Power of Minspeak

The Bridge to Literacy Approach

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The Bridge to Literacy Approach was developed for at-risk readers, including students using Minspeak and other AAC strategies. It is an eclectic approach that emphasizes language-rich experiences, aided language stimulation (Goossens', Crain, & Elder, 1992), and storyboards with Minspeak symbols. The program follows a constructivist approach to learning (Fosnot, 1996) and reading development, encouraging children to construct their own language, based on information they already know, using a core vocabulary of reading words. The approach follows a weekly reading routine, with specific language, reading, and writing activities completed throughout the school week.

The Bridge to Literacy approach to reading instruction integrates "the best" of several reading approaches (Adams, 1990; Blachman, 1991; Booth, Perfetti, & MacWhinney, 1999; Ehri, 1991; Ellis & Large, 1987; Hanley, Reynolds, & Thorton, 1987) into a language-rich GROUP reading program developed specifically for students using AAC strategies, while remaining applicable to any student at-risk for literacy development. The Bridge to Literacy approach is used with ALL students, not just the student using the Minspeak device.

Minspeak-Simulated Reading Boards

The Bridge to Literacy Approach uses **Reading Boards** that simulate the Minspeak device. These boards have core vocabulary represented with Minspeak icons and printed words. A large, poster-sized Teacher Reading Board is used in group activities in conjunction with smaller Student Reading Boards given to each of the individual students.   The reading boards have approximately 188 core words.

Teacher Reading Board   Student Reading Board

The reading boards are designed to "match" the Minspeak overlay. They provide critical core words for reading development – which happen to be the same words needed for speaking and language development.   You are learning about your Minspeak system while also learning literacy skills

Why use Minspeak-simulated Reading Boards?

- Use of Minspeak-simulated reading boards promotes vocabulary-to-icon learning.
- Use of Minspeak-simulated reading boards support motor learning and automaticity for retrieval of words on the Minspeak device.
- Use of Minspeak-simulated reading boards allows ALL students - even the non-disabled, oral students - to use the same materials.
- Use of Minspeak-simulated reading boards allows for multiple words to be written above the Minspeak icon.
- Use of Minspeak-simulated reading boards allows for Minspeak icons to be "faded-out" when no longer needed to cue the printed word.
- Use of Minspeak-simulated reading boards de-mystifies AAC and Minspeak.
- Use of manual Minspeak-simulated reading boards ensures that the peer group can communicate with the student using Minspeak and visa-versa.

For the student, the Minspeak icons are "clues" to help the student read the words logically associated with that symbol. These symbols act as "bridges" to traditional orthographic skills. The approach promotes the use of high frequency, re-useable core words used in both spoken and written language of young children, along with morphological markers (e.g., verb endings). As a language-rich program, it supports language development in conjunction with AAC system learning and literacy development.

The Teaching Schedule

The Bridge to Literacy approach involves a five-day, weekly schedule that builds redundancy and routine in reading instruction.

Day 1: Monday = Experience and Student-Construction of Sentence
1. The students take part in a fun, language-rich experience. Students refer to this experience as *Fun-Day Monday*. Examples of the experiences are: having a welcome to Grade 1 party, going on a nature walk, blowing giant bubbles, making jet planes and having races, etc.
2. Following the experience, the students develop, based on group consensus, a single sentence to describe the activity. Student generated language is the basis for promoting meaningful and effective reading instruction. They are guided to use words from the Reading Board. As they become more proficient in generating sentences, they are encouraged to increase the complexity of the single sentence and later to have two or more simple or complex sentences.
3. The teacher records the sentence on a strip of a paper, called the **Sentence Strip**.

Day 2: Tuesday = Reading the Sentence Strip
1. The Sentence Strip is cut apart into individual words by the teacher or a selected student.
2. Individual sentence strips are given to each student and they cut them apart. This helps the students to physically define the word boundaries, one of the requirements for the development of phonological awareness.
3. The individual word cards are used to re-construct the sentence onto a Sentence

Wall/ Each week, an additional sentence is added to the wall, creating a substantial bank of words which the students are learning and can practice reading .

