

A Perspective on

READING INSTRUCTION, 1973

PAUL CONRAD BERG*

AMERICAN reading instruction has reflected, as a kind of history, the fortunes of a growing, progressive country. As America has continued to change, so have its systems and materials of reading instruction, passing through as many as eight major periods of emphasis.¹ Until the 1900's, most of these changes were philosophically motivated and not based on research.

Before the 1920's, classroom reading was from one assigned reader, and each pupil read orally as his turn came. With the advent of testing in the early 1920's, ability groupings were initiated; silent reading techniques and skills workbooks were introduced as necessary for "seat work"; and the first remedial reading programs were created to help those who could not profit by regular classroom instruction. The introduction of the concept that reading was a thinking and reasoning process brought about a broader spectrum of reading content, including factual material and stories for silent reading based on children's experiences. Thus the "lock step" of the class period "recitation" began to break down, making way for directed reading activities based on the experience background of individual pupils.

The changes that began in the 1920's grew relatively consistently until around the 1960's. Technically, there were major changes during this period in the development of the attractiveness of books and materials, accuracy of grading for readability, the publication of a large number of reading and aptitude tests, the addition of a great range of parallel materials, and experimentation with a variety of aids and mechanical equipment for improving rate of reading, word recognition, and the like. But at the elementary level of reading instruction, the basal reader program dominated the classroom. Indeed, it had held this position since the introduction of the McGuffey Readers in the 1840's.

In the middle 1940's the termination of World War II sent many thousands of men and women back to college. Inadequate reading skills by many of these returning veterans, coupled with military research on visual perception during the war, encouraged the development of college reading programs and the production of college level reading improvement materials. High schools did not develop reading programs on any scale until the 1950's when technological advances,

¹ Nila B. Smith. *American Reading Instruction*. Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1965.

* Paul Conrad Berg, Director, Reading Clinic, University of South Carolina, Columbia

particularly space development, and the civil rights movement created much concern in America over our educational institutions and their curricula. Today, at both the high school and college levels, curricular changes and the addition of special programs to accommodate reading and study skills training are much in vogue.

A Mobile Society

The events which led to the U.S. Supreme Court's decision of 1954 that racial segregation of schools was unconstitutional accentuated for the nation's schools the diverse language patterns and cultural differences of a mobile society bent on an education for all its youth. New areas of investigation and research were sought to find answers to these new problems. The science of linguistics, with its emphasis on decoding, caught the attention of many who were working with the linguistically different pupil in the belief that an application of linguistic theory to the task of decoding was more "natural" for this pupil than was the basal reader's eclectic approach. In 1963 *Let's Read*² was published as a first reader of this type, and in 1966 *The Linguistic Readers* was the first graded series to apply linguistic theory.³

Present emphases in reading instruction that are language based, such as language experience approaches and listening-speaking programs, are developed from a linguistic point of view.

Before the 1960's the materials of American reading instruction reflected the social and cultural biases of the middle class, suburban white family. In 1964 the *City Schools Reading Program*⁴ was prepared, and it included reading texts offering content

² Leonard Bloomfield and Clarence L. Barnhart. *Let's Read*. Bronxville, New York: C. L. Barnhart, Inc., 1963.

³ Charles C. Fries, Agnes C. Fries, Rosemary Wilson, and Mildred K. Rudolph. *The Linguistic Readers*. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1966.

⁴ Detroit Public Schools. *City Schools Reading Program*. Chicago: Follett Publishing Company, 1965.

familiar to the multicultural, multiethnic backgrounds of urban children. Other readers of the same type appeared almost simultaneously. New editions of basal reading series began to offer these content changes also. With the concerted attempt to reach all the pupils involved, multimedia and multi-sensory materials became more and more in evidence, and reading programs like *Sesame Street* and the *Electric Company* began to appear on national television.

Publishing houses aided by imaginative authors and inventors made ready large amounts of new and innovative materials and devices. The purchase of these was greatly abetted by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act passed by Congress in 1965, making available to American schools billions of dollars for their general upgrading. Funds through the Office of Economic Opportunity were supplied to finance preschool educational programs such as Head Start, but many of these early attempts did not result in significantly better first grade achievement than that of pupils who had not had these preschool experiences.

The orbital flight of the Russian Sputnik in 1957 and the subsequent technological explosion in the United States exerted another important effect on reading instruction. It placed a great deal of pressure for achievement on the American schools, and the space race developed the concept of the systems approach, which brought together literally thousands of persons from many professions to work on a single project. This idea was incorporated into a variety of educational systems, reading instruction being one area to benefit. Concepts from industrial technology, medicine, psychology, optometry, and from many other disciplines were brought together to form systems of instruction made up of multilevel, multisensory, multimedia materials which are individually prescribed through continuous evaluation of the pupil and in which each pupil progresses at his own rate.

