Take-Home Video for Adult Literacy

VALERIE YULE

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SUMMARY.

In the past, it has not been possible to "teach oneself to read" at home, because learners could not read the books to teach them. Videos and interactive compact discs have changed that situation and challenge current assumptions of the pedagogy of literacy. This article describes an experimental adult literacy project using video technology. The language used is English, but the basic concepts apply to any alphabetic or syllabic writing system. A half-hour cartoon video can help adults and adolescents with Learning difficulties. Computer-animated cartoon graphics are attractive to look at, and simplify complex material in a clear, lively way. This video technique is also proving useful for distance learners, children, and learners of English as a second language. Methods and principles are to be extended using interactive compact discs.

My grandfather taught himself at home from dozens of do-it-yourself books, but the one skill he could not have taught himself from books is how to learn to read. It has never been possible to teach yourself to read at home, because learners cannot read the books to teach them.

Video can change that situation. Animated graphics in videos can show every skill from home plumbing to brain surgery, because speech can accompany the pictures and script, and the animation that can explicate and simplify complex concepts is a visually fascinating form. Videos that teach foreign writing systems also show the potential to teach how to read in the learner's native language. Adult literacy programs already use the electronic technology of computer software, audiotapes and live-film video, but to date their principles for video have been developed for computers, television, and classroom tutoring, or television literacy programs for adults such as the British BBC *On the Move,* and the Australian ABC *Between the Lines,* which encourage adults to want to read and to undertake courses. Animated graphics are used in computer software to teach and test aspects of reading and writing, often as a series of activities to complement courses, and in children's television such as *Sesame Street.*

Yet the opportunity for revolutionised teaching principles lies in the combination of advantages available to video and interactive compact discs - with the direct link of speech and the written word, the potential of animated computer graphics, and the learner's control over viewing, reviewing and application to real reading, so that no time is wasted and no gaps or confusions go unrecognised.

To my knowledge, the Australian experimental video project *Teach Yourself to Read or Find out Where You got Stuck (TYTR,* Yule 1988) that is described in this paper has been the first to take up the opportunity for radical innovation in methods and content of literacy teaching that is offered by this medium. It demonstrates how to read from the very beginning, by a single-session overview with animated computer graphics. Video-graphic for take-home adult literacy is not a mere translation to a new medium of the usual methods in class teaching, or worksheets whether on paper or electronic screens. It seeks to encourage self-help learning towards independent

reading through a halfhour's overview and demonstration of how to learn to read that includes an exposition of the English writing system. Animated computer graphics give an overview of "what it helps to know" about the writing system for reading and spelling. Students relate each point of their learning to reading in two booklet manuals and to reading of their own choice, rather than undertaking directed "activities". The video is designed to be watched and rewatched at least three times, so that what seems at first complex and packed becomes simple and unpacked, and students can concentrate on the sections which they feel most need their attention. There is no live film or extraneous content for extra entertainment. It is not like television literacy programs, which must be diffuse and serialised to ensure the message gets home on a single viewing of each episode.

Uses of a take-home literacy video

The stimulus to produce the video was the finding in professional practice that many baffled learners did not have dyslexic problems, but were simply blocked by some simple gap or confusion that had never been recognised, such as "Are there only 26 letters? I thought there were thousands!" As M D. Vernon's pioneering research in 1957 revealed, "the basic cause of reading difficulty is confusion" (Vernon).

A half-hour video that gave an overview of the whole reading process as a diagnostic and remedial self-help tool could be accessible to anyone. It could be borrowed or purchased from local video-libraries, public libraries and shops, as well as from work-places, schools and courses.

The concept of take-home literacy video-graphics has been primarily but not only designed for adults who are completely or functionally illiterate in English, to view individually at home because they are unable or unwilling to attend courses. At home they can avoid social embarrassment, and the novel approach is so different from any previous experiences of failure that it does not reactivate previous conditioned anxiety reactions and negative responses. The structure and content of the video takes account of the cognitive and motivational resources and needs of adults and teenagers who have been through the school system without learning to read, or who have become ex-literates, or remain very poor readers. Typically they have missed out on essential clues, have developed habits and strategies that handicap them, have a morale block about reading that is more disabling than their original childhood weaknesses, find formal learning situations difficult, do not know how to put their own effort into learning, are deterred by their early experiences from classroom situations, and watch television casually with scattered concentration. They may have learned to expect to be pushed in their lessons, with the teacher doing the work, since they have not yet realised that mental effort can be as rewarding, exciting, and satisfying as hard sports training.

