

**AN INQUIRY INTO THE PLACE OF PHONICS
IN BEGINNING READING INSTRUCTION**

BY

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AN INQUIRY INTO THE PLACE OF PHONICS IN
BEGINNING READING INSTRUCTION

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Presented to
the Graduate Council of
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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in Education

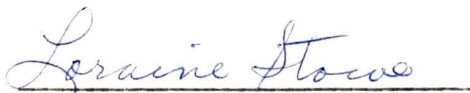
by
Jeannette June McMurry
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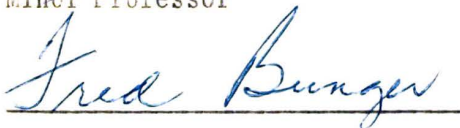
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a research paper written by Jeannette J. McMurry entitled "An Inquiry into the Place of Phonics in Beginning Reading Instruction." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Education, with a major in Curriculum and Instruction.


Major Professor

We have read this research paper
and recommend its acceptance:


Minor Professor



Accepted for the Council:

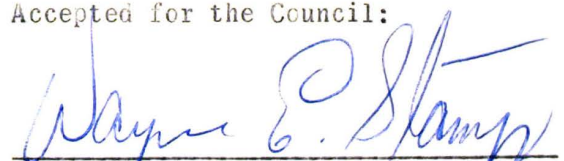

Director of Graduate Studies

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CHAPTER I

I. INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem. For many years a difference of opinion has existed regarding the effectiveness of teaching reading through phonics. Since about 1910 there has been more heated debate over the merits of using phonics than any other single element of the reading program. Reading instruction has shifted from a system which stressed phonics as the chief method of word recognition to a method having no phonics at all. The trend reversed itself in the 1920's to the extent that practically all American basal reading series contained phonics as one of the significant word recognition skills. A recent survey of 1300 teachers sampled throughout the country showed that 95 to 98 per cent of primary teachers and at least 80 per cent of intermediate grade teachers used basal readers every school day.¹ Dolch says regarding sounding and the use of basal readers:

We must admit that our group reading system is a rather dismal failure when it comes to teaching sounding. . . . The fact seems to be that having a small group of children sitting in front of the teacher (the rest at the seats), going through the prescribed steps given by the manual, does not successfully teach sounding to all.²

The question remains as to the necessity for teaching sounding in order for children to learn to read.

¹George D. Spache, Reading in the Elementary School, (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1964), p. 58.

²Ibid., p. 87.

The purpose of this paper was to explore the place of phonics in beginning reading by describing several phonics methods currently in use and contrasting these with the basal reading approach. In addition, an attempt was made to present the opinions of experts in the field of teaching reading regarding four questions: (1) what is reading? (2) how well do Americans read today? (3) what place does phonics have in beginning reading instruction? and (4) what is the best approach to teaching children to read? A resume of the research that has been accomplished in the area of phonics in beginning reading instruction was also included. The method used in this research was the historical, theoretical survey approach.

Statement of Subproblems. A brief description of the four subproblems is included in this introduction to provide a background for their study.

First, what is reading? Many books fail to explain what is intended when the word reading is used. The following are some definitions that have been given:

Reading is recognizing most of the words, guessing or³ sounding out the others, and getting meaning as a result.

Reading is getting ideas from printed matter.⁴

The heart of the reading process is comprehension.⁵

³Edward William Dolch, Teaching Primary Reading, (Champaign, Illinois: The Garrard Press, 1941), p. 2.

⁴Ibid., p. 3.

⁵C. W. Hunnicut and William J. Iverson (ed.), Research in the Three R's, (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1958), p. 2.

Reading is the process of translating basic sounds into words.⁶

Reading is a central mental⁷ activity--the reorganization of experiences back of symbols.

Reading is a language process rather than a subject. . . . Basic consideration should be given to meaning and secondary consideration to the symbols.⁸

Most modern definitions of reading deal principally with the product of reading, i.e., comprehension, and often eliminate a statement of the process through which comprehension is obtained.

A second point of dissension was the answer to the question, How well do today's readers read? Answers to this question varied greatly. Consider the following:

Several comparative studies have been made which are favorable to present-day results. Worcester and Kline compared test scores of 1921 with those of 1947 in Nebraska; Miller and Lanton compared scores of 1934 with those of 1954 in Evanston, Illinois; and Gates compared scores of 1937 with those of 1957 derived from representative groups throughout the United States. All of these investigators found gains in the scores of youngsters taught at the later date.⁹

⁶Spache, op. cit., p. 119.

⁷J. Allen Figurel (ed.), Challenge and Experiment in Reading, International Reading Association Conference Proceedings, Volume 7, 1962, (New York: Scholastic Magazines, 1962), p. 30.

⁸Charles C. Walcutt (ed.), Tomorrow's Illiterates: The State of Reading Instruction Today, (Boston, Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, An Atlantic Monthly Press Book, 1961), p. 47.

⁹Figurel, op. cit., p. 187.

When we consider that in 1880, only seventeen percent of our population could read, as compared to today, with almost no illiterates, we must appreciate the tremendous strides that have been made in our techniques for teaching reading.¹⁰

The specialist revising the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Test examined 213 California children in 1955 and discovered that twelve-year-olds were reading on the average only as well as ten-year-olds had been reading twenty and forty years earlier when the two previous editions of the same test had been issued.¹¹

The army discovered at the beginning of World War II that 16 million Americans over twenty years of age were unable to read up to the fourth-grade level.¹²

For the past thirty years, standard high-school history and social-studies texts have been revised for each edition to smaller vocabularies, simpler sentences and fewer ideas.¹³

California, beset by angry parents and mounting criticism of her ultra-progressive schools, has devised a reading test on which the children of the state score a year or more better than they do on the standard national tests.¹⁴

Still another point of dissension was the answer to the question, What place does phonics have in beginning reading instruction?

¹⁰Selma E. Herr, Phonics, Handbook for Teachers, (Los Angeles: E. R. A. Publishers, Inc., 1961), p. 8.

¹¹Walcutt, op. cit., p. 12.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid., p. 14-15.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 15.

One authority stated that "Phonetic drills have a very real value but are not essential to every child."¹⁵ Another insisted that the "role of phonics in the first grade program is that of catalyst or facilitator of the larger job of developing the ability to recognize a large stock of words immediately at sight."¹⁶ In the Foreword to a phonics handbook for teachers, Lida Williams wrote:

Phonics is not a method of teaching reading but a study of speech sounds. Properly taught in conjunction with the basic reading text, it facilitates learning to read and gives independence in the mastery of new words while stressing the need to read for meaning.¹⁷

Still another said:

The look-and-say system was worked out in purest theory; it has never been objectively tested by the educationists; and a significant portion of the thousands upon thousands of books and articles on reading that have poured from the schools of education during the past forty years have demonstrated the superiority of proper phonic instruction to look-and-say.¹⁸

These statements show to some extent the degrees of variation of opinions on this question.

Those who support the early, intensive approach to teaching phonics based their support on one or more of the following premises:

¹⁵Nila Banton Smith, Reading Instruction for Today's Children, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), p. 204.

¹⁶Figurel, op. cit., p. 29.

¹⁷Herr, op. cit., page unnumbered.

¹⁸Walcutt, op. cit., p. 141.

1. Phonics training has been used in the teaching of reading for a long time and careful research should be accomplished before the practice is abandoned.

2. Phonics training provides the pupil with independence in recognizing words previously learned and in unlocking new words.

3. Phonics training improves spelling.

4. Phonics training opens the way for the child to write creatively at an early age.

5. Phonics training strengthens correct pronunciation and enunciation of words.

6. Phonics training provides the child with the ability to read independently.

7. Phonics training enables the child to read literature of a higher quality than that which is found in the basal reading series.

Those who criticized the intensive approach to phonics usually presented one or more of the following arguments:

1. Phonics training tends to isolate words from their meaningful function by emphasizing sound.

2. Phonics training tends to cause neglect of context clues and to sacrifice interest in the content.

3. Phonics training leads to unnecessarily laborious recognition of familiar words.

4. Phonics training is impractical because of the nonphonetic character of the English language.

5. Consonants cannot be pronounced except in combination with vowels.

6. Phonics training is unnecessary for many pupils since such knowledge can be acquired without formal training.

7. Phonics training tends to slow speed of reading both silently and orally.

8. Skillful readers do not need to look at each letter in recognizing a word.

9. Gestalt theory states that people see wholes before they see the parts of which they are composed.

10. Phonics is ineffectual with children under the mental age of six and one-half to seven.

11. Recognition of words by a variety of clues is of permanent value in reading development, and no one clue should be permitted to interfere with or displace this essential habit.

12. An interest in reading and a desire to read should be developed before teaching technical aspects of reading such as sounding.

13. Good eye-movements should be established before children concentrate on the smaller units within words.

The fourth point of disagreement was the basic one: What is the best approach for teaching children to read? In order to answer this question most authors agreed that it was necessary to understand how a child learned to read. Unfortunately, no one knows exactly how children learn to read. Tests seem to reveal, however, that the following are basic to such learning taking place:

The belief that a child must evidence certain physical, mental, social, and emotional maturities before he is introduced to formal reading instruction has grown to widespread acceptance in American schools.¹⁹

1. language facility
2. physical development
3. visual perception
4. intelligence
5. auditory discrimination
6. emotional adjustment
7. cultural background of the home
8. home and community experiences
9. social experiences

To this list other writers added more specific terms such as eye-movement patterns, mixed dominance, visuo-motor organization, dyslexia and so on. It would seem important then in deciding on any method for teaching reading that the complexity of the reading process be kept in mind.

Definition of Terms. For the purposes of this paper the following definitions were established:

Reading. Reading is the process of translating symbols into sounds in order to derive meaning.

¹⁹Spache, op. cit., p. 32.

Phonics. Phonics is defined as the science of sounds as related to the teaching of reading.

Intensive phonics. Intensive phonics teaches all the main vowel and consonant sounds from the beginning of reading instruction and uses this method to train the beginning reader to pronounce all the sounds of a new word and to use context for confirmation of the result.

Gradual phonics (Intrinsic phonics). Gradual phonics refers to the conventional approach of teaching phonics found in most basal series programs. In this approach the teaching of most vowel sounds and some consonant sounds is delayed until second grade. Parts of a new word (usually the first and last consonant) are analyzed and the word is guessed from the context.

Phonetics. Phonetics is defined as the science of speech sound.

Basal series approach. The basal series approach refers to author-prepared materials which employ a variety of word recognition skills including the look-and-say method, configuration, structural analysis, phonic analysis, context clues, and other devices aimed at providing the learner with a variety of word-attack skills. This approach includes coordinated use of reading textbooks and workbooks.

II. METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

The approach to this research was a historical survey of current and past literature dealing with phonics in beginning instruction of

reading. The study sought to develop a theory or set of hypotheses relating to the place of phonics in beginning instruction of reading.

Sources of data included periodicals, professional journals, textbooks, workbooks, course instruction books, and other written reviews or research papers pertaining to the subject.

III. ORGANIZATION OF STUDY

The study was divided into four principal parts and a summary. The first part describes several phonics programs, contrasting the old methods with the new. Criticisms and praise of these approaches are also discussed.

The second part describes the basal series approach to beginning reading. A comparison of the gradual approach to phonics of several basal reading series is made. The success of the basal readers and criticism of this method is brought out.

The third part brings out the opinions of reading instruction experts regarding the four questions listed as subproblems:

What is reading?

How well do today's readers read?

What place does phonics have in beginning reading instruction?

What approach to beginning reading instruction is recommended?

The fourth part reviews research that has been carried out regarding the claims made both for and against the use of intensive phonics in beginning reading instruction.

The final chapter is an attempt to summarize the findings made in this study and to present the conclusions and recommendations of the investigator.

CHAPTER II

SURVEY OF SEVERAL PHONICS SYSTEMS

In this chapter an attempt was made to present the history of phonics in America and to describe the old phonics program and compare and contrast it with several new programs.

I. HISTORY OF OLD PHONICS SYSTEM IN AMERICA AND CURRENT EFFECTS

Around 1890 for a thirty to forty year period the center of reading instruction in America was a synthetic phonics method. Rote learning of the ABC's preceded this, but the shift of interest was to drill on the sounds of the letters rather than their names.

Rebecca Pollard introduced a synthetic method advocating the reduction of reading to a number of mechanical procedures focusing on units smaller than a word.

Children drilled on isolated sounds as illustrated below:

da	ha	la	ma	pa	ra
be	se	te	ne	le	re ₁
pi	mi	ti	si	li	ri ¹

Facility in reading became synonymous with facility in calling words. Drill on word families, isolated sounds, and the rote memorization of diacritical markings for first graders were commonly accepted practices. Stories which

¹Arthur W. Heilman, Principles and Practices of Teaching Reading, (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Books, Inc., 1961), p. 212.

follow exercises frequently included words centering around a word family, such as:

Can Ann fan Nan?
Nan can fan Dan.
Dan ran to Ann.
Ann had a pan.

The big pig can jig.
The big pig can dig.
The big pig can dig and jig.
Jig, big pig.²

Phonics rules were carefully memorized, exceptions noted, and (hopefully) put to use in the oral reading in which each child participated.

The school, the teacher, the class itself were unfamiliar with terms such as reading readiness, individual differences, slow learner, motivation, the disadvantaged child, remedial reading instruction and that most basic principle of all, reading for meaning.

In the 1920's the total emphasis in phonics exploded in a reversal-- a sudden shift to no phonics. Heilman lists several common misconceptions regarding phonics which have developed out of the reaction to the phonetic method of the past. These misconceptions are:

1. The concept that because teaching the alphabet was a common practice in the early era of phonic emphasis, it is wrong to do so. The issue as Heilman sees it is not in learning the names of the letters and recognizing them but rather the question of teaching the alphabet in sequence.

²Selma E. Herr, Phonics, Handbook for Teachers, (Los Angeles: E. R. A. Publishers, Inc., 1961), p. 7.

2. The teaching of word families is often considered an indefensible practice. This is based on the synthetic way in which they were previously taught. Word families are useful.

3. Another misconception is that no work or drill on phonics should take place that is not related directly to what the child is reading. The fallacy of this is the individual differences of the pupils taught, their readiness to learn, the necessity for systematic classroom instruction, and the failure of children to grasp a phonetic principle when it is first taught.³

Heilman summarizes by saying:

Opposition is voiced against most of what was practiced during the so-called phonic age. In the literature on phonics, a great deal of stress is placed on the evils of past practices or methods of teaching phonics. Often the indictment should be against the misuse of a practice rather than against the practice itself.⁴

Edna Burrows Smith states in discussing the Phonovisual approach (a new phonics approach) that "It was generally believed that phonetic teaching consisted of letter-calling, teaching letters in isolation, and resulted in slowing up the reader and in reading without comprehension."⁵

³Heilman, op. cit., p. 215-216.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Albert J. Mazurkiewicz (ed.), New Perspectives In Reading Instruction, A Book of Readings, (New York, Toronto, London: Pitman Publishing Corporation, 1964), p. 521.

The trend in reading instruction has shifted back to the degree that all basal reading series contain phonics as one of the word recognition skills. Some authors question its relative importance in comparison with other methods. Certainly, the main approach to introducing new words is the sight method (commonly referred to as look-and-say) of introducing all new words in context prior to reading. Other authors question how much phonics teachers actually teach when using the basal series.

In an article for the Journal of Elementary English David H. Russell reviewed a survey of 220 experienced teachers and other school personnel from 33 different states on the place of phonics in the reading program. Seventy-eight per cent of this group claimed to teach phonics as part of some or most reading lessons. They favored emphasis of phonics in grades two or three, or where needed by individual children. They opposed the use of phonics workbooks. "Phonics is seen as only one method of word-attack, and word-attack skills in turn are viewed as only one goal in the total program of developing understanding and thoughtful readers."⁶

The extent to which teachers can and do teach their pupils various phonics skills is dependent upon their knowledge of the underlying principles and conventions. Research in this area is not encouraging.

⁶David H. Russell, "Teachers' Views on Phonics," Journal of Elementary English, (October 1955), p. 375.

Studies "raise grave doubts regarding the adequacy of the teaching of phonics in our classrooms. Despite the emphasis upon these skills in the manuals and guides accompanying basal reading materials and the claims of teachers that they faithfully follow such guides, can we believe that phonics is well taught by teachers who don't understand the basic principles?"⁷

II. THE NEW PHONICS APPROACHES

A renewed interest in phonics as the method of teaching reading has produced new methods and new approaches. (Some of these programs are considered linguistic methods of teaching reading and others as strictly phonetic. There is a difference, but much of this difference lies in the mind of the creator of the system. For the purposes of this paper no specific distinction will be made.)

The New Castle Experiment. This approach is a partial phonics approach. It is used in conjunction with the Laidlaw reader, a typical look-and-say basal series. Phonics is introduced analytically. The method uses colored filmstrips to project the reading lesson on a screen or blackboard. Periods of fifty minutes a day are standard. The filmstrips parallel but are not identical to the basal reading series. Heilman, in describing this approach, says:

⁷George D. Spache and Mary E. Baggett, "What Do Teachers Know About Phonics and Syllabication?" The Reading Teacher, XIX (November 1965), p. 99.

The basic principle behind the entire program was the idea that, because of the obvious value of a visual approach, every textbook lesson could best be introduced and taught from a large image projected on a screen, with the textbooks themselves serving as testing and practice material.⁸

The experiment was begun in 1947 at the McGill School in New Castle, Pennsylvania, by Glenn McCracken. The program, which has abandoned reading readiness and started reading at the beginning of the first grade, has consistently produced readers 40 per cent superior to the national average.⁹ Reading achievement is exceptional particularly for first year of instruction.

Factors credited for this success are: (1) high pupil interest in the projected image; (2) longer attention span; (3) child requires fewer repetitions due to vivid presentation; (4) fewer distractions; (5) size of print better adapted to immature nervous systems than close-range book print; and (6) when projected on clear blackboard teachers and pupils can work together.

Mr. McCracken presented his experiment and conclusions in a book entitled The Right to Learn, published in 1959.

⁸Heilman, op. cit., p. 121.

⁹Charles C. Walcutt (ed.), Tomorrow's Illiterates: The State of Reading Instruction Today, (Boston, Toronto; Little, Brown and Company, An Atlantic Monthly Press Book, 1961), p. 142.

Phonetic Keys to Reading (Economy Company). This is an integrated program that combines phonic drills and reading materials from a series of paper-bound books. It is presently used in several thousand schools between Texas and Illinois.

