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ABSTRACT

This monograph is composed of two papers, one which discusses a study undertaken to examine standardized reading tests in relation to pupils' performance and another which contains samples of materials that could be made available to parents by their children's teachers or by community leaders. The research project analyzed the scores of 61 seventh grade pupils who had taken the Standard Diagnostic Reading Test during the 1971 school year. From the analysis it appeared that only 42 out of 255 items were designed specifically to find out how well the pupil can comprehend printed prose. An examination of the items in the subtests on vocabulary and comprehension suggested that at least 27 of the 82 items could be failed by pupils for reasons other than inability to read. The materials intended for parents' use include samples of things parents can do to help with reading. The first samples are intended for use with younger children who are just beginning to read and contain activities for developing auditory discrimination, visual discrimination, and language development. Activities for older readers are suggested toward the end of the booklet and contain activities for developing comprehension, motivation, and language development. (WR)

TEMPLE UNIVERSITY

of the Commonwealth System of Higher Education

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

TRIPLE "T" PROJECT

MONOGRAPH SERIES

1

WHAT DOES A READING TEST TEST?

Virginia F. Allen

HELPING WITH READING AT HOME

Clinicians and Staff

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For the past four years, with financial support from the U. S. Office of Education, Temple University has been conducting a doctoral level program to prepare leadership personnel in the areas of mathematics and English education. The Trainers of Teacher Trainers program or "Triple T", as it has been called, has focused solely upon education in the urban environment.

The primary objective of the program was to provide teacher trainers and curriculum and instruction specialists with the insights and competencies necessary to provide leadership in inner-city education. This objective was achieved by a three-phase program: academic and professional experiences within the university; internships within the university and inner-city schools; realistic community experiences within the various urban communities of Philadelphia.

During its operational period, thirty-one doctoral students (clinicians) from elementary and secondary schools, colleges, universities, and social organizations were full-time participants. The majority of these were from minority groups. In addition to the student participants there were more than fifty college and school personnel and no less than one hundred community people who had an active involvement. The project indeed brought together, with singular purpose, representatives from the community, public schools, and various colleges of the University.

From the outset an integral part of the program was the creation of innovative curricular and instructional materials and projects; also

a considerable number of papers were written and extensive research was conducted by the participants, an associated research professor, and the project director. The research efforts dealt with virtually every aspect of the project and at this point in time are nearing completion. The materials that follow in this publication, and others in the series, are a means of disseminating the results of TTT's efforts with the hope that others interested in similar problems can profit by the program's experiences. It is also hoped that several of TTT's innovative approaches would be of practical use to schools and teacher training institutions in the common quest to improve education and the training of teachers. *

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April, 1974

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WHAT DOES A READING TEST TEST?

Virginia F. Allen

Virginia F. Allen, Professor of English Education at Temple University, coordinated the activities of Temple's TTT English Education Clinicians during the 1971-72 school year. She is co-author of a handbook on the teaching of beginning reading (Read Along With Me, published by the Teachers College Press) and author of several books for young people and adults with reading problems. Dr. Allen has assisted in developing language tests for the Educational Testing Service at Princeton. Currently she is working on two projects sponsored by the U. S. Information Agency for students and teachers around the world: a series of readers, and a set of video tapes on the teaching of reading.

When a school child takes a standardized test of reading, just what is it that he is required to do? What kinds of tasks are set by the various parts, the subtests which determine his grade-level so far as reading is concerned? How relevant are these tasks to the kind of reading needed for getting information from the printed page?

Because testing procedures and the content of test items are not publicized, for understandable security reasons, most parents and other adult members of the community would be unable to answer any of the foregoing questions. Yet the public is frequently called upon to form judgments about the reading level of school children, and to react to shocking reports based on the results of standardized tests. The public hears appalling statistics regarding seventh graders who are reading "below fourth grade level" for instance. There is a widespread impression that only a tiny fraction of high school graduates can function at all in the world of print.

Since these alarming reports and impressions are generally based upon the scores pupils receive on standardized tests, it might be worthwhile to look closely at one of the widely used tests, noting what kinds of skills are measured by its component parts, studying the pupils' performance on these various parts, and attempting to see how the tested skills relate to the practical task of extracting meaning from print.

During the school year 1971-72 a study related to those points was conducted by the TTT Program at Temple University. (TTT is a federally funded program for the Training of Teacher Trainers, designed to improve the quality of education in inner-city schools.) Irene Randleman, a TTT clinician, was chiefly responsible for collecting the data, with the assistance of clinicians Leatrice Bennett, Yvonne Peterkin and Dorri Phipps.

The TTT research team analyzed the scores of 61 seventh grade pupils[1] who had taken the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test during the 1971 school year. Although these pupils were seventh graders, they had been given the Level I test: "intended for use from the latter part of Grade 2 to the middle of Grade 4."[2] It might be assumed, therefore, that any seventh grade student who performed poorly on this test would indeed be unable to read for all practical purposes. It might further be assumed that any seventh grader scoring below 80% on any part of this test was performing poorly, and belonged below the fourth grade so far as reading proficiency was concerned. The raw scores which had been recorded for each of the subtests were therefore converted into percentage scores. For example, a raw score of 20 (out of the 42 items on Subtest #1) was converted into 48%. A raw score of 39 on the same subtest was converted to 92%. This produced a set of percentage figures which facilitated comparison and discussion of the pupils' performance on the various subtests.

Table I shows the number of pupils within this group of 61 seventh graders who "performed well" (i.e., scored 80% or more) on sections of this standardized test, a test designed for "the middle of Grade 2 to the middle of Grade 4."

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[1] The study began with 70 pupils, but 9 were eliminated when it was found that data on their performance was incomplete.

[2] Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test: Manual for Administering and Interpreting. Level I, Form W (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World), 1966, p.3.

TABLE I

PUPILS SCORING 80% OR ABOVE ON SUBTESTS

Subtest #	Subtest Title	Number of 80+ Scores	Percentage of Population
1	Reading Comprehension	36	59%
2	Vocabulary	12	20%
3	Auditory Discrimination	20	33%
4	Syllabication	24	39%
5	Beginning & End Sounds	46	75%
6	Blending	35	57%
7	Sound Discrimination	7	11%

From Table I it can be seen that, taken as a whole, this group of seventh graders "performed poorly" on the standardized test. On the basis of this evidence, it appears that the label below-fourth-grade could be applied to the reading competence of one quarter of the group (if Subtest #5 is used as a measure in order to focus on the group's highest scores). A more drastic interpretation of the data would lead to the conclusion that almost nine tenths of these pupils are reading below the Grade 4 level (if Subtest #7 is used as the index to reading skill).

