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**THE ROLE OF PHONICS**  
**in**  
**THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL READING PROGRAM**

**AN ABSTRACT OF**  
**A THESIS**  
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**by**  
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The role of phonics in reading instruction in the elementary schools has been a much discussed topic. The problem is no longer whether or not phonics should be taught, but rather when, how, and how early in the school life of a child should phonics be taught. This thesis has been written to present phonetic analysis in detail. The writer has presented the positions of reading authorities on the place and value of phonic instruction and has attempted to give readers an insight into the methods and procedures of phonic instruction.

Instead of isolated drill on phonic elements, as was done in the past, phonics has become an integral part of the reading program in which it is functional and meaningful. The emergence of functional phonics and the historical background of methods of teaching phonics are discussed in Chapter I. The chapter also highlights the history of the English language and points out that the English spelling is not entirely phonetic. Since many words cannot be unlocked through phonetic analysis, the phonetic approach should be regarded as only one of the methods of word recognition.

Chapter II of the thesis discusses readiness for phonetic analysis and concludes that while evidence is not conclusively in favor of very intensive phonics at the

preprimer level, neither does it support a very slow and gradual phonic program. The major part of phonic instruction is introduced in the second and third grades. Visual discrimination and auditory perception, two basic components in the total phonic process, are also discussed as part of the phonic readiness program. Chapter II provides a reading program for grades one through three on phonetic items and the sequential order in which they should be drilled. The writer concludes that an effective program must consider individual differences and progress from the simpler, more widely used elements and generalizations to the more difficult. Also discussed are phonetic generalizations and their importance in the analysis of a word.

Chapter III contains a brief description of basal phonic systems and a supplementary phonic program. Since evidence about their value is not conclusive as yet, caution is advised in evaluating the claims made for these phonic systems. The writer also presents sample activities for practice in visual discrimination and auditory perception skills. These supplementary aids are helpful for review and reinforcement in a phonic program.

The writer contends, as many reading authorities do, that phonics can never be the total answer to the problem of teaching children to read. However, phonetic analysis is an important part of the total reading program and can materially aid reading if based on these principles which are discussed in the thesis body: (1) The work in phonetic

analysis should be adapted to individual differences. (2)  
Phonics must be used in balance with other word recognition skills and be directly related to the instructional material which children are using. (3) Instruction in phonics should follow a systematic program with frequent review. (4)  
Generalizations should be developed inductively.