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EDITORIALS

One outcome of recent school surveys is the added attention to instruction and attainment in elementary school subjects. Not the least important of these is reading. Investigations have been carried on to determine the points of strength and weakness in the existing methods of instruction, and the legitimacy of the effort expended in relation to the product. Questions arise of whether the objective point in teaching reading should not be varied from grade to grade; whether teaching of reading as it has been rather uniformly carried on in the grades has of itself reared any barrier to the ends sought; whether *what* one reads rather than *how* one reads is not the important element; and wherein lies the chief value of reading that it shall absorb so large a part of the time spent in school. These problems might well be considered by high school teachers whose tendency has been to over-emphasize the analysis of the classics rather than to stress reading for purposes of gathering ideas and using them for revelations in other fields.

Reading in the public schools has been in the past largely a matter of securing effective oral expression, and while schools do not aspire

to the results attained by teachers of expression, formerly called "elocution," yet all the gymnastics attendant upon the mechanics of expression have had their share of attention. Vocal accompaniment to the getting and reproducing of thought has often been the criterion by which advance in reading has been estimated. Again, the mechanics of reading has received attention on the side of quick association of symbol and pronunciation to the exclusion of comprehension. To realize the efficiency of reading in relation to other subjects one must establish anew the value of reading in intellectual attainment and practical achievement. If it is conceded that efficient grasp of content is the chief function of reading, one may then shift the emphasis from correct and fluent vocalizing to mastery of the ideas expressed.

Efficiency in grasp of content must include rate of reading as well, since extensiveness can not be unduly sacrificed to intensiveness. Comprehension and retentiveness are included in this also. What do investigations show to be necessary for success in acquiring ability to read?

Briefly, it has been found that attention must be given to habits of visualizing the printed page, to increasing the span of attention, to the exercise of alertness in mastery of the content, and to individual differences. Awkward and wasteful habits which hinder rapid reading must be counteracted. The knowledge that the articulation of the child in the first grade is quite comparable to that which he will have in the eighth grade, or as an adult, might justify the abandonment of the attempts throughout the school to raise the achievement in that direction. Increase in rate is slow after the fifth grade; comprehension regularly increases from lower to upper grades. Opportunities for development in mechanics are possibly the greatest in grades three and four. Tests tend to stimulate achievement in speed rather than comprehension. Silent reading, with which little has been done, has not yet had its technique mastered by teachers, although they have realized the validity of its claims.

Such findings and recommendations as are here suggested are carefully elaborated in the Cleveland Survey by Judd and Bobbitt. As Dr. Judd remarks in commenting on the situation in Cleveland, since "American schools are chiefly reading schools," different from European in the amount and character of oral instruction, it is well worth while to know what constructive effort can be expended to secure the greatest good at all points along the line from grade to grade.

G. M. W.