Guidelines for parents of beginning readers

Ellen Ryan

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GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS
OF BEGINNING READERS

by
Ellen Ryan

RESEARCH PAPER
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

Introduction

In recent years parents have become much more involved in education. They no longer put their blind trust in the educators. They read, listen, think, observe, evaluate, support, and criticize. This has made educators more accountable to parents as well as to children. Frequently parents criticize new programs because they have not been informed as to their educational and/or psychological value. It is important that schools assist parents in their understanding of these programs and changes so that parents and teachers can work together in the best interests of the children.

In analyzing the questions parents ask about reading, Artley says:

It may be that the questions parents never ask are the ones we should try to answer: 'What does one do if he is truly to interpret?' 'What part does imagery - seeing, feeling, hearing - play in reading?' 'Why should a mature reader react to what he reads?' 'How can reading be made an act that truly modifies thinking and behaving?' Answers to these questions provide a context for such specifics as the ABCs, phonics, and oral reading. One needs to see reading not in terms of letters, sounds, and factual recall of specific facts, but in terms of its breadth and scope, in terms of the effect it has on the development of the individual. ¹

¹A. Sterl Artley, "What Do Parents' Questions Mean?," Reading Teacher, X (October, 1956), 19.
Statement of the Problem

The major purpose of this endeavor was to assist parents and educators in understanding the preschool and early primary child as he prepares for and launches his initial reading experiences. This was done through two lectures given for parents of young children. The topics discussed were:
1. The emotional and social needs to be fulfilled in the child who is to reach his potential in reading
2. Readiness for reading and the beginning reading program

Significance of the Study

The last decade has brought changes that have hastened the young child's readiness for reading. Among these are parent knowledge and interest, an increase of early childhood experiences, and the television productions, such as "Sesame Street" and "The Electric Company". Many children enter first grade already reading. Many others were ready at age four or five but were not given the opportunity. Yet others lack many experiences necessary before they are ready for formal reading instruction. Never before has there been such a need for an understanding of and consideration for each individual child in his uniqueness.

It was hoped that this paper would influence readers as well as the listeners who attend the lectures to be about the business of meeting this need.

Summary

In this chapter the writer has introduced and stated the problem and discussed the significance of the study. In the following chapters the major ideas gleaned from the recent literature as well as from the
writer's 22 years of experience as a first grade teacher will be presented as the framework to be used in delivering the lectures.
CHAPTER II

BEGINNING READING: THE PERSON AND THE PROCESS

Introduction

This chapter contains the formal content of the topics included in the talks given to parents of preschool and primary children. It is a survey of the literature on the subjects and provides the framework for the discussions. However, the actual delivery was informal and more personal.

The Emotional and Social Needs to Be Fulfilled in the Child Who Is to Reach His Potential in Reading

When a child enters school, he comes as one who has become a unique individual formed primarily by his environment. His early social relationships have made him what he is. The fortunate child comes with a normal emotional and social development. He is ready to enjoy his new school environment and to continue to grow emotionally and socially as well as intellectually. The less fortunate child may be unable to grow in this new school situation because of harmful experiences that have hindered him. Parents and teachers must be aware of the needs of children and must make every effort to feed these needs.

Emotional Needs

Every person has basic emotional needs which must be met if he is to be a happy adjusted person in society. Some of the needs which are extremely important for the very young child will be discussed. These
are the needs for love, for security, for success and happiness, and for freedom.

**Love and Security.**—Probably the greatest need of every individual is to love and to be loved. The new-born infant is completely dependent upon others for his physical needs, which appear to be his only concern at this early age. Those who supply these physical needs teach the baby what it means to be loved and these people are the first recipients of his love.

Being hungry and being fed have a relatively greater prominence in the life of the young infant than they have later on, and the same seems true of the infant's contacts with others when any of his wants are being cared for. These contacts are interwoven with his well being and his survival from day to day. Within a few days after birth, he will cease his crying, at least for a time, if he is held in someone's arms, while earlier it required not only holding but also food to pacify him. Within another few days, he will cease fussing simply in response to the sight or sound of a person who is coming to him. Later comes a time when he wants someone to be near him, even though he is comfortably warm and dry and well fed, as though he desired company for its own sake.\(^1\)

Infants seek attention. The mother responds in countless ways—holding, squeezing, cuddling, talking, playing. All of these are shows of affection which are most important in the child's later development as a person. Many parents refrain from holding infants because they fear spoiling them. While wanting to help their child, these parents are depriving him of one of the greatest sources of affection. No amount of holding will injure the infant.

The love need...is a deficit need. It is a hole which has to be filled, an emptiness into which love is poured. If this healing necessity is not available, severe pathology results; if it is available, at the right time, in the right quantities and with proper style, then pathology is averted. Intermediate states of pathology

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and health follow upon intermediate states of thwarting or satisfaction. If the pathology is not too severe and if it is caught early enough, replacement therapy can cure.¹

The child's interactions with other family members, friends, and neighbors also play a role in his desire for love, affection, and security. Actually the child seeks an unconditional affection...

...a valuing of the individual for himself alone, regardless of his particular qualities or characteristics. But sometimes the affection seems to be contingent on good behavior - so that lapses in acceptable toilet habits, aggression toward a sibling, or a violation of any of the middle-class mores brings about disapproval, censure, or punishment by the elder. The child often interprets such acts as personal rejection or the withdrawal of love. On the other hand, the over indulgent elder, who avoids correcting or curbing a child's antisocial behavior for fear that such action will cause the child to feel unloved, can contribute to an increase in a child's self-centeredness and lack of respect for elders. On the whole, however, children who early and continuously experience love and a feeling of being valued are usually able, with increased maturation and experience, to distinguish between the two functions of adults. The secure child or adolescent has the support necessary to accept correction and can work toward meeting and accepting the ways imposed by the culture.²

According to Perkins children may experience any one of four general types of emotional climates: affection, rejection, inconsistency, or overprotection. In the affectionate climate, the child witnesses happy satisfying relationships with and among his family. He learns to value himself as a worthy member of this group, is able to receive and express affection, and is freed from fears and anxieties. In short, his environment has made him a happy, secure individual.

In a climate of rejection the "family relationships are cold, indifferent, hostile, or rejecting. In such a climate, the child feels


uncertain of his own worth, and, consequently, feels threatened, anxious, and in constant conflict."\(^1\) This child meets the broader society craving the attention that is denied him at home. He uses aggressive, unacceptable behavior to attract attention.

In a climate of inconsistency, the child never knows what to expect. Behavior that brought parental approval one day may bring punishment another day. Not knowing what the outcome of his actions may be, the child becomes fearful. Having two parents with inconsistent views and behavior causes the child to use one parent against the other. Parents should try to solve their disagreements when the children are not present.

Frequently, in an effort to love and protect their children, parents create selfish children. This is the situation which Perkins describes as a climate of overprotection.

Some children are smothered in love. Their parents overindulge them, establish no firm or realistic limits for their behavior, or accede to their every whim. As a result, they become over dependent and self-centered and gain a distorted perception of their own importance.

The indulgent and overprotective adult often has emotional problems of his own. Overprotection may be evidence of irrational fears concerning the safety and health of an only child or a handicapped child, or it may serve as compensation for emotional needs left unfulfilled by the marriage.\(^2\)

The stages of love in the child develop from a complete self-centered, selfish love to a love centered on other persons. This change is natural; during infancy the baby is aware only of his own physical comfort, gradually coming to appreciate his own value as he becomes more aware of himself. The persons who supply these wants naturally gain the

\(^1\) Ibid.

\(^2\) Ibid., pp. 112-13.
affection of the child. Thus, his love is beginning to go out to others, even though it is still a self-centered response. By the time he is five or six, the people in his environment reject the selfish love and demand a more mature love-awareness of others. No longer will they do for him what he is capable of doing for himself. In addition to serving himself, he is also expected to do his part in keeping his environment in order. He now encounters situations in school where he is one among many of his own age, with only one or a few adults. He is expected to respect others of his own age, to help them when possible and to receive their help when necessary.

Recognizing that he has fallen short of the standards that parents and teachers have set for him, he tends to feel inadequate and dissatisfied with himself. He seeks to relieve these feelings of inadequacy and dissatisfaction by accepting and identifying with the standards of his parents and teachers by centering affection on another person. By freeing himself from the persistent demands of self-love, the child becomes able to give himself fully in relationships with others. He expresses concern for others and a willingness to help not only parents and siblings but persons outside of his family as well. This increasing capacity for love, and a sense of fulfillment in loving another person without guilt or anxiety, are the characteristic marks of mature affectional relationships. One cannot freely love another, however, unless he first feels loved and valued. Thus, the acceptance and value that one feels beginning in early life are crucial variables that determine his capacity for achieving mature affectional relationships later.¹

In summary, what are some influences that help build a sense of love and security in the child?

