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ABSTRACT

Debate regarding the teaching of reading as skills versus reading as securing ideas has been in evidence for some time. The "measurably stated objectives" philosophy emphasizes that the act of reading should be divided into specific skills in which the inherent component parts are identified and a highly detailed list of precise objectives are stressed in teaching and learning situations. A psychology of behaviorism harmonizes well with a skills reading curriculum. Toward the other end of the curriculum, an idea-centered curriculum may be emphasized. The excitement and challenge of reading ideas is paramount, and learners seek, select, and read diverse materials, sequencing their own learning. Trade books are much in evidence. A psychology of humanism harmonizes well with a "reading as securing ideas" approach. Holism is involved in that learners are to comprehend subject matter and appreciate literature rather than achieve specific skills, measurably stated, in reading. Specific skills may be emphasized as the need arises, but not as predetermined, precise objectives for learner attainment. Whether behaviorism or humanism is used as the philosophy of reading instruction, teachers need to guide each student to achieve optimally in reading. (RS)

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READING: SKILLS VERSUS IDEAS

Should the teaching of reading emphasize skills for learner attainment or should ideas receive major stress? Debates in the teaching of reading pertaining to the skills/ideas controversy has been in evidence for some time. Can the dichotomy be harmonized or are the two concepts too far removed from each other?

Reading as Skills

Teachers advocating a skills approach in teaching tend to analyze the actual act of reading when students are taught to read. Within the framework of reading, there are grapheme-phoneme relationships. When reading, individuals notice sequential graphemes (letters) and attempt to make the corresponding sounds (phonemes). A phonics program of reading instruction may result. Many letters do have their corresponding specific sounds in a one to one relationship. Irregularities in spelling individual sounds place a limit on the use of phonics in associating graphemes (symbols) with phonemes (sounds).

When analyzing further component parts of the reading act, syllables are certainly in evidence. A pupil may not know a word until he/she divides the unidentified word into syllables. Many pupils then determine which the unknown word is. Advocates of the skills approach in teaching reading place much emphasis upon learners dividing unknown words into syllables in the decoding process of print.

In addition to phonics and syllabication goals for

pupils to attain, skills educators would emphasize configuration clues. Words individually have a specific form or shape. The word "house" is longer, does not have an ending letter go below the line, and has the letters h, u, and e which "dog", for example, does not have.

Reading skills philosophy of teaching stresses young readers learning to use picture clues. If a learner does not identify a word, the picture may present the needed clue to the reader in recognizing unknown words. Skills are also needed to identify the unknown word in context within a sentence. The pupil needs to place a word for the unknown that makes sense in relating the other words in the sentence.

In teaching skills for word recognition, the teacher needs to teach phonics, syllabication, configuration clues, picture clues, and context clues. These five skills are inherent in the act of reading.

Beyond word recognition, the reading teacher must teach comprehension skills to pupils. Skimming or scanning, as well as reading to follow directions, secure facts, acquire main ideas, and obtain generalizations are salient for pupils to achieve in order to understand and attach meaning to content read, according to skills approach advocates.

Skills in reading can then be divided into component parts or specifics. The act of reading is analyzed into word attack and comprehension skills. Skills need to be

mastered first, prior to broader goals such as reading for enjoyment and overall comprehension in reading entire selections, articles, and books, according to advocates.

Skills approaches may emphasize a strong phonics curriculum whereby several textbooks may provide scope and sequence for kindergarten through grade two pupils. Phonics would then receive major emphasis in the reading program on the primary level of instruction. Pupils must learn to decode individual words in terms of relating symbols with sounds. Adequate consistency should then exist between grapheme and phoneme.

A psychology of behaviorism harmonizes well with a skills reading curriculum. Behaviorism with its predetermined objectives for students to achieve measures if learners have or have not been successful in goal attainment. To achieve the precise objectives in behaviorism, the teacher, logically, sequences learning opportunities for pupils. Sequence then resides within the thinking of the teacher, not the pupil himself or herself. Basal readers, accompanying workbooks, and specifically teacher designed materials may stress pupils achieving sequentially in each skill area, such as phonics and syllabication. The abstract may be prized more highly here than the concrete and semi-concrete phases of instruction. Concrete and semi-concrete materials are emphasized as they guide pupils to achieve the abstract such as phonics

generalizations and rules for syllabication.

