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# Workbooks Make Us Sick!

by Mary Drew

Many classroom teachers make slaves of themselves to workbooks. Of course, they feel sick with twelve workbooks stacked next to their lunches in the teachers' lounge at noon. They know that the last ten pages in each book need correction. Of course, nausea creeps up when they realize report cards must be graded this week. The reading grade looms ahead as the most important assessment. "Better get to work correcting and grading the workbooks," they think as they shove their lunches aside. Ick!

Many classroom teachers intensely disapprove of workbooks. Often this is a result of consuming the workbooks haphazardly without knowing their major uses. When materials are misused, despite their quality, few benefits are recognized. Used wisely, the student can profit immeasurably in reading progress.

Workbooks are an intrinsic part of the basal reading program. They have a definite place in the regular classroom if they are used sensibly. Their wise use enhances the basal reading program emphatically for the student.

## Major Uses of Workbooks

1. promotes pupil growth in basic reading skills through workbook practice after the new skill has been taught.
2. promotes student growth in evaluating his own ability to

understand and to use basic reading skills.

3. promotes pupil growth in being able to work independently.
4. provides the teacher with a diagnostic tool which reveals student reading strengths and weaknesses.

## Clues to Success Using Workbooks

1. To best promote growth in a reading skill, introduce the workbook page at the time the teacher's edition presents that skill and recommends the appropriate workbook page. Workbook practice after the new skill has been taught reinforces learning the skill.

For the classroom pupil workbooks are designed to be used **together** with the basal reader. One reason for this is that the vocabulary of the basal reader is paralleled in the workbook which accompanies it. They provide additional and meaningful reading experience. Another reason is that workbooks present reading skills in a sequential and developmental form at each reading level.

To present the workbook page at the appropriate time is only a third of this clue to success. The next clue is that the pupil see a connection between the basal reader and the workbook, or simply the **purpose** for using it.

Miss Beech during the reading lesson might whisper to John that "interpreting the main idea" of today's story seemed hard for him. Because the workbook page deals with that skill, she would plan to work with him in other ways before he started his workbook page. To the others in the reading group, who grasped this idea, she might point out that additional practice in the workbook would be beneficial and would reinforce the skill. After the teacher gave directions for completing the page, these students would return to their seats, leaving her free to work with John.

One consultant, Miss Elm, advocates pinpointing the use of the basal reader and its workbook on a broader scale. At the completion of both the basal reader and its workbook, the achievement test is administered. After the teacher has corrected this test, she shares the results with each student from the reading group by returning the test and the completed workbook. She evaluates each skill tested in this way:

For the pupils who worked above the 25 percentile in "syllabication," she had them review their completed workbook pages involving this skill. Most pupils observed that the workbook practice involving this skill was suc-

cessful and had few corrections. These students could expect similar success when she showed them specific pages from the next level workbook which included advanced "syllabication" skills.

For the few pupils who had tested below the 25 percentile on "structural analysis," she might invite them to look at their completed workbook pages involving this skill. Each pupil might observe that he had some trouble practicing this skill. If these pupils indicated enough progress to advance to the next basal book and workbook, she might distribute the new workbook, suggesting that the pupil put a check mark at the top of each page offering practice in this skill so that he can ask for extra help at this trouble spot.

The last third for success with student practice in the workbook involves **correcting** the assignments. An experienced teacher stresses rereading the completed page before correcting it to catch careless mistakes and skipped parts. Student correction of the workbook page is an important clue to success. A classroom teacher can accomplish this in different ways.

Mr. Hickory assembles the reading group together so that each child may correct his own work. Thereby, each pupil sees his progress and

corrects any errors made at that time.

Another teacher, Mrs. Cedar, might guide each pupil from the reading group into checking his own workbook page individually by using the teacher's edition of the workbook. Following this, he would correct his errors. "Children from the first reader level through the sixth reader can be taught to do this efficiently."

The last suggestion is based on the idea that immediate correction creates a better learning experience than waiting until the teacher can get back to group correction.

When a pupil realizes that the purpose of the workbook is to give practice and proficiency in developing his reading skills so that he may become an independent reader, he will consider the workbook seriously as a learning experience and tool.

2. To best aid pupil growth in evaluating his ability to understand and use basic reading skills, the pupil should not fear that the workbook will be used as a **grading** device. When emphasis for learning is misplaced on the anticipated grade—either "A" or "E"—instead of placing it on learning the reading skill in the lesson, the pupil may suffer needless frustration. At the completion of the assignment, each page should ultimately be an "A,"

if the pupil checks the page himself and corrects any error made. So why bother with grades!

Assuming the student has completed the workbook page successfully, the classroom teacher looks for evidence that the child understands the reading skill well enough to use it outside the workbook lesson. Consider the reading skill "parts of a book," specifically the title, author, contents, index etc.

