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ABSTRACT

In teaching the moderately retarded student to read, it is essential to develop a basic survival reading vocabulary consisting of words necessary to remain alive, as well as to retain one's personal dignity. The individual must be able to recognize and respond appropriately to common signs of instruction and direction within the community. From a list of 132 basic words and signs, a reading program and teacher's manual were devised according to four objectives: (1) the stimulus word or sign is presented in a form as close to the actual word or sign as possible--photographs of the sign are used frequently; (2) the experience is as pleasant and free from strain and boredom as possible; (3) four presentations of the word, assess the student's progress, each at an increasing level of difficulty; and (4) the format and process of administration are clearly defined for the teacher. (MAI)

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A Criterion - Referenced Assessment of Survival
Words for Non-Academic Adolescents

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A Criterion - Referenced Assessment of Survival Words
For Non-Academic Adolescents

Every individual who has the ability to live in the community and obtain some degree of mobility and independence must recognize and respond appropriately to functional-survival words. Educators and parents of non-academically oriented students have long recognized the latent abilities of these students to function with dignity in the community and a sheltered working world. Now with the enforcement of Public Law 94-142 (The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975) school personnel are becoming aware of the curricular needs of handicapped students.

When beginning the task of planning curriculum, one of the first questions to be considered is, "What is the purpose of this instruction?" Looking at the area of reading in particular, the curriculum developer and teacher must decide on the purpose for instructing a moderately retarded person. The question then becomes, "What must everyone be able to read and comprehend in order to survive?" The word survive is meant both literally and in an extended notion. Survival in this context means to remain alive as well as retain one's personal dignity. If one enters a room marked PRIVATE, smokes near a NO SMOKING sign or goes in the wrong restroom, personal dignity is in jeopardy. This makes psycho-

logical survival difficult. Therefore, the goal of a reading program for moderately retarded students (I.Q. 36-54) is for the individual to be able to recognize and respond appropriately to common signs of instruction and direction within the community. The reading priority for trainable mentally retarded students is functional-sight vocabulary. Reading in this context is defined as recognizing and responding appropriately to words or signs deemed essential.

After defining this as the goal for the reading instruction, the next task is to determine the exact content to be included in the list of functional-survival words. Teachers must also determine which words are already known at the criterion level, which words are emerging, and which words are not recognized or understood by their students. This task may be accomplished with the criterion-referenced assessment which is the focus of the present paper.

In the literature concerned with teaching the trainable mentally retarded student to read, the consensus is that a basic survival reading vocabulary is essential. Kirk and Johnson (1951) state, "A mentally deficient or feeble-minded child cannot learn to read beyond a few simple words for his protection, hence the reason for lack of emphasis on a systematic reading program in the sense in which reading is ordinarily defined." (p.258)

Stephens (1971) believes that "standing foremost among the concerns for educational programs for the moderately retarded is the development of curriculum." (p.28) Warren (1963) writes that a highly academic program is inappropriate for moderately retarded students if the skills essential for successful functioning as an adult are overlooked. MacMillan (1977) states, "Even children below I.Q. 50 can learn to read at least cautionary signs needed for their own protection or for independent functioning in the community (stop, exit, men, women)." (p. 361) According to Feinberg (1975), "For a training program for TMR adults to be meaningful and ultimately successful it must be reality-based, with a determined focus on survival, self-reliance and normalization." (p. 246).

In light of the need for practical skills for trainable mentally retarded students, Borreca, Burger, Goldstein and Simches (1953) developed a functional core vocabulary list for slow learners. The core vocabulary list consists of 1,042 words with an additional 133 words being purely vocational. Gunzburg believes all students classified as trainable mentally retarded should first be taught a social sight vocabulary because of the extreme importance for safety. Then, if the child can progress further, more instruction should be available. Gunzburg's list consists of 54 functional survival words.. A recent Edmark reading program for

students classified as trainable mentally retarded uses stimulus-response theory to teach fifty survival words. Four state schools in Texas, Richmond State School, San Angelo Center, Lufkin State School and Denton State School have developed a comprehensive functional program using behavior shaping techniques. The purpose is to develop sight recognition of environmental/survival words for the safety and well-being of the client, as well as teach socially appropriate behaviors. The survival/environmental words identified by this project consists of twenty-four critical words, twenty important words and sixty-four supplementary words.

Moderately retarded students, classified as trainable mentally retarded can and should be taught a basic sight vocabulary necessary for survival and dignity.

Procedure

Word List

Using sections of the Borreca, Burger, Goldstein and Simches list, words from the Gunzburg list, the Texas State Schools list and ideas from personal experience in teaching trainable mentally retarded students, a list of ninety words was compiled. The list was sent to seven school districts and one private agency serving the trainable mentally retarded to the Greater Houston Metropolitan Area. Teachers of trainable mentally retarded students were asked

to check the words which they felt were essential for their students to recognize and respond to appropriately. They were also asked to add any essential words omitted from the list. Seventy-five questionnaires were sent out to the districts and fifty-four were returned. A new list was then compiled using all of the words checked and added. This list was 317 words long. Using the words considered most important a revised list of 132 words was compiled as the tentative survival words for this program. This list will always remain tentative since various signs are important depending on the locale, the setting (institutional, public school sheltered workshop) and the time period. It has been observed, for instance, that there is an increasing use of International Signs which in turn adds to the survival signs to recognize.

