
UNIT 13 DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING READING PROGRAMMES

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13.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we shall make you aware of

- the basic features of a reading programme
- readiness of your students for beginning reading instruction
- assessment of such readiness
- assessment of general cognitive readiness
- planning the content, design and emphasis of beginning reading programmes.

13.1 INTRODUCTION

So far, in this course, we have been considering in quite a detailed manner the nature of the reading process, the strategies most helpful to the learner and the steps to be taken for providing the proper conditions for learning to read. But there is another aspect of the programme, that is, knowledge about how to develop a good reading programme and how to administer the tests necessary to assess the level at which the programme should be fixed. In this unit we shall look at these issues.

13.2 BASIC FEATURES OF A READING PROGRAMME

The formulation of reading programmes for the kindergarten classes has always been considered quite seriously because of the long-held controversy over whether or not reading should be taught in the kindergarten. During the 1970's, opinions were divided into three categories : (1) teach every child to read using systematic instruction (2) don't teach reading to any child; and (3) teach individual children to read when they show signs of being ready to read. But today social and media influences have brought about a strong support for teaching reading in the kindergarten, resulting in the publication of several text books intended for teaching reading.

Basic dimensions of a reading Programme

Teachers should be aware of the following three dimensions of a reading programme :

- a) Context and design of the programme
- b) Instructional emphasis of the programme
- c) Validity of the programme

It is quite natural to consider first the content and design of a published programme, and in doing so take into consideration the following :

1. The major instructional goals.
2. The specific instructional objectives in terms of content and responses, which, when learned will lead to achieving the instructional goals.
3. The content of the materials - a) the major linguistic units to be learned with the help of the materials by the meaning content of the materials; (c) the quality of the illustrations and the print of the materials and d) the durability of the books, workbooks and the relevance of the games included in the materials.
4. The provision for (a) pupil's interaction with the instructional material; (b) evaluation of pupil's reading performance during the course; and (c) the evaluation of pupil's development at the beginning and end of the programme.
5. The provision of assistance of the teacher in the form of lesson plans, core materials, practice materials and enrichment materials.

It is to be noticed that the first four points are also relevant for programmes represented as abstract plans. The teacher has to find out how to guide and implement the reading instruction. The fifth point does not apply to the reading programme represented as abstract plans because it is the teacher who has to create the materials necessary to realise the major principles of the instructional plan.

Secondly we have to consider the major instructional emphasis of the reading programme. This is to be taken as the maximum time allotted to linguistic units, skills and strategies in each to linguistic units, skills, and strategies in each of the lessons over the entire course in a year.

Linguistic units refer to (1) sound symbol correspondence (2) whole words; (3) syntactic and semantic cues, within sentences; (4) semantic cues and organising structures governing a whole passage and (5) different types of texts and their stylistic or organisational features. The amount of time spent on teaching each or all these units forms the basis of what the child experiences as reading instruction and learns about processing a text. It also indicates what the child has learnt which can be transferred to different reading tasks.

By Skills we mean (1) global word attack skills; (2) word recognition skills; (3) vocabulary skills; (4) study skills and (5) comprehension skills. Skills are learned resources to various linguistic units. Global skills are broken down into sub-skills and stated as instructional objectives. For example, word attack skills may be divided into objectives like these :

1. The learner will be able to differentiate between lower case letters that are similar in configuration.
2. The learner will be able to identify the graphemic representation of a sound of a consonant with which a word begins.
3. The learner will be able to identify the graphemic representation of single long or short vowel sounds in a word.

Strategies refer to different ways of finding out the meaning of a word, ways of constructing meaning in a passage and checking the extent to which the comprehension of the learner is adequate for a particular purpose.

For example, strategies for identifying word meaning would include combining graphemic or phonemic cues with syntactic cues to confirm the meaning of a word in a particular context. A strategy for constructing meaning during reading is predicting what will come next on the basis of redundancy cues or on the learner's prior knowledge of the content of the text. Strategies indicate how to coordinate skills needed to acquire meaning from a printed text.

Another aspect of instructional emphasis is motivation -- how to motivate children to read and to consider it as a regular activity. A reading programme may highlight a variety of instances in which reading plays a significant role in the child's life -- personal life, socio-cultural setting in which the child lives, and the child's academic pursuits. What is important is that the teacher should be acquainted with the emphasis intended in a programme as well as with its content and design, so that the materials are put to the best use in helping children learn how to read.

