

One of the chief drawbacks to success in teaching reading arises from the insufficient preparatory training of teachers. This is a disadvantage, however, which you can lessen or remove by your own efforts; which, indeed, you must remove, or be content with mediocrity where you might obtain distinction. The most advanced teacher is still a learner; and he should retain the learner's spirit when beyond the walls of the class-room. Within the walls, he is a fountain of supply only; without, he draws from every source the means of keeping the perennial stream of knowledge in full flow.

Your Association meetings tend greatly to this end. Here you teach and learn from each other. Here you find a range of standards for comparison. Here you have the advantage of mutual criticism; and you have also the most valuable opportunities for self-measurement, without which there can be no real progress.

The first point in teaching reading is to regulate the apparatus of speech. This involves nothing beyond the comprehension of the youngest pupils. The *modus operandi* is so simple that I may specify all necessary particulars even in this short section of a brief address. It is of course advisable that teachers should know more than they may be called on to communicate; such as the physiology of the chest, the diaphragm, the larynx, the pharynx, etc.; but for the training of their pupils it is enough to look on the whole apparatus of speech as a bellows, of which the mouth is at once the aperture and the handle. When you open the mouth you enlarge the passage to the lungs, and an influx of air from the atmospheric pressure naturally accompanies the act. Teach your pupils to open the mouth at the commencement of every utterance, and you will secure two important results at the same time: you will establish a habit of heartfelt, vocal respiration, and facilitate the acquirement of a style of sharp, distinct, and light articulation. The majority of persons—even public speakers—fail in a free opening of the mouth: they push the plastic organs—the lips and tongue—from point to point, without disengagement, and their utterance is consequently heavy and indistinct. The opening of the mouth before speech is the secret of ease, and fluency, and clearness.

Mr. Catlin, the author of a work on the North American Indians, recommends people to breathe only through the nose for hygienic reasons, and some teachers have copied the precept as if it were universally applicable. This is a mistake. There is wisdom in shutting the mouth when you pass from a heated room to a cold atmosphere, but there would be the reverse of wisdom in shutting the mouth every time you take breath in speaking, and in order to breathe solely through the nose you must close the mouth, either by means of the lips, or of the tongue and palate. Apply the theory of nasal respiration, if you can, while you are asleep—and stop snoring—or at any time when the organs are at rest, but not when they are in action in speech. You require an extra supply of air while speaking, and you want the largest possible channel for its entrance—by both mouth and nostrils. Use the jaw as the handle of your bellows, and the process will go on noiselessly and freely, replenishing the lungs by mere atmospheric pressure.

This maxillary action is apt to be overdone at first, or to be awkwardly done,—either by jerking the jaw downwards, by snapping it bitingly upwards, or by moving the head backwards. The desired action is more internal than external. The head should be perfectly still, and the movements of the jaw so light and floating as not to be in any degree obtrusive on the attention. But all art thus hides itself in facility.

“*Ars est celare artem.*”

The preparatory separation of the organs, which speech is to bring in contact, is really a mechanical necessity; it illustrates the

same principle as that which raises the hammer before its downward stroke—which draws back the arms before the outward push—or bends the knees before an upward spring. Thus to pronounce the letter P—which requires the lips to be closed—we must first separate the lips in order to make their momentary contact light and graceful.

The second point in teaching reading is to make pupils pronounce the elements of speech correctly. I assume, of course, that letters are thoroughly known; but even with elder people than school children it would not be safe to assume that sounds are practically familiar. Every syllable has, or should have, its definite impulse of sound, and every word its articulate boundary, delineated as clearly to the ear as the outline of the printed word is shown to the eye. This precision of utterance requires, on the part of the teacher, a perfect knowledge of the elements of speech. These are supposed to consist only of the two classes called “vowels” and “consonants,” but they compose, besides, an unrepresented class of transitional effects or glides, on the use of which, although they have not been noticed by writers on the subject, a good pronunciation depends. The percussion which is heard between a consonant and a vowel in the same syllable should be regarded as a real element of speech, and as such the effect should be heard, even when no vowel follows the consonant. An example will give you a clear idea of what is meant by these consonant glides. Let us again take the letter P. This is said to be pronounced by closing the lips, but it really derives all its audibility from opening the lips after closure. The percussion of this opening is the glide of the consonant P. The same principle of organic separation applies to all consonants, each of which, when final, should be finished with a glide. Glides are thus transitions either to another phonetic element, or to a position of rest.

Your pupils, then, must be taught to pronounce every vowel with its true quality, every consonant with its glide or percussion, every syllable with a definite impulse, and every word or group of words compactly and with well-marked initial and final boundaries. The initial boundary will be given by opening the mouth; and the final boundary, if the concluding element is a consonant, by the articulate glide of organic separation. The latter, being the least obvious of the elements of pronunciation, requires special attention on the part of teachers.

The best exercise in pronunciation is the separate utterance of syllables. This would be easy but for the anomalies of orthography, which have accustomed us to an unphonetic syllabication. But in dealing with sounds we must disregard letters. Double consonants, for instance, are divided in writing syllables, but they must be treated as single consonants in pronouncing syllables. Thus we write *pos-ses-sion* as the syllables of the word *possession*, but we pronounce *pō-zē-shun*, but we must teach our pupils to analyze the sounds of words in the actual phonetic syllables. Combinations of consonants are divided in speaking—as in the word *apprehension*, which would be analyzed into *ap-re-hen-sion*—but otherwise every syllable (except the final syllable of a word ending with a consonant) will terminate with a vowel. You must not be misled, by any theory of so-called “short vowels,” into supposing that you cannot end a syllable with a short vowel: you do so in every sentence. You certainly will never make your pupils pronounce well until you teach them to individualize syllables with the exact effect they receive in the concrete utterance of words and sentences. You cannot pay too particular attention to this point. A pure pronunciation is the rarest of all qualities both among pupils and teachers.

The third point in teaching reading is to distinguish the tones of the voice. Tones are not subordinate matters of mere taste and fancy; on the contrary, the tones accompanying the language are