Margaret Henderson Greenman, Director of Elementary Education, in Champaign, Illinois, began a study in 1952 with five teachers and 102 pupils. By 1955 the study involved thirty teachers and 710 pupils. At the end of three years Gates and California Primary Reading Tests indicated that there was a much smaller per cent of children scoring below the national norm in the experimental group using Phonetic Keys to Reading and the median of the experimental group was higher. In 1955 a more detailed evaluation was organized by Dr. J. T. Hastings, Professor of Education, University of Illinois, and Dr. Theodore L. Harris of the Department of Education, University of Wisconsin. In this evaluation four additional tests (Metropolitan Achievement Test, Stanford Elementary Reading Test, Iowa Basic Skill Text: Silent Reading and Word-Study Skills) were administered. Questionnaires were sent to teachers and parents; a sample of creative writing was taken; tape recordings of oral reading were made. They found the mean and medium of the experimental group were consistently higher. They concluded that at the end of the third grade the children in the experimental group were reading more independently.

A follow-up research report at the American Education Research Association concluded:

1. Most of the parents and teachers felt that the ability of the experimental group to read more independently also helped in arithmetic, social studies, creative writing, and in other uses of the language.

2. Most of the parents felt that this new method helped their child in learning to spell. The test results verify this opinion.

3. Observations in the classroom produced no indications that the experimental method produced word-callers or word-by-word readers.

4. From these test data now available from a six-year period, it now appears that this experimental group of pupils were able to maintain the reading proficiency they had at third grade, and it seems that they had benefited from their early introduction to phonetic understanding and the specific program of word-conception skills they had experienced during the first three grades.¹⁰

This six-year study has been published under the title The Champaign Story.

What is this program? The program starts with an eight-week period of audio readiness during which all vowel sounds, long and short, and consonant and consonant blends, are introduced. Next is a six-week primer period covering four diphthongs, more consonant blends, spellings like cy, ea, aw, ear, and ar; root words, syllabication and rules; followed by a five-week period introducing suffixes, prefixes, and compound words and the reading of a first reader. Following this, reading is done from whatever basal reader may be chosen to supplement the course. The vocabulary is somewhat wider than the look-and-say readers; in addition, children also read from library books which provides a still wider vocabulary.

¹⁰Mazurkiewicz, op. cit., p. 511.

The following are remarks made by a second grade teacher who worked with children taught to read by this method:

1. The children who have had the Phonetic Keys to Reading have done so much better this year in their Spelling Workbook.
2. They also have fewer mistakes when they write their sentences in Sentence Dictation.
3. Most of the children are able to read the reading problems in the Arithmetic Workbook for themselves.
4. In previous years many of our groups were unable to read the first chapter in the Arithmetic Textbook at the beginning of the year because they stumbled over the hard words. This year the children figure out the words for themselves.
5. In creative writing I've noticed a big improvement because they tried to write sentences for themselves. Their stories are longer too.
6. The phonetic approach gives them more independence in all their reading including the Weekly Reader.¹¹

Teaching Johnny to Read. This phonic system was presented first in the book, Why Johnny Can't Read, written by Rudolf Flesch. It has since been published separately under the above title. Perhaps no one author has been more criticized or himself more critical of others than Mr. Flesch. He abandons scholarly prose for a blunt presentation of reading education as he sees it in our society, and offers what he feels to be the infallible cure for the nation's reading ills.

Flesch particularly attacks those who state that the English language is not phonetic, nor is he alone in his opinion.

¹¹Mazurkiewicz, op. cit., p. 509-510.

But if 87 per cent of our language is completely readable by means of phonics, and even the other 13 per cent partly so, I think in agreement with Flesch, that we are being wickedly foolish when we discard the phonic method which worked well for the Romans, for all other nations which use alphabetic writing, and even for us Americans until about 1925.¹²

Flesch's program teaches the letters of the alphabet and their sounds, and then simply lists of words covering progressively all the vowels, blends, and phonograms. He suggests that at least fifty of the seventy-two exercises be done before having children read independently. Other phonic supporters consider this the principal criticism of the Flesch system: it involves too much drill before the reward of reading takes place.

Your Child Can Learn to Read. This phonics approach written by Margaret McEathron was published in 1952 by Grosset and Dunlap. It has also been published by the Kenworthy Education Service, Incorporated, Buffalo, New York, with two related workbooks. The author has run her own reading clinic in Balboa, California, for twenty-five years. She published her material at the insistence of parents and other teachers.

This is a highly simplified system. The material includes a list of 150 sight words. Otherwise, it is a systematic phonics approach which must, however, be supplemented by readers. A distinction is made between letter phonics and phonogram phonics (in other words the author shows children how to build letters into words).

¹²Mazurkiewicz, op. cit., p. 25.

Iroquois Phonics. This system, published by The Iroquois Publishing Company, Columbus, Ohio, was written by Winifred K. Eaton and Bertha F. James, in paper-bound books, The Word Shop, The High Road to Reading, Reading Trails, and so on, with teacher's manuals. The beginning of this system is strictly phonics and even the second volume is largely concerned with systematic phonics before it includes any stories.

Reading With Phonics. This phonics series by Julie Hay and Charles Wingo was published by the J. B. Lippincott Company, and has been used with success in Argo, Summit, and Bedford Park, Illinois. Its mention in Flesch's book, Why Johnny Can't Read, added considerably to its fame. It is used in over a thousand schools in thirty-six states, but is most popular with do-it-yourself parents. The system uses concerted phonic drill with pictures and two-color printing of words to call attention to phonic elements and syllabication. Short vowels and consonants as beginning sounds are presented first, then blends, and long vowels. Writing from dictation is stressed.

Reading: Chaos and Cure. This system by Sibyl Terman and Charles Child Walcutt published by McGraw-Hill Company, New York, in 1958, presents the alphabet and basic syllables. It progresses from perfectly regular phonograms to increasingly irregular ones. There is less drill in this system than in some others.

This system has been used both with beginners and with older students in remedial classes at all levels.

Word Mastery: A Course in Phonics for the First Three Grades. Published in 1913 by Houghton-Mifflin Company, Boston, Massachusetts, this one hundred twenty-four page book by Florence Akin begins with letters and progresses up to the most irregular phonograms. It is useful as a handbook for any teacher.

Listen and Learn With Phonics. Mrs. Dorothy Taft Watson developed an attractive and colorful phonics system which comes in a kit with booklets, games, phonograph records, and instructions. It can be purchased from the author or for schools through school supply houses.

The Christian Child Reading Series. This system published by Reardon, Baer and Company, Cleveland, Ohio, is a phonics system with readers, manuals, and workbooks used in Catholic parochial schools.

It is a complete phonics program for grades one through three. The child learns to write and say the letters of the alphabet. He identifies letters in words and hears rhymes. Next he hears the sounds of consonants, long vowels, and short vowels. Finally, he puts sounds together to read and write words. This training takes a month or two. Following this training, reading from books begins.

The Royal Road Readers. John C. Daniels and Hunter Diack, two research scholars at the University of Nottingham, England, developed a system called the Phonic Word Method which begins with eighteen three-letter

words that are phonetically regular. After mastering the alphabet and its sounds, children read stories with many different words but containing all short vowels and no silent letters. Long vowels, diphthongs, silent letters and all irregularities are introduced step by step.

The Writing Road to Reading. Romalda B. Spalding and Walter T. Spalding are the authors of this system published by Whiteside and William Morrow, New York, in 1957.

This system has been used for over five years in parochial schools in Hawaii with remarkable success, and has been urged for adoption by the public schools there.

Children learn to read by writing. They are first taught to print the letters accurately. Then they learn seventy basic phonograms. From this they begin writing from dictation the first words of Ayres Spelling List (the one thousand most frequently used words in English). They learn twenty-six rules about spelling and must be ready to give the rule.

After two months of this spelling, children begin to read. They read from library books on the level of A. A. Milne and are reading independently in six months.

Breaking the Sound Barrier. Sister Caroline from San Bernadino, California, was a high school teacher who decided to teach first grade reading. After six years she was so dissatisfied with her look-and-say and incidental phonics material that she devised her own system which has since been published by the MacMillan Company.

Part one of her handbook presents consonants, consonant clusters, such blends and combinations as th, sh, or kn.

Part two presents vowels (long and short), diphthongs and vowel diagraphs. (This part is not used in the first grade until a basic sight vocabulary is established.)

Part three presents the vowel sounds in words. She has the children ask themselves four questions: How does the word start? What are the vowels? What do they say? What is the word? Words are presented in context which is used to check the pronunciation and see that it is right. There are no workbooks. Sister Caroline states regarding workbooks: "Phonic analysis is a matter of sound. Workbook exercises involve writing rather than sound."¹³

Phonovisual System. This system was developed by Lucille Schoolfield, teacher of speech correction in the Washington, D. C., public schools, and Josephine B. Timberlake, who taught hard-of-hearing children to speak. ("The background and experience of both emphasized the relationship between the sounds which compose a word and the letters which represent the sounds.")¹⁴

Edna Burrows Smith pinpoints the following as unique characteristics of the Phonovisual approach:

1. The Phonovisual Method is organized phonics.

¹³Walcutt, op. cit., p. 151-152.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 156.

2. The Phonovisual Method is taught as a separate subject.
3. The Phonovisual Method has universal application.
4. The Phonovisual Method develops skills in three fields:
better reading, better spelling, better speech.¹⁵

This system has been used in the Primary Day School in Bethesda, Maryland, as well as many other schools. This school is a demonstration school with a cross section of children whose IQ's ranked from 75 to 143. At the beginning of the second year children tested from 2.3 to 4.4 grade level on the Metropolitan Test. On Gray Oral Reading Test some scored as high as 5.2 grade level.

The Carden System. This system by Mae Carden is a complete language arts program for eight years. Walcutt says, "It sounds like an exaggeration to say it, but the fact is that phonics and the basic mechanics of reading come so fast when her system is properly taught that they seem little more than incidents in a program that includes speech rhythms, enunciation, identifying the key word in a sentence, summarizing, outlining, and identifying grammatical terms!"¹⁶ Unlike other systems, Miss Carden will not permit hers to be published because she wants to personally supervise in its installation and the training of any teachers in any place adopting her system.

¹⁵Mazurkiewicz, op. cit., p. 516.

¹⁶Walcutt, op. cit., p. 156.

Miss Carden sees the goal of the reading program as the "development of the ability to read efficiently and the development of the love of reading on the part of the learner."¹⁷ The skills necessary to do this are (1) ability to read words; (2) ability to group words within a sentence in order to establish the relationship in completing a thought; (3) skill of determining main or key word of sentence; (4) possession of a vocabulary which enables reader to express the thought of a sentence in the form of a title; and (5) the ability to organize and summarize the content of the material being read.¹⁸

Let's Read. Dr. Leonard Bloomfield, Professor of Linguistics, Yale University, published a book in 1933 entitled Language upon which his recognition as a great American linguist was founded. In this book, he dealt in the last few pages with the teaching of English and reading in the schools. "Our schools are utterly benighted in linguistic matters. . . . Nothing could be more discouraging than to read our 'educationalist'' treatises on methods of teaching children to read."¹⁹ Several years later Dr. Bloomfield developed an alphabetic-phonetic primer for teaching children to read. Flesch states, "After Bloomfield's death in 1949 his literary executor offered the manuscript to every single elementary

¹⁷Mazurkiewicz, op. cit., p. 516.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 516-517.

¹⁹Rudolf Flesch, Why Johnny Can't Read and What You Can Do About It, (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1955), p. 9.

textbook publisher in the United States. Not one of them considered it.

As I am writing, the book is still unpublished."²⁰

Clarence L. Barnhart, leading lexicographer of English language, after several efforts succeeded in having Dr. Bloomfield's system published. He states:

We made many attempts to obtain some recognition, discussion, and trial of the Bloomfield System. To a certain extent these efforts have succeeded, in that knowledge of the system is widespread. In 1958, an educational foundation gave me the necessary money to write new stories, expand the lists, edit the copy, prepare the Bloomfield System for publication, and see it through the press.²¹

In 1961 Bloomfield's system was finally published by the Wayne State University Press.

Over a period of twelve years, from 1937 through 1949, Leonard Bloomfield and I offered his system for trial and experiment to the schools of education at three large universities noted for their experimental work in education, submitted it to three large schoolbook publishers and two large tradebook publishers, and offered it to various school systems. Two university presses also considered publication but for various reasons (usually after consulting a psychologist or a teacher in the reading field) were unwilling to go ahead with any experiment.

.....
It is a remarkable fact that a system worked out by one of the great linguists of the twentieth century could get no hearing in educational circles, and that there was only one attempt to try out his ideas of how to teach reading in schools.²²

²⁰Flesch, op. cit., p. 9.

²¹Leonard Bloomfield and Clarence L. Barnhart, Let's Read, A Linguistic Approach, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1961), p. 16.

²²Ibid., p. 12.

Gans described Bloomfield's system as a linguistic approach which presents regular word forms first; then irregular forms; and which relies on word families.²³ Stern criticized the system on the basis that Bloomfield uses senseless phonograms to teach sounding. He objects to the use of meaningless, artificially made-up words such as "tat, jan, yip, wen, fen, etc."²⁴

Barnhart described the Bloomfield system as "a linguistic system of teaching reading," which essentially, "separates the problem of the study of word-form from the study of word-meaning."²⁵

²³Roma Gans, Fact and Fiction About Phonics, (Indianapolis, New York, Kansas City: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1964), p. 82.

²⁴Catherine Stern and Toni S. Gould, Children Discover Reading, An Introduction to Structural Reading, (New York: Random House, L. W. Singer Company, 1963), p. 34.

²⁵Bloomfield, op. cit., p. 9.

CHAPTER III

SURVEY OF THE BASAL SERIES APPROACH

In this chapter the basal series approach was reviewed, describing in general the materials and methods used. Specific readers were reviewed with reference to the amount of phonics taught and the procedure and sequence followed. The advantages and disadvantages of this method were also outlined.

I. GENERAL DESCRIPTION

What is a basal reader? In an article in Elementary English Dayton Benjamin and Alice Burton give the following definition:

A basal reader is purposefully selected and prepared reading matter which incorporates all of the vocabulary and basic reading skills or techniques required for a particular reading level. . . . The stories are conceived and constructed to develop a definite skill in the reading process.¹

Spache outlines the modus operandi and materials for the basal series approach for first grade as follows:

First Grade Basal Materials	Total Vocabulary
Readiness or pre-reading workbook	
Two or three pre-primers	40 to 110 words
Workbook to accompany pre-primers	

¹ Dayton Benjamin and Alice Burton, "The Basal Reader in the First Grade," Elementary English, XXXII (April 1955), p. 238.

Word and phrase cards for wall chart or flash card use	
One or two primers	120 to 310 words
Primer workbook	
A first reader	230 to 475 words
First reader workbook	
Teacher's manual or guide for the first grade	

(Optional Materials)

Supplementary or cobasal readers
Poster-size wall chart₂
Poster-size pre-primer²

Roma Gans finds that basal reading series generally have certain qualities in common. Among these like qualities are the controlled vocabulary that is gradually introduced and repeated conscientiously; the choosing of topics highlighted with bright pictures supposedly appealing to six-year-olds across the country; the manuals presenting a variety of ways for helping children recognize the words and remember them; the inclusion of discussion of the meaning of the material.³

Following a readiness test, the class is generally subdivided into groups. Those, who are ready, begin learning to read either through using the pre-primer program or by an initial experience with an experience chart. Children who are not considered ready will complete a readiness

²George D. Spache, Reading in the Elementary School, (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1964), p. 59.

³Roma Gans, Common Sense in Teaching Reading, (Indianapolis, New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1963), p. 96.

period, and then some according to Gans: "may be started off after the Christmas holidays; the remainder, a month or so later."⁴ ⁵ Gans further describes the method as follows:

Three groups at varying stages of progress with the basal materials meet at separate periods or simultaneously, the teacher going from group to group. This is considered the reading period or lesson. During this time, a teacher has a chance to hear children read individually, to note their successes as well as the errors they make, to note what additional help they may need in phonics or in added drill, and to give them directions for the individual work periods that usually follow. Some youngsters who are found to be misplaced in ability level are changed from one group to another. Some may reveal difficulties⁶ which indicate that more careful diagnosis is desirable.

The time spent in teaching reading varies from school to school and class to class. Spache states: "In all, this first grade reading program occupies from 90 to 110 minutes every day, with, unfortunately, most of this time being devoted to oral reading from the basal or supplementary materials."⁷

While students read in groups, other students carry out workbook or other assignments at their desks.

⁴Gans, op. cit., p. 97.

⁵Most schools require that children complete a first reader prior to promotion to the second grade. In these cases if the child does not begin to read until after the Christmas holidays, it generally means he will be retained.

⁶Gans, op. cit., p. 97.

⁷Spache, op. cit., p. 63.

II. ADVANTAGES OF THE BASAL SERIES APPROACH

Warren G. Cutts describes the basal series approach as being "either good or bad, depending upon the manner in which it is carried out."⁸ Gans tends to agree with this stating that "One cannot overemphasize the importance of a 'peppy' creative teacher--no matter what the philosophy of reading involved."⁹ Gates believes the new basal reader is concerned with teaching the abilities and skills needed to read well and enjoy it. He feels that within this area the basal reader functions satisfactorily. "The modern basal reader program is designed primarily to teach reading, not literature or science or history or geography or any other subject."¹⁰

The basal reader should occupy only a small part of the time devoted to reading in the school program. Cutts finds an advantage in the fact "that all children master a minimum sight vocabulary and receive training in the same word-attack skills by the time they have reached any given level."¹¹

⁸Warren G. Cutts, Modern Reading Instruction, (Washington, D. C.: The Center for Applied Research in Education, Inc., 1964), p. 75.

⁹Gans, op. cit., p. 98.

¹⁰Albert J. Mazurkiewicz (ed.), New Perspectives In Reading Instruction, A Book of Readings, (New York, Toronto, London: Pitman Publishing Corporation, 1964), p. 15.

¹¹Cutts, op. cit., p. 74.

To Heilman:

One of the greatest advantages in using a good series is the availability of excellent teacher guides. These guides are carefully worked out by the authors with the total reading program in mind. Sound laws of learning are followed, specific techniques are suggested, lesson plans are given in great detail, and the reasons for using certain approaches are explained.¹²

And Dayton Benjamin and Alice Burton flatly state:

In conclusion attention is called to the fact that the basal reader method is a necessary and important part of the first grade reading program, something that we would not wish to do without.¹³

Following are two lists of supposed advantages to the use of basal reading programs. It is seen later that several points considered by these two authors as advantages are viewed by other experts in a less favorable light.

