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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

TEACHERS' DIFFICULTIES IN READING
AND THEIR CORRECTIVES

By

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INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

This bulletin reports the results of an attempt to collect difficulties which teachers encounter in the teaching of reading and to formulate correctives for these difficulties. As in the case of a similar investigation in the field of arithmetic, Miss Streitz found that teachers have not analyzed their experiences so that they are conscious of their difficulties. This condition constitutes the limitations of an investigation of this type and affords a significant criticism of the efficiency of our present teachers. It is hoped that the investigation, even though it has not proved highly successful with reference to identifying difficulties in teaching reading and to providing correctives, may stimulate teachers to analyze their experiences and thereby lay the foundation for improving their instructional procedures.

This report, as many others issued by the Bureau of Educational Research, represents the cooperation of a large number of teachers and superintendents in Illinois. To all who have contributed we gratefully acknowledge our indebtedness.

Walter S. Monroe, Director
Bureau of Educational Research.

February 10, 1925
TEACHERS' DIFFICULTIES IN READING AND THEIR CORRECTIVES

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Teacher difficulties versus pupil difficulties. The teacher's task is to stimulate and direct the pupil in his learning. In assisting the pupil to overcome a particular difficulty which, as a learner, he may have encountered, the teacher may or may not meet with difficulties also. Her difficulty although related to the pupil's is not identical with it. In addition, the teacher because of the general conduct of her class may have to contend with obstacles which have no counterpart in the experiences of the pupils.

Purpose of the investigation. The first purpose of the investigation reported in this bulletin was the compilation of a list of the specific difficulties that teachers are actually encountering in the field of reading. The second purpose was the formulation of one or more proven correctives for each difficulty. Wherever possible these correctives have been restricted to those methods and devices which, the writer found, were being used successfully by teachers but, as the number of such correctives was far from adequate, books on the teaching of reading and other sources were utilized.

Plan of investigation. During the school year of 1921-22, a request was addressed to the superintendents of city school systems in Illinois asking them to invite their teachers to report specific difficulties which they were encountering in the field of reading. The responses to this invitation furnished a tentative list of difficulties. The second step in the investigation was a visit by the writer to a number of school systems for the purpose of observing the teaching of reading, of interviewing teachers in regard to their specific difficulties, and of seeking correctives for the various specific difficulties listed. In most instances the investigator asked the superintendent to direct her to his most successful teachers of reading, some of whom were willing to demonstrate their teaching of a particular topic even though it was not a part of the regular work. Books and articles dealing with the methods of teaching reading were consulted also in order to become more familiar with the general principles
of teaching reading and of securing additional devices for correcting specific difficulties.

**Limitations of the investigation.** The one outstanding limitation of the investigation was the inability of teachers to analyze and define their difficulties. Many teachers even asserted that they experienced no difficulties in teaching reading; others were able to mention only difficulties in general terms, some of which applied more to classroom management than to the teaching of reading.

Relatively few correctives were secured from the teachers. It was necessary, therefore, for the writer to formulate most of the correctives given in the following chapters. No attempt was made to bring together a complete list of correctives for each difficulty nor have those listed been tested experimentally but they are believed to be in agreement with generally accepted principles.

**Plan of the report.** In Chapter II of this bulletin, certain questions, which are connected with reading but which cannot be regarded as problems requiring reflective thinking for solution, are discussed. Chapter III presents general difficulties in the field of reading which do not apply specifically to either oral or silent reading. Chapters IV and V, respectively, deal with problems encountered in the teaching of oral and of silent reading. In each of these three chapters, the "difficulty" first is definitely stated and usually is explained briefly, the "correctives," are then given, describing methods of dealing with the particular difficulty.
CHAPTER II

MISCELLANEOUS QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE TEACHING OF READING

Question 1. Shall script or print\(^1\) be used in presenting words to a beginning reading class?

This question is asked frequently by teachers in the first grade. The symbols presented at the blackboard and on the flash cards may be in the form of print or script and the question arises as to which results in the most economical learning. The advocates of the use of print maintain that it makes the learning of word symbols easier than script and that, after children have acquired some facility in recognizing words expressed by the symbols employed in printing, they can form the new associations necessary for the words presented in script within a period of ten days or two weeks. There are, however, some drawbacks to the use of print at the board and on cards constructed by the teacher. In the first place the printing is not identical with that in books and the child therefore is required to learn three sets of symbols—the printing of the teacher, the printing in books, and script. On the other hand if script is used, the child is required to learn only two sets of symbols.

It is the writer's judgment that the teacher should keep in mind the principles of economical learning and should use script in presenting all work at the board and also in making flash cards, unless she is provided with a good printing set which makes the print uniform in character.

Although many teachers are willing to grant the wisdom of employing script, observation of first-grade reading reveals that in actual practice there is a predominance in the use of print. Differences of opinion and of practice no doubt will continue so long as teachers' manuals, in taking up the presentation of new words to a beginning class in reading, state that the words may be presented in either form.

\(^1\)"Print" in this discussion refers to the printing done by the teacher.
Question 2. What kind of material should be memorized and how much memorizing should be done?

This question refers primarily to the teaching of poetry as there is little or no memorizing of prose in the elementary school. Teachers differ in regard to the kind of material which should be memorized. Some are of the opinion that the poems most frequently found in school readers should receive most attention, and often fail to take into account the fact that many such selections are there by virtue of tradition and are of little interest to the average child of that grade. For example, Whittier's "Barefoot Boy" is generally taught in the fifth grade and yet is not a child's but an adult's poem. The title probably is the only part of the selection which appeals to the average child.

Other teachers think that certain poems should be memorized and recited orally because the beauty of the rhythm will be enjoyed at the time, and even though the meaning is not understood the children in later life will be better able to appreciate the selection because of their early school experience. Such poems as "Thanatopsis" and "The Chambered Nautilus," given in courses of study as required memory work for the eighth grade and sometimes for lower grades, undoubtedly are selections taught for the rhythm and beauty of the phraseology rather than for comprehension.

