

1-1-1970

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Recommended Citation

Warner, D. (1970). Future Teachers Look at Reading Instruction. *Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts*, 10 (2). Retrieved from https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol10/iss2/2

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FUTURE TEACHERS LOOK AT READING INSTRUCTION

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Association with the teaching profession, including the manner in which instructors themselves were taught by their teachers, appears to have a profound influence on the interpretation which the teacher applies to his professional role and to the type of instruction which he provides, in turn, to his pupils (1:215). In order to explore this relationship between instructional methods by which they were taught and those instructional approaches for which they indicate preference and intent to use as teachers in the area of reading, a study was conducted with university students who were completing their preparation for teaching.

PURPOSE

The goal of this study was to determine the nature of the initial reading instruction received by these students and their attitude toward reading, comparing that with the methods of reading instruction for which they express value.

THE SAMPLE

Two hundred students at the University of California at Los Angeles participated in this study. They ranked within the top 12.6 per cent in scholarship within the state of California in order to gain acceptance to the University. They had maintained a grade average of "C" or higher in their academic work at U.C.L.A. The subjects were predominantly female, 190 women and ten men. The average age for this sample was 22.

PROCEDURE

The two hundred students in the final phase of preparation for their credential entitling them to teaching in grades one through eight, participated in this study which was conducted during 1967-68. Questionnaires were designed to collect data relevant to the goal for this study and were administered to the sample.

RESULTS

Fifty-five per cent of the sample indicated that they could remember when they first realized that reading held meaning for the reader.

The modal year for this group in which reading for meaning was discovered was indicated as 1948, when their modal age was five. The majority of the students indicated that their mother and/or first-grade teacher were the key figures in their reading instruction. They also mentioned the helpful influence of an older sister who “played school” with them and thus provided great assistance in helping them to learn how to read.

Thirty-six per cent of the sample reported that their initial reading instruction was based on the sight method, also referred to as the look-say or whole-word approach, incorporating the use of flash cards. Twenty-eight per cent of this sample indicated that they were introduced to reading by a predominantly phonetic approach. Twenty-four per cent recalled the use of basal readers and fourteen per cent did not recall the circumstances surrounding their initial reading instruction. Subsequent reading instruction in later grades was recalled by all of the subjects involved and reportedly such reading instruction emphasized a predominantly whole-word approach for sixty-one per cent of the sample, while thirty-nine per cent recall emphasis on phonics.

When asked about the method that they felt was most effective for reading instruction, forty-nine per cent indicated that they felt that an approach incorporating many methods such as phonics, sight recognition, structure, and other techniques should be used. Forty-one per cent favored phonics. Ten per cent preferred a sight-word method.

FIGURE 1
 PREDOMINANT METHOD BY WHICH READING
 WAS TAUGHT TO RESPONDENTS

ITEM	USE		
	SIGHT METHOD	PHONICS	OF MANY METHODS
Initial reading instruction	36%	28%	—
Subsequent elementary reading instruction	61%	39%	—
Method preferred for use when they teach	10%	41%	49%

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that future teachers in this sample received reading instruction which focused on singular methods rather than on the use of many methods. They tend to prefer to emphasize phonics and/or the use of diversified methods when they teach reading. The modal year at which they received their initial reading instruction was 1948, when the history of reading instruction in the United States reveals that the method of sight recognition was popular in teaching reading (5:81). It would appear that for this sample, the approach focusing on phonics and/or diversification in method, which was less emphasized when they learned to read, is their preference for use with their own pupils, when they teach reading.