1. The multiple proofs of affection from the adults who supply the health and comfort needs
2. An environment where love and joy pervade among all the inhabitants
3. Early childhood playmates to reinforce acceptance

¹Ibid., p. 115.
4. Warm, affectionate nursery school, kindergarten, and first grade teachers

5. Signs of approval and acceptance of achievements from adults

6. The proper use of a respectful, positive form of discipline

**Happiness, Success, and Freedom.**-- The child who has gained confidence in his environment through frequent experiences of affection, approval, and security, is almost sure to be a happy child and to be a source of happiness to others. When a young child experiences joy, he is happy all over. Sources of joy include physical well-being, achievement, incongruous situations, and slight calamities. These last two explain why children enjoy cartoons and ridiculous books, such as those written by Dr. Seuss. The parent or teacher who can create and/or enjoy these situations with children can create a haven of joy.

The importance of physical well-being has already been discussed. Now a consideration of achievement. For too long schools (and parents following them) have had wrong priorities. Importance was placed on silence, straight lines, teacher lectures, and uniform learning for all. Many thoughtful educators have realized that these priorities do not lead to happy, productive learning. These have been replaced by a recognition of the importance of the individual child who must have choices about his education and who must be successful. No child fails; only teachers fail children. No child cannot learn; some do not want to learn what the teachers choose to teach. Others do not learn because teachers do not allow them to master one thing before moving on to the next.

In schools where successes are considered important, rather than counting a child's errors, his correct responses are recognized and his errors are corrected. The child is no longer compared to others of his grade and class-
ified "A", "B", "C", "D", or "F", but his own accomplishments and learnings are acknowledged. Tests are given not to determine which grade a child should receive on his report card or to rank him in his class or with others his age in the country, but to serve as a diagnostic tool for the teacher to determine whether or not the child has mastered the material taught and is ready to proceed to new learnings.

The school and home that recognize the value of each unique individual provide a learning environment that motivates a child — makes him curious and provides the opportunities for satisfying his curiosity. Experiences whet the child's desire for knowledge and enhance his values. These in turn add to his self-concept. And together these things increase his motivation. According to Holt,

School may become a place in which all children grow, not just in size, not even in knowledge, but in curiosity, courage, confidence, independence, resourcefulness, resilience, patience, competence, and understanding.¹

Rogers describes freedom as an inner thing, set aside from any of the outward choices of alternatives which are so often thought of as constituting freedom.

It is the quality of courage which enables a person to step into the uncertainty of the unknown as he chooses himself. It is the burden of being responsible for the self one chooses to be. It is the recognition by the person that he is an emerging process, not a static end product. Freedom, rightly understood, is a fulfillment, by the person, of the ordered sequence of his life. It is a freedom in which the individual chooses to fulfill himself by playing a responsible and voluntary part in bringing about the destined events of the world he lives in.²


According to Rogers, this is the essential goal of education. He suggests the following things as ways to produce this freedom:

1. The teacher must confront students with issues which have meaning and relevance for life.

2. The teacher is sincere, a real person in his relations with students.

3. The teacher must trust the capacity of the individual for developing his own potential, thus giving him the opportunity to choose his own way in his learning.

4. The teacher accepts the whole child, prizes him as an imperfect human being with many feelings, many potentialities.

5. The teacher is understanding and tries to view the process of education and learning as it appears to the student.

6. Availability of many resources, both people and materials.

Rogers says that modern culture, in his opinion, does not operationally want persons to be free. Yet, "individual rigidity and constricted learning are the surest roads to world catastrophe".  

Holt summarizes well the true meaning of education.

True learning, learning that is permanent and useful, that leads to intelligent action and further learning, can arise only out of the experience, interests, and concerns of the learner. Every child has an innate and unquenchable drive to understand the world in which he lives and to gain freedom and competence in it. Whatever adds to his understanding, his capacity for growth and pleasure, his powers, his sense of his own freedom, dignity, and worth may be said to be true education.

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1 Ibid., pp. 284-89.

Neill discusses the harm done to so very many children in their preschool years by their parents, who accept unquestioningly what they have been taught and hand down their fears and frustrations to their children. These parents were victims of dull desks in dull schools followed by a duller desk in an office or a dull factory bench. Neill contends that

unfree education results in life that cannot be lived fully. Such an education almost entirely ignores the emotions of life; and because these emotions are dynamic, their lack of opportunity for expression must and does result in cheapness and ugliness and hatefulness. Only the head is educated. If the emotions are permitted to be free, the intellect will look after itself.¹

Yamamoto encourages the use of freedom in the home. The young child's decision-making power is very limited, but as a member of the family group, he too has rights and abilities to make choices. The parent's authoritarian role makes it difficult for him to relinquish some of his decision-making power and therefore the parent denies the child his right to learn to make decisions. While imposing external controls the parent denies the child the opportunity to develop internal controls.² Why not allow the preschooler to choose the clothes he will wear, the games he will play, the television shows he will watch, and the storybooks he will listen to? He may need guidance, and safety or prudence may occasionally demand restrictions. But it is better to make a poor choice than not to choose at all.

Eventually the person, even the child, must choose for himself. Nobody can choose for him too often, for this itself enfeebles him, cutting his self-trust, and confusing his ability to


Emotions to be Controlled

Everything a person does is directly dependent on the emotions; the very motives that arouse activity and sustain and direct it are essentially emotional in nature. His attitudes, values, self-image, personal goals and ambitions, likes and dislikes, and standards of behavior are all emotional in nature. Emotions can work either to the individual's advantage or disadvantage. In themselves they are neither good nor bad. Depending upon their direction and control, emotions are a powerful creative force or a destructive force.

As children encounter experiences that are appropriate to their age, their emotional potential gradually develops. It is only after they learn to cope with minor conflicts and frustrations that they become able to face greater stress. The child who was able to handle the problems of sibling rivalry comes to school equipped for the problems of relationships there, and later on as an adult, at work. To enable the child to cope constructively with difficult situations, parental and teacher guidance should be loving and reasonable, in an environment where happiness and freedom abound.

Following will be a brief consideration of several of the emotions that need to be controlled by young children.

Anger. -- Age is an important factor in anger. According to Jersild, the preschool child's anger responses will depend primarily on 1) his urge and strivings, 2) his activity tendencies, and 3) his personal limitations.

1 Maslow, Toward a Psychology of Being, p. 49.
The most significant motivating factor is the need to think well of oneself. A child can become very angry when something threatens his self-image. For example, having to give in to an authority person can make the child feel inferior and less powerful. Goodenough says that the control of anger in children is best achieved when the child's behavior is viewed with serenity and tolerance and is met with consistent adult behavior. Self-control in the parents and teacher is likely to be the best guarantee of self-control in the child.

Fear.-- Fear is an emotional resource that must undergo its own maturation and growth process. The child must not become dominated by obsessive or abnormal fears; rather he must direct the action of his fears, so that they become a positive and constructive force in his overall development. The young child is afraid of more things than is the baby or the older child. The baby is less capable of recognizing potential danger in situations. For the older child experiences have caused fears of the unknown to decrease. More lasting fears are developed through conditioning, imitation, and unpleasant memories. The causes of fear are numerous and vary for each child at different stages of development. Parental acceptance and understanding of the normality of fear is the best treatment.

Anxiety.-- As fears decrease, anxieties often develop. In fear, the child experiences a sudden, sharp, intense feeling of impending disaster. In anxiety, there is a prolonged tension accompanying a pessimistic view of the future. To eliminate the unpleasant feelings anxiety brings, the child may become timid and withdrawn in order to free himself from the anxious threats to his security. The best defense against

excessive anxiety is acceptance by the child's loved ones.

Jealousy.-- Jealousy is a powerful motivating force in the child. It can be a significant determiner of his personal adjustment and the adjustment of those around him. Jealousy is always originated by social situations, especially those involving individuals whom the child loves. Jealousy is frequently aroused when the loved one shifts his or her attention and interest to someone else.

