

NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

The Whole Language Movement:

Its Hindrances in the United States and Successes in Australia

A Thesis submitted to the

University Honors Program

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements of the Baccalaureate Degree

with University Honors

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

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December, 1991

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## Abstract

Reading instruction in the United States has been dominated by phonics instruction for generations and has not been effective in creating a totally literate nation. With the identification of the need to formulate a new instructional methodology to rectify this situation, the whole language philosophy was created. However, only a small fraction of U.S. teachers implement this philosophy today, largely because the whole language movement has been stifled by several factors of the U.S. educational system. By contrast, however, whole language has developed in Australia in recent years as in the U.S., yet the majority of Australian teachers have successfully implemented this philosophy. This paper will describe the aspects of the Australian educational system that have fostered this success, and compare them with factors that have inhibited whole language development in the United States. These inhibitors must be removed from influencing whole language in the U.S. for the movement to succeed.

## Introduction

American reading instruction in elementary schools has been dominated by basal textbook series and phonics for generations. This piece by piece approach to teaching reading has fallen under criticism. An estimated 60 million Americans are illiterate (Kozol, 1985, p. 4), indicating a weakness in this system of instruction. Within the last two decades, a new philosophy has arisen in America's schools in an effort to revolutionize reading instruction. This philosophy is known as whole language. Although many educators claim to be advocates of whole language, 90% of elementary teachers continue to use basal texts as a foundation for teaching reading (Gursky, 1991, p. 28). The transition from basal textbook usage to holistic instruction in the United states has been a difficult one, facing much opposition.

Whole language developed simultaneously in Australia and in the United states. "Essentially, what appears as a current revolution in this country was a relatively calm evolution in other countries" says Kenneth Goodman of the whole language transition in Australia (Gursky, 1991, p. 29). An informal survey of Australian educators reveals that about 60-70% of Australian teachers are firm advocates

and implementators of the whole language philosophy, a triumph when compared to usage in the U.S. This success is largely due to many aspects of the Australian educational system that permit and encourage such a change to occur. These encouraging factors in Australia are seemingly nonexistent in the U.S. educational system, and are major hindrances of the whole language movement.

In order for the whole language movement to succeed in America, these hindrances must be removed from influencing its development. A diagnosis of the traditional methods of teaching reading in the U.S. will reveal the need for a major shift in the philosophies of reading instruction. Factors present in the U.S. educational system that inhibit the implementation of the whole language philosophy include: (a) the lack of global identification of literacy as primary goal of education, (b) the inequalities and misdirection of educational allocations, (c) administrators who are reluctant to relinquish classroom decision making to teachers, and (d) methods of assessment that contradict the fundamentals of whole language.

Comparatively, the Australian educational system encourages an atmosphere in which whole language has flourished. The identification of the factors within this

system that have fostered this success clearly indicates the need for the American educational community to follow suit.

#### American Education

##### Analysis of American Textbooks

The origin of basal texts, the primary source of reading instruction in the United states, is first documented in the late 19th century. "Basals were intended to 'rationalize' reading instruction in order to overcome the lack of good children's literature and the teacher's relatively low education levels at the time" (Gursky, 1991, p. 28). Although teacher training since then has grown more advanced, and the quality of children's books has greatly improved, basal usage is still in effect. Current surveys indicate that basal activity encompasses 75%-90% of elementary reading instructional periods (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985, p. 35).

From a traditionalists point of view, the learning theory on which basal instruction is based suggests that reading is equal to the "sum of the parts"; if a student learns the components of language piece by piece, then he/she will be able to read. Analysis of traditional basal instruction (Chall, 1967; Flesch, 1981; Harman, 1987) reveals two methodologies. One is "phonics first", also

known as decoding, systematic phonics, explicit phonics, or intensive phonics. Using this approach, children learn the graphophonic elements of language before ever reading a story. The other method is "look-and-say", also known as analytic phonics, incidental phonics, indirect phonics, or meaning emphasis. With this approach, children gradually develop a sight vocabulary by reading abbreviated versions of stories. This method limits the students exposure to vocabulary determined by the basal authors to be at their reading level. Both of these methods have their disadvantages, and neither appears to encourage global literacy.

The flaw in using phonics as the principle means of reading instruction is that it unnaturally separates the three cuing systems (syntactic, semantic, and graphophonic). Anderson et al (1985) state that "...many young children cannot extract an individual sound from hearing it within a word ....A problem with explicit phonics is that both teachers and children have a difficult time saying pure speech sounds in isolation" (pp. 40-41). Although these authors feel phonics is essential, phonics instruction should only be one component of reading instruction. Whole language theorists agree on this point. Ken Goodman states,

"'No one's suggesting that phonics isn't involved in learning to read and write' ...It is the reliance on phonics as the main or sole approach to teaching literacy that whole language proponents resist" (Gursky, 1991, p. 27). "The approaches to phonics recommended in programs available today fall considerably short of the ideal, and we call for renewed efforts to improve the quality of instructional design, materials, and teaching strategies. The right maxims for phonics are: Do it early. Keep it simple. Except in cases of diagnosed individual need, phonics instruction should have been completed by the end of the second grade" (Anderson et al., 1985, p. 43). Yet, upon examination of most basal programs, the evidence shows phonics instruction is extended into the fifth and sixth grades.