The third major dimension to be considered in a reading programme is construct validity. This refers to whether or not the underlying ideas of a programme are true, logically connected with each other and with the general instructional goals for reading as claimed in the programme. The design and emphasis of a valid programme should be based on explicit formal and testable assumptions about how reading is learned. This is to say that, when a teacher asks "Does the programme actually teach what it claims to do?" or "Do most children successfully learn reading behaviours that lead to the goals that the programme claims as the outcomes of its instructional emphasis?" then that teacher is questioning the construct validity of the programme. It is necessary for every teacher to assess the construct validity of a reading programme in order to find out how much trust to place on a programme and the degree to which the teacher should feel free to change its content, design and emphasis.

There will always be a wide range of published programmes for the teacher to choose from but not all can be considered as valid programmes. If a programme is not just a description of how to teach reading a particular way but a working plan of how to influence learning to read, then it must pay special attention to the programme's content and design, its instructional emphasis and its construct validity.

Let us now recapitulate the issues discussed so far, by answering the following questions :

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 1

- 1) Why is the Reading Programme formulated as a set of guiding principles more useful and effective than a Reading Programme which is seen as a set of prescribed textbooks ?

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- 2) Why is the content of a text used in reading instruction considered to be of primary importance ?

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- 3) What are the reasons for including motivation in the features describing instructional emphasis ?

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- 4) What is the essential difference between a plan to teach reading in a particular way and a plan of how to influence learning to read ?

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13.3 READINESS FOR BEGINNING READING INSTRUCTION

The success of a reading programme depends on a proper analysis of the persons to whom reading is to be taught and what should be taught. If we apply this criterion to the primary school, then we will have to consider questions such as : (1) to whom reading should be taught in kindergarten; (2) what should be taught as reading in kindergarten; (3) how reading should be taught and (4) how should kindergarten reading instruction be different from first Standard reading instruction. To be able to answer these questions we need to from first of all clarify to ourselves what we mean by cognitive readiness and then find out how it can be applied to reading instruction.

Cognitive Readiness : The term “readiness” is based on cognitive psychology. According to Ausubel (1959), Cognitive Readiness is “the adequacy of existing capacity in relation to the demands of a given learning task”. In other words it is finding out what the child must know in order to perform a new task quickly. It is what the child must know to transfer his or her existing knowledge to a hitherto unexperienced situation. For knowledge to be transferable, it must be relational. This means that the readiness to perform a task depends upon the generalizability of the learner’s prior knowledge to the specific requirements of a new task.

Readiness is not a state reached at a certain point of time. It is a relative state of continuing development. The child’s state of readiness changes according to his or her available knowledge, the extent to which it is integrated and the relatedness of the knowledge to a particular, not-yet-performed task. If a child can accurately and automatically perform a task, then the child is no longer in a readiness state for learning the task, but has in fact learned it. If the child cannot perform the task at all, with or without instruction, then the child may not possess the relational knowledge necessary to perform the task. On the other hand, if the original task requirements were changed, then it may fall within the relational knowledge of the child and he or she may then be able to do the similar but revised task. This means that the teacher either has to teach what a child needs to know to do a task or has to alter the nature of the task so that it makes sure of what the child already knows and builds upon it.

Now, in such a situation, it is clear that a teacher cannot judge how prepared a child is for a specific reading task without first observing how the child reads without any help or noticing how the child responds, during the early attempts of the teacher to teach him or her how to read. This is necessary for the teacher to do if the proposed reading programme is to benefit the learner. This implies that a beginning reading programme requires individualized instruction. So, in the kindergarten reading readiness may be seen as the extent to which a child possesses the relational knowledge either to perform

a reading task independently or to meaningfully participate in learning a relatively novel reading task.

Children in the Kindergarten are ready to be introduced to reading at some level, so long as they can bring what they know about language and their own personal experience of the world to bear upon the reading task. What children may know about language is how its grammar works and that the prediction and reception of speech are meaning centred acts. But what the children may not realise is that all speech statements are not literal in meaning, and that they depend heavily on pragmatic cues. Therefore, the transition from participating in spoken language to participating in reading printed language may not be direct because the printed text lacks the rich pragmatic cues found in speech.

