

READING INSTRUCTION FOR NATIVE AND SECOND LANGUAGE STUDENTS

by Sid Jenson

A well designed language program works regardless of the student's first language or ethnic background. This is one of the conclusions that can be drawn from the RISE (Reading Improvement Services Everywhere) Project held on the Church College of Hawaii campus this summer.

Under the direction of Mona Sherwood, Chairman of RISE for the State of Hawaii, Dr. Carl Harris and Dr. Sid Jenson of CCH and Elaine Makaio of the Laie Elementary School offered a structured tutoring program for children from the ages of 6 to 11 who were behind on their grade level in reading skills. The tutoring program ran for five weeks, with the children in class for one and one half hours, five days a week.

The class period was divided into three parts: (1) each child was tutored in reading about 15 minutes per day; (2) the child read graded material for 5, 10, 30 minutes per day (the length of time depended on the child); (3) and the remainder of the class time was spent in organized activities, such as movies, games, coloring, motor skill drills, and outside recreation activities.

The tutoring program used was Grant Von Harrison's *Beginning Reading I* (Brigham Young University Press, 1972). Harrison's structured tutoring uses trained tutors. It takes about four hours minimum to train an adult or teenager. We used teachers, parents, college, high school and junior high school students as tutors. All worked about equally well. The personality of the tutor was more critical than age or previous education.

Harrison's *Beginning Reading I* has eighty-five well explained steps which the tutor follows. The student is first taught five sight words (the, is, is, this, I), and then is taught the names of five letters (s, m, f, n, a) and then the sounds of those same five

letters. For example the sound of "m" is blended with "a" to produce "ma." Then after two letter combinations, three letter combinations, such as "mas" and "maf" are learned, the student is asked to decode real and nonsense words, such as "maf," "fan," and "sam." When this is accomplished, the student reads a story composed of the five

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sight words and five sounds they have learned. Very quickly the student can read; this does wonders for his self-esteem.

Basically this is the program. The student learns names of letters, sound of letters, then blends the sounds - name, sound, blends. With the addition of some critical sight words, the student then reads sentences and stories. Dr. Harrison, through much trial and error (his book is in the eighth version) has determined which letter, diagraphs, and sight words are easiest and which need to be learned first. The student follows a sequential, step by step, program, guided by the tutor, working on a one to one basis for short periods of each day.

The personal attention, the sequential order, the mastery of a small amount of material each day, the controlled reading material all make Harrison's method successful.

The backbone of the method is flashcards. The letters, sounds, and sight words are on triplicate cards; and through the tutor's manipulation of the cards, the student has a high repetition of material he is learning. Little time is wasted on material which has already been mastered. However, there is sufficient repetition to reinforce the

student's past learning and to give him confidence.

Our summer at CCH program is not yet completed. Many of the students have finished only about one half of the eighty-five steps. The program will be continued this fall in the local elementary schools. But the program has a series of mastery checks, and so the teachers and students know quite clearly all through the program how successful the teaching and learning are. A student is not allowed to continue from step to step unless he has mastered the past material.

Judging from the results we have so far, it is very clear that we have one factor which determines success or failure — attendance. If the child attended, he progressed in his reading skills. If he didn't he didn't. The student who progressed the most in the session was the student who missed only one day, and that day was excused. Three students were asked to drop the program because they would not attend regularly, which meant the tutor had to go back several steps and review, which made both the tutor and the student frustrated. If the child had regular attendance, we would measure regular progression. Some children progressed more rapidly than others; but all progressed, regardless of their first language

or ethnic backgrounds.

We had children from several different cultural, and economic backgrounds. We had Koreans, Tahitians, Japanese, Caucasian, Chinese, Samoan, Tongan, Hawaiian, and part-Hawaiian. The differences in their progress seemed due more to the home situation and personal temperament than to any cultural or language heritage. This leads to our not new, but re-confirmed conclusion, that any good language program will work for all ethnic groups.

We recognize that our students were young and adapt easily to new programs and new languages, but we are confident that this program will successfully work with older persons as well. This is a subjective hunch on our part, but near the end of our session we were given outside statistical data to support our belief.* When this year's program is finished in the spring of 1974, we will have more statistical data on which to base our conclusions, but as of now, we feel very pleased with the reading progress the children have shown so far.

* *Improving Human Performance: A Research Quarterly*, 1 (December 1972), This issue contains several articles with bibliographies of work done in tutoring and reading instruction.

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