OE-30004-A
Bulletin 1964, No. 27

# *how children learn to* READ

*by* Helen K. Mackintosh
*and*
Elizabeth Guilfoile

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE • Anthony J. Celebrezze, Secretary
Office of Education • Francis Keppel, Commissioner

ERIC Full Text Provided by ERIC

(Formerly Bulletin 1952, No. 7)

Printed 1952

Reprinted 1954, 1957

Revised 1964

Superintendent of Documents Catalog No. FS 5.230:30004-A

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON: 1964

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C. 20402 Price 20 cents

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## Foreword

PUBLISHED ORIGINALLY IN 1952, the bulletin *How Children Learn to Read* was the first in a series designed to illustrate the philosophy and principles set forth in *The Place of Subjects in the Curriculum*, Bulletin 1949, No. 12. It was planned to describe as simply as possible, especially for inexperienced teachers and for parents, the process of learning to read as it is developed in the elementary school.

There is an ever-increasing need in the 1960's for reading ability far beyond that required in the past. The tremendous quantity of reading materials calls for skills in skimming, evaluating, selecting, interpreting, and using materials bearing on many varied problems, some simple enough for the first-grade child; others highly technical. It is important for every individual to develop the ability that he possesses to the fullest possible extent in terms of the life demands he will need to meet, not only as a child, but as an adult.

Since the bulletin first appeared in 1952, many aspects of beginning reading have become increasingly controversial. These include methods of teaching, kind and quality of textbook materials, age of beginning to read, and sharp differences between educators and lay persons with regard to the nature and purpose of reading. The revised bulletin includes a selected bibliography for the person who wishes to study the problems in detail.

It is important to examine the basis of sound method in teaching reading that takes account of the mental, physical, social, and emotional development of the child as well as the abilities and skills required by the successful reader. The proposal to use phonics as the basic approach to the teaching of reading has occasioned a great deal of controversy. This revised bulletin discusses what many reading specialists recommend concerning when, where, and how phonics can be used appropriately in relation to other reading skills.

Children need to read for many purposes with understanding and with skills that can reasonably be expected at the individual maturity level of each child.

The part of this bulletin that deals with skills in the mechanics of reading is an attempt to explain to parents especially the why and how of methods of teaching beginning reading. Of equal importance to the parent should be his own attitude toward reading and the suggestions of ways he can use to determine how well his child is reading.

It is in each individual school that parents and school teachers should evaluate today's reading methods and purposes as objectively as possible. Teachers and parents should find the point of view developed in this bulletin one that is suitable for use as a springboard in discussing together children's reading needs, purposes, and problems in the 1960's and beyond.

RALPH C. M. FLYNT
*Associate Commissioner*
*for Educational Research and Development*

J. DAN HULL
*Acting Director*
*Division of Elementary*
*and Secondary Education*

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*Elementary School, Wilmington, Del.*

You read, then I'll read

## How Does the Home Influence the Child's Learning To Read?

WHETHER A CHILD learns to read easily and happily depends upon the home as well as upon the teacher and the school. His feelings about reading reflect his parents' attitudes both toward him and toward reading. If, at home, he is secure in the love of his parents, feels himself a person in his own right through sharing in family experiences, and has learned to give and take in play with children of his own age, he is likely to be emotionally and socially ready, when the time comes, for school and for learning to read.

If his father and mother listen to the stories he makes up, or retells from those he has heard, if they give satisfying answers to his questions, if they take him on trips and discuss with him what he sees and hears, he acquires words to express his ideas, and develops some ability to put them together orally in a connected way, that will later help him to write, speak, and read more readily.

If he shares in the family conversation, if his parents tell him stories and read to him, if he enjoys picture books, if he sees the grown-ups in the family using books and magazines, he looks forward to reading on his own. If his brothers and sisters or playmates read, he may get a book or magazine and try to read, too.

But if he has no books other than comic and coloring books; if there are few if any books or magazines in the home; if his parents rarely read, then reading, when he goes to school, may be something completely new and bewildering. Often to make matters worse for the child who is unready, his parents assume that he should be able to read a book within the first few weeks or months of school.

Parents interested in books and reading and alert to opportunities in the home may use the child's own ideas to develop an interest in books and reading. Charles was a little past 5 years old when he told his mother a story about Shadow, a little ghost. Shadow started out to frighten children, but on the way became so frightened himself that he ran home to *his* mother. Charles was not satisfied to have his mother say that it was a good story.

Since he had listened to a radio news commentator who reviewed books, Charles said he thought the story of Shadow should be broadcast. His mother agreed to write Shadow's story for him as he dictated it. Then Charles wanted the story made into a book. So he and his mother together made a cover and on it his mother wrote the name of the story and the name of the author. Charles made some pictures for the story and with his mother's help put the pages together. As they put it in an envelope and mailed it to the broadcasting station, Charles said with great satisfaction, "That ought to be worth at least thirty-five dollars." Charles' mother was astonished when the commentator reviewed his book—but not Charles!

Not all children have Charles' initiative. Not every mother would see value in helping the child express his ideas. But as a result of this experience Charles will have an attitude of interest in books and reading that will make the actual process of learning to read easier. At least it will if no one unthinkingly puts an end to his interest in telling stories. Children have good ideas and should be encouraged to speak and to listen.

## What About the Kindergarten?

In the kindergarten the child hears the teacher tell and read stories to the group. He and other children tell stories about themselves, their fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters. Each child may retell stories or poems that have been read or told to him or to the group. Sometimes the teacher puts together a big book of stories which individuals or the group have dictated, and she has written down. She may then read from these to the children just as she would from a printed book. It is easy for a skillful teacher to move from such a book to one with many story-telling pictures and a few words. The teacher may show the picture book to the group and read or tell the story. Often two children may sit at the reading table, sharing a book and acquiring ideas from story-telling pictures, as they turn the pages together.

What are the advantages of these experiences in telling, listening, rehearing, and perhaps repeating together for fun a story or poem that has been heard many times? Through all these activities, provided they are pleasant and happy, the child is developing a favorable attitude toward books and reading. He is saying to himself, "Reading is fun. You can find out about things in books." To reinforce this interest, children may engage in dra-

matic play, pretending they are various members of the family and carrying on conversations as they play. Such experiences help children to develop a vocabulary around home and family living, although they may think of it as play rather than work.