Children in the kindergarten can be classified as follows :-

1. Those who have no acquaintance with books, sentences, words, or letters and show no interest in producing or receiving information from print.
2. Those who have some acquaintence with books and show some interest in acquiring information from print.
3. Those who understand the concepts necessary to use a book meaningfully, follow along as a book is read, read some words, discriminate between lower-case and upper-case letters and show interest in having books read to them or in trying to read independently.
4. Those who can already read parts or all of a simple book tht has been read to them several times after an interval of several days and who definitely show an interest in producing print as well as in attempting to read it.
5. Those who show consistent interest in reading books on their own, who have read some books and can reread them with little or no help and who regularly show interest in developing their knowledge through exploring books.

These categories represent a natural sequence in becoming acquainted with print. It is also to be noticed that the intensity of involvement of children in the reading activity plays an important role in deciding how reading is learned.

The major reason for introducing kindergarten children to reading is to bridge the gap between their knowledge of language and their level of acquaintance with print within a meaningful context. However, it is also necessary to specify what reading tasks or reading related tasks can be considered as worthwhile instructional goals for kindergarten children.

Foundational Instructional Goals

Durkin (1978) and Clay (1980) have listed the following instructional goals as worthwhile for almost all kindergarten children :

1. Make children interested in learning to read.
2. Help children to understand what reading and learning to read are all about.
3. Teach about the left-to-right and top-to-bottom orientation to written English.
4. Teach what is to be understood by 'word' and the function of spaces in establishing word boundaries.
5. Teach children the meaning of the terms that are frequently used in the teaching of reading.
6. Teach children to discriminate conceptually and visually among letters and words.

- 7. Teach children the name of letters.
- 8. Teach children strategies for using their knowledge of spoken grammar to predict meaning, to correct mistakes in reading.

It can be seen that these eight goals are the minimal goals and they need to be supplemented in order to meet the full range of readiness for reading as revealed by some students at the primary level. These additional goals are :

- 1. Get children to copy and print letters, words, phrases, sentences and simple stories, messages for a meaningful purpose.
- 2. Teach children how a story is structured and show them how to predict words and events.
- 3. Involve children in talking about pictures, sequences of pictures, and stories that were read to them or read by themselves.
- 4. Teach children to correctly recognize words they are interested in learning or those that occur in meaningful contexts such as language experience stories, songs, nursery rhymes, and their day-to-day experiences outside the classroom.
- 5. Teach children letter sound correspondences when they show an interest in them or when they spontaneously attempt to sound out words on their own, and show how to combine these correspondences with syntactic or semantic cues in meaningful contexts.

These extended instructional goals are intended to offer the learners opportunities which facilitate their interaction with print at the level they have reached through their own efforts and help them to move towards a higher level of reading acquisition. These extended goals may be fully realised either through a language experience approach or the shared books method. It can also be implemented at a lesser level by reading to children regularly and to stock the classroom with plenty of print and picture books for children to explore on their own.

In this section we have analysed an important concept related to reading, viz., readiness to read. The success or failure of the classroom instruction regarding reading depends on whether it is seen merely as a mechanical activity or as a cognitive activity manifested through speech sounds. Attempting to answer the following questions will help you to keep in share focus the essentials of the reading activity.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 2

- 1. How does Ausubel's definition of cognitive readiness help you to understand that reading is not a mechanical activity ?

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- 2. What will be the serious consequences if a teacher ignores or does not know how to take into consideration the reading readiness of children while teaching them how to read ?

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3. What is the essential difference between participating in spoken language and participating in reading printed language.

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13.4 ASSESSING READINESS FOR BEGINNING READING INSTRUCTION

Traditional practices of assessing readiness for reading have relied on the use of norm-referenced, standardized, reading readiness tests. But these tests have deservedly come under criticism in recent years.

Given these doubts, it follows that the use of standardized reading readiness tests to find out what to teach in the kindergarten cannot be totally accepted. What types of reading assessment devices, then, should be useful to the kindergarten teacher ? But before deciding on these devices, the teacher needs preliminary information to decide on the extent of the child's acquaintance with reading print. Also, the teacher needs a more global estimate of a child's overall cognitive readiness for schooling. Once these decisions are made, the teacher will know who should be taught what and can place children who require similar instruction needs into small groups.

There are six kinds of information that are quite useful in making initial decisions about the type of instruction most suitable for individual children at the beginning of the school year :

1. The child's experience with reading books.
2. The child's understanding of the concept of letter, word, sentence.
3. The child's ability to predict words from context and that language units made sense within a larger message context.
4. The child's knowledge of letters.
5. The child's ability to read any of the most frequent words in written language.
6. The child's readiness to benefit from sight word instruction.