Social Needs

Positive Self-concept.-- Before an individual can live successfully in society, that is, can contribute to others and gain from others, he must first believe that he is capable of giving to and receiving from others, that he is both lovable and capable of loving. The child's picture of self develops from the picture others have of him, and his self-picture colors all his relationships with others.

A person with a healthy self-image is one who believes he is lovable and worthwhile, is happy and at peace, recognizes and uses his own strengths, accepts but tries to correct his own weaknesses, is secure, confident, and realistic, and enjoys life alone and with others.

The child's self-concept is dependent upon his social contacts. He values himself to the degree that he has been valued. The child who has received recognition, understanding, and empathy believes that he is lovable. Successes in physical, social, and intellectual skills convince the child that he can succeed and are strong motivating forces. On the other hand, the child who has repeatedly met failure does not expect to succeed and is not motivated to try. Children should not be put in a position where they can fail. The traditional report card has destroyed
too many self-concepts. It is the impossible demands and the high expectations of adults that destroy the ego of the child. Research has shown that:

high self-esteem individuals to be characteristically more independent, creative, confident in their own judgment and ideas, courageous, socially independent (self-determining), psychologically stable, less anxious, and more success orientated. Such individuals see themselves as competent and have high expectations for the future which generally results in greater motivation. Persons with high self-esteem are generally happier and more effective in their daily life than those with low self-esteem. Low self-esteem individuals lack trust in themselves and are reluctant to express themselves in a group, especially if their ideas are new or creative. They tend to listen rather than participate, are self-conscious and self-preoccupied. They are far less successful in interpersonal relationships and frequently less active in social, civic, and political affairs.1

The insecure person is not capable of learning what is possible for him. The teacher must encourage, praise, and provide successful experiences until the child is convinced that he can learn.

The person is the key to our endeavor in teaching...The child who does not feel and see an image of himself as a worthy, capable, likable, giving, and communicating person cannot feel and see himself as a learner; nor can the child accept the teacher as a communicator-of-learning worthy of his attention and effort. We cannot reach the individual as a person unless he has reached himself.2

Acceptance and Respect.— Each person is an individual, unlike any other individual. "The essential factor in acceptance becomes the awareness of and the respect for individuality."3

The child who is respected has equal rights in his family, the right to speak and to voice his opinions. Respect breeds respect. The parent who mishandles and undermines his child is not respected by the child.


2Alice V. Kelihor, "Reaching the Individual As a Person," Childhood Education, VIII (September, 1964), 21.

And the child who is physically mistreated usually treats others in the same manner.

The aim in discipline is not to curtail freedom but to give the child a greater freedom within manageable limits.

A parent must be both permissive and restrictive, and a failure to strike a fairly good balance between the two or, better yet, an integration of the two, will have unfortunate effects. For, if a child has more freedom than he is able to handle he is likely to get into trouble. A child needs freedom to grow and to learn in his own way, but he cannot thrive on unlimited freedom. ... A final word about corporal punishment. It is direct, emphatic, and it helps to relieve the feelings of the punisher. If the child feels a need for punishment, it may also relieve him. But it is also an assault, a form of violence, which people are much more likely to use against the young than against persons their own size. When a big person strikes a little one he usually is taking advantage of his superior legal power. When an older child strikes his parent or his teacher it is usually considered a more serious offense than if they strike him, even though justice may be on the child's side. Custom and law gives adults more right than children to be bullies. In view of this an adult should be wary of using corporal punishment. But he should be even more wary of punishing the child through such means as sarcasm, belittling, constant nagging, and a continual undertone of disapproval.

Just as an adult has a right to a good reputation so does the child. Too often the child witnesses his parents' unpleasant conversations about the child's behavior or his school failings. Adults frequently seem to forget that children have feelings too. The quiet, shy child has heard his parents excuse his shy behavior so many times, that it becomes even more difficult for the child to overcome this behavior. He feels that adults expect this shyness of him.

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1Jersild, Child Psychology, pp. 89-92.
Readiness for Reading

Every person, regardless of his age and the task being performed, wants to be successful. His success depends upon his preparation for the task. If he possesses the abilities and/or skills necessary, success is assured. This is especially true in education. According to Witty,

In any teaching-learning situation the most important element is the learner's readiness for the experience. This factor is critical in learning to read, since the child's readiness for the initial experience in reading may, to a considerable degree, determine his attitude toward and his success in this significant aspect of his education.¹

Heffernan says of readiness:

Readiness for any learning means that the child is able to bring to the task abilities equal to the demand of the specific situation. Every child is ready to take his next developmental step whatever that may be.²

Readiness does not just happen. It is the result of maturative teaching and experience. To begin instructing a child in reading before he is ready is to expose him to failure.

Essential Elements of Reading Readiness

Since our society is deeply entrenched in a traditional practice of starting all children to first grade at age six, chronological age has become the only criterion for deciding if children are 'ready' for this new and exciting adventure. Of course, chronological age will be the only characteristic that many of these children have in common even though it is the least important in assessing whether or not each child has the psychological, intellectual, and neurological maturity to profit from this experience.³


Some things are essential elements in reading readiness. Those which seem most important will be discussed. They are physical fitness, visual and auditory perception, listening, language development, memory, experiential background, intelligence, interest, and attention.

**Physical Factors.**—Good health is certainly an asset in becoming a good reader. The restless, undernourished, tense, and/or ill child cannot reach his potential. Smith and Dechant see this as the beginning of more complex problems:

Physical problems may result in mental or at least cultural retardation, lowered vitality, and slower physical development. Naturally, any condition that hinders vigorous performance can affect reading development. We should expect a lowering of the child's vitality to affect his reading success. Fatigue alone can make it difficult to enjoy and become interested in a reading task; attention suffers and comprehension is certain to be lowered. As nervous tension due to failure experiences builds up, disinterest, disgust, and possibly even reading disability may result. Illness also may cause the child to miss school and thus miss important phases of instruction.1

A child must be able to hear sounds accurately in order to reproduce them accurately. Even a moderate hearing loss interferes with reading and spelling. Some symptoms of hearing difficulty are general inattention, straining to hear and a cocking of the head.

The printed word enters the mind through the eye. Obviously, there must be clear vision for word recognition and good functional vision for the necessary eye sweep from left to right and top to bottom.

The bulk of all visual work in reading is at close range. The stimulus is about fourteen inches from the eyes. The retinas of both eyes reflect the image seen, in this case word symbols. For proper vision, the tiny images on both retinas must be properly synchronized or 'fused'. If fusion does not take place, the image will be blurred.

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or, in extreme cases, two distinct images will appear. When the stimulus is near the eyes, as in reading a book, the eyes must converge slightly. This convergence is accomplished by muscles in each eye. Any muscular imbalance between the eyes can result in the lack of fusion described above.¹

Estimates of the incidence of visual defects among retarded readers vary greatly. Helen M. Robinson (1953) found that more than half of the reading cases at the University of Chicago reading clinics had vision problems which either needed correction or had already been corrected. The incidence of visual problems is high enough to recommend that a visual screening test be given to all cases of reading disability.²

Hopefully visual difficulties will be discovered and treated before the reading problem occurs. An ophthalmologist stated that children's eyes are efficient enough for reading at twelve months.³ If no problem develops, the child is ready for visual perception training in his readiness program. However, if a visual problem has developed, no amount of perception activities will enable the eyes to perform adequately. Parents and teachers should watch for signs of poor vision: squinting, holding the book too close to the eyes, bending over work, watering of the eyes, cocking of the head, inability to see charts and flash cards and suppression of one eye.

Visual Perception

Visual perception grows out of visual-tactual experiences. These experiences are multitudinous and require four to six years for sufficient development to the levels which will permit the child to read. They begin with the first visually directed reach and grasp of the infant, his first visual-tactual learning. Their number and variety determine most of the child's nonverbal or kinesthetic

¹Arthur W. Heilman, Principles and Practices of Teaching Reading (Columbus: Charles E. Merrill, 1967), p. 34.

²Ruth Strang, Reading Diagnosis and Remediation (Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1968), p. 18.

³James Harold Shaw, "Vision and Seeing Skills of Pre-School Children," The Reading Teacher, XVII (October, 1964), 33-36.
learning and also forms the basis for his verbal learnings, speech or reading. Visual-tactual experiences eventually are substituted for by visual movements, communication and speech patterns, which in turn yield to visualization and symbol manipulation (reading). Restriction of these experiences retards the child's entire physical and intellectual development to a point below his inherited potential.¹

There are many visual-tactual experiences used by pre-schoolers and primary children which are helpful pre-reading activities. Among these are tracing, coloring within lines, cutting out forms, practice with puzzles, design cubes, and peg boards.² (There is a tendency, however, to overdo coloring books with young children. These can stunt the child's creative ability.)

