1952

The approach to reading

Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER)

Primary School Studies—No. 1

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AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

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DISCUSSION BRIEF

1. In a Word-Recognition test given to pupils at the end of a year in Grade I in which they had shared the same teachers, and done much the same type of work, the scores ranged from 0 to 38 out of a maximum of 46. A test of comprehension gave scores ranging from 0 to 10. In each case the words used were chosen from those used by more than half of a group of pre-school children from the same neighbourhood. What are the implications for infant-school practice?

2. The ACER Curriculum Survey showed considerable differences between states in the relative importance given to, say, arithmetic and reading. How is the relative importance to be attached to them determined in your state and in your school? Do you agree with the existing position regarding time allotments? How do you justify your agreement (or disagreement)?

3. In general, one may expect children from poor neighbourhoods to have a poorer background for reading than those from better-off neighbourhoods. To remedy this inequality the school in the poorer neighbourhood probably needs much more equipment, and many more books. Does the present system of library provision in your state make this possible, or does it work in just the opposite way?

4. In a normal class of forty children commencing school at 5 yrs 6 months, how many would you expect:

(a) to be able to read already?
(b) to be ready for formal reading?
(c) to need at least twelve months' preparatory work before formal reading commenced?

How would you organize such a class?

5. From what sources do we at present derive our knowledge of what are the most common words? Ask your colleagues to write down what they consider to be the six nouns and six verbs they consider most commonly used by children immediately prior to entering school. What measurement of agreement did you find?

6. It is obvious that many of the techniques used in schools in the preparatory and in the early reading stages, can also be used in the homes. Have you ever tried to enlist the support of the home in

teaching reading by explaining your practices and encouraging the parents to follow them? Why is such a custom not common in Australian schools?

7. At what stage do you think children need to learn the alphabet? What are the advantages of knowing it

(a) to a child?

(b) to an adult?

8. The 'vocabulary-controlled reader' in the early stages of teaching reading, keeps to words common to the child's vocabulary. It is sometimes argued that this limits his vocabulary development, and that new words, not known to the child, ought to appear in the reader. What are the merits and demerits of this argument? Has it any foundation in fact?

9. Some books for children (e.g., Little Tim and the Brave Sea Captain) have lines of varying length and in some instances a line that runs across a double page. What is your view of these practices in assisting a child to read fluently?

10. What size type is most suitable for normally sighted children of ages six, eight, ten, twelve and fourteen? How do the texts and readers you are using compare with this standard?

11. Is there any place for a formal class lesson in reading? In view of the wide variation in abilities in reading in an ordinary class, can class readers be justified?

12. Do you keep any record of the books the children in your class read either at school or at home? Have you ever asked them to keep such a record? What differences between these records did you find most interesting?

13. What amount of reading instruction do you think legitimate to include in a literature lesson?

14. Should oral reading be used for all children in the early stages? Should it be continued as one of the *objectives* of teaching reading, or is it simply a *means* of teaching reading?

15. How far are your unsuccessful pupils 'emotionally involved' in their reading failure? How far is the emotional attitude a cause, and how far a consequence, of failure to read?

This is Number 1 in a series published by the ACER as a follow-up of a nation-wide Curriculum Survey. Some of the outstanding results of this Survey were published in 1951 in *English and Arithmetic for the Australian Child.* The present series of pamphlets is designed to lead to discussion of problems raised directly or indirectly by the Survey. They are written by a panel of writers drawn from all States. The authors are anonymous but include teachers, inspectors, lecturers in Teachers' Colleges, and members of University Departments of Education. Each author has been left free to express his own view-point, and the views expressed, and ideas expounded, are not necessarily those of the Council. The Discussion Brief enclosed with each pamphlet takes up other points of view and endeavours to centre discussion on some of the major issues touched on in the pamphlet.

The titles of the pamphlets are:

1. *The Approach to Reading*
2. *The Individual Child*
3. *Ends and Means in Arithmetic*
4. *The Appraisal of Results*
5. *Highways of Expression*
6. *The Purposes of Teaching*
7. *Power Over Words*
8. *Children in Groups*
9. *Priorities in the Primary School*

I have travelled in no country presenting so many problems which can only be solved by tough individual thinking. Surely this nation's children ought to be educated by teachers who set the example of such thinking.—H. C. DENT.

