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THE TEACHING OF READING
IN A
ONE-TEACHER RURAL SCHOOL

By

Roberta Robinson C. Walls

A Thesis in Education Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the

Degree of Bachelor of Science

in the

Division of Arts and Sciences

of the

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Prairie View, Texas

August, 1938

Dedicated

to

My Mother,
Mrs. Annie B. Robinson,

and

My Husband
Mr. R. B. Walls.

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R. R. C. W.

Prairie View State College
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August, 1938

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INTRODUCTION

When one considers the poverty-stricken conditions of most of our rural schools, one wonders what the ultimate effects must be upon the plastic minds of boys and girls who are required to attend them.

The little school house of ancient village stands by the side of the road portraying, as it were, a past civilization. Nothing about it reflects our present standards of public undertaking. Imagine a building of box-car design; as bleak within as it is without; a teacher's desk; non-adjustable ones for the children; a stove - perhaps a jacketed one, of the law requires it; a very few books; a globe; blackboards; and a few old maps, and you have a picture of the little rural school that is so dear to the hearts of its patrons.

All educators agree that reading is the most important subject in the elementary school. Teaching reading has caused much research and experimentation as to the best methods of teaching it to the child. Not only have educators sought new and better methods of teaching but they have attempted to make certain

evaluations pertaining to the results one gets from various methods in reading.

The reading material in the primary section must be well taught in order that when a child leaves this section, he will have a broader and wider comprehension of the subjects to be learned in the intermediate and upper elementary grades.

We know that in teaching any subject, the primary object in view is to select material according to the child's ability, and interest; and the outcome expected from what is to be learned. The writer shall attempt to show that reading well presented in the primary section aids in developing the child for social and civic responsibilities which are the most important aims in the educational program.

The major purpose of reading should be for enjoyment. The amount of reading done in school, the selections that are chosen, and the methods used in teaching, are important factors which may influence the child's reading habits for life.

CHAPTER I
LOOKING BACK ON THE PAST

Probably no subject in the elementary school curriculum engages a deeper and more sustained interest on the part of modern educators, than reading.

No student has been able to trace the origin of the mysterious art of reading. Recent explorations have unearthed inscriptions which scientists estimate belong to the early part of the third millenium, before the christian era. Seven-thousand years ago reading in Egypt was passing through the pictograph stage - the first stage in the evolution recognized by the making of pictures in the air which were read as fast as they could be fashioned. This was the beginning of reading.¹

Mode of Conveying Ideas: Since the invention of the art of printing by Johan Gutenberg about 1448, the reading of printed symbols has continued to grow in importance until today it constitutes the fundamental subject of the elementary curriculum. More

¹O'Brien, Reading: Its Psychology and Pedagogy
pp. 3 - 10.

than one-fourth of the total time in our grade schools is now devoted to the teaching of reading. In the lower grades, little else but the mechanics of reading is attempted.

Teaching the mechanics of reading was inherited from the ancients. Tracing with the styles the various characters of their alphabet upon waxen tablets and on papyrus, the pedagogues of ancient Greece taught their pupils the names of the phonic properties of each letter, as the first and indispensable step in the process of learning to read. The alphabets remained in almost universal use in the schools of the world until the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

Progress and Attainment: Many of the colonies were established to secure freedom of worship; consequently, the religious motive affected reading materials. The early readers were devoted largely to selections from the Bible and religious admonitions. The chief characteristics of reading during this early period were oral reading and memorization. As the new nation began to develop the nationalistic aim greatly influenced the content of reading material taught.

CHAPTER II

SOME PRESENT DAY METHODS OF TEACHING READING

Methods of teaching reading in rural schools have lagged behind those used in the city schools. Rural teachers are not so familiar with the latest and best methods of teaching reading; neither are they familiar with the latest and best material children should read at given ages. Add to these drawbacks the scarcity of reading material in the rural school library, and you have a combination of factors that cannot be surpassed in producing poor reading ability, lack of interest in, if not a positive distaste for good reading.)

