TEACHING THEM TO READ

Fourth Edition

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Allyn and Bacon, Inc.

Boston · London · Sydney · Toronto

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Durkin, Dolores.
Teaching them to read.

Bibliography: p.
Includes index.
1. Reading. I. Title.
LB1050.D84 1983 372.4'1 82-16458
ISBN 0-205-07933-4

Printed in the United States of America
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 88 87 86 85 84 83

PREFACE

Whenever how to teach reading is considered, the urge to say everything at once is inevitable because all of its facets seem so important. However, since neither written nor oral language allows for a simultaneous treatment of different topics even when they are closely related, a sequence for dealing separately with the many pieces that make up an instructional program had to be selected for this textbook.

Part I, which consists of two chapters, is meant to serve as an introduction. The first of the two chapters can be described with its title, "Teaching Reading: An Overview." A general survey of effective reading instruction was chosen as the subject for the initial chapter on the assumption that seeing the whole picture before its parts are examined is helpful. Chapter 2 goes on to discuss in a thorough way the roles that oral and silent reading ought to play in an instructional program. This topic merits both thorough and early treatment because of the large amount of classroom time that is spent on having students take turns reading aloud. While this questionable practice, commonly referred to as "round robin reading," is usually associated with the primary grades, classroom observations indicate it is often used in the middle and upper grades when social studies is taught. That the goal of all instructional activities is comprehension via silent reading is underscored in Chapter 2, which, while making that point, does not overlook the unique contributions that oral reading can make when it is used in certain ways at certain times.

The next two chapters constitute Part II and look at reading ability and reading instruction in their earliest stages. Chapter 3 deals with "Readiness for Reading;" Chapter 4, with "Reading in the Kindergarten." Although these chapters should be of particular interest to kindergarten and first-grade teachers, the topics they cover have relevance for all teachers because, over the years, each has prompted controversy. In addition, even though readiness has been traditionally associated with the start of reading, it is, in fact, a concept that has significance for any teaching at any level. How it applies to reading instruction beyond the beginning is explained with a number of examples.

Chapter 5, "Whole Word Methodology," starts Part III, "Instruction: Words." Chapter 5 also marks the beginning of a detailed, multiple-chapter treatment of the specifics of instruction. Starting the treatment with a look at

whole word methodology is recognition of the fact that, at all grade levels and for various reasons, some words will have to be directly identified for students. Chapter 5 concentrates on how words are taught as wholes; when they should be taught as wholes; what facilitates or impedes word learning; what effect nonstandard dialects and bilingualism have on the meaning of "correct" response; and what can be done to provide what is always necessary: interesting, productive practice.

Like good parents, good teachers foster independence in their students; consequently, to ensure that they are able to figure out new or forgotten words on their own, instruction in using three types of cues (contextual, graphophonic, and structural) is essential. How to teach students to use the context in which an unknown word appears in order to get it identified is the subject of Chapter 6, which is followed by two others that deal with graphophonic cues. The first of the two tells what is taught in phonics; the second, Chapter 8, specifies how it can be taught. Chapter 9 then deals with structural cues, thus with ways for figuring out the pronunciation *and* meaning of derived and inflected words. All these chapters attend both to the details of instruction and to suggestions for practice and assignments. Like all of the other chapters concerned with the specifics of instruction, recommendations are based on elementary school teaching experience, countless numbers of observations in classrooms, frequent discussions with teachers, close analyses of instructional materials, and findings from research. Like all the other chapters, too, the fact that the essence of reading is comprehension is never forgotten.

As the next chapter, Chapter 10, concentrates on "Vocabulary Knowledge," it deals with a topic that should be uppermost in the minds of all teachers, since word meanings are an essential ingredient of successful reading. The chapter that comes next, entitled "Comprehension," recognizes that understanding connected text is the usual concern of readers. It thus shows what can be done to help elementary school students grow in their ability to understand authors' messages found in sentences, paragraphs, pages, and more. To supplement this direct and detailed treatment of comprehension, Chapter 12 follows and deals with "Content Subjects and Study Skills."

Even though instructional materials are referred to in all the prior chapters, Chapter 13, entitled "Basal Reader Programs," is one of two chapters that deals with them more directly. Basal series are considered first because they commonly structure a program. Chapter 14, "Language Experience and Other Materials," focuses on what loosens it up and makes it more personal for students.

Knowing what to teach, how to teach it, and how to select and use materials are all important prerequisites for superior instruction. Of no less importance, however, is getting a classroom organized to facilitate such instruction. Ways for doing that are discussed in Chapter 15, "Organizing for Instruction." Means for finding out who needs what kind of instruction are described in the final chapter, "Diagnosis for Instruction." Treatment of that topic was left until the end be-

cause knowing *what* to diagnose requires knowing the components of reading ability. Chapters 5 through 12 are, therefore, preparation for Chapter 16.

As the various chapters in *Teaching Them to Read* are studied, the use of "she" when teachers are being referred to will be apparent. This practice is followed (except when an actual case is cited in which the teacher was male) not because elementary school teaching is thought to be a feminine profession but to avoid the cumbersome "she or he." In contrast, reference to a pupil will use "he" unless a specific girl is the referent. This is done to avoid ambiguity when a pronoun for a teacher and another for a pupil are necessary in the same sentence.

