

5.4 Helping Students with Reading

John comes to my science class every day but he can't read the textbook. What do I do with this student who can't read?

Teachers can use the Language Experience Approach to help students improve their reading and writing skills while learning science. This approach is useful for students who can understand the basic content but lack the literacy skills to work independently.

The Language Experience Approach uses students' oral language to develop basic vocabulary and key concepts about written language. Students are asked to discuss what they know about subject material while the teacher writes down what the students say.

Research has shown the Language Experience Approach to be effective in many class settings from helping students in a remedial setting (Sharp, 1989) to assisting second language learners in a mainstream classroom (Perez, 2000).

Resources

A set of cards showing keywords with one word on each card with a relevant picture. Laminated cards can be used repeatedly. (Additional resources may include a laptop, data projector and access to the Internet for images.)

Class set-up

1. Divide the class into groups.
2. Give out keywords to your students. In the beginning, it is easier if these keywords cover a particular topic rather than large sections of the curriculum.
3. Ask your students to talk to you and each other in small groups about anything that they have learned (using the keywords as a prompt).

4. Identify students that have reading and writing difficulties and, as you wander around the room, quickly jot down exactly what these students tell you. Recite their own words back to them as you write them down. Other students can write their own sentences.
5. Transfer the students' exact speech from your note pad to the white board keeping each sentence on its own line. This can also be done on a laptop connected to a data projector so that students can see their own sentences. You can then easily print out each sentence and give it to the relevant student.
6. As you print each sentence, read it aloud and ask students to do the same when you give it to them. Sentences from students who do not have writing difficulties should also be included to avoid concentrating attention on those students with literacy difficulties.

Reinforcement

This activity can be considerably enhanced (and the subject matter reinforced) by creating a PowerPoint presentation using the sentences from the students and asking them to locate images on the Internet related to their sentences. The student's name can be included with their sentence. In this way, you can build a revision story that is unique to the class. The appearance of sentences can be timed to ensure an easy reading speed. The revision story can be printed so that the students can revise the content. Students demonstrate high levels of attention as they see their sentences appear on the screen and are eager to learn a story that includes their input. As the PowerPoint presentation plays automatically, students can be asked to read the sentence that they contributed out loud. With practice, students can also be asked to read out other students' sentences aloud.

This activity promotes reading skills and reinforces subject content in a way that includes all students. It is motivational and adheres strongly to the principles of

differentiated teaching and learning. With continued practice, it also becomes faster to implement and more fluid for both teachers and students.

For an example of this activity, see the *JC Biology Revision Story* PowerPoint presentation in the *Lesson Plans (Revision Lesson)* section of this resource pack.

This activity, which is adapted from the Language Experience Approach, is successful because it is based on students' own language and learning experiences and encourages active participation in activities.

References

Perez, S.A. (2000). Teaching second language learners in the regular classroom. Reading Improvement, 37(1), 45-8.

Sharp, S. J. (1989). Using content subject matter with LEA in middle school. Journal of Reading, 33 (2), 108-412.