Adults can go through the school system without learning to read, and may have been classified as children with "specific learning difficulties" or "dyslexia". But as adults they have now outgrown the immaturities that handicapped them between the critical ages of five to eight. They also have adult abilities to compensate for any continuing weaknesses, and the maturity to direct their intelligence independently.

A use-at-home literacy overview could be invaluable for all distance learners who want help

with reading and spelling at any basic level. It could help poor readers and poor spellers, who can often improve when they are given a way to understand the orthographic task and how to change to better strategies than their ineffective rote-learning. Complete novices could learn to read without incurring confusions or gaps in information.

Learners of English as a foreign language may be illiterate in their native tongue as well, or they may speak English but not read it, or read it but be unable to converse adequately. Video could develop and strengthen the links between spoken and written English. Immigrants busy establishing themselves can benefit from a take-home half-hour program, before they are able to take on a full course. Other immigrants may be isolated from the mainstream of Australian contact for reasons of culture, work-involvement or shyness, and learning in their own homes or workplaces may be the only way that they can move out of their isolation.

Adolescents can be embarrassed, reluctant and often rebellious about showing concern about a reading handicap at school, but some can be motivated to work at learning to read in private through an attractive medium.

Children as young as three can enjoy cartoon episodes in the video showing metamorphoses of words, letters and pictures. This initial learning can build up understanding and knowledge for the task ahead.

The video gives opportunities for teachers to do what teachers do best, in developing full literacy, while the video does the "hackwork" for students at home. Many adults unwilling to attend classes could, by learning initially at home, be given the confidence and motivation to join in further courses, to learn more. Teachers can also use the video to complement courses, and as a forum or platform for lessons, after all students have watched and rewatched individually. It can be a base for instruction about the writing system and reading strategies, in schools as well as in adult and remedial courses. It can serve a diagnostic function for learners and teachers to find out what students have not known.

Video that capitalises on the assets of adults

Most teaching of adult reading is based on research and observation of how children learn, since beginners are usually children, and they are also the most accessible subjects for research. Adult literacy entered late into the modern educational field and subjecting adults to assessment and observation is also a sensitive issue. Teaching reading to adults therefore requires caution about how methods and theories of learning are constrained by knowledge based on the developing abilities of child learners. However, adult learning differs from how children learn in important ways. Adult beginners and failing adult readers do have advantages over child learners apart from prevalent emotional blocks. Video-graphics can exploit their greater cognitive maturity, knowledge, accumulated linguistic skills, experience and the ability to orchestrate efficient strategies. Adults can learn "top-down" from an overview more easily, and link it with network learning to "bottom-up" processes, with less need for small sequential steps. They can learn more independently and use resources with less need for other help, self-pacing their own learning - once they realise they can. Adults are more able to do several things at once, and to hold several ideas in mind at once, to integrate reading strategies. When motivated, they can work harder and for longer periods. They can telescope into weeks or even days learning that takes children

months or even years, if they are not expecting that it will require a long course. Some young children learn how to read within a week of "the penny dropping" - adults can do as well. Adults can follow fast video-games - here is another game. Then once the "how to" understanding is gained, fluency in reading is achieved by practice - practice in reading "what you want to read".

Adults who have cognitive understanding of a task can reason about it, are more motivated and can learn more readily. Indeed, both children and adults have a democratic right to be informed of the nature and rationale of what they are trying to learn, to see the sense of it. Most adult literacy students are not intellectually disabled, and they have a right to understand the workings of the writing system that they must use, rather than be expected to simply rote-memorise and guess, or to ask if they do not know a word.

Structure and content of the experimental video

Computer-animated graphics can appeal to all ages. They can be designed to teach at an adult level of understanding, but nine-year-old children can still grasp basic teaching points, and younger children can preview what lies ahead as they enjoy the intrinsic entertainment of animated cartoon.

