Organizing Decoding Instruction

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In this presentation, I discuss organizing decoding instruction, especially for students identified as having specific learning disabilities. Since the trend in reading education is away from teaching explicit word attack skills, why do teachers need to consider decoding instruction? Because we know that not all children learn to decipher the code through natural language experience. Rather, these children benefit by learning specific strategies for dealing with written language.

Before I begin, let me assure you that I strongly believe that the goal of any type of reading instruction is to foster comprehension. Also, it seems reasonable that instruction integrating oral and written language (i.e., listening and speaking and reading and writing) makes a good deal of sense. Certainly, all children need numerous opportunities for discussion, reading, and writing. (But, many also require explicit instruction dealing with the patterns found in the words they must decode before comprehension is reached.) Good teachers and tutors do not eliminate comprehension and composition instruction in typical lessons, but may need to focus initially on strategies for decoding. Students will gain strategies useful as they read for pleasure or for content area assignments.

First, I will discuss what I mean by *organizing* our instruction. Next, we will examine the setting of most current reading instruction, that is, either the traditional basal approach or the newer whole language approach. Finally, I want to introduce you to an alternative curricular model for explicit decoding instruction, one which appears to be effective for reading disabled and non-disabled children (Henry 1988a, 1988b, 1989).

As formal education replaces the less formal, more natural education that takes place in preschool years, organization becomes more and more important. The American Heritage Dictionary (1982) provides several definitions of *organization*, and four are especially relevant to this paper:

1. to put together into an orderly, functional; structured whole

2a. to arrange in a coherent form, systematize.

2b. to arrange in a desired pattern or structure.

3. to arrange systematically for harmonious or united action.

We see the words *orderly, structured, coherent* and *systematic* – all useful terms for organizing instruction in any area, but mandatory for those children and adults who do not pick up the written language system just by exposure to written language.

So, how do the current instructional approaches organize their reading curricula and instruction?

The Traditional Decoding Strand: The Basal Series

<u>The Curriculum</u>

The decoding curriculum, the course of study that students follow as they learn to decode, is illustrated by the scope and sequence chart in a basal series. There is no attempt to link spelling with decoding though decoding and spelling are clearly related because they share a common orthography (Bryant and Bradley 1980). In addition, we find little instruction in the upper grades, yet word complexity changes dramatically beyond third grade. The decoding strand is generally divided into two parts, *phonics* and *structural analysis*.

Phonics. The phonics strand introduces the beginning reader to numerous graphemes (the written representations of these sounds) and phonemes (the sounds of the language). For example, the student learns that written *c, k,* and *ck* make the sound /k/.

The sequence found in basal series for introducing letter-sound associations appears somewhat arbitrary For example, in several series, short vowel sounds are presented in alphabetical order. Yet, *e* and *i* are difficult to discriminate, suggesting they should be not be taught consecutively. In addition, less common final consonant blends are sometimes taught before common initial consonant blends.

Both productive (i. e., patterns appearing in many words) and nonproductive patterns are presented. By nonproductive patterns I mean those that appear in only a handful of words such as the *u* saying /o͝o/ that appears in only six one syllable English words: *bush*, *bull*, *full*, *pull*, *push* and *put*. A thorough investigation of the scope and sequence chart shows that emphasis is often placed on these irregular letter-sound relationships rather than on frequently used patterns. The basal provides a great deal of information, but it is often left to the teachers to organize this material for themselves and their students.

Worksheet practice augments the introduction of patterns, but usually includes only a few examples of words using even the most productive patterns. Because only five or six target words may be presented for common and non-common patterns, both teachers and students become fused. By presenting a minimal number of examples, teachers and students may conclude that all sounds are highly useful, or that English orthography is highly irregular (because there are so few examples).

Word analysis. The word analysis section of the curriculum introduces a small number of common prefixes, roots, and suffixes. These meaning-bearing, structural units are presented in limited numbers; in one series only 10 Greek and Latin word roots are presented and not until 6th and 7th grade. Even then the lessons focus on the meaning of the root, not how it is useful for decoding and spelling as a unit that appears in thousands of related words. Words that are to be learned for a specific story are part of the vocabulary component, and are taught as isolated words even if the structure of the word is useful to consider.

It is virtually impossible for most students to memorize the thousands of words necessary for upper-elementary school reading; yet, some experts recommend a direct approach. Fry and Sakiey (1986) reported that only from 50 percent to 59 percent of the 3000 most common words are taught by the five major American basal series. They noted that the other 1500 or so words need to be taught separately. Among the words they urged teachers to teach by rote are *transportation*, *importance*, *described*, *hemisphere* – all words containing frequently used affixes and roots. I propose that to teach the roots themselves, and therefore the words that are related in structure, makes sense not only for decoding and spelling, but for vocabulary enhancement as well.

