

AN INVESTIGATION OF EIGHTH GRADE READING

THE following article grew out of a study of reading ability in the eighth grade of the Harrisonburg Junior High School. The investigation was accomplished through the co-operation of the high school principal, the junior high school teachers, the director of training of the college, and the college students enrolled in the grammar grade course in tests and measurements.

PROBLEM

In the junior high school formal reading is not emphasized. This means that a good part of the practice in reading that pupils in the seventh and eighth grade get is incidental, and comes through their study of other school subjects or through their recreational reading.

The question has arisen as to the effect of underemphasizing formal reading upon the reading abilities of these pupils and therefore on their ability to properly prepare their other school work. The purpose, then, of this study, was to attempt an appraisal of the reading abilities of these eighth grade pupils, to diagnose their difficulties, and to suggest remedial measures.

PROCEDURE

The following vocabulary and reading tests were given by the instructor of the tests and measurements class and were graded and tabulated by the members of this class. The diagnosis and remedial suggestions were also largely the result of class discussion after careful study of the tests and after extensive reading. The tests were given in the order mentioned.

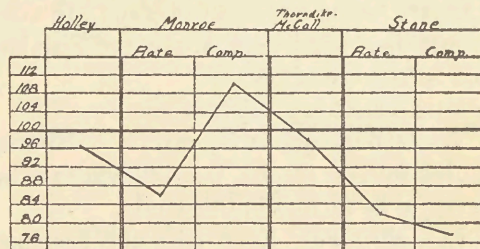
- Holley Sentence Vocabulary Scale
- Thorndike-McCall Reading Scale
- Monroe's Standardized Silent Reading Test Revised
- Stone Narrative Reading Scale

After the tests were carefully scored by

the class, the scores for each test were distributed according to rank, medians arrived at, and comparisons made with the standard norms given by each test for the eighth grade. In order that all the results could be put on a single graph with a common norm for all tests, it was decided to use the per cent of the norm method, that is, the score a pupil made in each test was divided by the norm for that test. Thus, if a pupil made a score of 12 in the Monroe test (comprehension) this score was divided by 13.7, the norm for the eighth grade and the resulting 87.5 would be the per cent of the norm. By this procedure the norms of all tests would be reduced to a 100% basis and have a common value. This makes it possible to construct a graph in which a single line will indicate the norm for all the tests.

Two forms of graphs were constructed. The first was an individual graph for each pupil showing in the per cent of the norm his scores in all four tests, both in rate and comprehension. An example of this graph is shown here.

COMBINATION GRAPH OF READING
for (pupil's name)
Harrisonburg Junior High School, 8th Grade



It is read as follows: Pupil "A" is 4% below the norm in the Holley Vocabulary Scale, 15% below the norm for rate in the Monroe Reading Test, and 10% above the norm for comprehension in the same test. In the Thorndike-McCall Reading Scale she is 2% below the norm and in the Stone Narrative Test she is 18% below in rate and 22% below in comprehension. This chart presents the scores of a pupil who is

complicated for reproduction here, but a whole.

The second graph was a combination graph showing the comparative records of all the pupils in all the tests in relation to the common 100% norm. The graph is too complicated for reproduction here, but a tabulation of the results follows.

TABULATION OF RESULTS SHOWN IN COMBINATION GRAPH OF READING SCORES (31 PUPILS)

		Above		Below		
12	scores averaged	12%	19	scores averaged	13%	in Holley Test
12	" "	5.5%	19	" "	13%	in McCall Test
9	" "	16%	22	" "	17.5%	in Monroe Test Rate
17	" "	21%	14	" "	18%	in Monroe Test Comp.
3	" "	21%	26	" "	21%	in Stone Test Rate
14	" "	26%	15	" "	26%	in Stone Test Comp.
Totals—67	" "	17%	115	" "	18%	in all tests

The tabulation reads as follows: twelve scores averaged 12% above and 19 scores averaged 13% below the standard in the Holley Sentence Vocabulary Scale, etc. The totals read thus: 67 scores averaged 17% above the standard and 115 scores averaged 18% below. In terms of per cent of the class above and below the standard, the results show that approximately 63% are below and 37% are above. Separating rate results from comprehension, we find the following: in rate 20% were above the standard while 80% were below. In comprehension 47% were above the standard and 53% were below.

POSSIBLE REASONS FOR TEST RESULTS

While one cannot be certain of specific causes for test results, the following are believed to be factors in this study.

(a) *Attitude.* Even with the best possible planning of a testing program there will creep in conditions that tend to invalidate the results. In this instance the examiner sensed what appeared to be an attitude of indifference to the testing program. It must be understood that these children have taken a great many tests during their elementary school experience, some of which they never heard of again after taking, and it is possible that to them these were "just some more of those tests."

Knowing the situation, the writer finds himself sympathizing with them. That this attitude exists seems substantiated by the fact that later, under different circumstances, a number of the pupils did very much better work than their test grades indicate.

(b) *Lack of Purposeful Practice.* As was stated in the beginning of this discus-

sion, these pupils had been a year and a half without formal reading practice. There has probably been a sliding back in their general ability to read. The reading skills had not been sufficiently habituated by the end of the sixth year. To the writer the results of the tests show the necessity for more formal and informal reading drill in the junior high school.

(c) *Lack of a Broad Reading Vocabulary.* The results of the Holley Test seem to indicate the lack of a good reading vocabulary and are further verified by the McCall test which has a wider vocabulary than most reading tests.

(d) *Lack of Ability to Concentrate.* There has been a growing feeling on the part of the writer, who has had the opportunity to observe this particular group over a period of years, that they have come to depend too much on the stimulation of their interest from sources outside the subject matter. The ability to concentrate has not been developed to the degree necessary to do rapid reading with a maximum of comprehension.