The look-and-say method has been argued to be ineffective by most and has seemingly vanished from basal texts. This method is commonly characterized by the "Dick and Jane" texts of the 1950s. "Look Jane look. See spot run. Run run run" is typical jargon. During the last decade or so, basal publishers have begun printing more realistic texts, highlighting excerpts from genuine children's literature. However, these excerpts are



essentially abbreviated, devoid of much of their original rich language. Publishers claim to have abandoned the "look-and-say" method, but in fact have disguised it to appease sight word advocates, and tossed in phonics-based workbooks for broader marketability,

Flesch (1981), seemingly a phonics-first advocate, mistakenly perceives "look-say" to be representative of psycholinguistics, thought to mean that children learned to read by reading these redundant texts. In reference to Ken Goodman's belief that reading is a "psycholinguistic guessing game", Flesch states, "For the look-and-say educators, reading is now a matter of 'guessing', 'cues', 'strategies' - never of simply looking at what's on the page and, if necessary, sounding out the words" (p. 25). By definition, psycholinguistics is, "the study of linguistic behavior as conditioning and conditioned by psychological factors" (Mish, 1987, p. 951). Individuals apply their thoughts and experiences in an interactive fashion when engaging in written and verbal language. Hence, psycholinguistics follows the holistic philosophy. However, the "look-say" methodology focuses on the part-to-whole concept, which is in striking contrast to the holistic whole-to-part concept. By placing psycholinguistics in the

same category as look-say, phonics advocates undermine psycholinguistics, since look-say is typically discredited. As a result, the need to teach intensive phonics seemingly shines through.

#### The Need for Change

These methods have fallen under criticism due to the seemingly low rates of literacy in the nation. The United States ranks 18th worldwide in male literacy, 13th in female literacy (Kurian, 1984, p. 357). Another source rates the United States 49th in literacy among the 158 nations in the United Nations. "Fifteen percent of recent graduates of urban high schools read at less than sixth grade level. One million teenage children between twelve and seventeen cannot read above the third grade level. Eighty-five percent of juveniles who come before the courts are functionally illiterate" (Kozol, 1985, pp. 4-5). A 1989 publication indicates that 4.5% of the American adult population is illiterate (Showers, p. 126). These percentages and tallies are merely estimates of the true number of illiterates. There may exist an infinite number of adults who have not surfaced from the void of illiteracy. Consequently, the need for a change in reading instruction was identified. The whole language philosophy was created.

Definition of Whole Language

A dictionary definition of whole language is difficult to establish. "...Whole language, as evidenced in staff room talk, teacher-parent communiques, professional books and magazines, scholarly conferences, teacher inservices, and publishers' catalogues, is often ambiguous and contradictory" (Dudley-Marling & Dippe, 1991, p. 548). This may have resulted from misinterpretations regarding the nature of the philosophy as a method, thereby basing the essence of whole language on its implementation. The following illustrates some primary tenets of the whole language philosophy, in addition to the theory's general practices.

Whole language advocates believe that reading instruction should emphasize the entire spectrum of language in a meaning-based, integrated fashion. Listening, speaking, reading, and writing are integrated to emphasize to students their interrelation in natural speech and literature. Writing is not viewed as a product, but rather as a process; the journey to achieve the product is equally significant. Language subskills, reading strategies, and likewise phonics instruction are components of the scope and sequence. Classrooms are littered with print, quality

children's books, cooperative learning, and integrated instruction with a real-life purpose. The focus of instruction is on meaning and is student-centered, teacher-guided. Whole language is a philosophy that views published textbook series as tools to implement a holistic curriculum, not as the curriculum itself. Texts are used selectively in combination with other materials and activities.

#### Definition of Literacy.

The concept of literacy is founded on a similar premise as the whole language philosophy. Literacy is "more than a set of skills" (Harman, 1987, p. 11).

Literacy, then, is not merely the ability to decipher letters and assemble them into words. Nor is it a determination of a satisfactory level of comprehension ...It is a combination of technical skills that make it possible, with content and purpose, to interact with the specific environments in which people live and function ...Illiteracy exists wherever there are people whose reading and writing skills are inadequate for the situation in which they find themselves. (p. 97)

Likewise, whole language theory is based on the premise that reading equals more than the sum of the subskills that comprise language. Whole language methods submerge children into the language arts and rich literature, striving to identify the relationship to the child's real life. "For each youngster, repeated exposure to the correct reading

methods and interesting, well-written books is the fastest way to reach high standards of literacy in our classrooms" (Carbo, 1990, p. 28). Holistic advocates identify the need to create lifelong literate readers, not children who merely advance to the next reading textbook.

If we wish to induce children to become literate persons, our teaching methods should be in accordance with the richness of the child's spoken vocabulary ...When this is done, nonreaders of long standing, children who have rejected all learning, become fascinated with reading. (Bettelheim & Zelan, 1982, p. 30)

The problem, then, with whole language development in relation to literacy is that literacy is not identified as a goal, so neither can whole language be. Experts on the subject are in constant disagreement with each other. Some claim the U.S. has a problem with literacy, others disagree. Some feel phonics is not the answer to solving the literacy problem, others disagree (McCuen, 1988). The U.S. Government, contrary to "literate" countries in the world, has not yet clarified their definition of literacy in relation to education, nor have numerous school districts when defining their curricula. The government targets adults who have already become illiterate, rather than preventing today's youth from becoming illiterate. With no clear definition or directive, it is unlikely that achieving

nationwide literacy can be an attainable goal. Consequently, the implementation of whole language is hindered by the lack of identification of literacy as a global objective of education.

