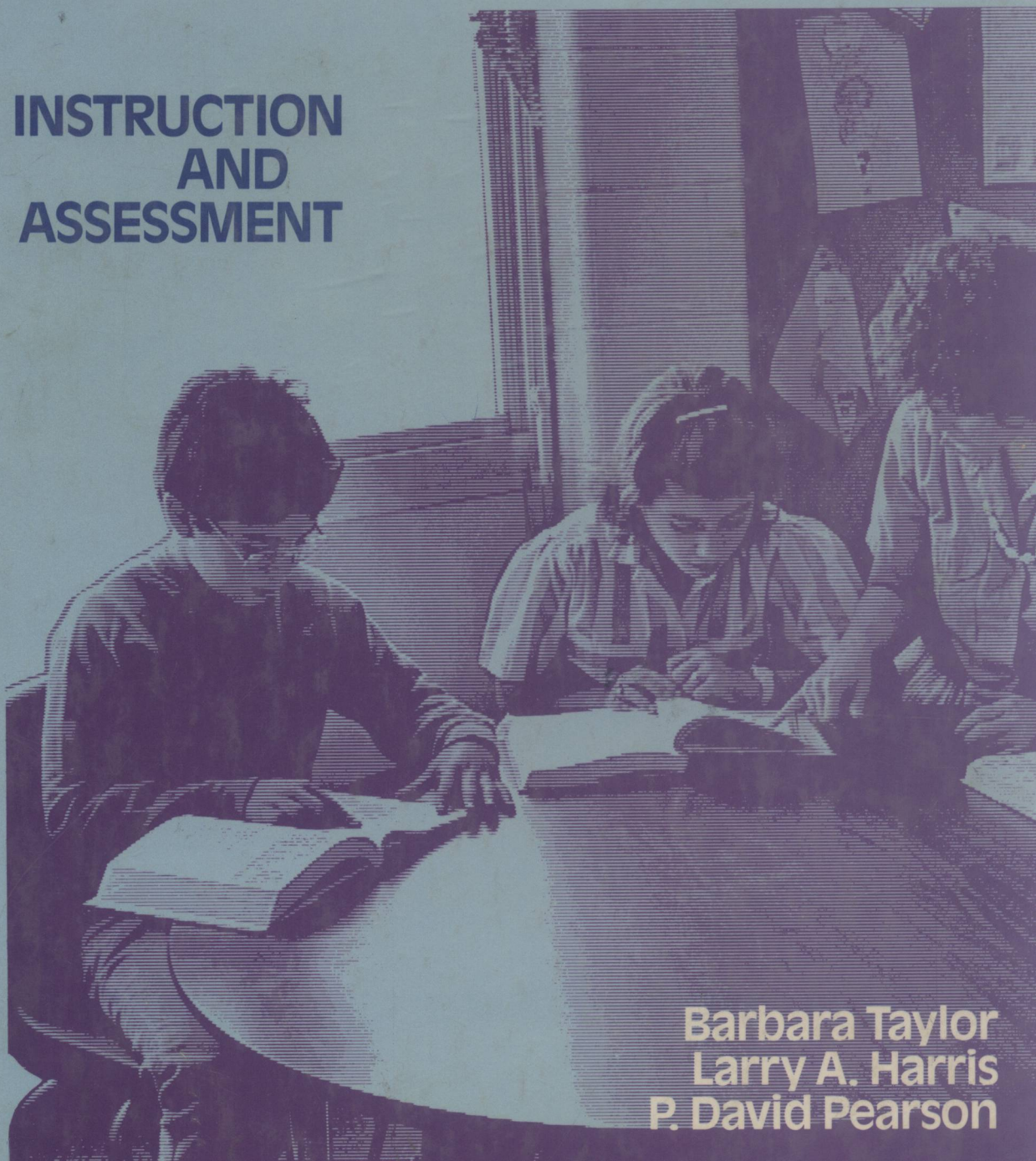
READING DIFFICULTIES

INSTRUCTION AND ASSESSMENT



Barbara Taylor
Larry A. Harris
P. David Pearson

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McGRAW-HILL PUBLISHING COMPANY
New York St. Louis San Francisco Auckland Bogotá
Caracas Hamburg Lisbon London Madrid Mexico
Milan Montreal New Delhi Oklahoma City Paris
San Juan São Paulo Singapore Sydney Tokyo Toronto

