Preparing to Teach Reading

Grayce A. Ransom

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Grayce A. Ransom
The University of Southern California

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(*continued on page 546*)

To John Seeley, my husband, whose enthusiasm for this book has been constantly supportive

To Judy and Janet, my daughters, who have opened new doors and windows to childhood

Preface

My purpose in writing *Preparing to Teach Reading* has been to convey the ideas and insights I have gained in my years of teaching children to read, doing research, and teaching reading teachers. In addition to my specific suggestions, I hope I've managed to convey two attitudes I think are essential to teaching reading: a great love and respect for children as individuals and a lifelong enthusiasm for books.

This book is intended to be a basic textbook for prospective kindergarten to eighth grade teachers. But experienced teachers should find it a useful reference, too, for it contains not only discussions of new and old approaches to reading instruction but also a wealth of concrete suggestions for ways to use these ideas in the classroom.

Reading is a complex skill to teach, for it involves many factors in two different dimensions: (1) the unique abilities, interests, and emotional characteristics that dictate a different set of instructional needs for each child, and (2) the maze of interrelated skills that children must learn if they are to be proficient readers. To help you understand the reading process, I've broken the book into four parts.

In the first section — *Preparing to Teach* — Chapter 1 examines the physical, intellectual, and emotional processes that enable children to understand what they see in print. Chapter 2 deals with the socio-cultural environment that molds a child's desire to read and his or her ability to understand "book" English. In Chapter 3, I've emphasized the importance of interesting today's TV-oriented children in seeking information and pleasure through literature.

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In the second section — *The Planning Framework* — you'll find methods of offering each child an instructional program geared to his or her specific needs. They include a choice of curricular approaches, various ways you can organize your classroom in order to work with children in small groups with similar needs, and a smorgasbord of testing devices you can use to pinpoint individual strengths and weaknesses.

The third section — *Teaching Reading Skills* — is broken down into teachable sections in six different skill areas: vocabulary concepts, word recognition, understanding of sentence patterns and other linguistic elements, comprehension, functional reading skills, and study and research skills students will need in their other courses. There is no reading readiness chapter as such since children may be ready to advance in one skill while developing more slowly in another; readiness for each skill is treated separately. The section opens with a chapter called "The Teaching–Learning Process," which is the heart of the book. It tells how to set and use specific performance objectives, how to find out which children need work in a specific objective, how to set up teacher directed and independent learning activities, how to test students afterwards to see if they've mastered the skill, and how to reteach those who still haven't mastered it. This set of procedures is called the "diagnostic–prescriptive" model. I strongly recommend it as a means of fulfilling the contemporary mandate for individualized instruction and accountability in education.

The final section of the book — *Teaching Exceptional Children* — brings up some special considerations for teaching reading to special learners — those who are linguistically different and are unfamiliar with standard "book" English, those who are handicapped by mental retardation, learning difficulties, or emotional problems, and those who are unusually gifted.

The book ends with a short epilogue describing some ways you and your school can evaluate the effectiveness of your reading program. It also addresses the need for evaluating yourself as a teacher and for continuing your professional growth.

At the end of each chapter, you'll find a special feature called a "Workshop" — a potpourri of activities, sample lessons, and resources to help you put into practice what's been discussed in the chapter. Scattered throughout the book you'll also find pictures of children photographed in one of the one hundred schools that have been using phases of my research program for the past ten years. The main focus of the activities described in the Workshops and illustrated in the photographs is getting children joyfully involved in really using language, rather than just imposing rules and techniques on them.

A "Preview" at the beginning of each chapter shows you at a glance what you'll find in it and should help you understand and remember its organization for study purposes. The extensive bibliography at the end of the book offers avenues for further research. And a separate Instructor's

Manual is available to guide teacher-teachers in the use of this textbook.

I am indebted to many people for their contribution to this manuscript. I appreciate the inspiration of my own students — both young and mature — and those of many fellow teachers dedicated to better ways of teaching reading.

In particular, appreciation is extended to reviewers of the manuscript: Edward C. Turner, University of Florida; M. Sue Collier, North Texas State University; Wanda Gale Breedlove, University of South Carolina; Helen Newcastle, California State University at Long Beach; and Jean E. Winsand, University of Pittsburgh.

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Preparing to Teach

ONE Before we examine the actual processes of teaching reading, it is essential that we get a proper perspective on the task ahead. In Part One, then, we will look at the complex learning experience, at some of the variables at work in each child you will encounter. In Chapter 1 we will cover the inner dynamics — psychomotor skills, sensation, perception, emotions, cognition — that affect a child's learning style. In Chapter 2 we turn to other factors on which learning ability is contingent: family, peer, and community influences, and the ubiquitous TV set. And in Chapter 3 we focus on our goals: helping the children we teach become skilled at reading for both information and pleasure, and instilling in them a joy in reading. A key to these goals is your classroom library, which you will see is far more than just a shelf of books.

Preview

I. Psychomotor skills

II. Sensation and perception

III. Cognition
- A. Intelligence
- B. Kinds of thinking
  - 1. Understanding
  - 2. Memory
  - 3. Convergent and divergent thinking
  - 4. Evaluation
- C. Contents of the brain
  - 1. Figures or objects
  - 2. Symbols
  - 3. Language meanings
  - 4. The behavior of others
- D. Cognitive styles
  - 1. Impulsive or reflective
  - 2. Field-dependent or field-independent
  - 3. Analytic or relational
- E. The halves of the brain

IV. Emotions
- A. Emotional development
- B. Emotions in the school
- C. Motivation to read

V. Reading as verbal communication

VI. A multi-faceted reading program
- A. A variety of learning activities
- B. Personalized instruction
- C. Joy in reading

VII. Summary

VIII. Workshop

Reading as Multi-Faceted Communication

1 Read this sentence:

Tom wants the apple.

How did you do it? How would you teach someone else to read it? Reading sets of straight lines and squiggles like these probably comes very naturally to you since you've been doing it most of your life. But in order to find out what is being communicated by print, you actually have to carry on a complicated mixture of activities.

First comes *sensation*. Your eyes, the basic sense organs used in reading, focus on the words, moving from left to right. To do so, they must be trained in certain psychomotor skills — muscular activities that are associated with mental processes. The patterned array of light your eyes receive is transformed in the retina into nerve impulses; these move to the visual areas of the brain. There, billions of electrochemical memory-storage cells change these sensations into *perceptions*, or "meaning-bearing" responses. They are meaning-bearing because your ears have heard many words and sentences that have tied *language* with *experience*.

When a child first learns to read, seeing each word probably triggers *memories* of its sound so that the reader can "hear" the sounds associated with it. (He has heard and spoken the word many times.) Other stored memories are activated, too: "Tom" (like my cousin) "wants" (like I am hungry now) "the" (signals the coming of the name of an object or happening) "apple" (round, red, crunchy, good to eat) (Hebb, 1966). If a reader runs across words that are not in his memory bank since he has had

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