Still other teachers would restrict the poems for memorization to those which are within the child's interests and experiences. "My Shadow," "The Swing," and "Rain" by Stevenson illustrate such selections. Several satisfactory collections of children's poems, which comply with the principles underlying good literature and at the same time fulfil the requirements for interesting young children, have been prepared and may be secured by teachers in the primary grades. There is a tendency, however, on the part of the makers of courses of study to assign poems to the lowest grades for which they are thought to be appropriate. Patriotic poems are often given very young children to learn and other poems are likewise required in the primary grades which better judgment might place in higher grades.

In addition to the differences of opinion regarding the types of poems to be memorized, a lack of agreement exists among teachers as to the amount of memorizing which the children are asked to do. Some schools require from twelve to fifteen poems memorized during the school year, others a much smaller number. In a recent investi-
Question 3. Should children be encouraged to seek aid from their parents in learning to read?  

The complaint frequently is made that when children in the first grade take their readers home they are often retarded in their progress because their parents endeavor to help them. Many parents are unable to understand how a child can read without knowing the letters separately and, when asked for help, proceed along the lines by which they were taught. For example, the child does not know the word “ground,” and the parents instead of calling attention to its meaning and to its similarity in sound and appearance to other words with which the child is familiar, spell out each letter, g-r-o-u-n-d. The child learns the word in this way, and in school the next day is required to recognize “ground” instantly as a word whole. A certain amount of confusion results, for habits that were formed must be broken up and new ones made. The child has difficulty in adjusting himself to both methods of teaching and the teacher is required to spend more time and energy in reteaching than would have been necessary had parental help not been given. Again, parents may not take the trouble even to have the child recognize separate letters but will tell the word, making no attempt to fix it clearly in his mind. This procedure leaves him dependent upon others, robs him of his own initiative and responsibility, retards his progress, and causes him, when in school, to guess at words and wait for someone to come to his assistance.

The practice of reading the story in the school reader to the child is criticized also because it often leads to memorization without comprehension. When some children appear to read well, investigation has shown that they did not comprehend the material at all but had so perfectly memorized the passage from hearing it read that to the casual observer they seemed to be reading.

Question 4. What are the criteria for selecting supplementary reading material?

Without doubt, in selecting supplementary material, interest should receive first consideration and an attempt made to determine

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3This question is especially applicable to the first grade.
whether or not the material is such as to insure the proper cultivation of interest. Nearly all children like to read but this desire can easily be crushed if the selection is such that the reading becomes drudgery rather than enjoyment. Many primary teachers favor folk tales and nursery rhymes since they are immediately interesting and the children do not tire of the natural repetitions in connection with their lessons.

The second requirement is that of content value. Recently, there has been a tendency in primers and first readers, to use accounts of the activities or experiences of children. From such a simple beginning an interest is developed which continues throughout a series of lessons. The supplementary reading material should provide the pupils with useful information as well as give them pleasure and enjoyment. Instances have been reported where failure to learn to read and also the formation of poor habits of study were traced directly to the meaningless types of material found in the school books.

The physical characteristics of the book also should be considered. Publishers now generally meet approved standards in the matter of print; large-sized type being used in books for very young children and smaller type for those who are able to adjust their eyes to a more limited space. No material should be selected for supplementary reading unless the print is good. The general appearance of the book also has much to do with the creation of interest. If it is attractively illustrated, nicely arranged, has wide margins, large letters, and paragraph divisions, the children undoubtedly will be more interested because of these features.
CHAPTER III
GENERAL DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED IN THE
TEACHING OF READING

Difficulty 1. How to develop an interest in reading.

Some teachers state that they have great difficulty in interesting pupils in reading. This may be due to a number of causes. Perhaps the pupils are already familiar with the selections to be read, the reader may be too difficult or otherwise not suitable for children or the method of teaching may tend to cultivate wrong habits and attitudes.

Corrective. Usually children are interested in reading as soon as they are provided with appropriate selections. Unfortunately many reading texts include some selections too difficult for the grade in which they are designed to be used. Others contain material inappropriate for children. On the other hand, some stories in primary texts greatly underestimate the intelligence of six and seven-year-old children. If the teacher has access to adequate supplementary readers, a great deal can be accomplished by choosing appropriate selections for reading both in and out of class.

Lack of interest in reading may be due to the use of faulty methods of teaching. Excessive drill which soon becomes deadening by its monotony and repetition, forms the basis of many of the older methods. The typical child is not interested in the mechanics of reading, he is concerned rather with what he can do with reading. Hence the newer methods take into account the child's experiences and interests and secure drill through the reading of selections which the children like.

\[1\] The World Book Company has recently published a very unusual and interesting Series of "Picture Study Reading Lessons" by N. B. Smith and S. A. Courtis. In using this material, the authors claim that the child's interest is aroused through his study of the pictures, that he is enabled from the beginning to use his reading as a tool in carrying out his purposes, that he is largely self-dependent, and that he progresses at his own rate. In Series I, each child is provided with a heavy envelope containing a large pad of pictures, frames, cut-outs and directions, a dictionary in which the meaning of the words is illustrated by pictures, and a pad of stories and covers for making his own book. A Teacher's Manual accompanies the Series.
Difficulty 2. How to enlarge the fundamental experiences of children from which meaning is derived.

Many children come to school with a very meager background of experience upon which they can draw in reading. Often their environment is more of a hindrance than a help in developing certain reading habits. Such lack of opportunity for enrichment places a great responsibility upon the teacher in bringing to these pupils sufficient material to furnish the experiences necessary for a well-rounded education.