With behaviorism and skills objectives in reading instruction, the following assumptions appear to be valid:

1. the reading teacher is in the best position through education and experience, to order and arrange objectives in ascending order for pupil achievement.
2. direct reading instruction is needed to teach skills to pupils learning to read.
3. activities for pupils should emphasize that which is stated within objectives, not outside that framework. The activities become valid as they harmonize and relate directly to stated objectives.
4. evaluation to ascertain achievement in reading is measured against each behaviorally stated objective.
5. validity and reliability in measurement is then possible to evaluate pupil achievement in reading.

Reading as Securing Ideas

Advocates of reading as a means of securing ideas tend to believe in holism when pupils read. The whole is involved here since the goals of reading must stress the securing of subject matter. Problems in reading may be hurdled by the quality of content read. The excitement and challenge of reading ideas become paramount, not specifics in word recognition techniques nor the kinds of comprehension emphasized at a given time. Reading is more than this. Reading stresses facts, concepts, and generalizations students attain as a result of learning to read.

To be holistic, the student and reading materials, need to be one, not separate entities. Thus, the learner must be heavily involved in seeking, selecting, and reading diverse types of literature. The student selects that which is interesting, purposeful, and provides for diverse ability levels.

An adequate number of trade books, covering diverse topics and levels of achievement, needs to be placed on an interest center. From the selection, the learner chooses a book to read. He/she reads the content at his/her own optimal level of achievement. The learner does not compete with others to stay ahead of them in total books read. Rather, the student feels challenge and motivation in desiring to read. The learner competes against the self to grow, develop, and achieve.

The teacher needs to introduce a few trade books to students to encourage their appetites for reading. A well developed bulletin board to motivate reading is also necessary. Former students' products made to reveal comprehension in reading may be housed at a center or station. Thus dioramas, murals, models, objects, pencil sketches, and water color products may be shown to students. From the models learners may select individually how they wish to be appraised after completion of reading a trade book. Additional ways a learner could choose to reveal comprehension pertaining to reading a trade book

include the use of pantomimes, creative and formal dramatizations, written reports, writing outlines, and oral reports given to the class.

The student is the chooser of sequential trade books to read. The teacher is a resource person, a guide, and a motivator. He/she selects a trade book if the student cannot do this for the self.

A psychological reading curriculum is in evidence if students sequence their very own learning, such as reading sequential trade books. Student sequencing of their own learning activities does not harmonize well with behaviorism which stresses a logical curriculum.

Humanism, as a psychology of teaching, stresses heavy input from students in the reading curriculum. Teacher-pupil planning of objectives, learning opportunities, and appraisal procedures in reading emphasizes the heart of humanism as a philosophy of instruction. A contract system could further emphasize tenets of humanism. The student takes the lead in stating trade books to be read in contract form. The due date of fulfilling the contractual agreement, as well as signatures of the student and the reading teacher, need to be in the contract. Thus, what will be read and how achievement in reading is to be appraised for each trade book read need to appear in the contract. Students tend to be highly motivated when setting their own goals. The due date can be challenging for learners to

fulfill. The reading interests of students will definitely be inherent in trade books to be read. Self-evaluation in the appraisal process might well become a very demanding way of evaluating achievement, progress, and growth.

Reading to secure ideas stresses

1. an open-ended reading curriculum whereby learners select from among others, which trade books to read sequentially.
2. heavy student input into self-selection of reading material.
3. sequence being within the student, rather than external forces.
4. interests of learners being predominate in choosing and selecting content to read.
5. learner selection of evaluation procedures to determine progress in reading.

In Closing

Two philosophies of reading instruction were discussed. The measurably stated objectives philosophy emphasizes that the act of reading be divided into specific skills. The specifics of reading need identification in which inherent component parts are identified. Phonics, for example, then can emphasize a highly detailed list of precise objectives to stress in teaching and learning situations.

Toward the other end of the continuum, an idea centered reading curriculum may be emphasized. Holism is involved in that learners are to comprehend subject matter and appreciate literature rather than achieve specific skills, measurably stated, in reading. Here, phonics and other

skills, maybe be emphasized as the need arises, but not as predetermined, precise objectives for learner attainment.

Be it behaviorism or humanism, used as philosophies of reading instruction, the teacher needs to guide each student to achieve optimally in reading. Individual differences in reading achievement need adequate provision to develop a literate society.