READING MADE EASIER:

The explicit instruction of reading comprehension strategies

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My affair with reading started over sixty years ago, when I "graduated" from second grade and taught a neighboring boy, only one year my junior, to read over the summer vacation. Today he would most probably be diagnosed as an LD kid, but in those days if you could not read by the end of Hanukkah you had to be either lazy or stupid, or both.

I have always been an avid reader. In high school, however, under the guidance of my English teacher, the late Jack Kimkhi, I decided I was going to read only in English. The books he recommended were unabridged editions of those he considered worth reading – Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*, Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, etc. It was not easy at first: I had to translate hundreds of words from each book and memorize them, because he would test me on these, but as he promised, it paid off in the end. As an undergraduate, I never had a problem with the reading load, and as a graduate in the States I found out very quickly that I had a much larger vocabulary than most of the native speakers in my department. It was then that I first heard about Flesch's (1955) *Why Johnny Can't Read* – one of the central questions raised about American education.

But in those days I was more interested in theoretical linguistics, my major. It took some years before I became interested in reading again. It has become increasingly clear to me as a teacher, teacher educator, and researcher that reading is at the core of all language learning, and that we can teach ALL students to read. In addition to teaching courses in linguistics, SLA, research into reading and writing processes, etc., as well as seminar courses in academic literacy in both English and Hebrew, I have been individually tutoring dyslexic and hard of hearing students. I am indebted to them for teaching me how to teach them and for bringing out the best in me. I am also indebted to all my "regular" undergraduate and graduate students, who shared their inner learning processes with me

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INTRODUCTION

Reading is probably the most common mode of learning in school and in institutions of higher education. In fact, reading is a prerequisite for learning (NCTE, 2014). However, the ability to use reading to learn from text does not come easily to most students, either in their first language (henceforth L1) – Hebrew (or Arabic or Russian or Amharic), or in English, their second or third language (L2 or L3, respectively).

Israeli fourth graders, for example, ranked 29 of 50 in reading in their L1 in the 2016 PIRLS – Progress in International Reading Literacy Study; tenth graders ranked 37 of 78 in the 2018 PISA – Program for International Student Assessment. Unlike the international assessments, the Israeli exam of the MEITZAV includes not only L1 (Hebrew or Arabic) but also L2 or L3 (English), respectively. The reports of the scores on the MEIZAV, including the most recent 2016 scores, for fifth graders, do not present separate data on reading comprehension in either language. The national average on the English section was 66 (SD 19). Likewise, the 2010 report of the English matriculation exam provides data only on students' passing rates for each track – five, four, and three points, but no separate data on their reading comprehension scores. Only 38.5% of the students took the 5-point exam, but only 61.9% of them scored 85 or above. This is less than what would have been expected of 5-point students. The more recent 2014 report does not provide any data on students' passing rates.[1]

In addition, of all the high school graduates, including native speakers of English, who took the psychometric exam required by the colleges and universities in 2009-2019,[2] only 16.10% on the average (SD 0.72%) scored at least 134 points, the grade that would exempt them from having to take

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1   For links to the different data sources see: *Appendix D*.
2   To allow for a valid comparison, only those taking it for the first time were included in the survey.

any EAP – English for Academic Purposes, reading courses in the first year of their academic studies (Avi Allalouf personal communication, March 26, 2020).

Reading difficulties are often the result of a lack of adequate language proficiency (Bernhardt, 2011) and a lack of reading strategies, particularly the higher-order, metacognitive strategies[3] required for significant learning (Segev Miller, 2004a, 2014, 2016) and for successful socialization (Brown & Campione, 1996). The definition of reading, or rather *reading literacy*, provided by PISA (OECD, 2006: 46) further elaborates on its implications for the reader:

> Reading literacy is understanding, using and reflecting on written texts, in order <u>to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential and to participate in society</u> (…).[4] It spells out the idea that literacy enables the <u>fulfillment of individual aspirations</u> – from defined aspirations such as gaining an educational qualification or obtaining a job to those less immediate goals which enrich and extend one's personal life. Literacy also provides the reader with a set of linguistic tools that are increasingly important for meeting the demands of modern societies with their formal institutions, large bureaucracies and complex legal systems.[5]

It is hardly surprising, then, that *reading-to-learn*, or *learning from text*, has become a focus of intensive research in the last two decades (for a review see: Flowers, 2013), and that reading projects in the United States and in other countries, such as CAST, Reach Out and Read, Reading Worldwide, RIF, and Room to Read (see: *Appendix D*), are being funded by governments and national and international organizations.

