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COMMERCIAL MATERIALS SUITABLE IN THE EDUCATION OF ABORIGINAL CHILDREN

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It is important to preface this talk with the observation that much of the material to be reviewed is suitable for any group of children requiring compensation of one kind or another in language, reading, number and social experiences. My recommendation of the material is based on personal use or favourable comments by special educationists using such material. It should prove useful if I mention, not only the material, but the education rationale for its use.

LANGUAGE

The Aboriginal child enters a language saturated environment, the school, at a complete disadvantage. His inability to use 'formal' language competently inhibits his early successes in reading and maths in particular, thereby endangering his chances of success, and exacerbating his feelings of alienation in what is, indisputably, a middle-class environment. Hence, the Aboriginal child (or similarly, the environmentally disadvantaged white child) needs a comprehensive language program to develop facility in communication. Material which is suitable includes:

- a. Move-Grow-Learn Cards.
- b. Distar Language Scheme.
- c. Peabody Language Laboratory.
- d. A Social Studies picture set "Families Around the World".
- e. The 'Emotion Series' pictures.
- f. Triad Maths Laboratory.
- g. Language Master, Tape Recorders and Video-Tape Recorders are some of the more effective examples of technological 'hardware'.

READING

Because the child's environment is limited, his formal language is less than competent, his aspirations are depressed and the school represents alien values, the Aboriginal child has little chance of success with the 'normal' reading material. The S.R.A. series, Young Australian Readers, Endeavour books etc., are all very useful *when* the child has developed language competence and *when* he is showing interest in reading material and success with reading.

Until that stage has been reached, it might be best to consider other approaches:

- a. One of the best of these approaches can be called "Environmental Reading". Briefly, the 'reader' consists of pictures of the child himself with an appropriate text underneath. (Perhaps even with modified language?). As the child's reading improves, so the textual language increases in difficulty. A Polaroid Camera can be used to advantage in this method.
- b. A similar scheme proposed by Sylvia Ashton-Warner is called ORGANIC READING.
- c. The Neurological Impress Method using simple yet interesting books, is another method.
- d. The Tutor System (M.T.A.) and the Heinvetter Tutor System are useful aids to reading.
- e. Non-fiction material is often a useful approach to teaching the older 'resistant' non-reader. Suitable material is to be found in the MacDonald readers (NOVALIT).
- f. For the older reader, Trend books, Topliner, Club 75, Crown Street Series and Cracking the Code (S.R.A.) have been found useful. Dominie also sells a set of very thin 'pamphlet' books called Eight Mystery Series.
- g. Many children have been captivated by the Dr. Seuss books and have developed a deep interest in reading as a result of Seuss' nonsense jingles.
- h. Books for the more advanced reader include the Tom Logan Series (Dominie), Cowboy Sam in another form; Space Science Fiction Series and Sport Mystery Series.

- i. A most comprehensive and beautifully presented scheme is Scott Foresman's OPEN HIGHWAYS PROGRAM (Ashton's P.O.Box 579, Gosford).
- j. The Breakthrough to Literacy Scheme has been found useful.

SPELLING

Spelling is relatively unimportant, compared to reading skills and assumes importance after the two prime communication skills have been developed. Approaches vary, individualized lists or goals being found useful. EPIC, which is a Spelling and Vocabulary Development Scheme, can be used effectively when the child can master the level of language and reading required by the scheme.

ENGLISH

For the educationally disadvantaged child, or for the slow learner, there is little in the way of interesting, useful material in language. M.T.A. (SWAAB) produces a most colourful and simple Language Laboratory (level 1 and 11), suitable for a child with a reading age of approximately eight years. For the Secondary slow learner the text "Australian Adventure English", appears satisfactory. It is best, I think, to discard the texts which place great emphasis on the rules of syntax, and explore approaches where the child uses the skills of literacy and oracy spontaneously and freely. This might involve the use of stimulating material mentioned earlier or a regular 'field-excursion' approach where language and expression (oral and written) are stimulated naturally.

MATHEMATICS

In my experience, it has been proved that children do much better if:

- maths is oriented to 'life-situations';
- individualized goals are drawn up which utilize and draw from the better sections of a number of commercially available Maths texts.

In sum, while there is growing evidence of the provision of stimulating culture- and class-free material, the best material is what the teacher and pupils make and use together. However, if material is purchased with regard to its applicability to the

language level and interest of the pupils and if it is used by a stimulating and interesting teacher in a classroom where learning is fun and working together is enjoyable and useful, then nearly any material will be suitable in the teaching of the Aboriginal child. Such materials include:

- a. Triad.
- b. A Social Maths approach using individualized goals based on a number of 'resource' text books. Suitable texts or laboratories are scarce.

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