It is during this time that each child learns to recognize his own name in writing if he has not done so before. He sees it printed on a tag with a picture of a butterfly, a bird, or a flower, to help him identify the hook for his wraps, or his seat at the table. The teacher writes his name on the big drawing that he makes on newsprint paper at the easel. He hears his name spoken and perhaps the teacher writes it on the board with those of other children who are to clean the hamster's cage. His own name is probably the first word the child learns to recognize.

When the children with their teacher take a trip to the grocery store they observe the STOP sign before crossing the street. The doors of the grocery store are marked IN and OUT. Each can on the shelf has a label—a picture with the name of the fruit or vegetable it contains. Through such experiences the children gain some familarity with signs and names. Here again children become familiar with certain important words they see every day, and attach meaning to them.

During his year in kindergarten the child enjoys many experiences as a member of the group, and through these he hears many new words. After he hears them, he may use them orally, and he may see them as the teacher writes them down for the group's big story book, from which she reads.

## What About the Child Who Does Not Go to Kindergarten?

Not every child has an opportunity to attend kindergarten in the community in which he lives. If he has not attended kindergarten, his parents should try to provide at home some experiences suitable to 5-year-old children. He should not be forced into a first-grade situation with more mature children where reading is introduced before he is ready. Schools throughout the United States solve this problem in many different ways. An example will help to make this point clear.

Teachers in an area that had no kindergartens knew that the 5-year-olds who fell just short of entrance age for first grade wanted to be in school. Their parents were unhappy because the children would have to wait for another year. The teachers in

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this situation agreed that something should be done to give fathers and mothers some help on the problem.

In a summer workshop first-grade teachers planned for meetings early in the school year for the mothers of the older 5-year-olds, who would be encouraged to discuss their problems. The teachers prepared a simple bulletin with helpful suggestions for health care and habit training. The bulletin included ideas the mothers could use to provide simple learning experiences for the children. Among the suggestions were these: selection of pets which children could care for, play with, and talk about; brief lists of simple picture books available at little cost; simple inexpensive toys that could be manipulated; and possible excursions to an airport, park, museum, zoo, or other places of interest. Teachers encouraged parents to spend some time each day talking with the children, listening to them, helping to develop new words in their vocabulary.

During the meetings at school parents had the opportunity to observe what first-grade children were doing. They also saw and handled books, toys, and other materials referred to in the bulletin. Such visits to the school helped parents to feel that the principal and the teacher recognized their problems and were genuinely interested in helping.

## What Happens in the First Grade?

Although all the children who enter first grade in September may be 6 years old or nearly 6, their differences in other respects may be much greater than in the range of their ages. Their intelligence, their ability to use language in speaking, their physical health, their home backgrounds, their experiences in playing and working with other children may vary greatly.

For these reasons the teacher recognizes that each child must be treated as an individual; that there are "early starters" and "slow starters" in learning to read. She recognizes that learning to read is not accidental; that she as the teacher must be able to tell just when each child is ready to start reading from books. She relies particularly on her own day-by-day observation to give her this information. But she also keeps informal records. These tell her when an individual child asks what certain words say, shows that he is interested in looking at books, reads a story by interpreting what the pictures say, tries to tell stories, or wants to have books that are his own. In some schools she will use standardized readiness tests to supplement her information.

But to the children starting to read, the teacher herself is probably the most important factor of all. If she is relaxed, if she is patient, if she takes time to learn to know each child as an individual, she creates a classroom environment which makes all the children desire to read. They are likely to be happy in the classroom and confident in taking part, each at his own level, in the reading activities. If she is nervous, if she is concerned about having all the children learn to read at the same time, if she is pressured by parents into forcing all children to read before the end of the first grade, her attitudes will be reflected in the way the children feel and act.

Since the age of entrance to first grade is about 6 years, it is at that time children are usually expected to learn to read. Many school administrators and teachers believe that a few months over 6, rather than a few months under, is more favorable to a child's success. Case histories of children with reading difficulties show that such problems frequently develop when teaching of reading is begun between 5 and 6 years of age.

It is true that one of the pressures today is for beginning reading at an earlier age. Dr. William D. Sheldon, in an Association for Childhood Education report,[1] concludes from his examination of the evidence as follows: "From the research which is pertinent, the studies and observations of five-year-olds in a learning situation, and the evidence of the later effect of early learning, there seems to be little or no justification for introducing reading into the curriculum at the kindergarten or five-year-old stage."

Some children under age 6 show interest in words, in books, have a wide vocabulary, speak well, have had travel experiences, and are intellectually mature enough to read. Their needs should be met, but not by imposing reading on all children in the group. Boys and girls who lack readiness, including those 6 and over, who are exposed to beginning reading gain little but frustration and reluctance to read. Moreover they miss learning experiences such as observation, manipulation, experimentation, dramatization, which in addition to increased maturity, will help them to succeed in reading at a later date.

## *Readiness for Reading*

Jersild in his book *Child Development and the Curriculum* defines readiness as "the timeliness of what we wish to teach in the

[1] Association for Childhood Education International. *Reading in the Kindergarten?* Washington: The Association, 1962. p. 40.

light of the child's ability to take it."[2] Such a statement is supported by many other authorities such as Olson, Hymes, Strickland, and by findings of research studies listed in the bibliography.[3] The "child's ability to take it" involves his language and speech habits; his physical development—particularly vision and hearing; the breadth and nature of his experiences, especially in relation to his interest in books and reading; and his mental, social, and emotional maturity.

*Language and Speech Habits.*—Research studies indicate that children start to school knowing several thousand words as reported in the most recent summary of such findings by Shane.[4] The first-grade child probably "knows" through hearing them, more words than he fully understands, and understands orally more words that he can use. Television viewing by children below school age in the home is probably responsible for development of vocabulary that is not particularly childlike. Schramm[5] reports that one-third of 3-year-olds and 80 percent of 5-year-olds see commercial TV regularly. The child with average home and neighborhood experience both understands and uses many more words than appear in reading materials and curriculum content for primary grades. Today's children have many opportunities for vocabulary building that were not available to children in earlier years.