Can it be literally true that so many members of this seventh grade group are functioning like primary-grade children in terms of reading proficiency? Perhaps. But first a closer look at the data.

From Table I it is clear that each of the seven subtests is intended to measure a different aspect of reading proficiency, and that the scores on some subtests were much lower than the scores on others. For instance, 36 of the pupils scored 80% or above on Reading Comprehension, but only 7

achieved 80+ scores on the Sound Discrimination items. Apparently the skill of perceiving and discriminating among sounds per se (measured by Subtest #7) has been mastered by only 7 of these seventh graders, although the skill of Reading Comprehension (measured by Subtest #1) was demonstrated satisfactorily by 36 members of the group. This raises some questions of interest to teachers of reading. The ability to recognize sounds and to distinguish between sounds is generally considered to be a first step along the road to reading proficiency, a foundation upon which to build the "more advanced" skill of reading comprehension. Yet, as seen in Table I, many of these seventh graders were able to handle the Reading Comprehension items successfully, even though they had trouble recognizing and discriminating among speech sounds--according to this standardized test.

Table II shows how this apparent paradox worked out in terms of the performance of individual pupils within the group. The Table focuses upon the 36 pupils who scored 80% or above on the Reading Comprehension items, and indicates how each of those pupils performed on the Sound Discrimination subtest.

Table II reveals a striking lack of consistency between Reading Comprehension scores and scores on the Sound Discrimination subtest. Among the 26 pupils who scored between 90 and 100 on the Reading Comprehension Section, the scores on Sound Discrimination ranged from 19 to 94, the mean score being 53%.

Furthermore, as Table II indicates, only 7 of the 36 pupils who had scored 80% or above on Reading Comprehension were able to score 80+ on the Sound Discrimination subtest -- this despite the fact that the recognition of sounds is viewed as an essential first step in many reading

TABLE II

SOUND DISCRIMINATION SUBTEST SCORES
OF PUPILS SCORING 80% OR ABOVE ON READING COMPREHENSION

Pupil	Reading Comprehension Subtest Score	Sound Discrimination Subtest Score
S-20	100%	92%
S-30	100	83
S-16	100	64
S-65	100	53
S-62	100	44
S-38	100	36
S-52	100	33
S-14	97	94
S-12	97	56
S-35	97	53
S-53	97	42
S-15	95	81
S-13	95	64
S-66	95	61
S-61	95	50
S-9	95	31
S-21	92	94
S-31	92	72
S-17	92	53
S-37	92	42
S-41	92	28
S-90	90	92
S-4	90	67
S-26	90	53
S-11	90	47
S-68	90	19
S-23	88	69
S-24	88	67
S-37	88	67
S-42	88	56
S-25	88	31
S-3	86	81
S-22	86	56
S-40	86	28
S-27	83	31
S-57	81	31

programs. How can this inconsistency be explained? Are reading specialists wrong in theorizing that perception of speech sounds is crucial to reading comprehension? Or is there something about Subtest #7 of this standardized test that makes it an unreliable gauge of the child's actual ability to discriminate among sounds?

Since the data for these two subtests do raise questions, it would be well to find out what each of the two involves.

Analysis of Subtests

Subtest #1, Reading Comprehension, contains 42 items, each item consisting of two or three short sentences. From information offered in the first sentence of the item, the pupil is expected to deduce which of four given words "belongs" in the rest of the passage. Here are the DIRECTIONS and SAMPLES for the Reading Comprehension Subtest.

DIRECTIONS: Find the one word that belongs in each space, and make a cross in the circle in front of that word. Do not write in the spaces.

SAMPLES
The mouse ran away from the cat.
The cat ran after the __A__.

A ○ dog ○ boy ○ mouse ○ horse

.....

The hen is white. Every day she lays one __B__.
She has __C__ legs.

B ○ chick ○ feather ○ nest ○ egg

C ○ two ○ three ○ four ○ six

.....

It will be noted that the Reading Comprehension subtest requires procedures quite familiar to most Americans who have undergone the educational process. Although the mechanics involved are more conducive to the convenience of the adult scoring the test than to relaxed, confident reading on the part of the pupil, nevertheless the Reading Comprehension section does appear capable of measuring a skill undeniably relevant to reading proficiency: the ability to keep the sense of one sentence in mind while making assumptions about the sentences which follow. It also measures certain less relevant factors, to be discussed later in this report, which may shed light on the poor performance of these inner-city seventh graders. However, the foregoing glimpse of the Reading Comprehension subtest is enough to show that scores on this part of the standardized test might be of some significance in assessing a child's ability to read.

Turning now to Subtest #7, Sound Discrimination, here are the DIRECTIONS and SAMPLES:

DIRECTIONS: Make a cross in the circle beside one of the last three words in each line that has the same sound as the sound which is underlined in the first word.

SAMPLES

A	l<u>i</u>ke	○	will	○	it	○	ride ○
B	m<u>a</u>y	○	man	○	cake	○	my ○

.....

In order to succeed in this subtest, the pupil must disregard the spelling of familiar words, and decide how each word would sound if it

were to be said aloud. For instance, he must decide whether the last syllable of circus would sound more like use, Christmas, or shoes (item 8); whether let sounds more like be, year or friend (item 13); whether soon sounds more like door, do or done (item 22); whether the last syllable of ocean sounds like lion, mission or clean (item 29) and so on.

University professors who have conducted linguistics courses for graduate students can testify to the fact that even highly literate adults often need special training before they can focus unerringly upon the sounds of words apart from letters used for spelling the words. Being able to perform the task required by this Stanford subtest is a useful skill to acquire: stenographers cannot learn shorthand without being able to distinguish between sounds and letters; phonetic transcriptions are based on such distinctions; there are a number of reasons why people should develop this skill. The fact remains, however, that millions of Americans have become expert readers without having mastered it. (It is interesting to note that the Manual urges the teacher: "Do not attempt to score the subtests without using the key.") Thus, it is not strange that so few 80+ scores were achieved on this part of the standardized test by these seventh graders, whose attention for years had been directed to the letters used in spelling a word, rather than to the sounds used in pronouncing it. Any assessment of over-all reading proficiency which is based in part upon the pupil's ability to perform this task may well be suspect.

