

**Introduction to a modernized spelling version of  
John Brinsley's chapter in *Ludus Literarius* :  
"Of reading English speedily"**

by Earl Eugene Roth, Jr.

In recent years I searched the history of education. I personally learned a lot about reading instruction from this chapter "*Of reading English speedily*" in John Brinsley's book *Ludus Literarius*, which was first published in 1612. I believe it could be very profitable for parents and teachers to learn about the reading instructional method described by Brinsley, and even use it to teach their children and students. Unfortunately, the spelling of the words is archaic thus it is difficult for modern readers to understand his writing; therefore, I have made a modernized spelling version of that chapter of Brinsley's book. This same information is not found in any modern book I know of. There are two books by Jennifer Monaghan in which there is information on how reading was taught in the past. (*Learning to Read and Write in Colonial America*, ©2009, ISBN 1558495819. *A Common Heritage: Noah Webster's Blue-back Speller*, ©1983, ISBN 0208019081.)

This chapter is part of a conversation or a dialogue between two Schoolmasters whose names are Spoudeus and Philoponus. A schoolmaster in 1600 was the head teacher of a school. This method of education in this chapter is called the Socratic method, in which two people have a dialogue about a subject. The people who read that dialogue are taught about that subject. That method of education was very popular at the time in which this book was written, but it is not well known now.

According to Chapter One, these two schoolmasters had lived together when they were students in college twenty years ago. Both of them became schoolmasters in poor country schools. Spoudeus is very discouraged about the poor results of his teaching. He has recently heard that in the last few years his old friend Philoponus has "found out the most plain, easy, and sure ways of teaching for the benefit of both yourself and others." They did not have telephones or the internet back then, so Spoudeus had to actually travel to talk with

Philoponus. He is asking Philoponus for his help and to impart to him his knowledge and wisdom about the best way to teach. Philoponus responded that at one time he too had been very discouraged about his poor results of teaching, but that since then he discovered the best ways to teach, and now he is very content with the fruit of his labor. Furthermore, Philoponus gives God the credit for helping him to learn those best ways of teaching, and Philoponus says that it is now part of his duty to God to communicate to Spoudeus what God has made known to Philoponus about the best way to teach.

The names of the two teachers were significant to readers in the 1600's. The name Philoponus means someone who loves hard work. The name Spoudeus means someone who is diligent and efficient, in this case it is someone who is diligent to learn without wasting any time. Our English words "diligent" and "study" are used to translated the verb form of the word Spoudeus. Spoudeus who is a schoolmaster is now coming to Philoponus as a student. He has recently heard that Philoponus has learned HOW to succeed as a teacher and Spoudeus is taking the effort without any delay to travel to visit with Philoponus so that he might learn from him HOW to succeed in teaching his students. There also more significance to the name Philoponus. There is a Greek philosopher named John Philoponus, also known as John the Grammarian, who lived from 490 A.D. to 570 A.D. Most of the schoolmasters of the 1600's who read Brinsley's book were literate in Latin and Greek and English. They would have known about Philoponus and his works, as well as the meaning and the significance of Brinsley's choice of the names Philoponus and Spoudeus.

In this dialogue, Spoudeus also represents the educational practices of the teachers in ordinary grammar schools of the 1600's, especially in country towns. It was common for children to attend school for many years and not learn how to read in those schools. Spoudeus is frustrated and discouraged, because he has worked hard as a teacher, but has had dismal results. Philoponus represents a reformer of educational methods, who has discovered the best way to teach students, including how to read.

Spoudeus comes to Philoponus as an old friend, for both encouragement and counsel. The candor and simplicity of dialogue is designed to win the reader's confidence. Spoudeus reveals educational practices that describe the schools of the time. Also the improvements proposed by Philoponus, reveal additional aspects of the state of education which Brinsley wanted to improve at that time. Notice that Philoponus has no criticism of Spoudeus. He understands Spoudeus and is compassionate because at one time he also was ignorant about how to teach his students to read. Philoponus is very thankful that he has recently learned how to teach his students to read and he is both willing and able to help Spoudeus to learn how to do the same thing.

The method used to teach children how to read as described by Brinsley was very successful. It is best known as the ABC method. Originally syllabaries were used as a major part of this method of reading instruction. Syllabaries are found at the beginning of all the English Spelling Books starting in the 1600's until about 1840 or so. Syllabaries are also found at the beginning of many educational materials used to teach children how to read, but almost no one today knows about syllabaries or HOW to use them. There are historical reports of over 90% success rates in reading instruction by the ABC syllabary method. Starting in about 1600 Brinsley's version of the syllabary method of reading instruction became the standard method of HOW to teach children how to read English for about 300 years in both Great Britain and the British colonies, and the early United States. Those spelling books were developed as part of the reformation movement which included a goal of every child learning how to read the Bible in the English language. The syllabary method of reading instruction was so popular that it became part of educational traditions of those times. Thus this method of reading instruction is not well described in any of the Spelling Books used to teach reading from about 1700, because every teacher had learned how to read by that method as a child, and they already knew how to use syllabaries to teach their own students how to read. In fact, it was so well known that most parents used it to teach their own

children how to read before they started school.

If you are a parent or a teacher or a tutor who wants to actually use Webster's Spelling Book to teach someone how to read, then you need to know HOW to best use his Spelling Book so that your students get the best educational results possible. Thus, it is very important for you to know HOW to use the syllabaries in it. I have owned copies of Webster's Spelling Books for many years, but they collected dust on my shelves, and they were only historical items that I collected. I had no idea of their potential value, because I did not know HOW to use them to help beginning students to learn how to read. In fact, I did not even know that they were used to teach reading. I thought they were books with long boring lists of words used to teach children how to letter-name spell words, which is one of the things they were actually used for. I also thought that at times teachers even used them to bore and to torture children who had already learned how to read. In fact Webster's Spelling Books were used from 1783 to about 1830 to educate many children how to read fluently, at a much higher level of literacy than is done in America today.

