PHONICS IN
AMERICAN READING INSTRUCTION

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ACCEPTANCE SHEET

I recommend that this thesis be accepted in fulfillment for graduation with Honors.

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INTRODUCTION

The place of phonics in teaching reading has been a controversial topic for many years and it continues to be so even at the present time. Much has been written on the subject and many conclusions have been drawn from research conducted in this field. In spite of all this research, opinions vary among educators as well as among lay people as to the place of phonics in reading instruction. In the past, there have been educators who advocated little or no phonics and others who have advocated the phonics method as the only way for successful reading instruction. At present there are a few who stress the latter approach to reading instruction; however, most experts in the field of reading do not go to such extremes. It was the writer's purpose in this paper to investigate the role of and the importance of phonics in today's reading program.
DEFINITION OF PHONICS

"Phonics is an adaptation of the highly specialized field known as phonetics."\(^1\) Phonetics classifies speech sounds of the letters as to their variations and physiological characteristics; it is defined as "the science of speech sounds considered as elements of language; esp., the study of their formation by the speech organs and apprehension by the ear, their attributes, and their relation to other aspects of language."\(^2\) Phonics is defined as "The science of sound; acoustics; phonetics; specif., the study and application of elementary phonetics as a method of teaching beginners to read or enunciate."\(^3\) Phonics concerns the relationship of letters or combinations of letters in printed words with their sounds in spoken words. As a method of teaching reading, "phonics concentrates on the most common sounds in our language, and on the letters or combinations of letters most often used to record them. Attention is given therefore to the sounds of long and short vowels, hard and soft consonants, and to the sounds of blends diphthongs, and digraphs. Because the sounds of letters are sometimes affected by their position in a word, attention is also given to syllabification."\(^4\)


\(^3\) Ibid.

\(^4\) Durkin, p. 2. A blend is a combination of two or more consonants in which both letter sounds are heard, such as bl, tr, spr.; a diphthong is a combination of two vowels in which both sounds are heard, such as oi in toil or ou in about; a digraph is a combination of two letters which produces a single sound, such as wh, sh, th, etc.
I. HISTORY OF PHONICS IN THE UNITED STATES¹

Introduction of Phonics (1776-1840).--The history of phonics in the United States begins in colonial days with the use of the New England Primer. This was basically an alphabetic approach rather than a phonic one. Children were required to learn the alphabet as the first step in learning to read. On completion of learning the alphabet, the children were taught long lists of syllables by spelling out the syllables. It was only after they had mastered these steps that words were introduced to them. The spelling out of letters was stressed in this alphabetic system with only a small amount of emphasis given to the phonic aspect, the sounds of the letters. The alphabet method was used for the first 175 years of reading instruction in our country.

It was not until Noah Webster's Blueback Speller was published in 1782 that sounds, as well as names, of letters were taught. Webster felt that dialects could be overcome and the speech of the new country be standardized by an emphasis on phonics in the pronunciation of common words. His book was used for teaching reading as well as for teaching spelling. In the reading instruction, the alphabet was again taught first, but a great deal of attention was given to the sounds of the letters. Syllables

¹The dates given for the various periods are approximate.
were the next step in the teaching and they were grouped and taught by sounds rather than letter-by-letter spelling as in the alphabetic method. Words were introduced in phonetically related lists as the last step in the reading instruction. This combination approach to reading instruction continued through the early 1800's.

Phonics was heavily emphasized in the famous McGuffey readers. Nila Smith says that these readers were first published between 1836 and 1844. Concerning the first reader, she says: "The book consists chiefly of sentences about children and animals. These sentences are usually subservient to the phonetic elements which McGuffey selected for drill purposes. . . . The content is very dull and so altogether senseless that it is difficult for an adult to read." ² Nevertheless, these books were used extensively in American elementary schools.

Introduction of the Word Method (1840-1890).—By 1840, educators were expressing enthusiasm for teaching reading by the presentation of whole words rather than syllables. Horace Mann, who was by then a recognized educational leader, was one of the first to express dissatisfaction with the phonics method. Also, educators who had traveled abroad criticized the phonics method commonly used in America and encouraged the teaching of the whole word method such as they had seen. The first reading book which was based on the word method was My Little Primer by Joseph Bumstead. This book was introduced in 1840. In 1846, John

Russell Webb published a primer named *The New Word Method*. In this book, "the greatest innovation was that the child learned entire words during his first weeks of reading instruction. As soon as this task was achieved, however, spelling and phonetics were employed in the same capacity and with emphasis equal to that found in the alphabet-phonetic method."³ Other readers employing the word method were published. The whole word approach to teaching reading continued in popularity until about 1890.

**Re-emphasis on Phonics (1890-1920).**—Because of complaints that the word method was not successful, several writers began advocating an approach which was completely opposite the word method, a synthetic method of sounding. One of the most important influences during this period of phonics popularity was Rebecca Pollard's *Synthetic Method* which was published in 1889. She was the first educator to consider children's interests in the content of her method. She used stories to introduce sounds, but did not advocate the use of drillwork and sounds analysis before work with whole words or sentences began. The *Synthetic Method* included "the mechanical mastery of words; the constant use of diacritical marks; the use of sound games and phonic pictures. . .; the personification of the letters. . .; all these are typical of the archaic devices and organization to which this method has constant recourse."⁴ This method was much more extreme than previous methods and had a great deal of influence on later series emphasizing phonics.

³Ibid., p. 90.

In 1894, Silver, Burdett, and Company published the Ward Rational Method in Reading. In this series, Edward G. Ward, Superintendent of Public Instruction of Brooklyn, New York, combined the word- and phonic-methods by "using the word method in connection with the early pages of his primer. . . . After the author had equipped the child with the stock of sight words which he thought necessary, he plunged him into intensive training in phonetics, which carried over to the reading materials by means of diacritical marks." 5

James H. Fassett, Superintendent of Schools of Nashua, New Hampshire wrote the Beacon series which were published in 1912 and 1913. This series also featured phonetic exercises and drills. Reading charts and phonetic charts were used in connection with these books.

It was during this period from about 1890 to 1920 that these and other such systemized phonics methods were in their prime. Nila Smith writes concerning this time "that phonics teaching reached the 'height of the ridiculous' as evaluated in terms of modern educational concepts. . . . phonics has not yet fully recovered from the harm that was done in teaching it unwisely during this period." 6 Some series were based entirely on phonics and largely ignored getting any thought out of the reading. Betts says that "to the more sensible teachers, this system became known as the 'hiss and groan' method of teaching reading." 7

5 Smith, p. 134.
Phonics Discarded (1920-1935).--During the 1920's and early 1930's, phonics was again looked upon with disfavor. Gestalt psychology, which emphasizes "wholeness" in the process of learning, was becoming important in educational circles during the early part of this period. The phonic method of forming whole words from parts (syllables) could not be reconciled with the teaching of "wholes" which supporters of Gestalt psychology stressed. Another factor which was partially responsible for the abandonment of phonics was the development and use of standardized tests; these showed that many children could not read meaningfully. Educators decided that phonics methods were at fault and that reading could be taught more successfully by emphasizing silent reading for meaning. The first use of experience charts as a way of introducing words in familiar situations also occurred during these years. Word analysis was discarded and sight words were taught in what is commonly referred to as the "look-say" method.