I found in my work as a clinical psychologist that putting suspected dyslexics through a single session of "what it helps to know to learn to read" was a teaching by testing method that often made further assessment superfluous; the experimental video therefore follows that structure. It starts from the very beginning, to clear up all the confusions and gaps that I have observed - some so elementary as to be frequently unrecognised by learners and even their teachers. Someone who is repeated told to "LOOK at the word" may still not know how to look. Inability to hear sounds in words has more often been a cognitive matter of not knowing how to discern them than due to any neurophysiological defect.

The experimental video starts from scratch, since so many adults have become lost to literacy even in their first year at school. It demonstrates aspects of how to read that good readers and spellers discover by intuition, if not by direct teaching, and it clarifies how to use knowledge of the spoken language to decode and obtain meaning from the alphabetic written language. Their first watching gives an overall view. Then learners can go back and watch the detail more carefully, and skip sections that they already know or now

understand.

A further advantage of a half-hour video is that the metacognitive overview of the task provides a cognitive map for learning, with "advance organizers". At all times it can be seen bow current learning fits into the total picture, with what has gone before and what is to come (Piaget 1959; Bruner 1960; Tzeng 1983).

Video-graphics are superb at visual "maps" which are economical summaries of processes and knowledge. They can group and link information (Miller 1956), using "one way to teach a thousand things". A great deal of information is presented in a very condensed form. The mapping strategy takes advantage of masculine visual-spatial abilities. As both surface structures and cognitive structure are presented simultaneously, multi-level, with no distracting diversions, viewers can "see what they can" at every point, and deepen and extend it on later

viewing. The compactness itself facilitates familiarisation, and the accompanying Picture Manual confirms and complements content, including expanded spelling information. And all this is under the viewers' own control, to cater for individual differences and preferences.

The video demonstrates features of letters, words, sentences and text, based on a story and songs with familiar tunes, with graphics and cartoons that make the print intrinsically interesting. Among other things, video can do the following:

_ Help the user learn to read by reading, using songs and story from the start.

Show the learner how to hear sounds in words and how letters represent speech sounds. Each letter is made memorable through morphing into an animated picture with the same shape and initial speech sound, then reverting - a presentation which also helps to prevent letter reversals - and the alphabet is linked in sequence with song and chart.

_ Illustrate different visual forms of the same letters, as represented in letter cases, handwriting and font varieties.

_ Demonstrate the importance of initial letters, the ten short and long vowel sounds and some of the ways to spell them, how sounds can be blended, and how letters can be substituted to make new words, with analogical "spelling families".

_ Explain how words and sentence structures are built up, and where and how to begin reading a word.

_ Show how to use analogies and times in word recognition, and highlight the importance of meaning.

_ Explicate the basic underlying vowel spelling system and consonant-vowel combinations graphically, with clues on how to cope with the unpredictable deviations from the English spelling system. Many failing learners consider they must be stupid because they cannot see the sense in many spellings; to be told that English spelling itself is sometimes "silly" and why, and how to cope with this, boosts their own self-confidence. Some teachers have condemned the video for giving away this information about English spelling, as being demoralising. However, students have a democratic right to know.

- Describe the linguistic origins of English spellings, helping learners to recognise spelling patterns outside the system.

- Show how words can be broken down into classical roots, prefixes and suffixes, thus assisting reading and comprehending new vocabulary.

In one part of the teaching program the most common 100 words are set in a simple story. Learners are encouraged to find that if they can read 100 common words, they can read almost half of most texts. When they test this claim out on a page of print by marking with a large pencil, the task remaining appears small and achievable. Setting the most common words within a single narrative chunks the information, and the meaningful context makes the corpus easier to remember than if set out in lists. Chunking the most common words together in one story **is** also strategic for spelling as a high proportion of these frequently encountered words are among the most irregularly spelled.

Criticisms of the project

The concept of a take-home video for adult literacy has faced criticism in its home country that

can be countered on grounds both of theory and of practical success.