Corrective. Second hand or vicarious experience may be secured through reading. In this way the pupil observes the affairs of the world, the types of people, their activities, the environment in which they live and is able to see into the most remote parts of the earth instead of being confined to the narrow limitations of his immediate surroundings. Reading enables him to participate in the activities of others, and for a time he experiences their lives even though the historical period or geographical position may be remote.

In adult life, people read magazines and newspapers for the sheer enjoyment of reading. They are not required to read for facts. They read because they want to read. So in providing reading material for children the teachers should keep in mind the enjoyment function. Throughout the elementary school, books which deal with all types of human experiences in all parts of the world should be selected. Geography, history, biography, travel and science, simply and interestingly written, contribute in enlarging the experiences of the pupils and in developing the habit of reading for enjoyment.

Difficulty 3. How to provide for individual differences.

There are wide differences among children of a given age and grade. These may be due to differences in native ability or to the types of training which the children have secured or to their general environment. It is not uncommon to find the fastest reader in the class reading silently four times as fast as the slowest reader. The slow pupil cannot read fast enough to keep up with the others and becomes easily fatigued and easily discouraged. Yet these strong and weak pupils frequently are grouped in the same class regardless of ability. Especially in the lower and intermediate grades, where the differences are most marked, does this problem of adapting class instruction to pupils of varying degrees of ability become serious.

Corrective. With reference to this situation, several teachers expressed the opinion that if the requirement for entrance were based
upon mental rather than upon chronological age, many of the reading difficulties in the first grade would be eliminated. Although such a requirement would enable the first-grade teacher to have a more uniform group according to mental age, there would continue to be individual differences in reading ability to cope with.

Many teachers have two divisions or sections in each room, one being made up of the stronger and the other of the weaker pupils. In the first grade perhaps two sections are sufficient, but beginning with the second grade the pupils of a room may be divided into two, three or four groups according to their capacities as determined by standardized tests. In this way each group may be given material of a difficulty suited to its ability and interest. If the pupil is unusually backward in reading, his case should receive individual attention.

Using the results of standardized silent reading tests as the basis for classification, pupils could be grouped in three sections designated as A, B, and C. These groupings should be flexible so that whenever the teacher thought best the pupil could be shifted easily to another section. The teacher may arrange for the B and C sections to study while the A section recites, or she may spend a portion of the time in supervised study for all. One teacher of a second grade said that she allowed a recitation period of ten minutes a day for the stronger pupils and of fifteen or twenty minutes for the weaker ones. Some days she even has two classes for the weaker ones and only one for the stronger. In following a plan which groups pupils according to ability, the stronger pupils should be given more work in connection with the reading assignment than the poorer ones.

**Difficulty 4. How to get pupils “to see” words.**

Teachers in the primary grades report that, after they have spent more than the allotted time in drilling upon certain words, some children seem unable to recognize them and a few cannot even distinguish between the letters which make up a word. It might be well to consider these questions—Do we recognize words by seeing them letter by letter? What are the factors which make recognition easier or more rapid? How may the child be trained in rapid recognition? and so forth.

**Corrective.** A child’s perception in reading depends in part upon the methods by which he learns to read. If the alphabet method is used, children undoubtedly notice the letters rather than the words. However, experiments in reading seem to indicate that in beginning
instruction in reading, it is best to train the child to perceive in words rather than in letters.

It is the business of the teacher to bring to the child’s consciousness at the appropriate time the details which make up words such as, letters, syllables, prefixes and suffixes, etc., as any one of these may be a unit of recognition under a particular circumstance. This work should begin with the study of reading and should continue as long as difficulty in the recognition of words is encountered.

The perception of a word does not as a rule take place through a detailed seeing of the letters or of other syllables. After becoming familiar with a word its recognition is obtained by means of “cues.” These cues are the dominant parts of the word. For example, the child may notice the consonants which extend above or below the line, in such words as, home, plume, gone; or he may notice the first half of the word as in flying, and playing, which is more important in perception than the latter half. The smaller letters or vowels which join other letters may help in bringing the word into consciousness. Some readers see the word as a total word length or word form rather than by noting a few particular dominant letter shapes. In presenting new words the teacher should call attention to characteristic differences between letters and words. She should also vary the instruction so that each member of the class is able to recognize the words according to the system which he has developed.

**Difficulty 5. How to enable the pupil to acquire an adequate vocabulary.**

Children, especially those who come from foreign homes, often are deficient in a speaking as well as a reading vocabulary and it becomes the teacher's task to provide them with experiences that will engender new words.

**Corrective.** Since words should be studied in context, little attention should be given to the learning of isolated new words. Vocabulary develops largely through experience and not through the use of the dictionary or the formal repetition of definitions. Each new activity enlarges our vocabulary because it carries with it a list of new words whose meanings must be understood. For example, golf and tennis have vocabularies of their own, and automobiles and radios have added new words with significant meanings. We learn to use these words as an understanding of them is developed through conversation and reading. The understanding or meaning and the use of
words or the language go together. They cannot be separated. Through language we are able to understand the affairs of the world about us, to participate in public opinion, to acquire technical vocabularies as well as a large general vocabulary so necessary for every well-rounded personality.

Language work, discussions, interpretations, conversations are all excellent means of enlarging the vocabularies of children. The teacher should keep in mind that in the development of a vocabulary we do not mean the mere acquisition of words spelled correctly. We refer to an adequate meaning vocabulary.

Difficulty 6. How to get pupils to understand assignments in reading.

The assignment in reading, particularly silent reading, should involve one or more specific purposes rather than merely the general purpose of reading certain pages in the text. At times the pupil may be reading in order to secure information but in general he should have as his objectives the acquisition of certain habits and skills essential to fluent reading.

Corrective. Pupil's difficulties in understanding assignments frequently are due to the methods used by the teacher. The assignment should not be left until the last minutes of the period because it is likely to be made hurriedly and the pupils fail to get a clear idea of what they are to work for. The teacher should give as much attention to assignments in reading as to those in arithmetic, geography, language or history.

