

A BEGINNING ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECTIVENESS
OF THE PHONETIC KEYS TO READING
in
THE RIDGEFIELD, CONNECTICUT, PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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PKR is a complete reading program which includes instruction in all other reading skills, along with a strong phonetic approach. The program is based upon the belief that a pupil should have a knowledge of the letters and their sounds before he is introduced to formal reading on the pre-primer level. In addition to an auditory training period of eight weeks, the pupil learns to apply a few simple yet powerful phonetic principles before the introduction of any pre-primer reading. At the very beginning of any reading the first-grade pupil is given a basis for attacking words independently to give him a feeling of pride and confidence. The purpose of the inclusion of Phonetic Keys to Reading Program into the Ridgefield schools' established reading program was to strengthen that program and to help build independence in word-attack.

The first chapter of the thesis deals with the selection of a program which appeared best suited to the needs of the first-grade classes involved in the study. The primary teachers felt that pupils could not adequately hear sounds of words used in the Ginn basal readers, they could not differentiate between the long and short vowel sounds and they lacked word-attack skills needed for independence in reading. A committee of the professional staff was formed to investigate the PKR, which was being used successfully in Norwalk, Connecticut and New Rochelle, New York. The committee adopted the phonetic program on a one year

experimental basis and in September, 1962 the PKR was inaugurated in the primary classes of all the Ridgefield public schools.

Chapter II reviews the history and the research supporting the phonetic approach to beginning reading. The research done by Julie Hay and Charles E. Wingo revealed that thirteen per cent of all English syllables are not phonetic, eighty-seven per cent of all syllables in our language are purely phonetic and the words in which unphonetic syllables occur are in part phonetic. Knowledge of phonetics is needed to enable a child to attack independently ninety-four per cent of our English words containing the short vowels.

The several studies comparing the phonetic method and word method discussed in this chapter revealed that the phonetic method developed independence in word recognition, ability to work out the sounds of new words and ability to recognize a large vocabulary of written words.

In Chapter III the objectives, materials employed, and the skills taught are discussed in detail for each book of the PKR series. After the completion of each book, the Ginn basal series were utilized as supplementary reading materials. At the end of a year of using PKR the pupil was able to read these books independently; any new words he encountered he could analyze. The pupil read rapidly and smoothly with little hesitation in sounding out the new words.

The fourth chapter deals with an evaluation of the program through observation as well as standardized tests administered during the school year. The Metropolitan Achievement

Tests were used to measure the pupils' growth in reading under the PKR. A summary of the test data showed that this new method helped children's recognition and use of words, and in comprehension. The results indicated that (1) the experimental group had fewer children below the national norm than the control group using the Ginn series, (2) over fifty per cent of the experimental group achieved at the superior level as compared to the control group, (3) the experimental group scored higher than the control group in Word Discrimination which indicated that the PKR program helped the child to associate the sound of the word with its printed form and to distinguish the printed word from other words similar to it with respect to beginning, ending, or middle sounds, and (4) the test scores of the first grade children in the experimental group are significantly higher on the average than the scores of children in the control group.

A questionnaire was distributed to first grade teachers in Ridgefield to discover whether this particular method benefited the children. The general consensus of opinion was that the PKR seemed to be a better method of instruction. Independence in attacking new words gave them more confidence in reading simple library books.