THE APPROACH TO READING

Learning to read effectively is by far the most important skill that pupils acquire during their school life—important because the acquisition of knowledge depends largely upon ability to read, important because learning to read is intimately related to normal personality growth in every child, important because in a literate community reading is a preparation for living, and important because for many pupils, reading may become a major leisure activity. Hence reading has vital functional values—so vital that in most other school instruction the non-reader or backward reader is heavily handicapped—and in addition, it has far-reaching personal, social and leisure values.

Now in teaching, while we may at times consciously strive for one or other of these values, in general, our reading programme should aim at developing all values in a balanced way according to the demands of pupils at particular stages and ages of reading achievement. In fact, all values of learning to read are interrelated and interdependent. For example, have you ever noticed that when a young child begins to progress in his reading his personality development seems to jump forward? He becomes helpful and industrious, he is less difficult in groups and his concentration improves. This is mainly because his newly acquired skill is so often in use, it so effectively provides him with new ideas and it so quickly reveals his value to his fellows and his teachers. Similarly, have you noticed the personality changes of a negative kind in the older child of say eight or nine or even ten who is failing in his reading, whose weakness is advertised to his teachers, his parents, his companions, in fact to the whole world? For him reading failure means psychological failure. And have you noticed too how another approach, or individual remedial help, which brings success, changes the backward pupil's entire attitude towards his own powers and towards school work in general? He lifts his head up again—he can read—the world, his world, cannot now dub him as a failure.

It is not without significance that a relatively high proportion of young delinquents and of children seen at Child Guidance Clinics have some degree of difficulty in reading—the relationship between effective progress in reading and mental health is a very intimate one. And finally in respect to the social aspects of a reading programme, have you ever noticed that increasing the social experiences of children can, for many of them, mean improved reading

achievements, and in turn, how improvement in reading provides them with ideas and fosters attitudes which in turn make for improved social relationships? For example, one group of 11–12-year-olds, many of whom were not very interested in reading, centred some of their class reading round a twelve-week project termed 'Bread', in the development of which they made visits to farms in the neighbourhood, had discussions on all aspects from sowing the grain to the production of bread, visited a flour mill and a bakery, and read material related to the various phases of the project. The teacher reported that from being a somewhat apathetic, uncooperative group they changed to alive, interested pupils who acquired a questioning attitude of mind which had its application in a readiness to read in search of answers to their various questions.

The purposeful reading, by children of any age, connected with a project or a centre of interest, often has more than merely informative value—it can have a social purpose and it can lead to improved social competence.

Because of these fundamental and far-reaching values of reading, it is well worth while to consider briefly at the outset the various problems associated with the nature, purpose and place of a full reading programme in a school curriculum. While Australian schools give most careful and praiseworthy attention to the utilitarian value of learning to read, not all of them provide opportunities or use methods that lead to a full and effective development of the other two values—the social and the leisure.

There still is, in some schools, a tendency to over-emphasize the mechanics of reading with a consequent neglect of reading for understanding and information, of learning to discriminate and to form reading standards, and of developing a real and lasting interest in reading. In fact, some schools have almost regarded their job as completed when the pupil could stand up and read a paragraph or two with precision and expression—at best a means to an end and a by-product. And whereas five or six periods in a week are devoted to arithmetic, only three or four periods are usually given to reading. Yet there is no comparison between the after-school values of the two subjects.

To some extent the achievement of a balanced school reading programme and the development of effective pupil habits in reading are dependent on the early attitudes formed and the early methods used. The seeds of an interest in reading are laid partly in the home and partly in the school. The child's first attitude towards books derives from the pictures in them and the stories read to him from the books. Children who have no books of their own and few stories

read to them may start at a disadvantage. The next stage in reading interest comes at school. With young children it is all-important that they should *succeed* with reading. They must not look on reading as something difficult, something they labour at only in school. To ensure that children will not fail in reading when they come to school, there has been a growing recognition that we should not press them, that for many, formal teaching of reading must be postponed until they are mentally and experientially read for it.[1]

This new deal in reading for the young scholar has derived to some extent from the study of failures in reading, but also from investigations of the reading process and from increased knowledge of individual differences in children. We have realized too that emotional attitudes become linked with early reading experiences, and that these attitudes tend to influence achievement and later progress. We are now more aware of the fact that children entering school at five years of age exhibit a very wide range in ability, in temperament and in background knowledge. Pupils who at 5+ are below level in intelligence may not be ready to learn to read until 6+ or even 7+, according to the degree of their dullness. Thus a pupil with an IQ of 70 has a mental age of only $3\frac{1}{2}$ years at 5+, while one with an IQ of 80 has only a mental age of 4+ when he first enters school at 5+, and these mental levels are quite inadequate for the commencement of instruction in reading.