#### Allocation of Funds

Another hindrance of the whole language movement is the system of educational funding. Only 6.2% of school revenues are received from the federal government, thus placing state governments in control over the bulk of educational funds. state funding accounts for 50.1%, which is largely allocated on the basis of student attendance. Local funding comprises the remaining 43.7% (Cochran, Mayer, Carr, & Cayer, 1990, p. 313). It is based primarily on property wealth in the school district, calculated by the ratio of taxable property to the number of students in the district.

The result of this allocation breakdown is unequal education. An inner-city school in a low socioeconomic community is disadvantaged where local revenues are concerned, since there is little "property wealth". Where funds are inadequate, teachers are paid less, materials are outdated, and school buildings are in need of repair. In such communities, the quality of education is low and is not always a priority. When this occurs, student attendance

declines, thus also reducing the revenues generated from the state government. In a study by the National Center for Policy Analysis (1983), it was determined that if every student in the nation took one day off of school, the U.S. public schools would collectively lose \$150 million in funding. combined, these scenarios substantially chip away at 93.7% of educational funding.

This allocation system perpetuates illiteracy in an unending cycle. As success breeds success, failure and negative experiences breed more failure. A poorly funded school has little means to break this cycle. Literacy development is "...a manifestation of people's surroundings" (Harman, 1987, p. 47). Such communities with negative educational cultures are commonly not provided the opportunity to achieve literacy. "In such societies, even if literacy is firmly embedded in the schools' curriculum, literacy cannot properly take hold" (p. 11). If literacy has little chance for survival, whole language will stand little chance of success.

#### Influence of Authority

The whole language philosophy is also hindered by opposing administrators. Since whole language deters from rigid textbook curricula, it causes a by-product of

empowerment of teachers. It places more decision-making ability in the hands of teachers and students, who shift their instructional direction the way they deem appropriate. Many administrators are hesitant to support this theory. Teachers abolish textbooks that administrators have chosen, hence administrators lose much of their control over instruction. They have more to risk due to less "objectivity" of student evaluation methods; there is more room for criticism of teachers/administrators if there is no publisher to blame. Hesitant administrators have the power to voice their disagreement, and in many cases, ensure that the district budget pays for new textbooks instead of whole language materials. Teachers must also comply if they value their jobs.

Barth (1990) states, "The principal is the most important reason why teachers grow - or are stifled on the job" (p. 64). Barth identifies the power the principal possesses, and believes that principals must work in cooperation with the adults (teachers, staff) present in a school. Collegiality established among the staff creates a cooperative atmosphere. Empowerment and trust in teachers as decision makers is essential. In order to accommodate whole language, these issues are vital. The nature of whole



language is such that teachers assume control over what occurs in the classroom. If a principal is reluctant to relinquish this control, whole language will not survive.

#### Assessment in America

The majority of school administrators today rely heavily on test scores for judgement calls and placement decisions. Typically, teachers administer weekly tests to assess the various subject areas, including reading. The majority of these tests are textbook-publisher generated, with intermittent teacher-generated tests. Teachers typically follow this script because they are held accountable for what takes place in the classroom. Parents and administrators believe that if a teacher can produce a series of test grades that compute into a term grade, the teacher has done his/her job. Of course, this is usually only acceptable when the teacher does, in fact, rely largely upon text tests. Along these lines, textbook publishers know how to assess the millions of individual children better than the individual teacher can assess the 30 or so children s/he sees every day. "What will happen is that teachers will 'teach to the test', not in the fraudulent sense of revealing the answers to particular test items, but in the sense of carefully preparing students for the types

of tests that they will be expected to pass" (Anderson et al., 1985, p. 100). "Teaching to the test also narrows the curriculum, forcing teachers and students to concentrate on memorization of isolated facts, instead of developing fundamental and higher-order abilities" (National Center for Fair & Open Testing, 1990, p. 2).

To compound matters, educators frequently view the scores students have achieved on standardized achievement tests with greater credence than that of daily classroom tests. The composition and role of standardized tests is perplexing when viewed as something relied upon greatly in elementary schools.

Standardized achievement tests were developed in the late 1800s to reinforce the use of basals (Gursky, 1991, p. 28). As stated previously, basals at this early stage of development were inadequate, and teachers poorly trained. Thus, standardized tests helped to rationalize the situation. Although basals have evolved and teacher training has significantly improved, standardized tests were, and are, still used for the same reasons.

Two types of standardized achievement tests exist: norm-referenced and criterion-referenced. Norm-referenced standardized tests rank students in relation to each other

according to the norm. They are "not testing precisely what teachers teach. Nor are they testing innate ability or any naturally endowed power. They are testing some general 'how to succeed in school and life' behaviors" (Cohen, 1988, p. 17). Criterion-referenced standardized tests evaluate the child based on some criteria, or in other words, learned information. The child is not ranked in relation to other students, but rather evaluated independently.