When new objectives are introduced, specific directions for the preparation of the lesson should be given. Frequently it will be desirable to have the pupils start the preparation of the lesson during the class period. If the teacher wishes the pupils to read for the purpose of securing information she may find it a good plan to dictate a few questions based upon the selection. In this way the pupil is given something definite to work for through his reading. However, the teacher should take care to avoid making the pupils dependent upon questions for their objectives in reading.

Having pupils understand the assignment is partly a matter of training them in good methods of study. A pupil is likely to say that he does not understand the assignment if he does not know how to study it. Therefore the teacher, when making the assignment, should give attention to the training in the methods of study which the pupils will need in its preparation.
Difficulty 7. How to teach children to use the dictionary.

Children find the use of the dictionary difficult because it is treated as an incidental tool. Formerly, readers for the intermediate grades contained lists of words with diacritical markings which were given considerable emphasis. Our present readers generally do not contain such word lists. Even in the teaching of spelling, authorities have urged that diacritical marks be abolished. Consequently, children come to the place in their school life where they must consult the dictionary without having had any training either in its use or in the interpretation of diacritical markings. Teachers should recognize this fact and in teaching the use of the dictionary should proceed as though their pupils had had no previous experience in looking up the pronunciation and definition of unfamiliar words.

Corrective. In beginning the use of the dictionary the teacher should give instruction first in finding words. Since memorization of the alphabet is no longer considered as a prerequisite for learning to read, pupils may not know the order of the letters. Hence they encounter difficulty in finding words in the dictionary. The teacher should prepare a few lists of typical words and require her pupils to practice finding them in the dictionary until they have acquired a considerable degree of facility in such work.

Attention next should be directed to the diacritical markings which indicate the pronunciation of words. Training must be given in the association of certain sounds with certain symbols. After the pupils have been given this instruction the teacher may place on the blackboard the principal diacritical marks with a few illustrations of each for use as reference throughout the year.

When several definitions are given for a word pupils often find it difficult to select the correct one. One teacher stated that in such a case she required her pupils to substitute the definition which they think to be right in place of the unfamiliar word, and if the meaning of the sentence is then clear, the correct definition evidently has been selected.
CHAPTER IV
DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED IN TEACHING
ORAL READING

Difficulty 8. How to create and maintain an interest in phonics.

Although the majority of teachers favor some teaching of phonics they are all agreed that such teaching is difficult and that children must be stimulated constantly by every outside means that can be devised by the resourceful teacher. Even then it may be hard to maintain interest from day to day when the material itself has no interesting features.

Corrective. The purpose of phonetic teaching is to enable pupils to analyze unfamiliar words as a means of ascertaining their pronunciation. This analysis should be introduced in special periods after pupils have begun to note similarities and differences in the words which they have learned in their reading exercises. If such work is begun with the first reading lessons the pupils will probably not be interested in the phonic study of words.¹

In teaching phonics the following suggestions should be kept in mind.²

1. Have the child's undivided attention.
2. Present the symbol, that is, a picture of the sound at the same time the sound is given.
3. Perform actions, when symbol is shown, to fix the sound in mind.
4. Play games to stimulate the interest of the children.
5. Do individual work entirely.
6. Insist upon the proper position of the organs of speech.
7. Work for speed but not at the expense of accuracy.
8. Put as much spirit into the phonetic exercises as in the reading lesson.

Some children are interested in rhyming words and in finding words similar in beginnings. The first-grade teacher can use this interest to good advantage by encouraging her pupils to look for such classes of words. A list may be placed on the blackboard and added to by volunteer contributions of the children.

Several teachers expressed the wish for advice in teaching the sounds and combinations of letters. A difference of opinion exists in regard to attaching the vowel to the consonants of short words. Should you attach the vowel to the final consonant as c-at, giving the "at" family, or to the initial consonant as ca-t. This latter view is held by those who object to the "family" idea. One teacher whom the writer observed was taking a middle ground and not emphasizing either plan. As she sketched a picture of a house on the board she talked to the children. "Now we will have the consonants go out for a walk and meet the 'letter sounds.' Remember the consonants are 'brother sounds.' Little Miss 'a' lives by herself. Brother 'h' comes out and meets sister 'a.' Here comes brother 't' and they all take a walk together (hat)." Then other letters were used and other words developed.

Another plan of teaching the vowel sounds is to cut off the consonants from short words. A word table like the following placed on the board illustrates how classes may be led to discover the short sounds of vowels. Erase the final

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
\text{cat} & \text{met} & \text{bit} & \text{not} \\
\text{bat} & \text{get} & \text{fit} & \text{got} \\
\text{rat} & \text{let} & \text{hit} & \text{hot} & \text{cut} \\
\end{array}
\]

letter of the first column leaves ca, ba, ra, and then erasing the initial letter leaves the short sound a. The next column when subjected to the same treatment again leaves a short sound. In this way the children are able to discover the short sounds of the vowels and are told that these vowel sounds are called "short." Later the children can be taught that sometimes the vowels are called "long" and they should then be given a list of familiar words illustrating the "long" sound.

Sounds may be derived by analyzing familiar words selected from the reading lesson. Pupils should also be given many opportunities to decipher new or unfamiliar words as sufficient practice given to this phase of the work will do much in overcoming inaccurate

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and halting reading. However, in order to secure an effective mastery of phonetic elements a well organized system should be used.

**Difficulty 9. How to develop a good oral reading mechanism.**

In the enthusiasm for silent reading the teacher must not lose sight of the necessity for training in fluent oral reading. For such reading a good mechanism is required. The child must be able to move his eyes properly, to pronounce words accurately and to give appropriate emphasis and inflection to words and phrases.

