

An Introduction to Words in Colour

The Use of Colour

For the beginning reader who first looks at words, there is nothing to tell him how they should be spoken. Letters do not shout their sounds any more than sentences speak their meanings.

Colour-coding provides the clue to this puzzle because it is unmistakable, it is easily recognised, and it does not change the traditional shapes of the letters. It is used on the wordcharts to identify sounds. Identical colours are used for identical sounds.

Example :

s in us
ss in pass

The signs **S** and **SS** are the same colour, which suggests that you should say them the same way. Therefore, when a child later sees the word science on the chart and recognises that the **sc** and **ce** are the same colour as the **S** in us, he will produce the correct sound because he already knows the sound associated with that colour.

But look at another example:

s in us
S in as

By colouring the shape **S** differently in these two words, we give a clue which indicates that their pronunciation must also be different. On the charts you will find as many colours as are necessary to represent the 21 vowel and 32 consonant sounds of English. No special phonetic symbols were introduced.

Once sounds are known, colour is no longer necessary and indeed the materials in the kit, except for the wordcharts and the Fidel, are in black and white.

It may be that children are already familiar with the alphabet or some of it. Of course the alphabet is extremely useful for looking up words in a dictionary or names in a telephone directory, but as a method for introducing the written forms of speech it creates more problems than it solves; a knowledge of *abc* is of very little help in sounding out the word *cab*. The sign **a**, as you will see, appears in ten different columns on the Phonic Code, which indicates that it corresponds to ten different sounds in English, as in: pat, was, village, any, swamp, metal, father, all, late, care. (As you listen to yourself uttering each of these examples, you will hear that only in one of them does the shape carry the sound we give for it in the alphabet. Besides, most letters never carry in a word the sounds we give to them when naming the alphabet.)

Instead of the alphabet, here your work will be with the signs (letters or groups of letters) which stand for the sounds of English, each represented by a different colour. However, since reading has several other components besides decoding (which means going from print to speech) colour does not solve all the problems of learning to read. The problem it does solve, it solves steadily and easily in a way that learner readers find within their reach.

The Demands of Learning to Read

Anyone who has learned to talk his mother tongue to an environmentally satisfactory level is endowed with mental powers that are, to say the least, sizeable. First he has worked out the meaning which underlies the words we speak. Then he has learned to connect the specific sounds used by the people around him with specific meanings, and has learned to speak. In comparison to these tasks, reading is a simple matter. The learner has only to match a system of signs with the corresponding sounds he makes when he speaks.

Written English employs six simple conventions and they will need to be used by learners, from the start, in order that their efforts find success. In Words in Colour these conventions are inherent in the reading approach and therefore need not be learned as a separate series of rules.

1. Words are printed or written on a straight line. (In English, the line is horizontal, but in some languages it is vertical.)
2. We read from a given starting point. In English we read from left to right, and from top to bottom of the page.
3. Our language is made of words. Words are printed with spaces between them. The spaces do not match the way we pause or run our words together in speech, so we must often ignore the spaces when we read aloud if we are to get the proper rhythm of speech.
4. Sounds are represented by signs, In English, a sign may be a single letter, or a combination of letters. Unusual spellings should be carefully observed. Developing an awareness of the inconsistencies of English spelling is one way to become a proficient speller, as well as a proficient reader.
5. In print, the signs can be switched around to form different words, just as sounds can be reordered to form different spoken words. (pat, tap, apt).
6. Reading should have the melody that speech has, but the correct melody can be found after the meaning of the whole phrase has been grasped. A fluent reader looks ahead, grasps a meaning for the whole phrase, and adds the speed and melody of his own speech, as well as the proper tone of fear, surprise, joy, anger, etc. Reading with melody helps the child to determine how sentences and paragraphs are linked together to convey meanings and ideas.

Words in Colour Materials

The teacher's guide *Reading With Words in Colour*.

Set of coloured chalks and a pointer.

Three reading primers: Books 1, 2 and 3, which gradually present words using all the sounds of English with all their various spellings.

Two sets of worksheets, numbered 1-7 and 8-14.

A set of coloured charts, which include 21 word charts and the Phonic Code of English (the Fidel) comprising 8 charts.

A Book of Stories.

Comparative table showing how the different parts of the material are connected

Primers 1, 2, 3	Coloured Charts	Word Building Book	Worksheets
Book 1 <—>	Charts 1-2 <—>	Tables 1-2 <—>	No. 1 <—>
Book 2 <—>	Charts 3-12 <—>	Tables 2-9 <—>	Nos. 2-5 <—>
Book 3 <—>	Charts 12-24 <—>	Tables 10-16 <—>	Nos. 6-12 <—>
		Table 16 corresponds to the coloured Fidel (Phonic Code)	Nos. 13 & 14 are linked with the Book of Stories

Characteristics of the Approach

Most children learning to read English have already been using spoken English for some time. In this approach, we propose to provide an adequate coding which will permit transcription of spoken speech into its written forms.