Surprisingly, most schools use commercially published norm-referenced standardized tests, rather than criterion-referenced tests that appear to test actual learning. These norm-referenced tests are usually administered at least once every year (Anderson et al., 1985, p. 95). The scores are used to aid in tracking children in reading groups, typically labeled high, average, low. However, the individual test scores represent a student's responses during a few hours on one given day. "Standardized tests of reading comprehension manifestly do not measure everything required to understand and appreciate a novel, learn from a science textbook, or find items in a catalogue ....The strength of a standardized test is not that it can provide a deep assessment of reading proficiency, but rather that it can provide a fairly reliable, partial assessment cheaply

and quickly" (Anderson et al., 1985, p. 97). Yet, school districts continue to rely on them for student advancement and sometimes even teacher effectiveness. "Using norm-referenced standardized tests to make teaching decisions redefines teaching as a method of ranking and differentiating. It compels teaching decisions that will make sure some students haven't learned" (Cohen, 1988, p. 7). A recent survey revealed that teachers found the information provided by norm-referenced standardized tests to be of little use. Daily observation of students' behavior, work, and elicited responses "provided them [teachers] with more detailed and trustworthy info" (Anderson et al., 1985, p. 95).

Whole language assessment contrasts with this current testing methodology. In a holistic classroom, observations made by the teacher are used as a primary basis for assessment. Test scores cannot be generated from these observances, so anecdotal records and checklists carry more weight in the evaluation process. The focus is on growth and development, rather than on a scale that delineates the superior ("A") from the average ("C"). Teachers collect samples of student work. Communication with parents is a vital link in the process due to the emphasis on

development. Parent-teacher discussions regarding the child's growth elicit a more comprehensive assessment than a letter grade.

In the rigid system of accountability based on grades, whole language evaluation methods are struggling. When standardized tests are constructed, "...a norm-referenced test of third-grade reading, for example, begins with a study of what is common to the main textbooks used through third grade in present day schools" (Weber, 1974, p. 34). It has been noted that standardized tests do not provide a thorough assessment of a student's reading proficiency (Anderson et al., 1985). Yet, standardized tests were originally designed to do just that in classrooms employing basal texts. It is therefore absurd to expect standardized tests to solicit useful information about the effectiveness of a whole language program. Standardized tests are designed to "match" a totally different methodology, and do not seemingly serve their purpose effectively in that context. The following (Anderson et al., 1985) illustrates this point:

Studies of whole language approaches in the United States have produced results that are best characterized as inconsistent. In the hands of very skillful teachers, the results can be excellent. But the average result is indifferent when compared to

approaches typical in American classrooms, at least as gauged by performance on first- and second-grade standardized reading achievement tests. (p. 45)

This kind of thinking is one of the reasons the whole language movement has been stifled in America. To accept the whole language theory, we must accept new ways to evaluate its effectiveness. "The U.S. is the only economically advanced nation to rely heavily on multiple-choice tests. Other nations use performance-based assessment where students are evaluated on the basis of real work such as essays, projects and activities" (National Center for Fair & Open Testing, 1990, p. 2). Standardized tests were once created to interpret basal instruction. Likewise, anecdotal records, observational checklists, and other appropriate methods must be used and accepted in evaluating a whole language program. "Tests ...are not intended as replacements for teachers' informal observations and judgements ...The teacher is still the observer and decision maker" (Gronlund & Linn, 1990, p. 4).

#### International Comparison

Many countries that are perceived to be more literate than America have long abandoned the basal approach to reading, identifying the need for holistic teaching. Among these countries are Sweden and Denmark {Kurian, 1984, p.

357), where the four language arts are integrated from the child's first formal reading lesson (Ollila, 1981, p. 9). In Japan, researchers now put forth their efforts into investigating "1) what parents do and should do about their children's reading; 2) how children react to books, and 3) what makes picture books interesting" (Ollila, 1981, p. 21). The Japanese have already determined that children learn from reading quality literature; a parallel to whole language as we know it. "Canada has also become a leader in whole language, with many provincial educational authorities adopting the philosophy for all their schools ...Some whole language proponents find it more than coincidental that New Zealand and Australia rank at the top of international comparisons of literacy, while the u.s. barely rates a spot in the top third" (Gursky, 1991, p. 29). Specifically, one source ranks Australia number one worldwide in literacy (Kurian, 1984, p. 357).

The following section provides insight into the Australian educational scene, and explains how it has encouraged the whole language transition in the same time span as in the United states. The research provided reflects the state of Queensland's educational system. The overall educational hierarchy provides insight into the

significance of the role of the principal and other educational authorities. The funding of education in Australia and production of "textbooks" also encourages whole language. Assessment of students is focused on the whole child to coincide with holistic education.

#### Australian Education

##### Hierarchy of Administration

Each of the eight states in Australia is independently responsible for education within its boundaries. Although states vary in their education, their hierarchies are quite similar. In Queensland, the Minister for Education, which is the highest ranking position, is the only position held by an elected official. All other positions are appointed. (See Appendix A for the detailed hierarchy.) Below the Minister, there exist three "levels": the Central Office, the Regional Office, and the schools themselves. Second-in-command to the Minister, and leader of the Central Office is the Director-General of Education, who receives complaints of teacher misconduct reported by school principals. The Regional Office handles the subsequent inquiries regarding teachers, and is also responsible for the placement of teachers. Similar to the U.S. armed forces employees, Australian teachers are employed directly by the government.



They are assigned and transferred from school to school at the government's discretion.