Informal Assessment of General Cognitive Readiness

Ollila (1976) has devised a thorough and well balanced checklist with which teachers can informally judge a child's general cognitive capacities. This checklist is very useful in the early period of instruction when teachers tend to adjust instruction to meet the needs of students. The sections on social and emotional adjustment in the classroom, desire to read and visual and auditory perception are especially relevant to revising instructional decisions in the initial stage.

However, we should also be aware of one shortcoming of checklists, which is their comprehensiveness and the difficulty of having to make judgements on so many areas

of the child's cognitive and physical behaviour. But the teacher should not feel it necessary to use all items on the readiness checklist but selectively use the items on the checklist and not attempt a yes-no decision when there is insufficient information. Once these are followed, then the teacher will find the checklist very useful in refining instruction in general and reading in particular.

Reading Readiness Checklist

Name of Child _____

Date : _____

Write yes or no or another appropriate answer for each of the following questions :

Physical consideration

What is the sex of the child ?

Have the child's general health, vision and hearing been examined ? If so, has any special restriction been imposed or has any special treatment been prescribed ?

Are there any signs of visual, auditory, or speech problems ?

Is attendance in school regular ?

Is she alert and responsive to instruction ?

Social and Emotional adjustment in the classroom

Is the child overdependent on the teacher ?

Does she interact well with other members of the class ?

Does she adapt himself easily to new situations ?

Can she assume responsibility and work independently ?

Does she complete assigned tasks ?

Does she know when to talk and when to listen to the teacher ?

Does she participate well and take turns in group activities ?

How well does she cope with minor frustrations ?

Does she have patience and show persistence in completing activities.

Desire to read and reading concepts

Does the child enjoy hearing stories ?

Can the child listen to a story with sustained interest for 10 minutes ?

Does she voluntarily look at school books in the library ?

Does she seem to have established a sense of left-to-right, top-to-bottom orientation in experience chart activities ?

Does she show interest in words and messages in the classroom ?

Does she bring books from home to school ?

Does she handle books with reasonable care ?

Can the child write her own name ?

Does she seem to understand that reading is talk written down ?

Reading : Preparing the Child

Intellectual factors

Has the child had an intelligence test ? If so, what were the results ?

Does the child seem to be mentally alert ?

Does the child interpret pictures effectively, seem to contribute pertinent ideas to class discussions ?

Does the child have a good memory for past experiences ? Can she memorise simple rhymes or remember simple messages ?

Does she show originality in her ideas and classwork ?

Does she understand and follow directions with a minimum of assistance ?

Does she seem to reason well and pick up new learning quickly ?

Does she show some ability in problem solving ?

Background of experience and language abilities

Is the child able to recite common nursery rhymes, and is she acquainted with well-known fairy tales ?

Has the child attended nursery school and/or kindergarten ?

Does the child have knowledge about common concepts -- food, family, house, animals, etc ? Are the child's concepts reasonably accurate ?

Is English spoken in the child's home ?

If not English, what language is spoken ?

Can the child speak with reasonable fluency ?

Does she seem to have a reasonable vocabulary to communicate her experiences ?

Can the child use more complex language structures in addition to so-called simple sentences ?

Does the child use and/or understand standard English ?

Does she use a nonstandard form of English ?

Does the child understand the school's language of instruction ?

Visual and auditory perception

Can the child see differences in pictures and geometric shapes ?

Can the child recognize her own name ?

Can the child match letters and discriminate words that have gross differences (o and x; see and hello) ?

Can the child discriminate between words that have only minor detail differences (wear, were) ?

Can the child recognize words that have been repeatedly presented to her ?

Can the child rhyme words ?

Can the child add to a list of words beginning with the same initial sounds ?

Can the child discriminate between words that sound very similar (watch and which) ?

Does the child demonstrate knowledge of the sound-letter relationships ? (that is, d. It makes the first sound in dog).

(Source : L.O. Ollila, "Reading : Preparing the child", in *Reading : Foundations and Instructional Strategies*, (ed) by P.M. Lamb and R.O. Arnold, Belmont, Calif : Wadsworth, 1976, 286-287)

To sum up, informal assessment of kindergarten children should be mainly making instructional decisions. These cannot be reliably made by using standardized tests. Any estimate of a child's readiness for beginning reading should be based on the child's previous acquaintance with reading and the child's potential to benefit from different levels of becoming acquainted with print. It should also indicate to the teacher the range of instructional alternatives needed to individualize the beginning reading programme.

