

## The Possibilities of "Potentials"

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In the summer of '99 I was privileged to take a four-week course at Canadian Univeristy College (CUC), entitled Reading Potentials - Action Phonics. After forty years of research and classroom work Frank Lang, an Adventist educator, developed this program. In the mornings we were taught the basics of the program and the theories it was based upon. Then in the afternoons we worked with students from the community. All students' reading levels were assessed at the beginning and by the end of two weeks some had gained one, two, or three grade levels. I was both stunned and excited. Just think what I could do in my classroom in 40 weeks.

What is Action Phonics? This is a whole-brain, multi-sensory, speech-based approach to reading that uses 'laleemics'. The word laleemics is derived from an ancient Greek verb 'to speak'. This is getting rid of all associations, such as A for Apple, B for Banana etc. and instead, learning the mouth/tongue position for the various sounds. It is learning to blend those sounds together instead of teaching in isolated sounds as regular phonics teaches.

The student uses oral gymnastics to over exaggerate each sound or letter representation so that a strong neurological impression is made between speech and reading. The instant the letter is seen, the mouth forms the position required to make its sound. Thus, reading becomes the visual aspect of speech. This is a very powerful concept that works amazingly fast, due to the fact that there is very little new information to learn. The child's speech structure is already in place. All he/she has to do is associate letters to this existing speech structure.

By using frequency, recency, duration, intensity, association, and primacy to reinforce learning 55 vowel combinations, and 5 categories of consonants the sounds come out automatically. Pointer control is used to focus attention and to teach proper eye coordination. Tachistoscopic exercises are used to increase the speed of recognition and students work on breaking words into syllables according to the number of vowel sounds. All of these techniques and more make up the program Action Phonics.

Well, after completing this course I was all ready to integrate this in my classroom. This is how I was going to teach my kids how to read. I was hired that summer to be head teacher in a one-room, five-grade school. After getting settled I tried teaching this program to a grade seven boy who had a number of reading disabilities. I found out quickly enough that I couldn't leave twelve other students in various grades just to work with one student. I also learned that because of this program's need to exaggerate sounds, it was far too loud and distracting for other students. I then attempted teaching him for part of lunch hour and for part of our story time, but this didn't work because he needed his exercise and he loved story time. I finally concluded that I couldn't teach this program in a multi-grade school. It frustrated me greatly having knowledge of such a successful program and not being able to use it, as I would have liked over the years.

Today I integrate parts of the program into my reading lessons, but my dream is to be able to teach this program full time in our Adventist schools. Why every Adventist school doesn't have a teacher certified to teach this to our students, I don't know. This program has been around for nearly fifty years, and I believe that it is high time we recognize the value of this program that is making such a difference in the

lives of students who have reading difficulties.

Parents are crying out for something that works. Their children are being pulled out of school and put in resource rooms that do little over the time they spend there, except to label them and destroy any thread of self-esteem that they might have. Many parents who have tried everything under the sun for their kids have come to this program hoping that this is the program that will change everything. And for most, it does. Their kids gain the tools they need to thrive in school and almost more importantly they gain self-respect. We could and should do all in our power to give students the tools they need to find all of their 'potential'. Action Phonics can do this for our children.