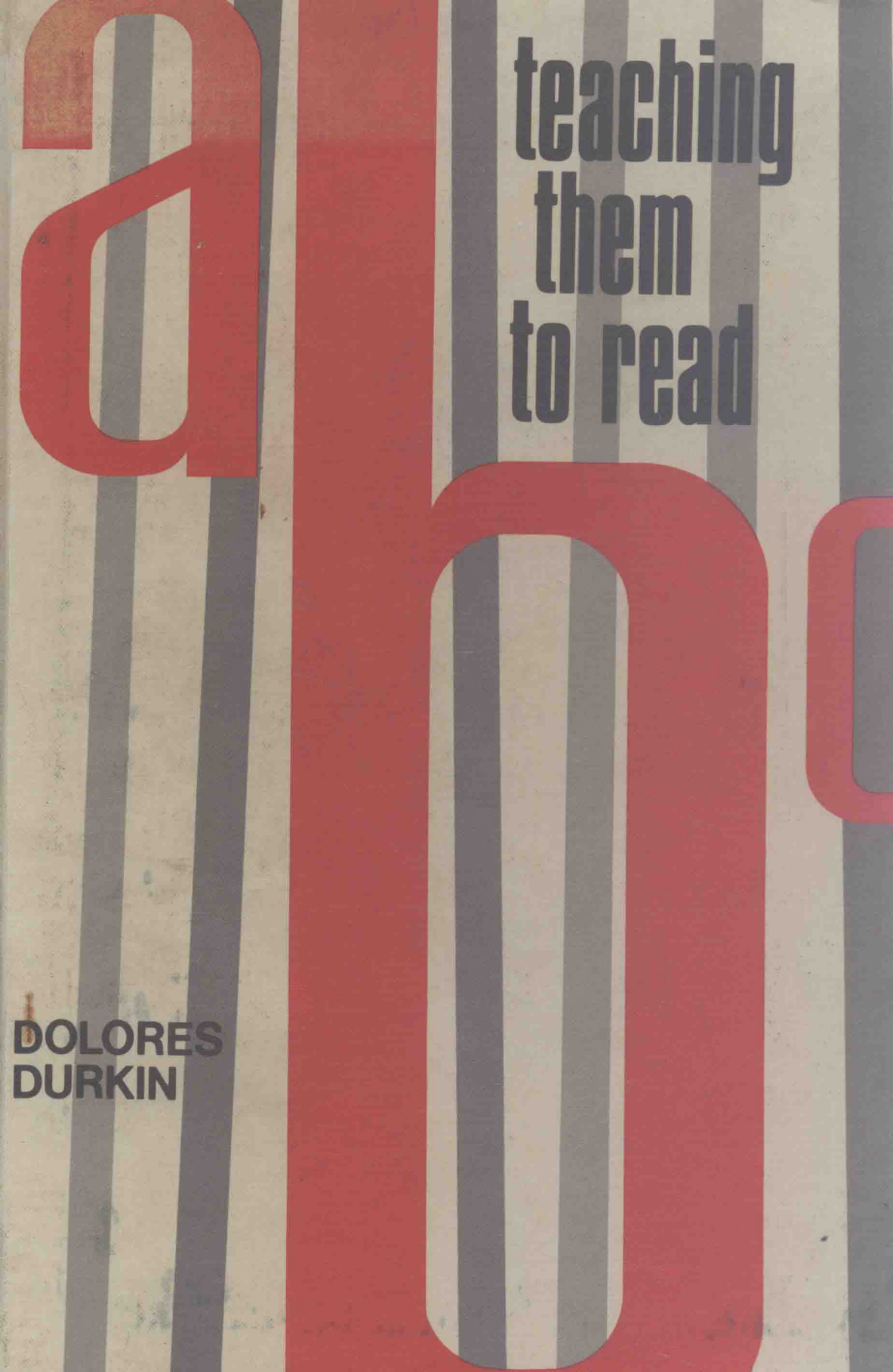
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Teaching Them to Read

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To Gene

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PREFACE

This book reflects the many different sources and experiences from which I have been learning about reading. These include elementary school and university teaching, research projects, innumerable visits to classrooms, in-service work with teachers, and consultations with school systems. The diversity has allowed me to write a textbook that combines the theoretical with the practical.

One book, of course, cannot be all things to all men. I have chosen to write especially for those who are preparing to teach. Hopefully, though, this book will also be helpful to teachers who want to evaluate and improve their efforts to teach reading or to prepare children to learn to read.

Chapters 1 and 2 provide background information and definitions of basic terms. While all subsequent chapters focus on the classroom, Chapter 2 looks at the total school, because that is bound to affect what does or does not happen in the individual classrooms.