Some children require many practice activities with pictures, letters, and words before they can make these quick discriminations. They have to be led to form generalizations regarding small changes in form and directional orientation of letters. For example, p turned around in different directions becomes q, d, or b. A reversal of serial position changes on to no and saw to was.³ Only children who can make accurate discriminations will master these letters and words in reading and writing.

Parents of first graders frequently express concern about reversals of letters and numerals in writing. This is a common occurrence with young children. Authorities disagree about the cause of reversals. Most agree, however, that they should not cause undue concern unless they persist in late second or third grade. Poor memory or lack of sufficient experience with the symbols seem to be common causes. Practice and reading experience usually clear the confusion.


²Ibid., p. 209.

³Strang, An Introduction to Child Study, p. 28.
Auditory Perception.-- Presupposing adequate hearing ability, training must be given to attain accurate auditory perception. The world is full of sounds made by nature, machines, man, and animals. The young child usually has many opportunities to differentiate sounds. He recognizes the sounds of wind, waves, airplanes, dogs, babies, pain, and many other things. He distinguishes loudness from softness, high pitches from low pitches. Some first graders are unable to make these distinctions and must be given training. Only after these are mastered is he ready to hear likenesses and differences in words, phrases, and sentences. The phonics readiness program teaches the ability to hear rhymes, beginning sounds, and ending sounds. Even children with average ability frequently require much practice in this before they can successfully begin a formal phonics program.

Listening.-- While children are starting school with more knowledge and a greater number of experiences than children a decade ago, they seem to be less capable of listening. Perhaps television is a leading cause of this. Children can be very passive and respond or not, as they wish. Children must be helped to become attentive listeners. This comes from a respect for other speakers, a self-discipline and an interest in what is being heard. Listening is a taught skill. The teacher should provide many opportunities which require a response to what is heard, such as retelling stories, completing sentences and stories, following directions, and predicting outcomes. There should be a purpose for listening such as a critical evaluation or later discussion.

Effective listening is a necessity. Children spend many hours daily listening to parents, teachers, classmates, playmates, radio, and television. Listening is not synonymous with quiet, passive, seemingly atten-
tive behavior. These can be merely physical processes with no thinking or critical reaction occurring.

Reading and telling stories are among the best and most-used devices for developing listening skills. These enlarge the attention span, develop interest in literature, encourage the desire to read, enlarge vocabulary, provide vicarious experiences, and provide interpersonal discussions with parents and teachers.¹

Witty's list of essentials for developing listening skills is worth noting.

1. Choose an interesting topic, plan a good introduction, and give attention to experiential or vicarious background.

2. The purpose should be clear to the teacher, parent and child. The purpose may be to give enjoyment or new ideas or to give directions.

3. The length of the session should be appropriate for the listener's age and maturity and for the complexity of the material.

4. There should be a pleasant environment—comfortable furniture, proper temperature, free from distraction, and a pleasing quality in the speaker's voice and manner.

5. Standards such as eye contact should be those which best encourage listening.

6. Material should be well-prepared and appropriate for the audience.²

¹See Appendix IV, pp. 54-56 for a list of books compiled by the author to be used in developing attitudes related to the basic needs.

²Witty, The Teaching of Reading.
Listening is basic to thinking and comprehending. Spache states that:

The aim of auditory comprehension training is not simply to provide experiences with words, to deepen and broaden the child's knowledge of words or his auditory vocabulary. It provides those stimuli to language development to be sure, but even more significantly the training promotes the child's verbal reasoning, memory, critical thinking, and other intellectual processes. These are the processes he must employ in dealing with ideas encountered later in reading. These are the processes which underlie that rather vague ability, comprehension.¹

Language Development.-- Language facility will vary greatly in any unselected group of six-year-olds, from incomplete sentences to advanced content and vocabulary. Environment, experiences, and intelligence play the major role in this development.

Language is being developed when parents, other adults and teachers encourage children in the use of the language. When they answer many of the child's questions, when they repeat for children so they can understand concepts in a conversation, and when they ask children to correctly repeat sentence patterns to form verb phrases correctly or to straighten out pronunciations. These are always done in an informal, encouraging way and the child learns, unlearns, and relearns the language which he has much time to assimilate through trial and error.²

Learning to read is related to, and built upon, past language experiences and therefore should be a natural outgrowth of these past language experiences.³

Head Start programs and kindergarten curriculums are strong on language activities. Too many adults criticize these as play-centered rather than learning-centered programs. They fail to see them as essential elements in preparing the child for reading.

Research shows that it is fatal to 'push' young children along in the initial stages of learning to read, particularly if there have not

¹Spache, Reading in the Elementary School, p. 225.

²Zintz, The Reading Process, pp. 393-94.

³Heilman, Principles and Practices of Teaching Reading, p. 44.
been activities to create a functional language background beforehand. Many children fail in reading because they are plunged into formal reading with an over-analytic method employing abstract symbols before they really understand what words and sentences mean in spoken, let alone printed form. Young immature minds need opportunity and time to 'sort things out', to understand what they are doing, and to see the purpose in the operations with which they are confronted. My strongest plea in the teaching of reading is, don't hurry children, don't expect too much in the early stages — do all you can to provide a language background. This slower, wider approach will repay doubly later on.¹

There are differences between preschool and school language activities which require understanding and direction on the part of the teacher. The young child changes from ego-centeredness to the ability to interest others, from the freedom to speak whenever he wishes to a shared-time program, from the freedom to choose his topic to a frequently centralized topic, and from unorganized thought content to a logically-built thought.²

**Experiential Background.**—Parents differ greatly in the amount of time spent with their children and in the opportunities they provide their children. Young children should be included in family conversations andplings, they should be taken on trips and to places of interest and amusement, should be read to and be allowed to discuss pictures in books and magazines. Library experiences develop interest in, appreciation for, and desirable attitudes toward reading. It is also important that young children have playmates older and younger than themselves as well as their own age. This variety develops the ability to give and take, to be a leader and a follower, and broadens interests and understandings.


Intelligence.-- Authorities differ on the relationship of intelligence and success in reading.

In de Hirsch's study IQ ranked twelfth among predictive measures, though it was significantly related to achievement two and one-half years later.¹

The use of intelligence tests for prediction has been challenged on the ground that reading difficulties occur among children at virtually all intellectual levels. An intelligence quotient, furthermore, represents a global rather than a differentiated evaluation of a child's potential and fails to take into account some aspects of perceptual functioning that seem to be important determinants in early reading success or failure.²

Smith and Dechant summarize their views on the subject, stating:

Although there is a high relationship between mental age scores and readiness test scores, it is also true that a high correlation is quite different from a perfect correlation. So long as the interrelation between two factors is imperfect, we expect to find that other factors are operating. Clearly, we cannot expect to predict reading readiness on the basis of intellectual development alone.³

The writer's experience agrees with these statements. Usually, the more intelligent child has immediate success in reading and the child with a low intelligence factor experiences difficulty in learning to read and requires more readiness time. Bright children with emotional and/or physical problems and duller children with high motivation, interest, and listening abilities tend to be the exceptions.

The concerned teacher considers the IQ score but is not prejudiced by it. The child must always be encouraged to produce at his optimum


²Jolores Durkin, "Children Who Read Before Grade One," The Reading Teacher, XIV (January, 1961), 163-166.

³Smith, Psychology in Teaching Reading, p. 89.
ability and be allowed sufficient time and practice to master each successive skill.

Interest.-- Interest is a leading motivating factor to learning and to achieving. Children with enriched backgrounds, as discussed previously, enjoy looking at books, being read to, interpreting pictures, and telling stories. Others who have not had these preschool experiences, gain them in kindergarten and first grade. They become curious about signs and labels, know rhymes and stories, learn to recognize the letters of the alphabet. It is only when sufficient interest has been developed that the child can hold his attention to skill development. An adequate attention span is another prerequisite for beginning reading instruction.

Reading Before First Grade

In every generation there has been a small percentage of children who learned to read before entering school and some even before formal instruction was given. In the years 1950 through 1968, the writer had only two first graders who came to first grade reading beyond a preprimer level. In 1970 she pretested 120 first-grade entrants to a middle-class neighborhood school in Chicago and found 14 children who could read, ranging from preprimer III to third reader level. According to the parents most of these had learned informally through "Sesame Street". At the end of that school year all but two of these children had still surpassed the other 106 first graders in reading achievement.