Many teachers face situations in which individual children, or whole groups of children, are limited in vocabulary as well as in language development in general. For these children appropriate opportunities to use language in connection with daily experiences are important as preliminary to reading. They cannot learn the printed symbols for words they cannot as yet understand and use, except in a mechanical way.

Speech habits are exceedingly important. The child who has heard only clear speech is likely to enunciate clearly and distinctly. Baby talk, nonstandard English, or foreign language used in his home will prove an initial handicap to the child when he enters school. Development in speech must precede reading. Words that he cannot say correctly will lack meaning in his reading.

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[2] Jersild, Arthur A. and associates. *Child Development and the Curriculum.* New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1946. p. 274.

[3] Olson, Willard. *Child Development.* Second edition. Boston: D.C. Heath and Co., 1959.
Hymes, James. *Before the Child Reads.* Evanston, Illinois: Row, Peterson and Co., 1958.
Strickland, Ruth. *The Language Arts in the Elementary School.* Boston: D.C. Heath, 1957.

[4] Shane, Harold, and Mulry, June Grant. *Improving Language Arts Instruction Through Research.* Washington: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, NEA, 1963.

[5] Schramm, Wilbur, Lyle, Jack, and Parker, Edwin B. *Television in the Lives of our Children.* Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1961.

*Vision and Hearing*.—The child's physical development plays an important part in his success in reading. This is particularly true of the quality of his vision and hearing. Studies show that a child will be more likely to succeed in reading if he can detect likenesses and differences in the appearance of words, can get his clues from beginnings and endings, and from the length and shape of words. Such ability is related to the maturity of the organs of vision. Similarly, the child must be able to distinguish between sounds.[6] He needs to be able to match beginning and ending sounds of words with known key words; to select the one word that is different in a list of four or five; and to identify the written symbol of a letter, or a group of letters, with the sound in a word. Such abilities are dependent both upon ability to hear and to observe carefully. The teacher encourages observation by questioning, such as, "Can you find the word on the chart that ends like this one?"

*Books and Reading*.—The quality of the child's experience with books and the attitudes that have been cultivated toward books and reading in his home before he comes to school, strongly influence his readiness for reading. These experiences are equally as important to the first-grade child as they are to the kindergarten child. If a child is slow to show interest in books, the parents and teacher together should try to find ways to encourage him as suggested by Hymes.[7] Children recognize the importance of books, when they have book ends, a bookshelf, or a bookcase for their own books. A new book for a birthday or for other occasions helps to develop a personal collection that can stimulate a continuing interest in reading.

*Mental, Social, and Emotional Maturity*.—If a child is happy in his group, not too much smaller or larger than the other children, is as well cared for as the others, leaves a happy home to go off to school in the morning, and returns to it at the end of the day—he should feel secure and enjoy working and playing with other children. If parents are separated or do not get along together, if parents praise one child and scold another, that one will probably be emotionally insecure, and more likely to have problems in reading. Olson states that the teacher's task is to provide the stimulating environment to "pace" the readiness of the child.[8]

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[6] Durkin, Dolores. *Phonics and the Teaching of Reading*. New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia, 1962.

[7] Hymes, op. cit., p. 20.

[8] Olson, op. cit., p. 12.

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The child who is mature mentally, socially, and emotionally has the best chance to succeed in his early reading experience.

Such an approach to reading, which takes account of many factors from the point of view of the child as a person, should bring about successful beginning reading experience for each individual. If the teacher, on the other hand, is concerned only with the mechanics of reading, designed to make it possible for children to pronounce words glibly, there will be little attention to meaning. Children need to understand what is read in order to make it a satisfying experience from the beginning.

### *What the Teacher Does*

The good first-grade teacher observes the evidences of readiness for reading in each child in her group. At the same time she works to broaden the experiences and the interests of all the children through their sharing of toys and games; observing pets or looking at growing things in an aquarium or terrarium; taking trips and excursions; looking at still pictures, slides, and filmstrips; preparing simple foods; painting and drawing; building and constructing with blocks and other materials; using simple tools; engaging in dramatic play, hearing poetry, telling stories, singing songs and responding to rhythms; reading labels, signs and experience stories; and using picture books and picture dictionaries in the school library and in the classroom.

Children get acquainted with each other, with the teacher, the principal, the custodian, with their building, with their own room, with the fact that the names on the doors help them find their way. In recognizing these names they are consciously using clues. It isn't guessing or a matter of memorizing. The length and shape of the word and its relation to person or place help the child in deciding what it is.

From the child's point of view, there are picture books to look at. There are interesting things to do and see—an aquarium or a pet (rabbit, hen, canary, hamster, guinea pig, duck). Children learn to play games, to sing, to visit a grocery store, to take a walk in the park, to see the policeman on the corner, to visit the firehouse; or they have a party in their room. At the same time that the teacher is providing experiences in seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and feeling in many different situations, she is helping children to understand that they can talk about their experiences and then write about them.

The teacher may write on the board a simple summary in two or three sentences as the children talk. She uses the manuscript

form of writing letters which the children themselves will soon be learning to use. Written language expression, including handwriting and spelling, are closely connected with the reading process. The story is copied on a chart for use the next day or later. At an appropriate time the teacher may comment as she places a period and begins with a capital letter, "Because I am ending one thought, I write this mark which is called a period. When I begin a new thought, I use a big letter that is called a capital letter."

While the children are accumulating a number of such experiences, the teacher anticipates that some child will remark, "I know what *that* word says," or "I can read what you wrote," or "I told my mother a story and she wrote it down," or "This is the story I wrote." Children are becoming accustomed to the sounds of words heard over and over and are beginning to connect the sounds with the looks of the words. This is the time when the teacher will probably say, "Can you find the words that tell where we went? Who went with us? What did we see in the park?" The answers will come in the form of sentences that the children recognize as they frame them by placing their hands around them, and then reading aloud. When enough of the words and sentences have been identified an individual child may be able to read the whole story.