It will greatly benefit your children and your students if you will follow the methods of beginning reading instruction described in Brinsley's chapter on HOW to teach reading. **IF** you will have your students and children learn how to "spell" the syllables in the syllabaries exactly as Brinsley describes, and also have them *master* reading those syllabaries, and also periodically *review* those syllabaries, **THEN** it will be much easier for your students to learn how to read the words in the word tables.

As a final note, it may even benefit a lot of older children and adults who have difficulty reading to learn how to read the syllabaries and for them to practice reading the syllabaries and word tables in a spelling book. Doing that may help them to overcome their reading problems.

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See my comments at the end of Brinsley's chapter for more information and for links to other materials, including a link to a copy of Webster's Spelling Book which you can down-load.

<http://books.google.com/books?>

[id=hZ1DAAAIAAJ&pg=PA12](http://books.google.com/books?id=hZ1DAAAIAAJ&pg=PA12) accessed Dec. 14, 2009

**Ludus Literarius: or, The Grammar School.**

By John Brinsley [1612, 1627], edited by Ernest Trafford Campagnac. Liverpoole: University Press. 1917. 363 pages. Chapter III, pages 12-27.

A Modernized Version of an Improved Method of Teaching Reading, edited by Earl Eugene Roth, Jr. CHAP. III.

*How A Student may be taught to read English speedily, to prepare him sooner, and better for the Grammar School.*

*Spoud.*

Before we enter into this question, let me put you-in mind of one thing, which troubles me much concerning: this very matter. That it seems to me an unreasonable thing, that the Grammar Schools should be troubled with teaching A.B.C. seeing it is so great a hinderance to those pains which we should take with our Grammar Students, for whom we are appointed : Because it takes up almost one half of our time, and thereby deprives us of a major part of the fruit of our labors ; especially when our minds are so distracted, and our thoughts carried so many ways, to do good to all. The very little ones in a town, in most country towns which are of any size, would require a whole man, of themselves, to be always bearing, testing & following them, so as they ought to be applied : for continual applying in a right course, is in this and all other parts of learning, above all other means. And young ones, by a little slacking of our hands, run faster back, than any time they go forward ; as boats going up the stream.

Besides, it is an extreme vexation, that we must be toiling with such little children, and in teaching such matters, from which we can get no profit, nor take any delight in our labors.

*Phil.* I am well accustomed with this grievance, which you speak of, and do know by long experience your complaint to be too just in this behalf. I myself have complained of it many times. For it is much to be wished, that none might be admitted to the Grammar schools, until they were able to read English: namely, unless they could read the New Testament perfectly, and that they were in their Grammar books, or ready to begin in them. There might be some other school in the town, for these little ones to start this. It would help some poor man or woman, who knew not how to live otherwise, and who might do that well, if they were rightly directed. Also it would be such an ease to all Grammar Schoolmasters, as they might do much more good in their places. Wherefore, all such Schoolmasters who are encumbered with this inconvenience, are not only to wish, but also to labor to have it reformed in their several schools. Yet notwithstanding, where it cannot be addressed, it must be born with wisdom and patience as a heavy burden. Patience will make it much lighter.

**Note:** This is a dialogue between two teachers

Spoudeus & Philoponus.

*The inconvenience of having the Grammar schools troubled with teaching A.B.C.*

*Continual applying in a right course is above all means.*

*How this might be remedied by some other school in each town for this purpose.*

*The redress of it to be sought.*

*To be borne with patience where it cannot be remedied.*

And therefore every one is to do his best endeavor, to know how to make it most easy, if it lies upon him. Moreover, seeing we purpose, God willing, to go through all the whole course of learning, and also since our labor is to find out the means, whereby to make the way plain, to train up every child from the very first entrance into learning, (as was said) until we have brought him into the University, we cannot omit any point, which may tend unto the same, much less the first step of all. For, a child well entered is half made : according to that Proverb, *Principium, dimidium totius.* [*Beginning is half finishing.*] The foundation well laid, the building must go forward much more happily. This is especially true in learning ; in which children feeling a sweetness in the beginning, are very much encouraged, as daily experience will manifest to every one.

*Spoud.* I see well the necessity of undergoing this burden, in those places where remedy cannot be had, without greater inconveniences. And therefore, since that necessity hath no law, nor for myself I know no means how to be freed from it; I pray you let us return again unto the point, and let me still entreat of you your best direction, to make this burden as light as may be. This is a thing worth the diligence of all, who must be employed amongst little ones : to wit, to teach children how to read well, and to pronounce their letters correctly; as also to spell correctly, and to know how to write true Orthography in a short time. For (that I may acknowledge the truth, and which hath been no small discredit unto me in this behalf) I have had some who have been with me, two or three years, before they could read well. And that which hath yet been much more grievous to me. I have sometimes been so abashed and ashamed, that I have not known what to say, when some being a little discontented, or taking occasion to quarrel about paying my stipend, have cast this in my teeth, that their children have been under me six or seven years, and yet have not learned to read English well. I myself have also known, that their complaints have been true in part; though I have taken all the pains with them that I could possibly devise. Therefore good Sir, set down as plainly and quickly as you can, how this may be helped. Both I and many others shall be much beholden for your direction in this first entrance. For my manner of starting them, it is that which I take to be everywhere : to teach & hear them so often over until they can say a lesson, and so to a new.

