

Assisted Reading for Second Language Learners

by Emilio Cortez

This article features teaching strategies that have been culled from several sources. The techniques described are associated with the assisted reading approach and are particularly appropriate for second-language learners during the initial phases of reading instruction.

The assisted reading technique has yielded favorable results in the classroom setting. Kenneth Hoskisson describes the assisted reading approach as follows:

Assisted reading consists of reading a word, a phrase, or a sentence and having the child repeat it....To begin to get the child to focus on the print the [teacher, parent, aide or peer tutor] puts a finger on the page and moves it slowly under the line while reading. The child is asked to follow the words and repeat them as they are read. Eventually the child is asked to put a finger under the line of print and move it along while reading the words aloud. (Hoskisson 1974:298)

Yetta Goodman and Dorothy J. Watson propose a variation of the assisted reading approach.

An alternative... is to have the adult [teacher or aide] read, stopping where a highly predictable word or phrase follows so that the reader can supply the appropriate language. (Goodman and Watson 1977: 868-869)

In keeping with the assisted reading procedure as proposed by Goodman and Watson, the snap reading technique (Cortez 1975) can be used effectively to aid in the improvement of students' reading and listening skills.

Snap reading requires that the teacher read orally at normal speed, stop, and snap his/her fingers. This alerts a student to read the next word. The teacher immediately resumes reading, stops, and snaps his/her fingers again. A different student within

the group reads the next word, and so on. Since some pupils inappropriately read function words with a heavy stress, it is suggested that such words be read by the teacher. In other words, nouns and main verbs should comprise the majority of words to be read by the students. (Snap reading can also be used with the entire class; when the teacher snaps his/her fingers, the class responds chorally.)

Carol Chomsky successfully used tape recorded storybooks with pupils who were described as chronic reading failures. Chomsky elaborates further:

The children listened individually to tape-recorded stories following along in the written text. They listened repeatedly to the same story until fluency was achieved. The text was then to be analyzed extensively through a variety of games... designed to lead the children from rote recognition of the written material toward an active interpretation of alphabetic and phonological features of the writing system. (Chomsky 1976:289)

It is important to note that although a child has memorized a particular reading passage and can read it flawlessly, it does not follow necessarily that the child will recognize the same words in different phrases, sentences, or contexts. Thus, as one might infer from the latter part of the quotation just cited, additional exposure to the same words in varied contexts is essential to ensure mastery.

Marie Carbo also used tape recorded stories with pupils who required remedial reading instruction. Carbo found that her students had problems following along in the text as they listened to the tape recorded reading. Nevertheless, this situation was rectified by utilizing three strategies which helped to synchronize for the students the printed words with the tape recorded words.

More specifically, Carbo implemented strategies such as:

1. *Cueing the listener.* I numbered the book pages consecutively... and cued the youngsters for whom I was reading by stating the page number before reading the page. Next, I paused long enough to allow the listener to turn to the correct page, look at the pictures, and find the first line of print.
2. *Phrase reading.* I recorded the material with particular emphasis on clarity, expression, and logical phrasing. The latter seemed to help the students to assimilate natural word groupings and lessen their tendency to read word-by-word.
3. *Tactual reinforcement.* I had each child move a finger under the words as they were spoken. (Carbo 1978: 269)

Short tape recorded reading passages can also make it easier for students to synchronize the language they hear with its graphic representation. For example, a number of brief pedagogic dialogues can be tape recorded, transcribed, and used as supplementary reading material. A straightforward dialogue such as the one that follows could be used for such purposes.

- A. I bought seven cookies for lunch,
and I ate three.
- B. How many do you have left?
- A. Just four.
- B. May I have one?
- A. Sure. (Cortez 1976:12)

Because of their brevity, inherent humor, and recurrent rhyme scheme, limericks can be used effectively in conjunction with

the assisted reading approach. Consider the following limerick that would be appropriate for young second-language learners.

There once was a man with a cold
whose story has never been told.
With one mighty sneeze,
he blew down some trees.
And they rolled, and rolled, and rolled.
(Cortez 1980:10)

In closing, when properly utilized and judiciously incorporated into the ESL classroom, assisted reading constitutes an effective approach for teaching reading and listening skills during the initial phases of reading instruction.

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