There are some important clues to reading readiness which can guide the teacher. Several children in the group may be able to read the stories aloud with very little help. For others who need more time the teacher may read and reread the stories as children request them. What kind of response is made to the chart reading depends upon the abilities of the individual children. As the chart stories are based upon immediate experience, the teacher can reasonably assume that the content has meaning to all the children. As the teacher observes children's responses and reaction she can judge whether they attach meaning to the written symbols. She will provide opportunities for slower children to find the word or phrase that tells who, where, when, what, or why.

In the early stages of working with such experience stories the material may be copied on a large chart which can be kept for a while for the children's use. The teacher will find situations in which children can read the chart stories to an audience—a mother, the principal, a visitor, other children in the school. The children themselves may make pictures to illustrate such stories, and thus help to double check the meanings. As they work, children's listening and speaking vocabularies will continue to keep ahead of their reading vocabulary, and this is as it should be.

When some children in the class are aware that written symbols mean something, when their eyes have learned to travel left to right along the chart lines, when they know by sight enough words that have recurred in the chart reading, the teacher starts them as a group in a preprimer or a primer. They learn to handle the books correctly and talk about the pictures. The teacher guides them to interpret pictures and print with such skill that the children will probably use orally the few words they will learn in the first brief printed pages of the book. Some children will be ready very quickly to use a first reader.

The term "look-and-say" applied to the recognition of words through this approach is a misnomer. To be able to pronounce a word at sight is no assurance that the child knows what it means. But when the child recognizes the word as a whole, in a sentence he has helped to create, the outgrowth of an experience in which he has shared, he is identifying not merely its appearance and its sound (its pronunciation) but also its meaning in the context.

The preprimer offers pictures for discussion. It introduces characters and a few words with much repetition. The vocabulary anticipates that of the primer, and it has some similarity to the vocabulary of other preprimers based on standard word lists. The reading vocabulary also is growing through the continued use of charts and other informal reading materials. Meanwhile, the general vocabulary grows rapidly through the experiences of touching, feeling, tasting, seeing, and hearing.

To be sure that children see that *dog* as printed in the book is the same as *dog* which she has written on the board in manuscript form, the teacher may write a line or two, or even a page of the book on the board in manuscript form. But aside from this she teaches all book material in the book instead of confusing the children with alternate images of words or sentences on the board.

While one group is reading through a preprimer, or several preprimers, other children will still be working with the stories that grow out of their experiences.[9] As more small groups are ready for handling books they are introduced to the preprimer. The process of forming groups continues, keeping the groups flexible so that a child can move from one to another depending upon his individual progress. There should be no predetermined number of groups. There may be three, four, five, or more as the needs of the children dictate. The number of children to a group will vary: it may be as few as two or three or even one.

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[9] Lee, Dorris M., and Allen, R. V. *Learning to Read Through Experience.* Second edition. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1963. p. 146.

Large groups defeat the purpose of grouping, which is to provide for the individual needs of each child. In an increasing number of elementary schools the ungraded primary plan is used not only in reading, but in arithmetic and other skill subjects, in order to provide for each child's continuous progress.

As soon as there are three or more groups the teacher has a problem in knowing how to keep every child at work without resorting to "busy work." If the class is not larger than 20-25 children, if the teacher does careful planning with the children, and if the planning provides worthwhile learning experiences, children are able to accomplish a great deal on their own responsibility. Many of these activities involve building, modeling, painting, and drawing. Others involve the use of blocks, toys, and other equipment. As the children develop skill to interpret written directions these give a purpose for much of the reading that is done silently. Some examples may help to make this point clear.

One first-grade teacher has a large chart made of heavy paper which lists ten or more things a child can do when he has a free time while she is working with a group. The items on the chart are changed from time to time with the children's help. The child finds that he may: read at the library table; watch the turtle so that he can help make a story about it; practice writing his own name; play in the playhouse in one corner of the room where furniture and objects are labeled; play with a fist puppet and make it talk; draw pictures to illustrate a chart story; or operate the movie-on-a-roll made by last year's first-grade children which has brief titles for each picture. Some teachers set up centers within the room where certain activities can be carried on because the materials are there. Children carry through their chosen work or play with the help of signs, labels, and simple directions.

The practical teacher helps children to decide in advance what their choices are going to be so that in the course of a week or more they will have had a variety of experiences. She knows, too, that such planning facilitates her working with groups and individuals without continuous interruption. As part of her responsibility, too, she helps the children evaluate these experiences to discover their importance to learning to read.

Throughout these experiences the teacher will emphasize reading for a purpose as well as the importance of interpreting the meaning of what is read through making pictures, through dramatic play, and by other means interesting and important to the children themselves.

### *What About Those Slow To Catch On?*

If the process of learning to read seems to be a slow one for some children, the teacher or parent should remember how *he* felt when he tried to learn something new, the mistakes he made, the things he failed to remember, and the amount of time he had to practice to gain any proficiency. Because the teacher knows what children are like, that they have a short attention span, that they need a great deal of practice with easy material, that they need to be successful, that they need to be interested in what they are doing, she will find many ways to give variety to the process of learning to read.

One teacher interested in photography took pictures of the children engaged in various activities. The pictures were then "blown up" to a size of approximately 12 by 15 inches. Each picture was used as a basis for talking with the children who appeared in it, and then dictated their individual stories to the teacher. The picture was made the center of the chart story that every child delighted to reread, since no story is more fascinating to either young or old than a story about one's self.

Another teacher often labeled a large sheet of heavy paper, newsprint, or brown paper *OUR NEWSPAPER,* and during the week wrote in manuscript form on it the two-or-three-sentence items that individual children dictated to her. The name of each child was attached to his story. Sometimes these newspapers were duplicated and sent home to parents at the end of the week, so that they might keep up with what was happening to their children day by day in the classroom. Each child had the opportunity to read to Father and Mother what he himself had dictated.

Given time and being made to feel secure, the child who is a "slow starter" should be successful in learning to read. He must be helped to see when he is making improvement, but such improvement must be real and must be evident to the child himself.