*Phil.* I likewise have been well acquainted with this your trouble : and therefore I will endeavor, to afford you so much as I have yet learned, how to avoid these clamors ; and bow any poor man who will employ his pains, may learn to teach children to read well in a short time, though this may seem unfitting our profession.

*The first entering of children to be looked to carefully.*

*To teach to read well in a short time, is of great profit.*

*Grief and discredit of the lack of this.*

First the child is to be taught, how to say every letter, pronouncing each of them plainly, fully and distinctly ; I *mean*, in a distinct and differing sound, each from others, and also naturally, from the very first entrance to learning. More specially to be careful, for the right pronouncing the five vowels, in the first place, as *a, e, i, o, u*. Because these are first and most natural, and do make a perfect sound, so that they may be pronounced fully of themselves ; and they being rightly uttered, all the rest are more plain. After these vowels, to teach them to pronounce every other letter : which are therefore called Consonants, because they cannot make a perfect sound of themselves, without a Vowel.

This may be done, and also the teaching of children to spell any syllable, before the child do know any letter on the book ; and that, some wise and experienced do hold the surest and best course. But they are, at least, to be taught to pronounce their letters thus, as they do learn them; to prevent the grief and weariness of teaching them to forget evil customs in pronouncing, which they took up in their first ill learning. And so ever in teaching to read, the teachers are to continue the like care of sweet and natural pronunciation.

Secondly, for the knowing of the letters (besides that common manner practiced in Schools, which is by often reading over all the letters forwards and backwards until they can say them) they may be much furthered thus ; That is, by causing the child to find out, and to show you which is *a*, which *b*, which *c*, which *f*, and so any other letter. First to find them in the Alphabet, then in any other place. Or if you will let them learn but one letter at once, until they can readily know or find out that letter in any place, and after that another in the same manner : This is holden the surer and more easy way: But this at your own judgement.

3. You may help them to spell thus, besides that course which is usual. Let so many as are beginners, or who can not read perfectly, stand together, and then test them without book, one by one. First, in syllables of two letters, as they are set down in their A. B. C. and where one misses, let his next fellow answer: if he cannot, then, let some other. Then examine them in syllables of three letters, after in more. And ever what syllable they miss, mark it with a dent with the nail, or a prick with a pen, or the like : and when you have marked out those where in they so miss, test them often over, not forgetting due praise to them who do best. One half hour would be spent daily in this kind of examining, until they be perfect in any syllable, or word. To make children to take a delight in spelling, let them spell many syllables together, which differ but only in one letter, as hand, band, land, sand, &c. These syllables and words following, I have observed,

1 *To teach children how to say and pronounce their letters right.*

*And first the five Vowels.*

*The Consonants.*

*Right calling the letters before the children do know them.*

2 *How to teach children to know the letters the soonest.*

*To cause them to find out any letter.*

*The surer way is to learn but one letter at once.*

3 *How to teach to spell.*

*M. Coote's English Schoolmaster might be profitable to this purpose, in which book are syllables, and words of all sorts.*

*To make children to take delight in spelling.*

to be of the hardest for children to spell: I will set them down together for you in this short brief. They may serve for spelling, reading, or writing, and may soon be learned by being often tested, read or written over.

Ac, ec, ca, ce, ci, co, cu, ag, eg, ah, az, ae, ai, au, ga, ge, gi, go, gu, va, wa, we, wee, back, base, bag, bage, gage, badge, baw, bay, daw, dew, jaw, rack, race, ross, rose, yell, you, gua, cha, cla, dwa, gla, pha, tha, sca, sha, swa, wra, chra, phra, spha, thra, twa, thwa, able, abs, ach, adge, afle, apt, ath, own, blow, brow, crow, dreg, dredge, dwarf, frog, gnash, gnaw, plow, snow, stew, slug, they, thorn, throne, twain, twig, school, cockle, puddle : peggle, good, gold, goggle, balm, fallen, stolen, scalp, salve, thumb, couple, pierce, chair, chapped, moth, mouth, nymphs, uncle, tenth, strength, height, depth, breadth, weight, joint, laude, beauty, deed, language, guide, feed, feud, vow, brow, dow, dove, knife, knives, yeoman, enough, air, here, doubting, island, isle, buy, league, hatchet, laugh, yew, bough, public, cushion.

These are some of the hardest syllables, as I said : you may add more as you encounter them. Also this is to be observed in spelling ; that before you spell or write commonly (ti) not (sh) as in salvation, not as salvashon, although we pronounce it as (sh.) But this is to be known mainly, by the Latin words from which they come.

Correct pronunciation of words, and continual practice in spelling, are the surest way to come to spell correctly.

If you mispronounce the word, which you want your child to spell, he misspells it : for he spells according as it is pronounced to him, or as he pronounces it. For example ; ask a child how he spells a strea, (as in many places the country manner is to pronounce straw) he will spell stree or stree: but ask him how he spells a straw and to pronounce it, and he will spell straw.

To direct further how to come to perfection in spelling or writing right, I shall have occasion to speak later.

In joining syllables together, they must be taught to say every syllable by it self, truly, plainly, fully, and distinctly, as we heard of the letters before; and so also as that others who hear may understand ; always sounding out the last syllable : as sal-va-tion.

Thus they may go through their Abcie, and Primer. And if they read them twice over, that they may be very perfect in them, it will be the better for them. For, the second reading of any book doth much encourage children, because it seems to be so easy then ; and also it imprints it more. Besides that, they will run over it so fast the second time, that it will be no loss of time at all to them.

*Some of the hardest syllables to practice children in the spelling of them. These would be written in some little table to test them often.*

*Note in spelling.*

*Right pronouncing makes right spelling .*

*Further direction for spelling later.*

*4 Joining syllables together.*

*Understanding the matter.*

*Books to be first learned by children : Abcie, Primer.*

*Second reading of a book.*

After these they may read other English books again. Among which, the Psalms in meter would be one, because children will learn that book with most readiness and delight through the running-of the meter, as it is found by experience. Then the Testament, in which the discreet Master may keep his student less or more, until he think him meet to enter into the Accidence.

