Reading Instruction and the Beginning Teacher

A Practical Guide
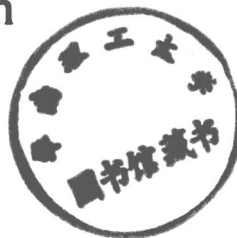
James F. Baumann
Dale D. Johnson

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A Practical Guide

Edited by

James F. Baumann

Purdue University
West Lafayette, Indiana

Dale D. Johnson

University of Wisconsin–Madison

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J I H G F E D C B

Preface

Our purpose in developing this volume is to fill a void in materials for college-level reading instruction. Many fine reading methods textbooks are on the market, all of which contain the basic information needed for training teachers in reading instruction. For example, the texts already available contain strategies for teaching word identification, vocabulary, and comprehension skills; procedures for assessing and diagnosing reading ability; and information about the various methods and materials used in reading instruction and about management and organizational options available to teachers.

In working with preservice teachers in reading methods courses, however, we have found that our students are frequently overwhelmed with the great volume of information contained in general methods texts and frustrated when authors present an extensive array of methods and materials for teaching reading but fail to recommend what is sensible and practical for a beginning teacher to use. In other words, beginning teachers want to know which *specific* procedures and techniques will be effective for them, given their limited experience.

Reading Instruction and the Beginning Teacher: A Practical Guide is a unique reading textbook and one that we believe fills this void. Rather than presenting teachers a potpourri of methodological materials and options, this guide includes only tried and tested procedures known to be effective and appropriate for teachers with limited experience. All of the contributing authors are professional reading educators who have had many years' experience as classroom reading teachers. Each chapter is written in a nontechnical, readable style and presents a specific set of teaching strategies or organizational guidelines

that is not only based on current research and theory but also, and more important, is educationally sound, easily managed, and realistic for a novice teacher to implement.

Do not be misled; this text is not simply an "idea" book or a reading "cookbook." Although this book presents many concrete teaching strategies, it offers a *select set* of instructional procedures—those known to be appropriate and feasible for a teacher of limited experience, a beginning teacher.

The text is organized into four parts. Part I presents teaching strategies for the development of basic reading skills: word identification, vocabulary, and comprehension skills. Part II contains information and procedures whereby beginning teachers can assess and diagnose their students' reading strengths and weaknesses and then use this information to make sensible instructional decisions. Part III presents organizational and management plans that are known to be effective but are also feasible for a beginning teacher to implement. Part IV describes numerous strategies for motivating children to read both in school and at home. We refer the reader to the introductions that precede each of the sections for additional preview information.

In addition to the content of our text, we believe several other features distinguish this book from others. As previously mentioned, there are introductions for each of the four parts of the text. Chapter introductions also provide the reader an abstract of each chapter and relate and link one chapter to the next. We are perhaps most proud of the many activities, exercises, and case studies contained in this book. Our authors have made a conscious effort to *involve* readers with the chapters by requiring them to *do* while they *read*. These activities enable readers to apply information as they are learning it. Each chapter concludes with a recommended readings section, a brief annotated bibliography of additional related readings.

As its title indicates, this book is aimed toward the needs of beginning teachers— undergraduate (or graduate) preservice teachers in teacher-training programs. Recent graduates of education programs—those with five or fewer years of teaching experience— may also find this text useful and informative. Experienced teachers wanting to update their knowledge of reading instruction, especially practical teaching strategies, also may be interested in this text.

Given such an audience, this text is appropriate for undergraduate reading methods courses as well as for beginning graduate-level developmental reading courses that bring teachers back to university classrooms after they have acquired some teaching experience. As a final note on the use of this text, we envision a university instructor using this book either in conjunction with a basic developmental reading methods text or even in lieu of such a text when classroom lectures, activities, and demonstrations address topics not covered by this book.

We wish to thank all the contributors to this guide for their efforts in translating their knowledge of reading instruction into practical instructional techniques, for the ultimate goal of true educators is to bring theory and knowledge to practitioners. We also sincerely thank Wayne Schotanus, our editor, for his encouragement and guidance, and Sharon Harrington, Anne Heller, Marcia Bottoms, and other members of the Burgess staff for their competence and cooperation in the production of this text.

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James F. Baumann
Dale D. Johnson

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Contents

PART I

Teaching Basic Reading Skills: Word Identification, Vocabulary, and Comprehension Strategies

Part I deals with the development of basic reading skills in the areas of word identification, vocabulary, and comprehension. Chapters 1 and 2 present strategies that beginning teachers can use in teaching children basic skills in word identification. Chapter 3 and part of Chapter 4 provide suggestions for expanding children's meaning vocabulary. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 address the complex task of teaching children to comprehend what they read. Chapter 4 provides suggestions for teaching comprehension at the word, sentence, and passage levels; Chapter 5 presents strategies teachers can use to engage children actively in comprehension instruction; and Chapter 6 describes activities appropriate for the development of critical reading skills. Chapter 7 explains the use of poetry as a medium for teaching a wide range of reading skills, and Chapter 8 provides beginning kindergarten and first-grade teachers numerous suggestions for the development of literacy skills in young children.