No-one can be expected to learn all the signs of written English in the first lesson anymore than he can be expected to learn all the words of his language in one session. It takes time to turn spoken speech into written speech. But how long a time is needed and how best to use the time are controversial questions amongst teachers. Time is one of the most precious commodities in life. In this approach we try to make the most intense use of it that is possible, so that the child learns to read in the minimum time and is, while learning, being educated in the fullest sense.

One of the main characteristics of this approach is intensity. This is seen in the tremendous speeding up of the process of learning to read and write.

To achieve this intensity, drill and repetition are banned from the start and are replaced by game-like activities which, on the one hand provide the motivation for learning, and on the other hand give the child the opportunity to form pictures in his mind which can be recalled easily. At the same time he learns to correct his own mistakes. The children will be asked to play seriously a number of games, each game having a particular function, complimentary to that of the others. Together these games will give children the opportunity to meet all the challenges of reading and writing. The games proposed here are original and each new one appears when there is a danger that the approach may become static and require the memorisation of particular facts.

Another characteristic of the approach is its deliberate reduction of the need for memorisation and its emphasis on conscientiousness and recognition.

Reading is concerned with a set of conventional signs which follow historically developed rules. Whatever views one may hold about it, one must acknowledge it to be a highly intellectual activity. In this approach it is accepted as that and treated as such. We do not attempt to hide the fact and have no preconceived ideas about young children being incapable of the high level thinking which is necessary. The discoveries about the ability of young children to operate at that high level, which result from the use of this approach with non-readers, may one day prove more important than the techniques suggested in it.

So from the beginning we put aside pre-conceived ideas and go on at once to provide the analytic-synthetic means that transform a speaker non-reader into a reader-speaker, aware at the same time of words, of their sounds and their transcriptions into a special code, here that of English.

Analytic-synthetic methods are similar to those used spontaneously by children whenever they learn independently of adults in essential fields of experience. This use of what may be covered by natural ways of learning, brings to the fore another characteristic of the approach. Here, children find out for themselves, with the teacher standing back and not allowing her own pre-conceived ideas to influence them.

Because of the game-like character of the method, outside motivation is no longer needed; because the teacher stands back and allows the children to find out for themselves, they become responsible for their own learning; because the children can use ways of thinking they have developed in meeting challenges, it is possible to operate at a high intellectual level, using analytic-synthetic procedures that are little connected with memory and that mobilise the full awareness of the learners. Because one constantly goes back to the dynamics of consciousness one fully uses the time consumed in the work, giving an intensity to each experience and helping the child grow in competence in using his abilities.

Algebra and Reading

In teaching a child we aim to put him in a position where he may use competently, the whole of the English language. We can work towards this aim in two ways. We can approximate to English from below as it were, using something less than the whole of English, working with restricted forms of the language made up of selected words. Concurrently, we can approximate from above, taking something which is more than the whole of the English language and working with algebraic operations on signs which occasionally yield English words and sentences. In our approach we use the word *algebra* to mean the way in which words and sounds can be made up from combinations of signs and transformed by combining the signs differently. Algebra of this kind has been given pride of place among the techniques which lead to mastery of reading and writing. That it has a place in this field is in itself important. It is one of the most useful tools we can give children to help them in sorting out questions and solving problems. To exclude it would be to leave them the poorer.

The two ways of working on the English language mentioned above are used as follows:- First one vowel is given using only one of its sounds, in this case the short one. We select a (as in pat) and form *words* of one, two, three or more a's. We follow this by similarly introducing u (as in pu) and more *words* are formed with one, two three or more u's, which are then combined with a's to form more words. We continue introducing the vowels i (as in pit), e (as in pet) and o (as in pot) and work at forming and reading combinations of sounds with the restricted language of five vowels. Children learn to read and write this fully phonetic restricted language in which there is not yet a word that is part of English. This is learning reading and writing where the activities are simply techniques. Later we introduce in turn the four consonants p (as in pu), t (as in put), s (as in pus) and s (as in pus).

<i>a</i>	<i>u</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>e</i>	<i>o</i>
	<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>s</i>	<i>s</i>
	<i>pp</i>	<i>tt</i>	<i>ss</i>	<i>ss</i>

The algebra of the situation is immediately understood if the set of signs above is considered.

A mute apostrophe is added to these signs and with them many combinations are formed. It happens that many *words* are formed that are not English, and in this respect we are using more than the words of the English language; also we are only using 13 signs from the written language and much that is part of English (e.g. *soup*, *pose*, *pious* and many others) cannot be obtained.

This algebraic approach may be said to do the following:-

1. It maintains the game-like activity.
2. It gives exercises which are intellectual in character.

3. It establishes from the beginning the analytic-synthetic method of forming words.
4. It increases awareness of what is being done and the sounds which are being uttered.
5. It helps children to recognise that words have to be formed and to see how they are formed.

This type of exercise is called Visual Dictation No. 1.

The set of signs which approximates to English from below develops in 16 stages. When children reach the 16th stage, the signs they know can generate the whole of the English language. There are over 270 of these signs on the full chart. They are displayed in 48 groups. 19 of these groups are the vowel sounds and each group represents one sound. The remaining 29 groups are the consonants, each of which sounds in one way only when associated with the vowels. It is obviously possible, by combining these signs to get many combinations which are not English words.

