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We Suggest

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WE SUGGEST

Eleanor Buelke

Hall, Mary Anne

Teaching Reading as a Language Experience

Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1970.

Pp. vii + 117.

Few reading experts would disagree with the statement that effective, competent reading is a form of overt behavior. Most would agree that learning certain academic skills is prerequisite to a high degree of reading skill. Most of them even concur in what the manifestations of good reading behavior are. Similar lists of skills basic to reading expertise are given by proponents of widely varying methods and materials for teaching reading. Differences among leaders in this field appear to be found most often in the way with which they view the learner, his needs, and his behavior in the total reading and learning milieu. Differences in attitudes toward the learner result in differences in goals for teachers and learners and differences in children's attitudes and behavioral performance in reading achievement. Writing of conflict and continuity in human behavior, Jerome Kagan states:

Academic skills cover a large and complex sector of behavior. Mastery of these tasks can serve different motives separately or simultaneously.¹

Many successful teachers of reading acknowledge this truth and the relevancy of a further point made by Kagan when he says:

Comprehension of a single piece of behavior requires knowledge of the cognitive system to which the response is attached.²

Such teachers strive to operate within a frame of reference resting on a philosophy that teaching and learning must be personal, communicative, functional, and creative.

In recent years, reading authorities, supervisory personnel, and classroom teachers have explored an integrated, functional framework for teaching reading and language skills which takes advantage of motives that prompt learners to energetic action and cognitive learning. A description of this approach and identification of instructional practices which can be followed in teaching reading are found in the recently published *Teaching Reading as a Language Experience*. In the author's own words, "This book is *not* a collection of practices for

¹Esther Lloyd-Jones and Esther M. Westervelt, Editors, *Behavioral Science and Guidance*, p. 68. New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1963.

²*Op. cit.*, p. 84.

teaching This book is a description of the theoretical base of the language experience approach and the implementation of this theoretical base in a classroom setting." Earlier chapters of the book establish the theoretical rationale for the language experience approach, while later chapters deal with its practical implementation, describe its effective setting, and summarize information.

Hall explains the rationale for the language experience approach with some major assumptions about relationships between/among reading and language, language and learning, and the learner's role during the process of acquiring communications skills: reading is not a separate subject, but is a part of the total language program; thinking is fostered in children as they articulate their thoughts and produce their personal reading materials; the use of children's own language and experiences takes maximum advantage of the role of interest and personal involvement in learning. Further, she defines the primary goal of such instruction as the development of ability to communicate in all facets of language. Acquisition of skills in decoding print, growth of thinking skills in concept formation, expression and encoding of thoughts in oral and written language are all included in this approach.

Classroom procedures designed for improvement of instruction in communications skills are described in detail in the chapters on experience stories, creative writing, vocabulary development, literature, and both pre-reading and reading skills. Appropriate pictures and samples of children's writing accompany the explanations, and expand the reader's understanding of methods and techniques to be used. Suggested sources for further reading are listed at the close of each chapter. They represent some of the current, outstanding, and exciting writing of thinkers and research authorities in this area.

In her final chapter, the author examines overall concerns of teachers who wish to use the language experience approach. Here she identifies the environment typical of the classroom in which reading is taught as a language experience. She writes of teachers' expectations and attitudes; provision of ideas and materials for worthwhile independent activities; reading, listening, and writing centers; and ways to organize the class for whole group, small group, and individual learning situations. Hall concludes with a section on evaluation which stresses pupil achievement as behavioral performance in the entire communications field. This underlines a major premise with which she begins the book, "A teacher must be concerned with developing language power, not just reading ability."