Chapter 3 deals with a question that is on the minds of both parents and teachers: When *should* a child begin to read? Because this question has provoked controversy from the time it was first asked decades ago, Chapter 3 considers it from a historical point of view, tracing the answers that have been given as well as the psychological and educational reasons for them. The chapter ends with the current years and the current answers. The next chapter, Chapter 4, looks at reading and the *pre*-school child, because parents constantly wonder what to do about chil-

dren at home who are interested in learning to read and, secondly, because they expect teachers—whatever grade level they teach—to be able to help with their quandary. Chapter 5 explains, with many illustrations, how typical kindergarten activities can become opportunities to start teaching reading to ready five-year-olds.

Chapters 6, 7, and 8 provide a framework for the last seven chapters. They deal with topics about which teachers ought to raise and answer questions before a school year begins. This does not mean that answers at that time will be complete and fixed; but it does mean that a classroom teacher ought to start a new school year knowing about available materials, about possible ways to organize children for reading instruction, and about the values and uses for silent and oral reading. Since these components of a reading program are equally important at all grade levels, the three chapters dealing with them use a variety of grade levels in their illustrative material.

The final seven chapters cover the vital "How to do it?" questions. Chapter 9 suggests ways to get reading started, making the suggestions maximally specific and meaningful by including many examples of teaching procedures. Like all the other chapters, this one supports no bandwagons and makes no claim that there is one best way to teach all children to read. Rather, it makes a variety of suggestions, cites reasons for them, and then shows what the suggestions would look like in a classroom.

Chapters 10 and 11 deal with phonics. Many teachers were elementary school students at a time when phonics received so little attention that they learned too little about its content to teach it well to children. Therefore, Chapter 10 covers content. Teaching phonics is the topic of Chapter 11.

Chapter 12 highlights structural analysis, emphasizing its importance as a way to help children figure out unknown words as they appear in print and as a means for helping them cope with word meanings. Because teachers must be knowledgeable about both the content and the methodology of structural analysis, both get attention.

Chapter 13 discusses the important job of helping children to learn the meanings of more and more words throughout their years of elementary school. Even though increasing his vocabulary assumes importance as soon as a child enters school, not all teachers seem to appreciate its relevance to reading. The earlier chapters in the textbook demonstrate this relevance, and Chapter 13 considers the many ways in which listening and speaking vocabularies can be extended, beginning as early as kindergarten. To encourage, at later grade levels, more frequent instruction in such productive topics as etymology, this chapter

also includes annotated references for teachers who want to add to their own education.

While Chapter 13 deals with the comprehension of individual words and expressions, Chapter 14 is concerned with the comprehension of combinations of words. This chapter begins by recognizing how little is known about reading comprehension because of the little that is yet known about thinking. It then goes on to show the relationship between a teacher's questions and assignments and some of the more obvious kinds of comprehension skills. Like all the chapters concerned with methodology, this one cites many specific illustrations of possible teaching procedures and also shows reproduced pages from materials designed to help with comprehension.

A teacher's knowledge of what each child needs to learn in order to become a better reader is always at the heart of effective classroom instruction. Consequently the topic of Chapter 15, "Classroom Diagnosis," is basic to all the previous chapters. It was left until the end because diagnosis is dependent upon a knowledge of what comprises reading ability.

When this text is compared with other reading methodology textbooks it will be found less research-oriented in the sense that fewer references to reported studies appear. This is a deliberate difference. After much careful study of the research literature, I am only able to conclude that very little about reading methodology is backed up with research findings that provide definite and reliable guidelines. Such a conclusion is not so much an indictment of the researchers as it is a reflection of the complexities of children, teachers, reading, and classroom instruction.

Dolores Durkin

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. . . Reading and Reading Instruction

WHAT IS READING?; KINDS OF VOCABULARIES; READING INSTRUCTION; THE READING TEACHER; THE CHILDREN; THE SCHOOL.

To teach reading, one must have specific understandings and abilities. Vague notions—either about children or about reading—help not at all. Therefore, I have aimed for a maximum of specificity in writing this book. Whenever possible, examples and illustrative material taken from actual classrooms immediately follow discussion of each topic. Also included are reproduced pages from published materials designed to help teach reading.

WHAT IS READING?

The most difficult terms to define are those found in everyday conversations. Technical terms tend to have precise meanings. Common everyday terms, on the other hand, seem almost arbitrary, and we have to struggle to define them. The word *reading* falls into the latter category.

