RELATIVE SUCCESS OF CHILDREN USING TWO
DIFFERENT READING PROGRAMS
CARLISLE, IOWA, 1956-1967

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by
Florence Lochmiller
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RELATIVE SUCCESS OF CHILDREN USING TWO
DIFFERENT READING PROGRAMS
CARLISLE, IOWA, 1956-1967

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Since 1961 the Carlisle School has used Phonetic Keys to Reading as a beginning reading program. The board of education, the administration, and the faculty are divided regarding their opinions of the worth of this phonetic approach to reading.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. It was the purpose of this study to:
(1) compare vocabulary and reading scores of The Iowa Tests of Basic Skills for the years immediately previous to initiating the Phonetic Keys program and the subsequent years that the course has been implemented in the Carlisle Community Schools, Carlisle, Iowa; and (2) present research on leading reading authorities' opinions and studies of this type of reading program to support or refute these findings.

Importance of the study. It is the prime requisite of the curriculum to present the best possible program of study in any area. A comparative examination of vocabulary and reading scores from the years during which two different types of reading programs were implemented seemed to lend itself to providing evidence in favor of one or the other of these methods.
II. DEFINITION OF TERMS

For purposes of clarity to the reader the following definitions of terms used throughout this field report is presented:

Grade equivalent. The term, "grade equivalent" was the way the scores were measured on the tests. All scores were of three digits: the first numeral indicated the grade level, the second numeral indicated the month of that grade level, and the third numeral indicated an additional part of a month to the nearest tenth. Therefore, a score of 35.1 meant all the third grade sections together had a mean composite score of third grade, fifth month, plus one-tenth of an additional month. The grade equivalent which was the norm to be attained was determined by the month in which the tests were administered. Therefore, a grade equivalent of 45.0 meant the test had been given during the time the student was in the fifth month of fourth grade, which would be January.

Phonetic or synthetic method. The term, "phonetic or synthetic method" of teaching reading means that beginners are taught the letters, their sounds, and how to analyze and sound out words before they do any pre-primer reading. Words which have been sounded out are then used in sentences and stories for reading.

Sight or analytic method. The term, "sight or analytic method," of teaching reading means that beginners are taught an initial sight vocabulary of fifty to one hundred words which are in their speaking vocabulary. The children associate the pronunciation and the meaning
with the form. By repeating that association frequently, they learn to recognize it. Phonics are taught later, as generalizations fit words already known in the sight vocabulary.

III. PROCEDURE

Rationale of the study. The composite grade-equivalent scores from The Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (Vocabulary and Reading) were compared for the years 1956-1967 in grades three, four, five, and six. The means of these scores were placed in table form and on graphs with the grade-equivalent norms of each grade for the corresponding years. Since the crux of the problem seemed to be sight method versus phonics method in the beginning reading program, the classes which were taught by each method respectively, were grouped together on the graphs in Figures 1-8.

Opinions of authorities in the field of reading research and curriculum were sought in an attempt to explain the results of the comparison of these scores.

Limitations of the study. The most complete and meaningful interpretation of student achievement may be made only through the combined use of both grade-equivalent scores and percentile ranks. Only grade equivalents were used in this study because some percentile ranks needed were not available. While grade-equivalent scores are very useful as measures of yearly growth, they are not as helpful as percentile ranks in interpreting pupils' standings on different tests.

Not enough years' scores were available to determine a trend. The study was based on comparison of classes whose initial reading instruction
was either by the sight method or by the phonic method, and not enough
time has elapsed to compare an adequate number of each method. Since the
Phonetic Keys program was initiated in the school year 1960-61, the third
grade graphs showed that the five most recent classes began reading by
the phonic method compared to the previous seven third grade classes who
were taught beginning reading by the sight method. Fourth grade graphs
showed four classes by the phonic method compared to eight taught by the
sight method. Fifth grades have had three classes of phonic method
compared to nine of the sight method. Sixth grades have had only two
classes of phonics-taught to compare to ten classes that were sight-
taught.

Two of the tests were not given at the same time of year as the
other nine tests. Therefore, the same amount of teaching was not repre-
sented for all years. However, this was taken into consideration in
determining the grade-equivalent norms for each year, and the two years
that tests were given at some other time than during the month of
January, the norms were adjusted accordingly.
CHAPTER II

PRESENTATION OF DATA

The data used in preparing the following table and figures for this study were obtained through permission of the superintendent of schools and the elementary principal of Carlisle Community Schools, Carlisle, Iowa. The data included in this report may be found in both of these offices in yearly editions of The Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, 1956-1967.