Answer the following questions to clarify to yourself the basic principles regarding how and what to assess in readiness for reading.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 3

- 1. What is wrong with standardized reading readiness tests in general ?

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- 2. Why is an informal assessment such as the one produced by Ollila better than the standardized tests ?

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13.5 PLANNING CONTENT, DESIGN AND EMPHASIS

The major goal of a beginning reading programme is to provide alternative instructional approaches which will permit greater individualised reading experiences. To do this the teacher should consider the following questions while planning a beginning reading programme. But the specific answers to the questions depend heavily on individual teachers, the particular group of children being taught and the range of resources available.

- 1. What kind of teacher-directed reading activities should I think about to co-ordinate reading with the other aspects of my teaching programme ; (a) Unit themes such as elephants or festivals of the year; (b) Story reading; (c) Calendar activities; (d) Field trips: pre trip and post trip activities and (e) Plant and animal study.
- 2. What range of commercial materials would be useful to meet the interests and abilities of children in my class ? Do I need (a) Picture sets; (b) Magnetic letter boards; (c) Puzzle pictures; (d) Cut outs for flannel boards or story boards; (e) Word cards (with or without pictures); (f) Work books; and (g) Hand puppets.
- 3. What kinds of reading related games might be used during the year given the range of abilities in my class ? Which of these will be appropriate: (a) Letter games; (b) Word recognition games; (c) Phonic games; (d) Word meaning categorization games; (e) Spelling games ?

4. What proportion of published books will my students need ? Will they need (a) Non-print picture books; (b) Alphabet books; (c) Read along tape cassettes and books; (d) Easy-print narrative books; and (g) Easy-print expository books ?

Implementing the Programme

The primary goal of a beginning reading programme should be to interest all children in reading and to meet the instructional needs of all the children. We must remember that reading instruction is only one component of the total kindergarten programme which is to create a secure and pleasant atmosphere in school.

The reading programme should be integrated with the total kindergarten programme. It should provide alternative experiences with print within the entire programme. Initially the teacher can work out a plan for the children, but later on the children should be encouraged to select their work activities for each day.

The use of print and text should be a daily experience in the classroom. The following activities suggest natural ways to accomplish this goal :

1. Writing daily messages to the class on the chalkboard.
2. Providing a class mail box for the children to send pictures and notes to the teacher and to each other.
3. Generating sight vocabulary cards by labelling objects in the room, selecting words based on films, holidays, festivals etc.
4. Providing a large wall chart, calendar to pin notes on, to write birthday names, special holidays etc.
5. Providing space to display language experience stories.

Reading daily to children is absolutely necessary and this can be done through the "shared books experience". In this approach the teacher creates a large sized reproduction of the favourite book read by children. The children listen and follow the word-to-print relationships as the teacher reads the text aloud. It exposes them to several text cues on a whole group basis. Children can also illustrate the reproductions and thus move from print to talk to pictures. This initiates them to comprehension instruction.

Any form of beginning reading programme should respect what children already know, in various degrees about language, print and reading. It should allow for their natural curiosity and interest in the new, and should encourage them to explore the various dimensions of print and text. For young children the onset of reading is by its very nature, a fascinating journey from the meaning they possess through their experiences and their spoken language, to deciphering print and the author's meanings. The beginning reading programme should help the children to sustain this fascination with reading as a meaningful activity.

Let us now recapitulate the major issues discussed in this Section by answering the following questions :

Check Your Progress 4

1. Why is the planning and implementation of a Reading Programme as important as the knowledge of the theoretical aspects of Reading ?

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2. What is the purpose of offering alternative approaches to reading to a Primary Class ?

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3. What do you think will ensure the success of a beginning reading programme ?

13.6 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, we have discussed some features of a reading programme. These make it necessary for the teacher to understand the importance of the student's readiness for beginning reading lessons. The teacher must assess the student's readiness if the instruction has to be meaningful and relevant. In addition, we have discussed how to plan the content of the reading programme, where to place the emphasis and how to design the lessons by looking at the theoretical and practical aspects of reading.

13.7 SUGGESTED READING

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