Sentence Wall
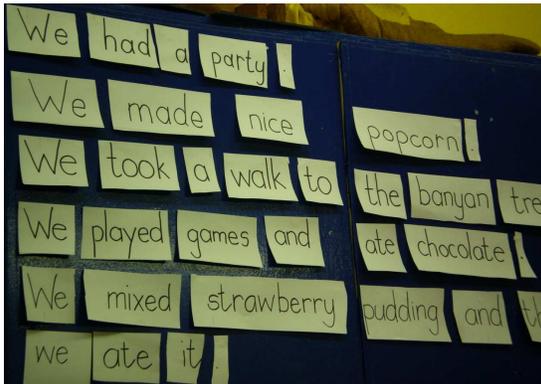
Reading from the Sentence Wall
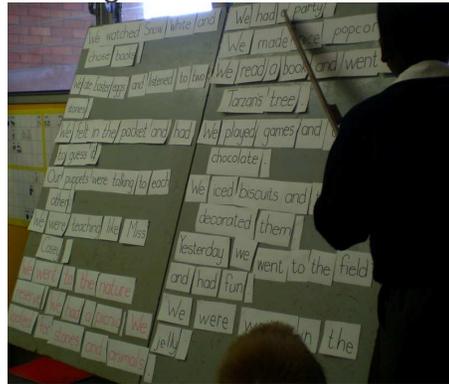
Day 3: Wednesday = Copy the Sentence Strip
1. The children are given a variety of media in which they can copy the sentence strip. Some days will see them writing in jelly powder, with paintbrushes and water on a brick wall or chalkboard, or with sticks in the sand. Students who have limited hand function will have a similar activity. They may copy they sentence with hand-over-hand assistance or with a QWERTY keyboard.
2. This sentence is pasted into a *Student Reading Book.*
3. The student draws a picture of the activity. This activity helps maintain the context of both the language and the written text. Students who are unable to draw will paste a remnant of the activity into their books or have their class assistant draw for them.

Day 4: Thursday = Sentence Re-construction
1. Color-coded, *Add-On-Tiles* are attached on the Teacher Reading Board. The *Add-On-Tiles* are organized in binders to make for easy retrieval.
2. They are removed and added to the Teacher Reading Board.
3. The Tiles are manipulated by the students in sentence re-construction activities.

Add-On-Tiles
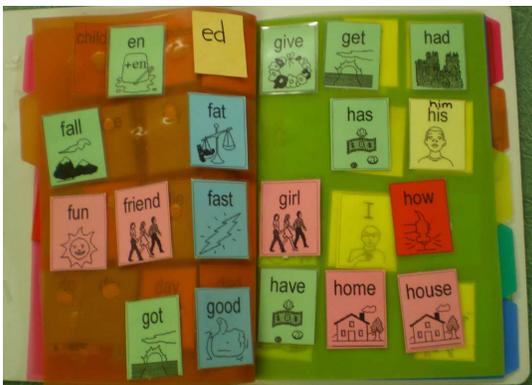
Individualized Storyboards

Day 5: Friday = Individualized Learning
1. A range of additional literacy activities are completed on Friday, leaving an element of surprise and individualized learning for the students. These activities

        might be in a group or 1:1 format.
2. One of the group literacy activities used on Fridays might be the use of familiar or classic stories. These stories are told using the Teachers Reading Board, incorporating aided language stimulation, during the story telling activity. In addition, individualized storyboards may be created which focus on a repeated line from the story. This is a particularly useful approach for students with emerging reading skills who can only handle a limited number of words at any one time. This storyboard is based on the vocabulary and symbol arrangement of the Teacher and Student Reading Boards. To date, over 20 different storyboards have been developed, each which coordinates with the Teacher-Student Reading Boards.

The variety of learning strategies used throughout the approach support a range of learning styles. For example, the sentences on the Sentence Wall, like a poem, support linear learners and tap into auditory-visual learning and auditory-sequential memory. The use of Teacher and personal Student Reading Boards help students learn through visual-spatial memory and motor automaticity. The level of physical engagement at all levels (e.g., pointing with the ruler at the words on the Sentence Wall) aids those learners who are kinesthetic learners.

The schedule is repeated weekly, focusing on new activities each week. The routine and repetition of this weekly schedule builds confidence and contextualized learning for the students. As they become more confident, each student uses his/her own reading board and points to words to make up sentences which have initially only been generated by the teacher, and thereafter they construct novel sentences purely on their own.

The following extract is an exact transcript of a student who is a second language learner (e.g., first language – Zulu, second language – English) with a low verbal language score. This student generated this language and text using her student reading board. While it is not perfect language, it reflects a learner who is developing solid literacy skills as well as language skills in the area of vocabulary selection, word order, and narrative development.

The three billy goats gruff were living up on a hill. They were hungry but they did not have any more grass. There was a troll under the bridge. The small billy goat went on the bridge the troll the troll came out of the bridge the troll said who is walking on my bridge.

Conclusion

The approach described in this article demonstrates how language, literacy, and AAC instruction can be completed collaboratively. The level of reading competence achieved by following this approach is allowing students to not only read the words on their Reading Boards, but to also read a variety of books at a primary reading level. The results of this approach show that students at-risk for learning to read are enjoying the reading process and becoming competent readers.

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