

March 3, 1965

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII LIBRARY

TEACHING ENGLISH IN THE TRUST TERRITORY

ON TEACHING

READING

IN THE TRUST TERRITORY

Teachers are divided in regard to teaching English in the Trust Territory. The first group is composed of teachers who have been trained to teach English in the States and are native speakers of the English language.

The second group is composed of teachers who have not been trained to teach English, but are asked to do so here. Therefore, they try to apply the methods and techniques that were used by them when they were students.

The third group consists of a few teachers who were trained in teaching foreign languages and who can apply the same principles to teaching English as a foreign language. The teachers from the first two groups are reluctant to change from their old, familiar, secure methods to the new oral method of teaching a second language. A method that is used around the world in many of the schools in the States that are engaged in teaching foreign languages. Instead, they continue to teach English by teaching the children how to read and write (specially drill and grammar) a foreign language.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
 TRUST TERRITORY OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS  
 SAIPAN, MARIANA ISLANDS, 1965

In order to help the teachers let us examine together the methods above. Allow to us cite over how to improve reading ability by Robert G. Harms (Director of the Educational Clinic and Professor of Education, Queens College of the City University of New York, David McKay Company, Inc., N.Y., 1963).

March 3, 1965

ON TEACHING READING IN THE TRUST TERRITORY

Teachers are divided into three categories in regard to teaching English in the Trust Territory:

- (1) The first group is composed of teachers who have been trained to teach English in the States; that is, English to native speakers of the English language.
- (2) The second group is composed of qualified teachers who have not been trained to teach English, but are asked to do so here. Therefore, they try to rely on the methods and techniques that were used on them when they were students.
- (3) The third group is composed of a very few teachers who were trained in teaching foreign languages, and who can apply the same principles to teaching English as a foreign language.

The teachers from the first two groups are reluctant to change from their old, familiar, secure methods to the new oral method of teaching a second language - a method that is used around the world and in many of the schools in the States that are engaged in teaching foreign languages. Instead, they continue to teach English by teaching the children how to read and write (actually sight and scribe) a foreign language.

In order to make this change more feasible, let us examine together the methods advocated by reading specialist in the States. Allow me to cite from HOW TO INCREASE READING ABILITY by Albert J. Harris (Director of the Educational Clinic and Professor of Education, Queens College of the City University of New York), David McKay Company, Inc., N.Y., 1962.

## "I. THE NATURE OF READING READINESS.

Before a baby can walk he must develop strength in his back and legs and must be able to balance himself. He has already become able to sit without support, to stand holding onto something, and to stand for a few moments without support. In this process the maturing of the nervous system is even more important than the strengthening of muscles, but both learning and growing are involved. After the baby has developed these necessary abilities he is usually ready to begin to walk; before then, no amount of teaching and helping by his parents will produce results. At this point learning comes more strongly into play. A painful fall on a slippery floor may retard progress for several weeks, while successful beginning efforts tend to result in quick accomplishment.

Reading, like walking, can be mastered only after a long process of growing and learning has taken place. It is a much more complex activity than walking and requires both a much higher level of general growth and brain development, and a host of specific learnings. Some of the traits involved depend primarily on the growth potentialities of the child as determined largely by constitutional make-up. Other traits, equally important, develop through learning from every day living. The intimate interplay of inner growth and environmental stimulation is present in all aspects of child development, and readiness for reading is no exception.

Reading readiness may be defined as a state of general maturity which, when reached, allows a child to learn to read without excess difficulty. It is a composite of many interconnected traits. A child may be more advanced in some aspects of reading readiness than in others. The major characteristics which are important in reading readiness are age, sex, general intelligence, visual and auditory perception, physical health and maturity, freedom from directional confusion, background of experience, comprehension and use of oral English, emotional and social adjustment, and interest in reading."

Each of the aspects Dr. Harris mentions is very important, but for our specific interest let us investigate the background of experience and the language factor involved in the teaching of reading.

Dr. Harris continues on the point of the language factor:

"Adequate mastery of spoken language is important for progress in reading. The major aspects of language that seem most significant in reading readiness are: (1) the child's vocabulary, which is basic both to his understanding of what is said to him and to his ability to communicate; (2) mastery of sentence structures, shown most clearly in the child's spontaneous conversation; and (3) clarity of pronunciation. Since typical first-grade reading employs a few hundred words and the typical six-year-old understands the meaning to thousands of words, sentence structure and clarity of speech are more likely to be deficient at the beginning level than vocabulary."

"Children who come from homes of low cultural level do not have normal opportunities to develop an adequate language background. If a foreign language is spoken in the home the handicap is more intense, as the child tends to develop a small English vocabulary, incorrect pronunciation, and faulty sentence construction. Foreign-born parents who do not try to learn English are usually poorly educated and their homes are often deficient in many respects besides language.

Pedro is an example of the hampering effect of a foreign-language background. Although born and brought up in New York City, he heard little English until he entered school. His parents had immigrated from Latin American and lived in a compact little community of other Spanish-streets, but even there Spanish was the major language. His reading reflected this poor background. He mastered the mechanics of reading fairly well (although he ignored endings and spoke with a marked accent), but showed extremely poor comprehension. A great many commonplace words meant nothing to him.