If any require any other little book good for beginning enter children; *the School of Virtue* is one of the principle and easiest for the beginners, being full of precepts of civility, and things that children will soon learn and take a delight in, through the roundness of the meter, as was said before of the singing Psalms: And after it *the School of good manners*, called, *the new School of virtue*, leading the child as by the hand in the way of all good manners.

By these means, children if they are well applied, and continually keep at it, may be taught so to read within a year or little more, as they should be ready to begin in their Grammar, by that time that they are six year old at the most; especially if they be in any way apt, and practice spelling the hardest syllables a lot.

For dividing or distinguishing of syllables, this one observation is to be remembered: That those consonants which are usually joined in the beginnings of words, are not to be disjoined and separated in the middle of words, except in Compound words. But we shall speak properly and more about this later. This is enough for now about the speedy reading of English; for I have certainly had much experience in this.

*Spoud.* I cannot justly dislike anything which you have said here, it stands all with so great reason: chiefly to make children so excellent in reading the hardest syllables. For, if they are good in those, then they will attain all the rest in a short time. Except only one thing which you uttered; which indeed seems a strange Paradox to me: Namely, that someone wise & experienced, would teach children to say and pronounce all their letters, and to spell any syllable before they know a letter in the book.

*Phil.* This is very true which you say; it may seem a Paradox to them who have not tried it. I myself was of your opinion when I heard it first. Yet setting myself to make some trial of it, and because of the respect I had for who told me, and because he showed me his experience with it in a child not yet four years old, I found it the easiest, most pleasant and shortest way of all, where one would begin in a private house with little ones playing. The manner is thus.

1. You must teach them, as I said, to say their five Vowels, and to pronounce them correctly: Which they will quickly learn, if you but only cause them to repeat them over often, after you say them distinctly together as:

*a, e, i, o, u,* with the sounds like five bells, or like we count; one, two, three, four, five.

*Psalms in meter.*

*Testament.*

**Note:** The Accidence was a beginning Latin Grammar Book.

*School of Virtue.*

*School of good manners.*

*5 In what time children well applied, may easily learn to read English.*

*Dividing and distinguishing syllables.*

*6 To teach little ones to pronounce their letters, and to spell before they know a letter, is the most pleasant way.*

*How little ones will presently pronounce their five vowels.*

2. Then teach them to put the consonants in order before every vowel and to repeat them over often together; like this:

begin with *b*, and say, *bā, bē, bī, bō, bū.*  
So *d.* *dā, dē, dī, dō, dū.*  
*f;* *fā, fē, fī, fō, fū.*

Then teach them to say all the rest, as it were singing them together, *lā, lē, lī, lō, lū;*  
Teach the hardest last, as *cā, cē, cī, cō, cū;*  
and *gā, gē, gī, gō, gū;*

because the sound is a little changed in the second and third syllables. When they can read all these syllables, then teach them to spell them in order, thus; What spells *b-ā*?

If the child cannot answer, teach him to say thus;  
*b-ā, bā:*

so putting first *b* before every vowel, to say *b-ā bā, b-ē bē, b-ī bī, b-ō bō, b-ū bū.* Then ask him again what spells *b-ā*, and he will tell you; so too all the rest in order. By often repeating these before he says it, he will certainly do it. After this if you ask him how he spells *b-ā*, he will answer *b-ā bā*, so too in all others.

Next these, teach them to put the vowels first, as to say, *āb, ēb, īb, ōb, ūb.*

Then, *ā-b āb, ē-b ēb, ī-b īb, ō-b ōb, ū-b ūb.*

After, what spells *ā-b, ē-b, &c.* Then go with them backward and forward, cross, in and out, until they can spell any syllable of two letters.

Then you may join those of three letters: After that, do all the hard syllables, to read what any of them spells, until they are perfect in all, or as you think necessary. By this means, and by a little repeating of the letters of the Alphabet over before they do, by three or four letters together, as they stand in order, so as they may best sound in the children's ears, they will soon learn to say the names of all the letters of the A.B.C. if you want. Repeat them thus:

*A.b.c.d.e.f.g.h.i.k.l.m.n.o.p.q.r.s.t.u.w.x.y.z.&.*  
To say this by rote, will not hinder, but help them.

Then they may quickly be taught to identify the names of the letters in the book, either one by one, finding first which is *a*, in the Alphabet; and then in any other place. Then to find which is *b*, and so through all the rest as you will.

Then when they know their letters and spelling, if you make them to understand the matter which they learn, by questions, for a little at the first, they will go on in reading as fast as you will desire. The easier and more familiar the matter is to them, the faster they learn.

Thus may any poor man or woman start the little ones in a town together; and make an honest poor living of it, or get some thing for helping the same. Also the Parents who have any learning, may start with their little ones, playing with them, at dinners, and suppers, or as they sit by the fire, and find it very pleasant delight.

So they may help their children to gain a year or two in learning, at the beginning, & also save the Grammar Schools this labor and hindrance.

*To put the consonants in order before the vowels pronouncing them.*

*To teach to spell these thus, putting the consonants first.*

**Note:** According to Coote, after students used the syllabaries to learn to read the vowels *ā ē ī ō ū*, then they used them to learn to read the vowels *ă ě ĭ ŏ ũ*. Later they learned to read the rest of the vowels. Webster followed a later educational practice of using *ā ē ī ō ū* for CV syllables and *ă ě ĭ ŏ ũ* for VC syllables.

