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## DEVELOPING READING READINESS SKILLS, CONCEPTS AND ATTITUDES

The term “reading readiness” suggests that there are certain skills concepts or attitudes that children must have in order to learn to read. Reading readiness is a preparatory stage of reading. Children attain readiness to learn to read at different times and ages, depending on the literacy-related activities they are exposed to.

In this chapter some reading readiness skills, concepts and attitudes children must possess in order to learn to read meaningfully will be discussed.

### READING READINESS SKILLS

The following are some basic reading readiness skills children need:

1. **Language skills:** Verbal language is widely recognized as the foundation of reading (Gibson and Levin, 1975; Lerner, 1976; Harris and Smith, 1980).

- The child must have a good background of experiences that will help develop good foundation for language skills. The child throughout pre-school and primary school years, continuously gains experiences and acquires language. It is important that the child visits places, because children who go places tend to have much more richer background of experiences than those who stay at home.

## **READING READINESS ATTITUDES**

- The child must have interest in books and in learning to read. Some children come to school with a desire to read and with a positive attitude towards reading. Some children develop a love for reading in school through their own discoveries and successes or through a teacher.
- The child must have confidence that he will be able to learn to read. Positive self-concepts are built in pre-readers in the same ways that they are fostered in anyone. Pre-readers need to experience success; they need opportunities to make decisions. They need to feel accepted, and they need to develop realistic expectations. The teacher should avoid “running” or “forcing” children to learn to read. Do not use difficult books to teach.

## **HELPING HANDICAPPED CHILDREN DEVELOP READING READINESS**

It is true that most visually handicapped children often need extra help in developing reading readiness skills. As a result, they are often weak in reading readiness skills by the time they start school. These children therefore need extra help in developing reading readiness. Examples will be made here using the V.H., H.H. and L.D.

### **The Visually Handicapped (V.H)**

The following are the problems of visually handicapped children:

- They often have limited experiences for language and concept development because of lack of visual learning.
- They also lack mobility training. They are restricted in mobility training. At times, there are also architectural barriers.

- They may also lack the ability to use tactile (touch) to discriminate objects, etc. especially if the child lost his vision later in life.
- They have limited development in classification skills. For example, where the objects are too large, too small and too similar.
- The visually impaired child may have problem because he does not know how to read Braille or Braille notes. He might not have seen Braille before or is not used to brailled books.

### **The Hearing Handicapped (H.H)**

The hearing handicapped child always has:

- severe limited language skills. He has serious problems in developing oral language or sign language, compared with hearing children.
- limited experiences and concepts due to lack of auditory learning. That is to say he does not know what sound is like neither can he learn the sound of letters, etc.
- problems in classifying objects.

### **The Learning Disabilities (L.D)**

The L.D. child might have problems in specific areas.

He might have disability in:

- listening, comprehension and/or speaking fluently;
  - developing classification skills.
  - in sequencing whether from right to left, top to bottom.
- The child might be severely disabled and may be kept at home, thus having limited experiences; for example, the severely mentally retarded child.

These various categories of handicapping conditions may need help with reading readiness skills, concepts and attitudes. For example, they may need self-concept and confidence in

order to develop reading readiness that will enable them to start to learn how to read.

## **ACTIVITIES FOR DEVELOPING READING READINESS**

### **Developing Spoken/Sign Language Skills**

Language is often used for communication. The ability of the child to remember and learn new words or signs will depend on whether they are used to express their own interests and feelings. It is the responsibility of the teacher to use every opportunity to develop children's language naturally by talking to them about what they are doing. The following activities are good examples of what could be easily done.

**Walking Class Visit:** Children should be encouraged to go on excursions. They could take a walk around the school compound or busy streets, visit zoo, wild life park, and so on. While they do so, the teacher should be able to create curiosity in the pupils by describing and discussing with the children during their visits. For instance, children could be encouraged to talk about various plants in the school compound, items in the school compound, things that hawkers sell in the streets, and types of animals in the zoo or Wild Life Park and the like.

A follow-up activity may be asking them to draw pictures, dramatize scenes, etc. by L.D. and H/H. The V.H. could be asked to model with clay or sand thermo phone, etc.

**Sharing (Show and Tell):** The teacher encourages children to come to school with interested objects so that they could discuss them in class. Each child should be encouraged by the teacher to talk about the objects he brought to class.

**Craft Activities:** Craft activities should include drawing, modeling, painting, cutting, paper tearing, "What I am making

game.” The teacher’s role here should be to describe what the child is doing, while the child tells about what he made or drew.

**Play Activities:** Children should be encouraged to play with toys, drive cars, play the roles of mummy or daddy, and so on, in order to develop their language skills.