In this text it is assumed that, in certain ways, the beginning stages of reading are different from the more advanced stages. All readers, of course, are concerned with the written form of language. All—whether just beginning or quite advanced—must remember how the individual

words of a language are recorded. They must also be familiar with the meanings of words as they appear singly or in a phrase, sentence, paragraph, or chapter. Yet, as experienced teachers know, children can learn both the symbols and meanings of thousands of words without ever becoming truly mature readers. Why?

The difference between knowing the symbols and meanings of written words, and the ability to read, often is a difference in the ability to think. This distinction becomes very obvious as reading materials become more advanced. For example, the child who can successfully read a problem in mathematics not only recognizes the words used to describe the problem but also thinks like a mathematician as he concentrates on those details which are relevant to its solution.

Or, for instance, the child who is able to read poetry not only recognizes the words comprising a poem but also thinks like and with the poet. He understands a figurative as well as a literal use of language. He is able to visualize or perhaps hear what is portrayed by words carefully chosen and painstakingly put together. Sometimes he is aware of a rhythm first heard by the poet. In other instances he participates in the author's feelings. In a sense, then, the child is able to read poetry because he has the understandings and the ability to become a poet.

Or, to give still another illustration, the child who can read a newspaper editorial not only recognizes the words used by an editor but also is able to distinguish between fact and opinion; to note both stated and implied assumptions; to distinguish between language used to inform and language used to persuade. Here, again, the child becomes like the author in his understanding of both the purposes of editorials and the means commonly used to achieve them.

Other illustrations of what is involved in reading could be cited. However, the few examples that have been described are probably sufficient to point out that (a) successful reading requires the recognition of written words and an understanding of their meanings, but that (b) successful reading, especially of more difficult material, is dependent upon the ability to think like and with the author.

Some types of reading, of course, go beyond the two basic requirements. A reading job may demand more than just knowing what an author says and thinks. Then the reader must raise his own questions and pit his thinking against that of the author. This is referred to as *critical reading*. Today, when children are literally surrounded by all kinds of unfounded claims, exaggeration, and high-powered salesmanship, critical reading merits the attention of all teachers as they plan their instruction.

KINDS OF VOCABULARIES

A child has various vocabularies. The term *reading vocabulary* refers to all the words that he recognizes and understands in their written form. In beginning instruction, the words for a child's reading vocabulary are selected from words which are at least in his *listening vocabulary*—the words whose pronunciations and meanings are familiar enough to the child that he understands them when they are used orally by others. More ideally, though, a beginning reading vocabulary should be heavily weighted with words in his *speaking vocabulary*—words so familiar to the child that he is able to use them in his own speech.

At the start, a child's reading vocabulary is very small compared to the many words comprising his speaking vocabulary. The relative size of the child's beginning vocabulary shrinks even more when compared to his extensive listening vocabulary. In time, though, the child starts to encounter words in his reading which are not even in his listening vocabulary. In fact, the occurrence of totally unfamiliar words becomes commonplace as he is expected to read a history text or a science book or, perhaps, a poem.

In some instances—for example when help from another person or a dictionary is available—the child learns both the pronunciation and the meaning of the new words, making them part of his listening and speaking vocabularies as well as his reading vocabulary. In other instances, however, the meanings of new words in written material become clear while their correct pronunciations remain uncertain. Such a situation, when it occurs frequently over a number of years, accounts for the fact that an adult's reading vocabulary often outgrows his speaking vocabulary. It also explains the uneasiness he feels when suddenly called upon to read something aloud. Even while he reads he wonders, "Will I know the correct pronunciation of all the words?"

READING INSTRUCTION

The foregoing discussion about different kinds of vocabularies suggests that the ability to read is related to abilities in listening and speaking. Especially in the beginning stages, reading can clearly be seen as an

extension of the earlier language skills. It is a response to the written form of words that the child has heard in the speech of others or that he himself has spoken. In all subsequent stages, too, the different dimensions of language are interrelated.

These interrelationships, by the way, are not just of academic interest. They have, besides, very practical significance. For one thing, interrelationships among the different aspects of language are a reminder to teachers that the ability to read does not sprout in a vacuum; it grows out of prior abilities to listen and to speak. Awareness of the interrelationships also brings into focus the breadth of meaning encompassed by a term like *reading instruction.*

In this text, anything a teacher does which leads directly or indirectly, immediately or finally, to improvement in a child's ability to read is considered to be reading instruction. In practice, much of this instruction will be so obviously related to reading that any layman could see the relationship. The teacher who identifies a written word, who explains how letter-sound relationships can be used to figure out unfamiliar words, who discusses the function of punctuation, who gives systematic attention to the variation in different newspaper accounts of the same event—this teacher, quite obviously, is involved in reading instruction. But so is the teacher who habitually displays a rich choice of vocabulary in his own speech, or who introduces new terms to describe the lines and shapes in a picture, or who discusses the methods used in television commercials to sell their products, or who takes children to a museum to see exhibits related to their own study of a particular historical period.