In comparison with the Sound Discrimination subtest, then, the Reading Comprehension section of this standardized test might appear to yield a more accurate picture of the child's ability to read. But the

Reading Comprehension items comprise only a fraction of the total examination, as Table III indicates. The Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test contains 255 items, of which only 42 are designed to measure Reading Comprehension (16% of the total).

TABLE III

NUMBER OF ITEMS AND NUMBER OF MINUTES PER SUBTEST

Subtest #	Subtest Title	Number of Items	Minutes
1	Reading Comprehension	42	30
2	Vocabulary	40	20
3	Auditory Discrimination	45	20
4	Syllabication	20	12
5	Beginning and Ending Sounds	36	20
6	Blending	36	20
7	Sound Discrimination	36	15
	Total	255	137

Table III shows that pupils answer Reading Comprehension questions during only 30 of the 137 minutes allowed for demonstrating their reading competence. The remaining 107 minutes are devoted to the assessment of other skills (including the highly sophisticated skill represented by subtest #7, Sound Discrimination). It may be useful to keep such information in mind when newspapers publish evidence of reading disability based upon a standardized test. The concerned citizen might wish to know what proportion of the test had a direct bearing upon the pupils' ability to get meaning from print.

Since Subtest #1 of the Stanford Diagnostic Test is the only section specifically intended to measure Reading Comprehension, a closer look at its items might be in order, keeping in mind such queries as the following: To what extent does choice of the "correct" answer depend upon guessing what the examiner expects one to choose? Are there points at which such expectations might conflict with some other basis for choice, e.g., the kind of reasoning that takes into account how language is used in real life situations? How might the child's own life experiences lead him to choose a "wrong" answer, even though he may understand the printed passage very well? Which items may suggest that language functions differently in normal life situations than in standardized test items? In short, are there items in the Reading Comprehension subtest which could be "failed" without necessarily demonstrating a child's inability to read with comprehension?

An examination of the Reading Comprehension subtest would suggest that an inner-city child could fail several of the 42 items through the simple misfortune of applying what experience in the real world has taught him to consider logical. Here are a few of the many examples:

Item 2: It was Tom's birthday.
He laughed.
He was _____.

crying sleeping little happy

(Of course the adult examiner considers happy the obvious choice; literature is full of people who "laugh for joy," though few of us can recall having seen real life people doing so. To the pragmatic seventh --or fourth--grader, laughter may well connote silliness rather than

happiness; and a boy who laughs at his birthday party is likely to be little.)

Item 7: The pencil has a long point.
It makes a thin line.
The pencil is _____.

thick dull rough sharp

(This item again illustrates the potential conflict between real-life language usage and the special use of language required by standardized tests. Sophisticated test-takers realize that such an item is basically a disguised definition, requiring sharp for its completion. In the real world, however, people seldom state that a pencil is sharp if they have already said it has a long point and makes a thin line. Having established the fact of its sharpness, the speaker would more probably add a new fact: e.g., that it is also thick -- if indeed he considers the pencil worth discussing at all.)

Item 12: There was a fire down the street.
A house was _____.

noisy fighting afraid burning

(Here is another case of potential conflict between commonsense communication and the special brand of language use expected of test-takers. Naturally the house was burning if there was a fire. But this looks like the beginning of a story, which in real life might be enhanced by the addition of a more interesting fact: that the house was noisy in the excitement of the fire.)

Item 19: Bill and Jane played with the ball.
Jane threw it to _____.

Bob Bill a basket mother

(If the pupil applies the logic of experience to this situation, he may well choose to develop the plot of the story -- introducing Bob or Mother into the ball game -- rather than to restate the obvious.)

At least 14 of the 42 Reading Comprehension items could be missed by a child who understood the items but who failed to apply the special brand of logic required for successful test-taking. In the experience of many children -- and of adults as well, unless they are teachers -- language functions chiefly for the purpose of self-expression, or for informing or entertaining people; and the word that "belongs" in a sentence may well be the word which contributes an element of drama or adds a new detail to the story. This practical view of language appears to be particularly characteristic of children and adolescents from lower class families, where there is less experience with the particular kind of intellection demanded by test items of this sort. Many middle class children (and a few others) have identified with their teachers closely enough to have mastered this aspect of test-taking; they have learned to set aside their normal expectations of how language works while guessing what the teacher or tester expects them to answer.

Thus one may wonder how accurate a measure, after all, is really provided by the Reading Comprehension section of this standardized test.

The same uncertainty prevails when one examines the items of the Vocabulary section (Subtest #2), on which only 12 of these 61 students

scored 80% or above. It is alarming to learn that only 20% of these seventh graders appear to have acquired a fourth-grade vocabulary. Upon examination of the Vocabulary items, however, it appears that at least 8 of the 40 items could be "incorrectly" answered by a pupil simply because his experience with life situations would lead him to consider a "wrong" answer a possibly logical choice.

For example:

Item 3: If you are unable to do something, you _____.

will do it wish to do it can't do it

(To the test-wise, can't do it is the obvious answer. However, many a child has learned from experience that if you are unable to do something, you often wish to do it. Thus, you wish to do it is just as "true" as you can't do it.)

Item 8: A car driven in reverse goes _____.

slowly backwards fast

(From the point of view of normal language communication, why is backwards more "correct" than slowly?)

Item 36: One kind of anniversary is a _____.

poem celebration birthday

(Rare is the child who considers a birthday an anniversary; those few children familiar with anniversaries are more likely to associate them with celebrations.)