This system renders the school principals powerless to discipline teachers or influence instruction, and consequently renders teachers free to make numerous educational decisions. The Regional Office hires teachers for life, essentially. They control the school the teachers teach in. Only in a situation of gross misconduct (i.e., harmful negligence, child abuse) is a teacher reviewed for job termination. According to various Australian principals, the principal is "the final decision maker", but in this system the principal has little to decide upon. The principal's responsibilities, taken from the 1988 Education Regulations of the Department of Queensland are as follows:

- 1) Subject to the Director-General, the principal of a state school:
  - a) shall be responsible for the general management of the school;
  - b) shall regulate, apportion, and supervise the work of each member of the staff of the school and ensure that the work is properly done;
  - c) shall forthwith report to the Director-General misconduct, incompetence or insubordination on the part of a member of the staff of the school;
  - d) shall give special attention and assistance in respect of the instruction and management of a class to a student undertaking a course of teacher education and allotted to the school for teaching practice;

- e) shall encourage the use of progressive teaching techniques and ensure that relevant information is disseminated to each member of the teaching staff of the school;
  - f) may require a member of the teaching staff of the school to perform school work or to supervise the activities of students outside the period allocated for instruction on a school day as he deems necessary in the circumstances;
  - g) shall give each member of the teaching staff of the school training and experience in keeping records and preparing returns.
- 2) For the purposes of this regulation, the staff of a state school shall include a student undertaking a course of teacher education and allotted to the school for teaching practice.
  - 3) Notwithstanding anything in this regulation, a principal of a state school shall comply with any direction given to him by the Director-General.  
(pp. 2-3)

By these responsibilities, a principal can identify "incompetence". He cannot control a teacher's curricula decision, nor act in any disciplinary manner, nor pose any real threat. Teachers interviewed in several Queensland schools all had complete control over materials, texts, evaluation methods, activities, and everything else in their classrooms. They found it absurd to feel even the remotest threat by their superiors. A recent American article cited that the Australian Education Council "...wields great power. As a result, the voices of professional educators are frequently excluded from key curriculum policy decisions" (Hill, 1991, p. 5). Seemingly, policies are made

at the higher governmental levels. In actuality, the Australian system does not provide for enforcement of these curriculum decisions, leaving teachers free to teach as they please.

The implications for whole language in this scenario are immensely positive. Teachers have the opportunity to "test the waters" of new instructional approaches freely. Since teachers are empowered, they are much more likely to become whole language advocates because they are given the option to do so. Principals are inclined to trust teachers implicitly. Consequently, parents emulate the trust principals have for teachers. With all this trust, any instructional decision made by a teacher is likely to be supported.

#### Allocations of Funds

Educational funding in Australia also encourages the whole language movement. Funds generated from taxes are apportioned equally to all primary schools within a state. There are no "local" taxes, and consequently no independent school districts. Teachers at the same level of education and experience receive the same salary. As this situation provides for seemingly equal quality education everywhere in a state, citizens are allowed to transfer their children to

schools of their choice. Children are not restricted to attending the closest school to their home, as district boundaries in America frequently dictate.

This system of funding apportionment supports whole language. By allowing for equal distribution, all schools have an equal opportunity to update their teaching methods and perspectives. In America, many districts use an excuse similar to the following: "We have these textbooks, and we will not receive money for new books/supplies, so use the textbooks we have." The Australian government eliminates the factor of monetary inconsistencies. Literacy *is* not only a well-defined goal, but also reinforced in extensive teacher inservices. The government also provides up-to-date "sourcebooks" every few years to all schools, thus keeping educators abreast of all new educational trends. Instead of publishing companies competing for profits, the centralized Department of Education searches for the optimum focus of education, and acts accordingly.

The Queensland Department of Education has recognized literacy as a priority in education. For 1990-91, \$1903.9 million *is* the total education allocation for the state. Five million dollars is specifically allocated to literacy and numeracy (Department of Education, Queensland, 1990, p.

2). For this to occur, literacy must first be defined. The National Secretariat for International Literacy Year (Department of Education, QLD & Brisbane Catholic Education Office, 1990) defines literacy as the:

integration of listening, speaking, reading, writing and critical thinking; it incorporates numeracy. It includes the cultural knowledge which enables a speaker, writer or reader to recognise and use language appropriate to different social situations. For an advanced technological society such as Australia, the goal is an active literacy which allows people to use language to enhance their capacity to think, create and question, in order to participate effectively in society. (p. 5)

This definition was printed in a teacher inservice coursebook, reaffirming teachers' literacy awareness and administrators' support. The definition corresponds closely to the philosophy of the whole language movement; the tenets of both philosophies are quite similar.

#### Nature of Sourcebooks

Within Australian schools, funds received from the government are directed towards trade books and resources applicable to whole language activities. Instead of a plethora of textbook publishing companies, Australian state governments issue their own "sourcebooks". The cost to produce these sourcebooks average about \$10-\$15 (AUS) for each individual book. Each teacher receives one sourcebook

for each subject. students do not receive any books; rather, the lessons contained in the sourcebooks are accompanied by student pages that the teacher can select from and photocopy. The sourcebooks contain ready-made lessons, organized by units in what Australians define as a "scope and sequence". However, this scope and sequence is merely a set of interrelated themes, unlike American scope and sequences that frequently itemize specific skills and sub-skills. The individual lessons in Australian sourcebooks contain abundant hands-on activities using a variety of instructional methods, materials, and group formations.