Reading in English has become especially important with the emergence of English as a global language (Crystal, 2012; Melitz, 2014). In spite

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3   For a definition of these see: PART ONE, Chapter 2, *2.1*.
4   Underlining, here and henceforth in all the quotes in this book, not in the original text.
5   The most recent definition adds *evaluating* (OECD, 2018).

of the disagreement regarding the different terms reflecting different definitions of and approaches to the status of the language, such as *World English*, *International English(es)* (for a review see: Jenkins, 2018), as well as the pedagogical implications of these (e.g., Kachru, 2005; Matsuda, 2012; McKay, 2002, 2018; Wang, 2015), statistics indicate that about 1.5 billion people, or about a quarter of the world's population, is fluent in English. Only about 365 million of these are native speakers of English. That is, those who use English primarily as a *lingua franca* – in diplomacy and international communications, in research and technology, in the media, and in education – constitute the world's largest group of English speakers, much larger, in fact, than that of native English speakers. It is not surprising, then, that Jenkins has long suggested that EFL – English as a Foreign Language, should be replaced by ELF – English as a Lingua Franca. Recently, the internet has "increased the number of second language readers dramatically in that it made the availability of second language materials (admittedly, written principally in English) immediate, plentiful, easy to access, and cost-free" (Bernhardt, 2011: 5). It is expected that by 2020 the number of children and adults around the world using English or learning to use it will amount to two billion (*The English Effect*, 2013).

One would have, therefore, expected the colleges of education and schools of education at the universities in Israel to invest in the preparation of English teachers to teach reading. However, a series of surveys, carried out since the mid 1990s among Israeli English teachers and among my graduate and undergraduate English students at one university and two colleges of education in the larger Tel Aviv area (e.g., Segev Miller, 2003a: 26), indicated that these institutions hardly offered any courses in reading comprehension instruction. Teachers complained, for example, that "In college, I had only one course on reading comprehension, and no course on reading comprehension instruction", "I feel I need more instruction in how to teach my students to read", and "At the university we had too many courses in literature and hardly any in reading". In a recent study (Segev Miller, 2016: 241 in Hebrew), one of the changes in

their preparation program my undergraduate students recommended was:

> It is highly important to emphasize reading comprehension in education colleges, so later on teachers will have the awareness, acquaintance and comprehension in order to pass it on to their students. The college should implement more methodology courses such as *Reading Processes*, since it is not enough.

In addition, an analysis of the programs offered by the English Departments of five of the leading education colleges also indicated the lack of courses on reading instruction. Some of the colleges offer a one-semester course, but most of these courses, such as "The psychology of reading", are theoretical, or focus on the beginning of reading.[6] Interviews with the pedagogical instructors at two of these colleges indicated that they had very little time to devote to the issue of reading. The same is true of the other (L1) departments at the colleges of education, even Elementary Education and Special Education, where the focus is on the learning disabled. It is also true of the secondary teaching certification programs at the universities.

In the United States, on the other hand, the requirements for reading courses for secondary certification have increased over the years from only nine states, requiring at least one reading course prior to 1980, to twenty-five states in 1993 (Barry, 2002), to "some forty-seven states and the District of Columbia, [which] now require either specific course work or have established a competency in reading methods for all or some of their middle and secondary teachers" in 1996 (Romine, McKenna, & Robinson, 1996: 197).[7] Since then, the NAE – National Academy of Education, has assigned a subcommittee to report and make suggestions for the preparation of reading teachers (Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005);[8]

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6   For their syllabi see: The MOFET Institute library website: http://infocenter. macam.ac.il/QueryForm.aspx
7   For a more recent document see: https://education.uky.edu/acadserv/pdac/ certification-by-state/
8   For the vast literature on the preparation of teachers to teach reading see, for example: Anders, Hoffman, and Duffy (2000); Dillon, O'Brien, Sato, and Kelly (2011); Sailors, Minton, and Villarreal (2017).

the IRA – International Reading Association, has drawn up the *Standards for reading professionals* (2018); and other national organizations, such as the AERA – American Educational Research Association and the AACTE – American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, have been focusing on the knowledge about literacy that all teachers need to have.