The theory of reading underlying the video

The most common objection is that it sets out to explain the writing system and how to decode new words using the alphabetic principle. Because of the deviations of English spelling from its basic underlying system, this "phonics" approach has been difficult to teach with uniform success in classrooms, and so has been condemned in many English-speaking educational circles. Once an alphabetic writing system starts to deviate *inconsistently* from its principles of relationship to the spoken language, learning to read is no longer as "easy as ABC". Morris (1994) describes the present politicised situation. Most English-language knowledge of reading and learning to read has come from research in reading and learning to read in the English writing system, and only recently has significant Anglo-American attention begun to turn to literacy in other writing systems too. Now, however, video can relate the written language directly to the spoken language, and hence can easily teach the alphabetical approach even for English - and after all, it was the original revolutionary principle enabling independent reading that facilitated Phoenician trade and Greek pursuit of knowledge. The new technology can demonstrate alphabetic principles concisely and clearly, and show how to cope with the deviations. It is ironic that today the approach is condemned when there now is an ideal way to teach it.

A second criticism of teaching the alphabetic principle has been that good readers do not use or need the alphabetic principle in reading; therefore it should not be taught, because it will divert learners from developing the strategies of good readers. This is also mistaken, as research evidence shows that good readers are better able to use this principle in many ways, together with the visual recognition strategies that develop from it.

Skilled readers integrate a wide repertoire of strategies. Derivation of meaning from the written word requires flexible use of all sources of information, phonological, graphemic, syntactic and semantic, without incurring information overload. (Downing and Leong 1982; and Weaver 1988, give representative though differing views.) Skilled readers can identify words as wholes or from associations of letters, and may scan whole paragraphs or even pages. At a central processing level they also "hear" what they are reading, and carry it in short-term memory on an abstract auditory basis, so that they can remember the beginning of a sentence by the time they get to the end, and are thus able to make sense of it. They use what they have read and what they also see coming later to help predict the word that will come ... ("next" is the word that I would predict here). And they automatically check that the written word actually spells the word that they expected. Goodman (1976) adopted the description of reading in English as a "psycholinguistic guessing game", but "the good reader need not guess; the bad should not" (Gough 1976:532).

That is, skilled reading is both "top-down", which has been termed "process-functional", and "bottom up" or mechanistic-behavioral. The video aims to teach both processes to learners, although popular educational philosophies in English-speaking countries have tended to polarise on this issue.

"Top-down" theories of reading emphasise non-phonemic sources of information in reading, and that meaning is an active reconstruction by the reader. "Bottom-up" decoding may be regarded as an incompatible distraction. Written and spoken language are "two different though similar abstract structures which enable users to represent relationships between ideas" (Kolers 1970:

117). Inference or guessing from context is promoted as the key to fast reading and learning in many teachers' colleges, Adult Literacy courses, and International Literacy Year projects, with often explicit dismissal of any need for orthographic strategies to understand print. There is a widespread but mistaken belief that spelling is of little or no relevance to reading processes, and that skilled readers do not make use of phonological representation and consistent orthographic sequences. Goodman (1982) and Smith (1985) saw no problem in skipping words that cannot be identified from context, configuration and initial letters, on the grounds that it is possible to comprehend a text even if one word in five is obliterated. A popular instruction to teach adults to read is by "linguistic guessing", that is, rote-learning of words from a few memorable graphic features and guessing from context. Words can be learnt as wholes or from "distinctive features" and initial letters and context used to identify them, but all words need not all be read (cf. the Australian TV series and workbook *Between the Lines 199* 1). However, this can be risky advice, and can really only refer to very simple text, or else requires considerable experience brought to the text by the reader. The more weighty and complex the message, the more risky it is to guess from context.

It would be impossible to design a half-hour video, however animated, to teach anyone to read independently using "top-down" principles only. *Teach Yourself to Read* has incorporated these principles, but also provides the "bottom-up" alphabetical clues to work out new words without recourse to "asking someone".

In "Bottom-up" processes in reading, the reader sounds out the letters, combines the sounds, identifies features of sound-symbol relationships and orthographic sequences, the result is a word, and from the combination of words, transformed mentally into speech, which is the reader's first language, discovers the meaning intended by the writer. (See, e.g. Perfetti 1984.) Writing is seen as a system of visual signs to symbolise the spoken language, and traditionally teachers have attempted to instruct learners how to segment ongoing speech into phonemes, and so to reconstruct speech from phonographemes. It is then assumed that the meaning of the written word will be automatically comprehended, and for most people for centuries it has worked thus - although not for all. Most learners are able to read for meaning from the start, and their decoding is an essential part of independent reading that is finally not detectable as it is exchanged for automatic visual recognition and the appealing but otherwise unexplained "direct reading for meaning". The normal progression of readers who have an understanding of phonics (often today through learning to write rather than being taught to read) is that after an unfamiliar word has first been decoded through sounding out, visual analogy and context, then after a number of recurrences or even with one-trial learning, it is incorporated into automatic visual recognition, so that in the search for meaning, "barking at print" does not occur.

