

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SENSORY SKILLS  
in  
THE PHONETIC KEYS TO READING SERIES FOR GRADE ONE

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## INTRODUCTION

To learn to read, a child must first learn to listen, and then to speak. Words on paper have meaning only if a child has used them or heard others use them. In these ways a child establishes the concepts and meaning for the words.

In one sense, the process of learning to read begins at birth. At that moment, the child begins to prepare himself, under the guidance of people in his environment, for the time when he will be able to derive meaning from the printed page. A child's progress can be seen in many ways. As he grows he learns to read in other areas long before he starts reading from the printed page.

All of the child's sensory organs have a definite effect upon his ability and growth in learning to read. He learns to read with his ears. Words that were only sounds to the infant take on meaning and symbolize the familiar things around him. Soon he imitates the sounds and so progresses to another stage of speech development, namely auditory discrimination. This enables the child to detect similarities and variations in sounds, which is a necessary skill in phonics.

He also learns to read with his eyes. Visual discrimination begins very early with the recognition of his toys, bed, and the persons who surround him. This visual skill

is strengthened as he notes likenesses and differences in objects, pictures, later letters and words in reading.

The sense of feel or the use of a child's fingers contribute to the reading ability. The heat of the sun, the cold winter wind and the stickiness of the candy provide early experiences for the child. These experiences also help to develop the child's writing skills.

He also learns to read with his nose. The smell of the freshly baked gingerbread, sweet odor of flowers, or clean sheets give meaningful experiences that later apply to formal reading.

The sense of taste creates behavior patterns very early in the child's life, which have a definite relationship to learning to read.

The processes of learning to read as mentioned in the preceding paragraphs refer to the process of developing meanings to go with printed words. In a wider sense, it refers to the process of developing meanings to go with other types of stimuli--persons, gestures, tones of voices, and things.

After the child has had varied experiences perceived through his senses from birth to the approximate age of six years, he is ready to learn to read from the printed page. According to Burton, "The process of reading is commonly defined as getting meaning from the printed page. A more accurate definition is bringing meaning to the printed page. Meaning comes from previous experiences."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>William Burton, Reading in Child Development (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1956), p. 6.

Burton states further that:

The reading process involves not only the present sensory experiences, but also the recallable residues of previous experiencing and present goals and purposes. The process is not mechanical, but it is highly creative and adaptive to moods, ideas, organic conditions and the like. Meanings are created and are projected to stimulus situations. We do not get meaning from stimuli but we make meanings out of them. That is why it may be said that we read with our prejudices (and other things) as well as with our senses.<sup>1</sup>

Reading in the primary grades is the process of making discriminative responses to the printed page through sense stimuli. The child makes direct responses by sensory reading through audio, visual, aural, tactile, thermal or kinesthetic routes. There are many methods of teaching reading in the primary grades. Most educators feel that there is only one goal--for the child to be able to read both orally and silently with confidence, assurance, fluency, understanding and interest.

The writer wishes to relate the use of the child's sensory organs in the phonetic approach to teaching reading as programmed in the Phonetic Keys to Reading basal series for grade one. The first grade program is divided into three levels, (1) audio-readiness or pre-primer, (2) primer, (3) first reader. At all three levels the sensory skills are developed in the analyzing of words and the reading of the stories. His ears are used to hear the sounds that the twenty six alphabetical letters represent, his eyes to see

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

and recognize the letters that are symbols for the sounds, his fingers to feel and write the letters for the sounds, his nose and tongue to reproduce the sounds vocally.

It should be kept in mind that phonics at the primary level is not an end in itself. It is a tool for helping the child to develop skills in word analysis and for helping him to use his initiative in applying these skills to his listening, speaking, reading and writing. The more associations the teacher can use, the better the results of teaching.

It is the writer's intention to present the development of the sensory discrimination skills as being essential in the Phonetic Keys to Reading program and to suggest supplementary games, activities, and procedures from other sources to enrich the phonetic program.