From a preprimer to other preprimers to primers and then to first readers are the steps in the reading process in the typical classroom in the United States. Some children are able to read when they enter school. They should begin where they are. But whether a child gets as far as reading easily from several first readers by the end of the first year in school is a highly individual matter. Some children may not be ready for first readers before the second grade, some even later. To be critical of a child who

is a slow starter is to put a roadblock in his way. Different methods may need to be tried with him. If he then does not succeed, a careful study of his problems should be made, first by the teacher, then with clinical help if it is needed.

As for those children who entered the first year of school able to read, the teacher needs to provide experiences and materials that can challenge their interests and abilities. She will make opportunities for them to read the first reader in the basal series, probably required in the school system. But, in addition, she will encourage these children who can read to read widely in library books for their enjoyment and for information. She will create opportunities for these same children to read aloud to groups of children as an audience. Children who make up the audience in turn may want to read the books for themselves.

## What Is the Place of Phonics in Learning To Read?

In the process of becoming a good reader the school child has to build many skills. For instance, the beginning reader must learn to read from left to right, and to return to the left for the first word of the next line; learn to read silently without movement of lips or touching words with fingers; learn to see words, not singly, but in thought groups of two, three, or more. These and many other skills he must make habitual in the early stages of learning to read. But what most adults want to know is whether the child is learning to read independently.

To many mothers and fathers and grandparents, perhaps because of the way they learned to read themselves, reading means ability to sound out words, or use of phonics. Phonics may be described as a system by means of which a child learns sets of phonograms—sometimes called "families" such as *at* in the words *cat, fat, mat, rat;* word beginnings and endings; and the long and short sounds of vowels, so that he can apply these learnings to the recognition of new words he encounters in reading. A system of teaching reading based on phonic analysis presupposes that a child learns the sounds of the letters first, next puts them together to form word elements, then words, and lastly connects the words in order to make sentences and paragraphs. This process is assumed to be the key to early and independent reading.

Too early attention to single letters, to the sounds of letters and to the mechanics of word formation probably hinders rather

than helps a child. If the teacher's purpose is to help him get meaning from the printed page, that purpose is defeated. Such attention to details slows down the act of reading and makes the child so conscious of mechanics that he fails to think of what the words are trying to tell him.

Moreover, phonics, or phonetic analysis, is a single skill, one of many the child must acquire in learning to read. Controversy develops when the assumption is made that phonics is the one basic skill or the first skill involved in learning to read, or conversely, that the experience method is the only sound approach. The good teacher employs a combination of methods that enables her to use every means at her command to meet the needs of each individual child.

Probably more research studies have been carried on in reading than in any other subject area in the elementary school. Many such studies have to do with the pros and cons of using phonics as the basic method of teaching beginning reading. Witty and Sizemore [10] reviewed 33 studies in phonics covering the period from 1912 through October 1955. They noted certain trends, such as delaying phonics until a body of sight words is known, and presenting phonic analysis in meaningful reading situations, rather than as a first approach to reading. They concluded that "the nature and amount of phonic instruction to be given is still a debatable question." A recent study by Durkin [11] reviews the phonics problem, pointing out the findings of recent research. Witty and Sizemore advised that both readiness and need for phonics should be determined for any child or group. Immature children may be confused by phonic analysis; more mature children may not need it at all. They point out that the approach to phonics in the basal reader series is usually sufficient; intensive phonics programs are not needed by most children. They advise very strongly against parents trying to teach phonics to their children.

The purpose of this section is to discuss the many ways in which children learn words, and to show the relation of phonetic analysis to the entire reading process. If the child's introduction to reading has been through an experience approach, he sees a word as a whole just as he sees the dog across the street. He may know Rinty by his color, his size, the twitch of his tail, and

[10] Witty, Paul and Sizemore, Robert A. "Phonics in the Reading Program." *Elementary English*. October, 1955. p. 369.

[11] Durkin, op. cit., p. 23.

his left-sided lope, but he was able to recognize the dog as an individual long before he was consciously aware of these details. Ask him how he knows Rinty and he may say, "By the black spot over his eye."

The child learns words in many ways. In his early chart reading he comes to know some words by position. He knows that *Williams Park* comes at the end of the first line in the chart story below.

We went to *Williams Park.*
We saw the swings.
We saw the pond.
We saw the ducks on the pond.

But *Williams Park* has not only position in its favor; it has also shape and size, that is, *configuration.* The other end words, "swings" and "pond" are learned partly by position and partly by auditory memory. "We saw" is learned by position and also by matching it to the same phrase above it and below it. Likeness or *comparison* offers clues to visual memory, just as do position and configuration. Repetition tends to fix the learnings.

But even in a very simple chart story like this one the *context* is the reader's most important aid. *Williams Park*, "swings" and "pond" are remembered through their meaningful relationship to the other words; "on the pond" falls into place because when the children saw them, the ducks *were* on the pond.

When the children begin to read in books, pictures are the chief aid to interpretation. As children look at the pictures the teacher skilfully guides the discussion so that the children *use* the words that they are about to read in print, and understand the meanings of the words in the situation that the words describe.

The first words reappear in later pages. Some new words are met on new pages. Children identify the known words, recalling them through configuration, position, comparison, and repetition, but most importantly through context. The pictures help them "guess" the new words. But this isn't mere guessing. It is reasoning from what they know to what the new word *should* say. If they reason incorrectly, the teacher quickly sets them right. The emphasis is consistently on meaning.

The children progress in reading, with both charts and preprimers, through using these word recognition techniques that have become habitual to them, but which, of course, the teacher helps them to develop further. While the child is using his cues of position, shape, matching or comparison, together with the meaning of the line or the passage as a whole, the teacher may

observe that the reader is also comparing first letters. "That looks like *Father*," the child says of Fanny's name on the board. "Yes, and it sounds like Father at the beginning," says the teacher. Initial consonants are usually the first elements noticed, and the most useful to teach. Known words are used to show how the first letter changes the sound of the word, *b*ook, *t*ook, *l*ook. As they observe known words in unknown ones when the pronunciation is the same, and how *s* at the end of a word means more than one, the teacher comments and helps them make these learnings permanent through a process of repetition.