Israeli English teachers in the survey cited earlier also complained that the English Inspectorate hardly offered any in-service courses in reading instruction. Indeed, an analysis of the in-service courses offered in recent years at PISGA,[9] indicated an overwhelming majority of courses on technology in the teaching of English, teaching learning disabled students, and the teaching of literature in high school. An analysis of the list of the courses offered in 2017, indicated forty courses altogether, but only four on reading.[10] Last year, only one course, on "basic reading skills", was offered, and this year, of the 87 online courses offered altogether by the English Inspectorate and by the Pedagogical Secretariat, none.

Consequently, the English teachers and students in the surveys deplored their lack of preparation to teach reading. A content analysis of their responses indicated four major findings, obviously resulting from this lack:

1. *Misconceptions of the reading process*. For example, the misconception that the meaning of the text resides in the text, and that there is, therefore, only one "correct" way to comprehend it. This misconception is also reflected in their use of the term *receptive skill*, still prevalent at colleges of education, to refer to reading.[11] Another common misconception of the reading process is conceiving of it as a step-by-step, or linear, process. These misconceptions are in contrast with current models of the reading process (see: PART ONE, Chapter 1).

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9   The Hebrew acronym for *Centers for Teaching Staff Development*.
10   E.g., course No. 2189 on reading for beginners and course No. 1106 on detecting struggling readers.
11   Even the recent document *Professional framework for English teachers 2020* (August, 2019) on the English Inspectorate's desk refers to reading as a receptive skill.

2. *Hardly any explicit instruction of the reading process.* The respondents reported that they did not teach reading. They also reported that they did not use the texts in the textbook for this purpose, but rather for what Spivey (1987) called "text as pretext", that is, for the purpose of teaching vocabulary and grammar. This seems to be the purpose of EFL school textbooks, and is probably one of the reasons that the texts in these textbooks are often of low quality in terms of textual coherence (Segev Miller, 2001, 2002a, 2013).

3. *Inconsistent use of terminology.* The term *strategy* was more commonly referred to by the respondents as a "skill", or a "technique", or even a "method" (for the difference between a *skill* and a *strategy* see: PART ONE, Chapter 2).

4. *Limited repertoires of strategies.* For example, in the first 1994 survey, only seven strategies altogether were reported: *skimming, scanning, predicting, guessing meaning of unfamiliar word from context, inferring, clarifying grammatical cohesion* (as in "What does the word *it* refer to?"), and *brainstorming* (more often referred to as *elaborating* in the literature).

In fact, reading comprehension at school has traditionally focused on the product rather than on the process: Exams, usually in the form of questions, are administered to assess students' level of comprehension of a text. However, as Alderson and Urquhart (1984: xiv) argued, "knowing *what* a student has comprehended does not, of itself, account for *how* he has or has not comprehended, and cannot provide information on how the student might be helped to comprehend at a higher level".

Surveys carried out in the States indicated mixed results. On the one hand, Barry (2002) found that middle and secondary school teachers of English as a first language reported thirteen reading strategies, and teachers of foreign languages (as is the case of English in Israel) – fifteen, that is, twice as many as the Israeli English teachers did. On the other hand, Spor and Kane Schneider (1999) found that of a list of ten popular reading strategies, only about half of the K-12 grade classroom teachers surveyed were familiar with these strategies, and many reported that they

did not use them in their teaching. The average percentage of teachers who expressed an interest in learning about or using these strategies was a mere 22.50%. A more recent survey (ILA, 2020: 7) indicated that the majority of respondents – literacy specialists, instructional coaches, and supervisors from the States and another sixty-five countries, "do not agree that today's teacher preparation programs are equipping educators with the skills they need for effective reading instruction".