ATTITUDES TOWARD READING

Ninety-seven per cent of the subjects in this study indicated that they enjoyed learning to read and that they were proud and pleased when they could read. They mentioned the added independence, understanding and competency they realized as result of their progress in reading. The majority of subjects reported that they felt that the most important factor in learning to read was interest on the part of the learner. They mentioned that they were looking forward to using the basal reader series in teaching reading to pupils as well as using additional supplementary materials. However, eighty per cent felt that the basal series would benefit from changes in content reflecting the experiential background of a wider range of pupils. Seventy-one per cent of respondents indicated that they regarded reading as a vital skill in their life for study, pleasure, discovery and knowledge of world and local developments. Ninety-seven per cent felt that reading is an important skill in the life of most people. When asked whether they felt that reading ability can be increased by using specific methods, their response reflected their earlier advocacy of a diversified methodological approach, since they indicated that they felt that the coordinated use of the most effective approaches would be best.

Sixty per cent were in favor of altering the English language into a more phonetically regular system. However, they pointed out the massive re-education program and gradual approach that such an alteration would necessitate. With regard to the effect of such a linguistic change on reading, fifty-eight per cent indicated that they felt that such a phoneticized language would hamper reading in-

struction because of the emphasis this would place on phonics to the disadvantage of a diversified approach. With regard to the future, ninety-four per cent indicated that they anticipated that reading would remain a vital skill, regardless of the proliferation of audio-visual methods for disseminating information. Respondents cited the following reasons for this, including the personal needs which people have for reading involving gathering of information, opportunity for specialized study and exploration of new ideas.

Finally, subjects were asked for their prediction about reading instruction in the future. The majority of these future teachers indicated their anticipation of the use of computerized programing in connection with reading instruction. They mentioned the increased individualization of instruction, self-pacing, immediate knowledge of results and reinforcement which this would provide for pupils. Respondents also mentioned the release of the teacher for other aspects of reading instruction, when computerized programmed learning was made possible. Teachers could then be more deeply involved in diagnosis of pupil progress and individualized tailoring of reading instruction to meet pupil needs. They further anticipated that although the vocabulary would probably change in the future, methods of reading instruction such as phonics, structural analysis and other approaches subsumed under diversified reading instruction, would not change, unless the language should undergo radical alterations. Respondents pointed out that if there would be a radical change in language, internalized language would also be affected. Both Piaget and Vygotskii recognized this internalization of speech as thought (3:2). Because of this, students doubted the possibility of a post-literate era. These university students reiterated that programing would ideally be designed to incorporate a diversification of methods for reading instruction, rather than emphasizing one or two procedures. Finally, respondents mentioned the probable contribution of programmed instruction to the earlier initiation of reading instruction.

RELATED RESEARCH

The subjects in this study mentioned the influence of older siblings in terms of their initial reading instruction. According to Durkin, a sibling, especially an older sister, appears to be involved in the development of early reading ability on the part of younger brothers and sisters. Apparently, the older sibling has the motivation to "play school" with the younger child and the younger sibling has a keen desire to model his efforts after that of the older child. This

pattern seems to be the relevant one in cases where children learn to read before they enter school (2:74). With regard to this, on the basis of his comprehensive study concerning the characteristics of teachers, Ryans reported that those teachers who attained higher scores on criteria such as friendliness, responsibility, stimulation of classroom behavior, favorable attitudes toward pupils and democratic classroom procedures, were teachers who reported childhood and adolescent activities such as playing school and reading to children (4:395). Ryans concluded that teaching demanded a variety of human traits and abilities which could be considered in two categories, those involving mental abilities and skills and those qualities involving personality, beliefs and attitudes (4:4). He felt that the significance of the study was the support which the data provided for a previously noted relationship between specific teacher behavior and teachers' attitudes.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of this study, students have formulated attitudes toward reading instruction which are influenced by the procedure used when they were taught to read. The sample in this present study indicated a preference for a teaching approach which emphasizes phonics and/or diversified methods to a greater degree than did the approach to reading instruction reportedly used by their teachers when they were taught to read. This sample of university students reported satisfaction derived from development of their ability to read, and from reading throughout their life. They perceived reading as a vital skill and indicated that they have definite ideas about effective ways to teach reading. It would appear that methods by which this sample of respondents was taught to read and the satisfaction which they have derived from reading have had an effect on the perception which these future teachers have toward their role in providing reading instruction for their pupils.

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