Phonics Returned with Supplements (1935-1955).--By the late 1930's, the cycle was coming back from the no-phonics viewpoint to a revival in the belief in the value of phonics. The resurgence of phonics came about in better planned and organized reading programs. Attention was given to word meaning and to word attack skills such as structural analysis and picture and context clues. Research on the place of phonics continued during these years, and although Rudolph Flesch's Why Johnny Can't Read brought the controversy

over phonics to the layman, the research which was already in progress has been more important to professionals in the reading field.

Phonics in Recent Years (1955-1963).—Flesch stirred up public discussion over phonics in his now "famous" book. Many of his statements are considered to be either unsound or untrue. He bluntly states that "the teaching of reading never was a problem anywhere in the world until the United States switched to the present method around 1925."9 He says that "if you teach reading by this system [the memorization of whole words], you can't use ordinary reading matter for practice. Instead, all children for three, four, five, six years have to work their way up through a battery of carefully designed readers, each one containing all the words used in the previous ones plus a strictly limited number of new ones used with the exactly 'right' amount of repetition."10 He calls these basal reading series which are generally used "series of horrible, stupid, emasculated, pointless, tasteless little readers, the stuff and guff about Dick and Jane or Alice and Jerry...."11 More distortion of facts can be seen in his belief that "it's utterly impossible to find anyone inside the official family of the educators saying anything even slightly favorable to the natural method of teaching reading. Mention the alphabetic method or phonetics or 'phonics' and you immediately arouse derision, furious hostility, or icy silence."12

9 Ibid., p. 2.
10 Ibid., p. 6.
11 Ibid., p. 6-7.
12 Ibid., p. 8.
One can discern that his writing is based largely on personal opinion from the following statement concerning the research he did as background for his book:

A few weeks ago I spent two days in the library of Teachers College, Columbia University, tracking down every single reference to a study of 'phonics vs. no phonics.' I carefully read each one of those papers and monographs. Naturally, it is possible that some item or items in the bibliography escaped me; but I honestly don't think so. I covered the ground as diligently as I possibly could, looking for scientific evidence in favor of the word method.\(^\text{13}\)

Flesch's concept of reading is merely word-calling, reading without understanding. He ignores the fact that getting meaning from the printed page is the most important aspect of the reading process. Reading experts criticize him for this as well as for the other weaknesses of the book. He formulates his own system which he professes to be the best method for teaching all children to read. Naomi Simms makes the following summary concerning Flesch's system:

According to the author [Flesch], this method of teaching reading is based upon the following assumptions: (1) reading is the mechanical process of putting together combinations of letters, (2) that the cause of all reading difficulties is lack of phonetic understanding, (3) that the Flesch method is the 'perfect' method of teaching reading, (4) that this method is based on Gestalt psychology, and that (5) scientific findings prove the superiority of the phonetic methods.\(^\text{14}\)

\(^\text{13}\)Ibid., p. 60.

She then writes, showing how each of these assumptions is false. Another writer says that "Flesch has mixed in just enough of the truth to make his case sound reasonable to people who are not acquainted with all the facts."\(^{15}\) Regardless of its faults and weaknesses, the book has made its impact felt in the field of reading and with the general public.

Two other books with the same theme as Flesch's are *Reading: Chaos and Cure*\(^{16}\) and *Tomorrow's Illiterates*.\(^{17}\) Both books are based on the concept of reading as naming words, not of getting thoughts from the printed page. The authors of both books expound on their ideas of what is wrong with reading instruction, but they do not document their ideas with research studies. They use double talk, unsupported evidence, and limited research slanted to support their beliefs. The writers ignore readiness and Terman and Walcutt go so far as to say that "most of the children in America could be taught [to read] in a few weeks or months at the age of five."\(^{18}\) This assumes, of course, that children would be taught by the "proper method," the system they put forth in their book.


\(^{18}\)Terman and Walcutt, p. ix.
Another author who criticizes American reading instruction is Arthur S. Trace, Jr. In What Ivan Knows That Johnny Doesn't, he presents the Soviet method of teaching both the Russian and English languages alphabetically and phonetically and compares the size of the vocabularies used in the readers for both Russia and the United States. He believes that the Russian children with their phonetic training can easily handle the much larger vocabularies presented in their books.

Summary.--It can be seen through this brief history of the influence of phonics in American reading instruction that it has been a controversial subject for many years and continues to be so. It can also be seen that the emphasis on phonics in reading instruction has been in cycles, alternating with the word method as educator and public opinion changed. The cycle is again coming around to popularity for phonics. This will be shown further in Chapter V of this study.

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II. SHOULD PHONICS BE TAUGHT?

Advantages of Phonics Instruction.--There are several sound reasons for including phonics in the elementary reading program. The following is a compilation of benefits which can be derived from phonics instruction. This listing comes from seven authors (2, 5, 9, 20, 21, 22, 44) but similar reasons are generally recognized in most writings on the subject. Of course the all-encompassing reason for instruction in phonics is that it will develop a technique for word recognition, thus leading to independence in reading. This main reason can be divided into such factors as the following: (1) Phonics will teach the basic elements, the speech sounds, of our language. (2) Instruction in phonics gives the pupil one of the mechanics of the reading process. (3) Use of phonics saves time, so indirectly it helps to maintain interest in reading. An interested child will use more books and reading materials. (4) Use of phonics aids in discrimination of confusing words. More exact reading comes through this help. (5) Knowledge of phonics reduces fear of dealing with polysyllabic words. A child will feel more confident because he has something with which he can attack long words. (6) Reliance on context clues is reduced; conversely, phonics can also serve as a confirmation of context clues. (7) Consciousness of phonics helps to improve pronunciation and enunciation of speech. (8) The training also aids auditory dis-
crimination; it helps in sound recognition and differentiation. (9) Oral reading techniques may be improved in such ways as "breath control and in speech coordination."¹ (10) Work with phonics is also an aid to spelling improvement. (11) Phonics is often helpful in remedial reading work.

