

Opponents of the phonic method always assume that this is the course pursued, and hence their ill-founded charges against it.

The other plan presents a word first,—the name of some familiar object, as *top* or *cat*. Having first presented the object, or a picture of it, and awakened some interest in it by conversation, the teacher writes the word on the board, and states that the word is *top* or *cat*, as the case may be. The children are then made to pronounce the word slowly after the teacher, dwelling on each sound, until they discover that it has three sounds. They are then required to give these sounds separately,—the first sound, the second, the third. Then looking at the written word, the children find that it is made up of three letters—as many letters as there are sounds—a letter for each sound. Naming the first sound again, they are taught to apply it to the first letter, and similarly with the other letters. In this manner the words are first pronounced and analyzed until the children know the sounds, and are able to give them when the teacher points to the letters. They are then set to find out words for themselves. In the first stage, therefore, while the children are learning the sounds, they are not required to make out words from the sounds, but to discover the sounds from the words.

The **WORD METHOD** gives the word as a whole, in the first stage, taking no notice of the letters of which it is composed. The child having been told the word, pronounces it, finds the same word in other places, thus learning to recognize and name it at sight.

The **SENTENCE METHOD** at the beginning gives a whole sentence, teaching the child to recognize and read it without specially noticing the separate words.

It is proper to observe that the distinctive features of these five methods pertain exclusively to the earlier stages of reading. Each method, in its own way, aims to bridge over the difficulties which meet the learner at the outset; but by the time the child has finished his primer, they all meet on common ground. The learner is then able to recognize at sight a large number of words which occur frequently, and he has acquired the ability, to a greater or less degree, of making out new words by some occult process which scarcely admits of explanation. New words which he cannot make out he must be told. Again, I would observe that whilst one method may possess features which give it superiority over others in certain respects, successful teaching is much more dependent on qualities that do not belong exclusively or necessarily to any one of the five methods. Energy, enthusiasm, and inspiring power in the teacher are important factors. The child's intelligence and interest must be aroused, and the child must feel that he is not working with dead things, or wandering in the valley of dry bones. The best method may be so administered as to deprive it of all vitality and power. It would be very easy, for instance, to divest the word method or the sentence method of those incidental features to which they owe their success, and yet leave enough to entitle them to their present names, and to all that is involved in the definition by which they are described.

The child may be taught to recognize words and sentences which represent ideas wholly unfamiliar, and which are to him entirely without meaning—mere “words, words, words.” Or the lesson may be well selected, but nevertheless be dead, because the teacher lacks life and power to bring the words into contact with the child's intelligence.

VERY EXTRAVAGANT THINGS

are said by the advocates of the various methods, each urging for his own method merits which are wholly incidental and may equally well attach to other methods, at the same time abusing these other methods on account of features not necessarily belonging to them.

The fact is there are few, if any, educationists who adhere exclusively to any one method. They, perhaps, call their way *word method*, *sentence method*, or *phonic method*, and yet when you analyze their practical course, you find it is, more or less, a mixture of the three. The advocates of the sentence method are probably the most extravagant and unfair in their utterances. And yet this method, as generally applied, borrows so much from the word and phonic methods, and is so dependent on them for its success, and even its practicability as a means of teaching children to read, that it is scarcely entitled to be called an independent method. At a meeting of the New England association of school superintendents, held a few months since in Boston, it was stated that the sentence method was in closest conformity to nature—that it is the method which nature employs in teaching spoken language.

NOTHING COULD BE MORE ABSURD

than such a claim. It strikes one that those who hold such views have forgotten the experience of their early childhood, and that they have either had little intercourse with young children learning to talk, or have profited little by their experience. It would be as correct to say that children begin to talk in paragraphs or chapters, and it would be much easier to prove that they begin to talk in syllables or inarticulate sounds. The fact is that children's early speech consists of separate words—names of familiar objects. When the child enters school, he has made such progress in the use of language that he can talk in sentences, but that does not prove that he takes no account of the individual words which make up the sentence. Separate words are the embodiment of such notions as children gain through observation; the sentence represents the product of thought.

The power of the *sentence method* to appeal to the child's intelligence, awaken his interest, and secure expression, (which are the chief benefits claimed), can be secured equally well by the word method, if it is rightly applied. The words should not be presented detached and apart from their relations with each other, but should be grouped as given. We should first present those that have an independent meaning, as the name-words; then those that cluster around, expressing qualities and relations, thus building up a sentence.

Thus, suppose the sentence is, *Tom spins his top on the floor*; the words should be taken in the following order:—*Tom, top, his, spins, floor, the, on*. These words are then grouped,—*his top, spins his top, Tom spins his top, the floor, on the floor*. Finally the child reads the whole sentence.

The first two or three lessons will probably consist of separate words, but these words should be so related that they shall lead up to a sentence. The child soon accumulates a stock of words which he can recognize at sight; new sentences can then be constructed by making new combinations of old words, with one or two new words.

THE PHONIC METHOD

has some features which give it special advantages over the other methods. It so exercises the organs of speech on the elementary sounds as to promote purity of tone and distinct articulation. It also stimulates and gratifies the natural desire of the child for activity by placing him in a position to find out words for himself. Some persons object to this latter claim on the ground that, owing to the imperfections of our alphabet, the words which children can make out for themselves are comparatively few. The limitation here urged is admitted, and if the objector will show some more comprehensive and effective way by which the learner can find out words for himself, his method should have the preference. The fact is no other method professes to confer this power, or even to