

IN THE FIELD

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A READING GAMES WORKSHOP

I have been asked to report on a workshop I conducted as part of the Bophutatswana Government Primary Education Upgrading Programme. The co-ordinators of the project are well aware of the need for a commitment to language development across the curriculum and are at present trying to introduce to the teachers some central principles of language teaching that will be implemented in their multilingual situation.

My brief was to focus specifically on reading and I decided to make the workshop an experience from which practical ideas could be derived immediately.

After an introductory session where through the means of a code-cracking activity the teachers and inspectors re-experienced the trials of initial reading, we discussed some of the factors influencing word recognition.

The teachers decided that in English, Tswana and Afrikaans knowledge of the correct sound-symbol associations is important and we explored ways in which this could be taught. Recognised needs were:

- a) differentiation;
- b) organization for the children to

work independently;

c) the enjoyment and motivation of the children;

d) the material must be sequenced in such a way that due care would be given to preparatory auditory and visual discrimination activities and contextual reading would be a natural outcome;

e) ample opportunity must be provided for reinforcement;

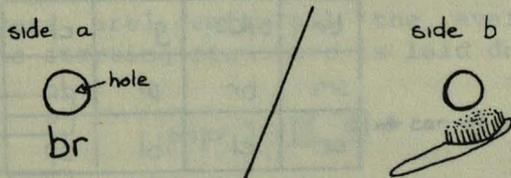
f) the material should as far as possible be self-correcting.

I had brought with me a series of reading games I had made all of which dealt with initial consonant blends. These games were played with great enthusiasm by the teachers.

I will describe the games briefly but must stress that these are activities that occurred to me in planning for one situation and are as such infinitely adaptable - not only for reading activities but for other areas in the curriculum as well. It is very easy, for example, to think of an application of each game in teaching Maths.

1. PORTHOLES

Those who are familiar with Stott's reading kit will be familiar with this idea. Portholes is played by a pair of pupils who hold a card between them which will have a number of holes in it. On one side of the card, next to a hole, will be a letter combination. On the other side of the whole will be a picture representing the letters. eg:



The child facing the side of the card with the pictures will name a picture; the other must find the letters representing the initial sound of the word. When he does so - he places his pencil point through the hole and his partner will be able to let him know if he is right or wrong.

We discussed the skills involved in performing this task correctly and decided that the following subskills were being utilised (or assessed):

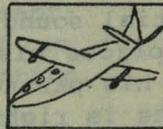
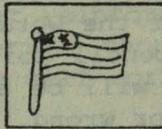
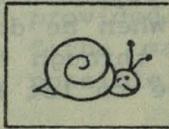
- a) auditory analysis (in separating the initial phoneme from the whole word);
- b) auditory discrimination (in discriminating between fine differences in sound, eg: tr/dr);
- c) visual discrimination (in distinguishing between subtle graphic features, eg: br/dr);
- d) letter-sound association;
- e) integration of auditory and visual information.

2. BINGO

This traditional game was adapted in the following way. Each child in the game plays with a card divided into the usual squares, but in each square is a consonant blend. eg:

tr	BINGO!	gl	cl
sm	br	pl	dr
cr	cl	bl	sp

The child who 'calls' is given a series of pictures representing words whose initial two letters are a consonant blend. eg:

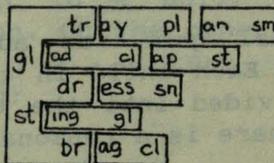


As the child 'reads' the word represented by the picture the other children cover up the square with the corresponding letter if they have one on their card. The winner is the first person to finish - this is usually a moment of great excitement.

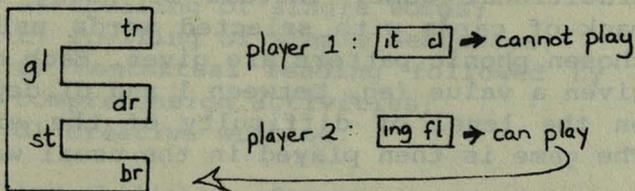
The task analysis for this activity is similar to that for 'Portholes'. This gives the child additional opportunity to use these skills. It must be noted that the child is not reading whole words yet.