Heilman lists the following ten advantages:

1. Modern reader series are characterized by excellent use of pictures and art work.
2. A number of the first books used deal with the same characters, giving children a feeling of familiarity with the material and adding to their confidence in reading.
3. The books are graded to provide systematic instruction from the pre-readiness level through the upper elementary grades.

¹²Arthur W. Heilman, Principles and Practices of Teaching Reading, (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Books, Inc., 1961), p. 103.

¹³Benjamin and Burton, op. cit., p. 239.

4. These graded materials permit teachers a great deal of flexibility in dealing with individual differences and in working with children grouped according to attained reading skill.

5. Excellent teacher guides are provided for each book or level. These provide suggestions for a step-by-step teaching program.

6. If used properly, the basic reader series deals with all phases of the reading program, guarding against overemphasis on some aspects and neglect of others.

7. Practice of new skills is introduced at the proper time and in the proper sequence.

8. A great deal of review is provided in deliberate, well-thought-out procedures.

9. To prevent frustration in reading the vocabulary is rigidly controlled.

10. Use of prepared materials saves teachers considerable time.¹⁴

Spache elaborates slightly on what he feels the basal series offers:

1. systematic guidance in the development of recognition, comprehension, and vocabulary skills by carefully planned sequential learning. Modern educational psychology tells us that such a system is superior to trial and error or to incidental learning, or, probably, to a program planned by the teacher.

2. materials based upon common child experience and the well-known interests of children. Thus it provides for a common core of experiences for the entire group.

¹⁴Heilman, op. cit., p. 110.

3. a program that is greatly superior to any that a modern teacher, in view of the breadth of his professional preparation or, rather, the lack of breadth in the area of reading methodology, could possibly create.

4. techniques and materials for determining the readiness of the child to learn to read or to proceed from step to step by easy stages.

5. a basic or core vocabulary that is essential to any beginning or subsequent reading.

6. materials that are carefully scaled in difficulty, sequentially arranged to promote learning, and controlled in vocabulary. Thus the program insures enjoyable and successful growth of the child's reading abilities. No other available body of reading materials possesses these characteristics.

7. materials that follow the best knowledge in such aspects as typography, format, and physical readability.

8. a well-rounded selection of reading experiences. It includes both recreational and work-type reading, poetry and prose, factual and fictional matter, informational and entertaining materials that extend the child's ideas and knowledge in many fields.¹⁵

III. DISADVANTAGES OF THE BASAL SERIES APPROACH

It is, of course, inevitable that any teaching approach will be criticized. Those who have not profited by it will naturally oppose it, and, in addition, those who object to the status quo as such will be heard. But there is a steadily increasing voice of dissension from those who have used and even written basal reading materials. Their criticisms are significant. In general the following are the prime

¹⁵Spache, op. cit., p. 72.

areas against which complaints have been lodged: content, style, vocabulary control, provision for individual differences, overemphasis on oral reading, and workbooks.

Content. There is a question in the minds of many people regarding the validity of the statements regarding interest of children that are found among the claims of basal series writers and supporters. Gans points out two thought-provoking facts: (1) no single book will ever be exactly right for every child, and (2) it is highly difficult (perhaps impossible) to develop a book that will meet the limited reading power of the beginner through limited vocabulary and repetition of words and still be a book in regard to appeal and literacy of content.¹⁶

In addition, the content is strongly biased in favor of feminine tastes. The children in the stories are well-to-do and quite saintly. Otto Klineberg, a social psychologist, presents the following generalizations based on analyzing the content of basal readers, and questions the rightness of using these to teach reading:

The American people are almost exclusively white or Caucasian. . . . North European in origin and appearance . . . almost exclusively blondes . . . quite well-to-do.

¹⁶Gans, op. cit., p. 133.

. . . . South Europeans are organ grinders, peddlers, and fruit and vegetable vendors. . . . Either there are no Negroes, or they must not be mentioned. . . . a snowman laughs, animals talk to one another. . . . trains converse, and so do airplanes and helicopters, cars and taxis. . . . In fact, life in general is fun. . . . all is peaceful and happy. . . . ¹⁷frustrations are rare and usually overcome quite easily.

The following quotation from Heilman is offered by him as a rejection of criticism regarding the content of the basal reader.

It is a common practice to find teacher guides making much of the fact that pre-primers, primers, and first readers 'do not require children to deal with concepts beyond their experience level.' Considering the small number of words found in these materials, it would be a challenge, using only this vocabulary, to confront the child with concepts beyond his experience level. He uses twenty to ¹⁸thirty times this number of words and understands many more.

Apparently Heilman can see no other possible approach or method for teaching reading other than the basal series. The teacher must accept these limitations and indeed be thankful for them. Heilman insists:

The beginning teacher would be remiss in not following the teacher guides and in not becoming very familiar with the rationale and concrete suggestions they contain. Experienced teachers might find the detail of these manuals a bit tedious, but they know that they can take what is ¹⁹offered and adapt it in light of their own experience.

¹⁷Spache, op. cit., p. 73.

¹⁸Heilman, op. cit., p. 103.

¹⁹Ibid.

Spache quotes from other writers who voice criticism of the content of the basal reading program:

James M. Reid, school editor of Harcourt, Brace and World, Incorporated, commented: "It seems fair to say, however, that today's school readers are too much watered down and do not offer enough challenge to today's good pupils."²⁰

James L. Hymes, Jr., a noted child development specialist and author states: "The penalty the child pays for becoming Six is to be fed a two-year-old diet."²¹

Dr. Jack A. Holmes, analyst of reading ability, remarks:

The basal program is weakest in reinforcing the child's range of information. The series merely repeats the homely concepts of vocabulary already known to the child. The series never stretches the child's mind, never prepares him for the wide range of information he must know to read, to learn or to deal with the conceptualizations needed for power of reading. The child needs a wider vocabulary in his early reading, as well as more, deeper and wider concepts.²²

Ruth C. Smith brings out the lack of stories about things interesting to the child, such as nature, science, fantasy, fairy tales, and animals. Instead, the series present children-parent stories, toys, community workers, and animal stories which deal almost completely with kittens and puppies.²³

²⁰ Spache, op. cit., p. 76.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

Gans says rather bitterly, "The result for far too many children has been a book that had the oh, see, look drivel, an affront to their respectability."²⁴

And there is, of course, the now famous story of the first grade teacher who "wraps her car's fender around the garage door. She looks at the damage and says: Oh! Oh! Oh! Look! Look! Look! Damn! Damn! Damn!"²⁵ Really not so amusing when thought about.

Nancy Larrick states, "The stories in the reader have been truncated and simplified until they are as tempting as Pabulum to the man who wants steak. Controversy has been edited out. Yet these children live in a world of controversy."²⁶

Style. Closely related to content is the style in which that content is presented. Spache quotes James M. Reid as saying, "A good many people wince over the lack of style in the writing of basal readers. Lack of a good writing style in itself kills interest. A good style helps to sweep a learner along."²⁷

²⁴Gans, op. cit., p. 134.

²⁵George D. Spache, Toward Better Reading, (Champaign, Illinois: Garrard Publishing Company, 1963), p. 29-30.

²⁶Mazurkiewicz, op. cit., p. 413.

²⁷Spache, Reading in the Elementary School, p. 75.

Linguists question the language patterns which are forced and unrelated to the normal sentence patterns used by children. Children tend to use complex and compound sentences in talking, and their vocabularies are wide and varied. Gans says, "As a rule their tales have a run-on quality and often a good resounding ending."²⁸ But vocabulary control limits the writer of the basal reader.

As a result the well-known short, staccato primer style came into being. In addition came research establishing the number of times it was necessary to repeat a word to aid the child in recognizing it with more certainty; the end result was the 'oh-oh-oh, see-see-see' insulting style in primers, preprimers, and primary books. Most of us have heard the effect of this style when a beginning reader takes a deep breath and in unrhythmic gusts reads, 'Oh, oh! Oh, look! Look, look.'²⁹

Stauffer describes these readers: "Preprimers are stilted in style. The sentences are short, the stories are short, and the pictures are large."³⁰ He recommends the use of experience charts as a partial remedy for this lack on the part of the basal reader. Larrick acidly comments:

. . . the language of this old-fashioned reader is unlike anything the child has ever heard. It is not the language he speaks, not the one he hears in the adult world of radio and TV. It is full of interjections: Oh! Oh! And of commands: See. See. One anthropologist is quoted as saying that this is the only primitive language left in the world today.³¹

²⁸Gans, op. cit., p. 128.

²⁹Ibid., p. 124.

³⁰Mazurkiewicz, op. cit., p. 301.

³¹Ibid., p. 413-414.

Vocabulary control. The limit to style and content is created principally by the vocabulary control exercised by the basal series writers and stems from the use of look-and-say techniques of presenting and retaining words. Supporters of the basal reader approach such as Gertrude Hildreth argue in favor of this carefully controlled vocabulary, pointing out that a more difficult load would encourage guessing and stumbling. When reading for meaning became stressed, Hildreth says, it became necessary to increasingly simplify the vocabulary. She states as further evidence in favor of vocabulary control: "The easy vocabulary seems to require less teaching expertness. The children find it easier to help themselves and one another. The inexperienced teacher succeeds with the easier books, whereas the experienced teacher has a difficult time with a heavy vocabulary load."³² Based on this, one may assume Hildreth would support indefinitely restricting the vocabulary simply because it is easier for the teacher to teach and the pupil to memorize whether it meets the needs or requirements of either. She further states that this vocabulary gives the slow learner a break in learning to read. It is generally accepted that basal reading series are geared to the so-called average child--the slow learner is stumped and the bright child stullified.³³

³²Gertrude Hildreth, "All in Favor of a Low Vocabulary," Elementary School Journal, XLIII (April 1943), p. 469.

³³Spache, Toward Better Reading, p. 26.

Clarence R. Stone asserts:

Although an abundance of easy material with a low vocabulary facilitates fluency and the mastery of a small sight vocabulary, the mere reading of a large amount of such materials does not provide the experiences and the training required for developing independence in word recognition in the case of pupils who find it more or less difficult to acquire versatility in applying visual analysis and phonetic knowledge in combination with the use of context or meaning clues. Probably at least half or maybe two-thirds of the children need instruction for developing skill in recognizing new words.³⁴

To which Hildreth would reply:

The time spent on extraneous drills in word analysis, which are only indirectly related to meaningful reading can be greatly reduced for all children and actually omitted for some pupils.³⁵

How the child learns to read words other than those found in his controlled vocabulary is none too clear, although a process of sudden and miraculous insight is indicated.

Spache summarizes by saying:

To the best of our knowledge, there is no proof that over-learning of a small core vocabulary is the only possible foundation for learning to read. This belief is predicated upon the assumption that a beginning reader must memorize each and every word he meets,³⁶ or else he will not be able to read other future materials.

³⁴Clarence R. Stone, "A Reply to 'All in Favor of a Low Vocabulary. . .'" Elementary School Journal, XLIV (September 1943), p. 43.

³⁵Hildreth, op. cit., p. 468.

³⁶Spache, Toward Better Reading, p. 30.

And again, "Teachers just cannot secure the claimed advantages of a controlled basal program and the advantages of an enriched reading program at the same time."³⁷

Provision for individual differences. The problem of vocabulary control leads quite naturally then into a discussion of individual differences and the provision which exists for these. Cutts notes that in a study by Patrick J. Groff regarding basal reading grouping practices: "The basal reader approach to reading instruction, with its typical three-group arrangement, may not permit children to develop their individual abilities to the fullest extent."³⁸

Mazurkiewicz comments on the lack of flexibility in the basal reader program and questions the blind acceptance of the program by many educators.

Far too often there is very little flexibility in the way basal readers are used to meet the range of individual needs. The assumption that a basal reader is a necessary concomitant to reading instruction continues to mislead many teachers. Certainly any printed material can be used to teach reading. Since basal readers with their overcontrolled vocabularies cannot be geared to the range of experiences, social and cultural levels, and interests or attitudes of all children, there is a clear need for an approach to instruction which provides for these differences.³⁹

³⁷Spache, Toward Better Reading, p. 31.

³⁸Cutts, op. cit., p. 76.

³⁹Mazurkiewicz, op. cit., p. 295.

Spache, writing as recently as 1963, declares:

Despite the many attempts to adapt the basal reader to individual differences, no current series makes complete provisions for slow learners or superior pupils. Even the provision of parallel or supplementary books, the between-grade, or the junior books does not entirely provide for the range of pupil differences. The common use of lower-grade readers with retarded pupils may meet the needs in learning rate or vocabulary control but ignores the pupil's age, or his need for fresh, vitally interesting material. Despite the evidence of less need for the complete basal program, superior readers are expected to follow the same pattern of reading experiences as all other pupils.⁴⁰

Also, the slow learner may not as Cutts puts it "have much zest for stories and books to which they have had some exposure in a lower grade or which they may recognize as a book used by more able pupils the year before."⁴¹ Even in a single class in a year's time, the slower group knows the stories the faster group has read just by listening, although they may never handle the books themselves.

Overemphasis on oral reading. Another criticism refers to method and that is the overemphasis on oral reading. Observers in primary classrooms often get the impression that oral reading in a circle is the sum and substance of the reading program. Far too often this is true.

⁴⁰ Spache, Toward Better Reading, p. 26.

⁴¹ Cutts, op. cit., p. 74.

Workbooks. A final criticism rests with the use of workbooks. Generally, the criticism is in regard to the way in which the workbooks are used. Supervisory and administrative personnel oppose workbooks as 'busy work.' However, the workbook itself does come under fire.

The arguments against workbooks point out the tendency to overdependence of the teacher upon these tools, their disregard of individual needs, their lack of creativity or training in expression or fluency, and their monotonous, repetitive nature.⁴²

In two studies by Doctor and Black and Whitehouse it was concluded that "workbooks probably reach their maximum values in the second to fourth grades but offer few significant values in the first, fifth, and sixth grades."⁴³

It can be seen from this brief discussion that there is much disagreement among reading experts as to the validity of the claims made by the basal reading series and to the necessity for centering the reading program around such a series.

There is a seventh point of criticism that is often raised. Due to its significance to the study being made in this paper it is treated individually under the next topic, dealing with the phonic content of various basal reading series. This point of criticism is the inflexibility of the teaching method.

⁴²Spache, Toward Better Reading, p. 28.

⁴³Spache, Reading in the Elementary School, p. 78.

IV. PHONIC CONTENT OF SEVERAL BASAL READING SERIES

Tinker and McCullough state, "Experts who have recently written or revised their basic-reader series are in essential agreement as to the phonic elements to be taught."⁴⁴ DeBoer and Dallman have listed these elements:

1. Single consonants in initial, final and middle position in words.
2. Consonant blends or double consonants.
3. Consonant digraphs.
4. Single vowel sounds: short, long, modified by r, l, w, remaining vowel sounds.
5. Vowel digraphs.
6. Diphthongs.
7. Silent letters.⁴⁵

The following is a review of four programs which involve the teaching of phonics as one of several word recognition skills. These four programs are published by Ginn Company, Row, Peterson and Company, Allyn and Bacon, Incorporated, and Bobbs-Merrill Company. A fifth program is described in order to present to some extent the changes taking place within the basal series themselves regarding the place of phonics in beginning reading instruction. This fifth program is published by Houghton-Mifflin Company.

⁴⁴Miles Tinker and Constance M. McCullough, Teaching Elementary Reading, second edition (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1962), p. 155.

⁴⁵Ibid.

Ginn Company. The following excerpts outline briefly the program of phonetic analysis used by this series:

. . . . plan makes activities designed for the phonetic analysis of words an intrinsic part of the entire word-study program. . . . The program is carefully graded from phonetic-readiness work, such as listening for initial consonant sounds and rhyming elements; through using initial and final consonants, consonant blends and digraphs in the first grade; noticing vowel differences in the second grade; syllabication in the third grade; to diacritical marks and the use of a dictionary in the middle and upper grades.

All phonetic elements are introduced through the use of known words. . . .⁴⁶

Readiness.

Books used are Fun with Tom and Betty and Games We Play.

Auditory discrimination includes recognizing and discriminating rhyming elements; recognizing beginning and ending consonant sounds, and acquiring sensitivity to rhythm.

Visual discrimination includes recognizing likenesses and differences in color, configuration, simple geometric forms, letters, and words.

Preprimers.

Books used are My Little Red Story Book, My Little Green Story Book, My Little Blue Story Book, and a supplementary reader Come and Play. The three regular books include fifty-six words.

⁴⁶ Odille Ousley and David H. Russell, The Little White House, teacher's edition, (U. S. A.: Ginn Co., 1957), p. 46-47.

Auditory discrimination includes discriminating between initial sounds of b, c, d, f, g, h, l, p, r, s, t, w, and m, and the final sounds of k and p.

Visual discrimination involves the recognition of the fifty-six sight words and the association of meaning with word form.

Structural analysis deals with practice in recognizing the plural form of nouns and the s forms of verbs.

Primer.

Books used are The Little White House and the supplementary reader Under the Apple Tree. The regular reader contains ninety-nine new words.

Auditory and visual discrimination involves the developing of the ability to combine the visual and auditory perception of identical elements in words that begin with the same consonant or the same digraph, or that have rhyming endings or end with the same consonant. Skill in noting likenesses and differences in word forms is promoted and the ability to use both context and phonetic clues to supply orally a word that will be presented in the basic reading vocabulary at a later time.

Structural analysis includes recognizing both the root word and the variant when 's is added to show possession, s is added to show the plural form of nouns, and s and ed are added to known verb forms.

First Reader.

Books used are On Cherry Street and the supplementary reader Open the Gate. On Cherry Street contains 171 new words.

Phonetic analysis is extended to include developing skill in attacking a new word by substituting or affixing an initial or final consonant or blend or digraph to a known word. Some skill is developed in comparing new words with old words and in using both context and phonetic clues to identify unfamiliar words.

Structural analysis includes the adding of ing to a known verb form and developing the ability to recognize the parts of compound words and to build a few new compound words from known words.

Row, Peterson and Company. In general the statement is made that "reading development is not possible without an adequate vocabulary of carrier and service words . . . which can be recognized automatically."⁴⁷

Readiness.

Books used are Here We Go, a diagnostic readiness book, and Over the Wall, a developmental readiness book.

Auditory discrimination emphasizes accurate pronunciation and the development of accurate perception of the sounds of words.

Visual discrimination encourages the ability to make visual discrimination between word forms, by attending to general form or configuration, and focusing attention on details.

⁴⁷Mabel O'Donnell, Guidebook for the Alice and Jerry Basic Reading Program, (Evanston, Illinois, Elmsford, New York: Row, Peterson and Co., 1960), p. 15.