**Corrective.** The pronunciation of words reverts to the matter of phonic training. Time should be taken to stress such portions of the word as seem to be causing difficulty. The attention of the pupil should be called to the similarity between an unknown word and the other words of which he knows the correct pronunciation. He should then be required to "sound out" the unfamiliar word not once but many times; and in order to establish the correct pronunciation, he should be encouraged to use the troublesome word as often as possible in his speech.

One teacher was observed who placed a list of difficult words on the board and told the pupils to look at them carefully and to be sure all could be pronounced. If a child was uncertain about any word he raised his hand and help was given him. In reviewing a story the teacher may proceed as in a completion test, telling the story but waiting for the children to supply certain words. The pupils may pronounce these words individually or in unison.

The omission of words in oral reading is due often to too much haste. The pupil skips over words in his endeavor to read rapidly. In such a case he should be instructed to read more slowly so that the class can hear each word or he may be told that the people in the story are talking and he must therefore read just as they would actually talk if he could meet them outside the book. If a word is omitted because the pupil does not know its meaning, the teacher may come to the rescue with some familiar synonyms and enable the pupil to overcome his difficulty.

If pupils fail to give attention to commas and periods, the teacher may suggest that they read the sentence without any punctuation to see if the meaning is as clear as it would be if punctuation marks were observed. This offers an opportunity for the pupils to see the real value or the necessity of punctuation. One fourth-grade teacher suggested that in using periods and commas the children play that
the period is a station, the comma a place where the train stops for water, and that no mark at the end of the line means the train goes right on.

**Difficulty 10. How to develop skill in the use of flash cards.**

The use of flash cards while generally confined to the primary grades has proven a very effective device for improving reading in the intermediate grades. The teacher’s technique in handling flash cards is important since satisfactory results cannot be secured from such exercises unless they are well administered.

**Corrective.** Flash card exercises are primarily speed exercises and therefore the time element is not to be forgotten. Since the purpose is to get a rapid automatic reaction to words or groups of words the cards should be exposed only for a very short length of time. A general rule is to expose word or phrase for less time than is required to pronounce it.

Holding the cards also is important. Teachers will undoubtedly have systems of their own but they should keep in mind that a method which insure better exposure or easier manipulation is the one to adopt. In any case the cards should be exposed only for a brief period of time and then replaced in the pack. They should not be given in a regular order as some pupils will rely upon the order rather than upon recognizing the phrases. In holding the flash cards before the group, one teacher held the card at the bottom edge, allowing her fingers to be placed under the one word on the card which was the essential word. For instance, in flashing “Run to the door” her hand would be placed beneath run, etc. Because of this simple device, the children notice the position of the hand, which emphasizes the word, and are helped to remember.

**Difficulty 11. How to correct carelessness in pronunciation.**

What constitutes carelessness? We may say that a careless reader is one who omits certain words or portions of words and mispronounces many of the words with which he is familiar. Teachers report that the and and are often omitted, words with similar letters such as saw and was are pronounced incorrectly, and numerous substitutions as so for as, this for it are made. In speech, parts of the words are frequently dropped as the ing in going, coming, etc.; final d’s are not sounded as in played, and endings of ly are slighted. Prefixes are slighted occasionally but not so commonly as suffixes.

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Corrective. An oral vocabulary test should include a list of the words most frequently mispronounced. If the pupil pronounces these words accurately when isolated but fails upon them in context, it is evident that the mistakes are due to carelessness. Most pupils when cautioned to read more carefully will try to do better. The correct pronunciation of words is secured by applying the principles of habit formation. The making of errors is a fault which should be prevented by the teacher, or if once made should be detected and corrected by proper exercises and drills. The prevention and detection of these errors requires constant vigilance but nagging which so often accompanies corrections must be avoided. Positive practice should be given words with endings that are frequently clipped off. No exceptions should be permitted in the formation of habits, and incorrect forms always should be noticed and corrected.

The omission of words or letters may be due to defective eyesight. The portion of the letter which is boldly printed is seen while the finer parts of the letter may be so indistinct that the pupil fails to recognize the word as a whole. In such a case, the corrective is outside of the teacher’s sphere and the parent of the child or the school nurse should be informed of his condition.

Meanings of words should be emphasized as a pupil rarely mispronounces a word whose meaning he understands.

Difficulty 12. How to get children to speak distinctly.

Some children speak distinctly on the playground and in conversation but fail to do so in reading. This may be due to shyness or to insufficient experience in reading aloud. Children often start out with a good tone of voice but before the passage is finished, their voices have dropped so low as to be scarcely audible. It may be that the pupil has forgotten that he is reading aloud; or he may be absorbed in his effort to keep the place, recognize the words, etc.

Corrective. A motive for speaking correctly may be secured by asking the pupil to read material that his audience has not read. This procedure may be employed in the first grade, as soon as the child has gained some facility in reading. In this way the child who reads comes to a better understanding of the function of oral reading, namely, to read something to another person in such a way that he will grasp the meaning.

Some children tend to speak unnaturally, some even shouting, in their attempts to read aloud. One teacher said that she found if
she did not hold a book before her and if she stood some distance from the children who were reading, a more natural tone of voice was induced. Voices can be modified, and especially is this true with pupils in the lower grades. Adhering to the principles of habit formation and always insisting upon well modulated voices will in time produce the desired results. Dramatization is an excellent device to use, as the children generally know the story so well that in taking the parts of the different characters in the book they speak easily and naturally. A few teachers observed made use of the piano as a means of placing the voice.

**Difficulty 13. How to get children to phrase.**

Grouping words into thought units is commonly known as phrasing. The failure to pronounce words in groups is due to the fact that the children are handicapped by recognizing only one word at a time. For example, when some children are confronted with the phrase "crossing the road" they may read *cross-ing-the-road* instead of swinging it or phrasing it as, *crossing the road*.

