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PATTERN BOOKS: AN ACTIVITY FOR BEGINNING READING INSTRUCTION

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The Language Experience Approach is recognized as a highly effective method of beginning reading instruction (Ashton-Warner, 1963 and 1972; Hall, 1976 and 1978; and Lee and Van Allen, 1963). Reasons for the success of this approach include both the cognitive and the linguistic "match" of the reader with the material to be read. Students use their own vocabulary and grammar to dictate their own thoughts, feelings and experiences. This "match" makes the dictated material easier to reread as well as highly interesting, relevant and motivating to the reader.

A possible disadvantage of the Language Experience Approach, however, is the lack of vocabulary control which may sometimes occur. Since practice and reinforcement are important in developing a sight vocabulary, it is important that beginning readers have frequent, repeated contact with the vocabulary to be learned. The development of such sight vocabulary is necessary, to allow the reader to read more and more proficiently one's own dictation as well as the writing of others.

The Pattern Book activity to be described can provide a means of introducing and reinforcing high frequency vocabulary within a Language Experience Approach. With this activity the teacher selects a high frequency word (or a few words) which a small group of students or an individual student does not know. These words may come from the students' self-selection, from student' dictation, from a word list or from a basal pre-primer. The teacher then thinks of a common pattern in which the word(s) might appear.

For instance, the students and/or the teacher may decide that "this" is a word needed to be learned. The teacher then constructs a pattern using the word "this." For example, "This is a _____." Having selected such a pattern, the teacher follows these directions with a small group of students or an individual student:

Have students cut pictures of interest to them out of magazines. Large, colorful advertisement illustrations in magazines such as Ebony, Life, and Sports Illustrated are good sources. Paste each of these pictures on a large sheet of lined paper.

With the students, say and slowly print the chosen pattern under the picture pasted on the first page of paper. "This is a _____." The students take turns

completing the pattern for each picture on each page. Print exactly what the student says. Re-read as you print. You may ask the students what letter or sound certain words begin with. Re-read the pattern dictated with the students before going on to a new page. After doing seven or eight pages, put them together into a book. Make a book cover from construction paper and have students select a title. Put their names on the cover as authors. Re-read the book with the students until the students can read the book by themselves.

As a next step, select a number of words from the students' book and print each word on a card. These cards can be stored in a library pocket pasted in the back cover of the book. Have students practice reading these word cards. If a student has trouble, have the student find the word in the book and then try to read the word card.

The student can use these word cards to remake and re-read the patterns in the book. The word cards may later be used in sentence combining activities, in which the student makes new sentences from the word cards, reads these and then copies them in a journal.

Students can share their book and word cards with other students. The books can go home to parents and/or become part of the classroom library or reading center.

Other simple patterns for beginning readers might include:

I can _____

I see a _____

We like _____

I like to _____

I have a _____

The _____ is _____

I want a _____

More advanced patterns might include:

My favorite _____ is _____

Last year I _____

My first wish is _____

My friend likes _____

Such pattern Book activities have been found to be highly effective with both young and older beginning readers. Pattern Books can provide a supportive approach for the introduction and practice of words the student uses in dictation as well as words to be met in the basal reader, thus helping slower students, or students learning English as a second language, to develop a basic sight vocabulary and to experience success.

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