Animated graphics can provide almost one-trial understanding of how to go about using phonics to learn to read, and after a basic level, students do not need further direct phonics instruction. (See the US Federal survey of "practices in the most successful classrooms", Anderson et al. 1985.)

There can certainly be intrinsic difficulties in conscious phoneme discrimination for learners. Countries with almost ideally phonemic spelling systems still find that most children aged four to seven can have difficulty analysing or blending phonemes unless given suitable preparation and teaching. (Fowler, Shankweiler and Liberman 1979: 29.) The study of illiterate Portuguese adults by Morais, Cary, Alegria and Bertelson (1979) is also a standard citation on this point. But in order to speak and listen, all children discover how to discriminate the speech phonemes of their

native language, without deliberate tuition or apparent conscious awareness, so there is a capacity there that can be made conscious and consciously applied to decoding and encoding words in print. Phonological awareness can be taught to children. (See for example Downing 1987; Bradley and Bryant 1983; Anderson et al. 1985; Bryant and Bradley 1985; Nicholson 1978, reviews by Chall 1983, and the video *Preparing to read through play*, Yule 1981.) And now animated audio-graphics can teach learners the phonological awareness essential to be able to apply phonics and learn how to decode successfully. Cartoon graphics and songs can show simple techniques for learners to become aware of the phonemes in their language, and how to relate these to graphemes. The old problem of difficulty and tedium is removed.

When adults are nervous about literacy, and may have had a traumatic history of being set to blend sounds in words when it was a mystery to them, whole-word guessing or paired reading may seem kinder than trying to teach them to help themselves using sound / symbol relationships, but they can fail to progress to skilled reading by these unstructured approaches. Rather, they need clarity of exposition in a permanently available form. To realise how to decode print for meaning is an intellectual breakthrough - one of the "aha" stages which open the way for new progress. Once learners discover this, they have the opportunity to race ahead to independent reading.

Single-word decoding skills are important. More than use of contextual information, they differentiate good and poor readers (Stanovich and West, 1979). This is true of successful learners, regardless of method of reading instruction (Yelland 1987; Nicholson 1986). Regardless of teaching method, successful learners are found to be those who discover how to use the alphabetic key (e.g. Stuart and Coltheart's longitudinal study 1988, and studies by Ehri from 1980 onward). Poor readers are found to be more likely to try to rely more on higher level process and on contextual information, to compensate for deficiencies in lower level processes (Stanovich and West). Both good and poor readers read words better in context than in isolation, but good readers are better in both conditions.

Spelling is also useful in learning to read in other ways, as in analogical spelling patterns and the analysis of onsets and times (Goswami 1988; Bryant and Bradley 1985; Stuart and Coltheart 1988).These features are demonstrated in the video by the word-play with songs.

The actual process of phonemic segmentation assists rapid development of word recognition units, facilitating immediate visual recognition, so that as reading vocabulary grows, learners rely less on conscious pre-lexical phonological coding (Stuart and Coltheart 1988; Doctor and Coltheart 1980). Successful decoders thus become good readers with faster access to the lexicon, the "language processor in our heads" with its semantic information about words. Learning to read itself helps the development of phonological processing, and the relationship of linguistic awareness and literacy acquisition appears to be spiral, with each enhancing the other (Downing 1987. See also Stuart and Coltheart 1988: 147, and reviews of research in Bertelson 1987, Fowler, Shankweiler and Liberman 1979, and Beech and Colley 1987.)

Thus the theoretical basis of the contents and structure of the video is grounded in the findings of two decades of practical experience and empirical research on reading and learning how to read. The content of the video demonstrates how to integrate both "top-down" and "bottom up" reading strategies, as skilled readers do, and with its animated graphics for the eye, and songs and explanation for the ear, uses both sensory modalities to teach both reading and spelling, and gives maximum room to cater for individual differences in learning style.

