"SEE SPOT RUN" TEACHING METHODS HAVE CHANGED

Almost everyone over 40 years old can remember sitting in a little circle with their classmates and learning to read.

The characters in those first grade readers were MOTHER who was always dressed in high heeled shoes and a white frilly apron; FATHER, in a business suit, shirt and tie; DICK in his knickers; and JANE, with a ribbon in her hair and a tidy dress.

And of course, there was SPOT, the dog who romped through the entire series. The family represented white, middle class Americans.

Today's textbooks have more realistic illustrations. Every child can identify with them. Father is shown in many occupations, mother is not always all dressed up, the children wear play clothes and all races are represented.

Methods of teaching have changed along with the characters in the stories.

In the "See Spot Run" days, children learned to read by word recognition, one word at a time in the recommended series commensurate with their ability.

Teachers manuals were not as complete in those days. A teacher wrote the words over and ovewron the blackboard and used flash cards as an additional aid.

There was not a lot of individualized teaching geared to both the slow and advanced student. Everyone moved along at the same pace. Children caught on or they didn't and those who didn't struggled along until they reached eighth grade or until they were old enough to legally quit school.

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Reading has always been the key to whether a student does well and enjoys school. In the past, the only alternative was to pass a child along whether he was reading well or not because there was a limit as to how long a growing child could fit in the small seats of the primary grades.

These are the people who graduated from school but cannot read well enough to fill out a job application. Others can recognize the words but are unable to comprehend what they are reading.

Betty Ramsdell, recently retired reading director at the Pine City public school, Florence Kalenius, first grade teacher, Lillian Olson, sixth grade teacher and former Librarian, Gloria Harwig have all been involved in education long enough to have observed the changes in the techniques of teaching reading.

"Far more is expected of the child in the classroom today than in the old days," they agreed.

"When a child stumbles over a word, we don't tell them the word but encourage them to sound it out, to think about what word they would use if they were doing the talking and we urge them to figure things out for themselves," Kalenius said.

The same series of books is used from first grade right through sixth so the children can fully understand what they are reading before they move on even if the reas of the class is ahead of them. They will eventually catch up.

The teachers were in agreement that children today are far more sophisticated than their parents were at the same age. Travel and television have exposed them to the outside world.

They are easily bored and teachers must introduce far more action into a reading program than they did years ago. In a sense, teachers must become actors and actresses, competing with

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television to get the child's attention.

"Television is often blamed for curtailing the desire to read," Harwig said. "This is not always true. The book "Little Women" was never checked out until the story was on television. The next day all three copies in the library were requested and they have been in circulation ever since. The same is true with the "Little House on the Prairie" and the "Disney" series," she added.

In the old days of early education, outstanding scholars came out of rural schools where students sat three to a seat . Older children tutored the younger ones and many of the children learned the basics well.

Some old timers maintain that an eighth grade education in the old days was better than a high school education today because time spent in the classroom was devoted strictly to learning.

Before the consolidation of rural schools, many of the students in the entire school were related to each other. The cost of maintaining these schools became too great. It was cheaper to transport the rural children into town where they could all attend school under one roof.

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