

# The Magic Pill

## To read, or not to read

By Carole Richards

When families come to North Coast Education Services to solve a reading problem, we would love to say, "Here you are, take this magic pill with water and by morning you'll read like the very best students in your class". We truly wish a magic pill could fix the reading problem. We would make children and their families extremely happy, and reading would become a more popular past time.

### Why?

Why can't someone develop a magic pill to solve the reading problem? The answer is the ability to read and comprehend is a complex process. Reading seems simple to those who read well. Learning to read "just happened" as many good readers were exposed to books. Not everyone learns to read in the same way. Some people literally read books from back to front, from the bottom of the page to the top. Is it possible that these people understand and can discuss with they read? Absolutely! These readers comprehend material they read as well as you and I.

### It's Not Intelligence

When we discuss reading problems, we must first establish the fact that poor readers, even non-readers, are not stupid. Many poor readers are extremely intelligent. If so, why can't they read? Usually the difficulty lies in their processing ability. Let's use the analogy of a 3-1/2" floppy disc to illustrate processing ability. Take a new floppy disk and place it a Macintosh computer. Fill that disc with files or information composed on the Mac. Now, remove that disc from the Mac and insert it in a PC. What happens? Nothing happens because a PC can't read Mac files and visa versa. (Newer software will read both types of files, but that's not the point.)

So how do we explain this phenomenon for readers? Reading is a matter of decoding the words. Many of us learn to decode quite effortlessly. Others struggle with decoding and it takes more time and patience for these children to become good readers. Memorizing

lists of "vocabulary" words is not the answer. Children are able to memorize word lists, but as they memorize more words, they cannot recall the first words memorized.

Another common reading problem is comprehension. Some children can read quite fluently. However, when finished reading a paragraph, page, or story, they cannot recall what they just read. They can't answer simple questions about content. Yes, they can read, but they don't understand what they read. Again, memorizing lists of words is no help in improving reading comprehension.

Parents become alarmed when they see their children falling behind in school. They should be alarmed -- reading is the key to success academically and success in life. Parents begin looking for answers in the most logical place - the school. They start asking teachers for answers and usually don't get them. However, parents often don't ask the right questions. The answers to these questions are most enlightening:

Q: "Do you know how to teach children to read?"

**A: Yes, of course. That's part of my job.**

Q: "What method or methods do you use?"

**A: I have learned and seen many methods and I use some parts of all of them.**

Q: "Have you taught other children to read who have similar problems?"

**A: Yes, I have taught many children to read.**

Q: "May I talk to some of those parents?"

**A: No, confidentiality restrictions prevent revealing this information.**

Q: "What reading methods and techniques were you taught in college?"

**A: We did not learn reading methods or teaching techniques in college.**

Q: "How does your principal/school district train you to teach reading?"

**A: The school leaves reading techniques to each teacher.**

Q: "Do teachers in all grades use the same method or methods?"

**A: No, there is no standard method(s) in the district, but we have content standards to follow (with no road map to get there).**

Clearly, these answers tell nothing about the teaching skills of the teacher or the curriculum in the school. So what's next? Where do parents turn for information and advice? Many parents go to the principal or school counselor. Since the school has no system or method for teaching reading, answers are not available other than to suggest more of the same - more reading, more memorizing, more struggling.

Next, many parents turn to a psychologist to test the child. Several local hospitals have large educational testing operations that can identify the specific problem. Testing takes time, several months to schedule an appointment for testing, more time to process and return results to the parent. Armed with this testing information, parents schedule a meeting with teachers and administrators at school.

Often, an IEP or Individual Education Plan is written for the child. The school district will identify the problem, but depending on the school district, the school may or may not be able to take positive action to help the child AND solve the problem. This process is both expensive and time-consuming. The end result is a whole school year has been wasted going through the diagnostic process which generates little or no positive action from the school.

### **Yes, There IS a MAGIC PILL!!**

No, it's not what you think. It's not one pill taken at bedtime with a glass of water. Instead it's a time-release pill for the long haul.

Depending on the age of the child, we recommend reading instruction an hour or two each week. We use a reading system that works. It's simple, logical, systematic, multi-sensory, and phonics-based. It's ... RICHARDS READ Systematic Language.

It works at every age, in every grade, in all subjects. RICHARDS READ is research-based. RICHARDS READ is effective with ADD, AD/HD, Dyslexia, Asperger's Syndrome, Learning Disabled, and many other diagnoses that result in struggling readers.

The main reason RICHARDS READ is so effective is that children learn the basic system that explains how words and sounds are put together. It doesn't require lots of memorizing,

and as the child becomes more familiar with the system, reading becomes easier and easier.

Some students take several years to learn to read confidently. Others learn in five or six months. No one learns in a few hours! This "magic pill" takes time. But, most important, IT WORKS.