Assessment Instrument

From the list of 132 words, a criterion-referenced assessment was developed. Four conditions were taken into consideration in the development of the instrument. First, it is important to present the stimulus word or sign in a form as close to the actual sign or word as possible. One characteristic of mentally retarded learners is the inability to easily transfer information or skills learned in the classroom to real life situations. For this reason photographs of the signs are used whenever possible. A second important consideration is the attention span and interest level of

the students being assessed. The assessment instrument is also to be used as the teaching instrument, therefore, the experience must be as pleasant and free from boredom or strain as possible.

Therefore, only twelve words are included in each booklet, each word being presented in four different forms. Another consideration is that the teachers need as much information as possible concerning the student's abilities to recognize and respond to the sign or words.

Therefore each of the four presentations of the word assess at an increasing level of difficulty. The first presentation asks the student to say the words(s) and tell what they mean. If this task is not accomplished the student is shown the second and most elementary task. Three signs or words are shown, two being the stimulus sign and the third, a distractor. The student is asked to match the like signs. The third presentation is of two signs. The teacher names the sign and asks the student to point to the one named. The fourth and final presentation is one picture of a person responding inappropriately to the sign. The student is to choose the correct picture. The fourth consideration is to make the format and process of administration as easy as possible for the teacher. The booklets are clearly marked as to word or sign to present, the instructions are on the back of the stimulus sign so that they can be read easily and naturally as the teacher is

giving the assessment.

Assessment Manual Teaching Suggestions

Recommendations for teaching the survival words are included in the criterion-referenced assessment manual. The first consideration is: Did the student clearly understand the question asked? Were the directions understandable so that the reason for error was not knowing and understanding the sign. After the task is thoroughly understood the actual teaching begins. Configuration clues are emphasized in teaching the student to distinguish the two signs that match from the one sign that does not match. Recognition and identification of the sign after hearing the auditory stimulus (third presentation in criterion-referenced assessment) is taught using a technique similar to Montessori's Three Period Lesson. This procedure is followed using increasing numbers of signs taken from the assessment booklet. When the word can be identified using an auditory stimulus to match the visual stimulus, appropriate response to the word or sign is emphasized. It is suggested that this be done using a multiple questioning technique so that the student discovers the appropriate response. Questions such as: What is happening in the picture? What does the sign say and mean? Is what is happening in the picture agreeing with what the sign says? Why or why not? The teacher is free, however, to use whatever approaches to teaching of the survival

words she finds most successful.

Discussion

The importance place on education for all handicapped children emphasizes the need for curriculum materials which are interesting, appropriate to the students skills and abilities and futuristically oriented. For the student classified as trainable mentally retarded, the reading program must emphasize the recognition and proper response to words of survival and dignity. (In order to meet this goal, teachers need the diagnostic materials, teaching materials and ideas for helping special students to reach their potentials.) The criterion-referenced assessment discussed in this paper was designed to meet these needs.

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WORDS FOR SURVIVAL AND DIGNITY

ADDRESS
 AGE
 AMBULANCE
 AUTHORIZED PERSONS ONLY
 BACK
 BATHROOMS
 BEWARE OF DOG
 BIRTHDATE
 BLASTING
 BOTTOM
 BOYS
 BUS STOP
 BREAKABLE
 CAFETERIA
 CASHIER
 CAUTION
 CLINIC
 CLOSED
 COLD
 CROSS NOW
 DANGER
 DATE
 DETOUR
 DIME
 DIRECTIONS
 DIRECTORY
 DO NOT CROSS
 DO NOT DISTURB
 DO NOT ENTER
 DO NOT FEED ANIMALS
 DO NOT TOUCH
 DON'T WALK
 DOWN
 DYNAMITE
 ELEVATORS
 EMERGENCY
 EMPLOYEES ONLY
 ENTER
 ENTRANCE
 EXIT
 EXPLOSIVES
 FEMALE
 FIRE ALARM
 FIRE ESCAPE
 FIRE EXTINGUISHER
 FIRST AID
 FIRST FLOOR
 FLAMMABLE
 FOR RENT
 FRAGILE
 FREE
 FRONT
 GENTLEMEN

GIRLS
 GLASS
 GO
 HANDICAPPED
 HANDLE WITH CARE
 HARD HAT AREA
 HARMFUL IF SWALLOWED
 HELP WANTED
 HIGH VOLTAGE
 HOLD ON TO RAIL
 HOT
 IN
 INFORMATION
 INTERNATIONAL SYMBOL FOR MEN
 INTERNATIONAL SYMBOL FOR WOMEN
 KEEP CLOSED
 KEEP OUT
 KEEP OUT
 LADIES
 LEFT
 MALE
 MEN AT WORK
 MEN ONLY
 NAME
 NO ADMITTANCE
 NO SMOKING
 NO TRESPASSING
 NON FLAMMABLE
 OCCUPIED
 OFF
 ON
 ONE WAY ONLY
 OPEN
 OPEN HERE
 OPEN OTHER END
 OUT
 OUT OF ORDER
 PHONE
 PHONE NUMBER
 PLEASE BE SEATED
 PLEASE PAY HERE
 PLEASE USE OTHER DOOR
 POISON
 PRESS
 PRIVATE
 PULL
 PUSH
 PUSH BUTTON
 QUIET
 RADIO ACTIVE
 RAILROAD CROSSING
 REST ROOMS
 RESTAURANT

RIGHT
 SALE
 SECOND FLOOR
 SILENCE
 SLIPPERY WHEN WET
 SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER
 STAIRS
 STEP UP
 STOP
 TAKE ONE
 TELEPHONE
 TOP
 THIS SIDE UP
 THIS WAY OUT
 TOILET
 TURN OFF
 UP
 USE CROSS WALK
 VACANCY
 WAIT
 WALK
 WATCH FOR CARS
 WATCH YOUR STEP
 WET FLOOR
 WET PAINT
 WOMEN