Furthermore, there is a very wide range in the vocabulary backgrounds of children when they first enter school. Thus Vernon's investigation[2] of the vocabulary of Scottish children entering school which was based on the conversations of two hundred pupils (one hundred boys and one hundred girls), all aged $4\frac{1}{2}$ to $5\frac{1}{2}$ years, revealed a range of 'from about thirty different words for one child up to more than five hundred for another'. Most of the records of the children's speech contained between fifty and two hundred different words with an average of one hundred and forty different words.

An ACER assessment of the vocabularies of twenty-four children[3] (ages four years ten months to five years eight months) reveals

[1] Evidence on some of the values of postponing formal instruction in infant classes and preparatory grades is to be found in reports of Miss D. E. M. Gardner's investigations: *Testing Results in the Infant School*, 1942, and *Long-term Results of Infant School Methods*, 1950, Methuen & Co.

[2] *Studies in Reading*, Vol. I, pp. 93–213. 'A Preliminary Investigation of the Vocabulary of Scottish Children Entering School', P. E. Vernon. Scottish Council for Research in Education No. XXIV, University of London Press, 1948.

[3] *A Speech Vocabulary of Australian Pre-school Children*, 1951, ACER Information Bulletin No. 23.

a range of from about three hundred to one thousand different words used.

Some children come from homes where books are in constant use, where letters are written and stories read, where much suitable simple picture-reading material is available—such children almost teach themselves to read, and they come to school at five ready for reading.

But on the other hand there are children who come from homes where books are rarely in evidence, where stories are never told and where in general the verbal background and cultural standards are impoverished. These children will neglect any approach to reading as long as the school will permit, and obviously need a planned programme of help to orient them towards printed material, and to provide them with ideas and an increased vocabulary for success in reading.

Thus there is the need to take note not only of intellectual maturity but of the social experiences of children first entering school. The school cannot hasten intellectual maturity per se—but it can make up to a large extent for other forms of immaturity—particularly can it prepare many children for a proper start with reading by a rich and varied preparatory stage which provides all kinds of opportunities for adding to their verbal experiences and so extending their knowledge of spoken words.

Hence the growing trend is to postpone formal reading instruction—a development which will benefit many, but which may, unless special provision is made for the bright twenty per cent of pupils, unnecessarily hamper and hold back those intelligent boys and girls who have the requisite equipment to commence reading, and in fact may have already started reading.

DETERMINING READING READINESS

Reading readiness tests are available to help teachers decide when children are ready to commence formal reading. In the main these tests require a pupil to match pictures and visual patterns and to match words, i.e., to see whether he has the power of differentiating between different patterns. An estimate of vocabulary is also obtained. Thus the Gates Reading Readiness Test[4] consists of:

[4] Available from the ACER. The application of this test in Western Australia to a group of 475 children between the ages of 5·0 and 5·6 has provided tentative Australian norms. A detailed analysis of the results from 86 children (pp. 24–25 *Manual of Directions*) suggests that a weighted combination of sub-tests, Nos. 2 and 3, will give the busy class teacher a fairly effective indication of reading readiness. New Zealand norms have been established for the Metropolitan Reading Readiness Test (from NZCER, Brandon St., Wellington).

(1) vocabulary (through questions asked about pictures);

(2) word matching (finding two similar words in a group of four);

(3) word-card matching (matching a card with a word on it to a similar one in a group of four words);

(4) a rhyming test;

(5) a knowledge of letters and numbers test.

However, the reliability and validity of some of these tests are not very high, and experience shows that teachers may obtain almost as effective an estimate based on information gathered during the period of reading preparation now common in many schools. It is therefore suggested that class teachers may use a combination of:

(a) an intelligence test result from a suitable non-verbal picture test (if available) or from an individual intelligence test (Terman-Merrill);

(b) an estimate of the pupil's spoken vocabulary as evidenced in his ability to talk about his experiences and to recount a story or answer questions on it, his interest in his own name, the names of his companions, the printed names of objects round the room, etc.;

(c) an estimate of his ability in word matching.