Similarly, in past years it was the rare child who could associate consonant sounds with their letters. Of the 48 first graders pretested in a Milwaukee school in 1972, 16 were able to do this consistently well. The writer has found this skill and that of recognizing the letters of
the alphabet to be the most accurate predictors of success in beginning reading.

Fewer first graders need extensive readiness programs today than in the past. Many need none; they are ready to begin formal reading instruction almost immediately.

These experiences are repeated in classrooms throughout the country indicating that children are ready to begin reading at an earlier age. The consequent questions being asked by both professionals and parents are, When should a child learn to read? How should he learn? Who should teach him?

When the child demonstrates the desire to learn and the prerequisite readiness skills are learned, it is well to begin his instruction. For the majority of children this happens when they are in first grade. Hopefully, kindergarten teachers will provide instructions for those five-year-olds who demonstrate readiness. "Sesame Street" and "Electric Company" can supply a whole program for some children of all ages and can entertain as well as aid instruction for many others.

Preschool readers are of two types,

Those who seek reading of their own accord and learn to read informally at home and those who are given systematic instruction at the initiative of an adult who wishes to hasten them along their educational way.¹

From all that has been said, it seems obvious that only those children in the former category should receive preschool reading instruction. The latter may be successful (if it happens simultaneously with the child's desire to read) but may also end in frustration and a dislike for reading.

For children who enter first grade already reading it is extremely important that their instruction begin at their proper instructional level. They frequently will not fit into a classroom "group" and will need to be taught individually. The teacher cannot presume that the child who reads orally at a second grade level has mastered the comprehension and word analysis skills of the first grade level. It is better to begin formal instruction below the level indicated on the tests of these children, since much of their learning has happened informally.

Many children are ready to read before first grade but do not receive instruction because of the parent's feeling of inadequacy or lack of time. These children are usually not harmed. They experience immediate success in first grade and advance rapidly.

**Beginning Reading**

No distinct line can be drawn between readiness and the beginning of actual reading instruction. For many children a sight vocabulary is growing while books and experience charts are being used for developing experiential background and visual training for left to right and top to bottom reading format. Exercises in auditory and visual perception enable some children to grasp the relationship of letters and sounds, resulting in the ability to decode words. Similarly after formal reading begins, children continue to grow in the areas stressed in preparing them for reading. Actually these skills are among the purposes of learning to read. Witty discusses the reasons for learning to read:

*Effective reading is necessary in order for any person to become well-informed generally and to acquire specific information in many fields. At one time educators stated: first a pupil must learn to read; then he must read to learn. To some degree, this statement is true, but it should be recognized that during the initial stages of learning to read, the pupil should acquire in-*
formation that makes the process more than merely preparatory for later learning. Learning to read, at all stages, should be regarded as an intelligent act in which meaning is derived from or associated with the printed material. Learning occurs from the beginning, and simultaneously extends and enriches the experience of boys and girls. Throughout the sequential development of reading skills, there should be a continued acquisition of knowledge. Later the flexible use and application of the fully developed skills should make rapid learning in many areas possible to a greater degree.¹

It is sometimes difficult to judge when a child is ready to begin reading. The child with low intelligence may never appear to be ready, but with a carefully planned, slow-paced beginning, he may prove that he is ready and will advance more rapidly than some who had appeared more ready. Others may demonstrate a need for further readiness instruction only after they fail to cope with reading instruction.

Early Skill Development

It is advisable to begin each child very slowly, enabling the teacher to do careful diagnosis to determine the method, the pace, and the books best suited for the individual. The teacher's time and the materials available will have to be determining factors in setting up the program. In most instances grouping for instruction is a necessity. However, consideration must be given to the children who are unlike any others and therefore would not have their needs met by group work alone. It would be better for these to have only five minutes of the teacher's assistance daily than to have 60 minutes of boring or frustrating instruction.

¹Witty, The Teaching of Reading, pp. 2-3.
Word Recognition

The purpose of reading is to obtain meaning from the printed word. This cannot be done until the child can recognize words. Children learn words many different ways.

Before they are introduced to phonics, children spontaneously employ a variety of clues for word recognition. Among these are word shape, word length, context or sense of the sentence, pictorial clues, and details within the word.¹

Most readiness and initial reading programs include the composing of experience charts. These stories are dictated by the children and written by the teacher. These are often the child's first experience with the procedure followed in writing and reading a story. Words interesting and meaningful to them are located in the story and are often remembered. These charts provide the basis for many activities. An experience chart made by first graders on their first day of school read:

ALL ABOUT US

We have 14 boys in our room.
We have 11 girls in our room.
We have 25 happy children.
We like to come to school.

The repetition of words and the personal interest enable some children to "read" the story independently. Thus, their sight vocabulary begins.

There are different vocabularies possessed by individuals: the listening vocabulary is that which the person is able to understand; the speaking vocabulary comprises only those words used by the person when speaking; his reading vocabulary is his stock of words recognized in read-

¹Spache, Reading in the Elementary School, p. 375.
ing; and his writing vocabulary is that which he is able to employ in writing. According to Zintz:

It has been estimated that a typical middle-class six-year-old child may have as many as 8,000 to 10,000 words in his listening vocabulary; 5,000 to 7,000 in his speaking vocabulary; and at the beginning of school no reading or writing vocabulary of significance.

The reading vocabulary should come from the child's stock of listening and speaking words. The aim is to increase all the vocabularies and eventually to raise the reading vocabulary to surpass the speaking vocabulary. This will happen at about grade five for the able students.

The beginning reader should be exposed to all forms of word recognition. The better readers learn words easily and need few of the techniques to any great extent. The poor readers have much difficulty learning any of the methods and have poor word recall ability. Whatever mode is used the teacher must remember that the purpose is to teach word recognition and must not get unnecessarily detained in the means to the end. The few children who experience no word recognition difficulties (they just seem to know all the words) should be given necessary practice and generalizations and should move right into reading.

Sight Vocabulary.— Most modern basal readers have a heavy phonics program. Even these, however, usually offer a good number of sight words initially. Most of the preprimer vocabulary has to be taught by some form of memorization since not enough phonics would have been learned at this level to make it a useful tool. Parents frequently express a concern about the school's reading program, fearing that a sight, rather than a

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1Zintz, The Reading Process, p. 131.

2Ibid.
phonics, method is being employed, because their children cannot "sound out words" at the preprimer and primer levels. They are forgetting three important facts: 1) to sound out words requires at least a mastery of consonant and vowel sounds; 2) not all words can be attacked phonetically; and, 3) reading is a developmental task, requiring a gradual building of many complex skills before independence is attained.

Children experience great joy and a sense of achievement when they can read even a few words. This builds their interest in reading and increases their motivation for learning to read. It is these beginning sight words that teach children how reading happens and what the letters of the alphabet actually do. For slower children, learning the letter names is an extremely difficult and meaningless task. Some never master this skill until they are well into the preprimers. These same children have trouble learning sight words. They require endless drill, using a variety of gimmicks and games. The teacher employs every method -- auditory, visual, kinesthetic, and tactile. The average child also requires these varied approaches and repetitions at this early reading stage. Only the abler reader learns new words at first sight and is able to store them permanently into his supply of sight words.

It is recommended that reading instruction begin for most children with the identification of words and as soon as possible move into phonics approaches. The child who depends too long upon memory and configuration for word recall, without the assistance of word attack skills, will become confused as his number of sight words increases.

**Phonics.**-- The child is ready for a word analysis program after he can hear likenesses and differences among sounds of words, can see likenesses and differences among words, and has learned a basic stock of words.
The question now is not 'Should phonics be taught?' but 'When and how should it be taught?' In general teachers will agree that phonics should be taught in a functional setting that is meaningful to the child, not as a science of the sounds of language.¹

Research can be found supporting both heavy phonics programs and meager ones. The individual must be diagnosed to determine how much phonics he should be taught and when he is ready for instruction.

The first year in most basal programs includes auditory and visual discrimination of consonants in initial, medial, and final positions, and auditory and visual perception of long and short vowel sounds. Some programs also include the vowels controlled by r and consonant and vowel digraphs.

