

Elementary Reading

Emma C. Colicell, St. John Public Schools

IN THE teaching of my subject one must have in mind a definite aim, and in no other subject is this more important than in Elementary Reading. Without a knowledge of Reading how may one acquire a knowledge of any other subject?

The first lessons must be given by such a method or combination of methods as shall result not only in word mastery but also in facile thought reading. Much depends on the teacher's clear knowledge of results to be obtained and her skill in recognizing and meeting the needs of the pupils. She must aim, First—To teach the pupils a number of words with their sounds and meanings. Second—To give them skill to recognize and spell these words at a glance. Third—To give them practice in getting the thought in sentences and in giving that thought clear oral expression.

To accomplish this there are many methods in use. Among those best known are *The Alphabetical Method*, which begins by teaching the names of the letters first, then words of two or three letters. This method used to be considered very successful but it is not much used today. The *Look and Say Method* begins by showing children words and requiring them to be learned as wholes, before calling attention to the letters of which they are composed. This method was in use in the Model School when I attended Normal School. *The Phonic Method* begins with sounds only. *The Synthetic Method*, *The Word Method*, *The Sentence Method*. Each of these methods has its good points and its followers. Each its faults. No one method is perfect.

For my own school I use a combination of the *Phonic*, *Word*, and *Sentence Methods*. I have used it many years and find it fairly successful in giving the children both *power* and *skill* in finding out new words at *sight*. It makes the pupils self-reliant also. Instead of telling the children the words, it teaches them to sound them and pronounce them for themselves.

My plan is to have, First—*Oral Phonics* (a) by the teachers, (b) by the pupils. Second—To associate the printed form with its sound. Third—To build words at first by synthesis; later to obtain them by an analysis of the printed word. Fourth—To have the word so built used in sentences and recognized there. Fifth—Sentence Reading from Blackboard, Chart and Primer, then, from Supplementary Cards and Primers.

In presenting a lesson, either an object may be used or a picture shown, or better still a drawing of it put

on the board before the class. The interest is keener if the picture grows before their eyes.

A visit to the coat-room provides me with a hat. What is this? I ask. "That is a hat." Listen while I say hat. I then make each sound, prolonging it somewhat. How many sounds did you hear? I ask. "I heard three sounds." I make the sounds several times and then have the class make them, then individuals. Look at the board, I say. This is a picture of h, its name is H. This is a picture of a, its name is A. This is a picture of t, its name is T. The names are repeated by the class and by individuals, the pointer indicating the letter to be named. The sound of each letter is called for again and again, the pointer indicating the letter to be sounded. The sounds are given by the class and by individuals. We next use the word in a sentence orally, then on the board. What do you see? I see a hat. Watch the board and I will put down what John told me. See if you can find the word hat. In printing the sentence (and by the way I always use the word sentence, not story, to the class. A story is a different thing). I underline the words *I see* and *a hat*. This attracts attention to the phrasing from the beginning. Individuals are called upon to read the sentence and point out the word hat. Other sentences follow given largely by the pupils in these first lessons. After which they learn to spell hat and then to print it also. In printing I use the script. It is easier to read, and much more quickly put on the board. When they begin to use books the transition from the Script to Common Print is very readily accomplished. It is better not to introduce writing in the first two or three months.

I continue to use the phrase *I see* with such other words as mat, bat, cat, man, can, fan, pan introducing as you see a new initial consonant with the old sounds, until they are known. As soon as possible I combine the vowel with the final consonant thus making a phonogram and lessening the difficulties. I vary the sentences by leaving out *I* and use "See the cat." "See the man." When the phonograms *at* and *an* are known I proceed to *et*, *it*, *en*, *in*, *on*, *un*, *ag*, *eg*, *ig*, *og*, *ug*, etc. Words are built from these phonograms by using a new initial consonant until at length the whole alphabet has been learned. This may be done in 19 words, if a careful selection be made and the class able to travel so fast. I do not move so quickly.