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PART I

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1

TEACHING READING: AN OVERVIEW

At the risk of starting with the obvious, let me acknowledge right away that achieving excellence in the teaching of reading is no small, ordinary accomplishment. As the best teachers demonstrate, however, it is not an impossible one.

Although it is true that highly successful instructional programs are not identical in every detail, teachers who have them do share certain characteristics. As a start, for example, effective teachers like and respect their students. This shows up not only in the way they talk and listen to them but also in the amount of effort they are willing to expend in order to ensure that each student's potential for reading is realized. "Contrary to popular myths," writes one observer of classrooms, "teachers in 'schools that work' are not charismatic figures generating unforgettable experiences. They are simply hard-working organized teachers moving crisply through a well-planned day" (2, p. 3).

Not to be forgotten is that successful teachers work hard *on the right things*. In short, they know what contributes to reading ability and concentrate on that.

WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO READING ABILITY

Describing *reading ability* is not an easy task. Why it is difficult is explained well in an observation made many years ago by a reading specialist named Edmund Huey, who in 1908 wrote, "To completely analyze what we do when we read would almost be the acme of a psychologist's achievements, for it would be to describe very many of the most intricate workings of the human mind" (1, p. 6).

While Huey's contention would be hard to dispute, a textbook that proposes to help teachers and those preparing to teach do an effective job with reading has an obligation at least to describe what contributes to reading ability.

Extensive Sight Vocabularies

Although the ability to read requires much more than expertise in identifying individual words, such identifications—especially when they are automatic—make a considerable contribution to proficient reading. This is verified by the fact that even a single sentence may be difficult (or impossible) to comprehend if an important word is unknown or if several words are identified with great hesitation or much uncertainty.

The importance of individual words is the reason effective teachers see to it that their students are able to identify on sight a sizable number of words, especially those that appear frequently in print. This is accomplished with the help of practice, which wise teachers try to make as interesting as possible since involvement and achievement go hand in hand.

Ability to Figure Out Words Independently

Knowing that new or forgotten words will inevitably show up in the materials that students need or want to read, successful teachers provide instruction for developing the understandings and skills that allow students to figure out themselves the pronunciation of words. Concern for this kind of independence accounts for the carefully planned attention given to letter-sound relationships and to parts of words called *roots, prefixes,* and *suffixes.* Thoroughly knowledgeable about phonics and word structure, these teachers are able to pick and choose from materials like workbooks only those pages that stand a chance of contributing to their students' ability to cope with the identity of words without outside help. The same knowledge also allows them to fill in gaps and to offer extra instruction and practice for any student who needs them. Essentially, then, superior teachers are *independent* professionals who *know* what needs to be taught.

Word Meanings

Because they are aware of what is vital for success with reading, the best of teachers—whether working with kindergartners or older students—do whatever they can to add to the number of words whose meanings will be familiar when they show up in print. Recognizing that experiences, direct and vicarious, are the primary source of vocabulary development, these teachers view schooling as one important means for enlarging and deepening students' knowledge of the world. In addition, they plan special lessons for vocabulary development and also take advantage of unexpected opportunities to teach the meanings of one or more words.

Ability to Comprehend Connected Text

Underlying everything that is done in an effective instructional program is the realization that reading is comprehending. Aware that authors' messages come in many sizes and forms, successful teachers provide instruction that will help their students comprehend as little as a phrase or as much as a book. Recognizing that different types of text make different demands of readers, the instruction of competent teachers is also marked by balance as it focuses on narrative discourse (such as a fable), expository discourse (such as an explanation of how dew forms),

and procedural discourse (such as directions for making a pinwheel). And poets who have something to say to children are not overlooked either.

DIAGNOSTIC TEACHING

While knowing what contributes to mature reading ability is essential for effective teaching, knowing exactly what to teach to whom is equally mandatory if an instructional program is ever to succeed in getting each student to realize his or her potential. That is why identifying what children do and do not know, and can or cannot do, is viewed as a daily task by superior teachers. It also accounts for calling the work of such individuals *diagnostic teaching*. What such teaching accomplishes is *individualized instruction,* the major concern of this textbook. As used in *Teaching Them to Read,* individualized instruction is any instruction that (a) deals with what contributes to reading ability; (b) concentrates on something that has not been learned or is not understood by those being instructed; and (c) proceeds at a suitable pace. Conceivably, individualized instruction can be carried on with a group as large as one hundred—or one thousand, for that matter. And it can also take place with a single child. In the latter case, the description "individualized" is appropriate not because someone is being taught individually but because what is getting attention is what he or she needs and is ready to learn. Obviously, individualized instruction in the setting of a classroom is a tall order. It also is central to the concerns of conscientious teachers.

The components of one kind of direct, individualized instruction start with a goal and proceed as follows:

1. *Instruction:* Explanations, information, illustrations, modeling, questions, and so on.
2. *Application:* Attempts by students, supervised by a teacher, to use what was taught.
3. *Practice:* Independent attempts by students to use what was taught, often carried out in written assignments.
4. *Evaluation:* Examination of students' independent responses in order to see whether further attention to the same goal is necessary.