Phonics

When we think of teaching in terms of employing certain methods, we think of reading by drill to attain the goal. There are many kinds of reading drills that may be used in teaching reading to beginners, but let us consider the phonetic drill. Conson-

ant sounds, chosen from sight, that the teacher has compiled from the children's immediate environment should be presented first. "S" is good to use as a beginning. Next the class should be taught to recognize phonograms by placing the words on display in this form: M - at, M - ight - Sp - in. Some drill on word families in this form is very important.

Gray's Oral Passages provide a means of observing phonetic skill in the actual process of reading. Gate's Pronunciation Test makes possible the discovery of the techniques utilized in working out the recognition of words when the influence of context is eliminated. A further test constructed and tried out by the author was designed to test abilities to recognize and deal in certain other ways with the individual word elements.

The author regards the two preceding test of far greater utility than this one, since mere ability to recognize word elements in isolation does not guarantee aptitude in recognizing words which contain these word-parts. If the pupil cannot deal with the whole words, however, it does not follow that he is

unfamiliar with the word elements as such.

In brief, they are conducted as follows: The pupil reads the two lines of Capital Letters as rapidly and accurately as possible. The time indicates fluency of recognition and pronunciation; the errors indicate deficiencies. After all the test is completed, the letters mispronounced should be presented again, in order to ascertain whether they were really unknown or merely misrecognized in rapid work.

How well the pupil succeeds in these tests may be decided on the basis of the examiner's own convictions concerning the proper degree of knowledge of such elements, and skill in handling them, or by comparing the scores obtained with the average or norms.

The tests show what degree of familiarity a pupil has achieved with the phonetic elements; whether he can readily name or sound the letters; pronounce or sound the larger phonograms, and detect phonetic elements in new combinations. These elements may be single letters, two or three letter combinations or blends, such as bl, tr, sch, or syllables such as or,

ing, ba, etc. Blending these give a production of a total word.

Word Families: Many children learn to read without the flash cards by experiences with learning words, the use of wall charts, and reproduction of the early primer stories which bring in the use of an extensive vocabulary and difficult units of reading material, thus fostering memory reading. The best results you know cannot be obtained except with children of superior intelligence. The real test comes in the use of the method with the children who experience difficulty in learning to read. With this type of child it is wise that we use carefully constructed reading materials that contain a large amount of repetition of minimum easy vocabulary in a variety of meaningful reading situations especially organized to promote facility in word recognition.

The Chart: The chart may be used to furnish material for teaching reading, pictures of objects, in matching words to show or express their meaning. For instance, we take the picture of a dog, place it on a chart and give the child a number of word

cards from which he is asked to select the proper word and place under the picture. This creates action; the child may turn or jump up and see how quickly he can go to the duty to be performed. A lesson may be taught in the simplest form in silent reading, as well as oral reading word drill through activities.

¹The underlying theory is that, in an integrated activity program, learning to read takes place largely in a natural incidental way as reading is needed in relationship to project activities which furnish enjoyable and profitable experiences and pleasant and interesting associations. Smith, author of this method, points out that this method of teaching is rapidly gaining a foothold in this country. He states that the newer philosophers and psychologists are calling for a functional teaching of reading, a type of instruction in which reading is taught largely as it enters into and flows out of children's interest and activities; and he further states that the basic set of readers will eventually disappear.

¹Clarence R. Stone, Elementary School Journal
Oct., 1935. pp. 105 - 108.

Charts, then, are a means of objectively clarifying our thinking with reference to facts. They also help to fix the attention of the reader, and are often the sole cause for turning his thoughts into a direction which might otherwise have been avoided.²

The universal use of charts in various phases of daily life, has made it necessary for every citizen to be able to interpret them. It has thus become a responsibility on the part of the rural teacher to teach children how to make forms of graphic expression in developing their daily lessons.

For practical school purposes four types of graphs are commonly used in text books; namely, the bar, the circle, the curve, and the pictorial chart. The bar is used particularly to represent comparative distances, sizes, values, and quantities of industrial art. Because our eyes are trained to read along a horizontal bar graph can probably be read with greater speed and accuracy than the vertical bar type.