Preprimers.

Books used are Skip Along, Under the Sky, Open the Door, and High on a Hill, which present a vocabulary of seventy-eight words.

Auditory and visual discrimination of initial consonant sounds (b, c, ch, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, p, r, s, sh, t, th, v, w, wh) is presented.

Primer.

Books used are Day In and Day Out and the parallel primer, Wishing Well. The primer presents 101 new words.

Auditory and visual discrimination of initial consonant sounds is continued and discrimination of final sounds (d, g, l, n, p, t, y) is introduced. Some attention is given to initial blends (bl, br, gr, pl, sn, st, tr) and the long vowel sounds a, e, and o.

Phonetic parts (ar, ay, er, ew, ir, oo, ou, ow, oy) are included.

Structural analysis includes the understanding of nouns ending in s, possessives, and verb forms s and ed and ing.

First Reader.

Books used are Round About and the parallel first reader, Anything Can Happen.

Recognition of final sounds is extended to include ch, ck, k, ll, m, ng, sh, th, and y. Additional initial blends are presented (cr, fl, fr, pr, sl, sm, tw). The short sounds of the vowels a, i, and o are introduced.

Additional phonetic parts are introduced (oo as in too and look; ow as in show and now; and ur).

Allyn and Bacon, Incorporated.

Readiness.

Books used are Picture Stories and More Picture Stories.

Auditory discrimination includes recognizing and discriminating among common sounds, similar sounds, rhyming elements, and initial consonants (b, c, d, f, g, h, j, l, m, n, p, r, s, t, w, y, and the hard sounds of c and g). Sensitivity to inflectional variants is developed.

Visual discrimination involves configuration regarding activities dealing with color, detail, kind, place and position, size, serial order, and visual memory of objects, as well as letter forms, word forms, and sentence forms.

Preprimers.

Books used are At Home, Here and Near, Here and Away, and At Home and Away.

Activities of the readiness program are continued. In addition the basic sight vocabulary is presented in regard to configuration clues, picture clues, context clues, and recognition of capital and lower-case letters.

Structural analysis includes adding s to nouns and verbs.

Primer.

Book used is Our School. The emphasis changes from auditory discrimination to visual-auditory discrimination.

Phonetic analysis includes the initial consonants covered during the readiness and preprimer stages and the rhyming elements ake, all, ay, ig, ill, and ook.

Structural analysis covers adding ed to verbs and 's to form possessives. Compound words are also considered.

First Reader.

The book used is Our Town.

Auditory discrimination of final consonants is introduced.

Phonetic analysis is broadened to include rhyming elements at, en, et, ight, ing, ot, and final consonant substitution. Initial consonant blends (br, dr, fr, gr, tr, bl, cl, fl, gl, pl, st) are substituted. Initial consonant digraphs are introduced (ch, sh, th (unvoiced), th (voiced), wh as in when).

Structural analysis includes adding ing to verbs and introduces contractions.

Bobbs-Merrill Company.

Readiness.

The book used is Get Ready to Read.

Auditory discrimination involves recognition of rhyming words, and beginning sounds.

Visual discrimination includes recognizing likenesses and differences in shape, size, position and color.

Preprimers.

Books used are Don and Peggy, Come and See, and Here We Play. There are fifty-eight words in the preprimers.

Auditory perception and auditory-visual perception includes recognizing beginning and ending like sounds and words that rhyme. Visual discrimination is carried out in regard to word configuration.

Structural analysis includes adding s to nouns to form plurals.

Primer.

The book used is Days of Fun which includes 102 new words.

The acquiring of word attack methods is an important part of this phase of the reading program. Workbooks provide repeated practice in the scrutiny and comparison of word forms. Auditory-visual perception of initial and final consonants and rhyming words is practiced. Auditory perception of initial digraphs is introduced.

Structural analysis includes the s-form of verbs.

Houghton-Mifflin Company. The general statement of how the teacher is to teach reading is given in each of the manuals:

The pupil is taught a single, wholly reliable technique for unlocking strange words, and that technique is briefly:

- 1) to use the context (the meaning of the other words) to think of a word that makes sense
- 2) and simultaneously to use a few of the letter and sound associations in the word for accurate positive identification.⁴⁸

⁴⁸Paul McKee, et. al., Teacher's Manual, third edition, (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Co., 1963), p. 4.

The word exercises in the manual are referred to as "unlocking strange words" and the terms phonics and phonetic analysis are carefully avoided for the most part.⁴⁹ However, this approach is somewhat in-between intrinsic and extrinsic phonics teaching, being neither as casual as the one nor as committed as the other.

Readiness.

The book used is Getting Ready to Read.

The children learn letter-sound associations for eighteen single consonants and four speech consonants (b, c, hard d, f, g, hard h, j, k, l, m, n, p, r, s, t, v, w, y, ch, sh, th as in thumb, and wh). They learn to distinguish letter forms from one another. They listen for beginning sounds. They associate letter sounds and forms and use spoken context and the first letter in a printed word to supply the unknown word.

Preprimers.

The books used are Tip, Tip and Mitten, and The Big Show. The books introduce sixty new words. This figure does not include words used in the unlocking strange words exercises.

Children discriminate words beginning with the same sound, and words that rhyme and end with the same sound. They learn consonant blends bl, br, cl, cr, gr, pr, st, thr, consonant z, soft c, and endings ed, es, and ing. They discriminate between capital and small letters.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 5.

Primer.

The book used is Jack and Janet which introduces ninety-one new words.

Children continue to discriminate words beginning and ending with the same sound. They match pictures and key sounds and use letter sound and context clues to identify new words. They discriminate among similar words. They learn the additional consonant blends fl, fr, pl, sl, str, and tr.

First Reader.

The book used is Up and Away which presents a new vocabulary of 164 words.

The first reader continues the activities begun previously in the program. Continued effort is made toward independence in recognizing new words.

Summary. The phonics outline of these basal readers follows generally the elements listed by DeBoer and Dallman. Two questions remain for the teacher of reading:

1. Is it practical to withhold the teaching of vowels until grade two? Durkin states:

I . . . have tried . . . to discourage what might be labeled a 'grade-level approach' to teaching phonics. That is, I have tried to help teachers see that it does not make good educational sense to think of the content of phonics as being divided into sections each to be taught at a prescribed grade level.⁵⁰

⁵⁰J. Allen Figurel (ed.), Challenge and Experiment in Reading, International Reading Association Conference Proceedings, Volume 7, (New York: Scholastic Magazines, 1962), p. 428.

2. How closely do teachers of reading follow the intrinsic program?

It has been mentioned in Chapter II that research in this area was not favorable.⁵¹ There seems to be a wide discrepancy between what is claimed and what is taught. Again Durkin points out that in the classes she taught (both those preparing to teach and those who were presently teaching) she found it "necessary to teach, first, the content of phonics; and then, secondly, how the content might be taught to others."⁵²

⁵¹See page 16, Chapter II.

⁵²Figurel, op. cit., p. 428.

CHAPTER IV

SURVEY OF OPINIONS OF EXPERTS IN READING

INSTRUCTION AND RELATED AREAS

In this chapter an effort was made to review the writings of experts in the field of reading instruction regarding their stated opinions on the four questions listed as subproblems in Chapter I; namely,

1. What is reading?
2. How well do Americans read today?
3. What place does phonics have in beginning reading instruction?
4. What approach to beginning reading instruction is recommended?

Writings of the following individuals were considered:

Jacques Barzun
Emmett Albert Betts
Homer L. J. Carter and Dorothy J. McGinnis
Edward William Dolch
Donald D. Durrell
Rudolph Flesch
Roma Gans
Arthur I. Gates
William S. Gray
Arthur W. Heilman
Selma Herr
Gertrude Hildreth
Paul McKee
Margaret G. McKim
David H. Russell
George D. Spache
Ruth Strickland
Paul Witty
Gerald A. Yoakum

Certainly these are not the only individuals who may claim to be expert in the field of reading instruction, but their names are found quite frequently in writings of professional people and in much of the research that has been accomplished in this area. No attempt will be made in this chapter to refute or support anything that these individuals believe regarding reading instruction unless some inconsistency is found within their own writings which justifies clarification.

I. JACQUES BARZUN

What is reading? The art of reading is getting from the printed word as nearly as possible a sensation equivalent to the real thing.¹

How well do Americans read today? "Although the Army turned down only two hundred and forty thousand for deficient schooling, the level of reading in the camps for the ten million is reported as pretty low."² This, Barzun feels, is partially evidenced by the popularity of comics and Life magazine.

What place does phonics have in beginning reading instruction, and What approach to beginning reading instruction is recommended? Since Barzun favors a phonics approach, these two questions can be considered as one.

¹Jacques Barzun, Teacher In America, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., An Atlantic Monthly Press Book, 1945), p. 62.

²Ibid., p. 61.

The school teaches by one of two methods: the memorizing of letter sounds and combining them, or the learning of whole words. (The whole word method is sometimes referred to as the Chinese way since they have a symbol or character representing each word in their language, some characters having several meanings according to the context.) In later life Barzun describes all efficient reading as being performed in the 'Chinese' way of seeing words and phrases at a glance. He goes on to say, "The older way, however, did not prevent the acquiring of the one-glance reading habits, and it did help spelling and pronunciation. So that my choice, if I had any, would be for starting the old way and making sure that the child does not bog down at the letter or the syllable stage."³

II. EMMETT ALBERT BETTS

Emmett Betts has been Research Professor, University of Miami; Professor of Psychology and Director of Reading Clinic, Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Research Professor in Elementary Education and Director of Reading Clinic, The School of Education, The Pennsylvania State College, State College, Pennsylvania.

³Ibid., p. 62.

What is reading? Betts calls "the number-one goal of reading instruction-- teaching pupils how to think."⁴ He sees reading as a facet of language rather than an isolated fragment, and considers reading primarily a problem of interpretation.⁵

How well do Americans read today? He concludes that "In general . . . today's pupils read as well as or somewhat better than those of yesterday. In fact, pupils today tend to read more books and they read them faster and with better understanding."⁶ He finds classroom instruction more effective than it was, "but obviously it is not good enough."⁷

What place does phonics have in beginning reading instruction? Betts, writing in the late 1940's, felt that "a certain type of phonic instruction has a very definite place in a differentiated program of reading instruction."⁸

⁴Albert J. Mazurkiewicz, New Perspectives In Reading Instruction, A Book of Readings, (New York, Toronto, London: Pitman Publishing Corporation, 1964), p. 210.

⁵Emmett Albert Betts, Foundations of Reading Instruction with Emphasis on Differentiated Guidance, (U. S. A.: American Book Co., 1946), p. 4.

⁶Mazurkiewicz, op. cit., p. 207-208.

⁷Ibid., p. 208.

⁸Betts, op. cit., p. 614-615.

He went on to say that a desirable phonics program recognizes that phonics is only one clue in word recognition, that it is to be used only when need arises in reading situations, that a word-analysis approach is to be used rather than synthesizing sounds into words (the word being seen only as a whole), and that only those pupils who can profit from phonic analysis are taught the techniques.

Let us contrast this with an article written in 1961. In this article Betts states that most authors find it easier to take "a negative backward look at mutter-and-sputter brands of phonics and to avoid a positive forward look at phonics instruction in its perceptual setting."⁹ He goes on to present and answer the question, should phonics be taught to beginners? "Here the teacher has two choices: (1) to teach the child how to examine a word for its letter and sound associations, called phonics, or (2) simply tell the child the word which, in reality, is the word, or sight, method."¹⁰ Betts chooses the first, but feels that phonic skills should be developed in purposeful reading situations so that they are used automatically in all reading activities.

⁹Mazurkiewicz, op. cit., p. 209.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 211.

What approach to beginning reading instruction is recommended? Betts summarizes his approach to reading (which is neither all basal series or all phonics) by saying, "In other words, pupils pursue a continuous, unbroken program which takes them gradually and surely from letter phonics to syllable phonics and, finally, to pronunciation symbols of a dictionary."¹¹

III. HOMER L. J. CARTER AND DOROTHY J. MCGINNIS

At the time of writing their book Carter and McGinnis were connected with Western Michigan University.

What is reading? These authors state that reading is "defined in this book as a process in which the individual seeks to identify, interpret, and evaluate the ideas and points of views expressed by a writer."¹²

Learning to read is considered as a developmental process in which there are roughly three stages:

During the first period the child develops an interest in and a readiness for books and is concerned with the various aspects of word study and vocabulary building

¹¹ Mazurkiewicz, op. cit., p. 221.

¹² Homer L. J. Carter and Dorothy J. McGinnis, Teaching Individuals to Read, (Boston: D. C. Heath and Co., 1962), p. 9.

During the second period of expanding power the individual makes rapid progress in the development of the basic skills. He makes use of several means of studying words and he acquires an ever-increasing vocabulary of well-known words. . . .

During the third stage, reading becomes a means of personal satisfaction. He learns to read with a definite purpose and is successful in securing facts accurately.¹³

How well do Americans read today? No answer is given.

What place does phonics have in beginning reading instruction?

One of the first objectives in beginning reading is the development of a basic sight vocabulary. Instruction in this aspect of word identification involves the use of meaning and configuration clues. The second major objective is the development of independence in word recognition by means of word analysis. One aid to independent identification of words is phonetic analysis, a process of associating appropriate sounds with printed words. Writers in the field of developmental reading seem to agree that phonics has a place in the teaching of reading but that there are certain dangers in that it may be overemphasized with the result that the entire reading program is built around endless, perhaps even meaningless, drills consisting of the blending of phonograms into words.¹⁴

They list five general principles concerning the program of phonics:

1. Phonetic analysis should not be introduced until the children are ready.
2. Phonetic analysis should begin with familiar words.

¹³Carter and McGinnis, op. cit., p. 8.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 90-91.

3. Care must be taken to differentiate clearly between sounds and letters.

4. The teacher must have an adequate background in the principles of phonics.

5. Phonetic analysis is only one approach to the development of independence in word attack.¹⁵

What approach to beginning reading instruction is recommended? The authors state simply:

In the development of an adequate initial sight vocabulary both the informal and basal reader approaches have been suggested for use during the period of beginning reading.¹⁶

Much stress is placed on interpretation, understanding, and organizing.

IV. EDWARD WILLIAM DOLCH

Dr. Dolch has been Professor of Education, University of Illinois, and is the author of several books on teaching reading and remedial reading instruction.

What is reading? Dolch gives three definitions of reading which form a progression. The first is the beginner's definition: "Reading is (1) recognizing most of the words, (2) guessing or sounding out the others, and (3) getting meaning as a result."¹⁷ The second definition

¹⁵Ibid., p. 92-93.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 63-64.

¹⁷Edward William Dolch, Teaching Primary Reading, (Champaign, Illinois: The Garrard Press, 1941), p. 2.

he calls the everyday definition: "Reading is getting ideas from printed matter."¹⁸ And finally, he gives the student's definition of reading: "Reading is thinking and feeling about ideas suggested in printed matter."¹⁹

The first, or beginner's, definition is the one with which we are concerned.

How well do Americans read today? No answer was given.

What place does phonics have in beginning reading instruction? Pupils working at the beginner's level are "struggling with recognition of symbols, and they must do so before they can get to the meaning."²⁰ Dolch then lists nine possible ways of deciphering unknown words (including picture and context clues, previous association of the word on another page, and telling the word) before stating:

Sounding is, in the long run, the simplest and surest method for a child to use in identifying the word he does not know.²¹

¹⁸Ibid., p. 3.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 5.

²⁰Ibid., p. 7.

²¹Ibid., p. 159.

Dolch feels that sounding should be learned from known sight words. Seeing words as wholes must come first. Phonics should not be taught before reading because school work would then begin as a difficult, uninteresting task. He cautions, "Keep before everyone one slogan, 'Go slow with sounding.'"²²

In an article for Elementary English in December, 1955, Dolch still favors what he calls the developmental or discovery method of learning phonics. (This incidentally is suppose to be the basal series approach.) Dolch lists as the greatest difficulty the fact that teachers fail to use it.

Their whole attention has been on interest and content, and on language and sight recognition. Constantly, day by day, all new words are told and told and told, and there just has not been the development of sounding attack. The teacher's excuse is that she has paid attention to content and language because they are emphasized.²³

What approach to beginning reading instruction is recommended? From what has already been said, one would say the basal series approach using the discovery method of learning phonics. But, no, Dolch blandly states, "The child must climb the word ladder to become a reader."²⁴ That is,

²²Edward William Dolch, Methods In Reading, (Champaign, Illinois: The Garrard Press, 1955), p. 335.

²³Edward William Dolch, "Phonics in the First Grade," Elementary English, XXXII (December: 1955), p. 517.

²⁴Dolch, Methods in Reading, p. 112.

he must learn all words in each book as he goes through them. Some teachers, Dolch is sorry to say, do not rely on the word ladder of the basal reader. "Instead, they pin their faith on the teaching of word attack or phonics."²⁵ Since Dolch asserts children must be of a mental age of seven years and work hard at the difficult task of phonics if they are to succeed, the "plan of using phonics instead of a sight word ladder does not succeed with ordinary children in ordinary schools."²⁶

Dolch concludes, "We must give children the right attitudes toward school and toward reading, we must have some sounding, we must expect different progress in sounding, and we must preserve children's well-rounded education."²⁷

V. DONALD D. DURRELL

Durrell has been Professor of Education and Director of Educational Clinic, Boston University.

What is reading? Durrell does not present a definition for reading either as a process or a product in the writings used in this paper.

²⁵Dolch, Methods in Reading, p. 112.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Dolch, "Phonics in the First Grade," Elementary English, p. 518.

How well do Americans read today? Durrell referred to a study "of more than six thousand children in grades two to six with the Durrell-Sullivan Reading Capacity and Achievement Tests" which revealed "that 14.6 per cent were reading a year or more below hearing comprehension and 3.4 per cent two or more years below."²⁸

He goes on to say that the prevalence of reading difficulties cannot be lightly considered.

There is apparently no panacea in any field which will assure uniform growth in relation to capacity. While some educational enthusiasts may feel that 'all is perfect' in their particular type of approach, the more realistic educators recognize that we are in the beginning stages of professional development and that need for remedial instruction will be with us for many years.²⁹

What place does phonics have in beginning reading instruction? Durrell readily admits that phonics has a place in beginning reading instruction.

