

Magic Ladder: Early Results

In the spring of 2015, Louisville's Jefferson County Public School System and Learning Stewards engaged in an informal preliminary trial of the Magic Ladder, with five elementary and five middle school students. Anecdotal findings indicate that every student who participated improved significantly in their reading ability, and in their confidence as learners.

In 2014, Goodwill Industries of Kentucky and Learning Stewards engaged in two six-week trials of the Pcules components of the Magic Ladder. Pre- and post-student performance on TABE (Tests of Adult Basic Education) tests indicated that eighteen of the twenty-two participants improved by 1.9 grade levels.

Comments from Stewards (tutors) participating in the JCPS Trial (February-May 2015)



"That's *my* story." That was the response of my 3rd grade reading partner after he read a paragraph, written in first-person, about what reading used to be like for the narrator, and what it is like for him now. John had a strongly structured defense system for dealing with his reading problems, a system that protected him from further failure, but also prevented him from achieving success. For him, it had become easier to remain a "failure" than to continue to try, only to add to his sense of frustration and failure. That system is now slowly becoming dismantled. He stayed focused for the entire hour-long session

today. He did not invoke his defense system. That is monumental. I am quite interested in what we can learn from further testing and refining of Pcules. I am a retired elementary school teacher who cannot deny the nagging pull I feel to be excited about *this* program. The approach to cuing the sounds made by letters, inside of words retaining their normal spellings, just makes so much more sense to me than the way phonics was "taught"- and memorized. It is also an abundantly more user-friendly environment in which to read, since it builds on the child's existing vocabulary and personal reading interests. It deserves and needs continued face-time with students. I would willingly support continuing to test and refine this program with my own students – and even with my own grandchildren. – **Cathy Longstreet, Retired JCPS Master Teacher - See Video of student "I Improved!"** <https://goo.gl/gWnR6A>

This past year I worked with two third graders identified as struggling readers. I was privileged to witness a tremendous growth in their ability to decode, and to read with more fluency. I feel that this program has a great chance to become an excellent reading program that will work for the great majority of students who have previously fallen through the cracks. - **Laura Seigle, Master Teacher**

My students have reacted to the "Pcules" with enthusiasm! I even notice other students in the area (in the library) looking on with high curiosity. My students' energy levels have increased for reading, and this reading approach has given my older students a new sense of pride. They realize that they are not being punished by being singled out, but instead, they now seem to feel celebrated. This program is their ticket out of confusion, as I suspect there has been much shame for them over the years. Perhaps even MY Grandchildren will benefit from having this



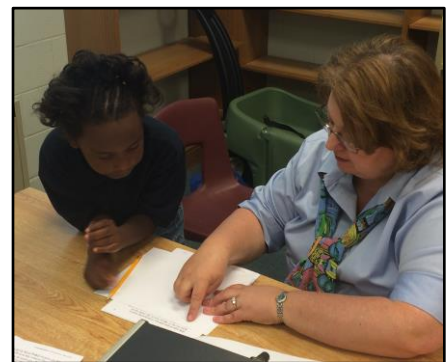
system help the student, through such a wonderful introduction to reading! – **Debra Schoo Hibberd, Volunteer Reading Tutor**

My student was in sixth grade, but she had such an accumulation of challenges, failures, and absenteeism, that even second grade reading was monumentally difficult. Building her confidence up through using The Magic Ladder tools was easy work. Her joy — as we progressed from words to whole sentences — inspired both of us, and on her own, she was eager for more material. Amazingly, she pushed herself through entire P-cued paragraphs, and quite often, she wanted to keep going much longer than our session time allowed. This was from a student labeled as "disruptive and not interested in school work." The Magic Ladder package of tools feels like a fresh new approach for even the most challenged reading students to help themselves make meaningful progress in this critical life skill. It not only provides a detailed map with clear sign posts the whole way, but it also reaches out a gentle hand to hold while reading transforms from stranger to friend. - **Mila Songer, Volunteer Reading Tutor**