²Clarence P. Stone, Elementary School Journal, Oct., 1935, pp. 105 - 106.

Children can be taught how to make and use these graphs very early in the grades if they are held to the simplest constructions. In introducing the significance of such symbolic representation, it might be well to begin with the individual as a basis for comparison. For instance, measure the height of three boys against the blackboard. John measures four feet and eight inches; Tom measures four feet and one-half inch; and Henry measures four feet, two inches.

The Use of Words in Flash Cards

Activities prove very successful when used in combination that present words of human interest. These words or sentences should be within the child's immediate environment, as the names of his toys, pets, etc.; the names of the members of his family uses; spoons, knives, forks, chairs, tables, beds, stoves, and other things he hears about and sees daily. The teacher should vary the activities in which these words are used often in order that child interest might not be lost. These activities may be carried on by use of bulletin boards, building

sentences, as seat work in teaching word families;

can

nan

ran

fan

pan

would

could

should

and others.

Place drawings of pictures and words on white paper or black board.

See that each child has a pencil. Distribute papers. Have children fill in blanks at the top of page (with your help).

Front page up when signal is given to begin:

Look at the first picture.

There are some words next to it.

One of the words go with the picture.

Draw a ring around the word that tells about the picture.

Put your finger on the word that goes with the picture.

Place these words on some paste board in case other material is not available. Correct errors, using one of the students as pronouncer. State results.

Drill Exercises

The drill exercise may be called the habit-forming or habituation exercise. The purpose of drill is to develop skill. Teachers find it necessary to drill pupils in order that certain knowledge and certain processes may become fixed in mind. Pupils must be drilled in reading, and not only in reading alone but in all the other combinations.

Gates stated that drill as a teaching process has for its chief end the training of power and skill, especially skill in the several school arts. This writer says that it is not enough that pupils be once led to know facts or even to reach a truth, by inductive steps under a teacher's guidance, they must also acquire the power to reach it again with less guidance and greater certainty. These results are secured by repetition or practice. In most schools the drill absorbs fully three-fifths of teaching time and effort. In playing quarts, for example, the boy who keeps his eye on the stake, other things being equal, will be the

one most likely to make a ringer. In shooting at a target, the successful shooter aims to hit the bull's eye. In reading or singing he succeeds best who is best able to picture an ideal which he aims to attain.

Good teachers know when to stop a drill exercise. Nothing is gained by keeping children at a drill when they are tired of it. To come back some other time, is a good rule. There are plateaus in the attainment of skill. William James said that we learn to skate in summer and swim in winter. What does that mean? He meant that the neurone synapses, bonds or connections start in one season and grow and strengthen during other seasons as they are nourished by the blood supply. Thorndike and others now express some doubt as to the validity of this view, however; but whether James was right or wrong, it is an undoubted fact that frequent short periods of drill with intervals of rest produce the best results.

Drill on those topics which most need it. In order to do this, the teacher must know her sub-

ject matter and her individual pupils and apply intelligence to the work of drilling. There is a mass of scientific data to show that six or seven year old children vary very greatly in mental maturity, in ability to perceive likenesses and differences in word forms in visual perception and in other factors in learning to read. After the child has learned to read or has learned the nature of word symbols and acquired a reading vocabulary, many drill exercises should follow. The test of good preparation is the grasp of thought, and feeling in vocal expression. The thought should always be made a unit. In asking questions, make them of such nature that will lead a child to answer what you desire in a complete sentence, thus bringing up his oral reading and oral expression.

CHAPTER III
TYPES OF READING

Oral Reading

There are two main types of reading: Silent and Oral. Oral reading is valuable in the primary grades, because it gives the child an opportunity to connect meaning with sound. There is meaning or social appreciation recognized in primary oral reading when the child recognizes rhythm in poetry; as he grows in his auditory appreciations there's much more values. "This type of reading is necessarily limited by the muscular activities involved in articulation and pronunciation".¹ From this statement one should expect more speed from silent reading than from oral reading. This seems true when we think in terms of upper grades. S. S. Brooks in "Improvising School by Standardized Tests" advises that the child should do silent reading in the first grade and oral in the second. In view of

¹ Stone: Oral and Silent Reading
p. 24.

this idea we conclude that teaching oral reading at too early a stage is a disadvantage in the learning process, because the average child's comprehension at this stage exceeds his articulation.