*Repeating the letters of the Alphabet, by rote.*

*To teach them to know their letters as before.*

*To cause them to know the matter by questions, or often repeating to them.*

*Any one who can read, may thus start children reading English.*

*Spoud.* You have persuaded me very much concerning this question also. Surely, Sir, howsoever this may seem but a toy, yet all young parents will much rejoice in it, and acknowledge it a great benefit, to have their children so begun; and this time being saved in the beginning, will be found in the end as you truly said. Yet there is another matter that comes unto my memory, about which I have taken no small grief and discouragement many times, concerning this point of reading English. I will mention it here, and desire your judgement how to address it, although it might haply come in better later.

The trouble is this: That when my children do first begin in Latin, many of them forget to read English, and some of them be worse two or three years after they have been in my school, than when they began it.

Now if you could teach me how to help this likewise, that they might as well still go forward in reading English as in Latin, I would account this a very great benefit. For, some of their Parents, who treat me the kindest, will be at me, that their children may every day read some Chapters of the Bible, in order to help their reading of English. Now this I cannot possibly do, without hindering their progress in Latin, in some lessons or necessary exercises; and either be behind their fellows, or else trouble all their fellows very much, that they cannot go so fast forward as they should, but stay for these readers. Others being more ignorant or malicious, upon every light occasion, are ready to rage & rail at me, because their children, as they say, get nothing good from me, but are worse and worse. For, whereas they could read English perfectly (it may be) when they came to me, now they have forgotten to do it. Thus am I grieved on every side, and vexed daily, let me labor never so much, and spend my heart with them to do them good.

*Phil.* Sir, herein I can say, as she in the Poet; *Haud ignara mali miseris succurrere disco.* [Not unfamiliar with misfortune myself, I have learned to help the miserable. *Virgil*]

For I have tasted deeply of the same grief until very recently, in the last year or two. Yet now I seem to myself, to find as sensible and continual growth amongst all my Students, in their English tongue as in the Latin. And not only in reading it, but also in understanding it, and in ability to speak their minds about any thing with which they are acquainted, or which they learn in Latin; and also how to express the meaning of the Latin in the propriety, and purity of our own language: so that I am quite delivered from that clamor.

But to tell you what I think, in which there seems to me, to be a very big lack in all our Grammar schools generally, or in most of them; and which I have heard some great learned men complain about; That there is no care had in respect, to train up students so, that they will be

8 *The inconvenience of children forgetting to read English, when they first begin in Latin, and how to avoid it.*

*Complaints of Parents for children forgetting English.*

*Complaint of lack of care in our schools for growth in our own tongue, as in the Latin.*

able to express their minds purely and readily in our own language, and to increase in the practice of it, as well as in the Latin or Greek. Therefore, our chief endeavor should be for English, and that for these reasons, 1. Because that language which all sorts and conditions of men amongst us are to have most use of, both in speech and writing, is our own native tongue. 2. The purity and elegance of our own language, is to be esteemed a chief part of the honor of our Nation: which we all ought to advance as much as lies in us. When Greece and Rome and other nations have most flourished, their languages also have been most pure: and from those times of Greece and Rome, we get our chief patterns, from the learning of their tongues. 3. Because of those who are for a time trained up in schools, there are very few which proceed in learning, in comparison to those who pursue other callings.

*Spoud.* This complaint is not without just cause: for I do not know any school, in which there is regard held for this to any purpose; in spite of the general necessity and use of it, as well as the great commendation which it brings to those who have attained it. But I think every minute is an hour, until I hear this from you: how my trouble and shame may be avoided, and how I may obtain this ability to direct my children, how they may go thus forward, not only in reading English perfectly, but also in the propriety, purity and copy of our English language, so as they may speak their minds commendably about any thing which concerns them, according to their age and place.

*Phil.* I will but name the means unto you now: for I shall have occasion to show them all more particularly after this.

Besides the daily use of distinct reading over their English parts to get them perfectly, and correctly reading all other things which they learn in Latin, as you know; these methods following, by the blessing of God will accomplish your desire.

1. The continual use of the books of construing of *Lillies* Rules, by causing them to learn to construe, and to keep their Grammar rules, only by the help of those *construed*. translations. This I find one very good use of these books, besides some other which I shall mention after.

2. The daily use, and practice of Grammatical translation in English, of all the School Authors, which the younger sort learn; causing them each day out of those to construe, and repeat, whatever they learn. This I also have proved by happy experience, to be a rare help to make young Students to grow very much, both in English and Latin. But of all these, for the manner, benefits, and use of them, I shall have occasion to speak at large.

*Our chief endeavor should be for our own language.*

*Reasons.*

*Few Schools have any regard for our English language.*

*Means to obtain this benefit of increasing in our English tongue, as in the Latin.*

1 *Daily use of Lillies rules construed.*

2 *Continual practice of English Grammatical translations.*

3. Besides these, they would have every day some practice of writing English heedily, in true Orthography ; as also of translating into English; or, of writing Epistles, or familiar Letters to their friends, as well in English as in Latin. Amongst some of them, the reporting of a Fable in English, or the like matter, trying who can make the best report, doth much further them in this. And generally, amongst all those that can write, the taking of notes of Sermons, and delivering them again, or making repetitions, is a special means. Also striving to express whatsoever they construe, not only in propriety, but in variety of the finest phrase, who can give the best. This chiefly in the higher forms: So reading forth of Latin into English; first in propriety, then in purity. By these, and some use of the History of the Bible, and the like, which I shall be occasioned to mention after ; you may find their growth, according to your desire, and much above your expectation.