Table I. Table I shows the grade-equivalent norms per grade for both vocabulary and reading tests compared to actual mean composite scores made by students of grades three through six for the years 1956 through 1967. This table was intended to be used as a reference for Figures 1-8 to locate exact scores since these are not shown on the Figures.

Figures 1-8. The line graphs presented in Figures 1-8 show how actual mean composite grade-equivalent scores compared to the norm of each grade's vocabulary and reading tests. A comparison is further drawn to show which group of classes scored the higher average composite score: those classes who had beginning reading by sight method or those who had phonics method.

The mean of the third grade classes taught by phonics method exceeded norms for both vocabulary and reading tests, but the mean of
<table>
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<td>58.5</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>41.4</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td></td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>52.1</td>
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<td></td>
<td>65.0</td>
<td>62.0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>January, 1967</td>
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<td>34.7</td>
<td></td>
<td>45.0</td>
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<td>46.2</td>
<td></td>
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<td>53.2</td>
<td></td>
<td>65.0</td>
<td>63.5</td>
<td>63.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

GE = Grade equivalent  
M = Mean score  
Above ------ = Mean scores of classes taught beginning reading by sight method.  
Below ------ = Mean scores of classes taught beginning reading by phonic method.
the sight classes failed to meet the average norm in vocabulary. (See Figures 1 and 2.)

The mean of the fourth grade classes taught by both methods did not achieve the norm in the vocabulary tests. (See Figure 3.) However, the fourth grade sight classes and phonic-method classes both exceeded the norm for reading tests. (See Figure 4.)

Fifth grade classes representing both methods failed to achieve their average norm in vocabulary tests. (See Figure 5.) The fifth grade sight group, however, averaged more than their norm in reading tests. (See Figure 6.)

Neither of the sixth grade class groups achieved their average norms in either vocabulary or reading tests. (See Figures 7 and 8.) However, as was pointed out earlier in the limitations of the study, there are not enough test results available for much comparison to be made, especially in fifth and sixth grades.

Review of the literature. No area of curriculum has been the center of as much controversy through the years as the question of how to teach beginning reading. Because modern psychology principles state that learning is done best from "wholes" to "parts," most reading authorities have advocated teaching a sight vocabulary of fifty to one hundred words which are in the child's speaking vocabulary, then begin teaching phonics as generalizations of words known.

Cordts and Morrison wrote that when a beginner in reading is taught the sounds of the letters before he has learned to read for
1956-62 Mean GE Norm: 35.1
1956-62 Sight-method beginning reading, Mean GE Score: 33.9

1962-67 Mean GE Norm: 34.5
1962-67 Phonics-method beginning reading, Mean GE Score: 34.6

Grade-Equivalent (GE) Score = \[ \frac{\text{Mean GE Score}}{\text{Norm}} \times 100 \]

Figure 1. Comparison of means and norms for beginners’ sight-method and phonics-method classes, third grade vocabulary tests, 1956-1967.
1956-62 Mean GE Norm: 35.1
1956-67 Sight-method beginning reading, Mean GE Score: 35.6

1962-67 Mean GE Norm: 34.5
1962-67 Phonics-method beginning reading, Mean GE Score: 35.6

Grade-Equivalent (GE) Score = 

Figure 2. Comparison of means and norms for beginners' sight-method and phonics-method classes, third grade reading tests, 1956-1967.
1956-62  Mean GE Norm: 44.9
1956-62  Sight-method beginning reading, Mean GE Score: 43.4

1964-67  Mean GE Norm: 45.0
1964-67  Phonics-method beginning reading, Mean GE Score: 43.1
Norm = Grade-Equivalent (GE) Score = ___

Figure 3. Comparison of means and norms for beginners' sight-method and phonics-method classes, fourth grade vocabulary tests, 1956-1967.
1956-62 Mean GE Norm: 44.9
1956-62 Sight-method beginning reading, Mean GE Score: 45.2

1964-67 Mean GE Norm: 45.0
1964-67 Phonics-method beginning reading, Mean GE Score: 45.3

Norm = ———
Grade-Equivalent (GE) Score = ———

Figure 4. Comparison of means and norms for beginners' sight-method and phonics-method classes, fourth grade reading tests, 1956-1967.
1956-64 Mean GE Norm: 54.9
1956-64 Sight-method beginning reading, Mean GE Score: 53.9