Much may be derived from poems and songs that give a pleasurable feeling as, "What does little birdie say?" "Who has seen the wind?" "To whit! To whit! To whee!" When such materials are used in teaching and presenting oral-reading-lessons concomitant learning and desirable attitudes are being developed, in that children receive information, appreciation and a social understanding.

Do not forget that every normal child is curious to know and likes to solve problems. See to it that he has problems in his reading as well as in his arithmetic. Boys and girls should be so trained in reading that they will desire to read when they grow up. Therefore, reading lessons should be assigned in such a way as to send pupils to reference books.

Silent Reading

Silent reading is more important than oral reading. Consequently the assignment and reading exercise itself should be of a character that will encourage as much critical silent reading as possible. Country boys and girls should be trained to some extent in that special kind of reading, which they will need as farmers and farmer's wives, although many of them may spend their lives elsewhere than on farms. The country teacher should recognize the fact that if upper-grade reading is done poorly in a country-school, all other upper-grade work of the school will suffer, as a natural consequence. The pupil who can read silently with rapidity and understanding has a distinct advantage over others who cannot.

The rural teacher who gives adequate attention to inter-recitation activities is the teacher who is teaching a good school, other things being equal. It is now possible for a teacher to purchase commercial materials for reading seat work of all grades, which will enable her to solve this problem satis-

factorily. Any teacher who is careful to make use of definite and stimulating assignments in her teaching of reading will soon find that pupils are gaining power, that the question of order is no longer so serious, and that the work in other subjects is showing increasingly better results.

When the child is required to read for information, silent reading should be used. O'Brien concludes that: "The average child in grades three through eight is slow and inefficient in comprehension; and that comprehension or rate can be increased in two months." The improvement in the first month shall be greater than in the second. If either comprehension or rate is inefficient, you should train specifically to serve that effect; either may increase and not impair the other.¹ One's rate varies according to character of material, that means the easy narrative is read more rapidly than the poetic. Familiarity has much to do with rate. Ex. - The doctor would read a book on medicine more rapidly than he would a treatise on law. The

¹Stone: Oral and Silent Reading
New York, Silver, Co. 1913. p. 24.

mechanical make up - length of line, size of point and distance between lines are some of the most important factors effecting rate.

The National Committee on Reading in 1925 reports: "The middle grades constitute the psychological period to stress silent reading. The child has a new social point of view." Careful planning of the silent reading lessons should be done, to realize that aim. This, however, is not to be interpreted as discouraging silent reading in the primary grades. Probably no subject in the Elementary school curriculum is the focus of a deeper or more sustained interest, on the part of modern educators, as is reading. This interest is largely traceable to two factors: (1). The psychological and physiological nature of the reading process, and (2). The keener realization of the importance and value of effective habits of reading especially silent reading.

In every rural school the question of the child's health should be given first consideration and the necessary materials provided. Certain considerations should be given to requests for such equipment, in the

rural school, as thermometer, toilet paper, towels, sweeping compound, soap, paper towels, wash basins, and a good well. Country boys and girls are entitled to supplies of this kind as well as their city cousins. If some of the money now squandered on cosmetics, candy, gun, tobacco, the movies, joy riding, and other luxuries could be put into rural school equipment it would add tremendously to the happy school experiences of many country boys and girls.

In silent reading the aim is to get thought and feeling from the printed page. Silent reading naturally precedes oral reading. In oral reading there is the added element of vocalization, which of course involves the use of the voice mechanism and requires additional expenditure of energy. Silent reading stresses the comprehension of meanings, while in oral reading the reader must give expression more or less adequately to meanings, to thought, and to feeling. In adult life most of our reading is silent, but in school work oral reading

has been common, it still has an important place in the early work of the first grade and in the reading of literary selections in any grade. Silent reading is a separate field of reading, involving a different kind of technique. However, from the beginning emphasis should be placed on content in the reading work as mere word reading produces mechanical readers, who of course, fail to get the thought. It is impossible to over-emphasize meanings, whether the reading is silent or oral.¹

¹Louth: Silent Reading
p. 497.