*Spoud.* Undoubtedly Sir, these must needs be very available ; because students may have hereby, so much use of the English every day, above that which is practiced in any School which I have known. But for any such translations of the School-Authors, I have not heard of them. Only I have seen the books of construing *Lillies* rules, and some of my children have them, though I feared that it would rather make them idle, being but a truant's book. Indeed I never conceived so much of them as you say: I will think better of their use.

*Phil.* There is not the best thing but it may be abused. But for that book as the others, I will show and prove to you the commodities of them, above all that you would imagine. Experience makes me confident: Yet to return unto your self, concerning the complaint of the Parents for their children going backward in reading English, when they first learn Latin ; the chief fault in truth is in the Parents themselves ; although we poor schoolmasters must be sure to bear all. For if such murmuring Parents would but cause their children, every day after dinner or supper, or both, to read a Chapter of the Bible, or a piece of a Chapter, as leisure would permit, and to do it constantly ; thereby to show their love to the Lord, and his Word, and their desire to have the Word dwell plentifully in their houses, to have their children trained up in it, as young *Timothy* was; then, I say, this complaint would soon be at an end : for they should either see then, their children to increase in this, or else they should discern the fault to be in their children's dullness, and not in our neglect. Notwithstanding, since there are so very few of whom we can hope, that they have any care of this duty in their houses, in respect of all the rest who omit it, and yet all the blame must surely rest on us, it concerns us so much

3 *Translating and writing English, with some other School exercises.*

*The chief fault of the children going backwards in reading English, when they first learn Latin, is the Parents themselves.*

as we can to address it; and therefore use all good means, to cut off all occasions of clamors, and of discrediting ourselves, and our schools, and to contend for the greatest profiting of our children, as well in this, as in any other part of learning; the use of this being, as we heard, most general and perpetual.

*Spoud.* You have directed me very rightly how to answer such Parents: now I shall be able to show them where the fault is, & be calling upon them to address this at home. I shall also endeavor to put all this in use, and more as you make the particulars more fully known unto me; and as I shall find by trial the fruit of it. But now, that you have thus satisfied me in all of my doubts; I cannot but demand yet one other point, wherein I find another great lack, though not comparable to the former; because there is not so much use of it: which is about the ordinary numbers or numbering. For I am much troubled about this, that my readers and others above them, are much to seek in all matters of numbers, whether in figures or in letters. Insomuch, as when they hear the Chapters named in the Church, many of them cannot turn to them, much less to the verse.

*Phil.* This likewise is a very ordinary defect, & yet might easily be helped by common means, in an hour or two. I call it ordinary, because you will have students, almost ready to go to the University, who yet can hardly tell you the number of Pages, Sections, Chapters, or other divisions in their books, to find what they should. And it is, as you say, a great & a foul lack; because, without the perfect knowledge of these numbers, students cannot help themselves by the Indices, or Tables of such books, as they should use, for turning to anything quickly : although it is something they should have used all their life long. And to conclude, it is a great neglect, because it is a thing so easy, as that it may be learned in so short a time, only by most usual means, as by these following. For numbers by letters, use but only to oppose them, according to the direction in the Latin Grammar at *Orthography*, and they will do them soon, if you ask what I. stands for, what V. what X. what L. &c. And back again, what letter stands for one, so what for five, or for ten. But especially if you desire to have them very ready in this, cause them to have these written, & then to practice reading them over often, until that they can answer any of them perfectly. Warn them also to remember always, that any number set after a greater, or after the same number, adds so many more, as the value of that later number is. As, I. set after X. thus, XI. doth make eleven, XV. fifteen, XX. twenty. But being set before, they do take away so many as they are: as I. before X. thus, IX. nine.

*An ordinary fault, that most Students are to seek in matters of common numbers, which they may be taught in an hour or two.*

*Numbers by letters known easily, yet often neglected.*

If you wish an example more at large, this may serve ; let each of them that should learn have a list of these, after this manner, to show them all the chief numbers. I. one, II. two, III. three, IIII. or IV. four, V. five, VI. six, VII. seven, VIII. eight, IX. nine, X. ten, XI. eleven, XII. twelve, XIII. thirteen, XIIIII. fourteen, XV. fifteen, XVI. XVII. XVIII. XIX. XX. XXI. XXV. twenty five, XXX. thirty, XL. forty, L. fifty, XC. ninety C. a hundred, D. five hundred, M. a thousand. And thus much shortly for numbering by letters.

For the numbers by Figures, this rule must also be observed; That the Figures do signify in the first place so much only, as if they were alone, or one time so many. In the second place ten, or ten times so many. In the third place, hundreds, or a hundred times so many. In the fourth place thousands, or a thousand times so many. In the fifth place ten thousands. In the sixth place hundred thousands ; the places being reckoned from the right hand to the left. As for example, 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16. 17. 18. 19. 20. twenty. 21. 22. 23. &c. 30. thirty. 31. 32. 40. forty. 41. &c. 50. fifty. 51. 60. sixty. 70. seventy. 80. eighty. 90. ninety 100. a hundred. 101. a hundred and one. 102. 110. a hundred and ten. 120. a hundred and twenty. 130. &c. 200. two hundred, &c. 1000. a thousand. 10000. ten thousand. 100000. a hundred thousand.

These being learned backwards and forwards, so that your student be able to know each of them, to call them, or name them right, and

Numbers by figures.

to find them out, as the child should find any letter which he is to learn: in a word, to tell what any of these numbers stand for, or how to set down any of them ; will perform fully so much as is needful for your ordinate Grammar student. If you do require more for any, you must seek *Records* Arithmetic, or other like Authors, and set them to the Cyphering school.

*Spoud.* This is a defect that I see is most easily supplied by a very little pain and care in examining. I have troubled you overlong in this, being in itself so very a trifle, though the lack is generally be to be blamed. Now therefore let us hasten unto our profession for the Grammar Schoolmaster. For I desire earnestly to be in our own element, as more befitting and becoming our position.