For this it is useful to select twenty-four or thirty words from the vocabulary of the first book in the series to be used for reading instruction, and to arrange these in sets of four words. Each word is printed on a card with an accompanying illustrative picture, and with each picture-word card are three small cards bearing the word only. Thus a set (in an envelope) will contain four cards with a picture and word underneath, and twelve single word cards (four groups of three of the same words). Pupils have to select the appropriate word cards from the twelve provided and place each alongside its correct picture card. The records of children who fail badly in this exercise should be related to information from (a) and (b).

PREPARATORY READING PERIOD

With the wide range in intellectual power, in verbal background, in attitudes and in special abilities required in learning to read, there must be few who can doubt the value of a preparatory period in respect to reading instruction.

The preliminary background for reading must be built up by providing the children with experiences that will lead to comparatively rich and varied language development. Their spoken language must be wide enough to cover many of the common words and

ideas that they will later meet in a printed form. Without such a background of spoken language there is a chance that the printed symbols will have only an artificial and arbitrary meaning for some pupils. Furthermore, the indirect experiences of the pupils with books, pictures and printed words in different situations should be used to create the correct attitude towards reading. The printed word must 'tell something' to the child, it must unfold information that he likes to hear, that provides pleasure and incentive for him.

During the preparatory period the children will handle picture books with simple captions, will take part in finger plays, in repetition of rhymes, verses, and songs, in dramatization and in telling of stories centred round daily life activities. There will be a constant display on cards round the room of names of various objects in the room—'door', 'table', 'chair', 'window', 'our shop', 'our train'. At a further stage there will be a display too of notices requiring some simple activity, 'please shut the door'; 'please clean the board'. A variation of this might be the allocation of daily tasks by means of notices, 'Please give out the paints today (John, Peter, Jack)'; 'Please keep the room tidy today (Joan, Bess, Jill)'. There is too the keeping of a daily nature chart and a daily newspaper. All of these will engender an attitude towards words and language in general, which will be the solid basis of later reading progress.

Many modern infant teachers make a powerful ally of drawing and painting allied to tracing as a means of letting the young child relate the expression of his interests to language. He often wishes to talk about his drawings and the compilation of a simple book by each child in which these drawings are accompanied by printed sentences in the child's own language, forms an excellent preparation for the real reading of a later stage.[5] Similarly a centre of interest or project[6] which is woven round the character of the stories in the pupil's first reading book is the most effective introduction to many of the words. and ideas behind the words, that form the vocabulary of his early reading material.

Recent experiments with the *Happy Venture Reading Series* reveal that film strips[7] may be used with advantage to arouse pre-

[5] Details are given in F. J. Schonell, *The Psychology and Teaching of Reading*, 3rd ed. 1951, Oliver & Boyd.

[6] For an example of centre of interest based on trains, together with an indication of range of printed words with which the children became acquainted, see Frances Roe, *Fundamental Reading*, pp. 12–21, 1944, University of London Press.

[7] Those wishing to explore the value of the strips or to conduct their own experiments with them, could obtain these film strips from Educational Productions, Denbigh Street, London.

reading interest and to introduce children to characters and words in the first reading books.

The significance of much of the preparatory period lies in the proven psychological fact that a child finds it easier to read words he has used frequently in his everyday life, and he finds it easier to understand reading material which deals with activities he himself has experienced. A background pregnant with meaning and experience provides clues to the nature of word patterns and enables pupils to make maximum use of context in word recognition.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

A brief glance at the changes in the methods and materials used in teaching reading reflect the changes in attitudes towards children and the influence of the systematic study of children.

The earliest method of teaching reading was centred inflexibly on *learning the alphabet,* and of then forming the letters into syllables, then into words and finally into phrases and sentences. An early English presentation of the alphabet was the Horn Book which consisted of a wooden frame to contain a piece of stiff paper or vellum on which were printed the letters together with a few odd words. The lettered vellum was covered by a sheet of transparent horn, like that used in the early lanterns—or lanthorns. Illustrated alphabets were also published in book form under such titles as:

> *The Invited Alphabet or Address of A to B Containing His Friendly Proposal for the Amusement and Instruction of Good Children,* Danton, 1808.
> *The Galloping Guide to the A. B. C. or the Child's Agreeable Introduction to a Knowledge of the Alphabet.*

Doubtless the 'agreeableness' of and 'amusement' from all this material lay in the minds of the makers of the books, as indicated by their titles, not in the minds of the children 'learning their letters'.

In the very large classes of the 19th century learning by the alphabetic method consisted almost entirely of spelling, or chanting in unison, each word from the primer. The book was learned page by page so that each pupil would pass the inspector's examination and earn a grant for the school.