The beauty of these sourcebooks is that they, too, give Australian teachers the ultimate decision-making freedom. Teachers can use all or part of the lessons in them, in any order, and with any supplemental materials they deem necessary. Teachers are not confined to relying on them as a cookbook for teaching, as American teachers methodically progress from lesson to lesson in a basal textbook series. The following is taken from the introduction of the Primary Social Studies Sourcebook (Department of Education, QLD, 1987) and is representational of all Queensland sourcebooks:

Teachers are free to develop their own units of work based on these organising ideas as the activities in this text are suggestions only. That means teachers can use the ideas to supplement existing programs, or elect to follow the sourcebook and delete and add activities to suit their pupil's needs. (p. 1)

The sourcebooks' function is like its name: one source of many sources to be used in the classroom. To implementate a whole language philosophy, a variety of materials are used to accommodate the different needs of students. The role of sourcebooks in Australia invites usage of other instructional materials, thus encouraging the whole language philosophy.

#### Assessment in Australia

Yet another factor contributing to the success of the whole language movement in Australia is the approach taken for assessment. An Australian student may never encounter a standardized test until taking a college entrance exam. At this level, standardized tests are used to provide general information about stUdents, and are not used to exclude students with low scores from attending college, as ACT or SAT scores in America are so used. Educators perceive it pointless to use such tests in any other manner when the tests give such irrelevant data about children. IQ tests and norm-referenced tests may be administered at the

elementary level if a child is falling severely behind his/her peers. This initial assessment and ultimate conclusions are based on teachers' judgements and daily classroom assessment.

A logical assumption may be that Australian teachers administer an abundance of daily tests. In fact, Australian teachers may teach for weeks without administering even a quiz. A progress report is commonly distributed at the end of each of the two terms (halves) of the school year. At the end of the terms, instead of racing to calculate percentage grades, teachers transfer their observational records to these reports. They spend hours reflecting on those notes and communicating those reflections to the parents. Appendix B shows the Progress Report used for Year 4 at Undurba state School in Queensland.

These assessment procedures have not always been used in Australia. The system has evolved to accommodate the whole language philosophy. Following is an excerpt taken from Kurwongbah state School's Information Booklet for Parents (1991):

When we talk of evaluation, parents often think of testing. However, we need to appreciate that there is a difference.

Evaluation of student performance or achievement can take place at any time. We evaluate when we listen



to a child read, when we read their stories and even when we watch them playing in the playground. We do not rely on pencil and paper tests to gather valuable information about children. Not all evaluation is recorded, not all evaluation can be shown as a mark out of ten.

The purpose of evaluation is to assess the needs of children, and to identify ways in which their needs can be met.

Making notes, recording marks and gathering work samples can be a useful way of maintaining a record of pupil achievement and progress. This information will be used to assess the needs of students and as a basis for discussions with parents who will have a great interest in the progress of their children.

Whilst the school has a report card which is distributed to parents towards the end of the school year, it is considered that reports are not a particularly effective means of communicating with parents about student progress and achievement.

Far more effective is regular, personal contact between teachers and parents where there is an opportunity for two-way communication, shared information and open discussion. (pp. 4-5)

As noted, the child's development is the focal point, rather than the plateau the student is ranked at by means of a letter grade. The teacher's comments and parent-teacher conference are given even more weight. Although the administration cannot control curriculum, report cards are within their jurisdiction. Instead of restraining the evolution of reading instruction with this privilege, the vast majority of principals comply with teachers.

The Australian focus on evaluating the whole child is the premise on which whole language is based. The holistic

philosophy cannot be employed in the classroom if it is restrained with assessment regulations. If a similar evaluation model reflecting the whole child can occur in the U.S., whole language has a chance to triumph.

#### Recommendations

The following changes of the u.s. educational system are recommended in order for the whole language movement to succeed. Although somewhat idealistic and not necessary feasible, these suggestions are made to address solutions for the issues presented.

Literacy needs to be defined as an ultimate goal of education. A global definition created at the national level would help to unify the directives of the various state governments. Locally, school districts must make literacy a priority. If defined as in Australia, this would help to ensure the implementation of whole language to achieve the goal.

Educational funding should ideally be allocate equally to school districts within each state. Revenues generated locally should not be distributed in a hierarchal fashion that caters to wealthy areas. state generated revenues should not be heavily reliant on student attendance. Funds should not be withheld if attendance declines; rather, funds

should be allocated equally as planned.

A necessary and practical suggestion for appropriation of educational funds is to shift districts' focus to support whole language. Instead of spending money on textbooks and workbooks, funds should be used to purchase trade books and assorted materials needed for a whole language program. This ties to the issue of empowerment. Administrators must consult teachers to decipher their individual priorities for classroom instruction in order to purchase appropriate materials.

Assessment must be altered to accommodate whole language. Although it is impractical to suggest that standardized tests be abolished, they can be used less frequently. With the reduced usage of textbooks in a whole language program, textbook tests are logically few in number. Teacher-generated tests, observational records, and portfolios of student work should comprise the bulk of student assessment. For this to occur, administrators must empower and trust teachers to make instructional decisions.

Report cards should also reflect these changed methods of instruction and assessment. As exhibited in Appendix B, scale systems exist that reflect student progress other than by typical percentage grades. Again, educators must buy

into" the philosophy and its corresponding evaluation methods in order for this to work effectively.

Whole language has been shown to be an effective means of reading instruction and a positive way to achieve literacy in other countries. Instead of analyzing the philosophy's components, American educators must examine other aspects of the educational system that affect the philosophy. Administrators must be willing to change these aspects if the whole language movement is to survive.

