

**A SEARCH INTO WAYS
of
TEACHING BEGINNING READING**

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**by
Lucille P. Jordan
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The controversy over the teaching of beginning reading that has raged for over a decade has resulted in enormous confusion for parents and teachers who are lost in a turmoil of words, opinions, and materials. What has been missing has been a clear, calm look at the facts about how to begin, when to begin, what materials to use for instruction, and how to organize classes for instruction.

A research project into the many innovations in teaching beginning reading brings together the relevant facts in the controversies and examines the materials and methods in use.

A brief description of some of the new programs are presented in what is believed to be the historical order of their impact as challenges to conventional programs. These descriptions are presented with the hope that one may gain from the descriptions a clearer understanding of the principles underlying both the conventional and the new.

Generally, three major lines of innovation in the new programs can be detected:

1. Innovations to bring about earlier acquisition of the alphabetic principle.
2. Innovations to bring about greater individualization of instruction.
3. Innovations to bring about more vital, realistic, and imaginative content, or to underplay content altogether.

Some of the new programs reflect only one of those trends, some two, and some all three. However, all continue to incorporate some of the aspects of conventional programs.

Despite recent innovations, most children in America still learn to read from instructional materials called a basal-reading series or the eclectic readers. Critics of the prevailing view are, in effect, criticizing these materials.

Children using the eclectic readers are taught by a sight or word method. The pre-primers start the child off on learning to read words and throughout the primary grades--up through the book for the end of the third grade--words are pretaught. Phonics are taught too, but they receive much less emphasis. Most of the practice suggested is on "understanding the stories." Throughout the primary grades, these programs lean heavily on the teacher. Very few self-directed pupil activities are provided or suggested.

A research program in First-Grade Reading Instruction provided for coordination of a number of individual reading studies making possible the exploration of the relative effects on early reading growth of various approaches to beginning reading instruction. The instructional approaches evaluated included Basal, Basal plus Phonics, i.t.a., Linguistic, Language Experience, and Phonic/Linguistic.

Results of the correlation analysis revealed that the ability to recognize letters of the alphabet prior to the beginning of reading instruction was the single best

predictor of first-grade reading achievement. The analysis of methodology indicated that the various non-basal instructional programs tended to be superior to basal programs as measured by word recognition skills of pupils after one year of reading instruction. The Phonic/Linguistic program was superior to the Basal or Eclectic Program utilized in the projects of this investigation. The Phonic/Linguistic program produced pupils with superior word meaning, paragraph meaning, spelling, and word study skills.

Thus the chapters in this thesis show that changes in theory, research, and practice in beginning reading instruction are indicated.

A code emphasis is recommended as a beginning method to start the child.

Finally, each teacher must try to learn from the work of those who preceded him and to add to a unified body of knowledge--knowing that neither he nor anyone following him will ever have the final word.