But not until they are reading at second-grade level will the children profit by consistent and progressive attention to sounding. Even here many of the more difficult items will be left to third-grade level or above. But as the second-grade year moves on the teacher calls attention to ending consonants as in *stop, street, road, them;* to the most useful consonant blends *wh, th, ch, sh;* to long and short vowel sounds as in *ate, make,* and in *cat, hat;* to double vowels as in *look, took, sleep, meet;* to word endings that change the word as *ing* in *ringing;* to known words in longer words as in *ham*ster, *rock*et; two words put together as in *doghouse* or *mailbox*.

When children meet words of more than one syllable as they advance in school, the teacher helps them to recognize syllables using a simple rule such as: "Every syllable must contain a vowel, or a letter that stands for a vowel. If two consonants (letters other than vowels) come together in the middle of a word, one usually goes with the first syllable, the other with the second. When there is only one consonant, it usually goes with the vowel that follows." Children should be taught to check with the dictionary for correctness, making use of picture dictionaries in the primary grades.

Only those roots that are useful are taught and always as part of the word, w*ell*, b*ell*, s*ell;* sh*eep*, sl*eep*, sl*eep*ing; t*in*, sp*in*, th*in*; f*ill*, f*ill*ing, sp*ill*, sp*ill*ed. The teacher presents what the children in the group can take. Some children can take very little abstract learning. For their daily reading the teacher chooses material with only a few unfamiliar words. She encourages each child to look through the sentence in which a difficult word occurs, and to try to get the meaning from the context, that is, in relation to the words that he does know, and that appear before and after the one that is unknown. She helps him build the habit of checking the meaning he assumes from the context with the other simple recognition techniques he has acquired.

As in *all* her teaching the teacher helps each child to take his next step. If an able child undertakes to sound *scratch,* the teacher pronounces it for him and helps him think of words like *scrape, scramble, screw.* The child who is doing independent reading profits by helps that enable him to work out words for himself. For example, an introduction of prefixes and suffixes helps the child to analyze many words of three or more syllables. Some of the more difficult items of word structure and phonetic analysis are suited to the learning level of a mature third-grade child and intermediate-grade pupils. It should not be assumed by teachers in these grades that the use of phonics as a tool was completed in the early primary years. The teacher must determine the needs of each individual in her class and plan next steps. Authoritative sources [12, 13] describe the continuing steps in phonic analysis, showing clearly the relation to other skills in word recognition and to accepted practices of a many-sided modern reading program. Some current curriculum guides [14, 15] take into account all means of word recognition and include minimum amounts of phonic analysis and analysis of word structure.

Although reading skills have been discussed in this section in detail, the teacher should not attempt to teach them by drill. Children should be encouraged to read in situations in which all the factors are as nearly right as they can be made. The teacher must use a variety of methods to help children who meet with difficulties and, once a suitable method is found, provide enough practice for each to solve his own problems. Reading is a highly individual matter. Physical handicaps should be recognized and dealt with promptly. Special care should be given to the seating of children with vision or hearing limitations when these are discovered.

Each child's first experience with reading should be so satisfying that difficulties are prevented from developing. If a child is successful in the earliest stages of reading, he is less likely to need remedial help later. It is important to see that he reads much familiar material, but with new purposes set up for each reading, and that he is prepared for each new step before attempting it. Children who have not acquired the basic skills by ordinary

[12] Gray, William S. *On Their Own in Reading.* Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Co., Rev. 1960.

[13] Russell, David H. *Children Learn to Read.* New York: Ginn and Co., 1961.

[14] Richmond Public Schools. *A Guide for the Teaching of Reading in the Elementary School.* Curriculum Bulletin. Richmond, Virginia, 1960.

[15] San Bernardino Public Schools. *Arts and Skills of Communication for Democracy's Children.* Vol. II: K-6 Curriculum Bulletin. San Bernardino, California, 1958.

methods after two or three years in school may respond to a more dramatic approach. Using the typewriter is one of these, especially if children's own stories that they dictate are typed for their reading, as well as for reading by other children.

The worth of mechanical devices for the early school years such as rate readers and linguaphones, has yet to be proven through classroom use and controlled experimentation. But their novelty may offer a challenge to stimulate the child's interest and renew his effort when he is discouraged. Reading to a tape recorder, and hearing himself read back can often stimulate a child to improve.

## What Is the Importance of Individualized Reading?

Articles in professional magazines and a number of professional books describe how some teachers from the beginning teach reading on a completely individualized basis. Such teachers find that a program of wide reading in single books is good for all children. Individualized reading requires an adequate supply of books, time for children to read and for the teacher to help and guide them, using methods suited to the maturity of the group, and to the individual child.

Many teachers take a middle-of-the-road point of view in combining group and individualized methods of teaching reading. In the completely individualized program, or in the usual program, the teacher plans for the continuous development of reading skills. Children are progressing through reading readiness activities, through experience charts and functional reading into group reading of preprimers. But the teacher also finds time to help some children begin to read on their own.

She helps children to experience fuller appreciation of the picture books, sitting with one or with two or three, for a few minutes, questioning and encouraging their responses. The teacher provides copies of preprimers from several reading series that have not been used in the group reading and encourages the children to read these as individuals or by twos or threes. She introduces "trade" books to individuals, reading for the child certain parts if necessary, and encouraging him to find pages or sections he can read for himself. The term "trade books" is used to refer to single copies of books often called "library books." It is important that the teacher observe and approve efforts of the children to help each other with the reading of these additional

materials. She is building steadily toward early initiative and later independence. The second half of the year will find some of the children browsing freely among the "trade" books available. Some children are still in the stage of simply enjoying the pictures in the available picture books. Many of the brief periods devoted to group work are now used for the sharing by the children of the individual books they have discovered for themselves.

*Elementary School, Cleveland, Ohio*

**Let's all read**

ERIC

A third grade in the same school may have reached a point where the children get along without basal texts and without formal grouping. The teacher helps the children individually to choose books of the right difficulty level, relating to their interests as well as their needs in science, social studies, or reading for pleasure. She aids the slowest at their own levels while challenging the ablest with materials that stir their curiosity and demand of them continued growth. The activities and undertakings of the daily program stimulate all the children to "read and find out," as well as to "read and enjoy." She organizes a group of children on a temporary basis for quick help on common needs, ranging from how to recognize syllables to how to read poetry aloud.

