PREFACE

Congratulations! This easy to use, direct-systematic-phonics program gives you the tools to get your child on the right track to reading success. *Right Track Reading Lessons* is specifically designed for teaching children to read in a one-on-one situation. This complete step-by-step program is easy to use for parents who have never taught reading before as well as for seasoned educators. This program empowers you with tools to teach your child how to read proficiently.

Right Track Reading Lessons directly teaches specific skills necessary for proficient reading. Research clearly shows direct systematic phonics programs are the most effective method of teaching children to read, and these phonologic based programs actually develop proficient reader neurologic processing pathways. *Right Track Reading Lesson's* carefully designed multisensory activities are based on the research and science and intentionally develop phonologic processing pathways by directly teaching the child to convert print to sound. In addition, these activities are 'kid tested' for both usability and effectiveness. The program explicitly builds skills in phonemic awareness, knowledge of the complete phonetic code, proper tracking, smooth blending, careful attention to detail, and correct phonologic processing. Importantly, this program also provides sufficient practice integrating and applying these skills.

This reading program evolved out of my passion for teaching children to read. My son's innocent request "Mommy, show me how to read" triggered this passion. My experiences teaching my children, studying significant quantities of valid research on effective reading instruction, learning from the fascinating neuroscience on proficient reading, observing many bright children who were not learning to read, scrutinizing ineffective instruction, and successfully tutoring children fueled my passion. As I learned more about effective reading instruction and prepared to teach my youngest daughter to read, I searched for the ideal effective program. Unable to find an affordable program meeting my expectations, I put together instructional materials that became the first draft of *Right Track Reading Lessons.* My newly developed reading program was extremely effective with my youngest daughter and with the struggling children I was asked to tutor. I used, refined, and improved the program and began sharing it with friends searching for a way to teach their children to read. I recognized the need to share this effective, easy-to-use direct systematic phonics program with more than a few friends and the small number of children I could personally tutor. Therefore, in 2004 I published *Right Track Reading Lessons*. Subsequently, I worked with older students, adapted instructional material to meet their unique needs, and published *Back on the Right Track Reading Lessons* in 2007. This 2nd revised edition of *Right Track Reading Lessons* continues my mission to help individual children learn to read proficiently by providing parents and teachers with effective, affordable and easy-to-use programs. We can improve reading proficiency rates in this country one child at a time.

This updated and revised 2nd edition *of Right Track Reading Lessons* builds on the strength of the original program by expanding decodable word lists and sentences, clarifying instructions, adding illustrations, providing helpful tips, including supplemental activities, and tweaking activities to reflect the insight and experience gained from six additional years of experience tutoring children. Improvements were also made based on feedback from parents and teachers as well as incorporating and applying recent findings from the neurobiologic research on reading. In addition this new edition contains links to the free information, articles and resources found on the **www.righttrackreading.com** website.

We have learned much from the neuroscience of proficient reading and scientifically valid research on effective reading instruction. The research reveals the importance of phonologic processing to proficient reading, the effectiveness of explicit phonologic based instruction, and the evidence programs utilizing multisensory structured language techniques can help children learn to read. We now hold the 'map' to proficient reading. The child needs to convert print to sound and develop phonologic neural processing pathways. However, the key is translating this 'map' into concrete actions parents and teachers can use to actually help their children travel the path to proficient reading. The direct instruction, multisensory activities, and structured techniques of *Right Track Reading* offer parents and teachers easy-to-use, effective and affordable implementation tools to lead their children to reading success.

This book empowers you with tools to help your child or student achieve reading success!

*Note: In this book sounds are indicated between slashes / /. For example, the letter **m** has the sound /m/.

OVERVIEW OF READING

A. Introduction

We all want our children to read proficiently. They need to be able to look at black squiggly marks on a page and translate this written code into our English language. Reading is the key that unlocks the door to the vast wealth of information and literature. Reading is critical to a successful education. If children struggle with reading, they suffer in other areas of education because they cannot easily access information contained in our written language.