Instruction

Given the character of the traditional decoding curricula, how can the teacher help students understand this material? If we look at the lessons in the basal reader, the piecemeal character of the curriculum is reflected by an equally piecemeal approach during instruction.

The decoding segment of the reading lesson is typically activity-oriented. The teacher edition prompts the teacher to present a spelling pattern (e.g., *oi* as in *noise*), to write several examples on the board, and to assign workbook pages dealing with the new pattern.

Furthermore, while students may have opportunities to discuss the sound of the new pattern, the teacher rarely identifies important features related to word structure (e.g., the pattern seems to appear primarily in the middle of one syllable words). Students spend little time discussing and reflecting on the new concepts, or reading and spelling additional words fitting the pattern. Children learn they can sound-out," that is, give a sound to each letter, but have little practice in doing so. The reliance on worksheet practice assures that assessment lacks both pronunciation and spelling, the most trustworthy measures of decoding skills.

Having completed the lesson, students may think of the new sound as one more in a steady stream of discrete elements presented in the primary grades. Without a way to organize this information, without a metalanguage to discuss the structural features and decoding concepts, and without practice in decoding and spelling, students are unlikely to recognize and reflect on these concepts.

Finally, during the traditional decoding lesson, opportunities for group discussion and projects for extended writing activity are rarely included in the lessons. The "bottom-up," drill-and-practice routine, with its stress on the mechanics of decoding with little intellectual fervor, is often considered deadly boring by students and somewhat mindless by teachers. I propose that students need to learn not only by doing, but also by knowing. Knowledge will be enhanced as students discuss decoding concepts, and reflect upon and monitor decoding strategies.

The Whole Language Approach

After reading extensively about the whole language approach over the past three years, I have had difficulty sorting out a coherent definition. I am not alone. (Bergeron 1990) I found that whole language had been described as an approach, a belief, a method, a philosophy, an orientation, a theory, a theoretical orientation, a program, a curriculum, a perspective on education, and an attitude of mind. She even found that even single authors often define whole language differently in different articles.

In California, and in other states as well, whole language is tied to the literature based instruction movement. Among the effective practices found in the literature based approach, authors of the California English and Language Arts Framework (1987) recommend that instruction (a) encourage reading and expose students to significant literary works, (b) emphasize integration of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, (c) teach language skills in meaningful contexts, and (d) include attention to the various stages of the writing process. Few of us would disagree with these recommendations.

In terms of classroom instruction, whole language advocates endeavor to place students' learning within the context of their own experiences, using their own language as a bridge to beginning reading instruction (Rhodes and Dudley-Marling 1988). Reading and writing instruction is based on making sense of text through silent and oral reading as students gain meaning from context.

In whole language instruction, teachers generally spend time each day reading to children (certainly an appropriate activity for all children). Teachers encourage students to write by following developmental stages including scribbling, using individual letters to represent something, writing initial consonants to represent words beginning with particular sounds, representing sounds with letters, and inventing spellings until ready to move to more traditional spelling and writing (Gunderson and Shapiro 1988). Students often write about their experiences in logs and journals.

Storybooks, rather than basal readers, are read by students. In some classrooms children choose their own books and in others the teacher selects appropriate stories (Heibert and Colt 1989). Anderson, Higgins, and Wurster (1985) found that while good readers knew how to select literature relevant to their interests and reading ability, poor readers did not.

Systematic and explicit phonics instruction is not a part of the whole language movement. Rather, Goodman (1986) suggested that in a whole language program readers and writers develop control over the phonic generalizations in context of using written language sensibly. While others strongly disagree with this conclusion (Liberman and Liberman 1990), this symposium is not the forum to debate the advantages and disadvantages of the whole language approach (For critical reviews see other papers, this volume, as well as Bergeron 1990; Carbo 1988; Chall 1989: Edelsky 1990. McKenna, Robinson, and Miller 1990: Stahl and Miller 1989).

An Alternative: A Curriculum for English Orthography

One assumption underlying my presentation asserts that few children pick up the code in a natural way. Thus, it makes a great deal of sense for teachers to understand and then teach the structures underpinning reading and spelling. I charge that neither the fragmented phonics approach introduced in basal series nor the global whole language approach serves students with reading problems very well.

