

This article is based on a paper delivered by Ann Pulvertaft at the Eighth Australian Reading Conference held at Adelaide in August 1982. (Ann Pulvertaft is a lecturer at Rivena College of Advanced Education, N.S.W.)

Every child should be exposed to print early, that is even before the child goes to school. The best method of exposure is for the parents to read interesting material to the child. This not only creates an interest in books but also strengthens the bond of love and friendship between parent and child.

In this article three methods of encouraging reading are outlined.

Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading (U.S.S.R.)

This aim of this programme is to breed readers — children who readily turn to books for information and enjoyment.

This method provides students the opportunity to read any material of their own choice, including magazines and comic books, for a set period each day. The students can bring their own material to school to read. (Teachers must check to see that no pornographic material is brought to school.)

The main feature of this technique is that there is uninterrupted work. The reader only interacts with the author. Another feature is that the reading is sustained — starting with ten minutes leading to half an hour. Only silent reading is done during the period. An important point to note is that the teacher himself should set an example. He should do only silent reading and not spend the time correcting pupils' work, writing in his record book or filling in forms.

The purpose of the U.S.S.R. is to get the pupils to enjoy reading. Some children have very limited opportunity for free reading at home and they may never see adults reading. This method also gives an opportunity for the weaker readers to read at their own pace and gives them a chance for independent problem-solving activities.

Occasionally there should be group-sharing sessions where the students talk among themselves about what they have read. These sessions are very useful and important for they generate a lot of interest in books and reading.

The teacher, before starting this programme, must take the following into consideration:

1. Some time during the course of the English lessons the teacher must inform the students about the reading skills of skimming, scanning, skipping and browsing.
2. The students must be told to get hold of their books before the lesson. If they do not have books of their own they should be reminded to go to the library to borrow a book.
3. The teacher too, must borrow some books and have them on hand, for there are usually some students who come to class empty handed.
4. The teacher may notice that some students always read very easy material. The teacher should not be too concerned about this for 'easy reading' builds confidence, consolidates vocabulary, increases reading speed and, furthermore, makes reading an enjoyable experience. Once a student has confidence he will graduate to more difficult material.
5. To give importance to reading, a prime-time slot must be set for reading. It should not be the last period on Friday when everyone is anxious to go home.

One important feature of the U.S.S.R. technique is that students are not required to report back to the teacher what they have read.

Directed Reading/Thinking Activities (D.R.T.A.)

This is another technique to teach children reading skills and to encourage them to read.

As we read we constantly predict the coming text on the basis of our real-world knowledge, our knowledge of the language and our understanding of the content.

Our world knowledge: *The telephone*

Our knowledge of the language: *He is a short (another adjective) man.*

Our understanding of the content: *Ahmad and Ali are brothers. They look*

To carry out this programme the following preparation should be done:

1. A brief, interesting story which is rich in character and incident should be chosen. Detective stories are very suitable.
2. The teacher should read through and choose thought-provoking stopping points.
3. Small groups of about 5 to 6 students of similar reading ability should be selected.
4. The title of the story should be written on a piece of paper.

The technique of presenting the material is as follows:

1. The title is shown to the children. They are asked to predict the story and to write down what they think it will be about.
2. The teacher then asks the children what they have predicted and why.
3. The first part of the story is then displayed on a screen using an overhead projector, or on a roll-up board or on sheets of manila card. All of the students read silently to the first stopping point. The children are then asked to reconsider their predictions – and to justify them from the text.
4. The next part of the story is then displayed and students repeat the process of prediction and justification.
5. The process is repeated until they come to the last stopping point which is just before the ending. The children are asked to predict the ending.
6. The last step is a discussion on the title, theme, characters, ending or on any other aspect of the story.

In the D.R.T.A. the students read not to please the teacher but to predict the story. This technique helps students to reflect what they read.

Cooperative Cloze

In this method students work in groups of about five each. The students in each group must have similar reading ability. The teacher should choose an interesting story appropriate in terms of reading difficulty for the group. Words are deleted at the rate of one in eight. The deletions should not be random but chosen from the following three categories:

- (i) Words that focus the reader's attention on the meaning of the passage;
- (ii) Words that focus on the flow of language such as conjunctions, prepositions or well-known idioms;
- (iii) Words that focus on particular grapho-phonetic features, e.g. prefixes, suffixes or root words.

Other conventions of writing may also be highlighted such as capital letters or *an* which directs the attention of the reader to words beginning with vowels.

The teacher should then make a copy of the story for each member of the group.

The technique of presenting the material is as follows:

1. All the members of the group read the passage orally together until the first deletion.
2. The group members suggest words. Usually a lively discussion takes place for they refute each others' suggestions and justify their own choices.
3. The group decides on the best replacement for the deleted word.
4. All the members then write the word in their own copy
5. The group then proceeds until the story is completed.

In this technique the children learn from each other and thus natural communication takes place. They not only fill in the blanks but also read at the same time. The only problem is that the groups can become very lively and noisy especially if the classes are large.