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Letter of Endorsement, the Magic Ladder

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2013), more commonly referred to as *The Nation's Report Card*, reports that 58% of fourth-grade students read below grade level. A major cause of this is due to students failing to acquire proficiency with phonics, or what is simply referred to as "the code." My recent work with 39 of the most struggling elementary schools in JCPS shows that 62% of students read well below grade level proficiency. Because effective reading is fundamental to academic achievement, these students not only suffer from poor educational outcomes, but perhaps even worse, suffer from the low self-esteem that comes with realizing they are poor readers. And the saddest part is that these children most often blame themselves for something that is not their fault. So why is reading English so difficult to learn?

Acquiring decoding proficiency with the English code is exacerbated by the many exceptions in the sound-to-letter(s) iterations found within the language that brings confusion to the learner. This makes the teaching of phonics more akin than not to rocket science, requiring a highly skilled teacher who can differentiate for individual students while managing the rest of the class. While some teachers become accomplished at teaching reading to all students, many do not, as evidenced by the 3 out 5 children who do not adequately learn to read. What is needed is an approach that simplifies the confusion encountered by the student when learning the code. This is the innovation that is the Magic Ladder.

By starting with what the child already knows by leveraging the power of technology, instruction using the Magic Ladder immediately re-sets the child's reading experience to one that is positive. Using their unique "P-Cue" system, the Magic Ladder eliminates the learning of the dozens of "phonics rules" by replacing them with digital manipulation of the text that makes the code understandably simple to the reader. This allows students to experience immediate reading success with text containing words they already know. This is then quickly scaffolded into new learning for the reader as new words are introduced and made understandable within the P-Cue

system. Based upon these successes, the Magic Ladder re-orients reading as a positive reading experience for the student, setting them on a success trajectory.

Make no mistake, the Magic Ladder is not another "reading program" which school districts have relied upon for decades, resulting in 3 out 5 children failing to acquire reading proficiency. Rather, the Magic Ladder is a revolutionary innovation that simplifies the way children are taught to read. At its essence, the approach is child- rather than teacher-centric as the Magic Ladder instructs from the child's perspective.

So where does the Magic Ladder fit into instruction and what is its future? There are at least four areas of impact that I think the Magic Ladder will bring to reading instruction:

1. The role of the Magic Ladder is as the *primary method* for teaching children to learn to read.
2. The Magic Ladder will greatly *increase teacher effectiveness* with all children, thus increasing the public's human capital investment.
3. *Children will learn to read faster*. The Magic Ladder will reduce the time it takes for children to learn the foundational decoding knowledge that 3 out of 5 children are currently failing to acquire.
4. The Magic Ladder will greatly increase the percentage of students reading at grade level at the end of third-grade, resulting in a downstream effect of *higher academic achievement* as these students progress through school.

The Magic Ladder will revolutionize reading instruction in the United States – period. By combining a better teaching method that is child-centric, that is easily understood and implemented by teachers, and that is available through the power of digital delivery, the Magic Ladder is by far, the most promising innovation in reading instruction that I have seen. As such, I am personally working as a member of the Magic Ladder team and am committed to its long-term success. My role is first, as a literacy expert who has authored numerous academic studies published in national, peer-reviewed journals, as well as chapters in several of the leading books on best practices in literacy. I will also lead the rigorous, formal assessment and evaluation of the Magic Ladder resulting in a report of its effectiveness.

Finally, I see education, and more specifically literacy, as a down-payment on the price of inequality that exists across our global society. Bringing the Magic Ladder to fruition will help ensure that down payment is actually paid!

Sincerely,

David D. Paige

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[1]David D. Paige is Associate Professor of Literacy Education at Bellarmine University. For the past three years Dr. Paige has served as the Program Chair of Bellarmine's Ph.D. in Education and Social Change program. Dr. Paige is currently Vice President of the Association of Literacy Educators and Researchers, a national organization of literacy professors engaged in teaching and research at the university level. Dr. Paige will assume the Presidency of this organization in 2016. Dr. Paige has published research in multiple peer-reviewed journals including the Journal of Literacy Research, Reading Psychology, the Journal of Adult and Adolescent Literacy, the Reading Teacher, Reading Horizons, and Literacy Research and Instruction, as well as others. Dr. Paige consults with numerous organizations around the world including Student Achievement Partners (New York City, founded by the lead authors of the Common Core), Achievement First Charter Schools (Brooklyn, NY), the Hawaii Department of Education, the Louisiana Department of Education, Don Bosco Schools, India, and the Salesian Schools, also in India. Prior to entering academia, Dr. Paige worked in industry for companies including Miles Pharmaceuticals and Westwood One Communications.

Dr. Paige's academic degrees include:

- Bachelor of Business Administration, Memphis State University
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