Evaluations of the experimental video

Qualitative evidence and a summary of students' learning is presented below, but rigorous evaluation of the project has not yet been possible. It is hoped that international publication will attract interest in thorough testing of the concept and lead to high-quality production of improved versions.

The current climate of adult education in Australia is opposed to rigorous evaluations of any literacy program, on the grounds that assessment is traumatic for literacy students and that progress in literacy cannot be objectively assessed.

Some educators' evaluations have been negative. "It sets out what you ought to know as if anyone except the learner knows what they need to know. Adults should not be treated in this fashion. Our tutors always behave as their equals, and provide their students only with what the students themselves ask for." The government regional agency for adult literacy rejected the video on the grounds that it was undemocratic and authoritarian for a half-hour video to tell adults what others think could help them to learn to read and write; the students should tell their tutor what they want to know, and then they negotiate how they can find it out.

Australian mainstream educational philosophy is influenced by Frank Smith (1985), Kenneth Goodman, deconstruction, post-structuralism and similar literacy theories, which influences rejection of the general approach of the video, and particularly its phonics, for adult literacy programs. Some objections were that "literacy teaching has developed in a very different direction from your proposal." "Using spelling in the teaching of reading has not been popular for the last decade." "I would be very dubious about students viewing this video since it uses an alphabetisation approach which is against our policies." Teachers are also worried about the trend to mechanistic methods of instruction as a money-saving measure. "Where does 'education' fit in all this?"

The objections can be answered. The video boosts learners' self-esteem because it "gives power to the people", allowing independent learning while still leaving a major role of inspiring, supervising and extending students for teachers, who can also find it a valuable complementary aid. With the mechanics of learning to read covered, the decks are cleared so that teachers as mentors can fulfil their function as irreplaceable human resources. Teachers will have a far more interesting working day when their students can read and write more easily.

There is also already evidence of the value of the video concept even in its present experimental form, in the enthusiastic responses of many students, who recommend it to each other, often to the surprise of sceptical tutors. it has been found most useful for older students when used informally and individually at home, viewed three times as needed, and complemented while viewing with the printed Picture manual that follows the sequence, the Script manual that follows the spoken narrative and their own reading material. *The video has not proved suitable for initial class viewing, except in some primary grades, where young children will join spontaneously in the songs and wordplay. Most older people with literacy problems find that a formal group situation makes it socially difficult for them to attend to the content of a video rather than to judge it as entertainment.*

Table I shows responses of small samples of students who completed a checklist, with or without help, to check both what they found out from the video that they had not known, and what they found out that they knew already. This overview of their own knowledge also proved

helpful to the students.

Table 1. What viewers learnt from the Experimental Version of the Take-Home Literacy Video 1993

Responses by a sample of viewers to a checklist indicating what they had learnt from the experimental literacy video *Teach Yourself to Read* that they had not previously known or understood.† Later evaluations confirm these findings of significant increases in understanding..

Information in the video	Percentage of viewers who had not previously known or understood this information				
	Adults N8	ESL N 6	Teenage N10	Children N 16	Total N 40

How to sing slowly to hear sounds in words.	100	100	60	75	80
The 26 letters in alphabetical order.	25	-	30	38	27
Basic sounds of the letters of the alphabet	-	50	-	44	25
Letters that can have 2 sounds - C G Y	25	50	30	69	48
Two letters can make one sound - CH SH TH WH PH NG	25	-	30	57	33
Letters can be in UPPER CASE and lower case.	12	33	20	38	27
Different shapes and sizes of letters. Cursive and fonts.	-	-	10	25	13
How to switch letters around to make more words	66	83	30	25	40
The 5 vowels *a e i o u* and their basic spellings	-	17	50	25	25
How to blend sounds to make words	12	50	60	50	46
The 5 long vowels *A E I O U* and their basic spellings	87	50	70	44	60
The 5 vowels *ar er air or aw* and basic spellings	100	83	100	57	80
4 vowels *ow oy oo* (as in BOOT) and *oo* (as in BOOK)	100	83	100	31	70
Adding silent 'e' to make long vowels in words	38	83	30	25	38
How to look at words to see if spellings seem sensible	25	33	60	50	46
How to look at irregular spellings of words.	50	50	60	57	54
How to make sense of spellings that seem silly	75	50	100	57	70
What Old English spellings often look like	100	100	100	50	80
What French spellings often look like	88	100	60	57	70
What Greek spellings often look like	75	50	60	68	65
How to read and spell long words	63	66	90	57	68
What Latin beginnings and ends of words are like	63	83	80	50	65
How Latin roots can help show meaning of long words	63	83	100	44	68
Basic spelling system for the 19 English vowel sounds	88	100	90	31	68
The 100 most common 'sight' words, half of most text.	12	17	-	57	27
How to use what you know about sounds and words, and guess and check to work out the sense of what you read.	12	17	10	57	33
Re-reading books and songs that you like again and again makes your reading easier, faster and enjoyable.	75	66	20	19	38