Many schools are moving toward writing their own individually prescribed instructional systems, including the concept of behavioral objectives. These objectives, based

on a taxonomic theory of development, fit the concept of a systems approach, for performance based objectives of learning thus stated are amenable to measurement, which is paramount to the success of the systems techniques. Systems approaches available for reading are the IGE or Individually Guided Education system,⁵ and the IPI or Individually Prescribed Instruction.⁶

Computer assistance for individually prescribed instruction is available also. There are two basic systems: Computer Assisted Instruction (CAI) provides the pupil with a device through which he can communicate with a computer simply by typing his name and the lesson number he wishes to study; the pupil responds by answering questions provided by the computer.⁷ Computer Managed Instruction (CMI) makes available to the teacher prescribed tests, readings, and activities based on an analysis of the pupil's

skills levels, interests, etc., relative to a particular content.⁸

Instructional modules are becoming extensively developed and used. They represent the attempt to build "packages" or modules of instruction on specific tasks to be learned. They incorporate the concepts of behavioral objectives and include in the system a pretest, rationale, instructional alternatives, a post-test, and resources. Instructional alternatives, the heart of the system, include a variety of media and techniques for completing the learning task. The pupil selects those elements he finds necessary to satisfy his criterion of performance.⁹

Evaluation

The U.S. Office of Education in 1964-65 sponsored 27 first grade reading studies in an attempt to discover if one combination of reading methods or materials was better than another. Stauffer, reporting the results of these studies, stated that the one general-

⁵ *Individually Guided Education*. Dayton, Ohio: Institute for Development of Educational Activities, Inc., 1970.

⁶ *Individually Prescribed Instruction*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Research for Better Schools, 1971.

⁷ James Schiavone *et al.* "Computer Assisted Instruction in Reading." *Education* 91: 301-302; April 1971.

⁸ John M. Finch. "An Overview of Computer-Managed Instruction." *Educational Technology* 12: 46-47; July 1972.

⁹ Richard W. Burns. "An Instructional Module Design." *Educational Technology* 12: 27-29; September 1972.



The School of the Future NOW

**Edited by
J. Galen Saylor**

Experienced and committed school people sketch their visions of urgent reforms for schooling of the future—needed NOW. They focus on four levels of maturity, but the perspective is the total school program, with practical application at all levels.

Contributors: William M. Alexander, Charles A. Beckman, Milly Cowles, Donald H. Eichhorn, Jack R. Frymier, and Mark Shedd.

Stock No. 17680 Price \$3.75 138 pp.

Order from:
Association for Supervision
and Curriculum Development
1201 Sixteenth Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036

zation which could safely be made was that "every method described used words and phonics, and pictures, and comprehension, and teachers."¹⁰ No method was found to be uncontaminated by another, nor could it be determined that one method was superior to another. Chall,¹¹ after an exhaustive study of reading methods, concluded that research in reading had added relatively little to the overall development of reading instruction. Wardrop, in 1971,¹² discussed three particularly vexing problems in reading research. They are design/analysis mismatch, inadequate specification of "treatments," and con-

¹⁰ Russell Stauffer. "Some Tidy Generalization." *Reading Teacher* 20: 4; October 1966.

¹¹ Jeanne S. Chall. *Learning To Read: The Great Debate*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967.

¹² James L. Wardrop. "Some Particularly Vexing Problems in Experimentation in Reading." *Reading Research Quarterly* 6: 329-37; Spring 1971.

ASCD Yearbooks on Microfilm

Copies of all ASCD Yearbooks, from 1928 to the present,* now are available on microfilm from University Microfilms. The Yearbooks, many of which have long been out of print, may be obtained on 35mm microfilm, 16mm, or microfiche.

Out-of-print numbers also are available in geographic form.

Permanent reference files may be completed, and future Yearbooks will be microfilmed as issued.

* No yearbook issued in 1941.

Write for complete information, or order direct from:

Xerox-University Microfilms
300 North Zeeb Road
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106

trol groups that do not control. Farr and Tuinman in 1972 discussed further some measurement problems, including selection and validity of tests for reading research, reliability of assessments, appropriateness of scores used in data analysis, and the description of tests and testing conditions.¹³

A study of these articles and others makes one believe that there is very little in the literature to suggest that reading research is more effective now than it was in the past decade when the "first grade studies" were made.

The Future

Refinements in individualization, using the technology already discussed, will undoubtedly continue to be the mark of the seventies. Refinements in research, financed and administered on a national scale like the present National Assessment in Reading,¹⁴ will be necessary to answer definitively the many questions about the methods and materials of American reading instruction. Changing values in American culture will continue to affect the story content and language usage, and women's liberation movements are already demanding "equal time" in the stories of the reading materials of the future.

The National Right To Read effort has targeted the task of assuring that, by 1980, 99 percent of the people sixteen years old and 90 percent of those over sixteen shall be functionally literate.¹⁵ Unless scientific research contributes significantly by giving direction to the development of new methods and materials and finally making valid evaluations of this effort, it would seem a reasonable prediction that the project will be less than entirely successful. □

¹³ Roger Farr and J. Jaap Tuinman. "The Dependent Variable: Measurement Issues in Reading Research." *Reading Research Quarterly* 7: 413-23; Spring 1972.

¹⁴ Frank Womer. "What Is National Assessment?" National Assessment of Educational Progress, A Project of the Education Commission of the States, 1970.

¹⁵ "The National Right To Read Effort." *Reading Teacher* 25: 616-17; April 1972.

Copyright © 1973 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.