

# Curriculum Developments

Column Editor: Arthur Hoppe

## A Study of Children's Language

Most educators, when they consider the nature of the language used by children, hark back to the research of the 1930's because there have been few significant studies since that time. Yet anyone who has listened to children through the years is aware that children today use extensive vocabularies, have varied interests, and many of them talk very maturely. It would be strange indeed if children were not using language in advance of children of similar age 20 or 30 years ago, because of the advent of television, radio, motion pictures, travel in the family car, and with children's books in all the supermarkets.

In contrast to this during the past 30 or more years the vocabulary of children's textbooks has been consistently simplified and controlled until there is danger that many children, through sheer boredom and lack of interest, do less well with learning to read than they are capable of doing. Information is needed regarding the relationship of the language used by children to the language of the reading textbooks and the quality of the children's reading skill.

A study is in progress at Indiana University that is designed to analyze the structure of children's language in the first through sixth grades, compare it with the language of the books which

children use in learning to read, and study the influence of any apparent differences on success in learning to read. The study includes these phases:

1. Recording the spoken language of 6 through 12 year old children in its spontaneous form in free interaction with children and adults and in its structured form in sharing, planning, reporting and evaluating periods in the classroom
2. Analyzing this spoken language for the following points:
  - Kinds of sentences
  - Length of sentences
  - Linguistic structure of sentences
  - Amount and kinds of subordination
  - Patterns of word usage
  - Rhythm and flow of language
3. Analyzing for the above points selected samples of reading matter in certain widely used sets of readers for grades 1 to 6
4. Appraising children's interpretation of some of these samples read orally
5. Testing children's comprehension of the meaning of similar samples of material when read silently
6. Comparing the quality of reading with the quality and kind of spoken language used by children of varying age, sex, intelligence, and socioeconomic levels.

To date, recordings have been made of the speech of 750 children of grades one through six, taken in informal situations. A sample from each recording has been analyzed by a linguistic formula devised and refined by six of the country's lead-

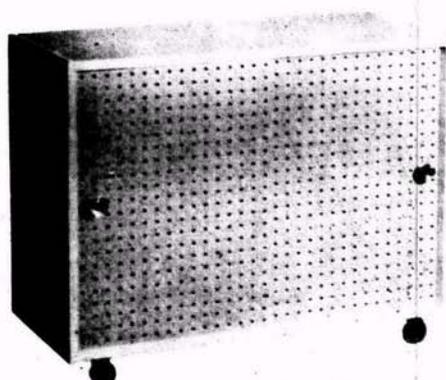
ing structural linguists. The formula is designed to indicate children's handling of the fixed slots in sentences—subject, predicate, inner complement and outer complement—and also their use of various types of movables denoting place, time, manner, cause and the like.

Though the study is only at midpoint, it appears increasingly clear that children, even at six years of age, are using all of the types of sentences used by adults. While older children use more advanced and complicated fillers for many of the sentence slots, children of all ages are skillfully using many patterns of subordination. Their speech flows smoothly and rhythmically, not cut into choppy units. The fact that few significant differences are appearing related to age, sex, socioeconomic level or level of parental education seems to indicate that within children's experience are highly effective leveling influences.

Recordings will next be made of language in more formal situations to determine the level of maturity a child may display in a setting that calls forth the best he is capable of achieving. It appears possible that the child who uses language maturely can learn to read material of similar level but that the child who rarely twists his tongue or his mind around a well-knit compound or complex sentence will read such a sentence orally with poor interpretation and silently with poor comprehension. This part of the study is still to be completed.

#### New Materials

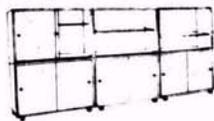
St. Paul Public Schools. *Social Studies for Elementary School Children, Kindergarten—Grade Six*. Curriculum Bulletin No. 71. St. Paul, Minnesota: the Public Schools, 1959. 110 p. (\$.125)



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Many classroom teachers worked with an Elementary Social Studies Curriculum Committee of 40 members over a period of four years to produce this bulletin.