Unfortunately, difficulty reading is a significant problem throughout our country. If your child struggles with learning to read, he or she is not alone. In 2009, 67% of the 4th graders in this country were NOT at a proficient level. Even more alarming, 33% of our nation's 4th graders were below the basic level. [1]

The fact is many students in the United States struggle learning to read proficiently. While the various testing measures can be debated, the undeniable proof of this prevalent reading failure is reflected in the adult literacy rates. Difficulty reading is far greater than the limited scope of a student's ability to read stories, complete classroom assignments or pass a standardized test. The end result is limited literacy skills that handicap an individual's educational potential, future employment opportunities, earning potential, and ability to function as a fully productive member of society. Approximately 93 million American adults have limited literacy skills. Literacy is now measured by the adult's ability to perform three different real life literacy tasks; prose literacy (reading materials arranged in sentences and paragraphs such as newspaper articles), document literacy (reading tasks not organized in sentences such as bills, maps, bus schedules and prescription labels) and quantitative literacy (activities requiring simple calculations such as written checking statements or tax forms). In prose literacy, 43% of adults are either below basic (14%) or at basic level (29%). In document literacy 34% are at or below basic level. In quantitative literacy 55% of adults are at or below basic level. [2]

The purpose of this book is not to debate the challenges within our education system in teaching students to read or to discuss the serious consequences of poor literacy rates, but rather to provide parents and teachers effective tools to help individual children learn to read proficiently. The bottom line is that learning to read is not easy for many children. It is critical to get these children on the "right track" to reading success. We can effectively help a child learn to read proficiently by intentionally teaching exact necessary skills in a direct, systematic and complete manner. This program tackles and solves the literacy issue from the bottom up, by effectively teaching one individual at a time how to read.

B. Important Background Facts About Our Wonderful English Language

1. Written English is a phonetic system: English is a phonetic language, meaning words are made up of sounds blended together. English words consist of various combinations of 44 sounds. The alphabetic characters, the 26 different artificial black squiggly marks, are the way we show this phonetic language on paper. The printed letters and combinations of letters represent specific sounds. The linguistic fact is written English is a phonetic alphabet, not a pictograph or other symbolic writing system. In linguistic history, written phonetic alphabets replaced pictographs precisely because there were too many words to represent by pictures. Written English is a phonemic code and we need to approach it as such. When the complete code is known, the vast majority of English words are decodable. In addition, even irregular words are mostly decodable. Written English is based on printed phonemic symbols representing sounds. To read, we need to translate or decode these written symbols back into the sounds that blend to form specific words.

2. Written English is NOT simple. It uses a complex code: Unfortunately, English phonetic writing is not limited to a simple one-to-one relationship between a single printed symbol and one unique sound. English contains numerous complexities. The 26 written symbols and combinations of these symbols represent 44 sounds. There is overlap where a single sound is represented by more than one symbol (/k/ can be written 'c', 'k', 'ck' or even with the Greek 'ch'). Specific symbols often represent multiple or alternate sounds (c=/k/ & /s/; o= /o/, /oa/ & /u/, y=/y/, /ee/, /ie/). Symbols combine in consonant digraphs and vowel combinations to represent different sounds than the individual components (t=/t/ h=/h/ but th=/th/, o=/o/ i=/i/ but 'oi'=/oy/). Many of the combinations of symbols represent multiple sounds (ow=/ow/ & /oa/; ea = /ee/, /e/ & in a few words /ay/). Some symbols influence and modify other symbols creating new sounds (w+a; w+or, a+l;

[1] The 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Reading Report Card www.nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/reading

[2] The 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy US Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics http://nces.ed.gov/NAAL/

and the r-controlled vowel combinations). To top it off, the English language has assimilated components of Greek, Latin, German, French, Spanish, Native American, and other languages. While this diversity adds to the richness of English, it does complicate reading. To read proficiently the student needs to learn these complexities.