### **Why TEST?**

If RICHARDS READ Systematic Language is effective with many different reading problems, why test? Frankly, there is no good reason to test unless it is to fulfill insurance or school requirements. We prefer to downplay reading problems so children don't think something wrong with them. There is nothing wrong other than the student has a reading difference.

Rather than testing, we look for attitudinal changes in the child. Does the child look forward to tutoring sessions, or at least not complain about them? Is the child more willing to read or complete homework? Is the child becoming more confident? These are the first measures of success. Test scores and grades improve more slowly.

### **A Parable?**

This story may sound like a parable, but it is based on actual case histories.

*"Once upon a time there was a little boy named Billy. Billy was a bright-eyed little boy who loved to run and jump and play. It took Billy a little extra time to talk, but he was smart, alert and even ahead of other children in some ways.*

*When Billy was four, he went to nursery school. He didn't color or paste as well as other children. But, he started using some big, big words. He was a deep thinker for a little boy.*

*During kindergarten and first grade, Billy struggled to keep up with the other children in reading. He had difficulty writing letters and words. Billy's penmanship was terrible. He had trouble sitting still for long periods of time. The teacher knew he was smart, but he wasn't keeping up. The teacher told his Mom and Dad, "He's just being a boy... don't worry".*

*At the end of second grade Billy began to act out in class. His work wasn't always finished.*

The teacher no longer mentioned how smart he was. He had become a "problem" for his teacher. Billy's Mom and Dad were very upset. They could tell Billy was bright, but he just wasn't reading. His teacher said Billy would be fine if would only "pay attention in class".

By fourth grade, Billy had become a bigger problem. It seemed he was always in trouble. He poked other children, dropped things on the floor, and talked at the wrong time. He almost NEVER turned in any work.

The teacher warned him that he might fail. "If only you would TRY HARDER," she pleaded. As you can guess, poor Billy repeated fourth grade. But he did no better the second time, so the school passed him to fifth grade.

The fifth grade teacher recommended learning disability testing for Billy. His Mom and Dad were relieved. At last they would find out that the difficulty was not Billy's fault. They were right. The test showed Billy had a serious learning disability in reading. Billy, now a fifth grader, COULD NOT READ "CAT" or "DOG" or "THE"!

So, the school gave him a tutor. This time his Mom and Dad were sure that everything would be all right. Billy would start to read better... keep up in class, do his homework and behave better. Everything would be just fine.

Again, you can guess what happened. Even though Billy started over again with reading, he still had to keep up with all his class work. He got extra help, but it required extra work. As hard as he tried and as hard as his Mom and Dad wished, it didn't work.

Billy was very good in sports. His Mom and Dad were very proud of his ability to play baseball. He could throw, catch and hit a baseball better than any other kid. "Why can't Billy read as well as he plays baseball?" they asked over and over again.

Billy's Mom and Dad even tried a private tutor suggested by the school principal. She was patient and tried to help Billy. She even made him sit still. But, after a few months, they could tell it wasn't working either.

In desperation, the Mom and Dad took Billy to a doctor who specialized in learning disabilities. This was the end of the line. There was no one else to take Billy to see. They hoped and prayed the specialist could help Billy. By now they were sure that something terrible was wrong with Billy and this special doctor would discover the problem and know just what to do.

Billy's Mom and Dad were tired of trying to help him. They were tired of being called to the school because Billy was bad. They were tired of taking him to tutors that didn't teach him anything. They were tired of paying for specialists that didn't fix the problem. They were tired of talking about Billy's problem. They were at their wit's end. They were completely frustrated.

But, they knew there was an answer somewhere. They even knew what it was ... The MAGIC PILL!

"If we could just find the MAGIC PILL, our troubles would be over," said Billy's Mom. "You're right, dear, and I know there is one somewhere," agreed Billy's Dad. "We just have to keep looking, hoping, praying and wishing for the MAGIC PILL," they said together.

The answer was simple – Billy couldn't read. If he could just learn to read, his problems would be solved. It didn't matter what the testing showed, it didn't matter if he had a low IQ or a high IQ. All that really mattered was finding someone, somehow that could teach him to read.

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**In one phone call, Billy's Mom and Dad discovered some important facts. Many children can't read or struggle with reading. If reading is delayed and children move up to higher grades, the reading problem is magnified. Behavior problems develop in children who can't read. Self confidence and self esteem sink when children realize they can't keep up with classmates.**

**There is a magic pill, but it's a time-release pill – it may take many months or even several years. It is effective with Asperger's Syndrome, Learning Disabled, ADD, AD/HD, and many other diagnoses.**

**You, too, can have the MAGIC PILL. It's called RICHARDS READ Systematic Language and it's available only from the specially trained Master Tutors and reading professionals at ...**

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