

Gerald G. Duffy and
George B. Sherman.
**SYSTEMATIC READING
INSTRUCTION.**

New York: Harper and Row.
1972. 311 pp. \$4.95.

Frank J. Guszak.
**DIAGNOSTIC READING IN-
STRUCTION IN THE ELE-
MENTARY SCHOOL.**

New York: Harper and Row.
1972. 300 pp. \$6.50.

Systematic Reading Instruction has taken the common sense notion of trying to specify one's goals, then checking occasionally to see if progress is being made and turned it into an end in itself. The activity is known as preparing behavioral objectives. While performance objectives are neither good nor bad in themselves, this book shows how their use can become pedantic, trivial, and probably harmful to the successful instruction of children in the process of learning.

It is easiest to formulate objectives for mechanical skills. Thus, this book has 175 pages devoted to kindergarten and first grade type readiness and beginning reading activities and 5 pages devoted to developing reading habits. The authors have the right to cover anything they like in a book, but to call this one *Systematic Reading Instruction* is like calling a *Playboy* centerfold Grey's *Anatomy*. Given this title, the contents are superficial and, tho potentially interesting, insufficient for a reader who needs information promised by the title.

In many ways this book could be used as a how not to do it example. But, if you were one of the potential readers the authors specify, you would not be reading the book to discover how not to use performance objectives. The preface says that if used with a reading program (basal, language experience or individualized), it

will provide supportive skill development. I would suggest that if a reading program were in operation, this book would be redundant. One might also note the do-as-I-say-not-as-I-do discrepancy between the specific performance objectives the reader is told to use on learners and the general exhortations the authors use on the reader. Contrast, for example, the following!

Given three geometric figures that are exactly alike and one that is clearly different, the learner marks the one that is different. (p. 38 — Key objective for developing skill in noting visual differences. Sample of pretest is 00□0. Criterion score is 80%.)

and

Have you asked your learners to think today? (p. 242)

or

Does your reading instruction end with the skill groups or do you find ways to help your learners apply these skills each hour of the day? (p. 158 — Emphasis the authors'.)

Some readers may wonder about the criterion scores applied. They seem to be there because criterion scores are supposed to be part of the preparation of such objectives, rather than because of any particular relationship to the specific skill. Other readers may wonder at the insistence that each skill be taught in order and that no skill be passed by until it is mastered. Most teachers are aware that skill sequences are to a very large extent administrative concerns, not learner concerns. Whether skill X comes before or after skill Y has to do with the sequence of the materials (i.e. an administrative problem) rather than with whether or not a learner actually learns either or both skills.

This book would seem to prove again just how uncommon common sense really is.

Diagnostic Reading Instruction is an interesting and valuable work. It manages that most diffi-

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cult of tasks: developing meaningful behavioral objectives — ones that are specific enough to be teachable and humane enough to be learned. Make no mistake, this is a book about specific reading skills, tested and taught with rigor. Guszak does refer frequently to the purpose of all this skill instruction competency — so that the teacher can individualize reading instruction. He also indicates the need for opportunities for wide reading.

This book is comfortable to use as a text in reading classes. It also has been very helpful to in-service teachers who are wondering how to be different so as to meet some of the problems they find in their present reading programs. It is precise enough that one can model on it and yet it is gentle enough that many have felt it safe to try. This is no small feat, since many books are either so general that we can not use them as change models or so slick and pat that, while we can admire them, we know that we are not so skillful and thus do not try to change.

The word diagnostic in the title does not mean that this is a remedial book. This is a teaching book, a diagnostic-teaching book. The message is: learn enough about your students so that you can choose specific materials and strategies to develop specific skills. The major units of the book are: basic concepts of diagnostic teaching; what the diagnostic teacher knows; what the diagnostic teacher determines; what the diagnostic teacher prescribes; and, what the diagnostic teacher organizes and operates. Within each of these units the expected topics of word attack, comprehension, fluency, motivation and organization are outlined.