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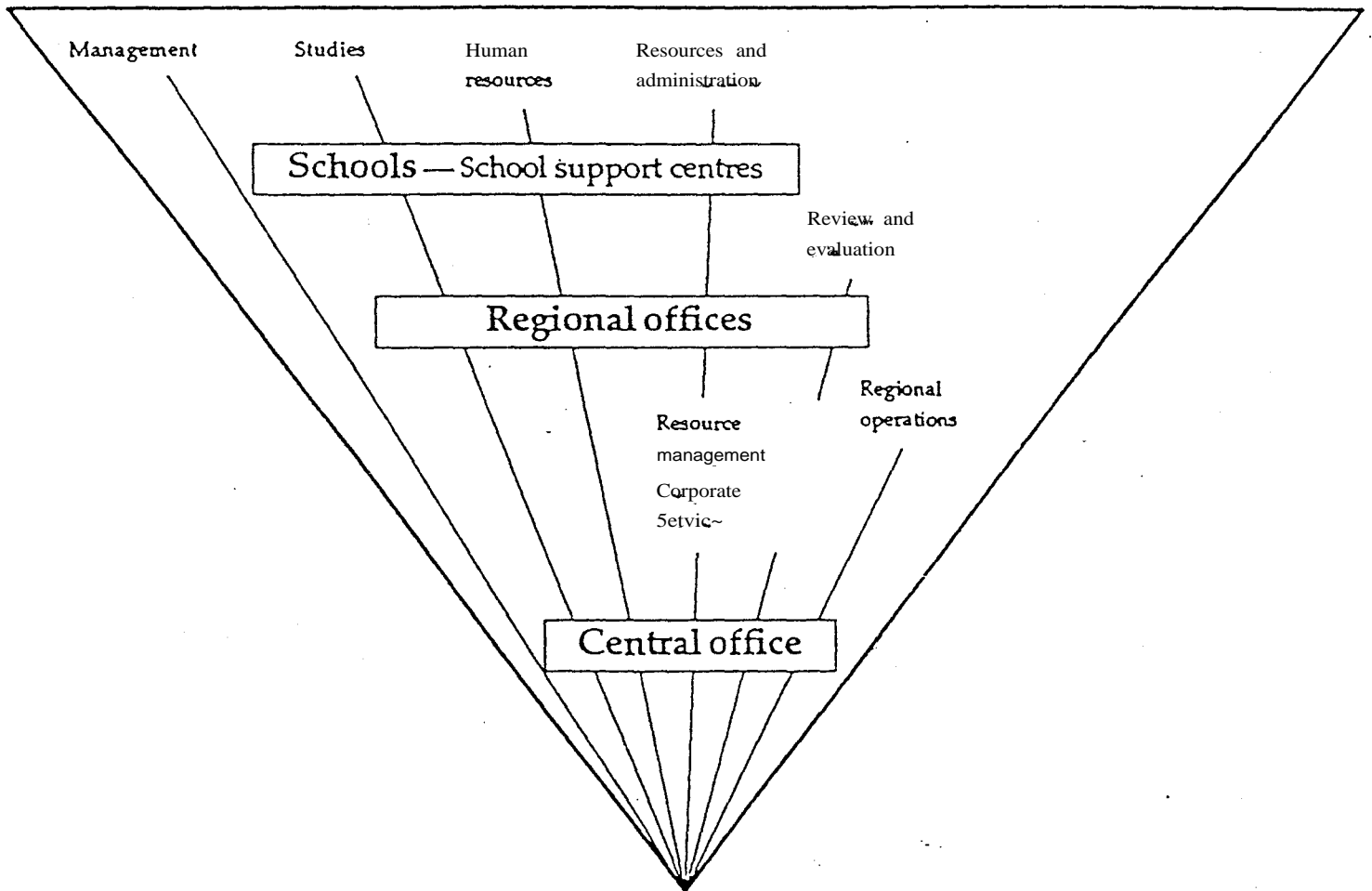
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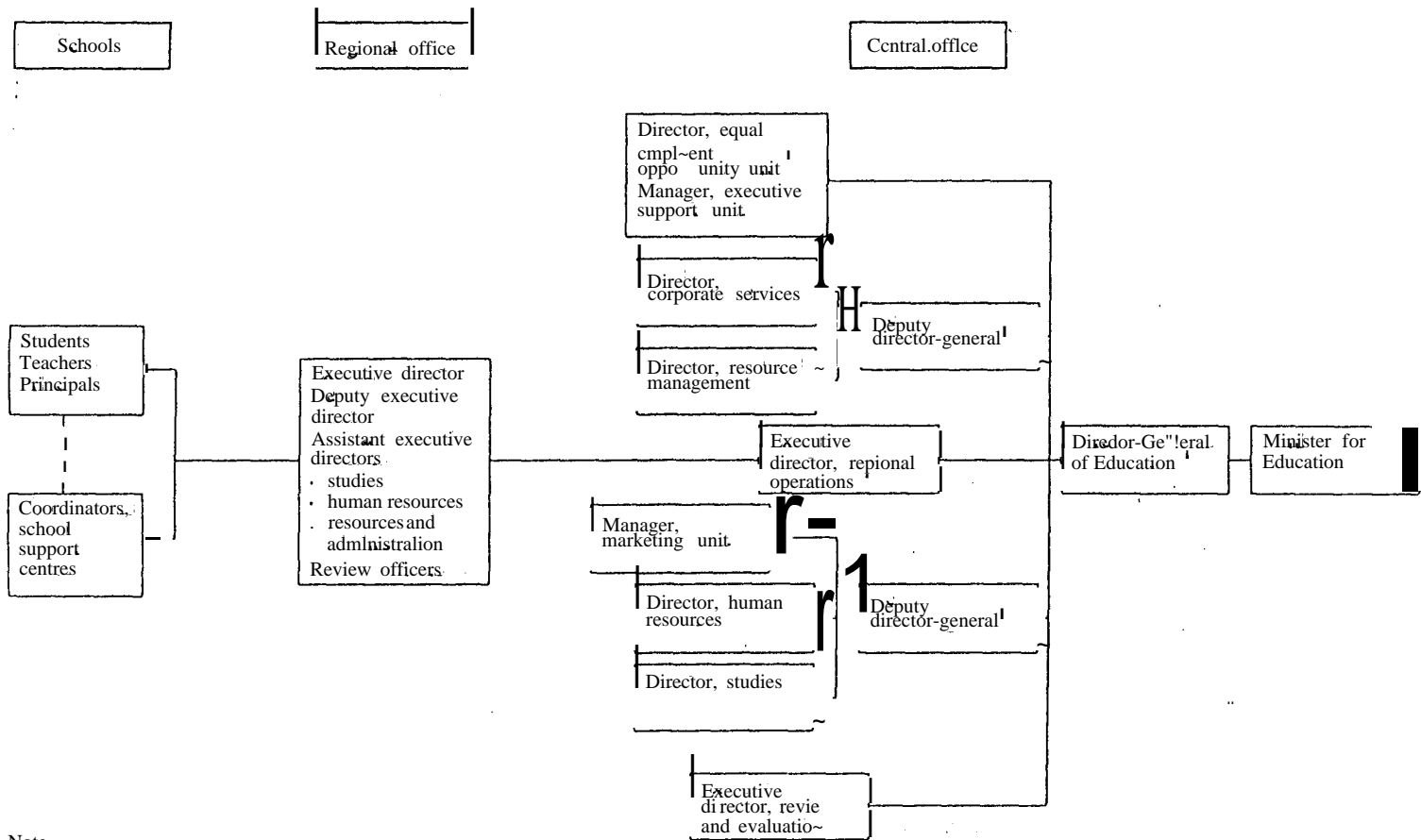
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Appendix A