**Corrective.** Children should be trained to recognize words rapidly enough to permit phrasing. It takes less time to sweep through a group of words at a glance than to name each one singly. Training on certain phrases found in the lesson should be given as a means of aiding pupils to think in large meaningful units and thus to become more rapid readers. Perception cards of phrases may be used in this training. Sometimes the phrases may be named by the whole class and sometimes by individual children and all drills should be brisk and should last but a few minutes. Care should be exercised not to have the phrases too long at first. Although phrase flashing is more frequently employed in the lower grades it may be used to good advantage in the intermediate grades and in ungraded rooms in increasing the unit of recognition.

As has been stated in the correctives for Difficulty 3 and Difficulty 4, providing an audience situation, insisting on correct practice and permitting no exceptions will do much to get children to phrase which in turn enables them to read more fluently.

**Difficulty 14. How to correct speech defects.**

The general term "speech defects" applies to those children who stutter, lisp, possess monotonous voices and who are unable to give the accepted sound for certain symbols. Foreign-born children and
children from homes where a foreign language is spoken frequently possesses certain types of "speech defects."

Corrective. Stuttering is perhaps the worst form of speech defect. It is not a habit nor a disease but a symptom which may result from several conditions. The child who stutters should be given the opportunity to talk freely, although this is often hard to do with our present school organization. However, in small classes there is more opportunity for individual work and for individual pupils to express themselves.

Adults are frequently at fault in being unable to control their restlessness when a stutterer begins to talk. They often take the words out of his mouth, with the result that he is humiliated and his nervousness increased. He should be guided carefully in regard to possible attacks of excitement and depression and above all he should be free from nagging.

Rhythm is lacking in the stutterer’s speech. In attempting to correct this defect, breathing exercises, swimming, dancing, etc., should be given to develop rhythm. Singing rhythmical tunes is also suggested. The stutterer should be treated with consideration and diplomacy often requiring the utmost patience.

The monotonous voice has the same effect in speech as in song and is corrected only by means of long and continued exercise and drill. Children whose reading is inclined to be monotonous because of failure to vary pitch, emphasis and inflection should be worked with alone so that the ear may be trained to distinguish between the right and the wrong way until the defect is corrected.

Another group includes those who lisp and who cannot sound s, z and ïð; those who sound r for l; and the foreign-born who have learned to sound out letters in their own tongue and seem unable to make the transition to English. This is especially true of children who have learned French or German as their original language. In order to correct these defects the teacher should analyze the sounds of the letters which cause difficulty. She should endeavor to teach the child the correct position of the lips and tongue. Drill on troublesome vowels or consonants also should be emphasized. Primary teachers often have to contend with indistinct speech or baby talk. This frequently is due to the misplaced affection of parents and the child may never be able to pronounce certain words. In addition to the suggested methods for the school treatment of speech defects, attention should be directed to deformities of the mouth, throat,
or teeth as any one or a combination of these may produce impediments in speech. Often a slight operation or the removal of irregular teeth is sufficient to correct the defect.

Difficultv 15. How to get children to read with more expression.

In recent years we have come to attach less importance to oral reading but we should require children to read with sufficient expression to convey the meaning of simple prose and poetry. Expression involves emphasis, pitch, and inflection but inflection is perhaps the most important. Monotonous reading involving absolute uniform pauses is the zero of expression.

Corrective. "Word calling" or "word reading" should be avoided from the first. In the lower grades the pupils should be taught to look through the whole of a short sentence before attempting to read it orally and then read it as a whole or by groups of words. In reading with proper expression the pupil groups words naturally into thought units, and "word reading" is eliminated. Reading to the class tends to improve the expression. If the child can be made to feel that he has vital content to tell about and that the class is dependent upon his reading in order to have a clear idea or picture of what is being read, the expression invariably improves.

Difficulty 16. How to secure appreciation in reading.

It has been said by some authorities that the term appreciation is too vague and loosely defined to be used and that in its place we should substitute the word "enjoyment." However, many of the teachers used the term appreciation in asking the above question.

Corrective. Enjoyment depends in part upon comprehension. In general, a child cannot enjoy a story unless he is able to comprehend it. Overemphasis upon comprehension, however, is fatal to enjoyment. This is particularly true if the child is asked to halt his reading and give attention to word analysis, or to other transactions

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5The following suggestions for developing appreciation are taken directly from Stone's Oral and Silent Reading, page 85.

1. "While an adequate knowledge is helpful toward appreciation, over-analysis is fatal to emotional enjoyment. It is not necessary to know the meaning of every word in order to appreciate a piece of literature. It is better to determine the essential points and let the rest pass.

2. "The best preparation for the teacher who feels that her teaching is inadequate in those phases of her work which involve appreciation is to plan to do what she can to insure her own growth in this particular. Read more poetry and especially read it with those who derive great pleasure therefrom if you wish to teach poetry better. The spirit of emotional attitude must be caught rather than taught."

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which seem to him to have no relation to the understanding of the story. It is not necessary to know the meaning of every word in order to enjoy or appreciate a literary selection. When appreciation is being emphasized it is better to allow a child to pass over some words and phrases which he does not understand rather than to place too much emphasis upon comprehension.

The teacher's appreciation of literature is a potent factor in determining the extent of pupil appreciation. If a teacher does not enjoy a poem she is greatly handicapped in getting her pupils to do so. For this reason teachers should cultivate their own appreciation for poetry and prose through extensive reading. "The spirit of emotional attitude must be caught rather than taught."

Difficulty 17. How to teach poetry.

Teachers generally claim that the teaching of poetry is more difficult than of prose. Perhaps a change in the method of teaching poetry may help to overcome this difficulty. Too often both prose and poetry have been taught by identical methods.