Take the case of Alan's paragraph, written from dictation. At the time of assessment, Alan was a brilliant 12-year-old with a college level vocabulary and computer skills befitting a Silicon Valley student (Figure 1).

Quote: "Truly the hour when he was compelled to develop a composition seemed the longest and grimmest of the whole week. He fretted, chewed his pencil, regretted that he had not applied himself earlier, and thought of other ways he would have preferred to spend the hour. In fact, he underwent every form of suffering except that which involves work. Finally, controlling his thoughts with an almost heroic effort, he ceased pitying himself and produced the weekly masterpiece."

Figure 1. Writing from dictation: Alan's preinstruction writing sample.

Though he had been exposed to many of these words throughout his young life, had family members who read to him frequently, and had numerous opportunities to read and write in his school and literate home, Alan did not make the generalizations necessary to decode and spell commensurate with his ability. Even as a 12-year-old, he couldn't spell common sight words such as *hour*, *when*, *whole*, *thought*, *ways*, *which*, and *work*. He sometimes adds the past tense form, -ed, but does not at other times (e.g., freeted and regreted, but, compeld, seemed, and aplide). He was unaware of when to double final consonants. Sequential errors include Spet. (Sept.) seemde (seemed), exspet (except), and wrook (work). More about Alan later.....

Now, how can we organize the decoding (and spelling) curriculum so that it can be translated into systematic, coherent instruction? I propose that when students thoroughly understand the structure of English words, they will learn the system.

Two factors influence the structure of English orthography or spelling, word origin and word structure. These themes flow through the alternative curriculum portrayed in the alternative model. The first theme comes from an examination of the history of the English language and the way this history has influenced the English orthography over centuries.

English words vary depending upon the origin they come from, and indeed, most of our words are borrowed, Claiborne (1983) noted:

> "The truth is that if borrowing foreign words could destroy a language. English would be *dead* (borrowed from Old Norse), *deceased* (from French), *defunct* (from Latin) and *kaput* (from German). When it comes to borrowing, English excels (from Latin), *surpasses* (from French) and *eclipses* (from Greek) any other tongue, past or present." (p.4)

We find that three language origins (Anglo-Saxon, Romance, and Greek) have largely influenced English orthography. The second dimension comes from three major structural components (a) letter-sound correspondences, (b) syllable patterns, and (c) morpheme patterns. These themes can be summarized in the following matrix (See Table I).

Table I. Word Origin by Word Structure Categories: Framework for an Integrated
Decoding and Spelling Curriculum

	Letter-Sound Correspondences	Syllable Patterns	Morpheme Patterns
ANGLO-SAXON	sad stand thin let frisk chat cap/cape card boil pin/pine tall foul ..... flow	button sister harvest pilot cabin hundred	cowboy software like get unlike forget unlikely forgetting
LATIN	direction spatial excellent	inter- intra -ity	construction erupting conductor
GREEK	phonograph scholar symphony	macro meta	microscope chloroplast physiology

This historical-structural perspective allows us to present and organize information rather than to present a number of isolated skills. As those tenants that are useful for decoding are equally useful for spelling, the curriculum is actually one for both decoding and spelling.

A Historical Perspective

The first theme for the alternative curriculum comes from an examination of the history of the English language. Balmuth (1982) takes one aspect of reading and language. English phonics, and through an in-depth historical presentation (in which she includes syllable and morpheme structures) provides insights on the importance of phonics in education over several centuries.

Numerous historical forces shaped the development of written English, but the result has been the emergence of Anglo-Saxon, Romance, and Greek based words as the dominant sources of English words (Claibome 1983: Nist 1966: and Balmuth 1982). English, then, is a polyglot (a lovely word from Greek, literally meaning "many tongues"), with Anglo-Saxon, Romance, and Greek all playing a role in establishing the words read and written today.

Anglo-Saxon layer. Words of Anglo-Saxon origin are characterized as the common, everyday, down-to-earth earth words, used frequently in ordinary situations. Nist (1966) provides a clever example of Anglo-Saxon words:

> No matter whether a man is American, British, Canadian. Australian, New Zealander or South African, he still *loves his mother, father, brother, sister, wife, son and daughter; lifts his hand to his head, his cup to his mouth, his eye to heaven and his heart to God; hates his foes, likes his friends, kisses his kin and buries his dead; draws his breath, eats his bread, drinks his water, stands his watch, wipes his sweat, feels his sorrow, weeps his tears and sheds his blood; and all these things he thinks about and calls both good and bad*. (p. 9)

Although the criteria for selection of words and patterns is often obscure, the primary source of Anglo-Saxon words is Old and Middle English (Balmuth 1982). Venezky (1970) described the basic patterns of Anglo-Saxon letter-sound correspondences, and Calfee and his colleagues (Calfee and Associates 1981; Calfee and Drum 1986) categorized this information (See Table II).