Helping Children to Identify Words by Using All Three Cue Systems of the Language

Dixie Lee Spiegel
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

The ultimate goal of reading instruction is to develop readers who can skillfully comprehend what they read. In order to achieve a high level of competence in reading comprehension, however, readers need to be able to read individual words. In other words, the ability to identify words is a necessary (but, to be sure, not sufficient) condition for reading comprehension. In this chapter, Dixie Lee Spiegel discusses three cue systems that readers can use to help them identify words: the semantic system (what "makes sense"), the syntactic system (what fits grammatically), and the graphophonic system (how letters are translated into sounds). Spiegel presents not only a clear discussion of what each cue system involves but also provides many concrete ideas for teaching children to apply each cue system. In addition, the reader will find exercises that help children to monitor their word identification skill, to integrate two or three cue systems when appropriate, and to be flexible in switching from one cue system to another according to the particular unknown word.

This chapter introduces the three cue systems of the English language and describes practical activities that will help children to develop the ability to use all of these cue systems effectively when reading. Teaching word identification in the elementary grades is too often perceived as a matter of teaching only phonics, and children learn primarily to huff and puff at isolated words in the name of reading. Unfortunately, such children are trained in using only one cue system of the language: the graphophonic cue system. A good reader is able to use all three cue systems of the language: the semantic (meaning), the syntactic (word order or grammatical), and the graphophonic (letter/sound) systems. A good teacher gives children the tools to use these cue systems and provides them ample opportunity to practice using the tools.

THE SEMANTIC SYSTEM

The semantic system is the meaning system of language. It is the semantic system that allows us to decide that the missing word in "I was cold, so I put on my _____" could be *sweater*, *scarf*, or *gloves* but not *shovel*, *glasses*, or *earrings*. A child's ability to use the semantic system to identify an unknown word in a sentence depends a great deal on the child's concept of what reading is all about. If a child does not think of reading as a process of finding meaning, she[1] might make a miscue (a deviation from the expected response [Goodman and Burke, 1972]), for example, inserting *glasses* in place of *gloves* in the example above. If the child views reading only as making noises based on the letters on the page, the child is likely to abandon the semantic system in favor of the graphophonic system (the letter-sound patterns of the language). The child is apt to provide nonsense words that have the *sounds* of the printed letters but that do not mean anything. For example, if the word *gloves* were part of the sample sentence above, a child who relies only on the graphophonic system might pronounce this word *glōves* (rhyming with *coves*).

The child who perceives reading as a process of finding meaning, however, uses the semantic system as an aid to word identification (in conjunction with the other cue systems, as we will see). That child might miss the exact word, substituting perhaps *sweater* for *scarf*, but the miscue would still make sense. The miscue might not represent the precise meaning that the writer intended, but the basic meaning-getting nature of reading would not be violated.

A child's ability to use semantic cues also depends on the child's experiential background. A child who has lived in Florida since birth would be less likely to be able to identify *stiff* in "The cold wind made our faces feel *stiff*" than would a native Minnesotan. Unless one has experienced minus 30 °F on a windy day, the word *stiff* does not spring to mind.

The great advantage of a broad experiential background is that the reader is better able to *predict* which word would make sense in a given slot than a reader who knows nothing about the topic. Readers who are able to use the semantic system effectively often can predict the next word before they see it.

Try this example to see how your own experiential background helps or hinders you.

The whiffling marfweezel has four legs, striped fur, and p_____ eyes.

Naturally, you supplied the right word, *plaid*. What? You did not? You put in *purple*? One would think you had never even heard of a whiffling marfweezel.

Try again.

The body of the bald eagle is covered with black or dark brown feathers, while its head is all wh_____.

How did you do this time? Did you put in *white*? Of course, you did.

A child who has no experience with the concepts presented in a story is at the same disadvantage as you were in reading about the mythical whiffling marfweezel. To be able to use the semantic system to identify unknown words, the reader must have a meaningful store of relevant experience from which to make predictions.

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[1]To avoid the use of sexist language or intrusive substitutes in this textbook, the feminine pronoun has been used alternately with the masculine pronoun throughout.

THE SYNTACTIC SYSTEM

The syntactic system is related to the grammar of the English language. Word order is an important aspect of the syntactic system. Because English is a highly positional language, only certain word classes (parts of speech) can fill certain spots in a sentence. In "I was cold, so I put on my _____," only a noun makes sense in the slot. A guess of *hers, into,* or *mumbles* would violate the syntactic system, since none of these words is a noun, and the resulting sentence would not "sound right." That is, it would not sound like the English language. *Red,* an adjective, would be acceptable syntactically only if the slot were followed by a noun.