Disadvantages of Phonics Instruction.--The following summary from several authors (2, 8, 14, 21, 41, 44), gives the major shortcomings of the phonics method. (1) One criticism which is frequently encountered is that phonic methods give little thought to children's interests. Some phonic material contains too much drill work, both on phonograms (often-used syllables) and on word families (groups of words all containing one common syllable). Such synthetic methods tend to lessen interest in reading. (2) It is often said that phonic training is a waste of time because of the non-phonetic sounds of letters in our language. However, our language is said to be approximately 87 per cent phonetic, so that argument is somewhat weakened when this knowledge is considered. (3) One of the most common arguments against phonics is that it produces "word-callers," children who read mechanically and do not gain meaning from what they have read. This can happen if the mechanics of reading are over-emphasized. (4) It is often contended that reading rate is slowed down when children have been trained in phonics. Time may be wasted when words are broken into parts unnecessarily. (5) Articulation

which is unnatural may be produced by the emphasis given to sounds rather than to whole words. This occurs especially when words are taught piecemeal. (6) Context clues and other helps for figuring out words may be ignored when the emphasis is placed on phonics. (7) So much time may be necessary to bring about proficiency in phonetic analysis that the other phases of reading may be slighted.

**Phonics Instruction is Sometimes Unjustified.** --There are times when the teaching of phonics should not be included in the reading program. Most reading experts now feel that it should not be included formally in the early stages of beginning reading. (Informal training auditory discrimination is an integral part of early reading instruction, however.) The experts believe that young children should not be taught to decipher lists of sounds, but should be given a stock of sight words so that they may quickly become fluent in reading some words with understanding and meaning. Children can thus develop the habit of seeing whole words rather than parts. This method also capitalizes upon the beginners' interest in learning to read. Phonics should also be withheld until the child is ready for it. More will be said about this aspect in Chapter III.

Not all children need specific training in phonics. Many children can pick up phonic generalizations without formal training. There are also some children who find it easier to remember words than specific rules for pronouncing the words; other children may want to learn all the generalizations a teacher may present and search for more. The ideal situation for this phase of reading
instruction would be individual diagnosis of each child's needs before introduction of word analysis.

There are a few children who are unable to form words from the individual letter sounds. Dolch calls this step "word synthesis." This is a problem which some proponents of phonic systems\(^2\) ignore. They neglect to mention the fact that phonics may present many difficulties to some children and that phonetic irregularities may confuse children so much that the value of phonics is lost. Another group of children who will probably get little benefit from training in phonics are those who have hearing defects; children must be able to hear and distinguish the sounds if the training is to be profitable. Other methods, such as tracing, kinaesthetic, or some other approach may be needed for those children who cannot learn with traditional methods.

Phonics should not be taught as the only method for learning how to interpret printed words. Other methods may be quicker and easier to use in many circumstances. This is another of the mistakes perpetrated by writers such as Flesch, Terman, and Walcutt. They emphasize intensive phonics and exclude all other systems of word recognition. The program must be balanced and taught so that children will realize which method fits each specific situation.

**Summary.**—The majority of specialists in the reading field recognize the value of phonics when the training is kept in proper perspective within the reading program. It is only one phase, even though an important one, and must be taught as such or other important parts of the program will be slighted or omitted. Phonics alone does not constitute the most effective type of reading instruction.

\(^2\)Rudolph Flesch, Sibyl Terman, and Charles Walcutt are notable examples.
III. WHEN SHOULD PHONICS BE TAUGHT?

Readiness is Important.--Most of the recognized leaders in the field of reading believe that readiness is an important factor in teaching phonics. One author says that "studies of maturation lead to the conclusion that phonic ability is an aspect of language facility and as such is inescapably related to organismic growth."¹ This same writer also states that "phonic training bears considerable positive relationship to oral skills of word pronunciation and word recognition. Phonetic ability is partially a function of training and, at the primary level, largely a function of mental age."² Another writer describes phonetic readiness as the time "when the child has acquired the visual and auditory discrimination adequate for differentiating between letter forms and between letter sounds, when the child has acquired a considerable stock of sight words, when he has attained a mental age of approximately seven years, and when he is making some progress in formal reading situations."³ From this, he concludes that "formal training in phonetics, therefore, should be started only after the child has progressed well along in first-grade work. Nevertheless, some informal training,


²Ibid., p. 15.

such as with initial consonant sounds, may profitably be given soon after the beginning of formal reading. Such training should always be intrinsic [naturally related] to the reading situation."\(^4\)

Another author summarizes as follows: "Important components of readiness for phonics include a knowledge of the names of letters, ability in auditory and visual discrimination, broad speaking and listening vocabularies, and the ability to recognize some whole words in their written form."\(^5\) Gray\(^6\) says that the first step is auditory perception—a child must be able to hear and produce a given sound before associating it with a printed letter. The second step named by Gray is called visual-auditory perception—after hearing the sound, the child must be able to associate it with the letter in print. Betts\(^7\) specifies that children have no need for phonetic training until their reading vocabulary consists of at least fifty words.

The most often quoted research on phonic readiness is that of Dolch and Bloomster as reported in 1937. From experiments given, they make the following conclusions:

\(^4\)Ibid.


\(^7\)Emmett A. Betts, "What About Phonics?" Education LXXV (May, 1955), p. 553.
The relation between mental maturity and the use of phonics is remarkably high. . . . Children of high mental age sometimes fail to acquire phonics ability but children of low mental age are certain to fail. The scattergrams seem to show the thing in which we are perhaps most interested, namely, the minimum age for phonics readiness. Children with mental ages below seven years made only chance scores, that is, as far as this experiment indicates, a mental age of seven years seems to be the lowest at which a child can be expected to use phonics, even in the simple situations provided by these two tests.

They say their research indicates that schools may be expecting success from phonics training too soon. Sight recognition of words requires less mental ability than phonic analysis and this must be considered in teaching beginning reading.

Albert Harris is one of the reading specialists who question the findings of Dolch and Bloomster. Harris writes:

Most of the currently popular basal readers follow [the recommendations of Dolch and Bloomster] and introduce relatively few phonics principles in the first grade. . . . This writer believes that the Dolch-Bloomster phonics test presented the children with a more difficult task than they face in connected, meaningful reading, and that their findings consequently tend to underestimate slightly the phonics readiness of first graders.9

Writers who call for intensive phonics in early reading instruction either ignore the mental age factor or repudiate it. Henderson, in writing about the Champaign, Illinois program of early phonics, contends that "test results appear to indicate that many of the children in the experimental group were able to profit from the teaching

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of phonics before a mental age of seven." Flesch openly disagrees with the Dolch and Bloomster study; he says that six-year-olds in many other countries learn to read phonetically and that in Great Britain reading is taught to five-year-olds in their Infant School. Terman and Walcutt also feel that reading can be taught to five-year-olds if the special phonics method they have formulated is used. It must be remembered that these authors' writings are based largely on personal opinion; research is lacking which could verify the opinions. Reading experts are almost unanimous in rejecting their writings.