In addition to 8 items that one might question as unreliable indicators

on the basis of logic, there are at least 5 Vocabulary items which are of doubtful significance because they test the pupil's familiarity with vocabulary words which are rarely found in reading materials. For example:

Item 1: Something dreadful makes a person _____.

scarce careful frightened

(The word dreadful is used very infrequently in contemporary writing. Even thirty years ago, when the Thorndike-Lorge frequency list was compiled, dreadful was found only 43 times in a text of a million running words.[1])

Item 6: A person who wanders is one who _____.

roams thinks watches

(According to the frequency list of 1944, roam -- the answer expected for completing this item -- was found only 19 times in a text of a million words. Having heard the teacher read the item aloud, a student who pronounces wanders like wonders would naturally associate it with the much more frequently used word, thinks.)

Item 7: A birch is a kind of _____.

tree animal fish

(The word birch is even less frequently found in reading materials -- only 16 times per million words, according to the Thorndike-Lorge count. Unfamiliarity with birches should not be construed as evidence of reading

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[1]Edward L. Thorndike and Irving Lorge. The Teacher's Word Book of 30,000 Words. (New York: Teachers College Bureau of Publications), 1944.

disability, especially when the pupil is an inner-city child.)

When the 5 items requiring an acquaintance with relatively rare words are added to the 8 items demanding the application of special test-taking logic (rather than the kind of logic operating in real communication situations) it appears that at least 13 of the 40 Vocabulary items could be missed without necessarily proving anything about the child's ability to read. The significance of scores on this section of the standardized test may therefore be questioned.

As a matter of fact, there is another section of the Stanford test which actually does test knowledge of vocabulary, though that is apparently not its intention. Subtest #5, Beginning and Ending Sounds, presents the student with a page of pictures. Part A of the subtest gives him the following task: "Make a cross in the circle beside the letter or letters of the beginning sounds of what you see in the pictures." Part B directs him to indicate the ending sound.

Obviously the child cannot perform either of these tasks without knowing the word which the picture is intended to suggest. The 36 words represented by the pictures are gun, plate, elephant, frog, spoon, grape, orange, cross, wheel, scooter, insect, chain, thread, string, envelope, fox, mouth, tub, match, table, lamp, pray, bow, bridge, bricks, chimney, fence, doctor, claw, raft, carrot, curvy, and soldier. Most of these are admittedly "easy" words for a seventh grader, one would assume -- if it were not for the fact that in recent years several reports have conveyed the impression that children from low-income homes lack even the most elementary vocabulary. In light of such reports, it is interesting, and encouraging, to see that the 61 pupils studied by the TTT research team scored higher on this subtest

(Section 5) than on any other section of the examination: 46 of the 61 scored 80% or above (whereas only 12 members of the group scored 80+ on the Vocabulary subtest, and only 7 scored 80+ on the Sound Discrimination items). This suggests that the group may be less severely handicapped than those two subtests would indicate, so far as vocabulary and the ability to recognize sounds are concerned.

To complete this exploration of tasks a pupil is called upon to perform when he takes the Stanford Reading Diagnostic Test, three subtests remain to be discussed: Test 3 (Auditory Discrimination), Test 4 (Syllabication) and Test 6 (Blending). Together they account for 93 of the 137 minutes allotted to the pupil for demonstrating his ability to read.

The Auditory Discrimination test begins with the following directions: "Listen to the two words your teacher reads. Then make a cross through the B on the [pupil's] answer sheet if the words begin the same, through the E if they end the same, or through the M (in questions 16-45) if the middle sound is the same."

The reader of this report may wish to test his skill on the following items included in this subtest:

Item 19. sugar - shovel

Item 24. pullover - thoroughness

Item 27. division - develop

Item 41. buzz - pause

Item 44. interpret - disturbance

Item 45. physician - permission

If the adult reader has experienced any hesitancy in deciding whether the two words of a pair are alike in their beginning, middle or ending

sounds, he need not conclude that his reading level is therefore "below Grade 4." Education trains people to pay attention to letters, rather than to sounds, when they read. It is not surprising that only 20 of the 61 seventh graders scored 80% or above on this Auditory Discrimination subtest.

The Syllabication test requires the student to indicate which of three choices is the first syllable of the word which is printed before the choices. Sample items from this subtest are the following:

Item 7.	riddle	ri	rid	ridd
Item 9.	after	a	af	aft
Item 18.	have	h	ha	have
Item 20	here	h	he	here

The subject of syllable-breaks remains a mystery to most Americans well into adulthood; many proficient readers and writers depend upon a dictionary to guide them in breaking words into syllables whenever a word must be divided. Understandably, only 24 of these 61 seventh graders scored 80% or above on Syllabication.

The Blending section of the Stanford test is presented to the pupil as "a test to find out how well you can put sounds together to make words." For example, when the teacher pronounces the word bird, the child is expected to mark the "b" circle, to show that "b" is the first sound in bird. Next he is to mark the circle beside "ir" to show that this is the second sound in bird. Finally he marks the circle beside "d" because "d" is the last sound in that word.

Apparently the test-makers anticipated trouble with the mechanics of this section; the teacher is instructed: "Walk about the room as you give

the items to be sure that each pupil knows how to do the test."

The first five words pronounced by the teacher are lamb, breath, dream, marble, and brick. The pupil hears each word without seeing it,[1] and marks his answer sheet, which looks like this:

1.	○	s	○	a	○	mb
	○	l	○	e	○	nd
2.	○	br	○	oa	○	th
	○	tr	○	ea	○	ph
3.	○	dr	○	ea	○	n
	○	br	○	i	○	m
4.	○	b	○	ar	○	ll
	○	m	○	ra	○	ble

[1] In order to appreciate how hard it is to hear distinctly a word spoken in isolation (i.e., spoken alone, out of normal context) one need only recall the many times one has been asked to spell a name to the listener. A test which requires accurate identification of the sounds in a word heard out of context fails to take into account this basic difficulty, which has nothing to do with reading competence.

5. ○ tr ○ i ○ ch

○ br ○ e ○ ck

.....

One may well ask what this subtest actually tests. Clearly it does not serve its announced purpose ("to find out how well you can put sounds together to make words"). What it measures is the special kind of mental agility required for separating a heard word into its component parts, and matching each part with a circle beside a letter or letters representing a sound or sounds. Some children become adept at this sort of mental gymnastics, particularly children who have learned that teachers prize such performances, and that it pays to please the teacher. The point here, however, is that scores based on such a test prove little about a pupil's ability to derive information from print. With regard to the seventh grade group studied by the TTT research team, it is doubtful that grave significance should be attached to the fact that only 35 of the 61 students scored 80% or above on Blending.

