

The "word-recognition" method of teaching reading is based on a fundamental confusion as to the nature of written language. This confusion stems from the erroneous view that, in a language employing a phonetic alphabet, written words are symbols of things. But they are nothing of the sort. They are symbols of spoken sounds. More accurately, they are more than symbols; they are chords of sound, comparable to musical notation.

Consequently, the protagonists of visual teaching of reading are making the hopeless attempt to convert a phonetic language into a pictographic language, and by so doing to set civilization back some 30 centuries. Next to the invention of language itself, the invention of the phonetic alphabet ranks highest of all inventions in the intellectual advance of mankind. For it gave an incomparable tool for the diffusion of knowledge among all classes; and in modern democracies, it more and more assures that the talents of all classes will be tapped for the common good.

That is, unless the visual method finally triumphs. For the visual method is the road to virtual illiteracy. The reason is very simple: the method demands that the reader memorize the forms of words instead of analyzing their dynamic sound-systems. The English language contains upward of 500,000 words. A well-read person knows many thousands of these words; but it would require a long lifetime to memorize the mere pictographic form of a few thousands of these words.

This fatal handicap of the visual method has been put to rigorous scientific test. Dr. Samuel Orton, well-known practitioner and authority in the field of reading, writing and speech difficulties of children, told me some years ago that he had tested thousands of children for word-knowledge; and that there was one difficulty common to the great majority of them.

Due to the pictogram method of teaching, they confused hundreds of common words that superficially looked alike, such as *rumble* and *ramble*. The result was that they could not comprehendingly read virtually any single paragraph in any subject of study. Dr. Orton's extensive investigations led him to conclude that among students of the visual method, 25 per cent learn to read moderately well, 50 per cent are so mediocre as to be almost illiterate, and 25 per cent cannot learn to read at all.

It is in this latter class that acute delinquency shows up at about the age of adolescence. For then, as Dr. Orton's case-histories show, revolt against this mysterious "inferiority" leads to such activities as truancy, theft and attempted murder.

Equally serious is the descent into a preliterate stage of culture. For visual reading, combined with TV, radio, the movies, the comic books and the pictorial magazines, is hurrying us along the road to pictographic illiteracy. It is no wonder that the book publishers are in the doldrums.

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"Reading" is defined as "taking in the sense of, as of language, by interpreting the characters with which it is expressed" (alphabet) or "uttering aloud or rendering something written" (note sound element).

"Alphabet" is defined as "the series of characters used in writing a language, and intended to represent the sounds, of which it consists."

"Writing" is defined as "one of the oldest arts, usually divided into ideographic writing" (such as ancient hieroglyphics) "in which signs represent ideas, and into phonetic writing, in which signs represent sound."

In all of these definitions, the idea of the correlation of the two senses of sight and hear-

ing is clear. Phonics is a very basic science. It is merely the science of the association of the sight of words with the sound of words.

A child hears words and he sees words; phonics is the tie-in. A child reads words he wishes to say; phonics is the tie-in. A child hears words he wishes to write; phonics is the tie-in.

How else can reading be possibly taught other than through the medium of phonics, the basic tool!

A child must see a word before he can read it. Therefore, all reading is sight reading. What do our "experts" mean by "sight reading" as a means of teaching "sight reading"? Can't quite figure this one out.

At any rate, I believe our modern educational "experts" slipped up and forgot to have the compilers of dictionaries and encyclopedias bring their definitions up to date to correspond with modern teaching methods.

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## SYNTHESIZER BROADCAST

WGMS Washington April 27 at 7:05 p.m. broadcast for the first time in the city the results of the electronic sound synthesizer developed and recently introduced by the David Sarnoff Labs, Princeton, N. J. The electronic synthesizer, according to WGMS, "is a music making device that can, in theory, originate any sound and any voice. Therefore, by mechanical means alone, music can be produced which does not originate with any musician or musical instrument." Members of the press, electronics industry and music and hi-fi fields heard a preview of the music and explanatory talks that same day before the broadcast. Musical examples were introduced with especially transcribed remarks by Brig. Gen. David Sarnoff.

Phonics, telecast