1965-67 Mean GE Norm: 55.0
1965-67 Phonics-method beginning reading, Mean GE Score: 52.3

Grade-Equivalent (GE) Score = \( \ldots \)

Figure 5. Comparison of means and norms for beginners' sight-method and phonics-method classes, fifth grade vocabulary tests, 1956-1967.
1956-64 Mean GE Norm: 54.9
1956-64 Sight-method beginning reading, Mean GE Score: 55.0
1965-67 Mean GE Norm: 55.0
1965-67 Phonics-method beginning reading, Mean GE Score: 54.1

Grade-Equivalent (GE) Score = 

Figure 6. Comparison of means and norms for beginners' sight-
method and phonics-method classes, fifth grade reading tests, 1956-1967.
Figure 7. Comparison of means and norms for beginners' sight-method and phonics-method classes, sixth grade vocabulary tests, 1956-1967.
1956-65 Mean GE Norm: 64.9
1956-65 Sight-method beginning reading, Mean GE Score: 64.6
1966-67 GE Norm: 65.0
1966-67 Phonics-method beginning reading, Mean GE Score: 64.0

\[
\text{Norm} = \frac{\text{Grade-Equivalent (GE) Score}}{10}
\]

Figure 8. Comparison of means and norms for beginners' sight-method and phonics-method classes, sixth grade reading tests, 1956-1967.
meaning, the habit of concentrating on the sounds and their letters in the sentence has to be unlearned before the mind is free to comprehend what the author of the sentence is telling the reader. Whole-word recognition, then, should come first. Phonics should come later to reinforce look-say reading when the reading vocabulary becomes too diversified to be recognized.¹

Durrell recommended a delay of instruction in word analysis until the child had acquired a sight vocabulary of seventy-five to one hundred words. This would permit him to experience the pleasure of connected reading and to understand the purpose of reading.²

Lillian Gray reported a survey conducted by Sparks and Pay to evaluate the two methods of teaching reading. A pair of schools experimented with the Phonetic Keys to Reading versus a basic reading program in grades one and three. The phonetic series seemed to produce superior results in comprehension as tested through the end of grade two, but the initial lead in vocabulary for this group was not maintained. By the end of grade three and in grade four, no significant differences were found. The authors concluded that the standard basic method gave enough phonetic training to provide pupils with necessary word-attack skills. Certainly, the basic reading approach allows for better balance, since the drill on


Phonetic analysis is related to the use of familiar words learned by sight and is not isolated from content.  

Gray concluded that letters of the alphabet studied in isolation mean relatively little to beginning readers, and that learning them by rote is tedious and unchallenging. The work in phonics should be introduced gradually. When the children have learned a modest stock of sight words and several of these begin with the same initial consonant sound, they are ready for some phonetic analysis. To modern educators, this gradual approach through sight words to associating sounds with letter symbols seems infinitely less confusing than presenting beforehand a string of letters or a combination of letters to be memorized in narrow arbitrary drill, isolated from function.

Witty recognized that there is little agreement concerning the number of phonetic units to be taught and the time these should be introduced. He mentioned the practice frequently followed in modern schools is to postpone formal phonetic instruction until children have acquired a basic stock of fifty to one hundred sight words.

Brownell's survey on the use of phonics by 627 primary-grade teachers in twenty-six different school systems reported the trend is


to give more emphasis to phonics in grades two and three than in grade one.¹

Harris reported a study by Dolch and Bloomster in which a substantial correlation between phonetic ability as measured by that test, and mental age, was found. Results also showed that the children whose mental ages were below seven years were able to do little or nothing on the phonics test. They concluded that the ability to learn and successfully apply phonetic principles required a higher degree of mental maturity than is needed for learning to recognize sight words, and recommended that the major part of phonics instruction should be placed in the second and third grades, because the majority of first-grade children are not ready to profit from such instruction.²

Because printed words are symbols for sound words, it might seem logical to teach reading entirely by the method of "unlocking" the printed word to see which sound word is meant. This is logical in one sense, but it is not true of the logic of human nature. Sounding is a laborious method. When children are presented with words at the time of beginning reading, they must have quick success. If they do not learn to read something rapidly and easily, they will lose interest and become set against reading. Therefore, Dolch emphasized that children must be


able to read a few sentences to get a story out of it. They must experience a quick success method. Such is the sight method. In contrast, the sounding method is painfully slow. Before a child can do any real reading, he must learn the "elements."