The book is clearly concerned with the development of skills and is consonant with current concerns for behavioral objectives and teacher accountability. Some readers may be interested in "indi-

vidualized reading" — in the usual sense of loosening up teacher controls and of having students read large quantities of print. They will find little solace here. However, neither will a teacher trying to justify usual grouping by average-reading level procedures find any comfort. Guszak makes a potent argument for individualizing and for grouping by attending to specific skill needs.

I am crotchety enough to resent paying six and a half dollars for any paperback but this is a better than usual book and, therefore, a better than usual buy.



Having just reviewed the two works above, I feel a need to share some concerns arising from the texts. Both the Duffy and Sherman book and the Guszak book make a great to-do about the use of specific (reading skill) behavioral objectives. Having lived through the times of school "goals" (in pretty binders ready for the inspector, but never used), I watch the growth of behavioral objectives with great interest. I am willing to grant at the outset that behavioral objectives are good. No objectives (goals) lead to no teaching, but....

It is possible to create all sorts of objectives which meet all the current rules for specificity of task and testing criteria and which are so trivial that no one really cares. It is possible to build large matrices of such skills which are so precise and so complete that such collections need to exist just for their own esthetic beauty. Such objectives are, of course, of no real interest for teaching from or to. I would suggest that the Duffy and Sherman book consists of such elegant, trivial, fascinating, useless lists.

Other objectives are so much like a sermon that the simile is too good to miss. Such objectives, like sermons, are rated on how pious and how removed from one's own life they are. (The old

"goals"?) One wishes to feel uplifted by a sermon, but not too threatened by the possibility of actually having to change oneself.

The problem of getting an objective precise enough to assess carefully and still significant enough to be worth teaching is very difficult. The tighter the objective the less likely it is to be related to *reading* and the more likely it is to be related to some *reading skill*. The Guszak book is on reading skills, but the objectives tend to be loose enough that one might actually use them to teach reading.

There are now many examples of behavioral objectives for the teaching of reading skills. The theory of using such objectives is excellent, but the application of such lists appears often to be truly abusive to the child as a learner and human being. One example is the attempt to restrict a child's opportunity to learn through the over-eager application of standards to arbitrarily sequenced skills as seen in the Duffy and Sherman book.

The collections of lists of behavioral objectives for reading skills will probably grow as concern is expressed for accountability and for the use of criterion referenced tests. Besides authenticating a teacher's right to be pedantic and picky-picky, such lists tend to decrease reading instruction as they increase time spent on reading skills instruction. It is clear that the tinier the skill being objectivized, the more precise the objective can be written. So, to a large extent, the "better" the objective the more finicky the skill. Some of us think that one of the fairer current criticisms of schools is that they spend so much time teaching children how to read that they never get around to teaching children to read. The wide use of massive matrices of behavioral objectives of reading skills can only increase this gap.

F. P. Greene
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Edmund Carpenter.
**OH, WHAT A BLOW THAT
PHANTOM GAVE ME!**

Toronto:
Holt, Rinehart & Winston,
1973. 192 pp. \$6.95.

Margaret Gillett.
**EDUCATIONAL
TECHNOLOGY: TOWARD
DEMYSTIFICATION.**

Toronto:
Prentice-Hall, 1973. 144 pp.
\$3.00 paper, \$4.95 cloth.

Like the First Commandment, "Thou shalt understand the laws of the media" is an extraordinarily difficult behest to obey. For the tyro who is left groping in these matters and who looks for enlightenment, here are two wholly dissimilar studies.

Oh, What a Blow That Phantom Gave Me! (the title is appropriately quixotic) attempts to out-McLuhan McLuhan. The news-flash-film-clip prose, the joke chapter headings, the mosaic build-up, they are all here (though not, alas, the wry puns which are a constant source of delight in *Understanding Media*). In the first half of the book, the author elaborates a number of themes which are, to say the least, less than original; e.g., we are moving into an era in which non-verbal communication will become increasingly important, our modes of thought remain print-dominated, etc. In making these points, Carpenter resorts to overstatement with the result that occasionally he relapses into patent absurdity.

"Translated into gears and levers, the book became machine," he declares. "Translated into people, it became army, chain of command, assembly line . . . Language in turn, was structured by the book." (pp. 40-41) Come off it, Carpenter!