3. Reading is a complex artificial skill: Reading our complex artificial system of recording the English language on paper is absolutely NOT a part of natural biologic development. While speech is a natural biologic process, reading our man-made arbitrary system of artificial black squiggles is not innate. All components of writing and reading our language are contrived. For example, even the basic left-to-right directional processing of print is not natural. Think about it. In the natural world, the best way to gather information is to look all over. In contrast, to read English you must process the alphabetic symbols in an artificial, straight-line, left-to-right manner. Other languages apply up-to-down or right-to-left processing rules. While we obviously use our biologic functions of vision and hearing to read, learning to read print is not a natural biological developmental process. Therefore, children do not necessarily acquire skills or biologically 'grow into' reading. Like all complex learned skills, reading it is best taught step-by-step with practice and mastery of individual steps before moving on to advanced skills.

4. Children are naïve about how reading works and can easily end up on the incorrect track: Not only is reading unnatural but children are also naïve about written language. Much of what skilled readers take for granted is *not* evident to children. From a child's point of view, print is simply abstract squiggles. Many are not aware of how our artificial alphabetic system functions with letters representing sounds blended into words of our language. Children can easily adopt incorrect strategies which lead to reading difficulty. Many children fail to learn with reading instructional programs that are incomplete, include incorrect strategies, fail to teach all necessary skills, or teach skills using analytical, embedded, implicit and indirect instruction. While *some* children figure out the necessary process and become good readers under any reading program, *many* do *not* learn. If a child gets on the "wrong track" on his approach to reading, he faces serious and persistent difficulties. The reason some children do not succeed has nothing to do with intelligence or ability, but rather with how different children learn and process information. Many children struggle with reading because they fail to acquire necessary skills. It is risky to leave it to chance for a naïve child to acquire the complex skills necessary for proficient reading on his own.

5. To read English, children must decode the print: While 'reading' obviously is more than decoding, this ability to translate printed symbols into sounds of the words of our language is a necessary foundational skill. The decoding needs to be effortless and accurate so the child has mental energy left over to achieve comprehension, enjoyment, content learning, critical analysis and the other higher level objectives of reading. Although proficient decoding is not the reason why we read, it is a foundational skill essential to reading success. To read written English, the child must learn how to decipher this complex phonemic code by translating or decoding the print to sound. The more advanced skills in fluency and comprehension are dependant on first mastering phonetic decoding.

Try to read a puzzle where familiar letters are replaced with unknown symbols such as the simple sentence, "⌂∞♓ϕЏЏ◘♋ ♓◘ ♈◘♉◘€ ζ◘ ⌘€ϕ∞ ЏД ◘€♎ ∞♓Д♐." The importance of deciphering the code is clear. A young child looking at unknown squiggles of the English alphabet faces a comparable challenge. To solve the 'puzzle' of reading, the child needs to learn the code. By the way, the puzzle answer is "Reading an unknown code is not easy."

C. Biologic Process of Proficient Reading & Difficulty Reading/Dyslexia

The scientific research on neurological processes involved in proficient reading is fascinating. Scientific advances allow neuroscientists to view images of the brain as it reads and map out these neural functioning pathways. Amazingly, researchers can actually see how the brain reads! We are learning much about the distinct neural processes involved with both proficient reading and difficulty reading. Sally Shaywitz describes this information in her book *Overcoming Dyslexia A New and Complete Science-Based Program for Reading Problems at Any Level*. [3] I highly recommend this informative book for learning about the science of reading or for anyone who has a child struggling with learning to read. In addition, a selection of informative research summaries and articles on neural imaging/phonologic processing, dyslexia and phonologic based reading can be found at **www.righttrackreading.com/page7.html**. This section lists a few of the key findings from the nueroscientific research.

[3] Shaywitz, Sally. *Overcoming Dyslexia A New and Complete Science-Based Program for Reading Problems at Any Level*. New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2004.