The average and slower learners tend to follow a pattern in learning phonics. The first several consonant sounds taught present great difficulty and confusion. After four to eight letter-sounds have been presented over a period of about four to fifteen weeks of daily practice, understanding comes. The average child moves forward quickly through the remaining consonants. The slow child continues to move very slowly but with success. The brighter children today have started school with a knowledge of letter names and sounds and are able to use these in their rapid intake of new words. They also are able to blend consonants together with very little direction. The slower students must be taught each use of consonants as a separate learning. Associating the sound with the letter in no way assures its recognition in various positions or in blends. Each of these requires teaching and practice.

The vowels also follow a common learning pattern. Most programs introduce the vowels at the primer level. The abler students have already made independent discoveries and are ready for formal instruction followed by an im-

¹Martha Dallmann, "Reading in Today's Schools", Helping Your Child Grow in Reading, ed. by the IRA Committee on Parents and Reading (Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1967), p. 11.
mediate application of the knowledge gained. At the other extreme is the slow learner who struggles through each new vowel presentation and can rarely make application outside the phonics lesson. For him, this does not happen until he has had much reteaching at each level. Hopefully, by the second reader level application becomes easier for him.

The teacher must guard against devoting too little or too much time to phonics instruction. Children differ greatly and their personal needs must always be diagnosed and prescribed.

Smith summarized research on the value of phonics and the time when phonics instruction should begin as follows:

1. It cannot be assumed that all children need phonics.

2. Phonics is effective with children who need word-recognition help, but its greatest effectiveness is attained when it is taught functionally and is related to children's reading needs.

3. It is advisable to delay intensive phonic instruction until a child has attained a mental age of 7 years.

4. Phonic instruction is most valuable at the second and third-grade levels.

5. The use of configuration clues and context clues should be supplemented with phonics.

6. It would be well to give more attention to both visual and auditory discrimination in teaching all types of word recognition.¹

Structural Analysis.— Training in structural analysis occurs simultaneously with phonics instruction. Spache describes the close relationship of the two:

Like phonics, training in structural analysis is founded upon the primitive recognition of words by configuration or shape as well as minor details. .... The purpose of training in structural analysis is the devel-

opment of the habit of recognition by larger, more meaningful units within words. Among the units commonly included in a structural analysis program are inflectional endings, compound words, syllables, prefixes, roots, suffixes, and contractions. Phonic analysis aids in structural analysis, for the final recognition of the structural elements is often dependent upon successful pronunciation derived from sounding the letters present. However, most of the word elements taught in structural analysis are composed of several letters and have a pronunciation which is not dependent upon the successive sounds of the letters present.¹

Most first year basal reader programs include some of each of the above-mentioned units. Adding ed, and ing are among the earliest presentations and also the most useful and easiest to learn. New books attempt to use vocabulary most frequently employed by children in speaking. Therefore contractions are introduced as early as the preprimer level in many series.

The majority of children learn and apply the early structural analysis teachings easily. The second and third grade levels involving syllabication and spelling changes present more difficulty.

Oral Reading

The usual purposes of oral reading are to share what one has read or to give enjoyment to others. Zintz quotes the concise description of Horn and Curtis:

Oral reading is more difficult than silent reading since, to be effective, it not only presupposes the ability to understand and appreciate the selection to be read, but in addition, involves other attitudes and abilities. In the process of good oral reading, the eyes lead by a considerable distance the words being spoken....The dominant influence in effective reading, whether oral or silent, is not the peripheral processes such as eye movements, but the central processes, including purpose and understanding. The best results are obtained when the material to be read orally is first read silently.²

¹Spache, Reading in the Elementary School, p. 407.

As the child grows in reading skills, he reads orally less frequently. At no time will he be required to read aloud as frequently as in the beginning stages of reading. While the value of oral reading in the classroom is under heavy criticism by many authorities, most agree that it is very important in the first-year program. It is the teacher's chief means of diagnosis and the child's greatest asset in vocabulary practice.

A considerable place for oral reading is justified for the student of whatever grade placement who is reading at a primary reading level. First of all, oral reading is more like talking, more like the use of oral language that the child enjoys all day long in and out of school. When the child begins his formal reading program in first grade he may feel that he has more in common with it if it continues to be a talking kind of language. In grade one, the teacher can expect to commit about 50 percent of the time to oral reading, and 50 percent to silent reading. From the beginning of formal reading through first grade, the teacher will have reading groups first read silently whatever story they are learning how to read. They will also re-read most of these stories during the first year orally. The teacher will set up new purposes for reading but one of the teacher's purposes for a second reading is to provide the child reading practice on the basic sight vocabulary.¹

From the very beginning, effort is made to achieve good oral reading. The child is urged continually to "read as he would speak". The proper use of punctuation and phrasing is encouraged and defenses are set up against bad reading habits. These include pointing to words (this results in choppy, word-by-word reading), repetitions, substitutions, and omissions. These errors are usually the result of inadequate word recognition and may be an indication that the material is too difficult for the child, or at least that vocabulary mastery is necessary.

Oral reading should be meaningful, enjoyable, and worthwhile. The good reader should not be forced to listen to poor reading nor to practice what does not need practicing. Poor readers should not be placed in an

¹Zintz, The Teacher and The Learner, p. 265.
embarrassing oral reading situation. If possible, children needing practice should be taken individually by the teacher or an aide. This is an area where the parent has an advantage over the teacher. He can work individually with the child.

Many opportunities should be given to listening to good oral reading. This is another reason for parents and teachers reading stories to young children. An excellent device is the read-along books which have recently become popular. The child listens to a recording of the story as he follows along in the book.

**Silent Reading**

The main objective of reading instruction at all levels is competency in silent reading. It is through this that the greatest amount of understanding is gained. Children should be instructed to recognize thought units, sequence, and cause-and-effect relationships in simple stories. They must develop skill in scanning for quick location of facts, to find main ideas, to note sequences, and to predict outcomes. They also learn early that some reading must be done slowly to absorb details.

Lip and throat movements are always discouraged during silent reading to prevent later subvocalization. As reading proficiency is increased, the speed of silent reading should be greater than that of oral reading. Subvocalization prevents this. Easy material enhances speed.

**Comprehension**

The beginning reading program necessarily devotes the largest percentage of time to word recognition. However, even at this level, comprehension is vital. Recognizing words is useless unless the child associates meanings with the symbols. The comprehension skills at the first grade
level center around getting the meaning from words, phrases, sentences, and stories. Workbook activities contribute much to building comprehension abilities.

Because of the strong component of reasoning in comprehension, which is also a recognized component of intelligence, we observe many marked relationships between the intelligence of the reader and his literal comprehension. The ability to recognize inductive sequences of ideas leading to a conclusion, to apply deductively a principle to new situations, to recognize cause-effect, comparison, contrast, and other idea relationships depend to a marked degree upon the reader's intellectual powers. Pupils of less than average mental ability can be taught the types of thinking while reading, but only within the limits of those capacities in most instances.1

**Word Meanings.**-- Picture and action words are easy to recall and understand. Multiple-meaning words require more instruction. The most difficult words are those which refer to no object, e.g. here, there, where, when, over, under, what, and the. Exercises for growth in word meaning include putting words in categories, matching word meanings, and choosing synonyms.

**Phrases.**-- Children are taught to read for units of thought and to see these as parts of the meaningful whole. Exercises in this include: choosing appropriate or substitute titles; finding phrases that answer specific questions; finding phrases with synonymous meanings; and combining phrases to make a sentence.

**Sentences.**-- The preprimers contain simple sentences which are usually easy to understand and are enhanced by colorful pictures. Children can build sentences from known words; locate the sequences of ideas within the sentences; find related sentences; finish incomplete sentences; draw inferences from one or a series of sentences; arrange sentences in sequential order; select appropriate sentences for pictures or ideas; and

read sentences to follow directions.

Stories.—All the preceding activities are steps toward, and part of, interpreting stories. Readers for young children contain a variety of story types: humorous, informative, true-to-life, fairy tale, and others. They allow children to become much more involved and to do more thinking than did the readers of past decades. They assist the child in developing comprehension skills and provide motivation for continued reading.

Even at the preprimer level, children can find main ideas and subsequent ideas in stories; put the ideas in sequential order; anticipate endings; choose titles; and draw inferences and generalizations.

Free Reading

The beginning reader experiences great joy and pride in his newly-acquired skill. He reads signs along the road, searches the newspaper for known words, and attempts reading books beyond his capability. This is the time to feed this desire for reading and hopefully to lay the foundation for a lifelong love for reading.

