

“Success”ful Reading Instruction

In the Success in Reading and Writing program, K-2 students use newspapers, dictionaries, library books, and magazines to build on their existing language skills in an environment that's free of the fear of failure.



Photographs by Rob Schurr

Nothing succeeds like success, or so we've been told. This is apparently true in three kindergarten, three first grade, and two second grade classes at Pierce Terrace School, a K-2 school for children of military personnel stationed at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. These children, who are of many different races, abilities, and backgrounds, are taught using the Success in Reading and Writing program, one of the few eclectic approaches to teaching reading. The Success program, developed by Anne Adams and others at Duke University in the late '70s, stems from the belief that children should be taught to read and write using the materials they will rely on later in life. Reading and writing go hand in hand in the program, and children have the opportunity to do both during a daily two-hour period. The Success program relies heavily on the children's use of language and the establishment of a good experiential background before any reading or writing instruction ever starts.

This is the program's sixth year at Pierce Terrace and results have indeed been satisfying. Based on scores on the Metropolitan Achievement Test given in September and May each year, class means have risen from 1.9 to 4.0 in one second grade class, and



from 2.0 to 4.2 in another. On the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills, children in Success classes have repeatedly placed at the 70th to 80th percentile in language and reading.

Particularly impressive in these classes have been the performances of children who speak English as a second language. Some of these students, who could not score at the beginning of the year, scored at 2.5 and 4.2 at the end. The program is excellent in meeting the needs of all children, but most important, in developing in them a positive self-concept and the desire to learn.

Workbook Activities

In the Success program, 90 percent of the child's allotted reading time is spent in actual reading and writing. Because many activities found in workbooks are of dubious value in learning to read (Anderson 1985), workbooks are not used.

Language Exercises

In the Success program, reading and writing go hand in hand, one reinforcing the other. Each day children are involved in the creation of some type of written composition. Language comes from the child's experiences and is used to foster writing skills while reinforcing those in reading. In the primary grades children begin the year writing short sentences or paragraphs. By the end of the year, they are composing stories of four to five paragraphs. Concepts are taught when they are needed and in a meaningful context.

Main Characteristics of Success

There are eight distinctive characteristics of the Success in Reading and Writing program.

1. There is no predetermined sequence of skills, although skills are emphasized in all modules. The timing for teaching certain skills is often generated within the moment—to extend pupils' social, psychological, and mental perspective at the optimal point in the learning process.

2. Sight words are not taught from isolated lists, but as they appear in a sentence or paragraph and in a meaningful context.

3. Verbal communication plays an important role in children's under-



Sight words are not taught from isolated lists, but as they appear in a meaningful context. Reggie Eakins and Elwood Wooten look for a toy store that might have just the bicycle they'd like.

standing. Word meanings are taught as they are volunteered by students in their own phrases or sentences.

4. Students' vocabulary is displayed on a chart, a key element of the Success program and an identifiable feature of a Success classroom.

5. Students begin with words they already know and proceed to learn words volunteered by others in the classroom or found somewhere in print. This freedom to learn to read and write an unlimited and uncontrolled vocabulary is another feature of the program.

6. Students get off to a successful start because they are not afraid of failure.

7. Small groups are formed from time to time, but never on the basis of ability levels, and are maintained only until predetermined objectives are realized.

8. Students' positive self-concepts develop from successful endeavors in reading and writing.

By the end of the primary grades, students have been exposed to a wide variety of printed materials and have composed various types of written communication. Most important, they have been given the opportunity to feel good about themselves because they have been successful.

Success is a strong program for teachers as well. It capitalizes on their

expertise and ingenuity by asking them to develop a skeletal outline into a challenging and rewarding experience for students.

Administrators find the Success program cost effective. No workbooks, ditto masters, vocabulary charts, or basal readers are required since the materials needed in the program are readily available. Subscriptions to several magazines and the daily newspaper and a well-stocked library fill the bill for supplies. Monies previously spent on reading kits and materials can be used more effectively in other areas.

Success in Reading and Writing gives every child the opportunity to succeed every day. It is an exciting and challenging program for both teacher and student. □

References

- Anderson, Richard. Condensed comments from interview. "We Can Become a Nation of Readers!" *Instructor* 95 (Nov.-Dec. 1985): 30-36.
- Success in Reading and Writing*, Teachers' Editions, K-6. Glenview, Ill.: Good Year Books, Scott Foresman and Company, 1978 (first grade), 1980 (K).

Carol J. George is a Second Grade Teacher at Pierce Terrace Elementary School, Columbia, SC 29207.

Copyright © 1986 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.