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Fostering the Self-esteem of Children with Reading Difficulties: A Christian Approach

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Introduction

Seventh-day Adventist educators believe that the purpose of true education is to "restore in man the image of his Maker" (White, 1903, p.15) by promoting "the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers" (White, 1903, p.13). They believe also that those students in whom this harmonious development of body, mind, and soul has been realised will emerge from our educational institutions as individuals who are "strong to think and to act,...who are masters and not slaves of circumstances,...(and) who possess breadth of mind, clearness of thought, and the courage of their convictions" (White, 1903, p.18). In essence, these individuals experience positive feelings of self-worth and a healthy self-respect which translates into loving service to God and man (White, 1903, p.57).

However, church school teachers are also acutely aware that the harmonious development of all the powers may be extremely difficult for many children. This paper will focus on the estimated 15-33% of school-age children (Prior, Sanson, Smart, & Oberklaid, 1995; Shapiro, 1996) for whom the development of the mental powers, ie, the ability and the motivation to think, plan and act for themselves, may be seriously compromised by failure at the critical task of learning to read. In particular this paper will focus on poor readers in Years 5 and 6, which are the final two years of primary (elementary) schooling in NSW, Australia.

Research findings indicating that children who experience difficulties in learning to read are likely to experience a negative cycle of low self-esteem, reduced motivation and less persistence at academic tasks, leading to further failure experiences (eg, Carr, Borkowski, & Maxwell, 1991; Fulk & Montgomery-Grymes, 1994; Gurney, 1988; Stanovich, 1986), come as no surprise to most educators. What may be more problematic for Christian teachers is how best to help these students reverse the downward academic and motivational cycle, especially in view of the secular humanistic basis of much current educational practice (Berlach, 1998).

This paper seeks to promote a Christian approach to nurturing the self-esteem and improving the academic performance of children with reading difficulties. First, research findings concerning some of the causes and consequences of reading failure will be discussed in more detail. The next section of the paper will briefly discuss some of the implications of the secular humanist approach to improving student performance through the enhancement of self-esteem, before outlining principles for nurturing self-esteem and improving academic performance which are consistent with a Christian worldview. This will be followed by a brief description of a research project, based on Christian principles, which was designed to improve the reading performance of poor readers at upper primary level.

Causes and Consequences of Reading Difficulty

Although there may be many reasons why children have difficulty learning to read (eg, specific learning disability, below average intelligence, disadvantaged home backgrounds, undetected sensory disability, different linguistic backgrounds, etc), research indicates that the vast majority of poor readers share a common source to their reading problem, that of failure to develop accurate and efficient (ie, automatic) word recognition skills (Stanovich, 1986). Moreover, a large and growing body of research evidence suggests phonemic awareness deficits, ie, lack of awareness of the phonemes or sounds within speech, to be the root cause of the problem for most poor readers (Munro & Munro, 1993; Stanovich, 1986). Lack of phonemic awareness slows the initial acquisition of spelling-to-sound correspondence skills necessary for efficient reading in an alphabetic language (Munro & Munro, 1993; Spear-Swerling & Sternberg, 1994).

Longitudinal studies suggest that children who fail to develop efficient word recognition skills in first grade, display ever increasing deficits in both accuracy and speed of word recognition (eg, Juel, 1988, Prior et al., 1995; Snowling, Goulandris, & Defty, 1996). As they advance through the primary grades and into high school, particular problems with decoding long, polysyllabic words may be exhibited. In addition they are likely to display an inability to generalise the rules for pronouncing long words, and a tendency to rely on only one strategy such as "sounding-out" by letter-sound correspondence or to make guesses based on only a few letters. Their lack of automatic word identification skills may also lead to a greater but far less efficient reliance on context cues than that of good readers (Prior et al., 1995; Stanovich, 1986, 1992).

While there may be one common cause of reading difficulty, that of failure to develop a high degree of word recognition efficiency, there may be many consequences which will be discussed below.