**Instruction Through the Elementary Grades.**—Children can begin learning many basic phonetic generalizations in first grade which can be expanded upon as they progress in school. Hildreth writes:

> Mastery of sounding for fluent use in context reading will normally require some three or four years, paralleling the child's growing perception of distinctions in sounds within words and the expanding oral vocabulary. There is no such thing as learning 'all of sounding' in Grade 1 or Grade 2, because this skill can be mastered only as fast as all the other components of the reading process.

> By the time they enter the second grade the pupils can begin to see the advantage of working out words by themselves. This provides incentive for working on sounding, and is the reason why the second year is recognized as the time to begin study. The teacher takes advantage of the pupil's growing powers of discrimination to give instruction in word analysis, word building, and syllabication. Third grade is the period for intensive practice to establish independent use of these skills in word attack. Pupils in second grade may get off to a good start in sounding, but teaching and checking must be done systematically throughout the rest of the primary period, and well into the fourth grade with slower learners.

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12 Ibid., p. 342.
The same author makes the following observation about the process of learning phonics: "Strange as it seems, no sooner has the middle grader gained possession of the sounding technique than he begins to drop it, because he now knows at sight more of the words he formerly had to sound out... and he can infer sentence meanings more swiftly.... Sounding through every part of a word has become unnecessarily slow and tedious, and it distracts attention from comprehension of meanings."\(^{13}\) This does not, however, negate the importance of phonics in the primary grades.

**Summary.**—Most reading specialists believe that both physical and mental readiness are necessary for phonic instruction to be meaningful and valuable. They feel that formal training in phonics should be withheld until a child has learned several sight words. Those people who press for intensive phonics disagree with them, however, and advocate systematic phonics work for beginning readers. These writings are based almost totally on opinion rather than research and are rejected by most reading authorities. Phonics can not all be learned in any one grade, but instruction must continue through all the primary grades and into the intermediate grades for those children who need it.

IV. HOW MAY PHONICS BE TAUGHT?

Phonics as Taught in Past Years.--A knowledge of the basic method of teaching phonics in past years will serve as background for understanding today's practices. Until comparatively recent years, phonics instruction was based on drill and rote learning of lists of syllables which eventually led into learning words. Gray says that "most phonetic programs consisted of teaching phonograms. The phonograms were ordinarily one of two types--either vowel-consonant combinations, which were called 'families' (ad, et, ot, ip, etc.), or consonant-vowel combinations, which were called 'helpers,' (ma, pa, ea, ca, etc.)"¹ This type of teaching was a synthetic approach in which words were built up from their parts. Little thought was given to interest or meaning in reading.

Changes in the Teaching of Phonics.--As it was shown in Chapter I, there have been changes in the teaching of phonics over the years. Nila Smith says that many of these changes "have been inaugurated as a result of reasoning based on modern psychology, philosophy, and classroom experience. Others have come about as a result of scientific investigations."² It is the writer's aim in the remainder of this chapter to illustrate the changes and the way phonics may be taught today.

Basal Reader Method.--When phonics is taught as an integral part of a basal reading program, the emphasis is placed upon relating the phonics instruction to the immediate needs of children. Proponents of this approach emphasize that phonics training is more effective when children receive it in natural reading situations. It then is a more functional and meaningful part of the reading instruction. During recent years, this functional approach has been looked upon with favor by most reading specialists. All the basal readers now in use feature a program of phonics in the teacher's manual. Each series develops the program systematically and sequentially. They do not rely only on the sounding and blending of phonics for word analysis, but also teach such skills as structural analysis (analysis of parts, such as root words, prefixes and suffixes, and whole words), use of configuration clues (the shape of words), and context clues. They present word analysis instruction gradually and let it evolve from the content and stories in the readers. Words which can not readily be recognized as wholes are analyzed by comparison with known words. This is often called an analytic or inductive method of teaching sounding because whole words are decomposed, or analyzed, to identify recurring parts. From discovery of similarities in known words, children discover the principles of phonics. Rote memorization and drill on sounds, syllables, and rules are not given, but rather, children discover and observe as they encounter them in actual reading situations. The authors of basal series incorporating functional teaching of phonics have considered the growth stages at which children can handle the series of phonic skills and have placed them accordingly.
in the books. Attempts are made in most series to provide for individual differences of children. Basal readers vary greatly as to the sequence, exact methods, and thoroughness with which planning for phonics and other skills is done, but all do cover the range of these skills. Two of the more widely used series are the Ginn and Company readers and the Scott, Foresman, and Company series. Excerpts from the teacher's guides to these two series serve to illustrate the basis for their instruction:

The New Basic Reading Program assumes the responsibility in the school curriculum for helping children grow in efficient word perception by:
- using all basic words many times in meaningful context so that the child learns to perceive them instantly,
- providing for the careful presentation of sight words,
- helping the child develop methods of remembering word forms,
- making sure that the child grows continuously in his ability to use word form clues and context clues,
- helping the child develop the ability to apply structural and phonetic analysis to attack unfamiliar words. 3

The Ginn manual lists six main abilities which are needed at all developmental levels—readiness, word-study skills, comprehension and study skills, creative reading abilities, reading interests, and related language abilities. Specific word-study skills which this series develops are "phonetic analysis... structural analysis..., the use of context clues..., the use of the glossary and dictionary..., and wide reading." 4 Each of these abilities is systematically developed in the series. Harris summarizes the basic

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principles underlying "word attack" instruction in today's basal readers:

**Phonic principles are developed from sight words.** Before a phoneme [smallest unit of sound] is taught, several words that contain it should have been learned as sight words... 

**Phonic principles should be developed inductively.** Instead of memorizing sounds, children should discover for themselves, with the help of the teacher, the significance of letters and letter combinations... 

**Whole-word phonics.** The whole-word phonics procedure was devised to avoid distortion of sounds and difficulty in blending. Emphasis is placed on not sounding phonemes in isolation, but rather using known words in which the phoneme is easily identified...6

This functional approach to phonics in combination with other word attack techniques is recommended by many reading specialists in professional books and periodicals as well. Gray says that when a child "begins to apply phonetic analysis to words of more than one syllable, she must always combine it with structural analysis--for it is through structural analysis that she determines which parts of the visual word form make up pronunciation units."

He too advocates that children formulate their own generalizations about phonic principles rather than memorize rules.

Miles Tinker is in general agreement with this philosophy and advocates:

that the training be introduced as an intrinsic aspect of meaningful reading in a sequential pattern at appropriate times in the developmental stages of reading. To be effective, phonetic analysis must be accompanied by visual analysis. As a matter of fact, visual

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analysis naturally precedes the sounding. It identifies the convenient pronounceable units of a word such as letters, phonograms, syllables, and any other common word elements. This guides the sounding in the phonetic analysis.7

Hildreth calls the approach to functional phonics instruction a "whole-word" analytical method; she summarizes the order of teaching as follows:

(1) First, learning to recognize a substantial number of common words as wholes.
(2) Identifying recurring parts within these words which serve as clues to sounds.
(3) Identifying these sounds in new words.
(4) Generalizing about sounds and pronunciation rules.8

She lists several advantages for this method of sounding for beginning readers. Among these are "full use of the child's interests in the words he knows and understands... simplification of methods and materials... children's self-discovery of letter-sound relationships... [avoidance of] blending problems,"9 and other related advantages.