CONCLUSIONS

From the foregoing analysis of the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test, it appears that only 42 out of 255 items are designed specifically to find out how well the pupil can comprehend printed prose. (These are the Reading Comprehension items in Subtest #1.) Even if the 40 Vocabulary items of Subtest #2 are added to this figure, only 82 out of the total 255 items are potential indicators of actual reading ability, in the practical sense of the term.

An examination of the items in these two subtests has suggested that at least 27 of these 82 items (33% of them) could be "failed" by pupils for reasons other than inability to read. These are items which require familiarity with words rarely used, or which involve a potential conflict between the test-maker's logic and the logic born of the pupil's experience in the real world.

Reports of reading disability based on this standardized test (or on other tests similar to this one) can therefore be assumed to be exaggerated. This is particularly true if the pupils involved have had little opportunity, or little incentive, to develop the middle class child's knack of guessing what adults expect him to do in such a test situation.

Many pupils in American schools do lack reading proficiency. It is even possible that many seventh graders are actually reading "below fourth grade level." Evidence based on pupils' performance in social studies and other subject matter fields requiring reading skill has proved beyond question the urgent need for more efficient teaching of reading.

The Temple University TTT study suggests, however, that schools should be wary of relying on standardized tests for guidance in designing remedial programs for disabled readers. It would be unfortunate, for instance, if the 54 seventh graders who scored below 80% on the Stanford Sound Discrimination subtest were to be put through an intensive course in sound recognition, as a consequence of having performed poorly on this part of the standardized test. The subtest is, as has been shown, a dubious instrument for measuring sound recognition; besides, more than half of the 54 with low scores on the Sound Discrimination section demonstrated an ability to read with comprehension.

The TTT study also serves to remind the public that newspaper accounts of reading deficiencies among school children ought not to engender panic or despair. The accounts may well be distorting the shape of the problem, if they are based on standardized tests.

The TTT Clinicians were doctoral students in English Education at Temple University. They all had had previous teaching experience in classrooms in urban schools throughout the United States.

Virginia F. Allen, Professor of English Education at Temple Univer ity, directed the English Education Program for the TTT Project during 1971-72, with the assistance of David Miller, a Teaching Associate in English Education at Temple University.

HELPING WITH

R E A D I N G

AT HOME

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PREFACE

This booklet contains samples of materials that could be made available to concerned parents by their children's teachers or by community leaders. The need for such materials came to our attention while we were working as TTT Clinicians in Philadelphia schools. When we discussed the subject of reading with our pupils' parents, we discovered that many were eager to supplement the school program by helping their children with reading at home. Several parents, even in the "poorest" neighborhoods, had already found ways of doing so. Others who wanted to help had doubts about their ability to improve their children's reading skills. They felt they could not do anything useful about reading without having had special training.

When we looked for guidelines to put into their hands, we found none that seemed quite right. Hard-working parents have little time to read about theories and methods of teaching reading; and most advice written by specialists is too academic to communicate readily with parents who have not had much formal education.

What we wanted was a set of leaflets, each a page or two in length, describing in simple terms some activity that a parent could easily initiate in the home. Along with instructions for setting up the activity, we wanted a very brief statement showing how this activity was related to an important fact about learning to read.

Finding no such materials in print, we prepared a few samples ourselves. Originally we hoped to have them printed, one each week, in a city newspaper that finds its way into our pupils' homes. Perhaps, we thought, parents who happened to see one of the activities described in

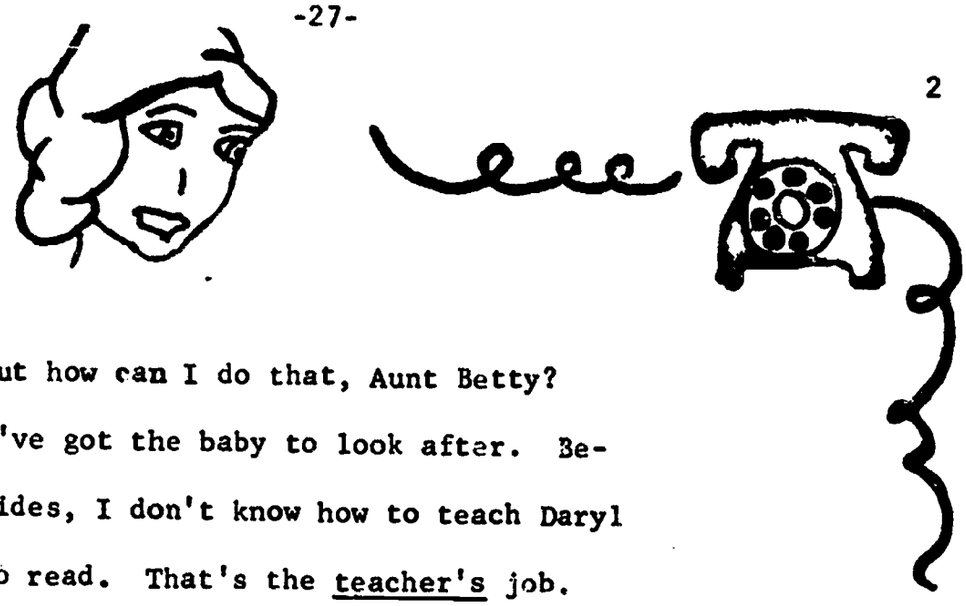
the newspaper would try it.

Since that means of reaching parents has not worked out, we have bound our samples together in this booklet, though we would have preferred to have parents learn about one activity at a time, as "something you can try with your child today."

First ...

to listen in on a telephone conversation --

please turn the page.



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SHARON: But how can I do that, Aunt Betty? I've got the baby to look after. Besides, I don't know how to teach Daryl to read. That's the <u>teacher's</u> job.

AUNT BETTY: You can help, though. There's lots of ways.

SHARON: Like what?

AUNT BETTY: Simple things, like asking him every day, "What did you do in school today?" Show an interest. Show him you care how he's doing in school.

SHARON: He claims he <u>hates</u> school. He hates to read.

AUNT BETTY: If he hates to read, then you read <u>to</u> him. Every day read him a story you like, and let him talk about it.