Corrective. The pupils' first impression of a poem should be from hearing the selection read by the teacher, without their texts before them. Such a procedure should be followed in the first five or six grades and perhaps beyond in some instances. The value of such a method is evident when one considers that the literary value of a poem is mainly auditory. By means of effective oral reading some teachers are able to introduce pupils to the enjoyment of reading poetry for themselves. Studying the poem in preparation for the recitation although frequently done is not advised.

The teaching of poetry is mainly to provide the pupils with a means of increasing their profitable enjoyment of leisure. The teacher would do well to keep this point of view in mind. She should also take stock of her own interests in order to transmit them to others. The following items are considered important factors in the teacher's equipment for such training.  

1. "A keen enjoyment of simple well-defined rhythms similar to the enjoyment of rhythmic dancing or marching.

2. "Sympathy with the common human interest in adventure, romance, humor, rhyme and jingle.

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6In the upper grades the pupils may get the idea of the poem by rapid silent reading.

3. "Skill in full-toned rhythmic phrasing and oral reading of poetic lines.

4. "Intimate knowledge of the varied enjoyment values to be found in a few select poems adapted to her grade, plus specific skill in reading these poems so as to impel the listener to experience these values."
CHAPTER V

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED IN SILENT READING

Difficulty 18. How to train pupils to be fluent in the recognition of words and phrases.

Fluent recognition of words and phrases as used here includes the ability to associate them with their proper meanings. In recognizing words the eyes are fixated on only a few letters. A child must spend years in practice before he can attain general facility in word and phrase recognition which characterizes a good reader but he can begin in primary grades the formation of reading habits which will be of use to him later on.

Corrective. One prerequisite for the fluent recognition of words is the development of proper eye movement habits. The teacher should watch the eyes of the pupil as he reads simple material and notice how many regressive movements have been made per line. A convenient method for doing this is to place a mirror on a stand in front of the child’s eyes so that their movements may be observed. The eyes of a good reader move across the page with four to seven evenly spaced fixations and there are no regressive movements. When the child has to stop and spell out words it is evident that proper eye movement has not been established.

Although drill in the recognition of words is necessary it can be relieved of some of its monotonous features by the introduction of various games. One teacher placed a series of words on the board and turning to the group said “Who can catch these words?” As the children gave the correct response the teacher quickly erased the word. Another teacher who played this same “game” had the words printed on card boards which were shaped like fish. As a child “caught the fish” it was given to him and at the end of the period each child counted the number he had caught.

Insufficient experience with words has been one of the chief causes for a lack of fluency in recognition. New words must be taught and the meaning of the word should receive especial attention. In all grades above the primary a point should be made of teaching new words together with their meanings, and the children should be encouraged to make use of the dictionary. Practice is required and a
great deal of simple reading material should be available. The amount of reading furnished by the average school reader is entirely inadequate and therefore the teacher must secure supplementary reading material from other sources in order to provide the necessary practice which children need.

**Difficulty 19. How to increase the span of recognition.**

This difficulty is essentially included in the preceding one and refers to the section of the printed line recognized at each fixation of the eyes. A very small unit is frequently the cause for the slow rate of silent reading and for the monotonous and ineffective voice of oral reading.

**Corrective.** To aid pupils in increasing their span of recognition, phrases printed on cards and presented in rapid flash card drill have been found effective. At first short phrases should be used and should be selected from the lessons which the pupils are studying. As soon as they can recognize short phrases, longer and more difficult ones should be used.

Sentences which cause difficulty may be written on the board and read silently by the pupils. Later they may be read orally and the words grouped effectively. Some teachers underline the words of a sentence which should be grouped together, as attention by this means is centered on accurate phrasing.

**Difficulty 20. How to secure appropriate supplementary material in usable form.**

The amount of material in school readers is not sufficient and sometimes not appropriate for supplementary reading. In the third and fourth grades especially the vocabulary in the readers is often too advanced and the content too meager. The supplementary material must be appropriate, not too easy nor too difficult, must be interesting and avoid duplication.

**Corrective.** It is the duty of the school to provide appropriate supplementary material, so that this difficulty should not arise. Even if the school fails to furnish material, the teacher should not be held responsible for supplying books and magazines. The Board of Education should have a fund available which may be used to purchase necessary materials. If this sum is not sufficient to buy whole sets of books, single copies could be purchased thus enabling each child to have a different story. When such a plan is undertaken it serves two purposes—the child reads for content and at the same time
gains training in expression when he tells the story to other members of the class.

If the teacher wishes help in selecting appropriate material she might consult the city librarian who is generally informed on the types of books which appeal to different ages. The pupils should be encouraged to make use of the city library and to form the habit of withdrawing books. They might be asked also to bring their own books to school and either read or tell certain portions to the class. Magazines covering a wide range of interests also should be available and opportunity given during the regular school period for pupils to make their own selections.

Difficulty 21. How to deal with selections in school readers which are too difficult or otherwise inappropriate for a particular class.

Many difficulties in reading are directly traceable to the reading text. It may not be adapted to the work of a particular grade although in other respects it may be a desirable book. For example, a number of first-grade teachers commented on the reader which was adopted by their school system. In their opinion the book was not properly graded and the words were too difficult for children with such limited school experience. Frequently a reading selection is written in language which is unfamiliar to the children, and consequently an interest in reading is hard to create. When reading in the intermediate and upper grades requires minute analysis and continued explanation, it is evident that the selections provided are too difficult and are therefore mischosen for the grade. One fifth-grade teacher stated that she had no time for silent reading as the children spent the entire study period looking up words for the next day's lesson.

Corrective. If a selection is so difficult as greatly to retard progress it should be omitted and taught when the pupils have advanced sufficiently to comprehend the material with a reasonable degree of success. However, such a procedure should be used with caution because if large portions are omitted an unfavorable attitude toward reading material as a whole will be created. At times, the less capable members of the class may be excused from the regular assignment and be given easier selections.

