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1966
Johannesburg College of Education
https://hdl.handle.net/10539/27430
Hosking, G. (1966). Contemporary methods of reading instruction in Class I and II. Symposium: A Journal of Education for Southern Africa, pp. 53-55.

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Contemporary Methods of Reading Instruction in Class I and II

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THE methods in contemporary use may be briefly summarised as follows:

1. **Programmes based on Linguistic concepts**
   Bloomfieldian-Barnhart;
   Fries;
   Lefevre.
2. **Programmes based on Phonological regularity**
   Daniels and Diack Method;
   Initial Teaching Alphabet;
   Diacritical Marking Scheme;
   Words in Colour.
3. **Language Experience Approach**
   Chandler — Language Experience Readers.
5. **Approach based on total learning teaching situation**
   Eclectic Methods used in Janet and John, Beacon Readers, Ladybird Series, etc.

1. Programmes based on Linguistic Concepts

In 1961, C. L. Barnhart presented the reading materials developed by the late Leonard Bloomfield in a book entitled "Let's Read: A Linguistic Approach" (Wayne State University Press, Detroit.) The main emphasis is on phonemic analysis. Intonation and syntax are treated rather superficially. The impression created is that, though interesting, the materials are rigid and artificial. It is difficult to reconcile the child's language experience and his needs in respect of creative writing, with the method which is suggested. The method is in fact a variation of the conventional phonic method.

In 1963, Fries produced his "Linguistics and Reading" (Holt, Rinehart and Winston). The approach to reading is what may be described as neo-Bloemfieldian. In this instance the emphasis is on a programmed development of recognition of English spelling patterns. In promoting this concept, Fries first of all stresses the regularity of symbol and sound. He therefore presents only those words which have grapheme-phoneme correspondence. Fries maintains that since over eighty percent of English syllables are phonetically regular, the child will learn phonetic features while recognising the significant contrastive features of whole words. (e.g. tub–tub e–tube). The first steps involve instant and automatic recognition of letters shapes, and to achieve this children are at first introduced only to upper case letters. The reason for this is their simplicity and uniqueness. They consist only of circles and strokes, and do not cause confusion due to close resemblance. The second step involves the instant recognition of what Fries refers to as function words. These one hundred and fifty odd words form the bulk of the words used in any continuous sequence of English sentences.

Modern linguistic studies show their influence clearly and powerfully in the work of C.A. Lefevre. The basic method proposed is the whole-sentence method; the reason being the conventional one that meaning can only be conveyed by whole language patterns at the sentence level. This method has several great advantages. In the first place it enables Lefevre to highlight intonation curves and demonstrate their role in conveying meaning. In the second place it enables him to show how meaning is signalled by syntactical-function order in sentence patterns. Thirdly, he is able to demonstrate the role played by about three hundred "empty" structure words, showing how they may operate as noun markers; verb markers; phrase, clause or question markers; and sentence connectors. Finally, it enables him to demonstrate the significance in respect of meaning of word-form changes.

The significance of all these features in signalling meaning is undeniable, and it is only on account of the inadequacies of the traditional grammatical description of English that these features have in the past been overlooked. But it is knowledge which on a conscious plane is clearly of more significance to teachers than to pupils. It represents valuable background knowledge for teachers, but appears to be of very limited value as a method of teaching reading.

2. Programmes based on Phonological regularity

Daniels and Diack, like Fries, restrict the words used in reading books to those which are phonetically regular until children have a secure foothold. Their phonic-word method is used in the "Royal Road Readers". Such an approach is bound to

place limits on the material that children may wish to use in making their own reading books and captioning their own pictures. The most serious restriction, however, is to an early start on creative writing.

The most impressive of the methods based on phonological regularity is *the Initial Teaching Alphabet.* Very briefly, the facts are as follows:—

(*a*) A large number of teachers in Britain and in the U.S.A. no longer look upon I.T.A. as still experimental.

(*b*) This fact is borne out by the number of books already printed in I.T.A. In Britain alone there are more than four hundred titles available, and twenty-five publishers have been involved.

(*c*) Sir James Pitman designed I.T.A. to regularise spelling, but for the sake of transfer, he kept it within limits of recognisability of traditional orthography.

(*d*) All the symbols are in one case and are reproduced strictly in one pattern.

(*e*) The forty-four symbols have an almost one to one correspondence with the phonemes of English. This gives I.T.A. a logical foundation for the synthesising of words, and spelling is regularised.

(T.O. I like my bike)

(I.T.A.: ie liek mie biek)

(*f*) Compared with other systems such as the Diacritical Marking System (which has certain advantages in respect of ease of transfer in reading) and Words in Colour, I.T.A. has marked superiority in Writing.

(*g*) It has been clearly demonstrated that I.T.A. children have experienced practically no set-back on transfer to T.O.

(*h*) The longitudinal research programme is now in its fourth year. After due allowance has been made for Hawthorn effects* and Reading Drive, one is forced to accept the fact that I.T.A. children are a long way ahead of T.O. children in reading ability; are, in their third year, better at spelling than in the traditional way; and are able to write creatively with greater fluency.

It is significant that of the hundreds of teachers now using I.T.A. methods, none have reverted to their former methods, or have expressed any desire to do so.

(*i*) Teaching is not made easier for the teacher by I.T.A. There are still a handful of pupils who have to transfer during their third year. The great majority, some ninety per cent of them, complete the equivalent of "Janet and John Book IV" within the two years and transfer completely before their third year. Many achieve this within a year.

(*j*) It takes children longer to transfer to T.O. writing than to T.O. reading. The answer in the written situation is to accept transfer gradually; to do as much T.O. reading as possible; and to encourage a lot of T.O. writing, highlighting spelling differences.