Children like Pedro form a large part of the school population in the larger cities and in many smaller communities. They often find it hard to progress in reading even when they have normal intelligence. If they are also dull - and many of them are - they are doubly handicapped in their schoolwork."

Pushing Micronesian children to read by using stateside standards and methods might lead to traumatic results. Guy L. Bond (Professor of Education and Director of the Reading Clinic) and Miles A. Tinker (Professor of Psychology and Education) from the University of Minnesota, describe this very vividly on page 115 in their book, Reading Difficulties, Their Diagnostic and Correction:

"Success in learning to read depends largely upon the stage of all-around development which the child has achieved. The pattern of growth involved embraces a complex of abilities, acquired behavior, and information. In general, a child is ready to be taught to read by a given program when he has attained a certain stage of mental maturity, and adequate background of experience, and satisfactory personal and social adjustments. Some aspects of reading readiness, as intelligence, come from inner maturation. But many important ingredients are learned and therefore are susceptible to guidance. To a large degree, therefore, reading readiness can be and should be taught. An appreciable number of children who arrive at the first grade are not ready to learn to read in the typical program. These children will range from those who may need from a semester to a year or more of this training in addition to the intellectual development to be gained during that length of time. It is always desirable to recognize that the program of instruction can be modified to adjust to differences in intelligence.

Reading disability is frequently caused by starting a child in a standard reading program before he has acquired the readiness which will assure success in classroom reading activities. Due to his lack of experience, verbal facility, intellectual or emotional maturity, or a combination of these, he is unable to achieve enough of the learnings day by day to handle satisfactorily what is coming next. He gets farther and farther behind as time goes on. Inability to cope with the assignments produces frustration which leads to feelings of inadequacy, inferiority, insecurity, and perhaps even rebellion. Such a child is likely to develop an attitude of indifference to reading. He may even come to hate reading and all persons and activities connected with reading activities."

"The large incidence of failures in reading during the primary grades is due in part to lack of reading readiness. Any educational program or administrative policy which provides the same formal reading instruction for all pupils at the beginning of grade one can only lead to disaster for many pupils."

This would also hold true in our high schools if we try to impose on the students the same standards as a stateside school. The change has to come slowly and gradually. The lack of patience is usually among the teachers and not the students. Even though we might mentally accept the fact of gradual change, in reality we tend to become bored with this "snail's pace" of progress. This slow pace is so important in learning a second language.

As has been pointed out, adequate mastery of spoken language is important for progress in reading. In Micronesia the child comes to school with no English language background whatsoever. Why then insist on teaching him how to read first? It is not done in the States. Why do it here? If the impulse to teach children how to read is so great and cannot be avoided, we should teach Micronesian children how to read and write their own language first since they have the adequate spoken mastery. Then after helping the child acquire an adequate oral command of English, teach him how to read it and write it. This does not mean postponing it to the future, for the reading of each pattern should be taught immediately after it is mastered orally.

Even though the first R is considered the most important aspect in the child's education, the teacher in the States will not embark on teaching the child how to read until he acquires an adequate background of the spoken aspect of the language.

If we start by teaching Micronesian students how to read their first language, then we will build a solid foundation of the student's first language to serve as a basis for learning a second - in our case, English. Becoming literate in one's own language is a tremendous asset in learning a second language.

We can also enrich the Micronesian child's background by allowing him to experience real-life situations in English. The child learns first through experience, then visual aids, and finally through words. An excursion, a trip, or a walk where the students, with the teacher, use English is indeed a rich experience. The objects seen, the odors smelled, the textures felt, and the sounds heard during this experience, are the visual aids; the language patterns used in the experience are practiced in the classroom; and, finally, the language is represented visually on a chart. These activity and experience charts should not be restricted only to the lower elementary levels, but should be used throughout the elementary and secondary levels - of course, with varying degrees of sophistication. They provide the students with many opportunities for favorable development.

Dialogues should rise from experiences and situations made available by the teacher and shared by all the students. What counts in child development is the intellectual and social environment with which the child is surrounded.

This brings us to another related point: Should we encourage Micronesian parents to speak English to their children at home? This has to be decided by the parents themselves. If a Micronesian couple decide to speak English to their children this will indicate that they feel comfortable in

English, and have confidence in themselves. This will be an asset to the child in learning English in school. But if an adult Micronesian is forced to use English with his child without having confidence in his ability to do so, the result will prove to be a liability for the child. He will learn a brand of English that would be very difficult to correct in the future.

When the Micronesian child is ready to use English he will use it. Our job is to saturate him with it and thus build his confidence in it. (Forcing our students to speak English on the school grounds is helping them to reinforce mistakes and to acquire bad language habits.)

With this in mind, let us not be too hasty to enforce a set English language program on the Micronesian students. Instead, let us evaluate their present ability and proceed from there, for "a successful program for young children, in reading as in other curricular areas, should be based on a realistic appraisal of what they can do now and what they are ready for next." (HOW TO INCREASE READING ABILITY by A. J. Harris)

PACC  
LZ  
910517  
.03