*Phil.* I am very willing to make all the haste that we can : for this I see, that though we neither use digressions, nor needless words; yet this our conversation will prove very long, so that that I can make my mind plain unto you : Unless I should be so short, as either to be obscure, or to omit many things which I take to be very necessary : But yet before we come to make entrance into the Latin, if we do keep order, we are to go through the way of writing, as being more general, and which chiefly pertains also to our English language; in respect of our more frequent use of it; I mean chiefly for the writing of our ordinary hand called the Secretary hand, which is almost wholly in use amongst us.

Why this Dialog is so long.

**Note:** Brinsleys chapter has been reedited and the spelling and wording modernized some. Also it helps to realize that reading was usually taught in a Pettie School or at home to four to six year old children. Once children learned to read basic English, then they could start Grammar School and be taught Latin, Greek, and the rest of what we would now call a classic education. Some of the words in this chapter changed meaning. I have endeavored to replace those words with modern words so as to keep the same meaning. Diacritical marks on ç and ġ in the syllabary show they stand for soft sounds. Macron diacritical marks show that vowel letters stand for their name sounds. Breve diacritical marks show that vowel letters stand for their short sounds.

Here is a facsimile of a page from an early edition:

<http://books.google.com/books?id=JstEAAAIAAJ&pg=PA79>

accessed Dec. 14, 2009

*A Textbook in the History of Modern Elementary Education: with Emphasis on School Practice in Relation to Social Conditions.* by Samuel Chester Parker. N. Y. :Ginn and Company, 1912, 505 pp. Original from the University of California, Digitized Nov 16, 2007.

*Of reading* 19 *English speedily.*  
**THE GRAMMAR SCHOOLE.**

your minde when I heard it first. Yet setting my selfe to make some triall of it, for the reuerence I bare to him of whom I heard it and for that he shewed mee experience of it in a child not fowre yeeres olde; I found it the easiest, pleasantest and shortest way of all, where one would begin in a private house with little ones playing. The manner is thus.

1. You must teach them, as I sayde, to call their five vowels, and to pronounce them right: Which they will presently learne, if you do but only cause them to repeat them oft ouer, after you, distinctly together thus ; *a, e, i, o, u.* after the manner of five bells, or as we say ; one, two, three, fowre, five.

6. To teach little ones to pronounce their letters, and to spell before they know a letter, is the pleasantest way

How little ones will presently pronounce their five vowels.

2 Then teach them to put the consonants in order before euery vowel, and to repeat them oft ouer together ; as thus : to begin with *b*, and to say *ba, be, bi, bo, bu.* So doe the rest, as it were finging them together, *la, le, li, lo, lu;* The hardest to the last, as *ca, ce, ci, co, cu.* and *ga, ge, gi, go, gu.* In which the sound is a little changed in the second and third syllables. When they can do all these, then teach them to spell them in order, thus ; What spels *b-a* ? If the child cannot tell, teach him to say thus, *b-a, b-a* : so putting first *b*, before euery vowel, to say *b-a ba, b-e be, b-i bi, b-o bo, b-u bu.* Then aske him againe what spels *b-a*, and he will tell you ; so all the rest in order. By oft repeating before him he will certainly do it. After this if you aske him, how he spels *b-a*, he will answere *b-a ba.* So in all others.

Next these teach them to put the vowels first, as to say, *ab, eb, ib, ob, ub.* Then thus, *a-b ab, e-b eb, i-b ib, o-b ob, u-b ub.* After, what spelles *a-b, e-b,* &c. Thus to goe with them backward and forward, crosse, in and out vntill they can spell any word of two letters. Then you may adioine those of three letters : Afterwards, all the hard syllables, to tell what any of them spels, til they be perfect in al, or as you shall thinke meete. By this meanes, and by a litle repeating of the letters of the Alphabet ouer before them, by three or fowre letters together, as they stand in order, so as they

To put the consonants in order before the vowels pronouncing them.

To teach to spell these thus, putting the consonants first.

Repeating the letters of the Alphabet, by route.

D 2 they

AN IMPROVED METHOD OF TEACHING READING FROM JOHN BRINSLEY'S "THE GRAMMAR SCHOOLE"

**Comments:** Brinsley's book is one of the few references ever written on HOW to teach beginning reading by the syllabary method. This practical knowledge was lost during the 1700's and early 1800's in the United States. All editions of Noah Webster's *American Spelling Book* had syllabaries [tables of simple syllables] in them, but in our times parents and teachers do not know *how* or *why* to use those syllabaries to teach children how to read in the way that Brinsley describes in his book.

This reference is provided to assist parents who are home-schooling their children to learn why and how to use the syllabaries in modern reprints of Noah Webster's "Blue Back Speller."

Free copies of Webster's Spellers are at:  
[http://www.donpotter.net/education\\_pages/spelling\\_books.html](http://www.donpotter.net/education_pages/spelling_books.html)

Brinsley recommended Edmund Coote's book *The English School-maister*. That book has even more on HOW to teach reading by the syllabary method, and extensive tables of simple syllables.

The 1596 edition of Coote's book with some of the history of Coote and that time is at:

<http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/ret/coote/ret2.html>

More history on Coote and his book are at:  
[http://www.folger.edu/html/folger\\_institute/mm/EssayJS.html](http://www.folger.edu/html/folger_institute/mm/EssayJS.html)

Charles Hoole wrote *A New Discovery of the Old Art of Teaching School*. Chapter III and IIII explain how to teach reading with the syllabary method. A 1660 edition edited by Thiselton Mark printed in 1912 is at:

<http://books.google.com/books?id=SFgWAAAIAAJ&pg=PA41>

These men accurately recognized and taught that consonants MUST be sounded with vowels in order to hear the full sound of the consonants. It is only possible to decode the sounds the letters represent accurately and completely when consonants are decoded with vowels in syllables. That is **why** simple CV and VC syllables need to be used to teach beginning reading.