As words (English words) are formed they can be retained and used in another game called Visual Dictation No. 2, in which words are put together to form sentences. Only some of the 'sentences' are English, for the structure of English must be taken into account in order to achieve an English sentence with English words.

There could have been a third type of dictation in which sentences were combined instead of sounds or words. In order to have a 'story' that has any meaning, however, more than a knowledge of English words and sentences is required. Each sentence may be correct in English and still not form part, with the others, of any schema which will yield a story.

The Integrative Schemata and the Inner Criteria

Another important component of the approach is its systematic use of one spontaneous element of speech, which, for want of a better expression, can be called the integrative schema.

Everyone who talks or writes knows that words are organised in the mind and come out, not at random, but in a sequence which expresses more or less adequately what one wishes to say or write. This power of the idea, of the lived experience, to mould together into a coherent whole a large number of elements from the physical, biological, mental and social fields of experience, is singled out and made use of in the approach. If a word is in the mind, it directs the search for the signs that make its spelling. Before a sentence is uttered, the mind has searched through its knowledge of words and selected those which express the meaning it wishes to convey. If a story is told, the mind searches through the possible sentences to select those needed for the adequate telling of the story.

So inner criteria are to be developed, so that a child may have that within his mind to which he may refer for correctness of spelling, rightness of structure and for good writing. These inner criteria can be the pre-occupation of the teacher from the start

and all the time. Indeed the approach caters explicitly for that, first through the coloured charts, which provide consistent clues and establish milestones to which reference can be made when needed. At first this reference will need to be made in actuality; later it will be possible to recall the image of the chart. Because colour has the labile quality of images and thoughts, its systematic use makes it possible to transform English into phonetic language. Images, here coloured ones, are evoked as wholes and can be maintained at the centre of awareness, while the mind works on them to get what it may need. Images are dynamic and because of that they gain new dimensions each time they are evoked, or re-evoked.

We make use of all this in establishing close contact between uttered and written words and sentences, asking the child to concentrate on the correspondence of sounds and visual images, and to form relationships that are as flexible as is required for the language studied.

If these relationships are correctly formed, rightness is simply a matter of correct association. When one really knows how a word is spelt and sounded, one experiences no doubt about it and one immediately recognises it as correct when one meets it. Young children learning to read can experience this recognition of the correctness of words, if the teacher follows this approach with care. Spelling need no longer be said to be a problem in the learning of English. ¶

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The Words in Colour materials were first published in 1962 simultaneously in Britain and the United States. There have since been six editions of the British English version and three editions of the North American English version. The approach has also been adapted for teaching the reading and writing of French to French speaking learners and similarly Spanish for Spanish speaking learners in publications known as 'Lecture en Couleurs' and 'Letras en Color' respectively. In Great Britain these materials are published by **Educational Explorers (Publishers)** and distributed by **The Cuisenaire Company**. Distribution throughout the rest of Europe is by **Educational Solutions (UK) Ltd.**

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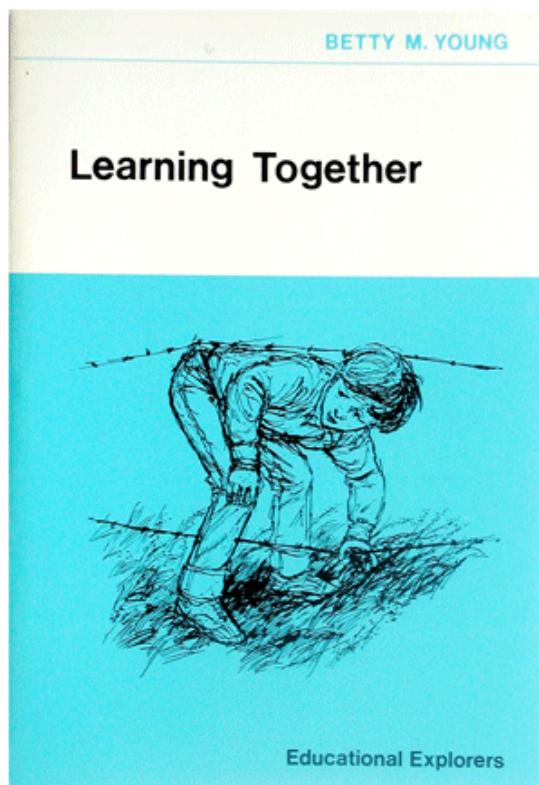
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Learning Together

by Betty M. Young
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This is the first published report from a school in England that began, not without reservations, to use the Words in Colour materials. Betty Young, headmistress and with over twenty-five years of teaching experience, decided on the innovation and was loyally backed by her staff. The first part of the book is Betty Young's introduction, an explanation of the course and her observation of what happened.

The second part of the book is written by the other teachers involved. They write as they found, but though each one dwells on her personal experience one constant factor comes through; the teachers, as much as the children, learned together, and whatever their final opinion, the experiment was rewarding far beyond their first expectations.