Realizing the rather barren nature of this kind of instruction, *teachers slowly changed to the phonic method,* in which the letters and their corresponding sounds are learnt. By a series of graded exercises sounds are combined into words and words formed into sentences. Educators logically argued that it was not the names of the letters but their sounds that mattered most in learning to read,

and hence children should learn the letters and their sounds. To a point this is right, but in so far as only one sound for each letter is taught, the method is limited, as the twenty-six letters of the alphabet represent in fact over sixty different sounds. For example, 'a' has five variants as in 'cat', 'ate', 'all', 'arm', 'any', but pupils learn only one form 'as' as in 'cat'. Hence, although through later work in the phonic families they 'pick up' some of the variants of other vowels, they are soon forced to learn as word wholes the many irregular words (e.g., eye, one, uncle).

A more serious objection to an initial phonic approach is the use of reading material in which there are far too many words of similar length such as 'on, is, in, big, did, bad, day, by, so, am', but these are the very words in which weaker readers make most errors. Unless short words are included with words of longer and more varied patterns in reading material, based on the children's experiences, we are needlessly causing some pupils to make errors.

But perhaps the greatest disadvantage of a thorough-going phonic method, as revealed by research, is that for some children it holds up the rapid recognition of words as wholes, and the ability to read two or three words as a unit, a technique essential to comprehension. Sounding individual words may become for the pupil a satisfying substitute for seeking to understand the meaning of the sentences.

The content of phonic primers is usually artificial, and gives the pupil no introduction to natural forms of English phrase and sentence, nor to a variety of everyday words. One primer still in use in some Australian schools contains such 'interesting and stimulating' reading matter as this:

'The man has a fan.
The man has a can.
A fan and can.'

It is extremely unlikely that anyone in his right senses would be wandering round with a 'fan and can', but of course the words fit to the particular stage of instruction and so are introduced irrespective of interest or meaning. In the same book one finds:

'Jim is at the bin.
His pet kit, Kim, is on
the rim of the tin bin.'

This kind of material not only contains too many words of similar pattern which are more difficult for children to distinguish, one from the other, but is dull and depressing. Children don't want to read about fans and cans, tins and bins, they are keen to hear about the things that they and other boys and girls do—playing ball, hide and

seek, cooking, keeping house, making things, visits to the shops, the railway station, to friends, to the zoo, and stories of all kinds about adults, other children and animals.

On the credit side for the phonic method two points emerge from research work. The first is that for later continued progress in reading *some* children require some phonic training (when they are mature enough to profit from it) to help them out when other means of word recognition fail. And the second is that a systematic course of phonic training dealing with the structure of words is a useful groundwork for spelling.

THE WORD-WHOLE ('LOOK AND SAY') SENTENCE METHOD

Experimental work in reading has emphasized strongly the value of the visual pattern of the word in its recognition by pupils, and the importance of meaning and interest, particularly meaning deriving from having used the word often in an oral form in a variety of situations (hence the preparatory or pre-reading stage). We have realized, as Billie did when his Auntie was teaching him the rudiments of reading, that letters and sounds do not matter in the beginning, for there is a short cut. When in orthodox fashion Auntie started C-A-T (giving each letter its sound value) which is 'C-A-T', Billie enquired of her, 'Does this read "Cat"?' (pointing to the whole word). 'Yes', replied Auntie. 'Well, why didn't you say so the first time?' commented Billie. Billie's observation was sound. Research and classroom practice have now firmly established that we should start with the word-whole sentence method, supplementing this with some phonic training after pupils have acquired a small sight vocabulary.

Investigations of both reading methods and failures in reading reveal that to start pupils with a phonic method is to predispose some to failure, because the method requires a power of analysis and synthesis not sufficiently well developed before a mental age of 6+ years. When phonic work is started too early some children do not understand what they are doing. They are handicapped in associating sounds with letters and are unable to analyse and blend these as they find them in words, so that they become confused.

While most teachers now use a combination of methods there are some who do not see how a 'look and say' approach can succeed. They forget that the word-whole sentence method requires a systematic preparation before children read from a book. As has been indicated, in this preparation children listen to stories, look at pictures of the boys and girls, the animals or the toys that will appear

in their books—they talk about them, ask questions about them, draw them, and carry through the actions of the characters. Thus the 'look and say' method is more than merely looking and saying, it is a playing, thinking, recognizing 'look and say' method. When Jim and Jessie come to read their books, they look at the pictures with the words alongside them and the whole material is familiar and full of meaning.