In a series of studies in the undergraduate and graduate courses on "Research into reading and writing processes" I have been teaching since the early 1980s both in English and in Hebrew (for a review see: Segev Miller, 2016 in Hebrew), my students investigated their own reading processes. They found that they had used altogether between 21 and 38 strategies while performing the reading-writing tasks assigned at the end of the course. They used significantly more strategies than they had reported at the beginning of the course. This was the effect of the explicit instruction I provided in these courses. For example, in my 2014 L2 undergraduate course, the students reported knowing altogether eighteen strategies, on the average – less than three strategies each, at the beginning of the course. *Skimming* and *scanning* constituted about 40% of these. The other strategies were reported with low (about 6.5%) to very low (1%-2%) relative frequencies. Six of these were reported only by two students, who were teaching high school and had to take an in-service course on the HOTS. At the end of the course, however, the students used altogether twenty-four strategies, on the average – more than nine strategies each. *Skimming* was not used at all, and *scanning* with very low relative frequencies. Moreover, at the beginning of the course, they reported only one metacognitive strategy – *evaluating*, with an average relative frequency of about 2%. However, at the end of the course, they all used it with their highest relative frequencies, on the average about 27%.

In another study (Segev Miller, 2009), I required my L2 undergraduate students to observe their mentoring teachers at school, using as their criteria Fielding and Pearson's (1994) recommendations for teaching

reading comprehension: (a) ample time for actual text reading; (b) explicit instruction of reading strategies; and (c) opportunities for peers to practice reading together and to share their responses to reading. A content analysis of their observation logs indicated that an overwhelming majority of my students – 84%, did not witness any explicit instruction of reading strategies, or any implementation of the other recommendations. Here are a few of their observations: "The teacher checked their comprehension of the text by asking questions and assigning various exercises, but she never taught them how to comprehend"; "It was all about answering questions in the workbook after the reading"; "Even when she used common reading strategies, such as *scanning*, the teacher never taught them explicitly."[12]

My surveys and studies of L1 and L2 reading strategies yielded similar results. For example, the findings of my studies of the undergraduate (Segev Miller, 2003b, 2016 in Hebrew) and graduate students (Segev Miller, 2011, 2016) in my L1 and L2 seminar courses indicated that (a) they acquired knowledge of "new" reading and summarizing strategies; and that (b) the differences between these and the strategies they had reported knowing or using at the beginning of the course, and the differences between their two written (before and after instruction) summary products, were statistically significant.

The findings of these surveys and studies are disturbing in light of the research literature (e.g., Rosenshine & Meister, 1994; Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995), which has indicated that successful readers may use as many as a hundred and fifty different reading strategies. These findings are the more disturbing in light of their implications: Teachers in Israel are not well prepared to teach reading comprehension strategies and consequently their students cannot read at the level required for significant learning, and, once they enter higher education, they often encounter difficulties fulfilling the requirement for intensive reading both in Hebrew and in English.

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12 For a recently developed observation instrument see: ERCOP – English Reading Comprehension Protocol (Smit, Van de Grift, De Bot, & Jansen, 2017).

A change in the English curriculum is, therefore, called for. However, the two reforms introduced by the English Inspectorate in the Ministry of Education, do not address the issue of reading instruction. The first reform – the *New English Curriculum* (2001), was first drafted in 1998 and was obviously inspired by the *Standards for the English Language Arts*, published earlier in the States by the IRA – the International Reading Association and the NCTE – the National Council of Teachers of English. The *Standards for the English Language Arts* (1996: 16) argued that "In addition to knowledge of texts and text features, students need to learn an array of processes and strategies for comprehending and producing texts". However, reading in general and reading strategies in particular were obviously not a major concern of the *New English Curriculum*.