Mrs. Spruce, an excellent classroom teacher, guided her students into curiously examining the various parts of any new book. She encouraged them to "Get to Know Your Book," by being able to answer questions like:

- A. What is the name of the Book?
- B. Who is the author?
- C. What parts or units are offered in the contents?
- D. Using the index, on which page would you find information if you wanted to read about:  
ships? p. \_\_\_\_\_  
animals? p. \_\_\_\_\_  
music? p. \_\_\_\_\_
- E. Who published the book?
- F. When was it published?

Teacher observation of the student **applying** this skill accurately in the basal reader, recreational reading or reading in any content area should indicate application of this skill in

reading situations other than the workbook.

3. To aid pupil growth in being able to work independently is another major use of workbooks. To make the transition from the introduction and teaching of a reading skill used in the basal reader to practicing that skill in the workbook, **instructions** by the teacher may be given in the reading group. Or at an early reading level directions may be written on the workbook page for the child to read himself. No child should leave the reading group without understanding exactly what he is to do.

Mr. Oak who had thoroughly introduced and taught the new reading skill in "indicating main ideas through selecting titles" assigned the appropriate workbook page. The students returned to their seats, but soon one, two and three hands shot up into the air indicating a need for further assistance and explanation. This teacher invited these students, and any others who had questions, back to the reading group. Then he used the chalkboard using an example similar to the workbook page. Next, he directed them to reread the directions given on the assigned page and to complete the first section. Finally, he dismissed each pupil who had a correct answer.

Careful teacher guidance at this point enables the pupil to "work for increasing periods of time without having to ask fur-

ther directions, and with minimum errors."

4. The three previous points denote pupil benefits from wise use of workbooks, while the fourth major use pinpoints the workbook as a diagnostic tool for the teacher. By her critical observation of student workbook progress, **reading difficulties** are unraveled and **reading strengths** are revealed. The teacher may see a skill which needs attention for only one pupil in the reading group. She can provide individual guidance for this. Or she may note that the entire group displays weaknesses in a specific skill which may indicate reteaching in this area or additional practice in this skill.

Words with "er" sounds still puzzled nearly all the pupils in Miss Maple's reading group. She recalled that a heavy snowstorm cut attendance immensely the day she first introduced this skill. Whatever the reason, she recognized the need to re-teach it. She started with auditory discrimination of the sound by having each pupil identify the two words out of three which included this sound when she said, "Turn, circus, spoon." When this was successful, she had them supply words that included this sound while she wrote them on the chalkboard. From this they observed that the same sound was represented by different letters, like "er" in dancer, "ear" in earth, "ir" in bird

and "ur" in church. Finally, she had them read the workbook directions and work the first sentence. Those who were successful found the rest of that page easy.

The alert classroom teacher can use workbooks as a continuous diagnostic tool.

### Conclusion

Workbooks are used wisely for reinforcement of reading skills, for student evaluation and application of these skills, for independent student reading and for a teacher diagnostic tool. Used with these purposes in mind, workbooks will enhance the basal

reading program emphatically for the students and make the use of them beneficial for the classroom teacher.

(Mary Drew is Elementary Consultant for Allyn and Bacon, Inc.)

### References

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Hester, Kathleen B. **Teaching Every Child To Read.** N.Y.: Harper and Row Publishers, p. 294-296, 1964.

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## Main Ideas (Continued from page 39)

Another book of readings, edited by Joe Frost, **Issues and Innovations in the Teaching of Reading**, is available from Scott, Foresman & Co. Many outstanding articles have been contributed by prominent authors including Walter Loban, David Russell, George Spache, Albert Harris, Russell Stauffer, and Helen Robinson. The book considers a diversity of topics such as Linguistics, Approaches to Reading, Diagnosis, Research, Readiness, and Language and Cognitive Factors.

Prentice-Hall has published a second edition of **Education of Exceptional Children** edited by Cruickshank and Johnson. An impressive group of contributing authors deal with the various phases of the education of exceptional children. Reading Specialists will be especially interested in the new material on the brain injured child.

The IRA has recently published their eighth book of readings in the perspectives series, **The Evaluation of Children's Reading Achievement**, Thomas Barret, editor. The entire book might best be summarized by the title of Margaret Amman's first article, "Evaluation: What Is It? Who Does It? When Should It Be Done?" All books in the perspectives series are \$2.50 for non-members and \$2.25 for members of the IRA, Box 695, Newark, Delaware, 19711.

Two issues of the **Reading Teacher** of special interest that may have been overlooked or forgotten: March, 1967, "The Role of the Reading Specialist"; April, 1967, "Gadgets and Materials". Both issues are of current relevance and worth digging out for review.