READING DIFFICULTIES

First Edition
9876543

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Taylor, Barbara (Barbara M.)
Reading difficulties: instruction and assessment/Barbara Taylor, Larry A. Harris, P. David Pearson.
p. cm.
"Developed for Random House by Lane Akers, Inc."
Bibliography: p.
Includes index.
ISBN 0-07-555546-8
1. Reading disability. 2. Reading—Remedial teaching. I. Harris, Larry Allen, 1940– . II. Pearson, P. David. III. Lane Akers, Inc. IV. Title.
LB1050.5.T34 1988
428.4′2—dc19 87-20739
CIP

Cover photo: Rae Russel

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Preface

This book is intended for classroom teachers who want to learn about providing sound instruction and assessment for their students who are low-achieving readers. The focus of the book is on instruction and assessment in the regular classroom. Therefore, we see the book as useful for elementary and secondary teachers who are participating in a course or series of in-service sessions on reading difficulties or for teachers who simply want to learn about this field of study on their own. We believe that the suggestions provided for instruction and assessment will also be useful for reading specialists working with small groups of students in schools and for reading tutors working with students on an individual basis in reading clinics.

A contemporary view of the reading process with an emphasis on metacognition and reader and text interaction is employed throughout the text. Part I, The Fundamentals of Reading Difficulties, discusses the reading process as well as difficulties in reading experienced by low-achieving readers (Chapter 1) and factors contributing to low-achieving readers' reading problems (Chapter 2). Two chapters are devoted to motivation (Chapters 3 and 4) because we believe that this topic is of utmost importance when working with low-achieving readers. The book gives specific suggestions for assessing motivation, and it develops a conceptual understanding of how motivation can be rekindled in students who have experienced difficulty with learning to read.

Part II, Instruction and Assessment for Low-Achieving Readers, provides an overview of remedial reading instruction and assessment (Chapter 5). This book was written in response to the perceived need for a reading difficulties textbook that focuses on classroom instruction and assessment in word recognition, comprehension, and vocabulary based on students' reading of actual text. Since low-achieving readers typically receive most of their reading instruction in the regular classroom, classroom teachers need guidance on how to effectively help low-achieving readers learn to read better. We believe that teachers can maximize low-achieving readers' reading growth by focusing on instruction and assessment based on the reading of actual text and on regular classroom reading tasks instead of on instruction and assessment based on reading skills performed in isolation.

The book places a heavy emphasis on instruction. Assessment is necessary, but only insofar as it helps teachers make decisions about initial and ongoing remedial instruction in reading. For this reason, we have placed the chapters on instruction (Chapters 6, 8, and 10) before the chapters on assessment (Chapters 7, 9, and 11) in the areas of word recognition, comprehension, and vocabulary. There are detailed descriptions of instructional techniques that have been found to be effective in improving students' abilities in these three areas. In most cases, we follow a model of explicit instruction in which we explain *what* a particular skill or strategy consists of, *why* the skill or strategy

is important, and *when* students would use the skill or strategy as they are reading on their own. We also discuss ways in which a teacher can model *how* to perform a particular skill or strategy and provide suggestions for guided and independent practice. Throughout the chapters on instruction in word recognition, comprehension, and vocabulary there are concrete examples of the instructional strategies we recommend.

The book emphasizes informal assessment (Chapters 7, 9, and 11). It provides detailed explanations of how to assess students' word recognition, comprehension, and vocabulary skills while they are reading instructional level classroom material. Ways in which the teacher can use frequent measurement, careful record keeping, and analysis of collected data to determine students' relatived strengths and weaknesses in these areas are discussed.

Part III, Traditional Approaches to Reading Difficulties, discusses assessment principles applied to remedial reading (Chapter 12). To illustrate what typically has been done in the past in terms of assessment and instruction in the area of remedial reading, we have included chapters on formal diagnostic reading tests and special remedial techniques. We also point out some of the problems with existing commercial diagnostic reading tests and with conventional remedial techniques.