During part of my 31 years in education (now retired), I taught reading in grades 1 - 3 as a classroom teacher, and as a Reading Specialist. When I heard about Learning Stewards' innovative approach to assist students in learning to read, I became very excited. Its initial activity focus was to help children get rid of the "shame" that they'd inevitably developed about not being able to read well. This was a refreshingly new, yet critical step toward reaching children and helping them to become more successful. I have tutored a third grade student at Indian Trail from Feb. through May this school year. She was reluctant during the first month or so, and she kept complaining of stomachaches as we worked through our reading activities. However, during the next couple of months, she started to feel successful with the various exercises, and she had fewer stomach problems. Once my student realized that her reading issues weren't her fault, she began to have a better attitude/demeanor (less distracted and less negative) during our time together. She became more confident and willing to work on the tutoring activities. When the Magic Ladder program provided reading passages based on my student's interests and her personal sight vocabulary, my student read them well and wanted to take these stories home to read to her mom. Even with so many sessions missed due to snow days and other calendar issues, I have seen progress with my third grader. - **Patti Whelan, Retired JCPS Administrator**

I have spent my career teaching elementary children, with my first love being teaching them to read, and to LOVE reading. So it was a good fit when I heard about the Magic Ladder project, a way to teach children to read that really works. This reading program is individualized for each student, based on vocabulary that is personal to each child. The young child who I was reading with struggled with a negative attitude at first. A turning point for her came when she read a letter using the Pcuces, addressed to her, telling her that it was not her fault that she couldn't read well. - **Carol Spalding, Retired JCPS Master Teacher**

Aniya began the program as a very quiet and somewhat disengaged student. She showed very little eye contact, and she spoke so softly that it was very difficult to have a conversation with her. But by the end of the pilot, she was a very engaged, smiling, enthusiastic learner. The 'light bulb' really came on when she read the letter that talked about how the difficulty that she is having with reading is not her fault. That was really a turning point for her as we moved forward. - **Timmie Butler, Volunteer Reading Tutor - See Video of Aniya expressing confidence and excitement about her reading:** <https://goo.gl/bZvHmL>



The overall concept of identifying words that the student already knows -- and then using those words to write stories which build the student's confidence -- is ingenious. The Magic Ladder software was very helpful in quickly building a database of the students' sight words. The students effectively used the Alpha, Common, and Silent Pcules to help them pronounce unfamiliar words, and they always displayed an obvious sense of pride whenever they conquered a new word. – **Larry Stevens, Volunteer Reading Tutor**

Comments re the Goodwill Learning Center Adult Trial (2014):

Having completed two six-week pilots using Pcules, I have concluded that this technology is not only beneficial for low-level readers, but it would also be highly effective in teaching all beginning readers. **Of the twenty-two students who completed the pilot projects, eighteen scored an average improvement of 1.9 grade levels on the Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE). These are dramatic results for low-level readers.**
- **Susan Carrell, M.Ed. GWIK, March 2014**

Comments from Experts about the Pcules component of the Magic Ladder:

“It’s a good idea. It’s the idea that underlies the Initial Teaching Alphabets, though I understand what you’re suggesting is very different in the way it would play out. I think it’s very researchable. No question. And it would relate not only to the quality of the Training Wheels, but to the overall efficiency of the process compared to the sort of hit and miss of existing approaches. I agree with you! It makes a lot of sense to me.” - **Dr. Grover (Russ) Whitehurst** - Ex-Director of the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education

“Pcules certainly looks good to me.” – **Dr. Marvin Minsky** – Ex-Director, Artificial Intelligence and Media Lab, M.I.T.

“Your ideas upon graphically reducing the ambiguity of spelling are innovative and worthy of support.” - **Dr. John Robert Skoyles**, Neuroscience Researcher, London

“I think it’s an interesting way of approaching it. What you’re talking about is obviously very different (than anything else ever done). It’s fascinating.” – **Dr. Timothy Shanahan**, Chair National Literacy Panel, President (2006) International Reading Association, Member of National Reading Panel; Director, Center for Literacy, University of Illinois at Chicago

“Basically what I’m feeding back to you is reinforcement of the theory that you have been discussing based on our on-the-ground experience with adults...”. -**Dr. Robert Wedgeworth**, Past President of ProLiteracy (world’s largest literacy organization), former executive director of the ALA (American Library Association)

“As a linguist, I'm all in favor of your method of adding more phonetic information” – **Dr. Martin Haspelmath** - Linguist, Max-Planck-Institut Fur Evolutionare Anthropologie

“Your Training Wheels Pcules approach is a novel and promising way of tackling a long-standing serious social problem, the functional illiteracy of many young people in the United States and other English-speaking countries.” – **Dr. Robin Allott** - Linguist, Author of the Motor Theory of Language Origin, Sussex, England

“Training Wheels for Literacy holds compelling promise for unlocking the key to reading.” – **Senator John Vasconcellos** – Ex-Chair, California Senate Education Committee

Comments about the research behind The Magic Ladder and Pcules:

<http://goo.gl/erVxjV>