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TEACHING BEGINNING READING THROUGH  
THE EXPERIENCE APPROACH

AN ABSTRACT OF  
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Children learn most effectively when reading activities are meaningful to them. These activities can be meaningful only by relating them to the past associations of the children. Therefore, the building of a rich background for each child is of prime importance. The experience approach to teaching reading uses those experiences from the children's backgrounds that are the most meaningful.

In the readiness stage of reading, the background of each child should be extended and enriched. In the classroom, many materials should be available for experimentation by the children. Trips furnish additional experiences and give the children the opportunity to check incomplete knowledge at first hand. Then, after seeing and doing something new, the children should be encouraged to talk about their experiences and listen to other experiences, for the more familiar a child is with language, the more meaningful printed words will be to him. Many new experiences are also found in books and the background of each child can be enriched greatly as he enjoys listening to his parents and teacher read to him.

The experience approach to reading builds a sight vocabulary through the association of symbols with the things the child can see, touch, and play with. In this way, the words he first learns have real

meaning for him. No other word means so much to a child as his own name and this is usually the first word he learns. Next, the objects around him are labeled and discussed. Then, notices, directions, plans, and news of special interest to the children are written on the blackboard or bulletin. Each activity used to introduce a new word is meaningful and purposeful because it is done with the children and is in their own words.

The child actually begins to read through the use of experience charts. These charts use only material that is familiar to the children. Each child learns the many skills necessary to help him become a good reader under the direct guidance of the teacher. These skills are easily taught through experience charts because the phrases and simple sentences contain familiar associations and much meaning for the child. If special care is taken in the use and construction of experience charts, the material will be meaningful and the interest will be kept high. As the child becomes proficient at the reading of many experience charts and adept at the skills needed to recognize printed symbols, he progresses easily to being able to read simple books.

A child reads quite literally with his own experiences. The building of experiences needs to continue throughout the reading program. Children can best use their experiences by beginning reading through the use of experience charts. These charts use the child's own vocabulary, have broad pupil interests, develop a better feeling for sentence structure and sequence, and are controlled by the teacher to fit the individual needs of the class. Reading, therefore, becomes an integral part of the children's experiences.