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RESEARCH REPORT

MOTIVATION SCORES RELATED TO PROGRESS
IN LISTENING AND READING

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Abstract: A one and a half year study of listening and reading among rural children in north-west New South Wales, indicated marked differences among Aborigines and whites in listening and reading. A Motivation for School Schedule, included in the initial test battery predicted over fifty per cent of variance in listening comprehension, administered at the end of years 2 and 3, for Aboriginal girls, and was significant in a multiple regression with Aboriginal girls' end of year three reading scores as the criterion. The schedule contributed little, if anything, towards predicting reading success for white children or Aboriginal boys.

The research underlines the importance of teachers understanding the conflict some girls from minority groups face when attending schools organized by the dominant culture, particularly when the vocabulary of the dominant language is assumed to be understood by all children in the same way.

When introducing a set of articles on language development and reading, Athey (1971) pointed out that reading as "part of the fabric of living and problem solving...ought to be the focus of the school's efforts in organization, planning and curriculum." (p.11). Another part of the fabric of living which schools need to focus on is listening. Durrell (1969) noted that a weakness in either listening or reading was detrimental to learning in most subjects.

Even though a school might focus on listening and reading in its organization, planning and curriculum, there are pupils who appear to resist efforts made to improve their performance in these complex skills. Watts (1969) noted that school failure among Aboriginal children was frequently a matter of lack of motivation for school. She saw the necessity of the goals of the school being perceived by these children as relevant and important to them. This is not an easy task for a teacher brought up in the white Australian culture. Even among children in a dominant culture such motivating agents as success and failure produce varied effects. Weiner (1974) noted that failure can

spur some people on to greater efforts to achieve, while others give up trying. He argued that it all depended on what the person believed had brought about the failure. If failure can produce such mixed results among people of the same culture, it is little wonder that teachers of children from mixed cultural groups have considerable trouble in getting all their pupils to wish to achieve the goals of literacy pertaining in the dominant culture.

To gain some insight into how Year 2 children attending rural schools might regard their school experience and view their classroom behaviour, particularly as it related to learning to read, a Motivation for School Schedule was prepared. Before writing the items, an examination was made of the Progressive Achievement Test developed by Grossman (1969) and the Children's Self-Concept Index prepared by Cicirelli and associates (1971). The items were then tried out on Years 1 and 2 children in a Sydney school. (See Appendix)

The Motivation for School Schedule was designed to be administered on a one-to-one basis. The co-operation of the child was obtained by presenting the questions with the aid of "international dolls". (Middleton et al, 1970). These little wooden dolls were of indeterminant race and sex, but adult dolls were made twice the height of child dolls for easy identification. When a boy was interviewed, a label "Jo" was hung around the neck of the reference doll. The label "Jill" was used when a girl was questioned.

Year 2 was selected as the starting point for the study because Williams (1961), after an extensive survey of children's reading vocabulary, noted that between a reading age of 7.5 and 8 years, vocabulary acquisition was at its peak. If a pupil was reading up to chronological age, school years 2 and 3 would be critical in the development and extension of reading vocabulary.

Because no longitudinal data were available about reading progress among rural Aboriginal and white children, the initial testing program was designed to examine non-verbal intelligence (assessed by the Queensland Test), psycholinguistic skills (measured by the ITPA), and some affective aspects tapped by the Motivation for School Schedule.

From the data collected over the period of one and a half years it was hoped to find answers to the following questions:

1. Did The Motivation for School Schedule have any significant relationship with listening or reading over time?

2. Were there any differences in listening comprehension skills of Aboriginal and white children, girls and boys?
3. Were there any differences in the reading development of Aboriginal and white children, girls and boys?
4. What suggestions could be made for improving listening and reading skills among these rural children?

PROCEDURE

In the middle of Year 2, children attending four rural state schools in the north-west of New South Wales were given two individual interviews. At one interview the Queensland Test was administered to the child, and at the other the ITPA and the Motivation for School Schedule. Two interviewers worked in one room in order to give shy children a sense of security. The presence of another child in the room was advantageous in helping Aboriginal children feel at ease with the white interviewers (McElwain and Kearney, 1970).

