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ABSTRACT

The key role of reading as a receptive skill in the communication process has long been recognized. Reading instruction must be a planned, sequential, continuous process from kindergarten through grade 12. Reading is a complex task which requires the ability to perceive visually and auditorally, to think abstractly and critically, and to apply what is thought about to one's behavior. Readers must be taught independence, and specific abilities must be developed in the content areas. A comprehensive reading program requires an eclectic approach and an abundance of reading materials. Reading has been and must continue to be an essential element in an instructional program which produces critical thinkers who can communicate effectively and efficiently in the oral and written symbols of their language. It is every teacher's business to meet that goal. (TO)

Reading is Every Teacher's Business*

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I would like to begin the discussion today with a change in the wording of the title. In place of "Reading is Every Teacher's Business", I would like to suggest "Communication is Every Teacher's Business".

The key role of reading as a receptive skill in the communication process has long been recognized. However, it is just recently that we have come to accept reading as only one, not the one, of those interrelated aspects of language-listening, speaking, reading and writing -- which are essential to the interchange of ideas and thoughts: communication. As one such aspect, every teacher has a vital role in reading instruction. But every teacher has an equally vital role in instruction in speaking, listening, and writing, for these skills reinforce, extend, and enrich the ability to read.

I would like to start by quoting several statements from a publication called Living and Learning, which is the recently published report of the Provincial Committee on Aims and Objectives of Education in the Schools of Ontario.[1] Better known as the Hall-Dennis Report, this document presents recommendations for the improvement of instruction in Ontario. The report is a valuable contribution to educational literature, since it provides a very useful framework for the consideration of the improvement and extension of instruction in any Canadian province. It is

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[1] Provincial Committee on Aims & Objectives of Education in the Schools of Ontario, Living and Learning. Toronto: Ontario Department of Education, 1968.

interesting to note that the need for attention to language and communication is a theme which prevades the entire report.

The Aims of Education[2]

The child has special and distinctive rights because he is helpless and unable to make important choices or express them cogently. Assuming only that the child wants to live and to be an active member of the society into which he was born, he has a right to all that healthy growth implies, a right to be taught how to communicate and live with others, and a right to be able and free to decide for himself, when he is mature enough to do so, what position to take with respect to major issues in human life. These three rights do not cover everything explicitly, but they are basic.

The Task of the Curriculum[3]

1. The curriculum must ensure that pupils have the basic necessities for a good education.

2. A good school does all that it can to ensure the physical and mental health of its students, and to enable them to acquire essential skills of communication.

Areas of Emphasis in the Curriculum[4]

The first area of emphasis offered is "Communications", embracing all aspects of learning that relate to man's interchange of thought. In terms of the curriculum, communication involves ability to speak and listen, to read and write, to record and to film, to paint, to dance. It also involves aspects of social studies, mathematics, business and commerce, manual arts, and almost all of man's activities

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[2] Ibid. p. 73. [3] Ibid. p. 75. [4] Ibid. p. 77

in which ideas are transmitted and received. Thus the skills of debating, of reading maps, of interpreting data and ideas, and invoicing and accounting, all become legitimate focuses for interests of learners.

The Skills of Communication[5]

The major essential for the achievement of virtually any curricular purpose is the acquisition of the skills of communication. Language is not the first or only means of communication, but it is the sine qua non of education in civilized society. The school must teach accepted usage of language and a discriminating vocabulary if pupils are to understand what they hear and read in almost every branch of knowledge and if they are to be able to think and express their thoughts in relation to such knowledge. Comprehension of English (or French or any other vernacular) and ability to use it must therefore be achieved by all who are to progress with maximum advantage through the school. Together with simple mathematics, they constitute the one skill which must be measured and brought to an acceptable standard in keeping with the pupils' ability.

The Teacher's Changing Role[6]

A dictionary defines the teacher as "a person who inculcates, instructs, guides ....". These three somewhat different meanings of the same word reflect the changes which have taken place in the role of the teacher in this century.

Traditionally, the teacher's task was to inculcate -- to impress upon the student's mind the mastery of a limited body of facts and principles, mainly through rote learning; the emphasis was on the memorization of facts.

Later the teacher became a person whose work was to instruct. In this role the teacher added the mastery of skills and the understanding of ideas to the

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[5] Ibid. p. 91. [6] Ibid. p. 122

earlier emphasis on memorization. Rote learning was replaced by a variety of techniques, mainly employing question and answer, but also including discussion and question and answer. The teacher continued to be the central figure in the teaching-learning process.

The modern professional teacher is a person who guides the learning process. He places the pupil in the centre of the learning activity and encourages and assists him in learning how to inquire, organize, discuss, and discover answers to problems of interest to him. The emphasis is on the process of inquiry as well as on the concepts discovered.