1. *Comprehension processes may be placed at risk, thus placing overall academic achievement at risk.* It has been suggested that poor decoding skills can reduce comprehension in a number of ways. First, poor readers devote so much attention to the decoding task that there are not enough cognitive resources left to allocate to construction of meaning (Ackerman, Spiker, & Bailey, 1989; Näslund & Samuels, 1992; Stanovich, 1986). Second, less-skilled readers often find themselves reading grade-level materials that are too difficult for them, thus degrading the contextual clues which might otherwise facilitate comprehension of text (Juel, 1988; Stanovich, 1992). Third, children who fail to develop good word recognition skills in the early grades begin to dislike reading and hence avoid reading whenever possible. This lack of practice could delay the development of vocabulary, syntactic knowledge, and general knowledge that are fostered by good reading. This in turn further inhibits growth in reading and so perpetuates the failure cycle (Juel, 1988; Stanovich, 1986).

2. *The child's motivation to take control of his/her own learning may be placed at risk.* Affective and motivational problems usually accompany difficulties with learning to read, as indicated earlier. Fear, doubt, shame or anger resulting from repeated failure experiences can lead to attitudes of "learned helplessness" whereby students attribute their failures to factors beyond their personal control, eg, lack of ability, teacher bias or luck. These students do not see themselves capable of success, believing that they will fail regardless of whether or not effort is

expended. Consequently, they give up trying and so perpetuate the failure cycle (Borkowski, Carr, Relinger, & Pressley, 1990; Gurney, 1988; Paris & Winograd, 1990; Spear-Swerling & Sternberg, 1994).

3.   *The development of the child's physical/moral powers may be placed at risk.* Research studies indicate a correlation between low literacy levels and at-risk behaviours such as substance abuse and criminal activities. The low levels of self-esteem and feelings of worthlessness engendered by academic failure, may lead students to seek to fill the void in their lives through undesirable behaviours, both in and out of school (Prior et al, 1995).

4.   *The child's spiritual development may be placed at risk.* Of particular concern to Adventist teachers is the possibility that negative attitudes to reading may cause children to avoid reading the Scriptures and character-building stories. This may not only affect their spiritual development but may also deprive them of the powerful tool for developing breadth of mind and clarity of thought inherent within Bible study itself (White, 1903, p.124).

Improving the Performance of Children with Reading Difficulties

Although the consequences of reading failure at the word recognition, comprehension, and motivational levels suggest a poor prognosis for future academic progress, especially after a number of years of failure (Prior et al. 1995), there is much in current research which suggests positive implications for educational practice. One such avenue of research has focused on the relationship between self-esteem enhancement and improvements in academic performance (eg, Gurney, 1988; Kohn, 1994). While it seems obvious that programs to improve the academic performance of poor readers should include attention to self-esteem building, the nature of those programs will depend largely on whether one holds a secular humanist or a Christian worldview. The educational implications of these two worldviews will be discussed below.

Enhancing Self-esteem: The Secular Humanist Approach

Typically, self-esteem is defined in terms of how we evaluate ourselves and our characteristics or, to be more specific, the personal judgement of worthiness that each of us places on our own abilities and behaviours (Berlach, 1998; Gurney, 1988). Related terms include self-concept, self-worth, self-regard, self-respect, and self-image. The secular humanist approach to improving self-esteem is said to be based on three over-arching principles, namely, (i) existentialism, or the notion of direct experience as the authoritative teacher; (ii) self-sufficiency, or the idea of people caring and being responsible for themselves, and (iii) empathy, or the notion of helping others meet their needs (Berlach, 1998). Application of these principles in the academic domain has led to the development of a plethora of self-esteem enhancement schemes based on the notion that if at-risk children are helped to "feel good about themselves" there will be corresponding improvements in both their academic performance and their social behaviour (Berlach, 1998, Katz, 1993; Kohn, 1994). Typically, in these programs children's attention is focussed primarily on themselves, with activities based on the notion of "I'm special", "I'm important", "Here's how I feel about things", etc (Katz, 1993; Kohn, 1994).

