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Improving Reading Skills

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IMPROVING READING SKILLS

A Special Studies
Presented to
Mrs. Louise Durkee
Ouachita Baptist University

In Complete Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Course
Honors Special Studies H491

by
Patricia Lillian Greene
April 1972

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INTRODUCTION

This study was undertaken as an aid for improving basic reading skills through the use of the Reading Lab instructed by Mrs. L. Durkee. This was thus a developmental project in reading.

Specifically stated the purposes of this study were: (1) to increase reading rate; (2) to increase the use of words through vocabulary building; and (3) to improve reading comprehension.

The approach here is one of practicality rather than theoretical. The course of study was therefore geared from the particular deficiencies of the student to improve reading skills. This afforded flexibility on the parts of the instructor and the student. The program was non-structured but was directed toward meeting the individual needs of the student.

The format of this presentation will follow several aspects while at the same time being interwoven and interdependent. Of significant emphasize will be the methods and materials used in the Reading Development Program.

READING TEST RESULTS

Before the program actually began the student was first given The Nelson-Denny Reading Test. This test was formulated for both high school and college groups to test vocabulary, comprehension and rate. The results from this test are given below.

	Raw Score	%-ile Rank
Vocabulary	33	12.9
Comprehension	44	13.5
Total	77	13.2
Reading Rate	250	12.4

The results from the test showed the greater deficiencies to be in the areas of vocabulary and reading rate, with reading rate being the lower of the two.

With permission by the co-ordinator of the reading program at Ouachita Baptist University, the student was allowed to use the facilities and equipment in the Reading Laboratory. A positive aspect along with the use of the lab was the attitude of the instructor in allowing the student complete freedom in selecting materials to be used in class. These selections were under the guidance of the instructor.

USE OF MECHANICAL DEVICES

The Tachistoscope. The first introduction to the reading lab was with the use of the tachistoscope. The flashmeter was used to improve concentration and quickness in perceiving numbers. Numbers were learned to be recognized in a fraction of a second. The beginning speed was Speed B with 90% accuracy. Advancement was made to Speed A. In several instances with both speeds A and B 100% accuracy was attained. The use of the tachistoscope required a paradoxical approach, consciousness, aggressiveness and at the same time a certain degree of relaxation. The tachistoscope was used in the first four sessions of the program. Later the machine was used with two sessions in a group setting.

The Controlled Reader. The KL series was used with the controlled reader. A dual purpose was involved with the controlled reader, improving reading rate and increasing reading comprehension. The reading strips had four basic values: (1) to give a mechanical stimulus which focused attention and aided concentration and the rapid association of words and meanings without vocalization; (2) to give practice in reading in thought units; (3) to promote simultaneous reading and comprehension; and (4) to give the reader objective evidence that rate can be increased and improved.

The student selected reading selections by personal preference and no sequential order was involved. Approximately fifteen selections were read on the controlled reader.

The initial reading rate was 300 w.p.m. During these early stages no record was made of individual progress with the reader. Later in the program rate and comprehension were checked and recorded.

Advancement was made from the tested rate of 250 w.p.m. to as high as 390 w.p.m. with 100% accuracy. With the use of the controlled reader several intervening variables affected the reading rate. Such factors included the time of day, the physical aspects of the reader such as fatigue and the motivation level.

TECHNIQUES IN WORD RECOGNITION AND VOCABULARY

Reading Text. IMPROVING READING ABILITY, by James B. Stroud, Robert B. Ammons and Henry A. Bamman was the reading manual used to give practice in reading faster through several techniques.

Along with the controlled reader, this manual aided in the alleviation of the problem of numerous fixations. This helped to develop a wider perceptual span which increased rate. Also a more extended reading span dissolved the problem of subvocalization.

Three chapters were covered in the manual. In the first chapter, "The Mechanics of Reading and Visual Analysis," the following kinds of visual analyses were provided:

1. Letter Recognition

Example: neh hne ehn meh nen neh

2. Word Recognition

Example: myrrh: shirr, rasher, catarrh, hurrah, myrrrh

Each of these exercises were timed. With letter recognition improvement was made from one minute forty-seven seconds for a list of 45 letters to 55 seconds. Rate was increased for word recognition from 36 seconds for 25 words to 22 seconds. Here the previous practice in letter recognition provided a positive transfer in word recognition.

Chapter Three, "Speeded Comprehension: Word Meanings," was designed to provide practice in recognizing a wide variety of meanings, associated with ordinary words.

The choice here was more than one.

Example: Stall: booth, stalk, evade, procrastinate, pursue.

This particular exercise took a longer time period. The longest time was two minutes five seconds. The shortest time was 62 seconds.

Word Clues and Words are Important. These devices were used primarily as vocabulary builders. With Word Clues a dual benefit was derived, improving spelling and increasing vocabulary. Vocabulary was not improved by rote learning alone but in addition through recall from the reading context. The only hindering factor with Word Clues was the fact that a second person was necessary to operate the machine.

The Second Book was employed with "Words are Important." Since a limited amount of time was necessary with this device to complete one lesson, the lesson coverage was lengthy.

Personal Evaluation of the Program

This semester's special studies has afforded one of the most practical and worthwhile projects engaged in since participating in the Honors Program. Although closer contact was made with an instructor than previously, this was still centered around independent study on the part of the student.

The student perceived actual improvement in the three basic reading skills: rate, comprehension and vocabulary. The greatest improvement was made in the area of rate with an increase of a recorded 250 w.p.m. to a recorded 390 w.p.m.

The student feels personally that the most helpful aids in the program were flexibility given the student and immediate results of reading materials showing specific weak areas and areas of improvement.