SHARON: A story! I can't go around buying story books...

AUNT BETTY: I'll bet you've got a public library nearby. Get a couple of library books and keep them in the house a while. Or ask his teacher for some, and keep them around for a few days.

SHARON: He won't read them.

AUNT BETTY: Maybe not right away. But after a while he'll take a peek into one of them. Then some day you take him to the library and let him get his own library card. Ask the librarian to help you find some books he'd like.

SHARON: I don't have time.

AUNT BETTY: You've got to make time, girl! You find time to buy him clothes. You've got to squeeze out a little time for helping him learn.

SHARON: But the school --

AUNT BETTY: You know which children learn best in school? The ones that get help at home, that's who.

SHARON: Well, I'll try reading to him, but --

AUNT BETTY: Don't act like it was hard work. Enjoy it! This is your chance to get acquainted with Daryl before it's too late.

SHARON: Before it's too late?

AUNT BETTY: First thing you know, he'll be grown up and away from you, child. He'll be off on the street. And you'll be wondering what he's up to. You won't even know him. Get to know him now. Talk to him. When he asks you something, take time to answer his questions.

SHARON: What's that got to do with reading?

AUNT BETTY: A lot. He can't be a good reader without learning to think. Asking questions has a lot to do with thinking . . . Does he do his homework?

SHARON: I don't know.

AUNT BETTY: Ask his teacher. Ask Daryl every night, "What about your homework?" Make him do his homework before he watches TV. Give him a quiet corner with a good light, where he can read and write.

SHARON: Maybe that worked for you, Aunt Betty. Your children did O.K. in school, but --

AUNT BETTY: They were no brighter than anybody else's children. But do you know what? I made up my mind they were going to learn, and I let them know it. I expected my kids to make something of themselves. I believed they could if they tried. I never let them forget that.

SHARON: All right. I'll get some books. He does read comics once in a while.

AUNT BETTY: There! That's where you start. Some comics aren't too bad. Get some. Get some magazines, too, and leave them lying around handy.

SHARON: Well, I'll try. But I'm no teacher.

AUNT BETTY: Parents are the best teachers, honey! Nobody knows a child like his own parents do.

* * * * *

So ...

What can parents do?

(Please turn the page.)

On the following pages, you will find samples of things parents can do to help with reading. In general, the first samples are for younger children who are just beginning to read. Activities for older readers are suggested toward the end of the booklet. But you may find that some of the easier things are interesting for older children, too.

Some of the most important ways of helping children can't be written up as samples. They include

_____ playing games that make children think

(For example: Say, "I'm thinking of something in this room -- or something that starts with the letter s. See if you can guess what it is.")

_____ making up part of a story and getting the child to think of an ending for the story.

_____ getting the child to help you make a list of things to buy at the grocery store.

(You say what you need to buy, and he writes it down.)

_____ encouraging the child to read signs to you while you are walking together around the city, or getting him to read labels on cans and medicine bottles.

_____ making a habit of reading yourself every day, and showing him you enjoy it.

JUST A FEW MINUTES A DAY CAN DO WONDERS. IT REALLY WORKS!

HAPPY AND SAD

If your child can't read many words yet, give him a pencil, and say:

"I'm going to tell you some words. When you hear a word that begins with the H sound, write an H on the Happy Face. When you hear a word that begins with the S sound, write an S on the Sad Face."

Then read the child these words:

happy

sad

sun

hit

sat

hop

hut

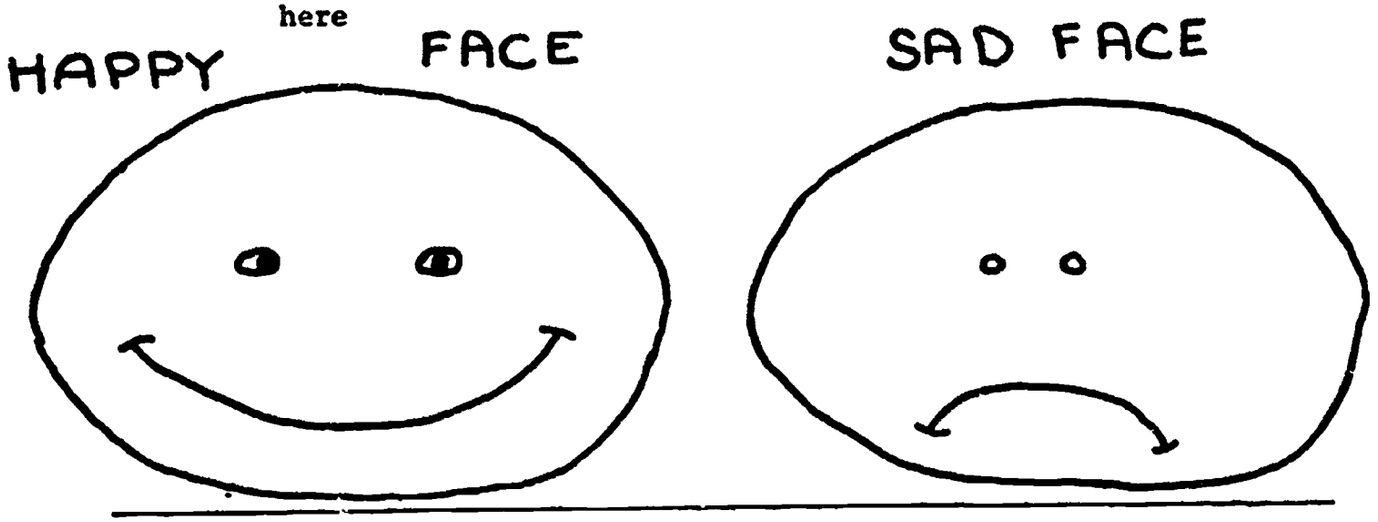
some

house

seven

sand

here



Sometimes writing helps a child learn to read.

WORD DETECTIVE

If you have a very young reader who has trouble telling one word from another, give the child a pencil and say:

"Let's see how good a detective you are."

Then ask the child to -

1. Draw a circle around the word that is not like the other words:

   big pig pig pig

2. Draw circles around the words that start with the same sound:

   then hat that bed

3. Draw circles around the words that rhyme:

   mouse men house had

Noticing how words look and sound

is an important part

of learning to read.