1. Neuroscientists have learned proficient readers use phonologic pathways: Thanks to the extraordinary advances in science and functional MRI technology, scientists have actually mapped out neural functioning pathways involved in proficient reading. Researchers discovered proficient readers convert print to sound using phonologic processing pathways. In contrast, struggling readers have difficulty turning print to sound and aren't using phonologic processing pathways. We now have biologic proof that the key to proficient reading is phonologic processing. Scientists learned these neural processing pathways necessary for proficient reading first form in beginning readers. Scientists are also learning how fluent reading develops word by word and is dependent on accurate phonologic processing. While actual neural processing is complex and involves multiple areas of the brain, the bottom line is that proficient reading requires phonologic processing of print. By converting print to sound the child taps into the brain's natural systems for efficiently processing spoken language. Phonologic processing is literally the pathway to proficient reading. This fascinating brain imaging research has given us the 'map' to proficient reading. To read proficiently, the child must develop and use the brain's phonologic processing pathways and turn print into sound.

2. Neurobiologic discoveries on dyslexia/reading difficulties: Dyslexia is defined as a problem learning to read despite normal abilities and intelligence. In other words, it is when someone with no specific physical or mental limitations has persistent difficulty reading. Researchers determined these frustrating problems learning to read have nothing to do with intelligence or ability but rather with how the person processes print. Thanks to the scientific advances, we now have neurobiologic evidence of why individuals have difficulty reading. The researchers discovered dyslexic readers use different neural pathways than proficient readers, and these improper neural pathways form because the individual does not recognize the sound structure of words, and does not process print phonetically. *Dyslexics have problems turning print into sound* and consequently do not develop phonologic processing pathways necessary for skilled reading. Researchers are learning dyslexia is a disorder within the phonologic processing component of the language system. Brain imaging shows struggling/dyslexic readers fail to process print phonologically.

3. Neural processing pathways form in beginning readers: Researchers determined neural processing pathways are created in *beginning* readers. Children who convert print to sound are literally on the correct neural processing pathway to develop proficient reading. Conversely, individuals who fail to develop correct phonologic 'proficient' reading processing pathways in the beginning continue to face serious and persistent difficulties learning to read. This helps explain the evidence showing that most children who fall behind in reading never catch up. Difficulty reading persists because from the beginning these struggling readers failed to develop necessary phonologic processing pathways.

Sometimes children 'get by' with incorrect processing in the lowest grades (K, 1st). The easy reading material, illustrations, context clues, oral directions and limited depth of content disguise difficulty decoding print. For example, if a child looks at the picture or memorizes repetitive text, it appears he can 'read'. However, children who fail to develop necessary phonologic processing rapidly run into problems as vocabulary expands. Incorrect strategies of 'whole word' visual memorization, word guessing, context clues, and predictable text fail as reading level advances. This is why 'reading problems' often become evident in 2nd or 3rd grade. In reality, the 'difficulty' processing print already existed because the child never developed necessary phonologic processing pathways. To read proficiently, the child must process print phonetically. Students who don't develop phonologic processing pathways face persistent difficulty reading. These neural processing pathways first form in beginning readers.

4. Effective Phonologic Based Reading Programs Create Proficient Reading Neural Pathways: The most exciting element of the fascinating science of reading research is the neurobiologic proof direct-phonologic-based reading programs can actually develop the neural pathways for proficient reading in both children and adults. The brain imaging studies have shown effective phonological based reading instructional programs that specifically taught letter-sound correspondence not only improved reading skills in struggling/dyslexic readers, but actually changed neural activity from incorrect neural pathways to 'correct' phonologic pathways used by good readers. We have scientific evidence effective direct systematic phonics based reading instruction builds the necessary proficient reader phonologic processing pathways. We can intentionally help children form the proficient reader neural pathways that lead to reading success.

