

## **Rainbow Reading: Sustaining and Building on Progress Made**

### **1993 Research**

In 1993, forty-three students spent on average 27 weeks on the Rainbow Reading Programme. On average they made gains of 2.23 years and up to four years in their reading level. Before and after data, collected twelve months apart, revealed that the reading skills of over half the students improved to the extent that they were able to read at levels equivalent to or higher than their chronological ages. After 27 weeks intervention the group as a whole was reading just .5 year below what is considered average for their chronological ages. This progress is highly significant taking into account students were initially, on average, reading 1.70 years (.5 – 3.5 years) below what is considered to be average for their age. Also, students were a year older at the end of the study and had had a six-week holiday break. Testing revealed that students on average did not regress over the holiday break but in actual fact continued to improve their reading levels, making average gains of .4 year between follow-up testing in December and final testing in February.

### **2001 Research**

In a later research study in 2001, the effectiveness of Rainbow Reading Programme was assessed in eight different schools. In this study 29 students made, on average, gains in their reading levels of 2.2 years in 18 weeks, along with corresponding gains in word recognition, spelling, writing and oral language. Two years later, in 2003, by way of follow-up, teachers were asked by questionnaire to provide information from school records on students' present attainments in reading. Unfortunately only eleven replies were received and these related to progress made by students in years 3 - 6 (8 – 11 year olds) at the time of the original research project and in years 5 – 8 (10 – 13 year olds), two years later. The replies included information on all the students who made slower progress during the research and a lower proportion of students who made average or better progress. On schools' own selected reading tests seven of the eleven students were reading at levels consistent with their ages and all of the rest were reported to be reading at levels such that they could cope in their classroom programmes. All had made further progress since the post-testing stage of the research.

### **Building on Gains**

Students in both research studies, and in thousands of other reported cases of successful school interventions, demonstrated an ability to maintain and build on gains made during time spent on the Rainbow Reading Programme. This trend is likely attributable to the fact that students on the Rainbow Reading Programme learn skills and strategies that become habitual and are not easily forgotten as are items of knowledge rote-learned in isolation and out of context.

## **Rainbow Reading and para-professionals/teacher aides/ parent help/volunteers**

- Progress of two years in reading level in 18 weeks, as reported in research, was achieved by students working predominantly with untrained teacher aides.
- There was no significant difference between the achievement of students working with trained teachers and those working with untrained teacher aides. However a trained teacher in every school was responsible for overseeing the programme and for formally assessing students' starting level and readiness for promotion to a new level.
- Teacher aides reported that the Rainbow Reading Programme is easy to implement because:
  - Detailed, easy to follow Teachers' Manual
  - Training video
  - Clear structure to programme
  - Students enjoy the programme so are generally well-behaved
  - Small groups are easy to manage
  - Students take control of their learning; making decisions and managing resources
- Teachers report that the Rainbow Reading Programme is ideal for Teacher aides to implement because:
  - Rainbow Reading is flexible so can be used:
    - by a small group or an individual in a class with teacher supervision and with or without regular teacher aide support.
    - By a small group or an individual working with teacher while teacher aide supervises rest of the class.
    - by a small group or individual withdrawn from the class to work with a teacher aide.
  - Rainbow Reading is a good practice programme which complements and supplements the classroom programme
  - Because minimal direct instruction is required teacher aides are not necessarily required to "teach" but rather to support, manage and encourage.
  - The programme is fully comprehensive in that all resources are provided; books, audio CDs, activity sheets.
  - Instructions for operating the programme and using activities are clear, detailed though concise and easy to follow.
  - Although practice is recommended to take place for half an hour daily; an ideal length of time for a volunteer, two or three times a week with a tutor is sufficient if independent practice takes place in between sessions.
  - Although desirable, it is not essential that the same volunteer works with the same student/s every session.

### Levelling of Books:

We have individually levelled books (with a suggested Reading Recovery level equivalent) in the White series (5 – 6 year reading level) and the Red series but not beyond, for several reasons.

Reading Recovery levels are really only supposed to be used for Reading Recovery. We levelled the White and Red series because some Reading Recovery teachers were using these books. They are unlikely to use books beyond these levels because students reading beyond Red are reading at the 7+ year reading level and are only 6 - 7 years of age in a Reading Recovery programme. Also, Reading Recovery levels don't apply beyond 25 so beyond our yellow series couldn't be levelled.

Levelling, for older students, is an inexact science as they bring so much to the reading task by way of background knowledge and interest in the subject that no readability formula can account for. Different students, supposedly reading at the same level will read the same book with varying degrees of ease because of their interest and/or knowledge in the topic.

The use of the audiotape tends to overcome any levelling anomalies as students simply have more or less practice with the audiotape.

Once teachers get to know the books and combine this with their knowledge of their students then they will be able to help students make good choices about which books to read first.

## Learning English with the Rainbow Reading Programme

Effective Approach *	<i>Rainbow Reading features:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• direct instruction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>orientation and conference to facilitate comprehension</i></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reading a variety of different text types</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>fiction and non-fiction</i></li> <li>• <i>many authors</i></li> <li>• <i>many different topics &amp; genre</i></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reading high interest books</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>topics of interest</i></li> <li>• <i>subjects they can relate to</i></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reading at an appropriate level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>graded text</i></li> <li>• <i>students practise at their instructional reading level</i></li> <li>• <i>individualised</i></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• repeated readings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>key component</i></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• listening to fluent models</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>audio CD featuring clear, accurate, rich, fluent but unrushed model of language</i></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• supported reading practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>unlimited, private access to audio CD</i></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• positive performance readings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>conference with teacher</i></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• responding orally and/or in writing to what they have read.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>conference</i></li> <li>• <i>activities</i></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• developing an awareness of fluency and an ability to monitor it (meta-fluency)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>fluency must be achieved before moving to a new book</i></li> <li>• <i>self-monitoring</i></li> <li>• <i>self-management</i></li> </ul>

Used together, these approaches create **a synergy** that makes the Rainbow Reading programme greater than the sum of its parts and, most importantly, it creates the conditions for students to experience success.

\* Riddell, D (2001) Teaching English as a Foreign/Second Language. London: McGraw Hill