This model is useful for organizing the basic letter-sound correspondences in the curriculum. Graphemes (the letter patterns) are organized either into consonant or vowel patterns. Single-letter consonant spellings seldom vary; each letter stands for a specific sound. Only *c* and *g* (and less often *s* and *x*) have more than one sound. Consonant blends, made up of two or three consonants retaining their individual sounds, are common. They may appear at the beginning or end of a one-syllable word or in the middle of a multi-syllabic word (e.g., *pl* and *nt* in *plant*: *dr* in *hundred*). Consonant digraphs usually add an h to a consonant to form a new sound (e.g., *sh*ip. *ch*ump, *th*is. *wh*at). Consonant digraphs also may appear at the beginning or end of a word (*ch*at, lun*ch*) or in the middle (far*th*er).

Table II. Basic Anglo-Saxon Letter-Sound Correspondences

CONSONANTS		
SINGLE	BLENDS	DIGRAPHS
bat hip fox rug	cramp clasp twist stand	ship church that, thin which
VOWELS		
SINGLE LETTER	-r & -l controlled	DIGRAPHS
cap, cape pet, Pete pinning, pining rot, rote cutter, cuter	her, fir, curl farm, corn marry, berry hall halter	1 sound: beet loy, spoil boat pail, stay paw, pause 2 sounds: bead, bread clown, snow cloud, shoulder pie, thief

Each single vowel spelling in English usually has one of two pronunciations, generally referred to as *short* and *long*. Words often contain clues, referred to as "markers," that indicate whether the short or long sound should be used. A single consonant between two vowels signals a long vowel sound. For example, the "silent" *e* at the end of a word shows that the vowel is long as in *shape* and *vote*. The doubled consonants in pinning and cutter are there to indicate the short vowel sound. The doubled consonant cancels the long-vowel signal that would otherwise be gĭven by the *i* in *ing* and the *e* in *er*. In the second vowel category, the vowel plus r̲ or l̲ is treated differently. These patterns are best presented as specific combinations (e.g., *ar, er, ir*). Vowel digraphs refer to the two adjacent vowels occurring in words of Anglo-Saxon origin (e.g., *oa, ee, oi, ou, au*). They usually occur in the middle of words. Those digraphs that have alternate sounds (e.g., *ea* in *beach* or *ea* in *bread*) are the most difficult of the Anglo-Saxon correspondences for many children. Happily, vowel digraphs appear only in the suffixes of words of Romance origin and rarely in words of Greek origin.

While some opponents of teaching phonics or rules related to letter-sound correspondences believe this study is boring, I like to intrigue students with how the alphabet empowers us to learn. Logan, 1986, said it well when he stated "The alphabet is the first thing that is taught in school because it is the gateway to learning and knowledge" (p. 18).

A relatively few, but extremely important, words lie outside of this structure, defying regular letter-sound correspondence. These words, the "irregular" words of the language like *rough*, *does*, *only*, *laugh*, and *said* do not follow direct letter-sound correspondence (usually in the vowel sound) and must be memorized by students.

Syllables refer to units of spoken language consisting of a single uninterrupted sound formed by a vowel or vowel digraph alone, or of a vowel preceded or followed by one or more consonants. Students are introduced to multi-syllabic words in the primary grades. At the same time, they may learn some common patterns for dividing words into syllables in order to make words easier to read and spell. Anglo-Saxon based words have a variety of syllable patterns. Students learn that each syllable must have a vowel. Evidence shows that students have more difficulty recognizing written syllables than in hearing syllables in words (Balmuth 1982). Readers may recognize vowel-consonant- consonant-vowel (VCCV), VCV, VCCCV, and CVVC patterns in words like *napkin*, *hobo*, *hundred*, and *create* respectively. These are useful separations to know when one analyzes unfamiliar words.

Anglo-Saxon morphemes, the meaning units within words, are found by compounding and affixing words. Compound words generally combine short Anglo-Saxon words to create new words (e.g., flashlight, railroad). Words can also be expanded by affixing beginnings and endings to the base or root word (e.g., un*likely*).

Romance layer. This layer of language, made up primarily of words of Latin and French origin, consists of technical words used in more formal settings. These words are often found in the literature or content area texts in the upper elementary and higher grades. Because these words are longer, many students expect them to be more complex. Yet, in many cases the words follow simple letter-sound correspondence and are easier to analyze (Henry 1988a).