3. BRICKWALL

This word building activity is another modification of an exercise in the Stott programme. Words are divided into two and can be combined to be built into a 'wall' in the following way:



The players are dealt all the available cards. The starting structure is laid down:



Players must take the card from the top of their pack and place it in such a way as to make a word. Play proceeds in a clockwise direction, if a card cannot be placed the player misses that turn. The first player to finish his cards wins.

Mastery of the skills practised in Portholes and Bingo will be useful here. In addition, this game is requiring the child to synthesize the word parts and identify the whole as being a meaningful word unit or not.

4. SNAP

The child is presented with whole words that may be paired with either an identical word or a picture representing the word. The reason for pictures being introduced is so that visual shapes are not merely matched without their function as a symbol being utilised. A further modification of this game is to use sentences that can be matched with the pictures the sentences describe. The sentence may also be matched with the identical sentence.

The game is played in the traditional way.

5. SNAKES AND LADDERS

Again this is a simple modification of a traditional game. Instead of using dice a pack of cards with selected words using the chosen phonic pattern are given. Each card is given a value (eg. between 1 and 6) depending on the level of difficulty of the example. The game is then played in the usual way.

A colleague of mine who uses this modification in her classroom says that her pupils now prefer playing snakes and ladders with words rather than dice - and choose to play in their free time.

This game represents a progression on the previous game. The child is now required to recognise whole words - however these are not yet being read in context and this is the goal of teaching the phonic unit.

6. RUMMY

Practice is given in reading whole words and matching these with their corresponding picture, ie. in associating the word with a meaning. Each player is dealt six cards and the balance of the pack is kept in the centre. The purpose of the game is for the player to make matching pairs of the cards in his hand. Players have in turn the chance of taking a card from the top of the central pack and rejecting one of the cards in their hand. Play proceeds in a regular direction.

NB: It is useful to note that the same basic packs of cards of words and pictures can be used for Rummy, Snakes and Ladders, Snap and Bingo.

Further exercises were completed where the same phonic unit was used in:

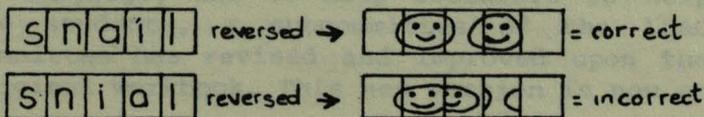
- a) spelling of single words;
- b) spelling of simple sentences;
- c) contextual reading followed by comprehension activities;
- d) creative writing.

The possibilities for innovation in such activities are endless. One interesting innovation I did use was for the spelling of single words.

Here I adapted an idea from the Tutor Systems series (Modern Teaching Aids). Words to be spelled were written on cardboard, cut into their individual letters and placed in an envelope with a picture of the required word on the front of the envelope. The picture is optional.

This activity gives the child an opportunity to sequence given letters to make a known word. This is an important step in learning spelling for some children.

For the self correction, the child has to turn over the individual letters once these have been sequenced. On the back of the word, before it was cut, I had placed a sticker which would then of course be distorted if the letters had been placed out of sequence. eg:



After playing these games we moved into the next phase of the workshop. The teachers now made adaptations of these and the extension activities for both Afrikaans and Tswana for their current classes. This was very exciting because their adaptation was innovative. All the ideas given were intended to serve only as fuel for their creativity and it was very satisfying to see the ideas being developed with so much variation and imagination.

One interesting game I saw had the dual function of reinforcing a specific phonic unit in Tswana as well as using traditional Tswana domestic objects which the teacher wished to introduce to her urbanised class.

These ideas may be 'old-hat' to many readers - and I am sure that even more exciting ideas must currently be in use in some of our schools. If you have more ideas - send them to us.

For teachers who are interested in finding out more about reading games a publication that I would recommend is: AMES, Ted. 1983. 40 Remedial reading games to make and play. London : Macmillan.

A useful source for 'easy to draw' pictures for use in phonic work is the 'Explode the Code' series.