It seems best for most children to advance developmentally through a basal reader and/or a skills program. This should never be the extent of their reading in school. A variety of books and magazines should be provided so that individual interests and abilities can be satisfied. Some children will gain most from an individualized approach based on a variety of freely-chosen books rather than a basal reader. This usually applies only to the gifted child, and then with planning and direction from the teacher.

Coding books according to readability levels is advisable in the classroom and school libraries. This assures the child of success in his
independent reading as well as freedom in choosing his own books.

Parents and teachers should encourage children to read at home. While on the preprimer and sometimes the primer level most children require vocabulary assistance. The individual help and attention received is an aid to their interest and success in reading. Parents must guard against impatience with children for forgetting words and reading poorly. The aim is to make reading a consistently happy experience.

Summary

The child who comes to school with emotional stability, social adjustment, and sound health and receives the necessary preparation for reading is ready to enjoy the complex skill of learning to read. Given understanding parents and an understanding, knowledgeable first grade teacher he should advance successfully through the developmental steps of reading.

A good beginning is the best guarantee for maximum growth and good attitudes. The pace is different for each child. Whether he completes the primary program in one or five years is not important. That he is always learning with success and happiness according to his own capability is extremely important.
CHAPTER III

DESIGN OF THE PROGRAM FOR THE PARENTS

Goals and Objectives of the Program

With the growing interest of parents in education, they seek ways to help their children academically. In order to assist them in their desire to understand their children better as they prepare for and begin to read, as well as to assist them better in the reading process two meetings were held. At the first, a lecture on the emotional and social development of the child was given. The second included reading readiness and the initial reading program.

Promulgating the Lectures

After obtaining the approval and permission of the pastor and principal of St. Catherine School, Milwaukee, an announcement was published in the parish bulletin for Sundays, October 22, 1972 and January 7, 1973. Two hundred letters were sent home with the children of St. Catherine's School prior to each lecture. These were given to families with children in primary grades and/or preschool children.

Attendance at the First Lecture

On Thursday, October 26, 1972, 11 parents and 2 teachers attended the lecture. Two of the parents were husband and wife, the other nine were mothers.
The lecture began at 8:05 and ended at 9:10. All remained until 10:05 for an informal discussion. The first question was directed to the speaker privately, thus preventing a whole-group discussion from ensuing. However, two small groups each involved the speaker in their discussions.

**Evaluation of Lecture I**

Following the lecture those in attendance were given a questionnaire which they were encouraged to return that night or the following day. One hundred percent (13) of the questionnaires were returned.

In answer to question 1, "Why did you come tonight?", all indicated an interest in the topic and/or a desire to be a more helpful parent.

Responses to question 2, 3, and 6 are found in Table 1. All responses were positive, indicating the lecture had been helpful.

**TABLE 1**

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS 2, 3 AND 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTION</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>NO RESPONSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Time well spent?</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Better role understanding?</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Attend &quot;Reading Readiness and Initial Reading&quot;?</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Responses to question 4, "What new insights did you gain?" are listed separately in Table 3. Responses to question 5, "Do you strongly agree or disagree with anything stated?" are listed separately in Table 4. In both
of these tables, responses are listed exactly as they were stated on the questionnaires, with the only corrections being made in spelling.

Responses to question 7, "Have you any suggestions to offer to make the future lecture more interesting?" indicated satisfaction with the first lecture and gave no suggestions for the future one.

Attendance at the Second Lecture

On Wednesday, January 10, 1973, 12 parents and 3 teachers attended the lecture on Reading Readiness and the Beginning Reading Program.

The talk began at 8:05 and ended at 9:10. This was followed by a 20 minute question-and-answer period.

Evaluation of Lecture II

Twelve of the fifteen adults who attended the lecture returned the questionnaire.1

Responses to questions 1, 3, 4, and 5 are found in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTION</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>NO RESPONSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Time well spent?</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. New insights?</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Strong agreement or disagreement?</td>
<td>4²</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Discussion period profitable?</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 A copy of the questionnaire may be found in Appendix III, p. 52.

²All 4 expressed strong agreement.
TABLE 3
RESPONSES TO QUESTION 4

NEW INSIGHTS GAINED

There is more to preparing a child for reading than teaching mechanics.
A lot of children from 4-7 have fears.
Realization that my child should be allowed a bit more freedom to choose.
A child should not feel the pains of failing in the sense that he is no good.
I'll be more aware of my day to day inter-relations with my children and my wife.
To respect the child as you would another adult; in turn the child will respect you.
To build a good self-image by acknowledging their successes.
I have learned how to understand all of my children.
That changes can come about in our educational system if solid reasons for change are presented to the people involved in an enthusiastic manner.
Made me question whether I'm satisfying some of my children's basic needs. Areas where improvement is needed in parent-child relations abound.
To treat children as individuals and to praise them for even the smallest accomplishments.
Statements regarding shyness and discipline.
To help a child always feel that he has done the best he can do, no matter what it is. To always take time to listen to him when he needs you most.
Not to criticize mistakes.
Respect each child as an individual.
TABLE 4
RESPONSES TO QUESTION 5

STATEMENTS WHICH ELICITED STRONG AGREEMENT

The fulfillment of the stated needs is fundamental to learning.

Basically I agreed (at least with the important points) with everything that was said in the lecture.

A child can only succeed when he feels loved and feels he is a worthwhile person.

Each child is an individual.

Warmth and understanding on the part of teachers will create a better educational climate.

Parents must try to be consistent with their children if they are to be secure and happy. Making allowances for occasional "bad" days I believe parents must really strive to treat their children in a consistent manner.

Remarks regarding report cards. (This was stated on three questionnaires.)

STATEMENTS WHICH ELICITED STRONG DISAGREEMENT

Punishment - There are times that the threats and the denial of privileges don't effect better behavior, but a swat on the fanny does, at least up to the age of seven.

Being consistent - at times this is too hard. Also, I don't feel life is consistent. Do not feel this to be anything drastic for the child.

I do not think a child should be allowed to hit an adult. It shows disrespect.¹

¹This reflects a misunderstanding of a quotation used by the speaker. See p. 17 for the quotation.
Seven respondents specified new insights gained (in answer to question 3). These were:

1. The material was very well presented and it was obvious she was an expert in this field.
2. A session such as yours is a healthy one for adults such as myself, not only for direction, but as a reminder of things I forget and neglect.
3. It made me more aware of accepting children where they are and not to push too soon. Reminded me to be patient.
4. How to handle the preschooler and to show more of an interest in what the older ones are reading.
5. Listening ability was of interest to me.
6. I was interested in the reading readiness aspect, especially.
7. Especially ideas involving phonics and sight reading.

In explaining their answers to question 4, "Do you strongly agree or disagree with anything stated?" people expressed strong agreement with the following ideas:

1. I strongly agree with letting the child read when he shows strong interest in doing so.
2. I strongly agree and plan to try the suggested approach.
3. I agree on your definition of I.Q. I like the approach you took to the importance of phonics in proportion to other elements of reading. Also, oral reading.

Responses to question 2 revealed that 7 people came because of an interest in preschool reading, 3 because of a child who experiences difficulty with reading, and 7 because of a desire to improve their child's reading skills and interest. Other reasons for coming were:

1. To learn something new and to renew what I had learned.
2. To support my fellow teacher and to gain insights from her.
3. To learn how to keep my child's interest in reading at a high level.
4. I've gone back to college (speech pathology) and was interested in hearing what you had to say.

At both meetings parents demonstrated a sincere interest in their children's social, emotional, and academic development. Many expressed gratitude after the lectures and again on future occasions.
APPENDIX I

NOTICE IN PARISH BULLETIN FOR OCTOBER 22, 1972

ATTENTION PARENTS OF YOUNG CHILDREN

Miss Ellen Ryan, a first grade teacher at St. Catherine's, will give a lecture entitled, "The Emotional, Social and Physical Needs to Be Fulfilled in the Child Who Is to Reach His Potential in Reading".

Miss Ryan has had many years experience teaching primary children and is presently completing her work at Cardinal Stritch College for a Master's Degree as a Reading Specialist.

The meeting will be held in St. Catherine's school cafeteria at 8 P.M. on Thursday, October 26. This should be especially helpful for parents of very young children.