The stress patterns, however, are complex. The schwa, or unstressed vowel sound, is common (as in *excellent, direction*). When one pronounces *excellent*, for example, stress occurs on the first syllable so the initial *e* receives the regular short sound. The following two *e's*, appearing in unstressed syllables, have the schwa sound (ə).

Words of Romance origin also become affixed, but neither the root word nor the affix generally stands alone (e.g., *interrupted; transmitting; dependent*). The Latin word roots are probably among the most productive elements for students to learn. These roots are relatively easy to learn and are important for enhancing vocabulary as well as decoding and spelling. Brown (1949) suggested that by teaching variations of just 14 master words containing 12 Latin roots and 2 Greek roots, students could learn the meaning of tens of thousands of words.

Greek Layer. Greek words entered English by the thousands during the Renaissance to meet the needs of scholars and scientists. Letter-sound correspondences are similar to Anglo-Saxon and Romance-based words, but words of Greek origin commonly use the sounds of /ch/, /ph, and /y/ found in found in *chlorophyll*. Other less common combinations (e.g., *pneumonia, mnemonics, rhetoric*) are readily identifiable as Greek-based. The Greek layer tends to compound forms or roots in words appearing largely in scientific texts (e.g., *microscope, hemisphere, physiology*)

As the preceding section suggests, the historical perspective is of primary importance to the study. I agree with Venezky (1970) and Nist (1966) that English orthography, when understood from this perspective, begins to make sense. However, when asked to identify specific structures within words (e.g., consonant blends or digraphs, prefixes, suffixes, and roots), children appear to know little about the structure of English orthography (Henry 1988a. 1989).

An Instructional Alternative

The curriculum model discussed earlier provides teachers and students with a framework for decoding instruction. Thus both historical and structural features of words comprise the basis of the instruction. Letter-sound correspondence, syllables, and morpheme patterns become the strategies available to decode unfamiliar words. The fluent reader first looks for familiar morphemes in unknown words, then makes decisions based on syllable division, and only when these strategies have been applied, falls back on letter-sound associations (Henry 1988a). Poor readers, on the other hand, appear to use only one strategy; they "sound out" the word by letter-sound correspondences. While this may be reliable for short, regular words, it furnishes little help for longer words.

Understanding how these patterns are influenced by word origin adds yet another useful dimension for reading and spelling unknown words. For example, when attempting the unknown word *interruption*, the reader will be able to recognize the Latin prefix, root, and suffix. As *-tion* has a unique pronunciation, knowing this suffix makes decoding thousands of words possible. Understanding these forms is equally beneficial for spelling. The speller may be tempted to write "*interupshun*" but knowing that the prefix inter ends with an *r* and the root *rupt* begins with an *r* he or she is less likely to omit an *r*. Additionally, knowing that the suffix /shən/ is usually spelled *tion*, he is able to write the word correctly.

The curriculum model was merged with the Project READ instructional model (Calfee and Henry 1985). Project READ stresses not only *content*, but also *structure* and *process*. *Content* refers to the subject matter, the materials, and the activities undertaken for the lesson. For example, the content of a decoding lesson may be an introduction to common -r controlled vowels, *er, ir, ur*. Each discussion, or reading or spelling activity centers around these patterns.

11

The *structure* involves both the frame of reference or the set of orthographic rules or patterns that apply to the content of the lesson and synthesizing the results of analysis. One set of structures associated with decoding instruction is Latin word roots.

Process refers to the pedagogical techniques and critical questions that lay out the content. Students may generate words fitting a specific patterns and address process questions such as: "How are the words in lists 1 and 2 alike and different?" "How does understanding these roots affect both decoding and meaning?"

Five units of instruction form the integrated decoding and spelling curriculum (Henry 1988a, 1988b, 1990). These include (a) Letter-sound Correspondences, (b) Syllable Patterns, (c) Layers of Language: Anglo-Saxon, Romance, Greek, (d) Morpheme patterns, and (e) Strategies for Analyzing Long, Unfamiliar Words: Reading and Spelling. Students first organize the letter-sound correspondences as they learn them according to the 2 X 3 matrix described earlier. Almost all graphemes, the letter patterns appearing in words, can be placed in one of these six cells. This makes it possible to organize within a coherent frame the almost 200 isolated patterns presented by most basal readers.