The second reform, the *HOTS − Higher-order Thinking Skills*, first presented to the English faculties of the colleges of education in Israel in July 2008, was an attempt to implement the more general reform of the *Pedagogical Horizon*, initiated by the Pedagogical Secretariat of the Ministry of Education (Zohar, 2009 in Hebrew),[13] in the teaching of English, and to encourage the integration of the HOTS with the teaching of literature in the upper grades. Three revised documents – *Integrating higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) with the teaching of literature: The teachers' handbook* (April, 2011 & October, 2015), the *Revised English Curriculum* (November, 2013), and the *Compatibility document* (May, 2014) on the English Inspectorate's desk, list altogether between sixteen and nineteen so-called higher-order thinking skills. However, my analysis of these documents (Segev Miller, 2014) indicated that these lists require significant revision, especially with regard to the terminology and definitions used to present them, which lack consistency, accuracy, and mutual exclusiveness. In fact, there are only eleven strategies on the list.

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13   This document lists only thirteen strategies, and their definitions are somewhat problematic: E.g., two of these (#6 & #7) seem to overlap partially; one (#9) seems to involve the use of more than just one strategy.

Unfortunately, there has been no change and no improvement with regard to this list in the recently *Revised English Curriculum* (January, 2018).

As is often the case with educational reforms (see: *Hed Hachinuch*, June 2009 special issue in Hebrew; Segev Miller, 2008b), the HOTS reform was introduced before the former reform had been completely implemented by all the English teachers, and in spite of their objections, either published in the *ETAI Forum* journal (e.g., Kirshenberg, 2009; Shrem, Zwebner, & Verter, 2010; Ur, 2009) or posted on the ETNI — *Israeli English Teachers Network*, that year. Some of the teachers argued that the HOTS reform should have been introduced first in the instruction of reading across all grades, rather than in the teaching of literature in the upper grades. In the *Revised English Curriculum* (2013: 18) and the more recently *Revised English Curriculum* (2018: 16), this issue has been only partially addressed by suggesting that "Learners at all levels are activated in ways that encourage them to use HOTS in all four domains". However, only learners in the Intermediate (i.e., junior high) and Proficiency (i.e., high school) levels are offered explicit instruction.[14]

With the "change of guards" at the end of 2016, the new General English Inspector initiated still another reform, with an emphasis on speaking, coupled with PLC — Professional Learning Communities, "where matters of pedagogy, classroom management and issues related to the teaching of English were discussed while placing the emphasis on teaching oral proficiency skills" (The English Inspectorate Bulletin, 2017: 5).[15] However, Allington and Gabriel (2012), Anderson (2015), and other prominent researchers in the field argued that reading should be placed at the core of language learning instruction, around which all language skills — writing, speaking, and listening, can be developed.[16]

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14 Last year, only two courses on teaching the HOTS in literature were offered at PISGA, and only for high school.
15 Over 70 such PLC courses are to take place at the PISGA centers in the coming year.
16 And see: Frankel, Becker, Rowe, and Pearson (2016), who argued that all four skills — reading, writing, speaking, and listening, should be taught together.

Several reports on the teaching of English in Israel, published in recent years, do not relate to the instruction of reading strategies at all. For example, the *Survey of the teaching of English in Israel 2012-2013*, commissioned by the Clore Israel Foundation Board of Trustees (Olshtain, Inbar, Goldstein, & Yaakov-Aviv, 2014), is concerned with the issue of decoding; and the report on the *English language studies in the educational system*, submitted to the Knesset's Committee of Education (Weissblai, 2014 in Hebrew), is concerned with statistics, such as the number of hours allotted for English, and the number of high school students in the different tracks.

A change is also called for in the preparation programs of English teachers. These programs have failed to cope with the changing needs of our society, particularly with the emerging importance of the ability to read in English, and have also failed to bridge the gap between research and theory on the one hand and the practice of reading instruction on the other:

> The use of research and theory for improving practice has not been consistent. While research continues to produce findings in the same direction, practice seems to move back and forth. More often than not, it moves in a direction that is not supported by research and theory. It would seem that the time has come to give more serious attention to why practice has been so little influenced by existing research (Chall, 1996: xx).

