

language, and reading, in order to see in what they are alike, and in what they differ. The arrangement of words in sentences, that is the idioms, are precisely alike. The thought in the mind, gained either from hearing language or reading, is identical. The only difference lies, then in the fact, that in one case the word is spoken, and in the other it is written or printed. I am sure you have said, as I have given my definition, that reading is the oral expression of thought. That is oral reading. But you will see at once that we may get thought—and by far the greater part of reading is confined to this process—and not give it to others by means of the voice. If we comprehend oral reading in our definition, we should say that reading is the getting and giving of thought by means of words arranged in sentences.

Not less in importance to the definition of reading, is the thorough knowledge of the preparation a child has made for learning to read, how he has made it, and exactly what is to be done in learning to read. This may be briefly stated thus: First, a child has acquired ideas from the external world by means of his senses. Second, he knows the ideas in their relations, that is, he has thoughts. Third, the child has associated spoken words with these ideas. Fourth, he has associated idioms or forms of sentences with his thoughts. Fifth, he has learned to utter these words and idioms in order to express his thoughts. This is a brief summary of the process of learning to talk. How he has done this will be discussed in another place. Exactly what the child has to do in order to learn to read may be clearly stated thus: The ideas that he has associated with spoken words are to be associated with written or printed words. If I am not mistaken, this is the sum and substance of learning to read.

Oral reading may be further defined as the vocal expression of thought that is gained by written or printed words. A child has already learned to express thought orally, by means of five or six years' continual practice. The emphasis, inflection, and melody of most children's voices can rarely be improved. The child should be trained in no new way, then, of expressing thought in oral reading. Unfortunately the beauty and strength of what the child has already gained is entirely ignored, and a new and very painful process of oral expression initiated. What is the use of oral reading? Talking enables us to see the thought in the child's mind; oral reading, to the teacher has no other use. Oral reading, then, enables the teacher to know whether the thought is in the child's mind in its fulness, strength and intensity. If, however, the long preparation of the child in talking is overlooked, and a new and stumbling process of slowly pronouncing words is begun, the indispensable function of oral reading is entirely destroyed. The thought may or may not be in the child's mind, his half-groaning utterances never reveal the fact.

What is the use of reading? We return to our definition: reading is getting thought by means of written or printed words arranged in sentences. Comprehensively stated, reading opens to the mind all the learning and erudition of the past. To the teacher, however, it is of the utmost importance, for reading is thinking, and thinking is the mind's mode of action; and all mental development is rightly directed toward action. Study of text books, then, if it differ from reading, the difference may be found simply and solely in intensity. In study the thought gained, may be clearer and more complete than in mere reading. You can judge for yourselves then, fellow teachers, of what immense importance it is for the little child to form correct habits of reading; and you know by experience how easily incorrect habits may be cultivated, habits that will dishearten a child in his attempts to read, and make words, instead of being clear mediums of getting thought, actual barriers to the truth they were intended to convey.

TALK III. READING.—THE WORD.

The child at five years of age has acquired ideas in their relations, has associated spoken words with these ideas, and idioms with the thoughts or related ideas. The process of learning to read, then, must consist of learning to use the written and printed word precisely as he has used the spoken words. Learning to read is learning a vocabulary of written and printed words, so that the child may get thought through the eye as he has done through the ear. It is a matter of great interest to the teacher of little ones to know just how the child acquires the spoken words. The process is a very simple one; an object is presented and the word spoken. That is, the idea produced by the object and the spoken word are associated in one act of the mind, which we call an act of association. We all know that only by means of a mysterious mental law, called the law of association, are we enabled to recollect anything. Words are used under this law to recall ideas. The word recalls an idea after a certain number of repetitions of these acts of association. In the same way related ideas are associated with idioms or sentence forms.

Every act of the mind is affected by some stimulus or mental excitement coming either from without or within the mind. As a rule, the greater the stimulus the more effective the act. The little child, for instance, sees an elephant for the first time. The sight of the huge, strange beast stimulates the mental action of the child to an unwonted degree. The perpetual question of the little one, "What is that?" comes to his lips with great fervor. The answer, "The elephant, my child," will be likely to remain in his mind forever. The spoken word, then, is acquired by repeated acts of association. The number of these acts necessarily depends in a great degree upon the stimulus of each act. For instance, the greater the stimulus the less the number of acts of association required, and vice versa. What we have said of words may also be applied to the learning of idioms.

Now, the question is, in learning the new means of recalling ideas by means of the written words, should there be the slightest change in the general method? A word is used simply and solely to recall an idea. It has no other use. It can be learned only by association with the idea recalled; and the sole question for the teacher is, to know how best to associate words with ideas. I think we can lay down this one rule as fundamental: in all the teaching and the study of the art of teaching little children to read, that which aids directly in acts of association of words with their appropriate ideas, aids the child in learning to read, and any other method, detail of method or device that does not aid the mind in these acts, hinders the child in learning to read. To this one rule, then, all our discussion of the art of teaching reading must return. Everything must be reconciled with this or it is wrong.

The first question, then, is, What is the best way of bringing about the acts of association with the best possible stimulus? It is plain common-sense to continue the method that has developed a fixed and powerful habit of learning new words, namely, the presentation of objects as the highest and best stimulus to acts of association. This is strikingly true in teaching the first few words. The written or printed word is a new, strange object. It repels rather than attracts. No stimulus, then, can be found in the strange hieroglyphics that look more mysterious to the child than Hebrew or Sanscrit do to us. Tide the child over his first difficulties by using the active energy of a fixed habit. Simply repeat that which has been repeated thousands of times, present the object (a favorite one of the child's), and say the word, not with the lips but with the chalk. The child's consciousness is filled with interest for the object, leaving just room enough for the new form to find a