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REVIEWS:

Pre-Reading Language Development Kit.

Reviewed by Lindy Roggio*

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to outline the *Pre-Reading Language Development Kit* and its application to the teaching of Aboriginal children. I will also offer some practical ideas for teachers of how this kit can be used within the primary classroom in both rural and urban areas.

SUMMARY OF THE KIT

The kit consists of four individual kits and one book of Teachers' Notes.

KIT ONE: Thought Trains. This kit contains 96 pictures of items that can be classified. For example, items that belong in a house (table, chair, clock).

KIT TWO : Sequencing Cards. 28 sets of pictures make up this kit. Each set consists of four sequenced pictures. For example, a natural science sequence of a spider spinning a web.

KIT THREE - What Do You Think? Cards. This kit is divided into two parts - A and B. Part A has 14 sets of three pieces, with the emphasis on the concluding aspects of the event depicted. Part B consists of 12 sets of four pieces with the emphasis on the cause of an event depicted.

KIT FOUR : Conditions and Consequences. This kit is also divided into Part A and Part B. Part A consists of 15 sets of three pieces with the emphasis on the pre-conditions required for an event to occur. Part B has 14 sets of three pieces with the emphasis on the likely consequences of an event depicted.

This kit is produced by Djawal Idi and was a cooperative project involving the Catholic Education Commission, the

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The Kit is available at a cost of \$12.00 from -

The Aboriginal Education Resource Unit
Ministry of Education
151 Royal Street
EAST PERTH 6000

AIMS OF THE KIT

The major aim for using this kit is to develop language. Children begin school with an oral language system that is consistent, functional and entirely satisfactory for meeting their needs at that stage. However, the child's language may not include all of the uses and strategies that will be needed to manage within the formal school structure. Because the concepts underlying some language uses and strategies may not have been developed, a program that promotes their development will need to be undertaken before children are expected to read about these concepts (Teachers' Notes : 3).

It is well known by educators that oracy is the basis of literacy. Sloan and Latham (1986:197) state:

There is a well established relationship between the oral developments of children and their improvement in reading and written language.

Children cannot make meaning of pictures and print if they have no experience to bring to the text. Much has been written about the 'mis-match' of many school reading books and Aboriginal (and in fact any other minority cultural group) children. The pictures in this kit are likely to be familiar to most Aboriginal children, which means they can talk about the items and events depicted and later read and write about them.

The aims of the kit will not be achieved if teachers label students because they do not speak the standard form of English. It is extremely important that the language of the child is not seen as 'slang' but rather is seen simply as the basis from where to begin the teaching. Children learn the language of their environment and, because there are different environments, children come to the beginning of formal schooling with differing language needs, strategies and levels of language competency (Teachers' Notes : 4).

RATIONALE FOR USING THIS KIT WITH ABORIGINAL CHILDREN

This kit has many strengths for use with Aboriginal students with a sound theoretical base behind it. I aim to outline these strengths but, firstly, I believe a definition of reading is essential. If this kit claims to be a Pre Reading Kit, then should not children be practising the same skills required for reading text later? Reading has been defined as many things over the years but for my rationale I use the definition that reading is 'making meaning of print' (Sloan and Latham 1986 :8, and *Reading K-7 Notes* 1986 :13). My philosophy of learning to read is based on psycho-linguistic theory, and this is the basis from which I outline my rationale.

Aboriginal children will readily identify with items featured in the kits. This is because both the natural environment and cultural features of Aboriginal society are depicted. For example, emus, birds, camp fires and boomerangs are shown in the kits. Clearly, if Aboriginal children can identify with the pictures, then they can discuss them, and later read and write about them.

Through the teacher's use of open questions, children can bring their own experiences to the pictures. Almost all reading manuals advocate that reading matter should, from the beginning, be linked to their own spoken language. Because children have experienced these things, they can talk about them and share their experiences with their peers. This can be done in pairs, small groups, or with the whole class. This will enhance the self esteem of the children because the teacher is acknowledging that the children have something valuable to contribute to the class. During discussions, children can observe and imitate the language modelled by the teacher and their peers. Stephen Harris outlined observation and imitation as a traditional Aboriginal learning style (Harris, 1987 :42).

APPLICATION OF THIS KIT IN THE CLASSROOM

The kits are designed for small group work. Small group work enhances discussion, leads to cooperation and an understanding of differences among students and it is less threatening for children to speak within a small group than in front of the whole class. Woolfolk, an educational psychologist, (1984 :285) states:

Using groups helps develop cooperative techniques in children. The interpersonal interaction with peers becomes part of the learning process.