CHAPTER IV
HOW TO AROUSE INTEREST

To arouse interest in students is getting the child's mind centered or focused on one central point. Interest is a feeling of concern or curiosity about something which arouses it as suspense gives interest to a story. The best way to obtain results from creative poetry, vocational art, reading lessons or any task is to develop the child's feelings of appreciation along with sustained interest in his work.

Curiosity through story telling is illustrated in this Unit on A Toy Shop:

The purpose of this unit is to train the children to appreciate the work of a store keeper from a reading point of view by creative story telling.

The teacher and pupils should usually develop this unit during Xmas season. The shop is constructed from orange crates given by store keepers. The children may make toys, dolls, doll clothing, beads, baskets, doll houses, and furniture; picture puzzles,

clay dishes, vases, etc. The arranging and spelling of the toys will be good exercise, and plans and discussions will form a basis for blackboard lessons. They may buy goods, sell goods, and write the names of the materials in the store, prices of the materials in the store, marking prices on the articles, not allowing the numbers to exceed twenty-five cents and not fall below five cents.

Pupil Activities:

Construct a toy shop.

Place price on articles to be sold.

State cost of purchases.

Keep accounts.

Make a table of profit and loss.

Make change for customers.

Practice speed in making change.

Now how creative story telling is brought about is when the teacher asks each student to make several stories about the work carried on; and the responses given will perhaps surprise one, due to the interest aroused in this particular unit, also socialization is very keenly brought out.

Other plans for stimulating interest in work are as follows:

Operating Post Office

The purpose of this operation is to train the pupils how to operate a post office, use stamps, and write and read types of money. The approach of this unit is initiated by the coming of St. Valentine's Day. The teacher may suggest a play "Post Office" for the distribution of the valentines. Whenever possible, the children's suggestions are regarded in the building of the post office, making stamps, and other manipulative activities. The children may secure card board boxes from stores to use in building the post office. The making of the post office may be supervised by the teacher. The activities used in the making of the post office are various opportunities for reading which children should experience.

The following devices may be used in helping attain the aim of the lesson:

- | | | |
|------------|---------------|--------------|
| 1. pencils | 2. books | 3. bottles |
| 4. boxes | 5. blackboard | 6. cardboard |

- | | | |
|-----------------|----------------|--------------|
| 7. clay | 8. chairs | 9. games |
| 10. songs | 11. marbles | 12. sticks |
| 13. stones | 14. tablets | 15. nails |
| 16. spools | 17. toys | 18. scales |
| 19. tacks | 20. yard stick | 21. scissors |
| 22. fruit | 23. sand table | 24. desks |
| 25. flash cards | | |

There is very little expense involved in securing these devices.

Pupil Activities

Make the Post Office.

Make valentines, rulers, fold paper, cut designs.

Make envelopes, stamps, one cent, two cent, three cent, six cent, air mail and special delivery stamps.

Use toy money

Formulate verses for Valentines.

Make designs for Valentines

Purchase stamps and valentines

Deliver Valentines (ballot for post master)
keeping count of votes.

Making envelopes also making change
and reading the names of each price of
money.

Telling Time

Purpose of this game is to train pupils how to
tell time, by the hour, and the half-hour.

To give skill in reading and writing the time
on the clock and the calendar.

To give knowledge of the time and meaning of the
terms: day, week, month, season, hour, morning,
afternoon, spring, summer, autumn and winter.

Pupil Activities

Use the clock to show time to come to school.

To show time to go to lunch.

To show time to go home.

To show number of hours of sleep,

Use Calendar

To show days of the week

- To show weeks in the month.
- To show days in the month.
- To show important days in month.
- To show seasons in the year.
- Record weather on a calendar.

These principles enable the child to get a conception of reading thru' association of material and objects in common use.

