

Section 6, Chapter 54:

Reading Improvement Through SITDOWN

Simultaneous Individualized Teacher Directed with students correcting their OWN

BACKGROUND:



Only one aspect of the SITDOWN concept could be said to be unique, and that is the combination. Each ingredient has been used either separately or in different combinations, all quite successfully. The combination came about as a direct result of my having to teach reading in classrooms in which the reading level of the students varied from 1.0 to 11.0. Like many others before me, I discovered that students with severe reading problems do their best to hide the fact from everyone, including themselves, but... when it comes to admitting spelling problems, these students are no different than the rest of us. Almost all of us freely admit to being poor spellers. It seems to be part of our cultural and linguistic heritage. I have even heard school superintendents and college professors publicly (if not proudly) admit to being "lousy" spellers. So, because there appears to be no stigma attached to being a poor speller as there is to being a poor reader, I began to attack students' reading problems through the back door of spelling. To help develop the self-confidence of my students who were basically illiterate and to give some form of challenge to the better readers, I began each hour giving a five minute spelling test, vastly different from normal spellings tests. First of all, the students were NOT given a list to study in advance. REASON: If one of my poor students missed one of the "easy" words he had "studied" he would learn the wrong thing: that he was dumb. If a student misses something that was never assigned, it's to be expected. But if a student gets a word right that he has NOT studied, then he's smart! Secondly, the words to be learned (not studied) followed specific word family patterns. REASONS: To allow students to discover for themselves the patterns within words belonging to the same families, to make it easy for students to learn from previous mistakes, and to incorporate vocabulary that is not demeaning, but even challenging. For example, even in the very simple -at family, there is the word scat and scattling which has a special meaning to jazz enthusiasts, or tatting which means a special way of making lace. Using this technique, I was able in a class composed of twenty-five juvenile delinquents with reading levels initially ranging from 1.0 to 8.0 to get every single student to correctly spell (and be able to read) the word installment. The Secret? SEQUENCING & STUDENT SELF-CORRECTION. But I don't have to go over that technique. That's on page 275. To work on the irregular words and the spelling demons I would dictate sentences. Just like the family words, I followed most of the basic techniques of SITDOWN. SITDOWN. Simultaneous — All the students together. Individualized Teacher- Directed with Students correcting their OWN mistakes immediately after making them and before going on to the next, so that learning and applying the learning can take place. Using this technique, I was able to get all of my students to correctly spell the words *your* and *you're* automatically in their own writing almost 100% of the time. To do this, I dictated two sentences (and two sentences only) each day for about a month which had the "YORZ" in them. To AVOID the APPEARANCE of a DAILY DRILL on the "yorz" mini-lessons on specific words were

slipped in. For example: For three days, the emphasis might be on: quit, quite, and quiet. On one day the two sentences might be: 1. If you're quiet, we might quit quite soon.

2. Does your mother know that you're planning to quit your job?

On another day, the two sentences might be:

1. Does your principal know what courses you're planning to take?
2. If you're going to your principal's office, don't tell him that he doesn't have any principles.

This technique worked well, except for those few students who could hardly spell their own name. A sentence like either of the #2's above was far too long. It was in meeting this challenge that I really put the I in **SITDOWN**

INDIVIDUALIZING in conjunction with the Simultaneous and the Teacher Directed with students correcting their OWN. I devised three levels of difficulty for the same sentence, such as the following:

You are doing quite nicely, but I wish you would quit being so quiet.

I first typed out the correctly spelled sentences as above. Then, I used Liquid Paper to white-out just what I wanted the slowest of the students to concentrate their energies on.

Their sentence would look like:

_ou are doing qu__ nicely, but I wish _ou would qu__ being so qu__ .

The "average" for the class would have the same sentence, except that I would have more of it whited out.

_____ doing _____ nicely, but I wish _____ being so _____.

For the "faster" students, I would have the same sentence. But they would have to write the entire sentence with no help.

By reading the exercise WITH all the students Simultaneously but with separate "versions" of the same sentence, the "slower" students were able to pick up a great many reading skills through what amounts to being a variation on "Neurological Impress," while ostensibly working on improving their spelling skills. You might note, that this SITDOWN technique can be used with almost any commercial materials. All you need is lots of white out and access to a copying machine.

HELP WANTED

We have not encountered any systematic studies on the effect on teaching spelling and/or reading through the use of SITDOWN.

SITDOWN: **S**imultaneous **I**ndividualized **T**eacher-**D**irected with students correcting their **O**WN.

We would appreciate it if some of our AVKO members (or university researchers) would give it a try and send us their results.