Figure 1: Organisation of educational services







Note  
1. Members of the executive management forum.

Appendix B

The purpose of the primary school is to encourage the total development of each child. A balance between intellectual, physical, social and emotional growth is sought. Co-operation and understanding between home and school is essential for the child's maximum development. Parents have an important role to play in the education of their children and also in developing favourable attitudes to school.

It cannot be emphasized too strongly that this written report is merely a summary of your child's progress. No written report can convey all the necessary information about your child. This written report is designed to be supplemented and enhanced by verbal contact between parents and teachers. In fact, reporting to parents about young children is best done by a parent-teacher conference. If you wish to discuss this report or other matters relating to your child's progress, please contact the class teacher to arrange a mutually convenient time.

At this school we use cumulative assessment. This means that any end of term tests are only a part of the total assessment program and are supplemented by other types of assessment procedures including:

- ~ Observations of children at work and at play.
- ~ Anecdotal records (written records) of observations.
- ~ Checklists of particular skills, abilities and attitudes.
- ~ Selected samples of children's work.
- ~ Oral tests.
- ~ Other assessment procedures.

This assessment program has two main purposes. One is to analyse a student's needs to assist the teacher to plan appropriate educational experiences while the other is to gain information about the student's progress so this can be reported to parents, colleagues and administrative staff.

Encouraging each child to try to achieve to his/her individual potential is an important goal. The teacher has given a rating of your child's effort in relation to each area of the curriculum. The symbols used are explained as follows:

- + working well.
- S working satisfactorily.
- capable of greater effort.

The progress ratings are explained as follows:

**ACHIEVING IN THIS AREA** means that the child is achieving the syllabus requirements for the particular year level.

**STILL DEVELOPING IN THIS AREA** means that the child is progressing but has not yet reached proficiency in the syllabus requirements for this particular year level.

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YEAR 4	W	COURSEMENTS	9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0
<p>ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS</p> <p>Uses a variety of speaking skills</p> <p>Uses a variety of listening skills</p> <p>Applies speaking and listening skills</p> <p>Uses a range of effective reading strategies</p> <p>Chooses appropriate reading material</p> <p>Reads for information and enjoyment</p> <p>Comprehends a range of texts</p> <p>Uses <b>cursive</b> handwriting</p> <p>Uses writing conventions (spelling, <b>grammar</b>, punctuation)</p> <p>Produces and enjoys different forms of writing</p>	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9		9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0
<p>MATHEMATICS</p> <p>Understands number and place value to 9 999</p> <p>Recalls +, - and x facts</p> <p>Performs operations at year 4 level</p> <p>Understands and uses fractions and money</p> <p>Estimates, compares and checks measurements (time, length, volume, mass)</p> <p>Collects, organises and interprets data</p> <p>Analyses, compares and classifies shapes</p> <p>Can apply problem solving strategies</p>	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9		9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0
SOCIAL STUDIES			
SCIENCE			
INFORMATION SKILLS			
ART AND CRAFT			
MUSIC			
PHYSICAL EDUCATION			