INCREASING RATE OF READING

Apparently the matter of rate is the greater problem in this class. It is first of all desirable that the pupils themselves re-

alize the importance of rate in reading. It is only with such knowledge that they can work intelligently toward increasing that rate. It is also necessary that they be able to distinguish between material that lends itself to rapid reading or even skimming, and that which requires slower and more careful reading.

Yoakam¹ lists four types of reading based on rate. (a) Skimming; a very rapid rate of reading where the reader's desire is to get a general idea of what the page contains, or to find some particular reference. Skimming should be taught children after they have become masters of the fundamental mechanics of reading. (b) Rapid reading; where the material is familiar or recreational. Newspapers, magazines, or novels for pleasure are good material for rapid reading. (c) Normal-rate reading; the habitual rate at which a reader proceeds, determined by the material he is reading, by the purpose of the reading, and by the degree of his mechanical efficiency in reading. The better type of novel, informational books, and all reading of ordinary difficulty make use of this type. It is in this type of reading that pupils of the upper elementary grades need special instruction with the conscious purpose of increasing rate. (d) Careful reading; where the pupil recognizes the need of close attention to details. This rate is much slower, depending on the difficulty of the material. Directions, technical articles, and explanatory material may be listed under this type. Pupils should be taught to discriminate between the different types of reading and study material so as to apply the proper type of rate to it.

Experiments have proved conclusively that rate in reading can be increased to a considerable degree without endangering comprehension, especially if comprehension is continually checked upon. Extensive reading is of course necessary if a fair rate of speed is to be attained. Here, as in every

other activity, practice of the right kind tends to improvement.

By the time the child has reached the seventh or eighth grade he has perfected to a fair degree the mechanics of reading. What he now needs is a well planned course of reading with many checks designed to develop not merely rate but rates of reading. This program could set up two aims; first, a large amount of general recreational reading of an easy character with plenty of action that carries the reader along with the rapidly developing story, and second, specific drill in getting thought out of paragraph or sentence in a limited period of time. In special drills for rate the reading material should always be of a difficulty less than that normal for the grade.

REMEDIAL WORK IN COMPREHENSION

There has been a great deal written on the improvement of comprehension in reading most of which is probably common knowledge to the readers of this magazine, so this article will give the subject but brief treatment.

Attention—Success in any type of work depends on the ability to attend, and this is especially true of reading. It is best achieved when the material is recognized by the child to be of real intrinsic value either as a recreational or as an informational medium. A good teacher can build up an *esprit de corps* that will demand attention on material the value of which is not so easy for the pupil to ascertain or recognize.

Reading for Specific Purposes—Much of the reading of children is aimless because they have not formed the habit of setting up definite ends. Where aims are definite the material read has a greater meaning. Without definite aims the reader falls from the level of reading for thought to that of reading to memorize. These aims will of course have to be set by the teacher until the child develops sufficient judgment to

1. Adapted from Gerald A. Yoakam, *Reading and Study*. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1928.

select for himself and probably such selection should never be without the aid of the teacher.

Vocabulary Development—Much of the lack of comprehension on the part of adults as well as children is due to the meagerness of their vocabulary. Imagine a young woman teaching colonial history who gave the writer recently as a definition of "stockade," "a small ornament worn on the hat of the French revolutionists." Yoakam suggests the use of progress books (a) to analyze polysyllabic words, (b) to study prefixes, suffixes, and stems, and (3) to study homonyms.

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CHECKING BASIC VOCABULARY IN THE FIRST GRADE

THE primary purpose in first grade reading is the development of right habits and attitudes: the child should learn to read across the line in an easy rhythm and to make an accurate and economical return sweep; he should read to find out something; and he should derive satisfaction from his reading. Such a program stresses the sentence and the story methods for beginners; it teaches words through context, always making sure that the word is rich with meaning. So far, so good. But often we find children promoted to the second grade so lacking in word consciousness that they are greatly hampered in their progress toward independence in reading.

This paper in no way advocates stress on the *teaching* of words out of context; it would always subordinate phonics to meanings. It does maintain that there must be systematic *checking* of single words if the teacher is to intelligently guide the child in his reading growth. And, for that reason, it offers a simplified scheme for such checking.

All primers contain some words not widely enough used to merit mastery. The teacher should therefore check the word list in her basal primer by some standard list such as the Thorndike list¹ or the Ayres spelling list² using for the checking only words common to the two sources. If she does not have access to such a standard list she can secure an approximate list by using words common to her basal and supplementary primers and first readers.

The words should be numbered in the order in which they occur in the basal primer. The number of words to be used will depend upon the time of the year; at the middle of the year 50 or 100 words is enough, but as many as 200 can be used toward the close of the grade.

The words should next be grouped in blocks of 10 or 20 according to the size of the class; it may take too long to get around a large class checking 20 words at a time.

If the teacher does not have word cards to accompany the basal primer and first reader, her next step is to make a card for each word on her list. Each word should be put on a separate card; the cards should be of uniform size so that the children can not associate a word with its card. The words can be lettered by hand, or a hand printing press can be used. In either case the work must be carefully done—all letters clear, evenly spaced, and well aligned—since a primary child's perception of a word is greatly affected by its legibility.

Each child must be tested individually. The first series of 10 or 20 words is presented to him several times, each time in a different order so that the check is on his recognition of the particular word and not on memory of the order in which the words occur. After checking a few words the teacher can appreciate the individual child's

¹*The Teachers Word Book*, by Edward Lee Thorndike. New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University.

²*Buckingham Extension of the Ayres Spelling Scale*. Bloomington, Ill.: The Public School Publishing Co.