Edward Dolch is another of the reading specialists who support the theory of teaching phonics as an integral part of a total, or basal, reading program and not as a separate activity. He says "sounding" should be learned as it is used, not memorized in drills before it is needed. He cautions that sounding must not be hastily taught. He makes the following comments concerning the problem:

Almost all our mistakes in sounding are in trying to go too fast. We try to teach mere knowledge when we must be teaching habits and skills. And habits and skill take a lot of time and practice. Try to see that

9Ibid., p. 341.
the child is sure of one thing and can use it before we try to get him to learn another. ¹⁰

Dolch has formulated the following progression of thirteen steps for teaching phonics:

1. The sounds of the consonants.
2. The sounds of the consonant digraphs (ch, sh, th, and wh).
3. The short sounds of the vowels.
4. The long sounds of the vowels.
5. Silent final e shows that the sound of the preceding vowel is long.
6. The vowel digraphs
   Group 1. ai, ay, ee, ea, oa.
   Group 2. au, aw, eu, ew, oo (long), oo (short)
7. The diphthongs (oi, oy, ou, ow).
8. Vowels followed by r have a special sound.
9. C and G followed by e or i have their soft sounds.
10. Take off common beginnings and endings.
11. There are as many syllables as vowels.
12. Divide consonants that come between vowels.
13. Open syllables are long, closed syllables are short. ¹¹

From the above discussion, it appears that although there are variations in methods or scheduling for teaching specific skills, most reading specialists are in general agreement as to the place of phonics in today's program of reading instruction. They generally ignore the teaching of phonograms and concentrate on the teaching of phonics in meaningful situations. Practice is given only after the concept has been discovered and developed by children. Phonics, as taught using this philosophy, is an intrinsic part of the balanced program.


¹¹Edward W. Dolch, The Teaching of Sounding, (Champaign, Ill.: The Garrard Press, 1951), p. 48. This inexpensive pamphlet explains each step and gives suggestions for understanding and teaching sounding (phonics) skills.
Letter-Blend Method.--Another way to present phonics is by a letter-blend method. When this method is used, sounds of individual letters and then combinations of letters are taught before words are introduced. As Chapter I recorded, Rudolph Flesch has been widely quoted on his demand for intensive phonics instruction. His book contains a phonics system which he has devised. A brief resume of his philosophy and system is contained in the following quotation:

You have to start with teaching the child the letters a, e, i, o, u in spite of the fact that each of them spells a long and a short vowel. The only way to solve this problem is to begin by teaching the child only the five short vowels (which are far more common than the long ones) and postpone the long vowels until a much later stage.

All of which means that the natural sequence of any phonic method is this:

Step One: The five short vowels and all consonants spelled by single letters.
Step Two: Consonants and consonant combinations spelled with two or three letters.
Step Three: Vowels and vowel combinations spelled with two or three letters.
Step Four: The five long vowels.
Step Five: Irregular spelling.12

It can be seen that his system (as well as his philosophy) is contradictory to Dolch's and the other major reading specialists.

Sibyl Terman and Charles Walcutt have also formulated a reading system which is presented in their book Reading: Chaos and Cure.13 Their system proceeds from single consonant and then vowel sounds through digraphs, blends, and phonograms to words. The authors of

this system believe that children can learn to read easily with this progression and will have no difficulty with blending sounds. This seems questionable; reading phonograms and words does not constitute the entire process of learning to read.

The Hay-Wingo system, Reading With Phonics\(^{14}\) is one of the better known systems. This hard-bound book has a teacher's edition containing directions for teaching at the beginning of the book and the same material as the children's books in the back. The outstanding difference in this book is the use of two-color printing (red and black) which is used to set off the phonic elements being stressed. This letter-blend system presents a great deal of phonic drill in word lists. The book, intended for use in grades one and two, introduces short vowel sounds first, then presents consonants, combinations of beginning consonants with short vowels and consonant blends. Introduction of long vowel sounds is delayed until much work has been done with the previously named parts of words. Unphonetic words are taught as "special" sight words. Stories are withheld until late in the book.

Mrs. Dorothy Watson has formulated another letter-blend system, Listen and Learn With Phonics\(^{15}\) consisting of a kit containing games, phonograph records of sounds, instructions, and booklets. There are four small preliminary booklets which are used to teach letters and sounds of the common phonograms heard on the records.


\(^{15}\) Dorothy Watson, Listen and Learn With Phonics, (5746 Park Blvd. Way, Oakland 10, Calif.)
Parochial schools in Hawaii have been using *The Writing Road to Reading*[^16] for teaching reading, writing, and spelling. This series begins with instruction in all the sounds of all the letters of the alphabet before any words are taught. Many phonic and spelling rules as well as phonograms are taught in the first grade. The series is unique in that phonograms are underlined and numbered in the spelling words. With this extreme system, then, children not only have to learn to read, spell, and write, but must also learn to decode symbols and phonograms.

**Letter Approach.**—*Your Child Can Learn to Read*[^17] was developed by Margaret McEathron who has been a reading clinician in Balboa, California for twenty-five years. This program is both inexpensive and simple to use. It is designed to teach children how to build words from letters and sounds.

**Blend Method.**—Anna Cordts, of Rutgers University, has developed a blend method in the *Functional Phonetics* series[^18] for use in grades 1 to 3. There is a hard-bound children's book for each grade and two-paper-bound manuals for teachers, one containing the readiness program for the series and the other containing lesson plans for the three children's books. The series is designed for use as a supplementary program. It emphasizes recognition of "cues" from pictures.


and known words. "Cues" are specially marked by a type of bracket within the words. Colored blocks contain words in which children are to say only the cue and not the entire word; children use their two forefingers to frame cues in their books. This work with cues is intermingled with small amounts of meaningful reading material throughout the books.

Mae Carden has developed a complete language arts program for all eight grades of the elementary school. This program contains a blend method of phonics instruction. Little information is available on this system because the author does not allow publication of her method by any trade publisher. She personally supervises the training of teachers in any school system which adopts the method.

Rule Approach.--The most widely known series which is based upon the rule approach is The Phonetic Keys to Reading series. This is a complete reading series for the first through third grades consisting of both phonic drills and material for reading in paperback books. The reading material is not considered to be of good literary quality so children are to use many supplementary library books with them. This series introduces both long and short vowels first, then consonants and consonant blends. Word analysis is started before any whole words are taught. A set of two fourth grade

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19 Mae Carden, The Carden System, (619 S. Maple Avenue, Glen Rock, N. J.)

books has been recently developed which is a continuation of the
series. The authors of these new books are Theodore Harris, Mildred
Creekmore, and Margaret Greenman.