Next, students consider syllable patterns. They begin by discussing the meaning of the term *syllable* and practice counting the number of syllables in a group of 2-5 syllable words. Students learn about both simple and complex syllable division patterns existing in most multi-syllabic words. Students read long words and divide them into syllables. They also spell words, being sure to count the syllables before writing, and saying each syllable as they write.

Unit III introduces students to the layers of language (Anglo-Saxon, Romance, and Greek) influencing English. Teachers present the growth of written language, tracing the link of picture drawing, pictographs, and ideograms to alphabetic writing. They then describe the events contributing to-the formation of English. Letter-sound correspondences, and syllable and morpheme patterns are contrasted for each layer of language, Anglo-Saxon, Romance, and Greek.

Unit IV provides numerous opportunities to read and spell words with Latin and Greek based morphemes. This unit focuses primarily on Latin based prefixes, roots, and suffixes. Common prefixes and suffixes are introduced along with Latin roots including *rupt, form, tract, script, spect, struct, dict, flect, fer*, and *mit/miss*. Lessons also focus on Greek combining forms such as *auto, phono, hydro, hyper, chron, micro, hemi, graph, meta*. and *sphere*. Students are given opportunities to read and spell numerous words and to generate new words fitting each category.

Finally, students practice using the alternative strategies for decoding and spelling unknown words. Unit V allows students to synthesize the information from previous units. Students practice using their new skills as they analyze long, unfamiliar words. Students follow the sequence used by most fluent readers. They first check for affixation and roots and if necessary divide words into syllables. Only if these two strategies fail, do students use letter-sound correspondences. In spelling they are taught to first repeat the word, listen for syllables and try to identify common affixes and roots. Students are encouraged to use letter-sound correspondences only after they attempt the morpheme and syllable strategies. They learn productive spelling rules (e.g., rules for adding suffixes) to assist in spelling words from dictation.

Lesson Procedures

Lessons within each unit focus on specific patterns within the historical and structural categories. Teachers first introduce students to the structural or conceptual focus of the unit. In the following lessons, students continue to learn and practice new concepts related to each pattern. The final lesson reviews and summarizes the unit.

These lessons are designed to be presented sequentially in 30–45-minute sessions. Each lesson consists of the "opening" where the teacher described the purpose and content of the lesson and explained the lesson procedures. In the decoding lessons, several patterns are usually presented for the student's attention. Following the opening, the teacher provides several "middle activities." These activities are framed in a small-group discussion format; students have the opportunity to read, spell, and discuss the patterns and concepts presented. Middle activities provide numerous examples of words fitting each pattern or rule. Students always have the opportunity to generate new words. Lessons can be adapted for individual tutorial instruction.

At the end of each session, teachers and students review and summarize the concepts and patterns learned that day. This "closing" is an important facet of any Project READ lesson. During the closing, students and teacher discuss the lesson in terms of its content, relationship to other patterns, key terminology, and applicability to their reading and spelling.

Teachers assign follow-up activities for many of the lessons. Some of these take place directly after the lesson, and others are to be completed as homework. For example, students might be asked to underline words containing Latin word roots in a newspaper article or to find as many Greek words as possible in a chapter of their science text. Or, students may write a paragraph using a number of specified Latin or Greek roots.

Conclusion

Any curriculum becomes active through instruction. The instruction for a structured approach to English orthography builds on the curriculum frameworks (See Tables I and II) presented earlier. (The goal of this instruction is an understanding of the English orthographic system as it is based on both word origin and word structure in order to gain strategies for decoding and spelling the great majority of words in the student lexicon.

What happens to the teacher? The instruction seeks to organize decoding concepts for teachers, and thus for their students. Teachers develop metalinguistic and metacognitive awareness by training students to understand the structure of the language viewed from its historical origins and by providing new strategies for decoding-strategies for reflecting upon and monitoring what they read and wrote. This approach empowers teachers to analyze where a child's breakdown in reading occurs. They can determine if the breakdown is due to trouble at the level of (a) word recognition, (b) word meaning, (c) comprehension at the sentence and paragraph level, or (d) overall text comprehension. Furthermore, teachers can isolate factors unique to decoding. The structural factors comprise a set of mini-components within the decoding curriculum that can be separably taught and discussed.

What happens when individuals with reading disabilities learn with this approach? Activities are designed to actively engage students; they spend little time in isolated drill and practice in workbooks. Students became aware of the process of strategy selection based on the structure and origins of the words presented. Even in a short period of time, they gain a further understanding of word structure, but more importantly they become better at decoding and spelling. Alan provides such an example (See Figure 2).