MADE-UP STORIES

Young children love to hear stories that you make-up about them, your family, and other children their age. Since they also enjoy following older people around, you can sometimes tell stories while you are doing things around the house (making beds, washing clothes, etc.). You don't have to stop what you are doing to tell a made-up story. The story can be about anything, such as

_____ what you are doing at that time

_____ something children enjoy (skating, bicycling, playing outside)

_____ some way you'd like your child to behave

_____ a fairy tale using your child's name and other family names instead of the usual ones

Here is the way you could start telling the old favorite, The Three Bears, for instance, if you are making it up for a child named Wally:

> I'm going to tell you a story about a little boy named Wally. One day Wally was walking in the woods. He saw a little house. He walked up to the door and knocked. When no one answered, Wally walked in. Nobody was home. Three bears lived in the house. Their names were . . . .

Generally, good readers in school

are children who enjoyed hearing stories around home.

MATCHING WORDS

1. Cut along the lines on this page so as to make 8 slips of paper (or get your child to do this).

then	think
than	thank
then	think
thank	than

(After that, see the next page.)

2. Read each word to the child while he looks at the slip. Show him that some words are exactly alike; they match. But other words (like then and than) look a little different. Of course they have different meanings, too.

3. Shuffle the slips and spread them out on a table, face up. See if the child can match up the words that look alike.

4. When he can match the pairs easily, make the game harder by shuffling the slips and turning them face down. The child turns the slips over, one by one. When he matches a pair he removes the slips and gets one point for each pair.

Sometimes a little difference in looks

makes a big difference in the meanings of words.

THE DAY-OF-THE-WEEK GAME

Children over five years old may enjoy this game. It can be played by one child with a parent, or by several people:

PARENT: What day is today?

CHILD: Today is _____.

PARENT: What sound does _____ begin with?

After the child has pronounced the sound, you say:

"Let's see how many things we can find around here that begin with that same sound."

Note: The best days for this game are Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday. The other days start with sounds that are harder for children to hear.

Paying attention to the first sound in a word is an important step in learning to read.

TAG DAY

If your child can't read words like BOX and TABLE, here is something to try:

1. Every once in a while, have a Tag Day, when you get your child to help you put labels on things around the house. Have labels like these ready to tie or tape onto things they name:

CHAIR	FLOOR
DOOR	SINK
BOX	TUB
TABLE	BED

2. Ask the child to go and get a word card (for instance, DOOR). When he brings it, ask him to say the word.

3. Have the child trace the letters with his fingers while he says the word.

Letters stand for sounds.

Sounds go together to make words.

Words stand for things and ideas.

JUNE

1. Say to the child:

   "June is a happy month. Many happy things go on during the month of June.

   Look at the picture and tell me about some happy things that happen in June. I'll write down the words you say."

2. Help the child read the words you have written down (the words he said).

The words on a page are words that people <u>say</u>.

THINKING ABOUT WORDS

Say to the child:

"I'm going to read you one of the words from this Word Box. See if you can think of three other words that have something to do with the word I say. Tell me the words that come to your mind when you hear my word from the Word Box. For instance, if I say DOCTOR, maybe you'll think of SICK, MEDICINE, or HOSPITAL."

WORD BOX

car	doctor
baseball	pillow
dinner	television
toy	clothes

Thinking is an important part of reading.

LAST WORDS

Say to the child:

"Let's play a game called LAST WORDS. Here are some rhymes. The last word of each rhyme is missing. Listen, and see if you can think of a good last word to make the verse rhyme."

1. Candy is sweet.
   It's good to _____.

2. Sit in that chair
   While I comb your _____.

3. Rain, rain, go away
   Come again some other _____.

4. Children like to play with toys.
   Children make a lot of _____.

5. There once was a cat
   That caught a big _____.

6. Every night when I go to bed
   The pillow is where I lay my _____.

7. Red is a color. Green is, too.
   So is purple. So is _____.

8. When the light is green, you can go ahead.
   But be sure to STOP when the light is _____.

9. Pick your clothes up off that floor!
   Somebody's knocking at the _____.

10. Don't forget to be home by eight.
    You'll be sorry if you're _____.

Practice in listening and thinking

helps children learn to read.

SILLY STORIES

Say to the child:

"Let's think of some words that rhyme with BUG. How many can you think of?"

(Write down the words that the child gives you. Then ask him to make up a silly story using those words. For example, if he gives you BUG, RUG, and MUG, the story might be:

THE BUG ON THE RUG FELL INTO A MUG.)

Then do the same for each of these words:

BAT _____

MOUSE _____

TOP _____

MAN _____

RING _____

_____

Having fun with words

can help a child learn to read.

_____

WHICH WORDS DON'T BELONG?

Say: "Five extra words got into this story by mistake. They don't belong in the story. See if you can find the five words that don't belong here. Take this pencil and put an X through every word that got into the story by mistake. The first extra word is <u>of</u>."

One day Edward was walking along the ✕ street. It was a beautiful morning cup. Suddenly a truck swim came up beside him. A man leaned out of the window and shouted with at Edward. The man had a gun, so Edward pipe ran into the nearest doorway.

Noticing what words say
is an important part of reading

WHAT'S WRONG HERE?

Say: "There's something wrong here. Read what it says and see if you can straighten things out."

1. Sometimes Jane is happy. Sometimes Jane is sad. She cries when she is happy. She laughs when she is sad.

2. Sometimes William is hungry after school. Sometimes William is thirsty after school. He drinks coke when he is hungry. When he is thirsty, he eats a peanut butter sandwich.

3. Sandra and Debbie are twins. They look exactly alike. Sandra is tall and thin. She has a long face. Debbie is short and fat. Her face is very round.

An important part of reading
is thinking about what the words say.

MAKING SOMETHING GOOD

Here is one way to help your child want to read.

Let the child prepare something good to eat --
something the child has never made before.

It should be something simple, like a cake mix or
a pizza mix.

Get the child to read aloud all of the directions,
so that you both know what is needed. Then stay near by,
in case your help is needed.

A child learns

when he feels a need to learn.

STORYTIME

Once upon a time there was a black child named James. When he was ten years old, he died and went to heaven.

James was an active child, so St. Peter gave him a brand new set of wings. St. Peter said, "Now, don't fly around too much. Don't disturb the other angels."