† The adults and adolescents in this sample had difficulty in reading and/or spelling, The learners of English as a second language (ESL) were also adults. The children, aged 9-12 in normal classrooms, also included immigrants whose first language was not English.

The results show the value of a 30-minute video to assist unskilled readers and spellers to find out what they may not have known or may have misunderstood. There was no information about reading and spelling that all the viewers already knew. Adults and teenagers were shown

to have gaps and problems even at a very basic level, that were easily remedied. Some of them did not even know the alphabet in sequence or how to blend sounds. Primary school children appeared better informed about important aspects of how to read and spell than adults who still had difficulties after leaving school, but they also benefited from clarification and the further knowledge that they obtained from the video.

Qualitative evidence is plentiful. For example, one Literacy Center Coordinator reported:

> Around 30 students have so far taken it home in turn.... All the students without exception think it is wonderful and all think it is very helpful. Not one student came back and said they found anything wrong about it.... The Asian students without exception really loved it. All of the students really enjoyed it, and I am sure they got a lot of value out of it.... It would be excellent for migrants learning the language, and need very little alteration.

Two Centres have attempted unsuccessfully to obtain funding to upgrade the video as part of their own courses.

The video was also popular in local trialling at a municipal library, three bookshops and three video-libraries. One factory manager hired the video until all his thirty Asian workers had borrowed it for three nights each, apparently finding it helpful and appreciated it.

A teacher at a primary school in an industrial area used the video with small groups of immigrant socially-disadvantaged children in Years 3-5, mainly from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

> I am getting amazing results.... They are learning well because they feel in control of the situation. It makes them feel really good about learning. It's just so amazing that these kids really want to watch it, and the great thing about it is that they feel they are teaching themselves to read ... I tell them they don't have to watch the whole thing, but they always do. At the end, it says, 'Go and practice and read' and they do. They jostle each other to borrow the manuals to go with it. It's really helping them with their reading.

The teacher commented that Reading Recovery was only available for a few children, and was expensive, but the video could be used by all, and it cost so little. She enclosed the children's own enthusiastic comments.

The significance of individual differences in students' responses is perhaps most concisely illustrated by two identical twins aged fourteen discovered to be illiterate in secondary school: one advanced from a reading vocabulary of approximately 30 words to around year 4 reading level in two weeks after he understood the message of the video, while the other made little progress.

Conclusion

The video-project has proved itself sufficiently to warrant a more improved and technically upgraded version based on the experience of this pilot study. A rigorous assessment of the progress to skilled reading made with a technologically improved production would also be an inexpensive and practicable test of the conflicting theories about the value of the writing system

for readers, and of the strategies advocated to obtain meaning from print.

From the base of the present video content, many different versions are possible, with extension into interactive compact discs. A ferment of experimentation is needed, so that a few models of tested value can emerge, with a range of material for each major target audience. Multimedia today have the advantage that improved versions are easily produced. All ideas can be tested out, including the crucial question of style. There are many ways, some still undreamt of, in which this new facility can be exploited to short-cut learning processes and to open up new understanding.

A take-home half-hour computer-graphics video that gives an overview of the writing system and demonstrates how to learn to read can be an inexpensive aid to adult literacy. It can lead into interactive CD-ROM for further home and distance learning. There is sound theory and research to back its concept and content. The experimental English-language version already exists. This innovation deserves attention and evaluation for its international possibilities.

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