A system has been developed by Sister Mary Caroline of San
Bernardine 21 which is to be used as a supplement to a basal reading
system. There is a manual for the teacher and handbooks of generali-
izations and rules for the children. There are no workbooks of prac-
tice material for this method. The book may be used at any grade
level. Two special supplements are available—one with a story
geared to secondary students' interests and another geared at the
adult level interest. Words are introduced in context in this book
and from the whole words, phonetic analysis proceeds. Consonants are
studied first, then vowels, then techniques or methods for working
with vowels. She says that this latter part is the heart of her
method. "Basically, the method here sets forth that the vowel 'says'
its short sound unless 1) it is followed by a consonant and a final
silent e. 2) it is part of a diphthong or a digraph. 3) it is
changed by an r immediately following. 4) it is at the end of a
short word or accented syllable. 5) it is an exception." 22 The
author deals with each of these in separate sections of the book.
This book is illustrated with stick figures and throughout the book
is the reminder, "Use the rule. Then use your head."

21 Sister Mary Caroline, Breaking the Sound Barrier, (New York:

22 Sister Mary Caroline, p. 7.
Combination Method.--Some systems have been devised which combine more than one technique or way to teach phonics. One such system, The Phonovisual Method23 is based on the use of classroom and individual pictorial charts. The system has a Method Book, workbooks, "flipstrips," a phonograph record, games, and two books for instruction in auditory discrimination. Beginning readers start on sight reading for half an hour each day; drill on phonics is given at a different time. The phonics material is simple and few rules are employed in the teaching.

Another combination approach, the New Castle Experiment, has been in progress in New Castle, Pennsylvania, for sixteen years. Glenn McCracken has conducted this program which features filmstrips containing the lessons. This method of teaching beginning reading ignores readiness and begins reading instruction at the start of the first grade. Fifty minutes a day are devoted to the instruction. The Laidlaw readers (a standard basal reading series) is used and phonics is taught analytically.

Harris mentions the following phonics systems which also use a combination approach:

Building Reading Skills, by Leila Armstrong and Rowena Hargrave. Wichita: McCormick-Mathers Publishing Co. Includes a Teacher's Guidebook, a series of six workbooks, and a box of Phonics Key Cards. Each workbook is accompanied by a packet of skill builders (key cards and manipulative devices).

Phonics We Use, by Mary Meighan, Marjorie Pratt, and Mable Halvorsen. Chicago: Lyons and Carnahan. Includes a manual for teachers and five workbooks (A, B, C, D, E), the first of which is for ear training. Exercises emphasize combining phonics and structural analysis with meaning and picture clues.

Eye and Ear Fun, by Clarence R. Stone. St. Louis: Webster Publishing Co. A series of four workbooks (1, 2, 3, 4) emphasizing applying phonics in meaningful context. Book 4 reviews primary grade phonics and develops elementary syllabication.

Spelling Magic, Books 1 and 2, by William Kottmeyer and May B. Lambader. St. Louis: Webster Publishing Co. These workbooks provide a phonic introduction to spelling and writing and are also useful for reading.24

Linguistic Approach. — A linguistic approach to phonics concentrates on the association of sounds with letters. Word forms are studied; word meanings are not studied in the pure linguistic approach. Leonard Bloomfield, who died in 1949, developed a linguistic approach which has recently been published.25 This system begins with instruction in two- and three-letter words. Nonsense syllables are taught as parts of words which are presented later in the book. Words are first presented in lists, then are used in sentences and stories. Mr. Bloomfield designed this book for use in teaching children to read before they attend school, but the content and lack of color and illustration shows little regard for young children's interests.

Another linguistic series, The Royal Road Readers,26 was originally intended for use in remedial reading, but is now used

24 Harris, p. 206.


for beginning reading instruction as well. The Phonic Word Method begins instruction with simple three-letter words. It teaches sounds by requiring children to listen to them in whole words and find the representative letters in printed words. Introduction of words occurs in phonic groups; "meaningful" reading comes first in unrelated sentences, then later, stories are read. When these stories require, phonetically irregular words are taught as sight words.

Other Systems.--One of the older phonics methods is Word Mastery: A Course in Phonics for the First Three Grades. Although this book was first published fifty years ago, it is still in print. There are 124 pages containing a graded approach which begins with letters and works up to phonograms. Words are used to illustrate the word part being taught.

A complete phonics system designed for use in Catholic schools is The Christian Child Reading Series. This is written for use in Grades 1 to 3 and includes reading books, workbooks, and manuals. The authors say it is a phonetic-semantic method. Basic phonics work is taught before formal reading instruction begins.

The Iroquois Phonics series is a set of three paper-bound text-workbooks. The series is designed for use with any basal

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28 The Christian Child Reading Series, (Cleveland: Reardon, Baer, and Co., n. d.)

29 Winifred K. Eaton and Bertha F. James, Iroquois Phonics, (Columbus, Ohio: Iroquois Publishing Co., 1956).
series or other primary program. It is strongly phonics oriented; phonics principles are systematically taught before stories are presented.

There are numerous workbooks now available for instruction in word analysis. These may be used for enrichment of a reading program, for re-inforcement of previously learned skills, or for diagnosis of students' problems.

Undoubtedly, there are many more phonics systems now in existence which the writer has neglected to mention in this section. There is surely much variation in methods and merit involved in the ones listed. It was not the writer's purpose to stipulate a way in which phonics should be taught or to evaluate the ways now available. Rather the purpose, as stated before, was to present ways in which phonics may be taught.

**Summary.**--In the past, phonics was mainly taught by drill and rote learning of lists of phonograms. Changes have occurred and the method which is commonly used today features phonics as an integral part of the basal reader method. It is related to meaningful reading situations and is taught as a functional part of the reading instruction. Other methods are available which are based almost completely on phonics; there are many variations among these methods, but all stress phonics alone rather than in the balanced program of the basal series.
V. WHERE DOES THE CONTROVERSY STAND?

Phonics Favored with Reservations.—At present, educators generally regard phonics with favor; most of them do, however, have reservations or limitations to some degree concerning its place in the reading program. This research did not produce any opinions of reading specialists who were completely against instruction in phonics. Phonics is once more in a period of favor. As it was pointed out in Chapter IV, the amounts of phonics work in the basal reading series illustrate approval for the phonics approach. Skill in phonics is now considered to be an important part of children's reading ability. Its use is considered to be an important part of children's reading ability, and an essential for working out pronunciation of unknown words. For this reason, most reading experts feel that skill in phonics should be one goal of the elementary reading program. They do not believe that it can be the only goal to be achieved, however. The following quotations are representative of the majority of opinions on the place of phonics.