By learning about the structure of words and gaining strategies for decoding and spelling, Alan learned to spell – not perfectly, but greatly improved. The words in this dictated paragraph (identical to that given prior to instruction) were not memorized. By learning about the patterns found in English words, Alan was able to begin making generalizations on his own. Note also that Alan used cursive-writing taught to him simultaneously as he learned new patterns, during the post-assessment.

Figure 2. Writing from Dictation: Alan's post-instruction writing sample.

Goodman (1989) and Rich (1989) note the impact of "whole language" instruction restoring power to teachers. In contrast, I believe we should be empowering our students by providing them with strategies to deal with the English language the way it is. This means teaching students about the structure of English words so they can read and spell words from Alphabet to Zoology.

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Original Note from Donald L. Potter

June 16, 2003

Elementary Bilingual Teacher, Odessa, TX

"Organizing Decoding Instruction" was originally published as an article in an important book of essays entitled *All Language and the Creation of Literacy* published by The Orton Dyslexia Society in 1991.

"Organizing Decoding Instruction" is now made available for download from the www.donpotter.net website with kind permission from the author, Marcia K. Henry, and the International Dyslexia Society (www.interdys.org) per e-mail from Cindy Ciresi, Director of Conferences and Publications, 6/16/03.

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On January 21, 2008, I published Marilyn Jager Adams's article "Why Not Phonics *and* Whole Language?" Adam's article was published in the same book at Marcia K. Henry's "Organizing Decoding Instruction." You can read that article at the following link.

http://www.donpotter.net/pdf/why-not-phonics-and-whole.pdf

Both articles were a great help to me in avoiding the pitfalls of Whole Language, which I was encountering as an elementary bilingual teacher. I read *All Language and the Creation of Literacy* on September 26, 1998. It took me a while to contact the authors to get permission to publish their articles for a wider audience.

Revised Note from Mr. Potter

July 13, 2021

Helpful Books

1. *WORDS: Integrated Decoding and Spelling Instruction Based on Word Origin and Word Structure*. Second Edition. (1990, 2010) Pro-Ed Austin, TX. This is a very complete, step-by-step approach to teaching beginning and advanced English morphology to improve reading ability. It can be used for classroom, small group, or individual instruction. http://amzn.to/2DtcUDt

2. *Unlocking Literacy: Effective Decoding and Spelling Instruction.* (2003) Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co. This is a comprehensive reference manual for teaching effective decoding skills, including detailed information on the Levels of English. http://amzn.to/2EZVOJF

3. *Beyond Blend Phonics: English Morphology Made Easy* (2015). This book builds on my years of experience teaching Mrs. Henry's WORDS program. I teach the words by language of origin illustrating the meanings of the morphemes using a technique utilizing parallel sentences that I learned from Dr. George Gonázlez. I use this book as a follow up for students who have completed my primary phonics method, *Blend Phonics Lessons and Stories*. http://amzn.to/2DwgcF2

Here is an excellent free Morpheme program by Jason Wade.

https://jweducation.co.uk/?sfw=pass1653826388

I wish I could say that the aspects of Whole Language that denigrated direct instruction including handwriting, phonics, and spelling were no longer with us. Unfortunately, former Whole Language authors and publishers continue to promote their products, often under the guise of *Guided Reading*, *Reading Recovery*, *Leveled Literacy Intervention*, and most forms of Balanced Literacy.

On December 12, 2022, I made many improvements to the formatting.

August 22, 2023: Here is a link to my most recent work with this approach. You will find a free textbook in PDF format and instructional videos on YouTube for all 60 lessons.

http://donpotter.net/beyond-basic-phonics.html

The following pages contain material I have gather over the years to help illustrate the importance of teaching students to read words of Romance (Latin and French) layers of English.

THE LAYERS OF LANGUAGE – HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

English has been influenced by other languages. It did not originate in England as you might think. The oldest words came from tribes who invaded England from northern Europe and wiped out the civilization they found there.

These **Anglo-Saxon** conquerors had few words, mostly those connected with things they used and actions of their daily lives. This Old English resembled German; many of the words we use today came from Anglo-Saxon. Most of our one-syllable words are Anglo-Saxon, words like <u>bed</u>, <u>cold</u>, <u>sit</u>, <u>but</u>, <u>milk</u>, <u>field</u>, <u>walk</u>, and <u>eat</u>.

Norman invaders came later (1066) from what is now called **France**. Their language contained many words they had learned from the Romans, who at one time conquered France. The language of the Romans was called Latin; we have many words that were originally Latin. This is the Romance Level of English.