There is ample evidence . . . to indicate the need for instruction in word analysis. Such evidence includes the complete inability of some children to solve new words, random guessing at new words without regard to word form or meaning, and various ineffective habits of attack on new words, such as mere sounding by letters and syllables. Some bright children may acquire the facility to notice the visual and auditory elements of words and hence need no formal instruction in word analysis. The majority of children, however, are aided by special practice to increase the accuracy and fluency of both visual and auditory perception of word elements.³⁰

²⁸Donald D. Durrell, Importance of Basic Reading Abilities, (Yonkers-on-Hudson, New York: World Book Co., 1905), p. 278-279.

²⁹Ibid., p. 316-317.

³⁰Ibid., p. 198.

It is evident, however, from the above quotation that Durrell does not favor the use of intensive phonics instruction. He outlines a program of phonetic analysis based on first acquiring a sight vocabulary of seventy-five to one hundred words. He says, "Only the most essential blends and phonograms should be taught and those only in words which have meaning for the child."³¹ He finds a significant place for learning the alphabet: "If a child has difficulty in recognizing the individual letters, he is likely to confuse words in which these letters appear."³² Initial consonants should be taught first, followed by the initial blends and final blends. He stresses ear training as readiness for phonetic analysis, and emphasizes the use of context to aid in solving new words.

What approach to beginning reading instruction is recommended?

There is no one best way to teach reading. Despite the large number of publications on the teaching of reading--professional books, teachers' manuals, national committee reports, and research studies--we have not yet discovered a definite series of steps which a teacher may follow with the assurance that all pupils will grow in reading ability in the most efficient manner.³³

Although Durrell says it is "unlikely that research will ever discover a single method which will be the most efficient one for all pupils and all teachers,"³⁴ he does list eleven characteristics of an effective reading program:

³¹ Ibid., p. 200.

³² Ibid., p. 203-204.

³³ Ibid., p. 1.

³⁴ Ibid.

1. The teacher is familiar with the individual differences of her pupils.

2. The teacher has specific objectives for each child or each group of children in her class.

3. There is a definite plan for observation of pupils' growth in voluntary reading habits.

4. The teacher knows the books that are available to the children.

5. There is adequate provision for differences in the reading abilities of the pupils.

6. The teacher has definite plans for motivation of reading.

7. There is full attention to growth in vocabulary.

8. Oral-reading instruction is made effective by maintaining interest.

9. The instruction in silent reading is characterized by insight into many problems and needs.

10. There is training in oral and written recall.

11. There is definite instruction for improvement of study skills.³⁵

VI. RUDOLPH FLESCH

Rudolph Flesch is an Austrian refugee, who prior to the publication of Why Johnny Can't Read, had earned attention and praise for teaching a system by which government agencies might write English which could be generally understood.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 4-10.

What is reading? "Reading means getting meaning from certain combinations of letters. Teach the child what each letter stands for and he can read."³⁶ He continues, "For reading, as I have said before, doesn't mean recognizing twelve hundred words by sight. It means being able to decipher and understand any word within one's vocabulary--and the vocabulary of an average college freshman, for instance, has been estimated by Seashore to be 158,000."³⁷

How well do Americans read today? Flesch feels that the proof of reading ability of today's Americans lies in the amount of books published and the number of experts in the field of remedial reading. In response to the statistics derived from studies of reading ability of today as compared with yesterday, Flesch states simply (and bluntly):

The educators, of course, deny that anything has happened. They trot out all sorts of data and statistics to show that American children read, write, and spell much better than they used to. I am not going to disprove those data one by one. What I am talking about here are not matters for argument but facts--facts that are public knowledge. The American people know what they know.³⁸

And what they know Flesch says is that "For the first time in history American parents see their children getting less education than they got themselves."³⁹

³⁶Rudolf Flesch, Why Johnny Can't Read and What You Can Do About It, (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1955), p. 2-3.

³⁷Ibid., p. 131.

³⁸Ibid., p. 133.

³⁹Ibid., p. 132-133.

What place does phonics have in beginning reading instruction, and What approach to beginning reading instruction is recommended? For Flesch phonics is beginning reading instruction. He feels that the natural sequence of any phonics system should be:

Step One: The five short vowels and all consonants spelled by single letters.

Step Two: Consonants and consonant combinations spelled with two or three letters.

Step Three: Vowels and vowel combinations spelled with two or three letters.

Step Four: The five long vowels.

Step Five: Irregular spellings.⁴⁰

General comment. Flesch has been greatly criticized for his all or nothing approach to writing Why Johnny Can't Read. Pooley says that the reason for the great excitement over Flesch's book was:

. . . . not that he offered a new approach to the teaching of reading; indeed, he advocated a return to materials and methods long since discarded. The reason was that he voiced in concrete terms a vaguely felt but widely experienced dissatisfaction with current instruction in reading in the elementary schools of our country. It was easy to prove, as many educators hastened to do, that many Johnnies did learn to read, and to read very well, at an early age. But there was equally available evidence from teachers in the upper grades, in high schools, and even in colleges that large numbers of students in their classes were unable to read⁴¹ at a level essential to success in their daily assignments.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 27.

⁴¹ Leonard Bloomfield and Clarence L. Barnhart, Let's Read, A Linguistic Approach, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1961), p. 5.

Perhaps it was the fact of this wall of resistance to the very mention of phonics in a favorable light that led Flesch to such unequivocal terms as "all, everyone, etc."

VII. ROMA GANS

Roma Gans has been Professor Emeritus of Childhood Education, Teachers College, Columbia University. She was winner of the Family Life Book Award of The Child Study Association of America in 1963 for her book, Common Sense in Teaching Reading.

What is reading? Gans doesn't specifically define reading, but presents instead the place of reading in society today, both for adults and for the beginner. She emphasizes the importance of attitude toward reading, the ability to listen, and interest and ability to observe as factors in learning to read.

How well do Americans read today?

. . . . children, up to the present time, have learned to read and . . . the majority have become successful readers
 . . . one may observe that in some schools up to twenty-five per cent have failed to make a good start on reading in the first grade, no matter what the theory, basal system, or emphasis used.⁴²

⁴²Roma Gans, Common Sense in Teaching Reading, (Indianapolis, New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1963), p. 112.

She goes on to point out that "Approximately 75 per cent to 80 per cent of the six-year-olds who enter first grade become readers during the year."⁴³

What place does phonics have in beginning reading instruction? Gans defines phonics as "that step necessary in translating letters and collections of letters into sounds."⁴⁴ She presents two theories regarding the use of phonics in beginning reading. The first (with which she seems to agree) is primarily intrinsic phonics. She relies on sight words, configuration, context, and so on, in teaching the child to read--in other words a multiple word-recognition skills approach. Phonics should not be taught in isolation from reading.

In Facts and Fiction About Phonics, she states:

However, both experienced adult reader and beginner must call upon phonics to translate the letters into sounds in order to pronounce the word. Without phonics, we would have to rely solely on sight recognitions and memory of each word. A new or unlearned word would slow us down or completely stymie us. Phonics is an essential collection of elements that everyone must master if he is to develop competence in reading.⁴⁵

(If this is true, then why allow a child to learn one way in the beginning and then attempt to reteach him and establish new learning patterns in the second and third grades?)

⁴³Roma Gans, Fact and Fiction About Phonics, (Indianapolis, New York, Kansas City: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1964), p. 86.

⁴⁴Gans, Common Sense in Teaching Reading, p. 76.

⁴⁵Gans, Fact and Fiction About Phonics, p. 2.

What approach to beginning reading instruction is recommended? Gans offered sharp criticism also of the basal reading series. She leans slightly toward an individualized approach, but does not definitely commit herself. Instead, she says:

Emphasis on any method, to be sound, must include the respect for the ideas a child is acquiring about reading and his attitudes toward the promises for him inherent in reading. Despite the bulk of material related to the teaching of reading in the first grade, a wise school encourages teachers to explore new, promising ideas and materials with children, to keep careful notes to evaluation, and to keep all avenues of information open for further adventures.⁴⁶

In general, she finds:

. . . . a common-sense approach and sensible use of facts about children, their ways of learning, and the English⁴⁷ language will be the safest course upon which to rely.

VIII. ARTHUR I. GATES

Arthur Gates has been Professor of Education, Teachers College, Columbia University.

What is reading? Gates describes reading as "a very subtle and obscure activity."⁴⁸ In the beginning reading period as the pupil attempts to recognize words, he is dependent on whether he can observe and study

⁴⁶Gans, Common Sense in Teaching Reading, p. 113.

⁴⁷Gans, Fact and Fiction About Phonics, p. 100.

⁴⁸Arthur I. Gates, The Improvement of Reading, A Program of Diagnostic and Remedial Methods, third edition, (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1947, seventh printing 1954), p. 4.

words with enough skill to enable him to recognize them later with sufficient ease to accurately get the meaning of a sentence. At this stage the child learns words by guessing or presentation by the teacher.

He is typically quite incapable of working out the recognition and pronunciation of a word presented in isolation, without any clues to its meaning. Real reading--that is, reading with a reasonable degree of fluency and clearness of understanding--will be confined to texts composed wholly or at least largely of previously studied words.⁴⁹

This is true Gates feels for approximately three months.

How well do Americans read today? A study by Dr. Dorris Lee on "The Importance of Reading for Achieving in Grades Four, Five, and Six," Teachers College, Contributions to Education Number 556, Columbia University, New York, 1933, is quoted by Gates. This study showed "that in typical large American schools the demands upon reading ability in the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades are well beyond those which can be realized on the basis of primary reading skill."⁵⁰ This is described as the "fourth-grade hurdle."⁵¹

What place does phonics have in beginning reading instruction? Gates considers phonics inadequate for deciphering long words, useful only for short one-syllable words. This is partly because he does not

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 28-29.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 35.

⁵¹Ibid.

consider syllabification or recognition of small words in big words as being in any way a part of phonic analysis. He feels emphasis on phonics makes the child word-form conscious; a slow, mechanical reader; and causes him to miss the meaning of what is being read.

Oddly enough he then states regarding phonics: "It is chiefly a beginning-state device which must be replaced later by observation of larger units."⁵²

What approach to beginning reading instruction is recommended? Gates lists four achievements upon which the effective functioning of the good teacher of reading depends:

1. The teacher should understand the nature of the reading process.
2. The teacher should know how to diagnose the pupil's abilities and difficulties in each of the essential abilities and techniques involved in reading, and how to locate and take care of the handicaps which may interfere with learning to read.
3. The teacher should know various good methods of developing the basal reading abilities and techniques.
4. The teacher should know how to adapt the materials and methods of instruction to meet precisely the individual needs, the strengths and weaknesses, of each child.⁵³

⁵²Ibid., p. 196.

⁵³Ibid., p. 15.

IX. WILLIAM S. GRAY

William Gray was Emeritus Professor of Education, The University of Chicago, and senior author of the New Basic Readers. He was author of numerous books and articles regarding reading skill.

What is reading? "Reading is receiving ideas from printed language. In order to do this the child must associate sound and meaning with printed words."⁵⁴ Gray further points out four component parts to reading:

(1) word perception, (2) comprehension of ideas represented by the words, (3) reaction to these ideas, and (4) assimilation or integration of the ideas with previous knowledge or experience.⁵⁵

How well do Americans read today? Gray quotes the following statistics:

"Even in our own country, the portion of the adult population who have not attained functional literacy is 11.0 per cent, varying by states from 3.9 to 28.7 per cent."⁵⁶

What place does phonics have in beginning reading instruction? Gray is definite in his opinion that teaching sight words should precede phonics

⁵⁴William S. Gray, On Their Own In Reading, revised edition, (Chicago, Atlanta, Dallas, Palo Alto, Fair Lawn, New Jersey: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1960), p. 10.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 13.

⁵⁶William S. Gray, The Teaching of Reading: An International View, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1957), p. 2.

instruction. He points out that until a child can "use a dictionary, we should not expect him to read words whose spoken forms he has never heard or used."⁵⁷ Sight words will establish associations of sound, meaning, and word form. Gray does feel that "In the final analysis then, word perception is the all-important base of the reading process."⁵⁸

What approach to beginning reading instruction is recommended? In discussing the relative merits of ways of teaching reading Gray comes to five general conclusions which in part outline his idea of the best approach to reading instruction. These conclusions are:

1. Children have learned to read by almost any method that ingenious men and women have devised.
2. The available evidence does not show which specialized method is best, because all such methods have not been tried out experimentally and many of the studies reported have not been adequately controlled.
3. All children and adults do not learn to read equally well by a given method. This implies that there are factors other than the method used that influence progress in learning to read, such as the teacher, the home and school environment, and the varying abilities and other characteristics of learners.
4. Contrasting methods emphasize different aspects of reading and start children on different roads to maturity in reading. If word recognition receives exclusive emphasis, one set of attitudes and skills is developed; if meaning only is stressed, a different set is cultivated. Ultimately a reader must acquire all the attitudes and skills involved in efficient reading.

⁵⁷ Gray, On Their Own In Reading, p. 17.

⁵⁸ Gray, On Their Own In Reading, p. 13.

5. Progress in learning to read is most rapid when both meaning and the skills of word recognition are stressed from the beginning. The additional statement may be made that a sound reading program promotes growth in all the interests, understandings, attitudes, and skills that characterize an efficient reader at each level of school progress.⁵⁹

X. ARTHUR W. HEILMAN

What is reading? Heilman states that "Reading is a process of getting meaning from printed word symbols. It is not merely a process of making conventionalized noises associated with these symbols."⁶⁰ He describes reading in terms of the interaction between the reader and the printed symbols. He feels that reading is more than a mechanical process of correctly saying words: it involves meaning and thinking. It is a language function and is therefore an extremely complicated process requiring simultaneous involvement of a great number of mechanical skills and comprehension skills, all of which are affected by the attitude, knowledge and past experience of the reader.

The process of learning to read is an individual process and the technique or approach that works well for one child may not work for another. The teacher of reading "must have a variety of approaches."⁶¹

⁵⁹Gray, The Teaching of Reading: An International View, p. 19-20.

⁶⁰Arthur W. Heilman, Principles and Practices of Teaching Reading, (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Books, Inc., 1961), p. 8.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 9.

How well do Americans read today? Without comparing readers of today with readers of yesterday or of other countries, Heilman says plainly, "The failure of large numbers of children to learn how to read to the maximum of their ability is a major educational problem. Evidence that such a problem exists is found in the large amount of time and energy devoted to the educational practice called remedial reading."⁶²

What place does phonics have in beginning reading instruction? "Phonetic analysis is probably the most important of the methods of learning words not known as sight words."⁶³ The author goes on to say that phonics should be integrated with the reading program. He gives the following steps in phonics instruction:

1. Auditory discrimination of speech sounds in words.
2. Learn a number of sight words. This step is not phonics instruction but must not be lost sight of, since all following steps are based on the child's knowing sight words.
3. Sounds of initial consonants in words which have been learned as sight words.
4. Mental substitution of initial consonants.
5. Substitution of final consonants.

⁶² Ibid., p. 368.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 210.

6. Initial consonant digraphs (th, ch, sh, wh).
7. Initial consonant blends.
8. Vowel sounds:
 - a. long vowel sounds
 - b. short vowel sounds
 - c. double vowels
 - (1) digraphs
 - (2) diphthongs
 - d. vowels followed by r
 - e. effect of final e
 - f. final y sounded as long i
9. Silent consonants.
10. Syllabication.⁶⁴

He then summarizes in this fashion:

The one principle which would, if followed, prevent an overemphasis on phonics, or on any other mechanical aspect of reading, is that reading must be viewed as a process of discovering meaning. The good teachers of reading never lose sight of this fact. But becoming facile in discovering meaning depends on mastering certain fundamental mechanics in the reading process, and phonics is second in importance to no other skill.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 217.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 244.

What approach to beginning reading instruction is recommended? Heilman presents several methods without specifically choosing one above the other (probably since he states in the first chapter that reading is an individual process and no method will work equally well with all children).⁶⁶ He does, however, tend indirectly to support the basal series approach. Consider the following excerpts:

In the writer's opinion, the experience approach is most vulnerable when advocated as a **complete method** in itself. Most teachers prefer to use the experience chart as a supplement to a basal reader series.⁶⁷

No teacher would ever have the time to match the meticulous planning that is reflected in the total program of a good basal series.⁶⁸

And regarding the use of the individualized approach, he says:

However, there is little point in breaking completely with basal instruction on the ground that these materials are sometimes poorly used. Creative teachers have for a long time recommended having supplementary reading materials available to be used in conjunction with basal instruction. In this respect individual reading is not a new technique, but a new emphasis.⁶⁹

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 9.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 100.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 112.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 125-126.

XI. SELMA HERR

What is reading? "Reading is not pronouncing words in a textbook but a thought-getting process. There must be enrichment, evaluation, and enjoyment. Reading must be functional and not an isolated activity."⁷⁰

How well do Americans read today? "When we consider that in 1880, only seventeen percent of our population could read, as compared to today, with almost no illiterates, we must appreciate the tremendous strides that have been made in our techniques for teaching reading."⁷¹

What place does phonics have in beginning reading instruction? Herr states "Phonics is recognized as an effective tool in developing the ability to pronounce new words but it does not mean that phonics alone will make a child a successful reader."⁷²

She feels that a special time should be set aside for phonics drill and that structural analysis and context clue skills should also be developed in order to make the child a thoroughly independent reader. There should be a readiness period of six to eight weeks; the phonics work should be correlated with basal reading text with an additional fifteen or so minutes isolated drill.

⁷⁰Selma E. Herr, Phonics, Handbook for Teachers, (Los Angeles: E. R. A. Publishers, Inc., 1961), p. 9.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 8.

⁷²Ibid., p. 9.

She sums up her feelings regarding the place of phonics by saying:

Most reading series today provide a sound and workable method for phonics instruction. The authors of the readers recognize the fact that phonics have their limitations but when combined with other techniques, they can be a valuable tool in learning to read.⁷³

What approach to beginning reading instruction is recommended? It can be seen from the answer to the above question that Herr recognizes and accepts the basal reading approach with the addition of an extra period for phonic drill. This drill, she insists, must "be given sufficient time but not to the exclusion of other techniques."⁷⁴

XII. GERTRUDE HILDRETH

Gertrude Hildreth has been Assistant Professor of Education, Brooklyn College, New York.

What is reading? Hildreth describes the reading process as a means to obtain certain objectives, rather than an end in itself. "Learning to read," she says, "requires learning to discriminate among a large number of word forms."⁷⁵

⁷³Ibid., p. 8.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 18.

⁷⁵Gertrude Hildreth, Learning the Three R's, second edition, (Minneapolis, Nashville, Philadelphia: Educational Publishers, Inc., 1947), p. 134.