Coote's and Hoole's books with the syllabary method were used to teaching reading in the American colonies in the New England area at least until the mid 1700's. Starting in 1740 Thomas Dilworth's Spelling Book began to replace it as the most popular book used to teach beginning reading. Dilworth's book omitted the instruction for teachers in how to use the syllabary, but since everyone at that time already knew how to use it, it was still taught properly. The syllabary reading method is

also called the ABC method, because beginning students say the names of the letters before they read the sound of a syllable of a word.

The proper use of the syllabary method resulted in most children learning to read well in less than one year, some in as little as six weeks. In the New England area in the late 1700's the adult literacy rate was over 95% for men, and about 75% for women. Many could read the Federalist Papers. In our times very few high school graduates would be able to read those fluently.

Noah Webster's Spelling Books started to replace Dilworth's book in 1783. In the early 1800's teachers gradually stopped using the syllabaries properly. The ABC method of teaching reading lost its emphasis on teaching students how to read syllables. In fact, after 1857 the syllable was no longer the unit of sound that was taught. It took longer and longer for students to learn how to read with the modified ABC method. Letter-name spelling of words in lists became the focus of education. Teachers also lost their focus on teaching students what the words meant that they were reading.

Then around 1820 the "*look and say*" method of reading instruction was introduced. It is now called the *word method* or the *whole word method*. In this method students are taught to visually recognize letters as whole words without decoding the sounds of the letters. Initially it appeared to be a good method, and more successful than the modified ABC method. Children learned to read simple sentences of two, three, and four letter words much faster. They sounded more fluent. But rather quickly it was also observed that most of the students could not read any other words. That had never happened with the ABC method. Once children learned how to read basic syllables as words by the ABC method, they could also easily read other words phonetically. Many teachers and school principals wanted to return to using the ABC method, but that was not allowed. By then School Boards determined the methods and books that teachers were allowed to use. In most schools the "*look and say*" method replaced all variations of the ABC method.

Then in the 1830's Elocution Book Series were published. The the Primer and First and Second Reader of those series were designed to teach beginning reading by the whole word method.

Later books were designed to teach older students to read out-loud in public. It took two or three years to teach students to learn to read about 1500 basic words. Then starting in the third book of the series, they were taught to analyze the letters in the whole words into the “sounds” the letters stood for so they could pronounce words accurately. Inadvertently it was during this elocution training that many students actually learned how to read words phonetically, and they became independent readers. These books helped many students to correct the habit of whole word reading. The *National Series* by Parker and Watson is an example of those books.

The famous *McGuffey Series* was designed to sell books in the late 1830's. It was called “*Eclectic*” because the books by design could be used to teach any method of reading. The publishers were not interested in providing the most successful method of reading instruction. They were most interested in how many books they could sell. That is very different from Noah Webster's stated motivation.

Literacy rates also decreased in the large cities in which children were be taught how to read in the newly established tax-funded government run public schools. Children who became whole-word readers could not read independently. They had to be taught every word separately, and they could not sound-out new words.

A lot of controversy arose about which method to use to teach beginning reading. For the most part, the university based professors philosophically liked the Word Method and variations of it, because of their focus on teaching meaning. Most teachers and principals liked phonics based beginning reading methods, because of better results. The most successful of those was a method developed by Edwin Leigh in the 1860's. It coupled phonics with the syllabary method and used a special phonic alphabet to teach students to decode all words in basic texts. Unfortunately by the end of the 1800's the political influence of university based professors and educational bureaucrats in and on school boards resulted in Leigh's methods being removed from the classrooms. It was replaced with whole word based methods, or the new sentence method followed with late, incomplete analytical phonics.

In World War I many recruits who were taught to read by the whole-word based methods were found

to be illiterate. More government intervention and massive amounts of spending have not corrected this significantly, as assessed by literacy rates. There have been battles known as the “reading wars” about which reading instruction method to use. These battles are primarily for the millions of dollars that are spent on textbooks by educational bureaucrats who oversee the public school systems.

In the 1950's Rudolf Flesch published *Why Johnny Can't Read*. That resulted in some return to Pure Phonics based reading programs. There were some good phonics programs developed that were used in some public schools, but now these are no longer in print, and difficult to find copies of. They were replaced with another variation of the Word method, or with new phonics programs filled with sight words taught by the word method.

It is my opinion that a return to a combination of a syllabary method coupled with improved phonics, would be extremely valuable to the students of our country. I envision teaching students to read simple CV and VC syllables, and to to teach them basic phonemes and to spell syllables by phoneme names, as well as, by letter names. I base that opinion in part on a comparison of the historical evidence of the the results of these different reading instruction methods. I also have my own personal experience, as well as, the experience of some other tutors and teachers who are using that approach to reading instruction.

I am working on developing an updated version of the syllabary method. There are also some very good phonics programs that are almost as good as the syllabary method. Here are four I know of:

*Blend Phonics* by Hazel Loring is free at:  
[http://donpotter.net/education\\_pages/blend\\_phonics.html](http://donpotter.net/education_pages/blend_phonics.html)

The Phonics Page has a good free program at:  
<http://www.thephonicspage.org/Phonics%20Lsns/phonicslsnlinks.html>

*Alpha Phonics* by Samuel Blumenfeld is at:  
<http://www.howtotutor.com/>

*School Phonics* by William Carroll is at:  
<http://www.didax.com/schoolphonics/>

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