Later, again, scholars in England borrowed words directly from **Latin** itself, which for centuries was the language of the educated men and women all over Europe. Many of our longer and more scholarly words reached us in this way, words like <u>illustrate</u>, <u>transportation</u>, <u>speculate</u>.

The Romans themselves borrowed many words from the **Greeks**. Some of the Greek words had themselves been borrowed form still earlier people, the Phoenicians. Today we use many words from Greek, including <u>philosophy</u>, <u>phonography</u>, <u>physiology</u>, and <u>hydrometer</u>.

English Vocabulary: Origins

Decile	English	French	Latin	Danish	Other
1	83%	11%	2%	2%	2%
2	34	46	11	2	7
3	29	46	14	1	10
4	27	45	17	1	10
5	27	47	17	1	8
6	27	42	19	2	10
7	23	45	17	2	13
8	26	41	18	2	13
9	25	41	17	2	15
10	25	42	18	1	14

Explanation: If we group the vocabulary of English into the first most frequent thousand words, second most frequent thousand words, third most frequent thousand words, and so on, then compute the percentage of native versus borrowed words in each of these groups of a thousand, we find the above figures.

The "other" group includes mostly mixed or doubtful words, or words that only might be assigned to English, French or Latin words. Only Dutch among "other" exceeds 1 percent in any of the deciles. When all the words are in running text are put into one group, the percentages are as follows: English 78.1; French 15.2; Latin 3.1; Danish 2.4; other (Greek, Dutch, Italian, Spanish, German, etc.): 1.3. Comment: These data were compiled from several thousand business letters. (Roberts, A. Hood. *A Statistical Linguistic Analysis of American English*. The Hague, 1965.)

From Williams, Joseph M. *Origins of the English Language, A Social and Linguistic History*. The Free Press, 1975.

The 14 Words that Make All the Difference

These words make all the difference because they contain the twenty most useful prefixes and fourteen most important roots and are to be found in <u>over 14,000 words in a collegiate size dictionary</u> or close to an estimated <u>100,000 words in an unabridged size dictionary</u>. This is according to James I. Brown, Professor of Rhetoric, University of Minnesota; in his *Programmed Vocabulary* book, printed by Meredith Publishing Company, New York, 1971. Also see the earlier work by J. I. Brown: (Brown, J. I. Reading and vocabulary: 14 master words. *Word Study* 24:1-4)

1. precept
2. detain
3. intermittent
4. offer
5. insist
6. monograph
7. epilogue
8. aspect
9. uncomplicated
10. nonextended
11. reproduction
12. indisposed
13. oversufficient
14. mistranscribe

The Story of English

I. <u>Simple English: Mostly Anglo-Saxon</u>

A long time ago there was a place that had no name. It was filled with men and women who could not do a lot of things. They could hunt deer. They could stand still and hide. They might kick a cat or pet the dog. They ran fast, and played games and built houses. They might stop and start or jump up and down with joy. They had no bats to swing or balls to hit. Yet they did shout and scream and laugh and cry. To get food to eat, they would spear fish and grow plants. They got milk from cows. They cut down trees to make houses. They grew grapes and made wine. At night they could watch the moon and stars. Or they could just go to sleep. Then came some men in big boats from a place called Rome.

Reading Levels: Flesch Kincaid 2.0

II. <u>Fancy English: Mostly Latin and French</u>

This place is what today we call **England**. When the **Roman legions conquered** this island, they **considered** the **indigenous** people **savages** who were **completely** without **culture** and **legal traditions**. **Naturally** they had to **educate** them. Since these **savage**s had no **legal** terms or **cultural** terms in their **vocabulary**, the Romans added the **necessary** words from their **language** which was **Latin**. **Eventually** from **Ireland** and **Italy** came **missionaries** who brought **Christianity** to these **pagans**. These **missionaries** taught the **savages** that if they changed their **religion** from **polytheism**, were **baptized**, and **accepted Jesus** as their **savior**, **salvation** could be theirs. Because the **savages** did not have the **appropriate** words in their simple story telling **language**, the **missionaries** added the words or **created** words from their two **favorite languages, Latin** and Greek. Then came the **Norman** French. They **conquered** the somewhat **civilized savages** and added to their **vocabulary** words dealing with **cuisine** and **military** matters. So now words like **victuals**, **lieutenant**, **colonel**, **bivouac**, **rendezvous**, **boudoir**, and **unique** were added to the **language**. And as **foreign** words entered the **language**, they kept their **phonetic** patterns rather than changing to the phonic spelling of the original **story-telling language** of the **savages**.

Reading Level: Flesch Kincaid 11.0