Overview--What Reading Is NOT

With these excerpts from the Hall-Dennis Report as a frame of reference, let's look at what reading is NOT.

Some authors describe reading as the association between visual symbols and sounds. For example, if I place the word FOOD before you, and if you have learned to associate appropriate sounds with the letters in FOOD and to synthesize these sounds, you can identify the word. The one visual stimulus appears to cue the response. However, what you are really dealing with are two stimuli, one visual and one oral. To invoke the response FOOD you must have some way to connect the name or label, or the visual and auditory stimuli, with the thing itself -- the concept of FOOD. Thus the response is behavioral. It invokes a reaction. To obtain an appropriate response to the written (visual) stimulus FOOD we must first develop the concept of food. Then other stimuli may also evoke the same response -- stimuli such as smell, taste, touch, and the like.

Thus we cannot say that the child is "reading" when he can say the words which are represented by the written symbols. However, we can say that he is at the first stage of reading instruction when he can say the correct words for the

symbols. If the words which he says carry meaning for him, then the association between visual and auditory stimuli and response in terms of an idea or concept (meaning) can be made. If these words have no conceptual referrent (meaning) the stimuli do not really evoke a response.

Several years ago, I was working with a research project involving children who came to school from a background where the language of the home, although English, differed considerably from the English spoken in the school. As part of this project, I gave an individual test of mental ability to a large number of children attending this school. In one instance, I was administering this test to a girl of about twelve years of age, who had been classified on the basis of prior testing as mentally retarded. One of the first questions on this test is, "From what animal do we get milk?" This child's response was "cat".

Since several of her teachers had suggested that this youngster was not as slow a learner as her test scores indicated, and since this question was concerned with information which we were sure this child knew, I stopped and repeated the question. Again, the child responded "cat". Puzzled, I asked the girl why she thought this was the correct answer. She rather indignantly responded, "Anyone knows a cat gets milk!"

It was not until later, when we analyzed her responses, that we realized that the totally unfamiliar linguistic structure of the question had cued the response which she had given. In general speech, and certainly in this child's linguistic experience, questions are almost invariably started with only one of the interrogative words -- what, where, why, etc. Only in very formalized oral speech or in written communication do we use the structure, "From what ....." in interrogative statements. Thus, the question, "From what animal do we get milk?" would normally be stated, "What animal gives milk?" Notice that in this construction the verb has been changed from gets to gives. The child had simply translated my question, phrased in an unfamiliar manner, into her own linguistic

patterning. In translation, unfortunately, the question, "From what animal do we get milk?" had become "What animal gets milk?" Although the meaning of the original question was lost in translation, the child's response to the question, as she heard it, was entirely correct!

If the spoken language of the school (of the teachers, administrators, etc.) is not in the learner's own vocabulary or mode of expression, the child may not get meaning. Even if the standard language usually used in the school is slightly different from that of the learner's, the child may not get meaning. If the materials from which the learner reads are not within his own listening and speaking vocabulary or within his own linguistic patterning, he may not get meaning. It should be noted here that the vocabulary and linguistic structure of basal readers, for example, is often artificial and not the child's language at all. Therefore reading is not and cannot be simply the ability to say the words which are represented in printed form.

What does this "NOT" imply for instruction in reading? It implies that uniform daily doses of such things as phonics for a reading group may be highly unrealistic. It implies that using any one set of materials, rules, exercises, etc., for all children in a class or in a reading group is unrealistic. It implies that the current stress on phonics or word analysis skills often to the exclusion of meaning in certain types of reading approaches is unrealistic. In this regard, I would like to call attention to Roma Gan's book Fact and Fiction About Phonics, which reinforces this point.[7]

This NOT further implies that the lack of attention given to developing general listening skills at every grade level is unrealistic. It implies that the lack of attention given to differentiating between learners with strong auditory

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[7] Roma Gans. Fact and Fiction About Phonics. New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1964.

perceptual skills and those who have difficulties in this area -- or, even worse, discovering these difficulties and then dubbing all such learners as "slow" or "unready" to read -- is not only unrealistic but downright unfair.

Oral language precedes written language. The listening vocabulary is the first one the child develops. He can listen before he can speak. He can speak before he can read or write. Speech serves to arouse meaning. Therefore, little is gained by teaching a pupil to read a word whose correct pronunciation is unfamiliar to him. In order for a word to "register" through the application of word analysis skills, the child must be able to identify this word within his listening vocabulary. One researcher administered a word pronunciation test to 72 poor silent readers among college freshmen and found that, of the words mispronounced, 78% were also missing in meaning. The implications of this finding are clear for instruction in reading: 1. Don't teach words which are not within the children's speaking and listening vocabulary; 2. Do develop within the speaking and listening vocabulary those words which you want the children to be able to read. Let listening and speaking vocabularies set the standard for reading vocabularies; 3. Help children to use their developing vocabularies from the start of reading instruction through functional application in speaking, listening and writing activities.