Many teachers of third grade and above (and some of first and second grade) are using individual reading for development of skill as well as for enjoyment. They recognize the motivating force of materials self-chosen, within appropriate limits, and the opportunity for every child to progress at his own rate. One teacher points out that reading is a privilege for the child who wishes at times to concentrate on his own interests. For example, "I want to find out all I can about the astronauts," says Harvey. The teacher thinks also that as a result of satisfying experiences, the child brings increased skill and heightened interest to the reading that goes on around group purposes, such as a social studies unit based on the subject, "Our rivers and what they do for us."

Adequate records kept by the teacher are absolutely necessary to an individualized reading program. She must know the ability of each child, his present needs, what he has read, as well as what he is reading at the moment. His needs may be many and as varied as extending his interests beyond animal stories, on the one hand, and, on the other, learning to find the main thought in a paragraph. But the record system should be simple, not time consuming. The children may assist with it by providing dated slips for each book or story read. The teacher records objective evidence of every child's progress, using a checklist of items as well as individual comments, at least weekly.

The teacher should evaluate the program constantly, adapting schedules and procedures as she judges the effect on class and individual progress. She studies the books, too, eliminating some as less useful or less interesting, and adding others that meet new needs. Purposes are evaluated, particularly those such as enjoyment of reading, extension of interests, and reading as thinking.

The teacher notes how these may be promoted through building specific skills—improving comprehension, adapting rate of reading to difficulty of material, improving ability to recognize words, and promoting growth of a vocabulary that the child understands and can use. Increasingly the teacher is able to relate the building of these skills to the overall goals of the reading program, so that children can achieve complete independence in reading by the end of the sixth grade.

In the individualized program, parents can be encouraged to see that a child is helped to build his own library of books from the earliest years. They can also make it possible for each child to secure a library card and to withdraw books.

## What Are the Reading Problems of the Child in the Middle Grades?

Teachers usually assume that a child who enters fourth grade has acquired the basic reading skills needed to comprehend or to get thought from the printed page. So far as this is true the child is ready to build new skills for coping with new kinds of reading materials, and is also ready to increase his reading in all subject fields. But there will be children reading on a second- or third-grade level who need encouragement and help. The teacher must begin with them where they are with easy material, and must offer the same type of help as the primary teacher gives.

It is likely that some children will be far ahead of the class in their reading ability. In one fourth grade, five children were reading at fifth-grade level, two at sixth, and one at eighth. The teacher was able to arrange a consistent plan for challenging the five, but at first found that she had to provide additional materials and activities on an individual basis for the top three. This led her to experiment with individualized reading. As a result the group read many more books of more difficult nature and better quality.

The intermediate grades in school should provide for wide reading. The teacher needs to use the school library or, if there is none, to provide in the classroom a great variety of books of all types which children are encouraged and stimulated to read. Children ages 9 to 11 need to develop skill in selecting good books independently and in reading for themselves. The teacher with

ingenuity will find many ways to help children locate, select, read, evaluate, and share with others their best-liked books. In this situation children will be applying some of the skills to be emphasized during these middle grade years.

*Elementary School, Camden County, N.J*

**We read to solve a problem**

Important among these skills are the ability to (1) locate information, involving a knowledge of sources; (2) select material and evaluate it in terms of a purpose; (3) organize material around a topic or a problem; and (4) recall information. Children should have made some use of these skills in simple form in primary grades.

This is the time when children are using more and more books as sources of information for activities and projects. The teacher starts simply with a group of beginning fourth-grade children

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who are looking at a new set of readers for the first time. She suggests that they look at the title, the author, the name of the artist who illustrated the book, the publisher, and the year when the book was published. As children locate each of these items the teacher guides the discussion. They often locate some of the pictures when they talk about the illustrator and his problem of interpreting characters and situations.

Next they turn to the table of contents—what does contents mean? Contents of a desk, contents of a pocket—what it contains. They see that the stories are divided into sections, each with a heading. They count the headings for one story, suggesting what they think the story may be like. They locate the title of the first story and then see how many can find the page on which it begins. The next step is to see a sectional heading written on the board and, by getting a clue as to content, to locate a story by title in the table of contents. As a tryout, the teacher may suggest that the children might like to locate a story when they do not know the title, but do know what the story is about—a brave girl. Several children find the title—"When Hannah Saved the Day."

Next they examine the index. What is an index? Index means "to point out." The words are arranged in alphabetical order as in a dictionary or a telephone directory. Some meanings are given, together with the pages on which the words are found. Discussion helps the children to see that not all words can be listed in the index, just the most important ones. Again the children find the first story, each one chooses a word and turns to the index to see whether it is included. Finally, the children take a simple test which they have helped to make to determine whether they know and can use the various parts of a book.

The skills developed in using a reading textbook are similar to those used in a geography, science, health, history, other textbooks, or in an encyclopedia. Some of the skills are more complex (such as topical and marginal guides and cross references), but the teacher would use a similar technique in helping children to understand these skills, use them, judge their own success, practice skills that need improvement, and use them again in situations related to classroom activities.

When children are reading to find material that will help in answering a question or solving a problem, they may locate information in a number of places in the same book, or in different books. The child must ask himself, "Which part of this material answers my question? Does it entirely answer the question? Is

it a good answer? If numbers are used, do they come from a book that was published recently? What do I decide when books do not agree? What shall I include in a report to the class?" Each of these questions requires discussion. As a result, skills must be analyzed and practiced in the process of securing information on a specific problem.

*Elementary School, Camden County, N.J.*

**A committee interprets facts and figures**

As he selects and evaluates, the child records in some way the ideas that he wants to use in reporting to his group or his class. Some children copy whole sentences and read them. But such practice does not involve interpretation and does not help the child to improve his oral language expression. Children need help in taking notes in running form or simple outline form for purposes of reporting. They need to have experience with outlining as a skill, such as making a composite outline from familiar material, filling in the topics for the Roman numerals in an outline,

for which the subpoints are given (again using familiar material); or, in reverse, filling in items for letters and numbered subpoints when the Roman numeral items are stated; or filling in all the points in a skeleton outline based on familiar material.