The teacher should make adequate preparation for the teaching of each day's work. Too often teachers take up a reading lesson when they have only read the story through hastily and are in no way pre-
pared to guide the pupils in dealing with the difficulties which they encounter.

**Difficulty 22. How to teach silent reading in the primary grades.**

Although silent reading in the primary grades is generally regarded as a minor activity, some authorities believe that the place for beginning definite systematic work in silent reading is in the first grade. This does not mean that silent reading should occupy a prominent place in the daily program during the first year, but it does mean that some provision for this particular form of instruction should be made regardless of the method which is employed by the teacher. Others believe that silent reading can be taught only after a certain degree of skill has been attained in oral reading.

**Corrective.** Since the main purpose in silent reading is to get the thought, the material must lend itself to this end and contain a thought that is worth while. This is even more important in the primary than in the advanced grades. The easiest way to begin silent-reading work is through the use of action sentences such as “Roll the ball,” “Run to me,” etc. In this type of work the child does not read the sentence orally, but silently and then does what he thinks it says. A number of primers have lessons of this type but unfortunately some teachers have not been able to differentiate between the handling of this material and that for oral reading.

As the child masters the mechanics of reading and progresses with his work, the teacher should be able to measure his rate of reading and his ability to comprehend what is read. There should be frequent exercises in silent reading but, instead of following these with an oral reading, questioning should take place. The teacher should be careful not to go too much into detail but should aim to bring out the main points and to be sure that the child has grasped the selection as a whole.

**Difficulty 23. How to get children to comprehend the material which they read.**

All teachers are familiar with the experience of having pupils’ rate of reading far in advance of their comprehension. Failure to comprehend may be due to several causes such as a lack of a good method of silent reading, lack of practice in reading silently due either to insufficient opportunity or to the absence of a strong motive, and lack of sufficient acquaintance with the necessary vocabulary.
Corrective. When pupils fail to comprehend material the teacher must determine whether the difficulty is due to an inadequate vocabulary or to one of the other causes. As a vocabulary test, words may be selected from the reading lesson and the pupils asked to define them and use them in sentences either written or oral. Other types of exercises can be devised to determine whether failure to comprehend is due to other causes. Some of the standardized tests have been used successfully for diagnosing pupils with reference to their ability to read silently.

In order to get children to comprehend the material read, the teacher must make use of and create situations in which the emphasis is upon thought-getting and not upon oral reading or rate of reading. A series of carefully worded questions placed before the children on the board should help them to grasp the real significance of the passage. Thought-getting cannot be overemphasized. Beginning in the primary grades exercises should be started in which meaning is the only significant element and the responses given should be in terms of things done or interpretations made. This may be accomplished by having cards with sentences or paragraphs written upon them which give very definite directions to be followed. One teacher combined her reading and art period by writing such directions on the board as, "Color the first row of circles blue; color the second row yellow," and so forth.

It has been found helpful to administer a standardized test and to compare the scores of the class with the standards for that grade. It is also desirable to have each pupil compare his own score with the standards.

Difficulty 24. How to train pupils to recognize certain difficult words or letters.

Some children with normal vision seem to have difficulty with certain words or letters such as distinguishing between such words as "was" and "saw," "left" and "felt," and "wind" and "with," and such letters as "b" and "d" in print.

Corrective. In writing the letters one teacher suggested that when we have "b" the children should think of a stick with a ball at the lower right side, while "d" is a stick with a ball or balloon at the lower left side; p and q were treated in a similar way. When words are discovered which repeatedly cause difficulty quick perception drills should become a part of the routine until the words
are mastered. New words may be added to the list as difficulties are encountered and the attention of the group called to the dominant letter in the word.

Pupils often become confused because of similarity in form. Though, thought, and through; there and where; then and when were mentioned. These words should be placed in sentences and presented in quick perception drills until the child has become familiar with the correct form. Difficulty was evidenced in a first grade when a child apparently could not distinguish between dog and doll. The child noticed the first two letters but was troubled with the endings. Special drill on words with similar endings will soon overcome this difficulty.

**Difficulty 25. How to eliminate lip movement in silent reading.**

Lip movement and vocalization while a natural tendency for beginners greatly retards the development of an efficient rate of reading. Young children nearly always move their lips and whisper to themselves in a suppressed tone. If this habit is allowed to go unchecked, the pupil is greatly handicapped in trying to read silently with a standard rate of speed and comprehension.

**Corrective.** As has been pointed out, flash card drill greatly decreases lip movement. The cards are exposed for such a short period of time that it is impossible for the pupil to sound out the syllables or to pronounce the words. In addition to the flash card drill constant reminding is necessary to get children in the first grade to read with their eyes and not with their lips. While the type of material determines whether oral or silent reading will be indulged in, reading for information or to get specific facts tends to induce freedom from articulation. This also provides an increase in speed which is generally accompanied with greater comprehension.

**Difficulty 26. How to develop speed in silent reading.**

There are several causes for a slow rate of reading. One may be due to the belief that some teachers have thought that in order to read well a child must read slowly. Or there may be too much emphasis upon oral reading which results in the pupil saying the words over to himself when reading silently.

**Corrective.** Motivation undoubtedly has much to do with the rate of silent reading. Interesting stories often serve as a stimulus because the pupil becomes interested in the selection and wants to know the outcome. Quality of reading should not be sacrificed to
rate but the rate certainly should receive attention. Easy material should be given and short periods of concentrated reading have been found effective.

A careful record of each pupil's work should be kept so that he knows where he stands. Some of the standards for rate as well as for comprehension should be posted on the bulletin board so that the pupil can compare his record with the norm. In addition to using some of the standard reading tests, the teacher may devise tests of her own, such as asking the pupils at a given signal to start reading a certain page or paragraph in the reader. At the end of a short period of two or three minutes, the reading should be stopped and the pupils told to count the number of words read. Although not an exact measurement, this is a rough index of the rate of reading.