The same children were visited by the senior interviewer at the end of Year 2, when the Progressive Achievement Test (PAT) Listening Comprehension, (Level 1, Form B) was administered to each class group. The children individually responded to the ACER Word Recognition test either before or after the administration of the listening comprehension test.

Halfway through Year 3, and then at the end of Year 3, the interviewer returned to give the children the PAT Listening Comprehension and Reading Words in Context measures. Part 2, Form B, of both tests was presented mid-year, and Part 2, Form A, at the end of the year.

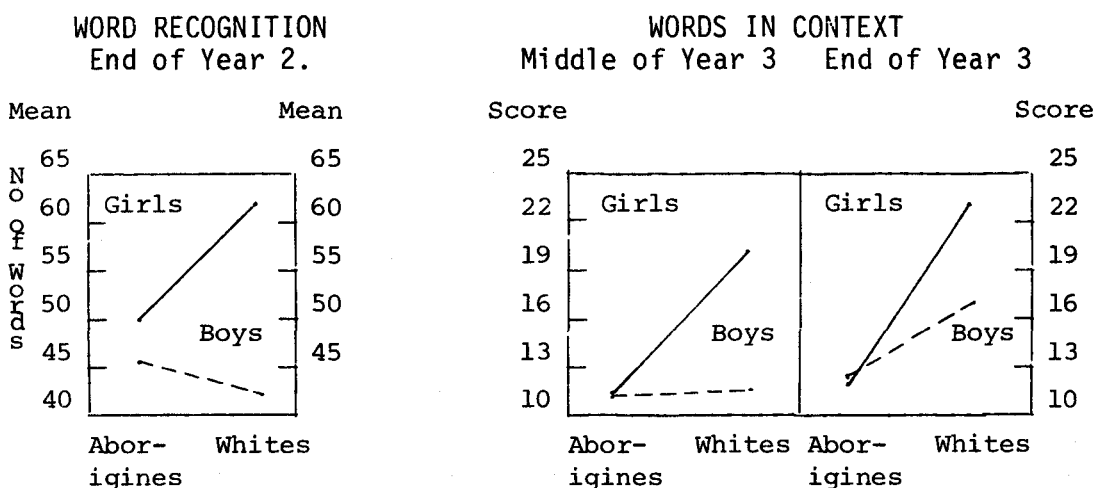
Of the original sample of 73 children (13 Aboriginal girls, 18 Aboriginal boys, 19 white girls and 23 white boys), 52 were present for all testing sessions. The results reported here refer to these 52 children (10 Aboriginal girls, 13 Aboriginal boys, 14 white girls and 15 white boys).

RESULTS

In the earliest analyses of results it was evident that the Aboriginal and white children performed differently on the ITPA subtests of Visual Reception, Auditory Association, Verbal Expression,

Grammatical Closure and Mechanical Expression. These differences were all significant at the .01 level. Significant differences in listening comprehension were also noted, with white children scoring higher marks. Sex differences only became apparent when the Word Recognition and Reading tests were introduced. (See Figure 1 below).

FIGURE I
Reading Test Scores Plotted According to Sex and Race



Intercorrelations among test scores for the four groups of children indicated that motivation for school was a significant measure of success in listening comprehension and comprehending words in context for the Aboriginal girls. In fact, the relationship between the Motivation for School Schedule and the listening test given six months later, accounted for 50% of the variance ($r = 0.71$). Listening scores for the Aboriginal girls at the end of Year 3 again showed a similar relationship with the Motivation for School results correlating at 0.72, which predicted 52% of the variance for the listening results even though the listening scores were obtained one and a half years later. When reading skills were examined, Motivation for School accounted for 36% of the variance for Word Recognition ($r = 0.60$); and in Year 3 the silent reading of words in context correlated with the Motivation for School Schedule, $r = 0.50$ half way through the year and $r = 0.60$ at the end of the year.

A stepwise regression analysis further confirmed the significance of scores on the Motivation for School Schedule in predicting the performance of the Aboriginal girls in both listening and reading

at the end of Year 3. However, the motivation results contributed only minimally to the prediction of listening scores for Aboriginal boys and nothing at all to their reading results. In fact, earlier measures of reading and listening were the best predictors of reading for Aboriginal boys at the end of Year 3.