She goes on to say,

Total, vague or undifferentiated impressions, or even partial impressions, appear to be effective in word recognition, but only when meaning is easily derived and outcomes or subsequent words easily guessed. When inference is impossible, the reader is in a quandry and must resort to minute analysis of a phonetic or visual sort in order to solve the problem.⁷⁶

She states (almost smugly) that "Reading is a convenience that enables anyone to gain information from printed word symbols who has learned to interpret them."⁷⁷

How well do Americans read today? Hildreth gave no answer to this question.

What place does phonics have in beginning reading instruction? Hildreth sees no place for phonics in the beginning of reading. She states:

Phonics practice is now recognized to be not a method of teaching reading, but a valuable aid in comprehending unfamiliar words in context.⁷⁸

And,

The time spent on extraneous drills in word analyses, which are only indirectly related to meaningful reading can be greatly reduced for all children and actually omitted for some pupils.⁷⁹

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 135.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 117.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 168.

⁷⁹Gertrude Hildreth, "All in Favor of a Low Vocabulary," Elementary School Journal, XLIII (April 1943), p. 468.

She then states, "Reading with understanding is possible from the beginning."⁸⁰

What approach to beginning reading instruction is recommended? Hildreth states plainly, "Today the method of beginning reading that prevails in the better schools is known as the experience method."⁸¹ She goes on to explain how manuscript writing has made experience teaching possible and that reading and language training go together. Children learn to recognize their names and messages on the bulletin board. Content for reading should all come from the same central experience. Writing, language and spelling "reinforce one another, economize teaching time, and prevent any need for the practice of these skills in isolated content."⁸²

Hildreth does warn, that "For a considerable period of time, it is true, most of the children will be in a state of 'half-reading.'"⁸³ But she hastily reassures "with continued practice in meaningful reading that is linked to experiences, the finer distinctions should eventually be made and accurate memorization of word forms should follow."⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Hildreth, "All in Favor of a Low Vocabulary," Elementary School Journal, p. 468.

⁸¹ Hildreth, Learning the Three R's, p. 206.

⁸² Gertrude Hildreth, Child Growth through Education, (New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1948), p. 251-252.

⁸³ Hildreth, Child Growth through Education, p. 253.

⁸⁴ Hildreth, Child Growth through Education, p. 253.

XIII. PAUL MCKEE

Paul McKee has been Director, College Elementary School, and Professor of Elementary Education, State College of Education, Greeley, Colorado.

What is reading? McKee sees beginning reading as a process consisting of three major acts. These acts are:

1. Identifying and recognizing printed words quickly and accurately.
2. Arriving at an adequate understanding of the meaning intended by the writer.
3. Making use of the meaning arrived at.⁸⁵

How well do Americans read today? McKee gives the per cent of pupils who have difficulty in reading in schools today and presents several reasons for their difficulties.

At least twelve per cent of the pupils in our schools today have not acquired the degree of skill in word identification which they can be expected to acquire. Some of these pupils fail to distinguish from one another the forms of words that are crucial in careful reading. Some have no effective means of identifying words independently. Some cannot blend the useful sounds of the parts of a word to recall the pronunciation of that word. Some do not even know the crucial sounds of letters and groups of letters.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Paul McKee, The Teaching of Reading in the Elementary School, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1948), p. 12.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 41.

What place does phonics have in beginning reading instruction? In 1934

McKee stated:

The emphasis employed in this discussion favorable to an approach in beginning reading based upon the idea that thought-getting is more important than mechanics must not be misunderstood. It does not mean that there is no place for phonics and word analysis in beginning reading. It merely insists that such procedure is not the most effective way of initiating reading instruction. It insists that phonics and word analysis constitute a tool with which the child can unlock new words rather than a method of teaching reading.⁸⁷

In 1948 he wrote:

There is a good reason to believe that the instruction which the school gives in the identification of printed words should be much more helpful, definite, and systematic than it has been during the past fifteen years or more, and that such improved teaching should be started much earlier in the child's school career than it is at the present time.⁸⁸

What approach to beginning reading instruction is recommended? In 1934

McKee wrote:

Today the most important thing about first reading lessons or experiences is that they introduce the child to reading as a thought-getting process. Consequently, the emphasis is placed upon meaning rather than mechanics. The first lessons do not seek to teach the pupil to derive the sound of a word through the memorization and the application of the names or sounds of letters. They begin, rather, with thought units already familiar to the child. These thought units are words or sentences taken from content that is interesting to the child because he is familiar with it.⁸⁹

⁸⁷Paul McKee, Reading and Literature in the Elementary School, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1934), p. 149.

⁸⁸McKee, The Teaching of Reading in the Elementary School, p. 41.

⁸⁹McKee, Reading and Literature in the Elementary School, p. 146.

And,

The first reading experiences, then, to be encountered by the pupil, are to be based upon familiar concepts cloaked in familiar expressions. Such experiences will be of two main types. These types are: (1) systematic informal lessons based upon the child's experiences; and (2) incidental reading in connection with various classroom activities.⁹⁰

But, writing in 1948, McKee states that this process has become more or less obsolete. He outlines instead four distinct programs involved in developing true reading. These are:

1. The program in the fundamentals of reading.
2. The program in the reading-study jobs.
3. The program in children's literature.
4. The program in oral reading.⁹¹

The first of these McKee says is what most teachers think about when the teaching of reading is considered.

To engage competently in adequate instruction in reading at any given level, the teacher at that level must know at least three things about each of the four programs. These are (1) the understandings, skills, and attitudes to be taught, (2) effective methods and materials to be used in teaching those items, and (3) effective means of measuring pupil achievement.⁹²

⁹⁰ McKee, Reading and Literature in the Elementary School, p. 149.

⁹¹ McKee, The Teaching of Reading in the Elementary School, p. 132.

⁹² McKee, The Teaching of Reading in the Elementary School, p. 135.

Specifically related to the question raised by this paper, McKee states:

Since beginning reading matter rightly prepared contains no meaning difficulties for first grade pupils, the teacher can and should center her attention upon problems in word identification and word recognition.⁹³

XIV. MARGARET G. MCKIM

Margaret McKim at the time she wrote the book used as a reference source for this paper was connected with the University of Cincinnati.

In the introduction to her book, Arthur Gates states:

This book reflects the results of years of work in the classroom as observer of and adviser to many kinds of teachers in many types of schools, combined with the training of teachers, both experienced and inexperienced, in the author's own classes, and with a diligent study of the literature.⁹⁴

What is reading? McKim skirts a definition of reading by such general statements as:

Reading is one of the communication arts.⁹⁵

Reading is a tool.⁹⁶

Reading is one of the language arts.⁹⁷

⁹³McKee, The Teaching of Reading in the Elementary School, p. 199.

⁹⁴Margaret G. McKim, Guiding Growth in Reading in the Modern School, (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1955), p. vii.

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 5.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 11.

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 12.

How well do Americans read today? McKim did not answer this question in her book.

What place does phonics have in beginning reading instruction? McKim finds that the "word-analysis process actually begins at the prereading level. Long before a child can recognize many of the words around the classroom he begins to note general similarities and differences."⁹⁸ Some of the child's first discoveries are of a structural nature (suffixes, roots, prefixes, etc). She favors an intrinsic program of teaching phonics.

What approach to beginning reading instruction is recommended? Beginning reading instruction should be given in small groups with little interruption. This small group work should begin at the first of the year so that children become accustomed to carrying out plans independently and to working with others.

Children concentrate on understanding the story. They read to find out, for sure, what is happening in the picture. They find the line that answers a question. They find the name of the boy in the story. They use the picture to help tell them what the story is about. They may be inaccurate occasionally in their recognition of sentences or phrases, but this is not, at first, a matter of as much concern as is that of helping them get the meaning. The teacher can make corrections in such a way that the child is helped to feel that he has done the most important part of the reading job while his attention is called to the exact words. . . . Such corrections help with accurate recognition, but they do not put undue emphasis on isolated words.⁹⁹

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 286-287.

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 136-137.

McKim differs with many other word-method writers, however, regarding the proper procedure for introducing a new word. She says:

Beginning-reading materials differ from those which will be read a little later in that the number of new words introduced at one time is very small, and the picture and context are particularly well designed to give clues for word recognition. Since this is the case, it often enriches the meaning both of the word and of the story to introduce the new word in the story context or at the time when children need it rather than to use some other device to introduce it ahead of time. This procedure also encourages children, from the beginning, to try to figure out the story for themselves.¹⁰⁰

XV. DAVID H. RUSSELL

David Russell was connected with the University of California, Berkeley, California, at the time he wrote the book used as a reference source for this paper.

What is reading? Russell describes reading as a "subtle and complex act,"¹⁰¹ which involves:

. . . . sensation of light rays on the retina of the eye reaching the brain, perception of separate words and phrases, functioning of the eye muscles with exact controls, immediate memory for what has just been read, remote memories based on the reader's experience, interest in the content read, and organization of the material so that finally it can be used in some way.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 137-138.

¹⁰¹David H. Russell, Children Learn To Read, (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1949), p. 74.

¹⁰²Ibid.

He sees the act of reading as including sensation, perception, comprehension, and utilization. To Russell reading is "not a simple, single process that applies to all situations involving printed materials."¹⁰³

How well do Americans read today? Russell quotes the 1940 census which revealed "that 13.5 per cent of adults over twenty-four years of age, some ten million of them, are functionally illiterate."¹⁰⁴ He goes on to point out that in a representative sample of one hundred American adults,

4 persons have had no formal schooling
 10 persons have had four years or less of schooling
 46 persons have had from five to eight years of schooling
 30 persons have had one or more years of high-school education
 10 persons have had one or more years of college education¹⁰⁵

He also points out some signs which he feels may be regarded as hopeful:

The United States Bureau of the Census reported that illiteracy in the United States decreased steadily from 20 per cent in 1870 to 4.3 per cent in 1930.¹⁰⁶

While army rejections because of illiteracy were high during the Second World War, the examiners found that complete illiteracy was not as high as in 1918.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 96.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 15.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 15.

What place does phonics have in beginning reading instruction? Russell finds that "In determining what part phonetic-analysis activities should play in the reading program a teacher will usually be guided by the suggestions for such activities made in the manuals of the basic-reading program she is using."¹⁰⁸

Regarding the use of phonics as the method for teaching reading he feels that "there is no superiority in the phonics method, when used as the sole or principal method of teaching, over other methods."¹⁰⁹

He outlines the following principles for guiding a phonics program:

1. Phonetic analysis is only one of several good methods of word recognition.
2. A program of phonetic analysis must be intrinsic.
3. Readiness for phonetic analysis must be established as for other reading activities.
4. Since phonics is a series of generalizations about words, the teacher will teach inductively.
5. Teachers must plan carefully when they will introduce word-analysis techniques into a lesson.
6. Lessons should be designed so that children have a chance to practice and synthesize various methods of recognizing new words.
7. Teachers should have a systematic approach in teaching the use of phonetic analysis.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 211.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 212.

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 213-215.

Russell elaborates on principle seven by stating that "Teachers will find such a systematic approach in the teachers' guides of the better basic-reading series."¹¹¹

What approach to beginning reading instruction is recommended? Russell states that "there is no one best method of teaching reading."¹¹² The first grade teacher must plan a wide variety of experiences aimed at improving personal and social relationships, building new concepts, developing interest in books, and leading up to simple reading skills. For the transition between prereading activities and actual reading Russell recommends the use of experience charts.¹¹³ He feels that the basic readers have been carefully prepared for graduation, variety, organization, and content, but that the good teacher "uses them as only part of her whole reading program."¹¹⁴ He states further that "children of any one class cannot all profit by the same book of a basic series."¹¹⁵

In general he lists several ideas regarding methods to be used. Those dealing with the subject matter of this paper are:

The methods used lend themselves to individualization of teaching and learning.¹¹⁶

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 215.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 104.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 136.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 106.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 107.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 103.

Pupils are encouraged to try a number of different methods of word recognition--by sight, by context clues, by phonetic analysis, by comparisons with similar words, and other methods.¹¹⁷

Pupils are encouraged to use reading material so that understanding and interpretation, not mere performance, are involved.¹¹⁸

And finally, Russell feels that "No reading program can prosper unless it carries the warmth and interest of some materials prepared by the teacher herself."¹¹⁹

XVI. GEORGE D. SPACHE

George Spache has been Professor of Education, and Head, Reading Laboratory and Clinic, University of Florida, and is the author of several leading books on reading instruction.

What is reading? Spache sees reading as beyond defining in a few words, even well-chosen ones. In one of his books he devotes a chapter to defining the reading process. He speaks of the change of reading from what is primarily word recognition to a mature act which involves such high mental processes as comprehension, interpretation, and application.

¹¹⁷Ibid., p. 103.

¹¹⁸Ibid.

¹¹⁹Ibid., p. 110.

Because of its complexity at any one stage the definition for reading could (and most likely would) differ. He sees reading as skill development, as a visual act, as the act of perception of likenesses and differences, as being influenced by what the reader brings to the page (i.e., his cultural inheritance), and finally, as a thinking process.¹²⁰

How well do Americans read today? The attacks made in the 1940's and early 1950's regarding the reading ability of students have been disproven according to Spache. He refers to his book Are We Teaching Reading? published in 1956 in which twelve comparative studies are listed which involved a total of over half a million children. In these studies he points out that only in one were "pupils tested in the last forty years inferior in any aspect of reading when compared with pupils antedating them by twenty to seventy-five years."¹²¹ In this one study the reason for the difference is cited as the shift in the 1930's to silent reading.

What place does phonics have in beginning reading instruction? Spache defines phonics as "the knowledge of letter sounds and their use as a means of recognizing words."¹²²

¹²⁰ George D. Spache, Reading in the Elementary School, (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1964), p. 26.

¹²¹ George D. Spache, Toward Better Reading, (Champaign, Illinois: Garrard Publishing Co., 1963), p. 222.

¹²² Spache, Toward Better Reading, p. 223.

He states:

. . . . it is apparent that phonics is not desirable as the basic approach to learning to read because it may promote habits in word attack which are antagonistic to the true nature of the process of word recognition.¹²³

He believes phonics should be taught to beginning readers only after the habit of perception by word form or shape has been established.

Spache admits that knowledge of letter sounds will enable the child to acquire independence in word attack and "to make more careful discriminations among words than recognition only by word shapes or the context permits."¹²⁴ He further states that,

Phonics is a distinct aid to word recognition among beginning readers because it promotes simultaneous analysis of the word by hearing it, by recognizing it auditorily and by contextual analysis. At the same time, use of phonics as the basic method of learning to read words is undesirable, for it produces slower reading, poorer comprehension and a piecemeal approach to word recognition.¹²⁵

Spache lists how he feels phonics should be taught:

Simple Consonants

(Pre-primer--Primer)

b, p, m, w, h, d, t, n, hard g (gate), k, hard c (cake), y (yet),
f (for), s (sat)

Harder Consonants

(First-Second Reader)

z (zoo), r, j (jump), g (engine), s (as), c (cent), q (kw), v, l,
x (ks, gs)

¹²³ Spache, Toward Better Reading, p. 224.

¹²⁴ Spache, Toward Better Reading, p. 225.

¹²⁵ Spache, Toward Better Reading, p. 225.

Consonant Blends and Digraphs

(First-Third Reader)

ng, sh, wh, th (thin, the), ch (chair, ache), ck
 Simple consonants with l, r, p, or t as--bl, pl, gr, br, sp, st,
 tr, thr, str, spl, scr, and others as they appear.

Short Vowels

(Pre-primer--Primer)

a (hat), e (get), i (sit), o (top), u (cup), y (happy)

Long Vowels

(Primer-First)

a (cake), e (be), i (five), o (old), u (mule), y (by, cry)

Silent Letters

(Primer-First)

k (knife), w (write), l (talk), t (catch), g (gnat), c (black),
 h (hour)

Vowel Digraphs

(First-Third Reader)

ai (pail), ea (each), oa (boat), ui (fruit), ee (bee), oe (toe),
 ay (say)

Vowel Diphthongs

(First-Second Reader)

ow (cow), ou (out), oi (oil), oy (boy), ew (few)

Vowels with r

(First-Second Reader)

ar (car), er (her), ir (bird), or (corn), ur (burn)

Phonograms

(Primer-Third)

ail, ain, all, and, ate, ay, con, eep, ell, en, ent, er, est, ick,
 ight, ill, in, ing, ock, ter, tion
 Alternates--ake, ide, ile, ine, it, ite, le, re, ble¹²⁶

It can be seen that this implies more phonic emphasis than that normally
 found in the intrinsic phonics of the basal reader series.

¹²⁶Spache, Reading in the Elementary School, p. 295.

What approach to beginning reading instruction is recommended? Spache recommends a combined program supposedly using the strengths of other programs and avoiding their weaknesses. He recommends use of experience charts for first introduction to reading to be continued for several months or until sufficient reading vocabulary has been developed to enable the pupils to read independently. Spache then divides his program to fit the gifted, the average, and the slow learner. For the gifted he sees the use of the individualized approach; for the average a modified basal reader approach involving introduction to reading by the experience chart, followed by the use of basal materials, and later, individualization; for the slow learner a lengthened readiness period, introduction to reading through use of the experience chart, then a basal reading series reinforced by workbooks, teacher-made exercises, visual aids and repetitive games.¹²⁷

General comment. Spache seemed to frequently contradict himself both regarding phonics and the success of the basal reading program.

In a chapter dealing with answering parents' questions the teacher is advised by Spache to urge parents not to add such books as those by Flesch, Metcalf, the Spauldings, and Terman and Walcutt to their bookshelves.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Spache, Reading in the Elementary School, pp. 178-196.

¹²⁸ Spache, Toward Better Reading, p. 209.

"In any event, every effort should be made to help parents realize that sufficient phonics teaching is being offered in the schools and that further teaching by parents is distinctly undesirable."¹²⁹

He then states, "From more than a decade of experience in a college level reading clinic the problem of ineffectual word attack skills is also great at that level."¹³⁰ And,

. . . . the basal system does appear to offer sequential training in word attack. But this program is sometimes introduced too late, divorced from its functional application to the act of reading, poorly related to relevant research, dictated by the vagaries of the basal author's beliefs, and finally, taught by teachers who are woefully weak in their understanding and personal practice of good word attack skills.¹³¹

XVII. RUTH STRICKLAND

Ruth Strickland has been Professor of Education, Indiana University.

What is reading? Strickland views reading as more than process. She states:

Reading is not just a skill but rather a resource for fuller living. That concept changes the emphasis in the teaching of reading from mechanics to meaning, from the acquisition of mechanical skill to the development of ability to gain meaning from symbols and to think with it, interpret it, and use it for personal and social ends.¹³²

¹²⁹Spache, Toward Better Reading, p. 209.