If a child put a verb into a slot that could only be filled by a noun, you would immediately wonder what that child thinks reading is all about. A good reader knows that the end result has to sound like real language, even if he is not sure of all of the words.

In addition to the child's understanding of the relationship of language to reading, the child's familiarity with the syntactic patterns of printed material can be an important factor. For example, "Betty Sue, who was the oldest girl in the third grade, was the smallest child in the class, despite her age" is so complex and convoluted that even you may have had trouble reading the sentence and understanding it. If the syntactic patterns are not familiar to the child, then the child may have trouble using the syntactic system to help identify unknown words.

THE GRAPHOPHONIC SYSTEM

In English, the letters used to spell a word often give some indication of the way that word is pronounced. Unfortunately, the graphophonic system does not always work. The common words *some, said,* and *do,* for example, should be pronounced *sōmĕ, sāĭd,* and *dŏ,* according to phonic "rules." Therefore, unlike some languages (e.g., Spanish), English does not have a reliable one-to-one correspondence between sounds and symbols or, conversely, between symbol and sound. The "long *e*" sound can be written as *e (be), ee (see), y (city), i (ski), ie (piece),* and *ea (bead).* The letter *a* can represent an equally bewildering array of sounds, as in *star, walk, father, assess, game,* and *bead,* to name a few examples.

On the other hand, the letters in a word often can give enough clues for identification of the word, especially when the word occurs in a meaningful context and the word is part of the child's speaking or listening vocabulary. For example, although *put* does not follow the common consonant-short vowel-consonant rule (CVC), most children would be able to identify that word in "Put that book over there" simply by using the consonant cues (*p* and *t*) and the context. Using the graphophonic cues (especially consonants) frequently helps readers get close enough to the target word to identify it when the word is used in context and is familiar.

Some children pay little attention to the graphophonic system when attempting to identify unknown words. These children might substitute *coat* for *sweater* in "I was cold, so I put on my coat" if they were attending only to the semantic and syntactic cues. Such children could use practice in integrating the use of graphophonic cues with the use of the other two systems. A few children disregard all three systems, with disastrous results, such as "I was cold, so I put on my *special.*"

Other children pay too much attention to the graphophonic system. These children are not concerned about whether their reading makes sense or whether it sounds like

language; they just want to "sound out" those words. As a result, they might say, "I was cold, so I *putt* on my gloves." These children need work with materials that deny them graphophonic cues and so force them to rely on context.

THE USE OF ALL THREE CUE SYSTEMS TOGETHER

Reading is not just "barking at print" (i.e., pronouncing words by using only the graphophonic system). Reading involves receiving the writer's message; therefore, it must use the semantic system of the English language. Reading also involves understanding that what one is reading is language; therefore, the use of the syntactic system is important. Reading also involves being able to select the writer's precise meaning from all possible choices; therefore, the graphophonic system often comes into play. Overreliance on any one of the cue systems can cause problems in reading.

Children need to be *taught* to use the cue systems interactively. They need to be shown how these systems are interwoven, and then they need to be given a great deal of practice in anticipating words through using the semantic and syntactic systems and in confirming these anticipations through using the graphophonic system. They need to be *taught* strategies for changing their decisions when subsequent information proves them wrong.

A Practice Exercise

Teachers should be able to recognize opportunities to help children practice the use of the three cue systems. Teachers should also recognize when one cue system offers more efficient clues than another, and they should be able to guide children toward using the most appropriate cue system. To help judge your own expertise in selecting the appropriate cue system, complete the exercise that follows. (The answers can be found after the exercise.) When completing this exercise, assume the following: (1) The child can read every word in the sentence except the one set in italics. (2) The child has read as far as the italic word and stopped, looking to you for help. (3) The child has had phonics training in consonant sounds and major vowel patterns. For each sentence, indicate what you think would be the *one* best way to help the child to identify the italic word. Mark *S, T,* or *C* in the blank for each example according to this system:

Put *S* on the line preceding the sentence if you would tell the child to *"sound the word out" by using BOTH consonant and vowel cues.*

Put *T* on the line if you would simply *tell the child the unknown word.*

Put *C* on the line if you would have the child use *context* (i.e., *tell the child to finish the sentence and see what makes sense).*

_____1. I like *suede.*

_____2. That is *enough* cake for me, thank you.

_____3. The *hat* is very tall.

_____4. I *have* to go now.

_____5. Did you *praise* him?

_____6. We went to the *ballet.*

_____7. Because Mother asked me, I used the *broom.*