Studies by Good and Beckerman (1975) have shown that student time on task was greater in small groups than in individual seatwork (cited Woolfolk, 1984 :443).

The activities outlined in the Teachers' Notes and also teacher-made activities using this kit, should all occur within a teacher-created language environment. Children need to be surrounded by posters, charts, plants and animals. This serves two very important purposes. Firstly, it immerses the children in language and creates a stimulating environment. Secondly, it gives children topics for discussion. The posters and charts allow children to see their spoken language written down.

The use of open questions is recommended in the Teachers' Notes for this kit. This means there is no one right answer and any answer that can be justified by the child is accepted. Durre (1988 :18) states -

Questioning should be open ended so as to encourage children to think, comment and to make their offering. This requires children to make generalizations, reason cause and effect, anticipate endings and introduces the idea of predicting which will be needed to gain meaning from text later.

This is very important. Michael Christie (1987 :70) outlined ways in which teachers of Aboriginal children can improve reading ability. Reading is essentially an active process and by using open questions the teacher is requiring children to be actively processing the information in order to answer the question. Open questions also take away the awful feeling of being 'wrong' as is the case with closed questions.

Teachers can use this kit to take children from the known to the unknown. An example of this would be using the pictures of food to teach about nutrition and the constituents of a balanced, healthy diet.

Drama activities can be developed around the pictures in this kit. A very good example of this would be the dramatization of a boy about to throw a brick through a window (Conditions and Consequences). This would be developed as part of a value clarification lesson.

The pictures in this kit can be used as the basis of story-making lessons. Similarly, writing activities could be developed

using this kit. An example of this would be to show a set of four sequencing cards. The children would sequence these and could then write a sentence, or paragraph (depending on year level) about each picture. This would result in a sequenced story.

Textless picture books could be created based on the pictures in this kit. Similarly, class 'Big Books' could be made based on events depicted in the kit.

During all activities using this kit the focus is on language. The language of the children is used and will therefore be meaningful and relevant to the children. This kit could be used equally effectively in a Bilingual program and for the teaching of English.

The pictures in the kit are quite colourful and visually appealing. Children learn through visual stimuli, and Judith Kearin emphasises this with regard to Aboriginal children. Kearin states -

Visual teaching methods may enable early learning to proceed faster and more effectively, even when the teaching objective is literacy.

(Teachers' Notes :2)

This means that literacy can be developed through the use of visual stimuli. The pictures in this kit are of an adequate size for picture talks within small groups, however, they are too small to be used for this purpose with the whole class.

During the activities, the teacher can listen to and observe the children to find out what is going on in their minds. This information will be useful for programming because you will have identified the needs of the children in the class. Also, you will have some idea of their levels of cognitive development and will be able to program instruction accordingly.

CONCLUSION

This kit can be used with primary aged children, K-7, in all language areas. The obvious use for the kit is in listening, speaking, reading and writing lessons. The kit can also be used in other curriculum areas, as I have outlined in the Application in the Classroom section of this paper.

By using this kit effectively, that is, with the teacher as a facilitator of learning, children will develop thinking, analysing, decision-making and communication skills. Children will also be practising imaginative, predictive and evaluative thinking which will be needed to gain meaning from text later. This kit can be used to develop in children, the skills required for reading, and clearly is a Pre-Reading Kit!

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Australia's Greatest Rock Art. By Grahame L. Walsh. (Book and associated video). E.J.Brill-Robert Brown and Associates, 1988. \$129.95.

This publication is superbly presented and was obviously well researched. It is a comprehensive study of Aboriginal rock art illustrating the diversity of styles, subject matter, method, purpose and significance. The author gives a detailed and valuable analysis of the motifs, symbols, patterns and figures, and their significance, as well as the methods and material employed by the artist. He emphasises the fact that there is a purpose for all Aboriginal art. It was not purely for art sake but it also served some higher purpose. Hence not all examples of Aboriginal rock art are of high artistic quality due to the fact that not only 'good' artists executed them.

Walsh leads the reader to an appreciation of Aboriginal rock art through comparison with rock art in other parts of the world as well as focusing our attention on its antiquity.

The author cites historical reasons for the fact that until recently, Aboriginal art was held in little regard. He supports this view with extracts from historical accounts/records of non-Aboriginal explorers, settlers and government officials. He expresses the view that there is a growing appreciation of Aboriginal art and that there needs to be further efforts to protect significant sites and art works.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED . UP-US-TR