Of course they are much helped by the fact that each word has its own particular pattern of letters—'hop' looks different from 'Fluff' and these are both different from 'runs', 'skips', 'dog'. Have you ever noticed how some very young children can select gramophone records they want played? Although they can't read, they know the particular pattern of each title made up of words of different lengths. Many a child can read ICE CREAM on a shop window long before he knows any letters or sounds—he is, of course, greatly interested in the 'ice-cream situation'.

To summarize, it has now been established that it is more effective to commence reading by a word-whole sentence method. This however must be preceded by a pre-reading period. Work on phonic families of words should begin after the pupil has mastered a small sight vocabulary and should continue parallel with further reading by word-whole sentence methods.

CONTENT OF READING BOOKS

Although method is important the kind of material a child has to read also determines his progress—its interest and its vocabulary burden are the two main criteria by which to judge a reading series. The difficulty of a book is dependent on the kind and number of new words used in it. The appeal of the book to the child is dependent on the activities and experiences it represents, or the story it tells, together with the effect of its illustrations. In America and in England there has been considerable investigation of the vocabularies used in reading books and their relation to the speech and vocabulary of the children for whom they are intended. Only a few Australian readers take adequate account of these factors.

We have now evolved what is termed 'vocabulary controlled readers'. These employ a known vocabulary of common words, i.e., common to the child's oral vocabulary. They keep to two or three new words per page in the early books and increase to four, five or six new words per page in the third, fourth and fifth books of a series. In each book the new words that appear on each page as the book progresses are printed against the page number at the back of the book. This is of inestimable value to the teacher who can take

preparatory and revision work on the new words either from the blackboard or from the Word List itself.

The successive vocabularies in the first four books of two word controlled series are:

	1st	*2nd*	*3rd*	*4th*
Happy Venture Readers[8]	43	62	96	196
		↓	↓	↓
Happy Venture Supplementary Books		35	70	56
Janet and John Readers[9]	27	32	46	83

It is possible that the 'Janet and John' series do not increase the vocabulary sufficiently to cater for the brightest children as well as for average children.

In the past, any words, and any number of them, were used in reading books, so that there were often too many new or strange words on some pages causing children to fail or to have to learn the page by heart. One of the older reading series, for example, starts with forty-four words in the first book but jumps to two hundred and eighteen words in the next book.[10] If there are too many new words per page many children are forced to proceed extremely slowly—some cannot proceed at all. Many of the less able ones need drilling repeatedly on the same page, and with the weakest pupils this results in memory reading. Even when the pupils have mastered a page with twelve or sixteen new words upon it, they are greatly discouraged to find that there are just as many new words they do not know upon the next page. Not only is training in adequate word recognition thereby neglected, but the pupils are discouraged by the difficulty of the task.

In America every reading series for teaching reading is word controlled. In England for a period of twelve years the only such books were *The Happy Venture Readers* (first published in 1937), but during the past few years numbers of such series have appeared and the change to them is rapid and comprehensive.

Recently the New Zealand Education Department adopted a word controlled series for every school in the Dominion—the opinions of teachers are unanimous in respect to the value of the change.

Despite recent advances in at least two states, in too many Australian schools phonic readers and the older non-controlled 'look and

[8] *Happy Venture Readers.* Five books. Each book accompanied by Graded Card Material for word matching and comprehension. Published by Oliver & Boyd, London and Edinburgh or Macmillan & Co., Melbourne.

[9] *Janet and John Readers.* Six books. Published by Nisbet & Son.

[10] Those interested will also like to read Vernon's work, 'Word Counts in Infant Readers' in *Studies in Reading,* Vol. II. *op. cit.*

say' reading series are still used, in spite of the proven values of graded reading material. Research results emphasize the following values of a small controlled vocabulary in early reading texts:

(a) it permits reading with understanding from the beginning;
(b) the children become quickly independent in reading skill;
(c) the time spent on drills in word analysis is greatly reduced;
(d) new words are derived largely through the context;
(e) failure is eliminated;
(f) the children develop very favourable attitudes towards reading;
(g) the children develop the power of reading by units of two or three words which facilitates comprehension.