For the white boys, the Motivation for School Schedule contributed nothing towards success in reading or listening. Among the white girls it made a minimal contribution towards reading performance at the end of Year 3.

DISCUSSION

Analyses of data gathered in the longitudinal study showed that the Motivation for School Schedule was a significant predictor of listening and also reading performance for Aboriginal girls at the end of Year 3. Significant differences in the listening skills of Aboriginal and white children were observed and both racial and sex differences were found in word recognition and reading words in context measures.

As can be seen from Figure 1, Aboriginal girls performed better than either the white or Aboriginal boys in Word Recognition but failed to show significant growth in reading words in context. Thus, by the end of Year 3 their mean score for reading actually fell below that of the Aboriginal boys. Obviously the Aboriginal girls who indicated less positive motivation for school in the middle of Year 2 were not putting effort into acquiring reading skills. But was this the only cause of their failure to learn?

To gain a better understanding of the Aboriginal girls' poor performance in reading words in context, answers selected by them to the reading test given at the end of Year 3 were examined. Table 1* sets out the words in context that were answered correctly by less than three of the ten Aboriginal girls. The response selected most frequently by these girls is also included to show the reasonableness of their answers in the light of their experiences as Aboriginal girls growing up in inland New South Wales.

Although little trace of an Aboriginal language remains among the tribal children who took part in the listening and reading survey, it is apparent that their familiarity with English is limited. The girls had little difficulty deciphering English words but lack of experience with English meanings severely restricted their desire to become proficient readers of English.

* See next page

TABLE 1

The italicized word in each sentence defined correctly by fewer than 3 of the 10 Aboriginal girls (PAT Vocabulary, Level 2, Form A).

Item No.	Sentence	Most preferred choice
12	The sea is very <i>smooth</i> today.	clear
14	The farmer was <i>beating</i> his donkey.	loading
16	The driver <i>swerved</i> his car.	started
24	When the bell rang at <i>noon</i> we went into the playground.	playtime or hometime
26	The boy deserved the <i>punishment</i> his father gave him.	prize
28	The new home was in a <i>jumble</i> .	big city
33	The sailor's knot was <i>firm</i> .	tied
37	The boy scout <i>gripped</i> the rope.	pulled
38	My bag <i>contained</i> something to eat.	covered
39	The train gradually <i>advanced</i> .	stopped
41	The tiger now looked very <i>fierce</i> .	hungry
42	Every <i>nation</i> is hoping for peace.	wise person

Teaching mixed groups of Aboriginal and white children is fraught with difficulties. In particular, white teachers are likely to assume that the children understand such common words as *noon*, *smooth* and *beating* when used in a variety of contexts. A child who must learn English in the school setting has limited opportunities to pick up the nuances of meaning apparent to the child who mastered the language in a one-to-one relationship with an important adult during the pre-school years. (Wyatt 1969, Brown 1970). Verbalizing their experiences in English could help many Aboriginal children to gain an understanding of the English language as a refined instrument for communication, even for communicating Aboriginal ideas. But it requires hard work on the part of the teacher and a creative approach to be able to exploit the opportunities that arise to improve English expression so that those children with limited skills in English usage

gain a satisfactory level of fluency to become competent readers of English. Already there are materials such as the Handbook for First Year Experimental Language Development Program Books 1, 2 and 3, Department of Education, Brisbane, to guide teachers in the preparation of their own English language schemes.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study indicate that scores on the Motivation for School Schedule, obtained in the middle of Year 2, relate significantly with listening and reading results gained at the end of Year 3 by the Aboriginal girls in the sample. For the white children and the Aboriginal boys, earlier achievements in reading and listening were the most significant predictors of success at the end of Year 3. Perhaps the motivation scores would have been of less importance for the Aboriginal girls if they had not been confronted with conflicts between their own life styles and school. When listening and reading materials are available which portray Australian life as the Aborigines experience it, and teachers become aware that for most Aboriginal children school English is a second language, the conflict might be reduced to enable more Aboriginal girls to benefit from attendance at school.

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