Many of these pupils gain almost a year, and a major problem has been to capitalise on these gains. It is claimed in Britain and the U.S.A. that the worst reading instruction occurs in the child's 3rd, 4th and 5th years at the primary school, largely because they are not extended.

The Diacritical Marking System as evolved by Dr. E. Fry of Rutgers University, New Brunswick, uses traditional orthography, but attaches nearly a hundred "marks" to indicate special features. Regarding the sound and symbol relationship as important, he made adjustments to T.O. such as the following:

GO: (Dash indicates long vowel sounds).

Know: (Silent letters have a slash through them).

shut: (A bar under consonants represents a phoneme which is written as a digraph: one sound, and not considered a blend).

Another new method which looks at the difficulty of sound representation is *Words in Colour.* This approach was devised by Dr. Gattegno, better known for his mathematical apparatus. Briefly, this method is a system of giving a series of forty-seven colours and colour mixtures to sound families, in place of sound names. The method is blatantly and exclusively phonic, and there is no concern with meaning. Gattegno's books are singularly unattractive but they have been used with some success. In his efforts to regularise English phonetics, Gattegno has evolved a highly sophisticated and expensive method. The concept is not a new one. As early as 1899, one Nellie Dale was working on lines not far removed from Words in Colour. Setting aside colour blindness, one of the main objections to the use of various colours in reading material is that this alters the sum total of the word shape by emphasising certain letters. This tends to change the "face" of the word. Colour, used with greater discretion, could be used to advantage to discriminate between short and long

*Hawthorn effect: Tests carried out in an American Industrial situation to assess increased production due to novelty, etc.

vowels, and to show digraphs (i.e. combinations of consonants which represent a single phoneme.)

3. Language Experience Approach

The Chandler Language-Experience Reader has been produced under the editorship of Dr. L. W. Carrillo. This approach may be outlined in four steps, as follows:—

(*a*) *Experience:* The first essential is a first-hand group, or individual experience which contains sufficient inherent interest to produce a discussion.

(*b*) *Awareness:* The teacher leads the children in a discussion of the experience, writing phrases and sentences used by the children on the board.

(*c*) *Composition:* The class, with teacher guidance, decides on the sentences and the order of these sentences needed to tell their story. This is written on the board, and the class reads the story.

(*d*) *Permanence:* Depending upon the nature of the story, the teacher may decide to give the material greater permanence by transferring it to a chart or large sheet.

The great advantage of this system is that the language comes directly from the children and is meaningful to them. A further advantage is that, since the experiences are recent and real to the children, they find the work intrinsically interesting and are motivated to make an effort. The limitations of the language experience approach are that the language tends to vary widely and provide insufficient repetition for any word to insure retention; and the discussion and organisation of the story is apt to be dominated by a few individuals.

The language-experience method would appear to be a good variation and worthy of use in conjunction with other methods.

4. Approach based on total learning teaching situation

This is the basis of the eclectic method used in our schools. The method is eclectic because it is based on word recognition which is reinforced by phonic instruction. Because it is based on the total learning situation, the maturity of the child has a decisive influence on the selection of vocabulary. These "Grade Readers", or "Basal Readers" as they are called in the United States, are being changed to place slightly more emphasis on phonics than has been the case during the last decade. Content too is being changed to make them more interesting and culturally valid to modern children. These changes will take cognisance of rural and urban interests, new scientific interests, and even colour prejudices!

Other Approaches

To complete the picture, brief reference is made to other approaches to the teaching of reading.

A Colour Story Reading technique has been developed by G. Jones (England). Jones uses only four colours; red, green, blue and black. In his method, if a letter changes its sound, it changes its colour; otherwise it keeps the same colour. Black letters, for example indicate non-conformity; a blue circle will indicate a silent letter. Jones uses, in addition, nine digraphs (e.g. th, ph, sh, etc.) He has obviously been influenced by Prof. Durrell (U.S.A.) in that his theory is based on first associating sound and symbol, and then moving to word recognition and phonic synthesis.

The Visual-Verbal (V-V) method has been developed by James Webster, Director of the Reading Clinic in Jersey. It is an extension of 'Look and Say' and is directed mainly at assisting "Word-blind" pupils. The method is to present simultaneously, picture and word: the word being written in the upper case and superimposed on the picture it represents. The method is to eliminate the object or picture by getting a conditioned response, and for this purpose packs of cards are used.

The Kinaesthetic approach was also developed (by Grace Fernald) during pioneer work in the field of Word-Blindness. This method harnesses the motor sense, or the sense of feeling and movement, to those of sight and hearing. The original approach consists in essence of tracing word shapes in the air, but any form of modelling, cutting, painting or tracing letters on paper is an example of kinaesthetic reinforcement at work.

C. Delacato, a neurologist, has made a close study of word-blindness, or dyslexia; and has come to the conclusion that laterality is at the root of the problem. His approach is to devise a reading programme in an environment which is sufficiently controlled to work on the neurological structure of the child. The interest of American neurologists in reading has recently been emphasised by the work of one of Delacato's colleagues, Glenn Doman, whose book "Teach your Baby to Read" has caused quite a stir. Doman maintains that the sensitive period for learning a language is between one and five and to achieve this he has devised what is basically a Look and Say approach. Though his assertions conflict with present notions of reading readiness, there seems to be something in what he says. There is no doubt that at one time six years of age was regarded as the "correct" age at which to start reading. I.T.A. has demonstrated, however, that four and a half year olds, even under normal school conditions, can learn to read.