluently recognizes all or most of the words he or she is reading. Until a student is able to read fluently, he or she will have difficulty with comprehension.

*LWR* helps the student achieve fluency or “automaticity” by a number of means:

- Use of high frequency words that are likely to already be a part of the adult’s speaking vocabulary.
- Use of controlled vocabulary. New words are repeated and reinforced in reading and writing exercises. The number of new words introduced in each lesson is limited. (The following lists served as the *LWR* authors’ references: the “Dolch Basic Sight Vocabulary, the Dale List of 769 Easy Words, the Mitzel Functional Reading Word List for Adults, and *The Teacher’s Word Book of 30,000 Words* by Thorndike and Lorge.)
- Inclusion of correlated readers to provide extra reading. These are collections of stories and articles using much of the same vocabulary as the associated skill book.
- Inclusion in the teacher’s manuals of suggestions for how to increase fluency for students who need extra help. These include the use of things like flash cards with phrases and the use of read-aloud techniques like duet reading (neurological impress) where the teacher/tutor models fluent reading. All of the phonics work in *LWR* leads to fluency.
- In the *Training by Design* (also published by New Readers Press) training that local programs use with tutors who are going to be working in *LWR*, tutors learn to supplement the series by using language experience stories as reading text. In this approach, the students develop fluency reading their own words.

### Importance of Fluency

The authors cited earlier point out the necessity of combining phonological awareness and phonics with early controlled reading in order for a student to achieve fluency. A variety of studies [such as Rasinski (1991) and Samuels et al. (1992)] have shown that people learn to recognize words automatically through repeated practice in the reading of stories.

### Reading Comprehension

The “Scope and Sequence Chart” has a section for comprehension skills. *LWR* teaches many reading comprehension skills, such as understanding inferences, making predictions, summarizing, identifying the sequence of events, distinguishing cause and effect and fact and opinion, understanding figurative language, and identifying the elements of a short story. The series includes discussion sections that help students relate the reading selections to their own experience and knowledge. The teacher’s manuals provide clear, detailed instructions on how to teach particular reading comprehension skills.

### Importance of Reading Comprehension

Many authors write about the necessity of teaching reading comprehension as part of an integrated reading program. Foorman et al.(1998) say that basic reading programs should include all of the following: direct training in phonemic awareness; systematic, explicit teaching of sound-symbol relationships (phonics); and direct and integrated instruction in text reading and comprehension.

S. Jay Samuels (1994) suggests that students can be helped to better comprehend texts by providing texts that are easier to read, and by emphasizing decoding first. Once the student is able to decode the text, the emphasis of the instruction can switch to meaning. He also suggests that a great deal of time be spent on reading: “Practice may be on important subskills in reading, but it must also include time spent on reading easy, interesting, and meaningful material.”

### Additional Information on the Overall Effectiveness of *LWR*

A variety of studies have shown that the *Laubach Way to Reading* is a highly effective curriculum for helping adults learn to read and write. Here are two examples:

- According to the study “An Evaluation of Reading Gains within Illinois Adult Literacy Projects” by Bowren & Dwyer (1988):
  - From the pre-test to the first post-test, the reading ability of students using the *Laubach Way to Reading* increased, on average, .64 of one grade level in 38 mean hours of exposure to the program.
  - Reading ability also increased .43 of one grade level from the first post-test to the second, in 26 mean hours.
- Alamprese (1993) looked at data from volunteer literacy programs that used formal testing to measure learner outcomes. These programs used the *Laubach Way to Reading* and other New Readers Press materials. The study found that the number of instructional hours required for learners to increase their skills one grade level ranged from 30 to 50 hours. She also found that adult learners in these programs had increased their perceptions of self-worth.

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