This publication is an important source of information, ideas and suggestions, covering organization, teaching techniques and basic elements of content. Pertinent skills to be developed, suggested activities and likely procedures are well presented. This includes a careful outline for planning and developing units which is generally followed in the illustrative units for each of the grades. Growth characteristics of youngsters for each grade are stated, together with some implications for teaching.

While the guide contains much specific help for teachers, it is deliberately broad and flexible so that every teacher who uses it may adapt it creatively to the par-

ticular needs and interests of his own pupils, their groups, their communities.

Long Beach Unified School District. *Life in Early California, A Unit of Work for Fourth Grade Children.* Long Beach, California: the School District, Office of Curriculum, Division of Instruction, 1959. 337 p. (No price indicated.)

Fourth grade teachers of Long Beach have here a unit which exemplifies very well the integrated experiences approach to the teaching of social studies. Appropriate emphasis is placed on subject knowledge; but conspicuous importance is attached to attitudes, techniques and behaviors characteristic of good citizenship in a democracy.

Life in early California was much simpler than it is today, yet it was pulsing with great vigor and drama and charm. This study by fourth graders provides, on the one hand, essential background for exploring the beginnings and expansion of our country, and, on the other hand, a basis of comparison with the complex social order of today.

This unit displays horizontal organization. The objectives for all topics of the unit are placed first. These are followed by teaching suggestions and suggested areas of experience. The section on evaluation provides for oral and written exercises, pupil and teacher concerns, and actually directs major attention toward improvements in *behavior*. The unit ends with elaborate listings of readings and resources of all kinds.

The work done in the production of this unit was of high quality. The result must be enormously rewarding to the builders and the users of the bulletin. Long Beach has a long and excellent reputation in the production of curriculum materials. This publication should enhance the system's fame still further.



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Los Angeles City Schools. *Health in the Elementary Schools*, Publication No. EC-201. Los Angeles: Division of Instructional Services, the City Schools, 1959. 360 p. (No price indicated.)

This is a factual and functional instructional guide for health from kindergarten through grade six. Some 1200 staff members were assisted by various consultants and representatives of community and public health agencies in its production. These persons were interested in helping children acquire scientific information about personal and public health, wholesome attitudes and effective habits.

The guide begins with two very useful charts: one showing the growth characteristics of elementary children; the other showing the scope and sequence of health experiences contained in the entire bulletin. Thus broad perspective is



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provided for any teacher at any grade level. Part One then outlines health instruction for each grade, and Part Two presents detailed health information for teachers and many teaching suggestions. Elaborate resources are identified—books, articles, films, filmstrips, pictures and recordings. There are many suggestions for evaluation and several illustrative test forms.

The guide is a distinctly scholarly work. It is comprehensive and is skillfully organized. It shows good use of color and illustration.

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M. Dunfee, in elementary social science, and Virgil E. Schooler, in health education.

—ARTHUR HOPPE, *Associate Professor of Education, Indiana University, Bloomington.*

## Team Teaching

*(Continued from page 88)*

time. New curriculum materials suitable for large-group instruction must be found or created, rooms rearranged and refurbished, audio-visual and clerical aids purchased, etc.<sup>1</sup>

For these reasons, many school systems will move slowly in setting up instructional teams, in spite of all their apparent advantages. Nevertheless, it seems certain that team teaching is going to play a more and more important role in the future of American education. How can it lose, after all, when the children are behind it? Most of the children who have experienced team teaching have been enthusiastic. They seem to adjust quickly to the idea of having several teachers instead of one. They make more friends and join more activities. Most of all, they find school more interesting. With team teaching, the old-fashioned picture of the hopelessly bored child, forced to sit and squirm day after day in a certain seat in a certain room, listening to the droning voice of the same teacher, becomes a thing of the past.

<sup>1</sup> For some recent descriptions of team teaching plans in practice, see: Robert H. Anderson, "Three Examples of Team Teaching in Action," *The Nation's Schools*, 65: 62-67, May 1960; Robert S. Gilchrist, "Promising Practices in Education, II," *Phi Delta Kappan*, March 1960, p. 269-74; and Liz Wilson, "150 Mittens," *Mark* (Mark Publications, 64 Wall St., Norwalk, Conn.), April 23, 1960, p. 5-8.

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