Part IV, Remedial Programs, provides suggestions for implementing a program of remedial instruction and informal assessment for low-achieving readers in the regular classroom (Chapter 15). It also discusses remedial reading programs that might be implemented by reading specialists within elementary buildings or by reading clinicians.

To help the reader comprehend the content of the book, a number of learning aids have been included. Each chapter begins with a list of *main ideas* and ends with a *summary*. *Suggested activities* at the end of most chapters recommend activities the reader can engage in to enhance his or her learning of important concepts and techniques provided in the book. Also, annotated *selected readings* at the end of most chapters provide recommendations for additional reading.

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Part 1

The Fundamentals of Reading Difficulties

The first part of this book sets the stage for what is to follow. In this part we make a statement about our views on the nature of the reading process and how children normally come to be literate. Against this backdrop we examine a number of factors that can interfere with learning to read. Various explanations concerning the cause(s) of reading difficulty are discussed and some of the evidence believed to support these explanations examined. However, regardless of the causes for reading difficulties, classroom teachers are confronted with the task of addressing and overcoming the symptoms of the problem. Because a child's willingness to continue trying to learn to read in the face of repeated failures is often the initial problem to be tackled by the teacher, we first devote our attention to the topic of motivation—what it is, how it relates to reading, how it can be rekindled, and how it can be assessed—before we turn to remedial instruction and assessment in Part 2.

Part 1

The Fundamentals of Reading Difficulties

Chapter 1

Reading and Reading Difficulties

OVERVIEW

As you read this chapter, use the following list of main ideas to guide your understanding and reflection.

Reading is very closely allied to other language processes such as listening, speaking, and writing. It is better understood when it is regarded as a language process.

Reading is a cognitive process, very much reliant on other basic processes such as attention and memory.

When reading is viewed from these perspectives, we can develop a consistent way of understanding how normal reading occurs and what we do when reading does not develop normally.

Perspective is an important aspect of our lives, for it determines how we view and understand the world around us. As authors of a book about reading difficulty, we are affected by our perspective; the recommendations we give for the assessment and instruction of students who have reading difficulties are a direct function of our view of the processes of reading and learning to read.

When we say that Amy Smith has a reading difficulty, we imply that

something is wrong, that somewhere in her reading skill development something that ought to have happened did not happen. Our judgment about the source of Amy's problem is therefore directly affected by our view of what *normally occurs*, how reading skill *normally develops*. And our recommendations for an instructional program for Amy will be similarly biased. We will undoubtedly want to get Amy back on "the right track." Our conception of "the right track" is, again, nothing more or less than a view of the normal reading process.

So, in order to reveal our underlying views of normal reading, we begin our journey into the world of mind, eye, and print with an overview of our perspective about the processes of reading and learning to read. In so doing, we hope that what we say later about assessment and instruction will be clearer, and we hope that you will be able to recognize our biases for what they are—the natural consequences of our point of view about how children learn to read.

Reading is a language process. It is closely linked to other language processes that children acquire: speaking, writing, and listening. Reading, like the other language processes, is a cognitive process. It is centered in the brain, and it involves all the processes that the brain uses in the normal course of mental activity: we pay attention, we perceive, we remember, we forget, and so on.

This chapter has been organized to make these two points as vividly and as convincingly as possible. First it will describe the components of the reading process that characterize it as a language process—its bases in the phonology, syntax, and semantics of oral language. Then it will discuss reading as a cognitive process, using the framework of schema theory to describe how reading works. Finally, it will try to convince you that understanding reading activities and reading difficulties becomes easier and more natural when they are examined from this linguistic and cognitive perspective.

READING AS LANGUAGE

What Children Learn When They Learn Spoken Language

Children learn language. They do it on their own (as long as they can hear others talk), sometimes, it seems, almost in spite of our efforts to perpetuate "charming" baby talk. When they learn language they learn three systems: phonological, semantic, and syntactic.

Phonological Knowledge The phonological system includes knowledge of the different phonemes (individual sounds) in the language, knowledge of how they are blended together to create words, as well as knowledge of less obvious aspects of the sound system—things like stress, juncture, and pitch. Stress is exemplified by the difference between "I *found* a red bandana" (I did not buy