

AN EXPERIMENT IN FIRST GRADE READING

A THESIS

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by  
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During the 1958 - 1959 school year, the first grade teacher at Falls Avenue School, Oakville, Connecticut, conducted an experiment that attempted to evaluate teacher guided parental aid in helping children to read.

Step by step the teacher guided the parents through a complete reading program which started with reading readiness and encompassed every phase of first grade reading. This program was carried out through the media of group meetings, individual conferences, demonstration lessons and bulletins sent to the home.

At the close of the school year the children were tested by Dr. Joll of the State Department of Education. He found the class to be above average in reading with no non-readers. But more important than their academic achievement was the fact that the children's personalities seemed to develop wholesomely and happily in this warm friendly atmosphere where the home and the school join together to work for the good of the child.

Most of the parents were wonderfully cooperative. They were very much interested in the meetings, conferences and especially the demonstration lessons. They developed a better understanding of the school, the teacher and amazingly of their own children. Some admitted their lack of knowledge in

child psychology. Others confided that formerly they had been afraid to help their children with reading because "they might do it wrong." Most of the parents were eager to learn all they could about the reading program.

It was unfortunate that the parents of the best readers were the most interested while some of the parents of the poor readers lost interest early in the program. The teacher had to contact them many times by telephone in order to make appointments for conferences, meetings, etc. These parents were also disinterested in library visits and carpools to the library. One parent felt that it was the teachers job "to teach the kids." But most of the parents were not only willing but anxious to help their children.

A phase of the program which delighted and interested the parents the most was a living example of interest and experience chart reading. This developed from the adoption of a stray cat by the class. "Rainy" lived in first grade the whole school year. A class roster designated which child would take the cat home for lunch or for the night. Rainy joined in all class activities, which resulted in much reading for interest and enjoyment and a decided aid to vocabulary building. This experience provided excellent ground work, demonstrating to parents the value of interest, motivation, and experience in learning to read.

The children constituted the happiest, best adjusted group of children the teacher has ever taught. They were delighted to have the teacher and their mothers "friends." Their reading improved amazingly due to the extra time spent on it at home, but most of all their personalities responded to the friendly home-school relationship.

The children knew that reading was an important accomplishment. They felt that they themselves were important people -- important enough for their mothers to visit school and learn about their reading -- important enough to have to show their mothers "how we do it in school."

This experiment also involved the children as a class in an active library program, rather unusual in such young children. The librarian of the Watertown Library, Mrs. Shons, brought books to the school regularly upon demand. Parents formed carpools to drive the children to the library. Every morning as part of opening exercises several children displayed "their book" and read a part of it to the class. Parents also took books from the library to demonstrate their reading at home. This had a wonderful psychological effect on the children.

The teacher felt that the experiment was a success. The close relationship with the parents engendered a warm friendly relationship which created an ideal situation for learning. The frequent meetings with the parents made for a better understanding of the children. The testing by

Dr. Joll of the State Department of Education proved that the children read better than the national average for their grade.

This was a difficult experiment in that it was most time-consuming and exacting. After many meetings, parents would visit with each other and the teacher. This tended to lengthen the school day considerably.

The teacher also felt that she played a dual role -- elementary school teacher and training teacher to a group of parents. Either one of these positions is a full time job. In suggesting this experiment to others the teacher would suggest that a helper in the form of a student teacher or even an office worker would be most helpful.

But with all the hard work involved in this experiment the teacher had a great sense of fulfillment and satisfaction. She felt that most children realized their full potential not only in reading but in personality development. The classroom was always a busy, happy place. The parents were pleased with the experiment and grateful for the extra time and effort donated to it by the teacher.