Another thing reading is not, then, is an isolated activitiy or skill. It is only one of a complex of interrelated language or communication activities. Reading cannot be taught in isolation. It is intimately related to all of the other language areas and therefore to the entire spectrum of the school curriculum, from kindergarten through university.

The relationship between reading and oral language is clearly indicated through research studies in which high positive correlations have been reported between listening vocabulary and comprehension and reading vocabulary and comprehension at every grade level. Knowledge of the spoken word apparently sets the standard of reading achievement that can be reached by the child. For this reason, children

brought up in environments in which the spoken language differs from the standard language of the school, such as the youngster referred to earlier, must be taught the school language orally and must be able to function comfortably within this language before reading instruction can be successful.

In their pamphlet, Language Learning Activities for the Disadvantaged Child, Bereiter and Engelmann provide a series of game-like activities designed to involve children directly in language.[8] While these activities were developed for teaching disadvantaged children, they are equally useful as supplementary learning activities for all children. I would highly recommend this pamphlet to you for your careful perusal.

Another activitiy which helps stimulate andpromote understanding of the inter-related aspects of oral and written language is the writing of poetry. Two forms which lend themselves well to this activity are haiku and cinquain. Haiku is a three line Japanese poetry form which consists of 17 syllables: 5 in the first line, 7 in the second line, and 5 in the third line. Cinquain is a five line poetry form in which the first line consists of one word which serves as a title, the second line consists of two words describing the title, the third line has three words which show action about the title, the fourth line includes four words which suggest emotion or feeling, and the fifth line is composed of one word which is a synonym for the title. More information about haiku poetry can be found in the article, "Haiku and Film" in the February, 1969 issue of the Alberta Teacher Association Magazine.[9]

Both of these poetry forms are simple, structured, and unrhymed. However, instruction can involve reading of poems written in similar form writing of haiku and cinquain, and reading these aloud in class. Such instruction can also involve tape recording, composing of books of poetry, using film to present the subject matter of the poems, and the like.

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[8] Carl Bereiter and Siegfried Engelmann. Language Learning Activities for the Disadvantaged Child. New York. Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith.

[9] Jack Cameron and Emma E. Plattor. "Haiku and Film". The ATA Magazine. February, 1969, pp. 8-11.

These haikus and cinquains, written by grade five and six pupils in Calgary, Alberta, are samples of the results of instruction in these two poetry forms:

Haiku

Out on the tundra
The mighty polar bear stands
Hunting for the seal.

The snow is blowing
The wind is whistling loudly
The darkness is cold.

You slow old tutle
Shuffling across the dry sand,
You slowly reach water.

Cinquain

Dinosaur
Big, clumsy
Batting the ball
Gentle housewife turned sportsman
Dino

Prism
Shimmering prison
Holder of light
Quiet, twinkling, shifting colours
Rainbow.

Let's look at another NOT. Reading is not simply the ability to derive meaning from the printed page -- although this is certainly a part of the reading task. This is the skill known as literal comprehension, where the reader knows what the author said because he can read the lines. He knows the meaning of each word, phrase, or sentence, and when asked to tell in his own words what the paragraph or page or story is about, the reader can do so. Unfortunately, instruction too often starts and stops at this point. (Most teachers' manuals for reading series don't help). In addition, most oral directions which children are required to follow in a classroom situation are given in too simple a form to involve much judgement either. Few listening lessons are ever planned to systematically and sequentially develop critical listening skills. Teachers often become upset or annoyed when their pupils don't act independently, listen critically, or react appropriately where judgement is required. They shouldn't. We don't really provide adequate instruction in critical thinking, or critical listening, or critical reading at any instructional level. Why, then, should we expect that children will learn these skills?

The critical reader is analytical, judgemental, independent, involved, and participating. He is sensitive to words and has a well developed vocabulary. He knows alternative meanings of words. The evidence from research indicates that children do not become critical thinkers, listeners, or readers without instruction.

They have to be taught these skills.

The implications for instruction are also clear here: Don't just teach comprehension skills. Teach critical reading. Correlate this with instruction in critical listening. Emphasize critical listening and reading from the child's entrance into school. This requires setting very specific purposes for listening and reading, teaching very specific skills for these purposes, and evaluating the outcomes of instruction in terms of the purposes set. Further, it implies collecting, developing, using, and assessing alternative, appropriate instructional methods, techniques, and activities. These are difficult but urgent tasks which involve such professional activities on the part of teachers as gathering a wide variety of materials, researching the effectiveness of these materials with different kinds of learners, developing new or more appropriate materials or alternative forms of these materials based on the needs of specific learners, and the like.