5. Summary of the Neurobiological Research: The key to proficient reading is the development of phonologic processing pathways. Proficient readers use phonologic neural pathways to convert print to sound. In contrast, struggling/dyslexic readers have difficulty turning print to sound and do not use phonologic processing pathways. Direct systematic phonologic based reading programs can actually create proficient neural processing pathways.

D. Effective Reading Programs Can Develop Proficient Reading

We have neurobiologic evidence effective direct systematic phonologic based reading instruction builds the neural processing pathways necessary for proficient reading. This brain imaging research supports the existing results-based evidence. For years, valid results-based research has shown direct systematic phonics programs are the most effective approach for teaching children to read. The neuroscientific research reveals *why* these direct systematic phonics programs work. In addition, the neurobiologic details on how proficient reading functions provide a wealth of information on how to design effective reading instruction. By directly teaching the child to convert print to sound you can intentionally develop proficient neural processing pathways.

The valid evidence based research clearly demonstrates the effectiveness of systematic and explicit phonics instruction in helping students learn to read. This research reveals "systematic and explicit instruction in phonics produces significant benefits for children from kindergarten through sixth grade and for children having difficulty learning to read".[4] Systematic and explicit phonics instruction is effective for children from various social and economic levels and is particularly beneficial for children who are having difficulty learning to read. Systematic and explicit phonics instruction significantly improves children's reading comprehension. The research also clearly reveals systematic explicit phonics instruction was significantly more effective than non-systematic or no phonics instruction. Direct systematic phonics instruction was not only effective, it was more effective than other approaches to reading instruction. "Students taught phonics systematically outperformed students who were taught a variety of nonsystematic or non-phonics programs, including basal programs, whole language approaches and whole-word programs." [5] Direct systematic phonics instruction provides the most effective approach to directly help children achieve reading success!

Direct systematic phonics programs of reading instruction are proven to help students develop correct phonologic processing pathways and build proficient reading skills. Scientific evidence clearly shows the specific program of reading instruction has a significant effect on rates of reading success. There is a "right way" to teach reading and to ensure the correct proficient reader neural pathways are activated. The brain research reveals why many children fail to learn to read with the popular methods of reading instruction such as 'whole language', 'literature based', and 'balanced' approaches. These well intentioned methods allow and often encourage development of incorrect neural pathways or at best fail to intentionally develop correct pathways. If children fail to convert print to sound and form phonologic processing pathways they face difficulty learning to read. Additional information is found in the article *Why Parents and Teachers Should Use Direct Systematic Phonics Programs* at **www.righttrackreading.com/directphonicsworks.html**

Effective direct systematic phonics reading programs intentionally teach children to convert print to sound and directly help children acquire specific necessary skills to develop proficient reader neural pathways. We have proof, both validated results-based evidence and findings from the neural imaging studies, direct systematic phonics programs are effective in helping young children learn to read proficiently and in helping struggling children and adults overcome reading difficulty**.** It is like railroad tracks leading from a beginning point**;** if the child accidentally gets on the 'wrong track' he most likely will never make it to the proficient reader station, unless direct appropriate intervention occurs. In contrast, effective phonologic based programs can 'wire' the brain for reading success and ensure the child is on the "right track" to reading proficiency.

Right Track Reading Lessons **is specifically designed to help children acquire necessary skills and develop proficient reader neural pathways so they get on the 'right track' to reading success.** *Right Track Reading* uses the train track image and analogy to represent this ability to directly help your child develop phonologic neural processing pathways in order to get your child on the 'right track' to reading success. Just as the correct track leads trains to their desired destination, the development of phonologic processing pathways literally gets your child on track to the desired destination of proficient reading. *Right Track Reading Lessons* is an effective direct systematic phonics program that gives you the tools to help your child develop proficient reading.

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[4] National Reading Panel's "Teaching Children to Read" Summary Report www.nationalreadingpanel.org/publications/summary.htm
[5] National Reading Panel's "Teaching Children to Read" Summary Report www.nationalreadingpanel.org/publications/summary.htm