William S. Gray agreed that skill in phonetic analysis is essential for independence in identifying new printed words, but this skill should be based on fundamental understandings of how sounds and their letter symbols function in the language; and these understandings should develop as generalizations based on the child's experience with words—words which he learns visually as meaningful wholes, rather than mechanically as a series of letter sounds.

McKee wrote that he felt it was unfortunate that in most first-grade classes the exclusive use of the sight method continues until seventy-five or more words have been taught, and that during all this time no teaching of the names or the sounds of letters or the sounds of groups of letters which would help the pupil to clinch those seventy-five words or to identify other words independently is attempted.

Twenty-seven well known writers on reading instruction who attended a reading conference prepared a public statement as to the place of phonics in a reading program and the constituent parts of such a program. They agreed that when children come to first grade, they

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expect to learn to read. This desire should be capitalized on at once.
It is rather standard practice for beginners to learn a few printed
words that are common in the children's speaking vocabularies. With
these few words beginners read very simple sentences almost immediately.
These beginning words are readily learned in meaningful situations. The
context in which they are used leads to their meanings. The whole pur-
pose of reading is to get meaning. ¹

Bleismer and Yarborough presented a comparison of five basic
sight vocabulary reading programs and five word elements methods. The
five phonetic method programs ranked highest. Phonetic Keys ranked
fourth of these. A criticism frequently made of phonetic programs is
that the close attention given to word elements may lead to inadequate
development of comprehension skills. In this study, there was only one
instance (out of twenty-five) in which paragraph-reading scores favored
a sight word program, and this difference was not significant. Twenty
comparisons revealed all significant differences in favor of phonetic
programs. ²

¹Learning to Read: A Report of a Conference of Reading Experts

²Emery F. Bleismer and Betty M. Yarborough, "A Comparison of Ten
Different Beginning Reading Programs in First Grade," Phi Delta Kappan,
XLVI (June, 1965), 500-504.
CHAPTER III

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It was the purpose of this study to (1) compare vocabulary and reading scores of The Iowa Tests of Basic Skills for the years immediately previous to initiating the Phonetic Keys program and the subsequent years that the course has been implemented; and (2) present research on leading reading authorities' opinions and studies of this type of reading program to support or refute these findings.

The composite grade-equivalent scores from The Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (Vocabulary and Reading) were compared for the years 1956-1967 in grades three, four, five, and six. The means of these scores were placed in table form and on graphs with the grade-equivalent norms of each grade for the corresponding years. The scores were grouped according to the method of beginning reading taught, by sight method, or by the phonic method.

The results of the study were rather inconclusive since there have not been a sufficient number of years since the Phonetic Keys program was initiated to provide an adequate comparison with the sight method.

However, comparison of the years' scores that were available and included in the study showed that the classes taught beginning reading by the sight method scored a composite mean of 4.9 below the mean norms.
for vocabulary tests. The total means for all the phonics-taught classes ranked 6.7 lower than the norms. This showed that both types of classes failed to achieve their norms, but that phonics-taught classes ranked 1.8 lower than the sight-method classes in vocabulary, as indicated in the following summary:

Summary of Vocabulary Scores

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<td>64.9</td>
<td>65.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The comparison of means in reading tests showed that classes taught by the sight method exceeded their norms. A mean total of 0.6 above the norm for sight-method classes compared to a mean total of 0.5 below the norm for phonics-method classes, showed the phonics-method classes scored a total range of 1.3 lower than the sight-method group, as indicated in the following summary:

Summary of Reading Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Sight Method</th>
<th>Phonics Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deviation</td>
<td>Deviation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>from Norm</td>
<td>from Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Norm</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>34.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>45.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>54.9</td>
<td>55.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>64.9</td>
<td>65.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research on the opinions of leading authorities in the field of reading overwhelmingly favored the teaching of reading by the initial sight-vocabulary method. This literature supported the findings of this study, insofar as it was conducted. However, there should be several more years of comparison to determine any conclusive evidence. Continuous examination of future years' scores should be made to determine if they definitely indicate a deficiency in the reading program.

In the meantime, investigations should be conducted of other types of reading programs. Reports on reading research and experiments should be studied to determine what new ideas are being developed and which ones are being proved practical and worthwhile.

Control-group experimentation may be conducted within the school to decide the merits of one reading plan over another. This could be readily done since there are several sections of each grade.

At least, more experience-chart reading could precede the present reading program to build a more adequate initial sight vocabulary.
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