That very different kinds of activities contribute to a child's eventual progress in reading is emphasized in this text because without a conscious awareness of this more realistic perspective, teachers can easily develop such a narrow concept of instruction that it inevitably leads to routine and unimaginative reading programs. It is possible, for example, that the teacher who views instructional materials only in terms of books, who views teaching procedures only in terms of having one child read aloud while other children follow the words silently in their own books, and who views assignments only in terms of having children answer questions about a story, is carrying around in his head a too narrow concept of reading instruction.

Sometimes, though, an emphasis on the breadth of activities encompassed by a term like *reading instruction* unintentionally suggests a reading program that is somewhat incidental, unstructured, and even vague in its goals and procedures. Such a program is not the focus of this text. Instead, its view of reading requires systematic instruction. It stresses the need for teachers to identify what each child needs in order

to advance his reading ability; to plan instruction in relation to these needs; and to evaluate outcomes as a way of determining the direction and the content of subsequent instruction. To insure these three procedures, it is recommended that at all grade levels a definite period of time each day be used to teach reading.

What happens during these instructional periods will vary, of course, from classroom to classroom, and even from day to day within a single classroom. What is unvarying, however, is that effective instruction is based not on a factor like the grade level to which a group of children has been assigned but, rather, on the kinds of help each child needs in order to advance in his ability to read. That is why diagnosis is an intrinsic part of all successful instruction. In fact, one way of thinking about reading instruction is to view it as a continuing search for the skills and abilities which need to be introduced or expanded, for the particular shortcomings that need to be remedied, and for the particular interests that can be used to make remedies more palatable. Obviously such instruction requires a knowledgeable and skillful teacher.

THE READING TEACHER

Throughout the many years in which the school has accepted responsibility for teaching reading, enthusiastic claims have been made for the singular productivity of some new teaching method or, perhaps, some new materials. Typically, the method or the material is introduced into a school in a way that makes its success inevitable. Today, for instance, teachers using a supposedly new method or somewhat different materials often receive special help in preschool workshops and meetings. Once the school year begins, it is common for these teachers to meet periodically to discuss what they have been doing and to work out problems that might have developed. In addition, interested visitors come to their classrooms to find out more about this "new way" of doing things or, perhaps, to evaluate its results. Predictably, the results are very positive. There is new hope for better reading.

But then, in time, the special help given the teachers stops, the attention wanes, and the new approach settles down to the level of routine. Now, however, nobody is around to notice the lack of spectacular results or to see children with reading problems. Instead, everyone is busy talking about still another new teaching method or about the development of still different materials. In time, these other methods and materials will be used by teachers who will receive not only special

assistance but, in addition, an amount of attention that is hardly ordinary. Perhaps it is unnecessary to say that their teaching, too, will be successful. Why?

Because of the key importance of the teacher, anything that makes him more knowledgeable and enthusiastic will have a positive effect on the outcomes of his instruction. No method, no matter how "scientifically" worked out, and no materials, no matter how carefully assembled and handsomely packaged, can take the place of a teacher who is both able and eager to succeed. In his hands, the most mundane of materials become interesting. As he uses and adapts them, the most ordinary of teaching methods is productive.

Because of the unique importance of the teacher, the emphasis of this text will not be on any bandwagon approach to teaching reading. For instance, no method will be described as *the* solution for every child's reading difficulties. Nor will any particular materials be promoted as being the best for all children in every classroom. Instead, what is available in methods and materials will be described. Then, it is hoped, readers will make choices in relation to the particular children they are assigned to teach. A safe assumption—especially for new teachers—is that some of the choices will be productive but that others will not. However, in time, and piece by piece, the right choices will evolve into a reading program that has something of value for every child involved. A program of this kind will emerge most quickly for the teachers who are most eager to have it.

THE CHILDREN

Just as experience and observation make clear the special importance of the teacher in any instance of successful instruction, so too do they highlight the significance of the learners. Probably teachers themselves become especially aware of their significance on the school days when all goes very well and on those days when the dismissal hour cannot come too quickly. Both the successes and the failures, it would seem, have a way of emphasizing that the outcomes of instruction are affected by the learner as well as by the instructor.

In some instances the learners in a classroom make successful instruction almost easy. They come to school with an eager interest to learn to read. Their minds are uncluttered with personal problems and concerns. They are adequately clothed and well fed. Their health is good, their energy vast. They are bright and they are curious.