Of vital supplementary value in modern reading texts are illustrations and the size and form of the print used. Young children like fairly large pictures in strong colours, bold central groups with a few details, realistic pictures rather than traditional ones, and pictures embodying action and story. Books should be printed in bold, clear type—the space between the letters being as important as the size of the letter. The spacing of the words on the page is vital—there should be adequate space between words and between lines, and material must be arranged to facilitate quick recognition in units. Examination of reading books shows that we still have to eliminate from our school books which have too many lines per page, and too many solid blocks of print on a page—insufficient breaks in lines of print handicap children in reading with speed and understanding.

READING IN THE PRIMARY GRADES

In most lower grades in the Primary School the range of reading attainments is usually about four years. In Grade I, for example, there will be in all probability a small group of slow backward children, and there will be pupils whose reading achievements are comparable to those in Grade III or even Grade IV. Indeed, if we give a graded word reading test to Grade I pupils we not infrequently find a wider range than this.

It is almost essential for teachers in early primary grades to apply a graded word reading test by which they can assess accurately the pupil's level of word recognition[11]—the basis of all achievement in reading. A graded word test consists of one hundred or one hundred and twenty words selected and graded by known steps of difficulty. The words in the test thus represent a careful sample, at various

[11] Such a test is found in F. J. Schonell's *The Psychology and Teaching of Reading*, Oliver & Boyd, obtainable from Macmillan & Co., Melbourne, or ACER, 147 Collins Street, Melbourne. The test, in appropriate size of type, together with instructions, is found on pages 92–93.

points, of the reading vocabularies at all ages from five to fifteen years.

It usually takes only three or four minutes to test each child and the teacher then has for each pupil a reading age which can be compared with chronological age. Teachers may use the results for three purposes—as a basis upon which to divide their classes into sections for reading, as a guide in the selection of reading books, and as a check upon the progress made by backward readers during a term or a half year.

The range of reading attainments in most grades indicates that for most periods in the week reading should *not* be taken as a unit class lesson. It is essential that reading lessons should be planned to give maximum practice with materials suited to the pupils' reading ages. Some will require much oral practice with simple reading books, while others will be sufficiently advanced to be able to do a considerable amount of motivated silent reading. The most effective organization for this is to divide the class into two or three sections on the basis of their reading ages (i.e., as derived from the graded word test). With appropriate books suited to the ability of each section, it will be possible for the teacher to take a certain amount of oral reading instruction for the benefit of the weaker pupils in a section, while other sections are engaged in individual card work or in silent reading checked by questions and exercises.

To obtain still more intensive practice for the weaker members, the class may be divided into even smaller reading units, namely four or five reading groups. Each group should contain pupils of approximately similar reading ages, and in this way we can still further suit the material to the reading level of each pupil, and arrange for more practice for the slower readers. When reading is taken as a unit class lesson only a few children actually get practice in reading, least of all the slower readers who should be reading most of the time. In a primary school there will always be some slow readers coming up from infant classes and these want special help. Learning to read is much dependent on maturation of certain abilities, and the fact that some children fail to learn to read effectively in the infant classes is not due to the fact that infant teachers have not done their job. Almost without exception, infant teachers with large classes of fifty and sixty pupils render magnificent service in teaching so many children to read. Some teachers may be misguided in the methods and books they use, and they could probably reduce the percentage of failures somewhat by better books and methods, particularly by the use of word controlled reading texts, but extremely few could be criticized for lack of interest or industry.

One function of the primary school is to develop effective silent

reading ability, and this is best done by graded sets of exercises on cards that will direct pupils to different objectives in silent reading —thus some exercises may foster reading for the central theme or main content of a page or paragraph, others will ask for specific detail, while still others will train children to find for themselves answers to questions, solutions to problems, or inferences from arguments, all of which are contained in the reading material.

For early primary grades reading books and supplementary material should be provided in sets of twelve to twenty books to suit the range of attainment. It is better to have a number of smaller sets covering a wide range than to have a large number of copies of one book.

In too many schools insufficient note is taken of range in reading attainments, and reading is always taken as a class lesson. Once a child starts reading he wants to be plied with plenty of books, short books at his own level of reading. Here schools could do much more. Some are still using out of date, unattractive texts and there are often insufficient supplementary books. Too much time is spent in pulling to pieces stories in the single reading series used—a product of the system of inspection and examination.

Recently a bright nine-year-old, who was developing a strong interest in reading, was asked how she liked her new school. 'Oh', she said, 'its all right; but I don't like reading at this school.' And when asked why, she replied, 'Well, we don't really read, we just go over six or eight paragraphs every day.' No wonder she was beginning to lose her interest in reading. The teacher was examining every word and phrase, in the mistaken idea that she was extending the children's vocabulary, while enjoyment was being squeezed out.