The boy said, "All right, St. Peter." However, he was so happy with his new wings, he just flew and flew, all around. He flew up and he flew down. He forgot about St. Peter's warning.

One day St. Peter called James and warned him again. "Didn't I tell you not to fly around so much?"

"All right, St. Peter. I won't [illegible] it no more," said James. But the little black angel forgot again, as soon as he left St. Peter.

All of a sudden a bolt of lightning cut right through the sky. James lost his wings and was sent down to the devil.

"See what happens when you don't obey?" the devil asked.

"Yeah," said James. "[illegible]t I sure had a lot of fun flying while I was up there!"

****

After reading the story aloud to your child, see if he can do the following:

1. Draw a picture of James with his new wings.

2. Draw a picture of the devil.

3. Find two places in the story where James says:

"All right, St. Peter."

4. Tell you why James kept on flying when St. Peter warned him not to.

Listening to stories and talking them over

can help a child learn to read.

WHY BOTHER TO READ?

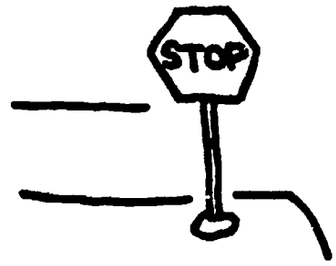
1. Read this to your child:

Once there was a little child who did not want to read. He wouldn't try -- no matter what his parents and teachers said or did.

One day he found a dime, and he wanted to go to the candy store on Main Street to spend it. But every one was too busy to take him. He had to go by himself.

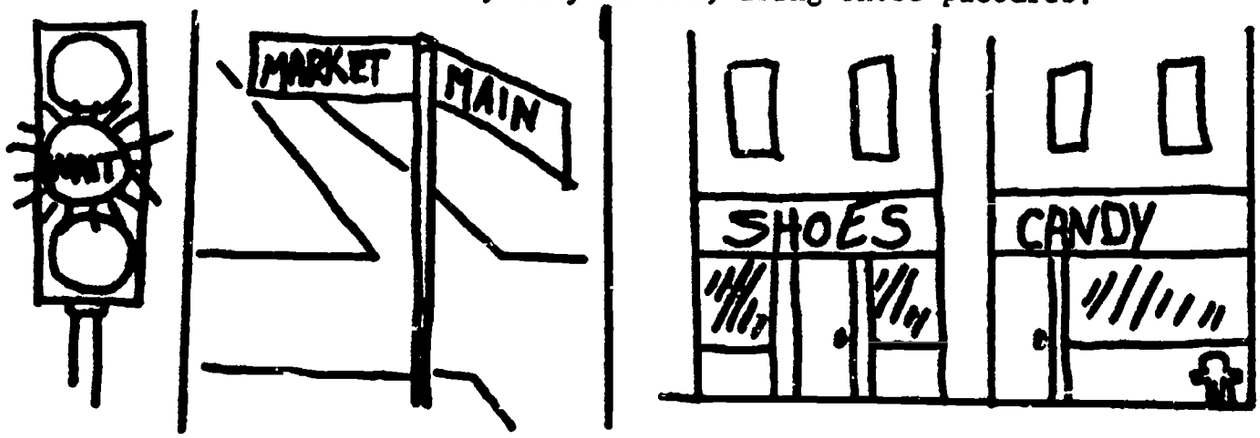
He walked to the corner;

there he saw this sign.



What do you think he did? (Remember -- he couldn't read!)

2. Continue the story on your own, using these pictures:



THE SNOW SURPRISE

1. Say to the child, "Let's look at the story together. I'll read it to you."

One cold, snowy afternoon, Mr. Johnson decided to clean off the snow on the walkway in front of his garage.

"De de dum dum," Mr. Johnson happily hummed as he shoveled the snow into a heap at the edge of the walk.

He lifted shovel after shovel of the soft white snow, until the door of the garage could be opened.

Then, suddenly, it happened. Look at the picture and finish the story. Tell what you think happened to Mr. Johnson.

2. Write down what the child says, using printed letters. Then read aloud what you have written.

What we read is <u>talk written down</u>.

HIS LUCKY DAY

Here is a story for readers above Grade 5, from the Evening Bulletin (April 19, 1972). The questions below the story will find out how well the story is understood.

In Sao Paulo, Brazil, Arnaldo Bisoni had a ticket for an airliner that crashed and killed twenty-five persons, but he missed the flight because he lacked proper identification for boarding. Feeling lucky, he bought a lottery ticket -- and won.

1. What were the two kinds of tickets in this story?
2. Why didn't the man get on the airplane?
3. Why did he buy a lottery ticket?
4. What do you think he said when he heard about the airplane crash?
5. Is Brazil in North America, South America, Europe or Asia?

Often there are interesting short stories in the newspaper to read aloud and talk about. This is a cheap, easy way to help children with their reading.

WHAT DOES IT ALL ADD UP TO?

Parents can help their children learn to read.

How can you help?

-- Talk things over with your children. Answer their questions.

-- Show an interest in their school work. Ask, "How did you do in school today?"

-- Ask, "How about your homework for tomorrow?" Make sure that is done before they watch TV.

-- Tell them stories, and get them to talk about what happened in each story. Listen to what they say.

-- If your child tells you a story, write part of it down, and help him read it back to you.

-- Read aloud to your children. Read them comics, if that's what they like. Find interesting pieces in the newspaper to read aloud.

-- Show them you enjoy reading. Make the reading time seem like fun.

Other ways to help:

-- Take them to the library. Ask the children's librarian to show you some books they might like.

-- Play guessing games and rhyming games with your family while you're working around the house, or eating meals, or waiting for a bus.

-- Get your children to read signs you pass while you're out together. Get them to read labels on canned goods. Praise them for trying to read.

-- Help them notice the sounds in words.

-- Get them to notice how words look -- especially the words they use every day.

-- Find ways to make reading seem worth doing. (If you've bought them a game they wanted, get them to read the instructions, to tell you how to play the game.)

WANTING TO LEARN ... FEELING A NEED TO LEARN ... TRYING TO LEARN, AND BEING PRAISED FOR TRYING - - - These make the biggest difference when children are learning to read.