Grouping Pupils

In order to determine the reading habits and skills of the primary grades each grade may be divided into two special groups. The grouping of each class is based on the pupil's experiences and the knowledge of reading obtained through the activities of home, school, neighborhood and situations arising through tests.

The pupils of superior reading habits and skills are placed in Group A; pupils not equipped with a background of sufficient reading experiences to enable them to grasp and understand instruction as clearly as those pupils in Group A, should be placed

in Group B.

During the term there will be some work common to all groups namely, practice lessons which are used to develop the habit of thoroughness and accuracy.

Reviews are useful as a practical rationalization of what was taught.

Individualized Instruction is also given to pupils for the purpose of helping dull pupils understand and really solve their reading problems.

Grouping also has something to do with the child's response; it seems to secure better attention and concentration; combination of materials are gathered with more ease and appreciation; the pupil's thinking ability increases, and the getting concepts becomes a pleasure through contact with groups.

Reading is well understood in this mode, and that feeling of fear is removed when children are grouped rather than when they are merely with a few classmates.

Desirable attainments are the results of using proper methods and devices, so that is what the teacher should strive to reach in all the phases of her "set up".

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In teaching reading in a small rural school, actual experiences of the children should be the beginning. Activities should grow out of rural interests which grow day by day, expanding in range as power in reading develops things that have vital interest to children who really take part in them, should be selected as subject matter. Topics which are of interest vary somewhat in different communities, but every community furnishes an abundance of material for the content of real stories and the like, that may be composed by the children, and written by the teacher.

The cue should be taken from the children themselves. From this cue, the teacher should build, leading the children onward in the development of reading power by constantly raising their standards of reading and helping them to work for that power which satisfies their desire for stories, and for information.

In learning to read the children should learn to recognize the large unit; first the sentence and later

the word; sentences should, of course be short.

Drill should be related to the content to be read, but it should not be permitted to interfere with the reading lesson proper. If there are difficulties to be overcome, time should be given over to the necessary repetition after the child himself perceives the need. When the actual reading for the story or information is undertaken, the oral interpretation of the printed page should go smoothly. If there is halting and stumbling there is evidence the child is not ready to undertake this particular task, and the reason should be found by the teacher. Drill should be related to the reading but subordinated to it.

Careful attention should be given to the physical factors affecting reading. Posture at all times should be comfortable but respectful. Proper lighting and seating conditions are absolute necessities. Reading materials should be mechanically perfect as far as this affects the eye sight. Large print and good spacing are requisites to good health, because to be attentive the child must be healthy. Eye-strain is closely connected with nerve-strain; so

special caution should be taken to prevent and not to aggravate either. Periods of relaxation should follow reading periods.

The non-readers are problems for special diagnosis and instruction. Before children can be classed as non-readers they must, however, have an opportunity to learn by the careful many availed instruction of the modern primary school.

The types of material to be read should be determined by the child's interest. He should be frequently permitted to choose within the limits the materials to be read. The reading should be guided to include various types however, because the ability to read one type seems to be entirely different from the ability to read another. Therefore, it is very essential, as the child grows in power that he learn to interpret the printed page; to read poetry, prose, social study content, dialogue drama, arithmetic and other forms of material. His reading is intimately bound up with his writing and investigative activities.

Before I close my discussion I must mention dramatization. Ability to dramatize a selection does

not guarantee ability to read it. Dramatization should be expression and never a means of fixing a particular habit skill or form.

Progress in a child should be tested for comprehension and speed and be allowed to progress at his own rate regardless of his classmates. He should sometimes participate in class work, however, or he will lose some of the social values of reading.

Oral reading is used predominantly in the earlier primary work because it is a means of connecting the familiar oral symbol with the less familiar printed symbol when the children watch their books carefully. Later children should read orally with a real audience situation. The teacher will see that each one who comes before the audience has a chance of success by her guidance in choice of material adapted to his ability.

In teaching reading in the small rural school we must not forget that too much attention to technique destroys the fun and spontaneity which normally characterize the activities of little children. It is for the teacher to measure results and lead the child into the best activities for him by providing right conditions.

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