¹³⁰Spache, Reading in the Elementary School, p. 87.

¹³¹Spache, Reading in the Elementary School, p. 87.

¹³²Ruth G. Strickland, The Language Arts in the Elementary School, second edition, (Boston: D. C. Heath and Co., 1957), p. 243.

She describes learning to read as a "steady upward progression, beginning slowly and on a small scale but gaining momentum and fanning out all the while to take in broader and more varied possibilities."¹³³

While recognizing word perception as the starting point of learning to read, she feels children need "more help with the thought processes that are essential to real reading."¹³⁴

How well do Americans read today? Strickland presented no answer to this question in her book.

What place does phonics have in beginning reading instruction? Quite simply, she states:

The bulk of systematic attention to word recognition techniques, particularly phonics, falls in second and third grades, or at least after children have gained a clear concept of reading as thought-getting and have a fund of words they recognize with ease.¹³⁵

Further,

Too much emphasis on phonics or too ~~early~~ emphasis, may result in slow, laborious deciphering of words which decreases interest in learning to read and is highly detrimental to emphasis in the thinking aspects of reading.¹³⁶

¹³³ Ibid., p. 245.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 247-248.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 252.

¹³⁶ Ibid.,

She does concede that "Authorities on reading agree that knowledge of the sounds of letters is useful in deciphering many unfamiliar words,"¹³⁷ but dismisses the subject with, "Most children learn without difficulty what they need of phonics."¹³⁸

What approach to beginning reading instruction is recommended? Strickland swiftly points out that "Mere reading of textbooks is not enough reading to make a child a real reader."¹³⁹ She emphasizes the use of experience charts for introduction to reading, challenges the teacher to vitalize the preprimers and find ways of repeating new words without being repetitive.

She feels a good reading program for the primary grades will include:

1. emphasis upon helping children with techniques which make them independent readers;
2. opportunity to read widely materials which interest them;
3. opportunity to share their reading with others;
4. opportunity to listen to the teacher's reading aloud of stories that stretch their interest and imagination on to higher levels and encourage them to read material of better and better quality and to provide them with an example of good reading to strive toward.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 253.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 244.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 256-257.

XVIII. PAUL WITTY

Paul Witty has been Professor of Education and Director of the Psycho-Educational Clinic, Northwestern University.

What is reading? Witty finds that:

Reading was once considered essentially a skill, and proficiency was regarded as an end to be achieved through drills and exercises. We see that modern reading programs stress: first, the pupil and his development; and second, the significant and fortunate role that experiences in reading may assume in promoting his happiness and continuous growth. In assuming the modern position, we do not disregard or underestimate our responsibility for safeguarding each child's acquisition of the fundamental habits and skills.¹⁴¹

Witty believes that the present trend "is to treat reading as one aspect of a language arts program and to utilize methods of teaching which are consonant with this objective. Above all else, meaningful reading is accorded primary importance."¹⁴²

How well do Americans read today? In Witty's opinion, "It is unknown whether reading attainment is actually poorer or better today than formerly."¹⁴³ He goes on to explain his position by saying:

¹⁴¹Paul Witty, Reading in Modern Education, (Boston: D. C. Heath Co., 1949), p. 14-15.

¹⁴²Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁴³Ibid., p. 15.

Complicating the problem of answering this question are factors such as the great increase in the number of pupils attending secondary schools, the lack of accurate criteria for judging reading ability, and the new and greater demands for reading skills of different kinds. It is clear that changes in the nature and variety of instructional materials have not paralleled changing needs; consequently, many types of reading matter are unsuitable or too difficult for the high school pupil of today.¹⁴⁴

What places does phonics have in beginning reading instruction? Witty recognizes the confusion which surrounds the use of phonics. He says, in part, "Experimentation has led to contradictory claims and to some confusion concerning the value of phonic training in helping children to recognize new words."¹⁴⁵ He feels that "it is recognized that some children have little need for formal instruction in phonics. But since such training appears to be helpful to certain children, the teacher should be prepared to offer appropriate aid whenever it is required."¹⁴⁶

What approach to beginning reading instruction is recommended? Witty is necessarily vague in pinpointing an approach to beginning instruction in reading. He says:

¹⁴⁴Ibid.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., p. 144.

¹⁴⁶Ibid.

It is evident that the present-day approach emphasizes the necessity for starting the reading process with materials that are close to the child's own experience and continuing with instruction in subject matter that fulfills his changing needs for reading. Thus, a concern for the pupil and his welfare has replaced the primary interest in methods of instruction. Moreover, in a balanced reading program the selection of materials of instruction is governed by the characteristics of each group and the ends to be attained through reading.¹⁴⁷

XIX. GERALD A. YOAKUM

Gerald A. Yoakum has been Professor of Education, Director of Courses in Elementary Education, University of Pittsburgh.

What is reading? Yoakum does not specifically define reading, but he does define what he calls basal reading.

In the opinion of the author basal reading instruction is that instruction which attempts to teach the child all the reading skills that are common to all reading situations. It takes the child who cannot read, introduces him to the printed word, and develops in him the skills essential to the interpretation of printed or written symbols. It develops the essential abilities which enable the reader to use books for the purpose of acquiring enjoyment, information, and guidance.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁴⁸Gerald A. Yoakum, Basal Reading Instruction, (New York, Toronto, London: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1955), p. 1.

He then elaborates on reading as a process of interpreting symbols and as thinking by saying:

As the reader inspects the symbols which appear on the printed page, he associates those symbols with meaning and interprets the meaning suggested by the symbols. He does not get meaning directly from the symbols. Even though the eye is the physical mechanism with which the reader receives impressions from the printed page, it is the mind of the reader which interprets the meaning of those symbols.¹⁴⁹

and,

Contrary to the ideas of many, reading is not mechanical reproduction of the sounds represented by the symbols on the printed page. If it were that, it would have no more significance than the memorized mimicry of the parrot. When the individual reads, the symbols on the printed page excite the mind to react in many complex ways. Such words as association, perception, comprehension, selection, evaluation, recall, organization, and retention have been used to express what occurs in the mind when a reader reads.¹⁵⁰

How well do Americans read today? In general Yoakum recognizes the failure of many students and adults to read adequately but makes no comparison as to differences in present-day reading skill and skill of reading in the past, other than the following comments:

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 13.

Very few adults plan the use of their leisure time in such a way as to leave free time for reading either for amusement or for profit.¹⁵¹

Surveys of both children's and adults' reading habits suggest that for the great majority of readers the choice of reading materials is largely a matter of chance. . . . Mr. Average Citizen knows very little about the sources of supply of both adult and children's books, and is too busy keeping up with the payments on the car, radio, or television to have time or money to invest in the intellectual and aesthetic development of himself and his family. Often he reads little but the daily newspaper delivered to his door by the son of one of his neighborhood friends. He reads the news, sports, and comics, his wife reads the woman's section, and the children read the comics. He finds the editorial page difficult reading; his opinions concerning politics and other matters largely depend on what he hears on the radio or television, at his club, at church, or in his favorite recreational place.¹⁵²

Thousands of readers never learn to use the ideas gained from reading except for the purpose of escape or relaxation. This idea is supported by the studies of library withdrawals, data on the wide reading of pulp magazines, and surveys of adult reading habits. The most popular of all books is fiction. The most widely read of all magazines are fiction magazines, and there is an enormous reading of cheap books of fiction in the United States.¹⁵³

The fact that Americans, as a whole, tend to read on the sixth or eighth grade level accounts in part for their not reading books of fact as much as they read books of fiction.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹Ibid., p. 271.

¹⁵²Ibid., p. 269.

¹⁵³Ibid., p. 245.

¹⁵⁴Ibid.

What place does phonics have in beginning reading instruction? Yoakum firmly states his opinion:

In a program of basal reading instruction, teaching the mechanics of reading should be a means toward other ends rather than an end in itself.¹⁵⁵

Fortunately, according to Yoakum, today's schools realize this fact.

The end of reading is the understanding of the ideas represented by the printed words and the enjoyment or use of those ideas. If instruction in reading places a maximum of emphasis on fluency of perception in recognition, children become word readers and fail to develop skill in interpreting what they read. Instruction should emphasize meaning first and mechanics only as the means to be used in learning how to interpret printed and written matter.¹⁵⁶

He then calmly remarks,

In spite of the fact that today there is a major emphasis upon the whole and a minor emphasis on the parts that make up this whole, it is essential in the development of ability to read that the specific skills which make up the wholes be identified. Independence in reading cannot be achieved until the child masters the specific skills of word recognition, for instance.¹⁵⁷

But he reiterates,

Now and then someone revives a phonetic approach to learning to read and produces in some bright children a rather astonishing facility in reading and writing words. To develop the ability to read by such methods, however, requires a difficult and unnatural approach to reading and the use of harsh drill methods which have

¹⁵⁵Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁵⁶Ibid.

¹⁵⁷Ibid., p. 29-30.

been generally abandoned. Certainly no one who is acquainted with the research of the last fifty years would advocate the use of the synthetic approach to reading today. The large majority of modern reading experts advocate the first approach to reading through the use of a whole method in which the word is encountered in a meaningful setting and recognized by its general configuration or visual peculiarities which distinguish word forms one from another. While some children do learn to read by such methods and learn to read well, the synthetic approach tends to encourage slow and laborious word reading. ¹⁵⁸

Yoakum constantly reiterates that phonics instruction will succeed only with the very bright child who is determined to learn to read and who possesses ability far above the average.

What approach to beginning reading instruction is recommended? Yoakum finds that,

All in all, it appears wiser to advocate that the teacher use certain ideas from each of the approaches advocated for the development of basal reading abilities. She may use the experience approach in combination with the basal reader approach and supplement both with topical, or unit, experiences in reading. She will certainly wish to differentiate instruction and materials to meet the needs of the pupils. She will want to make such use of visual aids as seem likely to aid the child in learning to read. She will probably want to guard against excessive emphasis upon oral reading. . . . ¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 84-85.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 89.

CHAPTER V

SURVEY OF RESEARCH PERTAINING TO PHONICS AS A METHOD OF BEGINNING READING INSTRUCTION

In this chapter a brief resume of research pertaining to the subject of the place of phonics in beginning reading instruction was presented. Each piece of research was presented as to purpose, procedures, and conclusions.

I. SOME STUDIES FROM 1912 TO 1954

Paul Witty and Robert Sizemore wrote an article for Elementary English as a result of the reaction to Rudolph Flesch's book, Why Johnny Can't Read. This article presents abbreviated accounts of research performed in phonics from 1912 to 1954.

For Phonics. Briefly, favoring phonics instruction, they found:

Research Study Number One. C. W. Valentine in a report in 1913 compared look-and-say with a phonics approach. After testing, he concluded that in every test the phonics method proved superior.¹

¹Paul A. Witty, and Robert A. Sizemore, "Phonics in the Reading Program: A Review and An Evaluation," Elementary English, XXXII (October 1955), p. 356.

There seems to be nothing so inherently difficult, even for little children, in the synthetic work involved by the Phonic method as has been asserted by some of its critics. Such synthesis was done readily by infants of six years of age. . . . Children taught by the Phonics method do better than those taught by the 'look-and-say' method, both in reading words previously seen and words previously unseen There seems to be evidence, however, that for very² dull children the 'look-and-say' method is more effective.

Valentine also commented that for teaching dull children, look-and-say "may be the only possible method. No doubt it is also the better method for the very dull teacher."³

Research Study Number Two. W. H. Winch conducted a series of experiments from 1905 to 1924 between "ordinary" phonics method, the alphabetic method, look-and-say method, and phonoscript method. The average age of the children was under six.

Phonic and look-and-say methods are put in practice and compared. The result is a victory for the phonic method. A phonic and an alphabetic method are compared. The result is a victory for the phonic method. The most recent phonic system, Mr. Hayes' Phonoscript, is compared with an ordinary phonic system, the result is a victory for the phonoscript method.⁴

Winch does question the helpfulness of phonics systems in teaching spelling.

²Ibid., p. 357.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 358.

Research Study Number Three. Harry L. Tate experimented with first grade pupils in Eli Whitney School of Chicago for eight weeks from March 1936 to April 1936. He divided seventy-three children into two groups: one phonic, one basal reader.

The results after testing: "Phonic instruction and drill . . . is far superior to the look-and-say method in developing ability to recognize words."⁵ There is slight indication that look-and-say is superior to phonics for sentence comprehension and is definitely superior for paragraph comprehension.

Research Study Number Four. Donald Agnew in 1939 investigated phonics versus basal reading series in Durham and Raleigh. The result: "The comparatively large and more consistent amounts of phonetic training received by the Durham pupils seem to have resulted in greater phonetic abilities. . . ."⁶ The Durham groups had larger vocabularies and were slower, but more accurate oral readers. There was comparatively little difference in silent reading.

Research Study Number Five. David Russell in December 1943 made a diagnostic study of spelling readiness among four classes of 116 pupils in the first grade and early part of the second grade. Two classes were

⁵Ibid., p. 361.

⁶Ibid., p. 364.

taught by phonics; two had little phonics. The study took place in Vancouver, British Columbia. The classes were tested in May, June, and November of 1941 with seven individual tests and six group tests.

The results "support the findings of Agnew and others that considerable phonics instruction in the first grade has a favorable influence upon achievement in word recognition and accuracy in reading."⁷

Against Phonics. And, briefly, against phonics the following:

Research Study Number One. Edmund J. Gill in 1912 in a report in Journal of Experimental Pedagogy described a study of three groups of children in a comprehensive phonics method with children in the thought or sentence method. "The results of the above investigation indicate the greater practical value of the sentence method of teaching to read, as compared with the phonic."⁸

Research Study Number Two. Mabel Hassell and Lillian Varley in 1914 studied two schools, one teaching reading by phonics and one by the sentence method (words never taken singly). The oral reading test showed whole word readers read faster and were better at comprehension.⁹

⁷Ibid., p. 365.

⁸Ibid., p. 356.

⁹Ibid.

Research Study Number Three. Lillian B. Currier and Oliver C. Duguid in 1916 studied two classes each of first and second graders of equal size and average ability; one group was taught by phonics, one by non-phonetic methods. The phonics group was bored with reading while the non-phonics group was eager to read.

The classes having no phonics were found to enjoy reading for the sake of the story. From the story they got the sense-content. They were less careful and less correct than the phonics classes in regard to word pronunciation. Keeping the sense in mind, they often substituted words from their own vocabulary for difficult or unfamiliar words in the text.¹⁰

It was also found that "Those who were foreign born or who had speech impediments or poor pronunciation habits were helped by phonetic procedures. . . ." ¹¹

Research Study Number Four. In 1925 Grace Arthur studied 171 first graders in seven public schools in Chisholm, Minnesota. The students were tested prior to entry and near the end of the first grade. "It would seem from these data that time spent in teaching phonetic methods to children with a mental age of less than five and a half years is largely wasted."¹²

¹⁰Ibid., p. 357.

¹¹Ibid., p. 358.

¹²Ibid., p. 359.

Research Study Number Five. Arthur I. Gates (1927) in the April edition of Journal of Educational Psychology reported two studies of phonics training in beginning reading: one in the Horace Mann School and one in the New York Public Schools. He concluded that in silent reading comprehension, the non-phonics pupils demonstrated markedly superior attainments.¹³

Research Study Number Six. Elmer Sexton and John Herron in 1928 reported on nearly 1000 pupils to test the value of phonics in the teaching of beginning reading. Eight schools in different sections of Newark, New Jersey, were divided into phonics and non-phonics instruction groups. Their conclusions "clearly indicate that the teaching of phonics functions very little or not at all with beginning instruction in reading during the first five months."¹⁴

Research Study Number Seven. Mosher and Sidney Newhall in 1930 compared phonics and word approach methods using seven classes of first graders in three public elementary schools of New Haven, Connecticut. They found no essential difference in the two groups. "In general, our results suggest that added time devoted to phonics would not appreciably increase reading skill, and that therefore phonics training is not especially to be recommended as a device for that purpose."¹⁵

¹³ Ibid. p. 359.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 360.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Research Study Number Eight. S. C. Garrison and Minnie Heard studied 111 children from 1927 to 1930. These children were divided into two groups and placed in four classrooms. One class in each category received phonics training during the first and second year but not the third, and one class did not receive phonics training.

They concluded that training in phonics makes children more independent in the pronunciation of words. Children with no phonics training make smoother and better oral readers in the lower grades. In the teaching of reading it seems probable that much of the phonetic training now given should be deferred till the second and third grades. There was some spelling advantage for the groups having phonics training.¹⁶

Research Study Number Nine. Arthur Gates and David Russell in the Elementary School Journal (September and October 1938) considered the types of material, vocabulary burden, word analysis, and other factors in beginning reading, for 354 pupils grouped in three groups: D, smallest phonics instruction; E, moderate phonics instruction; F, substantial phonics instruction.

They concluded that the differences were not marked nor highly reliable. The E group was highest on word recognition and comprehension. The D group
17
slightly higher on two tests out of four over the F group.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 361.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 363.

Research Study Number Ten. In October 1953 The Reverend John McDowell reviewed data from ten parochial schools in the diocese of Pittsburgh. Five were using phonics and five were using a "diocesan approved program including phonics training as a subsidiary word attack skill introduced gradually."¹⁸ The children were tested during the fourth grade.

He stated: "The conclusion should be obvious. The phonetic method, even under ideal conditions, is not accomplishing the results that it is said to accomplish."¹⁹

The writers of this article concluded:

1. A readiness program for phonics can safely be recommended.²⁰
2. The research studies do not substantiate the contention of Flesch and others that we can have perfect readers by using a phonics approach at an early age.²¹

II. SOME STUDIES SINCE 1954

For Phonics. Since 1954 there have been many other studies. Some of them which favor the use of phonics are:

¹⁸Ibid., p. 366.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 367.

²⁰Ibid., p. 369.

²¹Ibid., p. 370.

Research Study Number One. David E. Bear made a comparative study of two methods of teaching reading in April 1959. The purpose was to compare the synthetic method of teaching phonics with the analytic method.

There were fourteen classrooms in Alton, Illinois, involved in this study, from September 1956 to May 1957. The experimental group used a phonics reader (Reading with Phonics, published by J. B. Lippincott Company) in a special period for total group instruction and was divided into three groups for basal reading. The control group used the Row-Peterson basal series.