### **Developing the Ability to Recognize Differences and Similarities in Print/Braille Letters and Words**

The general guidelines are: when children learn names, they need practice in looking or touching only a few letters at a time and learning their names. We should note, therefore, that discrimination comes before labeling. Reciting A B C’s does not teach children to identify letters. Children are also most interested in their own names. The first activities should be with children’s names and the letters that make up their names. As far as print/Braille is concerned, children need help in learning that the position of a letter in space changes his name.

#### **Activities could include:**

- Name building by matching letters to samples given;
- Word matching and sorting, using flash cards to match objects or sort them out
- Letter or word sorting, matching, etc

### **Developing the Ability to Sequence**

Start teaching the child to write from left to right in all written activities and storybooks.

This can take the following patterns:

- Wordless storybooks.
- Retelling of stories, which can be of stories told or signed or read to children.

- Drawing and arranging drawings of stories told and signed or read to children.
- Dramatizing stories told or signed or read to children.

### **Developing the ability to classify**

The activities that could help develop a child's ability to classify include the following:

- Matching and sorting game.
- Picture file.
- Sorting box.
- Concrete pictures.

Visually handicapped children could use clothing materials, e.g. wool or silk, wooden shapes, e.g. geometric shapes, cut out shapes or raised diagrams that they could touch and feel easily.

### **Developing Readiness Concepts and Attitudes through the Use of Literary Awareness Programme (LAP)**

Literary awareness programme is a programme of regular reading aloud of children's storybooks to the child. Researchers have shown that the practice of reading aloud is the single most important activity parents can do to encourage their children's reading success. LAP stimulates in children a love of books at an early age. It makes children aware of connection between print and spoken language. You start LAP in nursery schools and primary schools using books with enough illustrations with few short sentences. This will help to develop skills such as sequencing ability, prediction, and expand the child's language skills.

In carrying out LAP, the teacher should select books that are short with simple stories. Illustrations in the book should be very attractive, and the print should be of large size.

The teacher should make sure that the books he or she wants to use for LAP are selected and kept ready the previous day. Such books could be got from children's section in the

school or public library. The children could be asked to bring some if they have them at home.

Before you start LAP make sure that you have read the book aloud to yourself. You can read it to a child of the same age group to see if she enjoys the book. If you find out that the book is not enjoyable to you, you drop it and pick another book. Practice the actions in the book orally, learn to sign the book if the children are hearing impaired and practice reading Braille books if they are visually handicapped.

The seating arrangement should be in such a way that children can sit near the teacher. Using the mat is very effective. While sitting on the mat or on the floor, the pupils should sit in a semi-circle while the teacher sits in front of them. Do the same if they are arranged to sit under a shady tree in the school compound. Visually handicapped children should be allowed to touch rough illustrated pictures.

Prepare children for the topic briefly by discussing some of the pictures on the cover page. Encourage them to “read to find out” what the story is about. While reading, hold the book in such a way that the children can see the illustrations in the book clearly. Continue to drill the children on some important aspects of the story or to ask questions.

- Read with expression and dramatize the story where necessary.
- While reading the story, older children may be allowed to draw pictures of the part they like best. This helps to make children sit attentively.
- During reading, if a child finds a book boring and gets restless, it is advisable to either change to another book or stop reading.

Follow-up Activities.

a) At the end of the reading, there should be follow up activities. There should be brief discussions about the story and

what they enjoyed about it. You can use for example, drama, drawing, modeling, and so on.

### **Developing Readiness Concepts and Attitudes Through the use of News on the Board (NOB)**

News on the Board is a variation of the language experience method. This method is ideal for teaching reading in a classroom that has no books. It is also very effective to start a normal reading lesson in the school after NOB. In order to use news on the board, the teacher leads the children into some discussion regarding what they did at home or what they saw on their way to school. After this you could ask about four children to dictate a sentence each.

The teacher writes each sentence on the board as it is dictated on the board. She says the words aloud as she writes on the board. The teacher now asks the whole class to read the words aloud alone with her as she points to the words. She then asks the whole class to read the news aloud. Individual pupils could be called upon to read the news.

After that, the teacher picks out five new words from the news and writes them on flash cards. The teacher calls on some children in the class to find the words on the chalkboard, which is the same as the words on the flash cards. The child is asked to copy the news on the board into their exercise books while other children add sentences to the day's news.

News on the board should be introduced daily during the first period. It should last ten to fifteen minutes.

Here is a sample of NOB:

Class 4A rows:

Today is June 28, 2002.

Ladi said, "I ate rice this morning."

Musa said, "My mother travelled to Abuja"

Laitu said , "My brother is sick."

Danladi said, "I saw a car when coming to school."



News on the Board prepares children for reading. It is a beginning reading activity. Children acquire sight words through daily NOB.