

Wilson Is Serious About Reading

BY DAWN ELLEN BOYD

Doris Wilson believes every child should leave elementary school with a solid knowledge of reading.

Rather than teaching her second graders at Union Primary School by the old "look-say" or whole-word method, where students learn to read individual words, she teaches them phonics so they can say any word that

can be sounded out. According to many experts, this takes in almost 90% of all words in the English language.

In the English language, there are 70 common phonograms. Phonograms are combinations of one, two or three letters which represent a single sound. Students are taught the phonograms and learn to blend them together to form words.

Wilson attended a Spalding phonics workshop in Emporia, Va., from Nov. 9-15. Workshop participants learned both philosophy and teaching practices associated with the method.

Wilson emphasized, "This method encourages a child to think and be self-disciplined."

Good speech, writing, spelling and reading practices are learned through the study of phonetics. "Even the handwriting must be precise," said Wilson. "There's no sloppy speech or careless reading either. It teaches children to think. That's a big plus."

Each child reads aloud every day, and frequent spelling tests are administered.

Even before taking the workshop, Wilson believed in the value of teaching phonics. "My class motto has been 'sound it out' as long as I've been teaching. If they sound it out they've got the right foundation to move ahead in reading."

Wilson's class works on phonics using the Spalding method for three hours each school day. The students are learning phonograms while they wait for the arrival of their Spalding-recommended reading books, which feature children's literature such as "Bambi," "The Story of Babar," and "The Emperor's New Clothes."

Unlike many methods for teaching reading, Spalding phonics doesn't require expensive instructional materials such as films and workbooks. Children use pencils and paper and their reading books.

Wilson plans to meet with parents soon to explain the method. "This is the reading method they use in New Hampshire, the state that leads the nation in student achievement," she said. It is also taught widely in Arizona, California and New York.

Reading has always been a love of Wilson's. "I inherited my love of reading from my father, a confirmed bookworm, and from my mother, who crowned each day with a story," she said.

Wilson believes reading deserves to be the first priority of the educational system. "We can prevent illiteracy in the elementary grades, so there won't be adults who can't read," she asserted.

"Research has shown us the best way to teach children to read (the phonics method)," she said. "We just need to do it."

Wilson laughed, "Barbara Tuchman said 'Reading is the greatest gift with which man has endowed himself, by whose means we may soar on unlimited voyages,' and I hope that no child in my charge will miss the boat!"



STAFF PHOTO BY DAWN ELLEN BOYD

DORIS WILSON, a second grade teacher at Union Primary School, thinks children will be more effective readers if they learn to sound out words phonetically. She uses phonogram cards to help teach the class specific sounds.

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