

“Miss-Education” in Our Schools

By Carole Richards

For decades I’ve talked about the literacy crisis in the United States. Despite our nation spending \$92,000 per year per child on education, the literacy rates have remained stagnant since the 1970’s.

Let me explain the problem. If a student cannot effortlessly read the big words in a passage, they will not comprehend what they read. If they cannot effortlessly spell, the words they want to write, they will write only basic elementary documents. Words like, “official”, “paradox”, even “elementary”, etc. are good examples.

So, imagine trying to read a biology or U.S. History text and only being able to read the simple words. The big words are where the comprehension lies. These words are the meat of the passage. You won’t comprehend this complex information.

Aimee Gilman, a respected education attorney in Cleveland recently told me. Students aren’t taught multi-sensory systematic phonics in our schools because our college teacher preparation programs don’t teach methodology to our future teachers. Consequently, we have decades of experienced teachers with little or no knowledge of how to teach reading.

Mrs. Gilman went on to say that schools are using Leveled Literacy Intervention by Fountas and Pinnell (FP): students read stories based on their FP level. Fountas and Pinnell describe their readers: “Reading is a highly complex process. Readers must build a system of strategic actions for processing texts A–Z+ that begins with early reading behaviors and becomes a network of strategic actions for reading increasingly difficult texts. The F&P Text Level Gradient™ should be seen as a continuum of progress for readers.”

Mrs. Gilman also mentions Guided Reading also by FP. A small group of students reads a passage or story together out loud with their teacher. I guess the theory, “practice makes perfect.” However, with 600,000+ words in the English language, you cannot memorize all the words.

Currently, a local school district is in federal court over a dyslexic student that has not made progress in five years of school using FP programs. This district bought both programs district-wide. Yet, this fourth grader cannot read!

Yesterday I spoke with Hope, a tutor in an afterschool program serving at-risk youth. She is teaching reading comprehension, writing, grammar, etc. Her students have significant behaviors

because they are frustrated. They cannot read well or spell well. Yet, her program requires “more of the same” they do in school. They see it as punishment.

Bernice, teacher of high schoolers in an online program said,. “My students got diplomas.” Hurray! But I dug deeper and she said, “Many of our at-risk youth, when placed on computers merely guess until they get it right. And with online programs there is no individualization for poorer students.” Bernice has scored SAT essays and she is appalled by the poor spelling on these college essays.

Mrs. Gilman, Hope and Bernice, all told me the same thing. Our children cannot read or spell well. Yet we keep forcing them to try and learn things they can’t because they CANNOT READ well. I keep beating the drum of literacy. Bernice calls it “Miss-Education”. We keep pushing higher standards and job ready- work ready initiatives. **Yet, until our kids can read, we will continue to have the same results.**

To learn more about the Richards Learning Systems Video Literacy Program for Teachers and Students, visit www.cei4learning.org. Please join our mailing list and donate to the cause. Every dollar we raise gets us closer to solving the literacy crisis.