Luckily most schools do not take this sterile attitude towards reading. Many have provided class and school libraries. In some schools the school library is thronged during the lunch hour when children come without restriction to take books. One headmaster characterized his well-used lunch hour and spare-time library as 'the best teacher on the staff'—and he said so when authorities wanted to deprive him of the room for 'this teacher'.

There is much sound evidence to show that children improve their reading attainments, extend their vocabulary and gather knowledge by reading as much as possible, not by studying one book *ad nauseam*.

DEVELOPING READING INTERESTS

In the first place parents can help to develop reading interests by reading to children even up to the age of nine. Parents who do this often find that books started together are sometimes finished before

the next session. Some books, of course, like *The Wind in the Willows, Peter Pan, Uncle Tom's Cabin,* may be reserved for dual enjoyment. The last few on one parent's evening list have been a mixture of the old—*Pinocchio, Anne of Green Gables, The Secret Garden*—with the new—*Snow Treasure,* a Norwegian war yarn, *Young Fu of the Upper Yang-tze,* the 1934 Newberry award for an outstanding children's book, and a magnificent story of the Indian jungle and elephants, *Hari, the Jungle Lad.*

Finally, selection and guidance are much related to growth at reading interest.[12] Between the ages of seven and fourteen the average child reads about four hundred books. Now it's just as well the four hundred books should be good ones, including those which feed individual interests. Recent New Zealand research reveals a considerable number of pupils of twelve to sixteen who start but do not finish reading certain classics: One in four don't finish a novel by Thackeray, one in five by Scott, one in twelve by Dickens. There are obvious reasons for this, but doubtless the failure does not increase their interest in reading.

Interestingly enough, only one in one hundred failed to finish books by Grey, Charteris, Farnol and Sabatini. Although some children are just discovering at twelve what others have left at ten, there is, within limits, great need for guidance to prevent failure and loss of interest.

Finally, a brief look at a few other matters. Fairy tales—what of them? Good fairy tales have their place—those of Grimm should be banished. His tales, by the way, were not originally written for children.

'Penny dreadfuls'—what of these, too? There is no evidence that they harm reading interests, provided there is adroit guidance to similar material done much better by accepted writers. Experience is that in the main the boy or girl who reads the most 'penny dreadfuls' reads the most books. And a plea for the historical, scientific, geographical and other informative novels. We can do a great deal for lasting interests by introducing children to such excellent books as *The White Cockade Passes, He Went with Magellan, Columbus Sails, The Hills of Varna, Bronze Eagle, Tents in the Wilderness, The Splendid Journey,* and *Men of the Icebreaker Sedov.*

And on the school library shelves, too, there should be such books as Eleanor Doorly's *The Microbe Man* (Pasteur's Life), *The Radium Woman* and *The Insect Man, The Adventure of Sajo and Her*

[12]Teachers who want help in this way could not do better than read *Tales Out of School,* G. Trease, Heinemann; *About Books for Children,* Dorothy N. White, NZCER, Whitcombe & Tombs.

Beaver People, Red Ruff (Puffin Book), *Starlight* (Puffin Book), and many other first-class Puffin books. But a full excursion into the rich fields of good children's books would form another pamphlet.

Finally, we might conclude with a rapid review of the cardinal principles emerging from this examination of reading in primary schools. In the first place, it is imperative that *the school should teach all pupils to read*—so vital is this skill to life and to the personality of every child. In some schools this will mean the establishment of remedial groups in the charge of teachers who have had special training in dealing with backward readers. Records of results from such groups, particularly those in New South Wales, provide ample evidence of their great value not only in respect to teaching children to read but in making no small contribution to the improvement of their mental health.

Research and classroom practice show that reading instruction should begin with a word-whole sentence method, later supplemented by phonic study. In this connection modern methods employing modern text books can reduce reading failure to a strikingly low figure. A modern reading programme makes use of scientifically graded reading material to suit individual differences in learning rates.

Finally, it is vital for schools to encourage and develop in children lasting and growing interest in reading, particularly as a possible stabilizer in a world increasing in complexity and in artificial and vicarious forms of leisure activities. If we want an understanding democracy, the members of which can think for themselves and use their leisure in a beneficial way, then a rich reading programme at all stages in the primary school will pay handsome dividends.