While preplanned instruction like that just described is at the core of successful programs, the use of unexpected opportunities to teach something significant is also characteristic. An example of the unexpected is described in the following section since it pertains to instructional materials.

INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

Instructional material, as used in *Teaching Them to Read,* encompasses anything that displays print. It thus encompasses textbooks, library books, magazines, comic

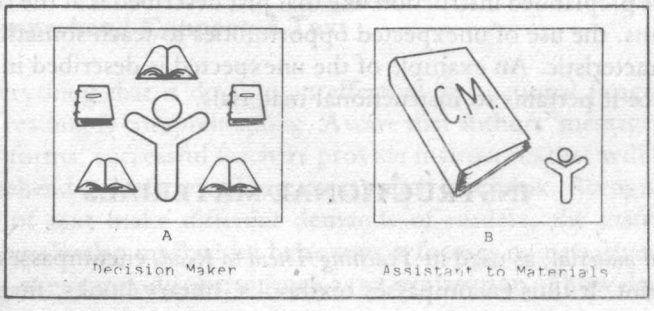
books, signs, labels, menus, calendars, newspapers, billboards, stamps, greeting cards, license plates, telephone directories, candy wrappers, and so on. Why this broad concept of instructional materials is highlighted as early as Chapter 1 can be explained with a reference to what was seen in a third grade.

At the start of the observation, the teacher had just started working with five boys who were much more interested in a pencil than they were in the basal reader they were being told to open. The pencil's attraction was both the die that had been attached to one end and the advertisement for a new furniture store that was printed on its side. The latter said, "Don't gamble on quality. See us first." At the time the pencil was taken from its owner, he and the other boys were doing their best to read the two sentences. Since they did anything but try hard to read the basal story—they kept insisting they had read it in second grade—a question had to be raised about why the basal reader was not temporarily laid aside in order to allow for attention to the slogan on the pencil because it had so much potential for reading comprehension. For example, the meaning of "Don't gamble on quality" could have been contrasted with the meaning of something like "Don't gamble on a horse," immediately setting up a chance to talk about literal and figurative language. Or, the words *die* and *dice* could have been written and discussed in the context of unusual ways to form plural nouns. Words like *quantity* and *quality* might also have been considered along with such directions as, When is quality more important than quantity? Is quantity ever more important than quality? Instead of doing anything like this, however, the teacher spent the time on some very poor oral reading, all the while the boys insisting that they had read the story when they were in second grade.

The reference to this classroom incident is not meant to convey the notion that instructional programs should proceed according to students' whims. Rather, it was made in order to allow for some comments about two related matters: effective teaching and the judicious (thus flexible) use of materials.

Role of Materials

The most important point to make about instructional materials is that they are meant to assist teachers, not to direct them. From a teacher's perspective, the difference between the two roles can be portrayed as follows:



Superior teachers, symbolized above by Teacher A, are thoroughly acquainted with available materials; however, *they* decide what will be taught. Once decisions are made about instructional needs, they use whatever materials are likely to forward their efforts to deal with them. In contrast, Teacher B is subordinate to materials and thus allows them to dictate both what will be taught and how it will be presented. The concern now is to carry out whatever suggestions materials make, thus demoting the role of the teacher to little more than "assistant to materials." Among the by-products of such a role is less flexibility than effective instruction requires.

Perhaps it is needless to say that the aim of *Teaching Them to Read* is to encourage the development of a sizable number of Teacher A's.

Relevant Materials

Recognizing the importance of motivation and interest for successful learning, Teacher A does whatever is possible to demonstrate to students why it makes sense to be a reader. With something like the slogan on the pencil, for example, Teacher A not only would recognize its potential for helping with comprehension but also would value it as a means for showing the children that reading ability is highly relevant for everyday living. Concern for relevance explains why a teacher who was seen in a second-grade classroom took the time to assemble a bulletin board display that effectively demonstrated the omnipresence of print. Featured on the board were such items as an addressed envelope, a page from a cookbook, a gum wrapper, headlines from a newspaper, a TV guide, and a T-shirt. Concern about showing the importance of reading ability with the help of materials also explains why a fifth-grade teacher prepared a news corner for displaying newspaper articles brought in by students.

All this is to say that Teacher A, with the help of a wide variety of both commercially prepared and homemade materials, succeeds in demonstrating that print is a valuable source for information, practical help, relaxation, and even inspiration. It is not accidental, then, that a child who is fortunate enough to have had a succession of Teacher A's not only *can* read but *does* read.

THE TOTAL SCHOOL

A discussion of reading that portrays teachers and classrooms as though they existed in isolation is unrealistic because the two are integral parts of a total school. This means that what any one teacher is able to do, or even wants to do, is very much affected by all that makes up the school. The principal, the other teachers, the neighborhood, the students, their parents—all have important effects on what happens in a classroom.

Because of the significance of the total school, it might be helpful to describe the kind that offers maximum opportunity to develop a superior instructional