Both groups were tested by Metropolitan Readiness Test, California Test of Mental Maturity, Primary Form, 1954, and Warners' Index of Status Characteristics. Children repeating a grade were eliminated from the study. At the end of the year the experimental group consisted of 136 pupils, the control group of 139 pupils. Each class devoted 150 minutes a day to reading instruction. The teachers in the experimental group eliminated all the exercises on phonics and auditory discrimination suggested in the teachers guide for the basal series.

In January results on achievement tests showed that both methods were equally effective.²²

²²David E. Bear, "Phonics for First Grade: A Comparison of Two Methods," Elementary School Journal, LIX (April 1959), p. 398.

In May two silent reading tests were used and the Durrell test for hearing sounds and for visual discrimination were also used. At that time the testing program provided evidence that the experimental group produced significantly higher reading achievement. The results were superior for low IQ's and middle IQ's with a much smaller difference for high IQ's.²³

Research Study Number Two. In 1964 in a second article David E. Bear reported on the long-range effects of an intensive synthetic phonics program in the first grade.

In May 1962 the Gates Reading Survey, Form 2, was administered. Two spelling tests were given: one of randomly selected words and one of phonetic syllables. Ninety-five of the original experimental group and ninety children of the control group were tested by using the California Test of Mental Maturity and socioeconomic status, and Warners' Index of Status Characteristics. There were no significant differences.

On the Gates Reading Test the experimental group was favored, but only on the vocabulary test were the differences high enough to reject the null hypothesis at the five per cent level.

²³Bear, "Phonics for First Grade: A Comparison of Two Methods," Elementary School Journal, p. 398.

The average group again was the most favored. The experimental group did better in spelling.

The differences found in the two groups in 1959 persisted through 1962 to Grade 6.²⁴

Research Study Number Three. Sister Mary Edward Dolan conducted a study to determine how reading achievement for a group using a modified Bloomfield plan would compare with a composite approach.

Two groups were selected. The first group was from Dubuque, Iowa, parochial schools. The second was a matched group from the Detroit, Michigan, parochial schools. The Dubuque group used the basal reading series while the Detroit (experimental group) used basal readers and phonics work charts. The experimental group spent 140 minutes a day for first, second, and third grades while the control group spent 145, 130, and 130 minutes a day for the three grades. Both groups were pretested by using the Lorge-Thorndike Nonverbal IQ Test, the Bond, Clymer, Hoyt Silent Reading Tests, and the Gates Reading Survey.

The data indicated that the experimental group recognized words in isolation more easily, used context with greater facility, had fewer orientation problems, possessed greater ability to analyze words visually.

²⁴David E. Bear, "Two Methods of Teaching Phonics: A Longitudinal Study," Elementary School Journal, LXIV (February 1964), p. 278.

They read faster, more accurately, had larger vocabularies, comprehended better and retained information longer than the control group. In complex comprehension abilities of organization and appreciation there were no significant differences in the two groups. Although all children profited, those of average and low average intelligence benefited more broadly.²⁵

The authors felt that the difference in performance could be caused by a more clearly defined and systematic application of the principles of learning in the experimental word recognition program.

Research Study Number Four. Paul E. Sparks and Leo C. Fay compared reading instruction under Phonetic Keys to Reading with a basal series reading program.

The study began in September 1952 and ended May 1956 involving 418 pupils from School A (experimental group using Phonetic Keys to Reading) and 406 pupils from School B (control group using a basal reading series). The following tests were administered: Warner's Index of Social Characteristics, Otis Quick-Swing Mental Ability Test, Gates Reading Survey, the spelling section of Stanford Achievement Test.

²⁵ Sister Mary Edward Dolan, "A Modified Linguistic Versus a Composite Basal Reading Program," The Reading Teacher, XVII (April 1964), p. 515.

The following conclusions were reached:

School A first grade was superior in comprehension and vocabulary.

School A second grade was superior in comprehension; there was no significant difference in vocabulary.

There were no significant differences in grades three and four.

There was no significant difference in speed in reading at the end of the fourth grade.

School B appeared to be superior in reading accuracy.

There was no significant difference in spelling.²⁶

Against phonics. Some studies which found either no significant difference or did not favor the use of phonics as a method of beginning reading instruction were:

Research Study Number One. Elmer F. Morgan and Morton Light compared third grade reading results of four independent school populations, two of which used the Phonetic Keys to Reading for three consecutive years and two of which used the basal reading program materials for the same time.

The following tests were administered: California IQ test was given and at the end of third grade Gates Basic Reading Test was administered.

²⁶Paul E. Sparks and Leo C. Fay, "An Evaluation of Two Methods of Teaching Reading," Elementary School Journal, LVII (April 1957), p. 390.

Twenty boys and girls were randomly selected from the two groups and given a spelling test. Fifty boys and fifty girls randomly selected were given the California Achievement Test, Form AA.

They concluded that (1) the phonics approach did not produce superior spellers, and (2) phonics as a method for teaching reading was not superior.²⁷

Research Study Number Two. Donald L. Cleland and Harry B. Miller made a comparison of the basal reading approach to reading and the phonics approach.

The experimental group (using the Phonetic Keys to Reading published by the Economy Company) was made up of ten first grade classrooms of public schools in a city in southwest Pennsylvania.

The control group (using the Scott-Foresman basal reading series) consisted of seven first grade classrooms in three public schools in a comparable city nearby.

Tests administered were the Kuhlmann-Anderson IQ tests, Form A, 1952; Metropolitan Achievement Test, 1960; and the Stanford Achievement Test (1953 edition revised) for spelling.

²⁷ Elmer F. Morgan and Morton Light, "A Statistical Evaluation of Two Programs of Reading Instruction," Journal of Educational Research, LVII (October 1963), p. 101.

They concluded that there was no significant difference in the two groups. It was felt that the children were not sufficiently mature to benefit from phonics instruction.²⁸

Research Study Number Three. Elizabeth Ann Bordeaux and N. H. Shope compared three approaches to teaching first grade reading. The three approaches were (1) basal reading using the Scott-Foresman basal series, (2) basal reading plus phonics, using Murphy-Durrell Speech-to-Print published by Harcourt, Brace, and World Company, and (3) basal reading plus phonics plus sensory experience (same as approach number two supplemented by many aural, oral and visual teaching aids).

All first graders in Goldsboro, North Carolina, were involved in the experiment. There were 751 children in all enrolled in seven schools in twenty-eight classrooms. Of these 385 were Caucasian and 366 were Negro. The time limit was 140 days.

Tests used at the beginning of the experiment were Murphy-Durrell Diagnostic Reading Readiness Test (1964 edition), Metropolitan Readiness Test, Form A, 1964 edition, Thurston Pattern Copying Test (1964 special edition), IQ Pintner-Cunningham Primary Test (1964 edition).

At the end of the experiment, the following tests were used: Stanford Achievement Test, Primary 1, Level Form X.

²⁸Donald L. Cleland and Harry B. Miller, "Instruction in Phonics and Success In Beginning Reading," Elementary School Journal, LXV (February 1965), p. 282.

They concluded:

There was no significant difference between basal reading approach and the phonics for the white population.

Basal reading was favored for the total Negro population.

Sensory approach was more satisfactory for both the white and Negro populations.

The general conclusion was that the more varied experience a child has the more he will learn.²⁹

III. SUMMARY

It can readily be seen that there is much disagreement in this area. No one method has been proved superior in every instance. It is evident that more research needs to be accomplished under carefully controlled situations and that such studies should cover a greater length of time.

²⁹Elizabeth Ann Bordeaux and N. H. Shope, "An Evaluation of Three Approaches to Teaching Reading in First Grade," The Reading Teacher, (October 1966), p. 11.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY

I. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

There are two easily reached conclusions based upon a survey of the literature pertaining to the place of phonics in the beginning reading program. First, Cleland and Miller stated in an article in the Elementary School Journal:

Because research results are inconsistent, it is possible to quote research to support any position on any aspect of phonics instruction.¹

and Durrell adds,

Whether a method is 'old-fashioned' or 'progressive' or follows a 'correct psychological principle' should be of little concern. An observant teacher will notice that psychological principles are plentiful and that one may be found to justify almost any educational practice.²

The second conclusion Betts states for us in an article included in New Perspectives In Reading Instruction edited by Mazurkiewicz:

¹Donald L. Cleland and Harry B. Miller, "Instruction in Phonics and Success in Beginning Reading," Elementary School Journal, LXV (February 1965), p. 278.

²Donald D. Durrell, Importance of Basic Reading Abilities, (Yonkers-on-Hudson, New York: World Book Co., 1905), pp. 3-4.

The teacher has two choices: (1) tell him the word or (2) teach him to apply his knowledge of phonic skills. The making of these two choices apparently is a controversial issue, because both classroom practices and articles in professional magazines reveal the majority of opinions call for telling rather than teaching.³

There is a third conclusion that may be made with reasonable security.

James B. Conant speaks of it in Slums and Suburbs when he says,

I am convinced that a common denominator among unsuccessful school children who later become dropouts and perhaps juvenile delinquents is the failure to develop reading skills. Once these pupils reach the junior high school, it may well be too late to salvage them.⁴

Yoakum agrees,

Children who are left to their own devices in learning to read fail to develop needed skills which lead to independence in reading. As a result of their failure to learn to read by reading, they develop serious emotional difficulties which finally lead them to the psychological or reading clinic, or both.⁵

Both of these statements portray a recognition of the seriousness of the problem of reading disability. Both point to the failure of early instruction in reading to produce independence in reading.

³Albert J. Mazurkiewicz (ed.), New Perspectives In Reading Instruction, A Book of Readings, (New York, Toronto, London: Pitman Publishing Corporation, 1964), p. 211.

⁴James B. Conant, Slums and Suburbs, (New York: The North American Library, 1964), p. 52.

⁵Gerald A. Yoakum, Basal Reading Instruction, (New York, Toronto, London: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1955), p. 37.

A fourth conclusion is less well accepted; there is no one best way to teach all children to read. Marjorie Seddon Johnson states that "In general it seems that even when excellent results appear to be gotten by enthusiasts using a particular plan, these results are not replicated by others."⁶ Durrell also emphasizes that there is no one best way and that the important thing to be remembered in any program of reading instruction is the individual differences of the students.⁷ Gans seems to agree, and urges that "teachers . . . explore new, promising ideas and materials with children . . . keep careful notes to evaluation . . . keep all avenues of information open for further adventures."⁸

A fifth conclusion regarding the place of phonics in beginning instruction may be made. With the possible exception of Hildreth and her followers, no writer precludes the use of phonics. They do tend to agree that "When all is said, however, phonics remain one of the most useful and the most consistently used techniques for word identification when properly supplemented by context clues."⁹

⁶Mazurkiewicz, op. cit., p. 549.

⁷Durrell, op. cit., p. 64.

⁸Roma Gans, Common Sense In Teaching Reading, (Indianapolis, New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1963), p. 113.

⁹Miles Tinker and Constance M. McCullough, Teaching Elementary Reading, second edition, (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1962), p. 157.

Yoakum points out, speaking of the beginning reader:

If he never learned how to work out independently the pronunciation and meaning of unfamiliar words, his reading would depend on how many sight words he could master. Thorndike has estimated that he could eventually learn and read approximately four thousand words. This would be a very restricted vocabulary. The child would read at approximately the fourth grade level.¹⁰

Word method proponents stick firmly to the idea that phonics is a word recognition skill and not a method for teaching beginning reading.

However, a corollary to the above conclusion could be made. Consider the following statements:

By teaching vowels in the first year we give the child independence.¹¹

Only after a child has a certain degree of competency in word-recognition skills is he able to read. That is, the act of reading is different from the act of identifying or recognizing words.¹²

Usually we say that when a child 'reads,' he gets 'the author's meaning.' But does he get all the author's meaning or only part of it? To get all the author's meaning he must at least get all the author's words. That is, he must be able to tell what each of the printed words 'says,' and he must know what each such word means. Specifically, (1) he must either recognize every word by sight or (2) he must know enough phonics to sound it out, or (3) he must be smart

¹⁰Gerald A. Yoakum, Basal Reading Instruction, (New York, Toronto, London: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1955), p. 33.

¹¹Mazurkiewicz, op. cit., p. 524.

¹²Ibid., p. 221.

enough to guess correctly from context or familiar parts. If he cannot get every word, he cannot get the author's full meaning, he cannot be doing 'complete' reading.¹³

Reading is basically a language-related process that must be studied rigorously in relation to what is known about the structure of American language--in relation to all that is known today, not merely spelling related to segmental phonemes. Reading instruction must take into account intonation patterns, patterns of syntax . . . structure words and word form changes.¹⁴

If then, we accept, what apparently the word method supporters accept regarding the importance and necessity for eventually teaching the child certain phonics rules in order to make him an independent and complete reader, we are faced with the challenge made by Mae Carden when she said that we "need to avoid the mistake of permitting the child to function with limited, inaccurate skills in the early grades and then requiring the youngster to apply corrective reading techniques in the elementary grades."¹⁵ And Yoakum, who is considered a strong supporter of the basal reading approach, points out: "It is obviously more intelligent and much fairer to children to teach reading in such a

¹³Edward William Dolch, Methods In Reading, (Champaign, Illinois: The Garrard Press, 1955), pp. 91-92.

¹⁴Carl A. Lefevre, "A Longer Look at Let's Read," Elementary English, XLI (March 1964), p. 203.

¹⁵Mazurkiewicz, op. cit., p. 517.

manner as to prevent them from becoming disabled in reading and maladjusted in their schoolwork."¹⁶ This statement follows a discussion of the need of the pupil to develop skills which lead to independence in reading.

To recapitulate, many writers accept the necessity for teaching phonics in order to provide independence in reading. If independence in reading is a major goal in the reading program and phonics provides the basis for satisfying this goal, then why wait to teach phonics until the child has become crippled, bored, and stymied in his attempts to read?

II. PROBLEMS IN RECONCILING THE TWO VIEWS

The first problem appears to be a matter of semantics and the lack of definition on the part of many writers and researchers. What one writer regards as his position on phonics may at second glance evolve into a slightly different stand. There seems at times almost a fear that rivals from the two camps might accidentally agree on anything and a concerted effort to be sure that this is not the case.

The second problem lies in the definition of the word reading. Is reading a skill to be learned or as many claim a language process through which meaning is to be gained? Should the child be expected to learn to read in the same way that an experienced reading adult recognizes words?

¹⁶ Yoakum, op. cit., p. 37.

The third problem is the question of the nature of the English language--is it phonetic or not? Many researchers grant the English language a score of 86 per cent in this regard. Watson Washburn, president of the Reading Reform Foundation states, "Women are prominent in the reading reform movement having taught their own children a speaking vocabulary of many thousands of words at home, starting from scratch, they refuse to accept as the reward of a year's instruction at school a reading vocabulary of 200 or 300 rote words. And all the excuses and double talk of some top educationalists cannot persuade them that alphabetical English should be taught like pictographic Chinese. . . ."17

The fourth problem lies in some common misconceptions regarding phonics as a method of reading instruction which have been accepted at face value due to the rebellion against the old way of teaching. These misconceptions include the three referred to Chapter II as listed by Heilman: (1) teaching the alphabet is wrong, (2) teaching word families is an indefensible practice, and (3) no work or drill on phonics should take place that is not related directly to what the child is reading.

¹⁷ Watson Washburn, The Education Digest, XXVIII (May 1963), p. 48.

These misconceptions were discussed at that time. There are two others which should be considered. They are (1) teaching reading by phonics involves intensive, meaningless drill, and (2) children taught to read by phonics automatically suffer losses in comprehension. In regard to the first it may be pointed out that the word method as used by many teachers is a matter of constant, repetitive drill on sight words and incessant oral reading. Dolch comments that this oral reading "is frankly a method of teaching word recognition. When there are too many hard words, there is no other way of teaching them. There are just too many new words for most of the children to work them out for themselves."¹⁸ He goes on to say that "theoretically the situation that demands oral reading for word telling should not exist in our schools. But with uniform textbooks, and with social promotion of retarded readers, no other plan seems feasible."¹⁹

Walcutt states the second misconception when he says regarding the idea of reading for meaning, "Joined with this notion was the belief that to attack a word as a sound would prevent a child from getting its meaning.

¹⁸Dolch, Methods In Reading, p. 131.

¹⁹Ibid.

This belief was rarely explained or even stated, but it was absolutely basic to the new thinking. . . ."20 Until this idea is discarded, there obviously can be no agreement among experts in the field of teaching reading.

The last misconception mentioned above leads to the fifth problem area--the conflicting statements made by the so-called experts in the field of reading instruction (including statements which conflict with other experts and statements which contradict themselves). Walcutt feels that there are several explanations of this situation.

One is that experts have been so busy defending the system that they have not had time to examine it. Another is that they have been cynical empire builders making fortunes from primary textbooks--but this is too simple to be the whole explanation. Another is that the school population has grown so explosively since the 1920's that no one has been able to keep up with the explosion of 'research' that has been incidental to the explosion of teachers and students. There is a great deal of truth in this point.²¹

Although the first two reasons may be freely questioned, the last reason which Walcutt gives is a sound one. There is a great deal of research being carried out in the field of reading; the results are at times confusing and contradictory; and it is difficult (if not impossible) to keep up.

²⁰Charles C. Walcutt (ed.), Tomorrow's Illiterates: The State of Reading Instruction Today, (Boston, Toronto: An Atlantic Monthly Press Book, Little, Brown and Co., 1961), p. 38.

²¹Ibid., p. 19.

III. SPECIFIC CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following conclusions and recommendations are made:

1. That additional research should be accomplished under carefully controlled situations and that such studies should cover a greater length of time.

2. That reading is a skill and the teaching of reading involves the mastery of the mechanics of that skill, just as a typist learns to type through the mastery of certain techniques learned by practice and repetition.

3. That any reading program is dependent upon the teacher who presents it; and there is a need even in the intrinsic phonics programs to be certain that teachers themselves know what they are suppose to be teaching.

Finally, the following major findings of a research effort involving first grade reading in the Greater Boston area are presented:

1. Most reading difficulties can be prevented by an instructional program which provides early instruction in letter names and sounds, followed by applied phonics and accompanied by suitable practice in meaningful sight vocabulary and aids to attentive reading.

2. Early instruction in letter names and sounds produces a higher June reading achievement than does such instruction given incidentally during the year.

3. Children with high learning rates and superior background skills make greater progress when conventional reading-readiness materials are omitted from their reading program.

4. There appears to be no basis for the assumption that a sight vocabulary of seventy-five words should be taught before word-analysis skills are presented. . . . While a knowledge of the names and sounds does not assure success in acquiring a sight vocabulary, lack of that knowledge produces failure.²²

²²Mazurkiewicz, op. cit., p. 515.

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