Organizing ability calls for skill in deciding the important points, the less important points, what question the paragraph answers, how to summarize the paragraph in one sentence. Here again practice is needed, but in relation to a problem on which children are working. Some children in upper grades have taken as their responsibility the organizing of current materials in children's newspapers and in current magazines in the form of a file available to the whole school. Such a job requires reading with comprehension, selecting, evaluating, clipping, pasting, classifying, labeling, and alphabetizing. This work goes on throughout the school year, and may be placed in a regular file or one made from a carton and decorated. Or children may develop an alphabetized card file of new words related to a unit of experience. Before entering a word, the child checks to see that it is not already included. When he does list it, he also copies the sentence from which it came and perhaps adds some comment of his own. Such a file gives children an idea of the nature and extent of new words they have learned. An ingenious teacher will find ways to help children organize the cards as an original game so that they will have continuing use.

The ability to recall does not come about incidentally. One needs to have some scheme or plan for using key words, for remembering the source, for making a time-line chart of historical events, or a pictorial chart, or planning other means of recording facts in order to relate ideas to a problem.

Teachers probably most closely associate the word "recall" with the memorization of poems. Learning poetry grows out of a liking for poetry, out of hearing a poem many times in different situations, of reading one's favorite poems to classmates, of participating in choral-speaking, or of reading a poem to make a tape recording that can be played back. Poems so learned have been learned by the "whole" method and the child is much more likely to remember them for that reason. In the course of the elementary school years the child can build up a treasury of many poems that he knows if memorizing has not been made drudgery.

All skills developed should contribute to a continually growing interest in reading. Much of the reading children do at this level is done for the pure joy of it. Ways of sharing interests in books, stories, and poetry may include story-telling, dramatiza-

tion, choral-speaking, and expression in drawing, painting, and modeling.

The elementary school child who moves on to upper grades or to junior high school takes with him those skills that he has acquired but will further develop skills suited to the new situations in which he will be reading. He takes also his expanding interests and his realization that reading can provide him with information, practical help, and unlimited pleasure.

But there are some children whose reading experiences do not follow this desirable pattern. In the middle grades of the elementary school particularly they are unable to read textbooks in science, mathematics, and social studies with the speed, understanding, and skills that are required. There are many reasons for this situation, which may include (1) a poor start in school, (2) frequent changes in schools attended, (3) physical difficulties uncared for, (4) lack of interest on the part of parents, (5) failure to diagnose the reading problem early, (6) lack of remedial reading assistance, and other contributing factors. There are some types of reading difficulties so complex that no classroom teacher can hope to deal with them. Every school system needs a person who can serve as a consultant on special reading problems. Large city school systems may establish a clinic or may provide a reading supervisor, or remedial reading teachers.

It is important that every school system attempt to develop a type of reading program with continuity that will prevent the development of difficulties. But if such problems arise, a vigorous attack on the treatment and cure of the difficulties must be planned for and carried out.

Reading problems of the culturally different child are crucial ones. They are not dealt with in this bulletin, since to explore them in depth would require a bulletin devoted to this one area specifically. This discussion has provided only an overall look at the philosophy and practice in the teaching of reading as represented in typical schools in the United States today.

## How Can a Parent Judge Whether or Not His Child Is Reading Up to Capacity?

Such judgment cannot be made on the basis of whether the child can read the book that grandpa gave him for Christmas, or whether or not he knows the alphabet. There are a few simple

means which the parent can use to get some idea of how well the boy or girl can read.

Can Sue reread aloud at home a story that she first prepared and read at school? Can she read the child's newspaper for which she subscribes at school? Can she read and understand directions for setting up a cardboard puzzle map of the United States? Can she read and use a simple recipe from a child's cookbook? Can she read street signs? Does she use her library card and bring home books? Does she reread the books that belong to her? Can she find the name and telephone number of a relative or friend in the phone book?

All these activities are normal to the child sometime during the elementary school period. These and many other comparable activities involve reading skills and furnish evidence of reading growth.

Parents should make an opportunity to visit in the child's classroom. They can see there the kinds of reading experiences he is having, the kinds of methods that are used, and the wide range of purposes for which children read today. These purposes are not limited to one book at a time, but extend to many reading experiences throughout the school day and outside of school hours, to many situations, and to many types of learning materials. It is important, too, that the parent talk with the child's teacher in order to learn what things can be done at home that will help rather than hinder a child's reading progress.

The school, the teacher, the parents, and the child himself are all equally interested in having him learn to read successfully and with understanding. It is through the cooperation of all concerned that the child can make best progress in reading which is basic to all learning not only in the elementary school but in all the years of education that follow.

The extent to which parents themselves are interested in books and reading has a strong influence on a child's attitudes toward his own reading. If parents show an interest in books, or child or adult magazines of good quality which the boy or girl is reading, the child will be stimulated to further reading. An invitation by the parent to read aloud, or to tell in his own words, what is the most interesting part or the most exciting part, can help the child to develop an ability to evaluate and to express an opinion. This type of experience with recreational reading and literature is of much greater value than one which calls only for factual answers to factual questions. This latter type of experience can be used in a limited way with science and social studies material, but even

in these subject areas, the child needs to be challenged by problems that involve thinking. At the same time, he needs help in evaluating possible solutions. Not all parents may have the ability to provide this sort of guidance, but, when suggestions are asked for, these possibilities should be considered.

## To Sum Up

The child learns to read by a series of related steps that are geared to his stage of development, his interests, and his needs. The teacher creates a classroom environment which interests each child in reading, and encourages him continuously toward next steps. Today there are many attractive books for use; there are many and varied purposes for which reading can be done; there are exciting ways of sharing reading and recording reading experiences. If a child encounters difficulties, there are ways of helping him. Reading is a complicated process, but the child and his teacher usually can work out his problems together. If his progress is not rapid, it is not a reflection on him or his parents. Children are different; they learn in different ways and at different rates. When teacher, pupil, and parents have common understandings about the nature and importance of reading, nearly every child learns to read without encountering major difficulties.

# More To Read About Reading

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U. S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1964—O 755-418