More recently, Baker (2017: 26) also deplored this "gap between research and practice". It would seem that the time has also come to give more serious attention to why reading instruction in English in Israel (and probably in Hebrew, too, to judge from the results on both the local and international exams) has been so little influenced by the existing research as well as by the relevant pedagogical literature. For example, over the last 20 years, TESOL – Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages, the largest international organization of English teachers, has been advocating a "shift from the previous product-oriented and

teacher-fronted pedagogies" (Canagarajah, 2006: 15) to process-oriented and student-centered pedagogies.

My vision, with regard to these changes, is by no means new. In fact, it has guided me for as many years as I have been teaching in both undergraduate and graduate programs at the university and particularly at colleges of education, and have been striving to bridge this gap. This book is, then, one more step in that direction. It is precisely these institutions, which should understand, as the McKinsey report (Barber & Mourshed, 2007: 16) argued, that "the only way to improve outcomes is to improve instruction." This can be achieved only by more appropriate preparation programs as well as by ongoing professional development.[17] My book is, therefore, meant, first and foremost, for English teachers, both pre-service and in-service, who can use it to independently develop and prepare to act as change agents within the system (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Putnam & Borko, 2000), by translating emerging, validated research-based findings into classroom practices. This book is also for English teachers' teachers,[18] who are preparing and training English teachers, for those who are in charge of policies and programs, and for those who develop teaching materials and publish textbooks.

This book differs from most other books on L1 and L2 reading strategies (see: PART FOUR) in three major respects. First, I offer a much larger repertoire of strategies than usually appear in these books. Second, rather than present the strategies in a list, as they usually are, I demonstrate how they are actually used in context. I believe that the best way to expand one's knowledge of reading strategies – both declarative knowledge (*what* strategies students use), and procedural knowledge (*how* students use

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17 See also the more recent McKinsey report (Mourshed, Chijioke, & Barber, 2010: 6), based on the former, which "is invaluable for policy makers and school system leaders who are or should be crafting a roadmap for improving their specific systems".

18 Teachers' teachers may also be interested in the tasks I assigned my undergraduate and graduate students and in the other activities they were engaged in (see: PART THREE).

these strategies), is to learn from authentic examples of students reading, rather than from mere lists of strategies. Third, most of the research and pedagogical literature on L2 strategy use has focused on older (middle school to college undergraduate) students (Lavadenz, 2003; Schweitzer, 2016).[19] In this book, the range of the students is much larger – from 5th graders to college graduates.

The book consists of four parts. In PART ONE, I review the theoretical and research literature pertaining to L2 and L3 reading processes and strategies. In PART TWO, I present the major instrument used in the study of the reading process: *Verbal reporting* – a technique, commonly used in the research to tap into the reading process and obtain data otherwise unobtainable. I also explain how these data are best elicited and analyzed. In PART THREE, I define and illustrate with authentic materials the reading strategies, altogether forty-five strategies good Israeli readers, both school and college students, make use of. In PART FOUR, I present a model of explicit reading strategy instruction and demonstrate how it can be implemented in class. I finally suggest changes in how reading comprehension is assessed.

How to read this book?

I have attempted to organize the book in such a way that it is reader friendly, especially to novices in the field, who might like to start at the beginning and work their way systematically to the end. The book lends itself to being read differently, or in different order, by different readers. Different readers are also likely to find different parts or chapters in the book, or the information I provide in the ample footnotes throughout the book, more relevant to their interests or immediate needs. Some may find, for example, that they are already familiar with the topics

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19   And most of the research on young L1 readers focused on vocabulary acquisition, not strategies. But see: Segev Miller (2003c) for examples of 3rd-11th L1 readers' reading and summarizing strategies.

discussed or reviewed in PART ONE, and may want to skip them and go straight to PART TWO or THREE or even to PART FOUR before they go back to other parts of the book. However, I believe that theoretical and methodological knowledge (PART ONE and PART TWO, respectively) is crucial to understanding both the examples of strategy use and the reading processes of the different readers in PART THREE, as well as the implications of these to instruction and assessment presented in PART THREE and PART FOUR.