The fact that a positive relationship seems to exist between phonetic ability and reading ability does not in itself mean that instruction in phonics will automatically improve reading achievement. However, certain studies do indicate that reading achievement tends to be higher if pupils have phonetic training in the primary grades than it is if they do not receive such training.¹

In no case should phonetics be considered a sufficient means for effective word recognition. There are, of course, many words that cannot be identified by phonetic analysis. . . . In general, however, phonetics is the most useful and the most consistently used technique for word identification when accompanied by context clues. Furthermore, phonetic analysis can be a valuable aid in structural analysis, especially in syllabification.

The one principle which would, if followed, prevent an overemphasis on phonics, or on any other mechanical aspect of reading, is that reading must be viewed as a process of discovering meaning. The good teachers of reading never lose sight of this fact. But becoming facile in discovering meaning depends on mastering certain fundamental mechanics in the reading process, and phonics is second in importance to no other skill.

Further evidence of the judgment of reading experts concerning phonics may be found in the report of a reading conference supported by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and held in September, 1961. Dr. James B. Conant writes in the Forward of this pamphlet that this was "a conference primarily aimed at preparing a public statement as to the place of phonics in a reading program and the constituent parts of such a program. . . . [The meeting] was attended by people who were known for the divergence of their views on the question of the use of phonics in reading instruction." A Majority Report (dealing mainly with reading in the primary grades) was prepared by twenty-seven of

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5Ibid., p. 1.
the twenty-eight members. The following excerpt is taken from this Majority Report:

It is not true that our schools, in general, use primarily a 'sight-word' method. It is not true that our schools, in general, do not teach phonics. We hold that reading cannot be taught through 'sight-words' (look-say) alone. Such teaching would require our children to memorize, word by word, the mass of printed words. No reading authority advocates so impossible a procedure.

We consider phonics one of the essential skills that help children identify printed words that they have not seen before and then understand the meaning that those words represent. Without phonics most children cannot become self-reliant, discriminating, efficient readers.6

Uncertainty Expressed by Some.--The report7 of another reading conference held in 1961 contains four articles pertaining to phonics. Excerpts from these articles illustrate the diversity of opinions over the importance of phonics. Three of these articles express uncertainty about phonics' value.

In one article of this report, Jesse W. Grimes, of Harvard University, says that the many opinions for the teaching of phonics in first grade cannot be justified on the limited amount of research which has been done. His viewpoint may be seen from the following excerpts:

There are indications that children possess phonics aptitude to a greater or lesser extent, and that some children evidently generalize their own phonic principles whether or not they are taught systematically. We now

6Ibid., p. 3.

wonder if this aptness for learning phonics skill is a character trait in itself that is at the same time effective in producing all-around school achievement. 8

This author reports that from a battery of tests given for his research,

phonics skill correlates with (total school) achievement +.81, which is higher than does any other measure of intelligence or reading proficiency. . . . While phonics skill seems to predict reading success, there are other factors at work within the personality complex that seem to show that those who learn phonics have characteristics necessary for school success apart from reading skill. . . . An aptness for learning phonics skill may be a personality trait, or may be related to measurable personality characteristics, and that these factors, if defined and demonstrated, may indicate how phonics and reading may best be taught to particular kinds of children.9

In another article, Theodore Clymer writes concerning his research on the most common generalizations which are taught concerning phonics:

The results of our analysis of the forty-four phonic generalizations leave me somewhat confused as to the value of generalizations. Some time-honored customs in the teaching of reading may be in need of revision. . . . The most disturbing fact to come from the study may be that the generalization concerning pronunciation of adjacent vowels fails to work even half of the time.10


9 Ibid., pp. 132-133.

10 Theodore Clymer, "The Utility of Phonic Generalization in the Primary Grades," Changing Concepts of Reading Instruction, ed. J. Allen Figurel, (New York: Scholastic Magazines, 1961), p. 158. The generalization to which Clymer refers is: When there are two vowels side by side, the long sound of the first one is heard and the second is usually silent.
Leo Fay reports the findings from a controlled six year comparative study conducted in Louisville, Kentucky. The schools involved used the **Phonetic Keys to Reading** method (which stresses early phonics training) and the **Basic Reading Program** (the Scott, Foresman, and Company basal reading series) for the comparison. There were differences of ability in some areas in the primary grades, but "at the end of grades five and six, there were no significant differences found between the two groups in any of the analyses made in either reading or spelling. The results of this carefully controlled study lead one to question the need or value of an intensive program of phonics in the primary grades beyond that typically provided in a basal reader program."\(^{11}\)

**Phonics Favored without Reservations.**--As this paper has pointed out, there are some people today who consider a total phonics method to be the only way to teach children how to read. These people believe that intensive training in phonics will make good readers of all children. These people do not approve of the programs which are presented in today's basal reading series. They proclaim that children do not learn to read because they do not receive enough phonics training or do not receive it early enough. The Minority Report from the Carnegie supported conference expresses the belief of Margaret Henderson, one of the advocates of teaching phonics before sight words. She says:

> There is evidence that phonetic elements and principles of word analysis can be introduced and emphasized through meaningful application prior to

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memorizing any group of words by sight. The first
and most vital step toward making the pupil inde­
dendent in reading is taken when phonetic analysis
is introduced before the pupil becomes dependent
upon the memorization of words. This can be done
only through a planned and well-organized program
introducing the sounds of individual letters and
groups of letters, the phonetic principles govern­
ing these sounds, and the principles of structural
analysis.\textsuperscript{12}

Miss Henderson has also written concerning the experimental
use of the \textit{Phonetic Keys to Reading} series in Champaign, Illinois.\textsuperscript{13}

This program was begun by five first-grade teachers in 1952 and ex­
tended for three years. The skills taught with the experimental
method were similar to those which were previously taught in the
system, but the series changes the order and timing in which the
skills are introduced and taught. She writes that "in all compari­
sions made between experimental and control groups, the results con­
tinued to indicate that the experimental group has made greater
progress in independence of reading.\textsuperscript{14}" She says that tests also
showed ability to spell was increased.

In the previously mentioned report of the International
Reading Association Conference, Rt. Rev. Msgr. C. E. Elwell, reading
specialist from the Cleveland Parochial Schools, discusses the first
grade reading program which his school system has developed. Teachers
in this system give training in basic phonic principles before they
begin the regular first grade reading work. He writes:

\textsuperscript{12}"Learning to Read...", p. 28.

\textsuperscript{13}Margaret G. Henderson, "A New Phonics Approach to Primary
Reading Instruction," \textit{Chicago Schools Journal} XXXVII (Jan.-Feb., 1956)
pp. 141-147.