NOTICE IN PARISH BULLETIN FOR JANUARY 7, 1973

Miss Ellen Ryan, a first grade teacher at St. Catherine's, will give a lecture on teaching reading to pre-schoolers and first graders. It will be in the School Hall on Wednesday, January 10, at 8 P.M.
ANNOUNCEMENT SENT TO PARENTS OF PRESCHOOL AND PRIMARY CHILDREN ON OCTOBER 23, 1972

ATTENTION! PARENTS OF PRESCHOOL AND PRIMARY CHILDREN

DO YOU KNOW.......

....what makes a child happy and adjusted?

....which years are the most important in developing the child's lifelong personality?

....that only the socially and emotionally healthy child can reach his academic potential?

....how and why our schools have changed?

These questions along with many others will be discussed in a lecture at St. Catherine's.

WHEN?.....Thursday, October 26, 1972 at 8:00 P.M.

WHERE?.....St. Catherine's School Cafeteria

FOR WHOM?..Anyone interested in children, especially parents of young children

BY WHOM?...Miss Ellen Ryan, a first grade teacher at St. Catherine's, with many years experience as a primary teacher. Miss Ryan will give two lectures as partial fulfillment of the final requirements for her Master's Degree at Cardinal Stritch College as a Reading Specialist. The subsequent lecture will be on Readiness for Reading and The Initial Reading Program. The dates for this will be announced later.
ANNOUNCEMENT SENT TO PARENTS OF PRESCHOOL AND PRIMARY CHILDREN ON JANUARY 8, 1973

ATTENTION! ALL PARENTS OF PRESCHOOL AND PRIMARY CHILDREN

Do you have a preschooler who shows an interest in learning to read? Do you have a child in school who experiences difficulty with reading? Are you interested in how and when a child best learns to read? Do you know how you can help your child to improve his reading skills and interest?

These things and many other facets of reading readiness and the beginning reading program will be discussed in a lecture/discussion at St. Catherine's. It will be in the school hall at 8:00 P.M. on Wednesday, January 10.

Miss Ellen Ryan, a first grade teacher at St. Catherine's, will give the lecture. This is in partial fulfillment of the final requirements for her Master's Degree at Cardinal Stritch College as a reading specialist.
APPENDIX III

QUESTIONNAIRE FOLLOWING LECTURE I

"THE EMOTIONAL, SOCIAL, AND PHYSICAL NEEDS TO BE FULFILLED IN THE CHILD WHO IS TO REACH HIS POTENTIAL IN READING"

October 26, 1972

Please answer these questions thoughtfully and leave on the table tonight or return it to Room 105 tomorrow. Thank you for your time and interest.

1. Why did you come tonight?

2. Do you feel that your time was well spent?

3. Do you think you have a better understanding of your role in guiding children?

4. If "Yes", what new insights did you gain?

5. Do you strongly agree or disagree with anything stated? (Elaborate, if you wish.)

6. Do you plan to attend the future lecture on "Readiness for Reading and the Initial Reading Program"?

7. Have you any suggestions to offer to make the future lecture more interesting?
QUESTIONNAIRE FOLLOWING LECTURE II

"READING READINESS AND THE INITIAL READING PROGRAM"

January 10, 1973

1. Do you feel that your time was well spent tonight?

2. Did you come because,...
   you have a preschooler who shows an interest in reading?
   you have a child in school who experiences difficulty with reading?
   you have an interest in improving your child's reading skills and interest?
   of any other reason?

3. Did you gain any insights in these or any other aspects of reading?
   (Specify, if you wish.)

4. Do you strongly agree or disagree with anything stated?

5. Was the discussion period profitable?

Thank you for attending and for taking the time to answer this questionnaire.
Books can give children pleasurable experiences. They can be used as springboards for conversations and discussions. The following are suggested books for home and school use. They demonstrate some of the basic needs of children, based on Maslow's list. This list was compiled by Miss Ellen Ryan.

**THE NEED TO LOVE AND TO BE LOVED**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Books</th>
<th>Suggested discussion leads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marjorie Flack, <em>Ask Mr. Bear</em></td>
<td>Do you think Mother liked her present? What are some presents you can give your mother?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire Huchet Bishop, <em>Twenty-Two Bears</em></td>
<td>How did the bears treat &quot;your&quot; bear? Was he grateful? Then why would he not go into the woods and sleep with them? Do you have a friend whom you love in a special way? Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia Sauer, <em>Mike's House</em></td>
<td>(This should be read soon after <em>Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel</em>, since it is the same &quot;Mike&quot;. It is a good portrayal of friendship, in the book and in the policeman.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louis Slobodkin, <em>The Sad Italian Pony</em></td>
<td>Why did the children want to make the pony happy? How did they? Tell how you have made others happy. Didn't it make you feel good too?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwen Williams, <em>Timid Timothy</em></td>
<td>Why was the little kitten afraid? Why did his mother want him to be brave? Does your mother teach you things to protect you? Why did the cat take her kitten and run away from the bees?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joan Walsh Angellund, <em>What Color Is Love?</em></td>
<td>Free discussion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**THE NEED FOR SECURITY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Books</th>
<th>Suggested discussion leads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Elves and the Shoemaker</td>
<td>Why was the shoemaker happy even when he had nothing? Why do you think the elves were so kind to the shoemaker? How did he repay them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret Wise Brown, <em>The Runaway Bunny</em></td>
<td>Do you think the bunny really wanted to run away? (Notice that he told his mother he was going to run away.) How do you know that Mother Rabbit loved her bunny? Why did he decide not to run away?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Read once uninterrupted. Read a second time, stopping for discussion. Children will want to share their "special way of feeling" experiences.

Discuss the uniqueness of each of us. Isn't it nice to have such a variety of people!

Mother Rabbit comes to the rescue of her disobedient bunny, punishes him and lovingly leads back to the nest. Compare this to the loving care of our mothers. How often they come along just when we need them.

Henry has a terrible fear of dogs. Children will identify with him. A discussion of their fears will allow them to see that they are not the only ones with fears. Henry manages to overcome his fear. Children may tell of former fears which they too have overcome.

The Need to Achieve

Lead children to identify with the wise little pig who was able to be successfully independent.

Can you remember trying to do something for which you were too little or too big? What are you now too little for? ...too big for? Tell about your joy in discovering that you were "just right" for a task.

When Mary Ann was replaced by better shovels, Mike was very sad. What made him happy again? Was it worth the hard work? Would he have finished the job on time if the people had not been interested? Was Mike satisfied when Mary Ann got a new job?

Why did Rene want his lamb to be chosen to be the lamb of Noel? Discuss the love and courage of Rene. These are what brought his success.

Why did Mr. Bobbin become a hunter? Did he do what other hunters do? Why? (Be sure children see that Mr. Bobbin loves animals and actually went hunting to enjoy them, not to kill them.) Were the animals afraid of Mr. Bobbin? Did they love him? Was the story well named?
The Need for Acceptance

- **Ruth Sawyer, A Christmas Promise** *(In A Book of Joy)*
  Notice how the poor children accepted their poverty and excused the kings for not stopping at their houses. Why did the kings leave their gold?

- **Jerrold Beim, Swimming Hole**
  Discuss the different attitudes of the white boys and the new boy toward Larry. How did Larry respond?

- **Dorothy Marino, Buzzy Bear Goes Camping**
  Buzzy Bear had a pleasant camping trip. He met delightful new friends, but discovered that their ways of doing things were not meant for bears.

The Need for Happiness, Play, and Aesthetic Satisfaction

- **Leo Lionni, Swimmy**
  The beauty of this book speaks for itself.

- **Louis Slobodkin, A Good Place to Hide**
  Discuss the story for the sheer enjoyment of it.

- **A. Tresselt, Timothy Robbins Climbs the Mountains**
  Discuss the beauty of nature.

- **Charlotte Zolotow, In My Garden**
  What do you like to do in the various seasons? How nice it is to have these changes!

- **Ezra Jack Keats, Snowy Day**
  Simply enjoy the story of the young boy who has a delightful day by himself, just because the snow offers him such a variety of fun.

- **May Garelick, Where Does the Butterfly Go When It Rains?**
  The beauty of pictures and poetic style should strengthen the sense of wonder.

- **Alvin Tresselt, Under the Trees and Through the Grass**
  Enjoy the beauty of nature and art.
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BOOKS


———. Reading Diagnosis and Remediation. Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1968.


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Artley, A. Sterle. "What Do Parents' Questions Mean?" Reading Teacher, X (October, 1956), 19.


Keliher, Alice V. "Reaching the Individual As a Person". Childhood Education, VIII (September, 1964).


**UNPUBLISHED MATERIAL**


**YEARBOOKS**
