



# The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

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## \*TEACHING A WORD LIST TO ADULT BEGINNING READERS

Mary Ellen Holmes

To get an adult to learn one of the *One-Two Hundred Most Commonly Written Words* lists is like shovelling coal into a smouldering fire. You know it's going in, but not when it will ignite.

Yet is a necessary segment of their learning, and approaching it in a *Ouija Board* fashion to make sentences out of the words after a first, few introductory steps helps.

First, adults appreciate an explanation of the list's origin and worth. It takes only a moment to explain the words were compiled by sampling several thousand articles and books to see which words occurred most frequently. Taking five minutes and having the learner circle some words from the list in any newspaper article proves this to the reader.

Also, give the learner a copy of the list to keep. The learner can track how many have been learned and also have the option to proceed on his or her own.

At this initial stage, some people benefit from having each word from the list on flash cards in order to learn the words. They can also form the cards into simple sentences. When comfortable for the learner and using only the list itself, point to the words on a small portion of the list for the learner to recognise. Try as much as possible to make a coherent thought from the words: *was he for it (?) can spark for what (?)* for example.

The learner also enjoys switching positions and testing the tutor. The usual tendency in the earlier stages of this process is for the learner to think of a sentence and find the words for the tutor to read; the learner (understandably) wants to *control* the words. A way to make the search easier for the learners is to suggest they look for the beginning letter, or even the ending sound of the word wanted.

After some time, when the learner has mastered more words, continue pointing to the words, gradually making longer sentences.

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Try to let your pen or finger skim the words, as for the Ouija Board, until a word that will form a thought *appears*. The emphasis on letting the words *appear* until one clicks or seems right, intrigues the learner (the teacher, too). Of course, it is the ease with which our eyes fall upon and understand the words that allows this, but training *that* into adult learners, enticing them also to take any portion of the list, however small it may be at first, and letting the words *speak* to the learner, is the trick. And the fire.

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