Developmental, Corrective, and Remedial Reading

It should be clear at this point, then, that reading is a complex task which requires the ability to perceive visually and auditorally, to think abstractly and critically, and to apply what is thought about to one's own behavior. It is essentially a personal thing; even if one reads in a group, one is reading alone. Nevertheless it is interpersonal as well; the reader must communicate with the writer or the task has no relevance at all.

Reading instruction must be a planned, sequential continuous process. Readers must be taught for independence. Children who have difficulty with any aspect of the reading process must receive corrective instruction immediately. Where corrective instruction is inadequate, remediation must be provided within the school setting. Instruction must be differentiated for different learning needs and styles.

Reading instruction does not stop at any grade level. Reading needs at both the elementary and secondary levels must be analyzed and met. Specific abilities

must be developed in the content areas -- at every grade level, but especially at the junior and senior high school level. Some reading skills are best taught or reinforced in the specific subject matter areas, while others are best taught in the regular classroom day. Teachers must "make time" for this -- it can't be separated from the content, but is an integral part of it. How, for example, can we teach social studies without providing instruction in such appropriate reading social studies skills as locating information, techniques for studying materials, outlining, organizing and the like? It is up to each school system to determine the content area skills to be taught and to see to it that these are in fact taught and reinforced at every grade level from Kindergarten to grade 12.

A comprehensive reading program requires an eclectic approach (the use of a variety of appropriate reading methods and materials based on individual learner needs) and the provision of an abundance of reading materials. Well-organized materials centers are essential to this. Note "materials centers" -- not simply libraries. There are so many kinds of media which are appropriate to the provision of reading instruction that it is essential that the library concept be advanced to the concept of the materials center.

It is also essential that practices which are ongoing in schools be shared. For example, I have found, in my supervision of student teachers, a variety of exciting activities going on in just three schools. Editorial reading and writing, use of film, cartridge tapes, letter writing, etc. are examples of such activities. Do you know what the teacher across from you is doing? Get to know your neighbor!

In a book of readings edited by Weiss, Paul Witty has suggested that certain reading habits and skills need particular attention at the junior high school level.[10] By the time the pupil has reached the sixth grade he has often attained a fairly rapid

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[10] Paul Witty. "What Experience Activities and Materials are Helpful in a Developmental Reading Program?" in M.J. Weiss' Reading in the Secondary Schools. New York: Odyssey Press, 1961, pp. 60-68.

rate of reading and a high degree of comprehension. Also, his ability to read orally may be quite adequate to serve his present needs. The task then becomes one of adjusting his rate for various rypes of reading and of refining his comprehension skills to meet a variety of new demands. According to Witty, abilities and skills which often require further refinement of development include:

I. Developing Comprehension

   A. Following directions and finding information

   B. Finding answers to personal and social problems

   C. Reading a story for various purposes

   D. Understanding words and increasing one's personal vocabulary

II. Reading to Remember

   A. Remembering important ideas

   B. Remembering significant details

III. Associating Ideas and Materials

   A. Finding proof

   B. Finding information relevant to particular problems

   C. Examining basic assumptions

   D. Studying the adequacy of presentations

IV. Organizing Ideas and Materials

   A. Arranging events in sequence and making outlines

   B. Summarizing

V. Increasing Speed of Silent Reading

VI. Improving Oral Reading

VII. Reading in the Content Field, With Wide Application of Reading Skills.[11]

I would like to call to your attention the other articles in Weiss' book, Reading in the Secondary School, and suggest that these may be of value to you in

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[11] Ibid. p. 64.

reading instruction. Specific exercises and instructional examples in a variety of pertinent areas are presented. Another book which may be of value to you is Delwyn Schubert and Theodore Torgerson's Improving Reading Instruction Through Individualized Correction. Published by Wm. C. Brown and Company, Dubuque, Iowa, in 1968, this second edition contains many valuable suggestions and recommendations for instructional objectives, techniques, and materials in corrective reading at all grade levels.

In Conclusion

This is an exciting educational era. The development of critical and creative communicators is the educational challenge of the day. The technical revolution of our times requires that communication skills not only be well taught be reinforced and extended at every instructional level.

Technology represented by the medium of television has given us some examples of our own lack of insight into some of the problems involved in communication. One particularly relevant example involved a recent segment of the TV program, Get Smart. In this segment, a knock is heard at the door and Maxwell Smart, the human secret agent, tells his robot partner, Hymie, to "Answer the door." The robot, not programmed for idiomatic speech, responds, "Hello, door. Would you repeat the question?"

We cannot afford to produce future generations of communication robots. Reading has been and must continue to be an essential element in an instructional program which produces critical thinkers who can communicate effectively and efficiently in those oral and written symbols which constitute their language. We cannot settle for anything less. Communication is every teacher's business.