\textsuperscript{14}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 144.
I became convinced, and all the teachers in our system became convinced that the key to the problem of beginning reading was to postpone reading until we taught the children the working of the secret code used to encipher meaning and then begin with a phonetically controlled vocabulary. Then the retroactive inhibition of the admittedly easier whole word approach would not block and confound the less able children, particularly because we taught the children to watch out for exceptions. From the very beginning also meaning was stressed.15

The writing of Flesch and others in favor of intensive early phonics has been described in earlier parts of this paper. Harris says of this practice, "until more is known about the later effects in the upper grades of intensive early phonics, as well as about the immediate results, wholesale adoption of intensive phonics instruction does not seem to be justified, but further experimentation is highly desirable."16 This statement describes a reasonable attitude concerning the problem.

Summary.--Phonics is once more in a position of favor as evidenced by the amounts of phonics work in the basal reading series. Most reading specialists feel that skill in phonics should be an important goal in the elementary reading program. There are a few reading people who question the value of phonics and other persons who feel that phonics should be the main part of reading instruction. Much has been written which is based on theory alone; sound research in the area is limited because of the difficulties in controlling experiments. Thus, controversy continues over when, how, and how much phonics should be taught.

VI. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Review of the Purpose.--The purpose in this paper was to determine the role of and the importance of phonics in the modern American reading program. To achieve this purpose, it was necessary to investigate a part of the great amount of material written about the subject. A study of the history of phonics was required to provide a background of its development and use in this country. It was necessary to know both the advantages and disadvantages inherent in the subject in order that it might be studied objectively. Much reading was required to gain varying opinions on when and how phonics should be taught. As research was done for these parts of the study, opinions were discerned which pointed out the controversy of the subject. All of these elements contributed to the formation of a conclusion on the importance of phonics.

Chapter Summaries.--Chapter I provides a background for the paper. Phonics is defined as the study of relationships of letters or combinations of letters with their sounds in spoken words. When phonics is used as a method for teaching reading, the instruction concentrates on the various types of sounds in relation to the printed words. The history of the use of phonics in our country has been in the form of a cycle. Early reading instruction was based on the alphabetic approach. From this method phonics evolved; sounds, as well as names, of letters were taught. Phonics was
heavily emphasized during the early part of the nineteenth century, but by 1840 the method was being criticized and use of the whole-word method was advocated. This new method remained in favor until about 1890, then it too fell into disrepute. Phonics was brought back, this time in the form of extremely synthetic methods. Diacritical markings were an important part of this mechanical approach. By 1920, educators were dissatisfied with these systems and the whole-word method reappeared. Emphasis was placed on silent reading for meaning and word analysis was discarded. By 1935, the whole-word phase of the cycle was ending and a resurgence of phonics came about in better planned and organized reading programs. In recent years, research and discussion have continued over the value of phonics. There are a few people who advocate a return to intensive phonics programs, but at this time, these programs are not widely used or accepted.

The advantages and disadvantages inherent in the method are summarized in Chapter II. The all-encompassing reason for teaching phonics is that it will develop a technique for word recognition. This will help a child to gain independence in reading and confidence in himself. The main disadvantages in phonics instruction are that children may become "word callers," slow readers, or become disinterested in reading. There are reasons for excluding phonics from the reading program at times; most reading experts feel that phonics training is inappropriate for beginning readers. It is unnecessary for the children who can pick up the generalizations without formal training, and the instruction is unwise for
those who cannot form words by blending letters or who cannot distinguish between sounds. Various methods must be used for such situations. Phonics alone does not constitute the most effective type of reading instruction.

The problem of age level for phonics work is considered in Chapter III. The research for this aspect of the paper showed that reading experts today agree that both physical and mental readiness are necessary for phonics training to be meaningful and successful. Those who advocate intensive early phonics, however, either ignore or repudiate the readiness factor. They contend that reading could be taught to five- and six-year-old children if intensive phonics methods were used for the task. There is a definite lack of research to verify these claims, and reading experts reject such theories. People in reading agree that the phonics training should continue throughout the primary grades because not all children of a given age or grade level will grasp the material at the same time.

Various methods for teaching phonics are described in Chapter IV. Changes have occurred in phonics teaching; the method no longer consists of drill and rote learning of lists of syllables. Today, phonics is most generally taught as an integral part of a basal reading program rather than as a lone approach to reading instruction. Each basal series develops phonics systematically and sequentially from the content and stories in the readers. This functional approach is generally approved by the majority of reading specialists. Other methods are available in which phonics is the basis, rather than a component, of the methods. Some of the various types of these are
letter-blend methods, letter methods, blend methods, rule methods, combination methods which use more than one technique, linguistic methods, and other miscellaneous systems. All of these are ways in which phonics may be taught today.

Chapter V presents several opinions concerning phonics to show where the controversy stands. The majority of educators presently regard phonics with favor and believe that the development of phonics skills should be one goal of the elementary reading program. They consider it to be an essential skill for independence in word recognition. There are a few educators who express uncertainty about the value of phonics. They feel that research has been too limited to provide definite judgment. In contrast to these opinions are those of the people who favor phonics completely. They ignore the lack of research and argue for a total phonics method for use with all children. These people disapprove of the widely used basal reader programs. The controversy is likely to continue because a great deal of writing must be based on theory and opinion; sound research in the area is limited because of the difficulties in controlling experiments.

Conclusion.--It is difficult to make an incontrovertible statement about the place of phonics in reading instruction. Educators are continually searching for ways to be sure of its value; discussion and research continue to be conducted by teachers and reading specialists. There is a lack of clear-cut data, however, which can give definite answers to the questions about phonics. Durkin says "existing research in phonics is characterized more by quantity than by quality. And because of the lack of quality, 'data' can be found to support
almost any claim or any point of view.\textsuperscript{1} Definite superiority for one single, exact system has not been proved by research to date.

A study of the sources consulted seems to indicate that the best approach to reading instruction would be use of a method involving instruction in all the different aspects--sight words, phonics, structural analysis, use of context and picture clues, and dictionary skills. Such an approach could be called a functional or combination method. Any technique which will help a child become a better reader would be a worthwhile part of the program. Independence and meaningful reading should be the two main goals in the reading program; whenever phonics, or any other technique, can help a child toward these goals, it should be taught. Phonics is only one possible help for a child to use in word identification, and it should be taught as such. A good reading program will consist of balanced amounts of "the necessary mechanics and the thought processes involved in the reading process. Knowledge of word elements is useless to the child unless he can synthesize or blend those elements, recognize the words, and call up the appropriate meaning."\textsuperscript{2} Phonics should not be given sole emphasis, but should be kept in proper perspective. There may be problems involved in a program encompassing all aspects of reading instruction, but reliance on a program of phonics alone will not solve all reading problems. Until research and study show a better method, it seems that the place of phonics should be that of a component part of the total reading program and not the total instruction in reading.


\textsuperscript{2}Naomi Simms, Analysis of Characteristic Factors of Beginning Reading Programs, ("Doctoral Dissertation Series" Publication No. 20, 723; Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 1957), p. 117.
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