While it is true that the research literature provides clear support for a persistent and significant relationship between self-esteem and academic

achievement (Chapman & Tunmer, 1995; Gurney, 1988), it has also been found that efforts to improve self-esteem which are limited solely to the humanistic "feel good" construct, have little lasting effect on either academic achievement or social behaviour (Katz, 1993; Kohn, 1994). In fact, secular writers such as Katz (1993) and Kohn (1994) have contended that a continued preoccupation with self-esteem simply facilitates aggrandisement and narcissism. Berlach (1998), a Christian writer, goes further in emphasising that a humanistic focus on "the self bringing about changes in the self" may not only be unhelpful, "but may in fact be emotionally injurious to the individuals they seek to help" (p. 70). As Katz (1993) observed, merely telling children (or asking them to repeat) that they are worthwhile without providing strategies to address the underlying problems which lead to low self-esteem in the first place, may only serve to reinforce and exacerbate feelings of negativity and incompetence.

Nurturing Self-esteem: A Christian Approach

Not surprisingly, in view of the humanistic basis of the self-esteem construct, Ellen White condemns self-esteem, which she equates with pride, selfishness and self-sufficiency (eg, White, 1903, p.109; White, 1923, p.467).

However, while Ellen White condemns an emphasis on self-esteem, she does advocate that individuals should have a "proper self-respect" and a "conscious dignity of character, in which pride and self-importance have no part" (White, 1977, p.260). She also recognises that many individuals, particularly the poor and disadvantaged, lack self-respect and need special nurture and training if it is to be regained (White, 1977, pp.258,9). In this context, Ellen White outlines a number of principles for increasing self-respect, several of which are relevant to academically at-risk children, and will be discussed below. It will be noted that each of these principles, focuses not on the self, but rather on the internal resources, values and skills necessary for the development of personal competence.

1.   **Help children develop abilities and skills so that they can take control of their own learning - (Metacognition).** Ellen White (1977, p. 258,259) suggests that the self-respect of the poor and disadvantaged could be improved if they are provided with the skills and the means to become self-supporting through useful employment. In current educational terms this can be equated to a metacognitive instruction with its emphasis on self-control of one's own learning processes. A metacognitive instructional approach to learning aims to help students develop an awareness of the skills, strategies, and resources needed to perform a task effectively; along with the ability to use self-regulatory mechanisms, such as planning, monitoring, evaluating and modifying (Wong, 1991). Metacognitive instruction thus focuses on students' thoughtful and selective use of cognitive strategies to promote academic learning (Winograd & Paris, 1988-1989). For students with reading difficulties a metacognitive approach aims to provide children with awareness and regulation of appropriate strategies for both identifying unfamiliar words and for comprehending written text.

2.   **Help Children Attribute Their Success and Failure to Factors Within Their Control - (Attribution Retraining).** Ellen White (1903) reminds us that "Every youth should be taught the necessity of the power of application. Upon this, far more than upon genius or talent, does success depend" (p.232). As indicated earlier, many children who have experienced years of academic failure, have learned to protect their sense of self-worth by refusing to attempt any task at which

they feel they may fail. Even if taught how, when, where and why to use effective strategies, they may not activate them because of negative perceptions about self-efficacy, or an attitude of learned helplessness. As a consequence, metacognitive instruction could be expanded and refined to include self-appraisal and self-management of affective as well as cognitive components of learning if students are to become thoughtful and independent readers (Borkowski et al, 1990; Paris & Winograd, 1990). In other words, metacognitive techniques should pay attention to both "skill and will" (Paris & Winograd, 1990) by combining specific strategy instruction with attributional training aimed at encouraging students to attribute their learning to factors within their personal control, such as effort and effective use of strategies (Borkowski et al., 1990; Fulk & Montgomery-Grymes, 1994).

3.   **Become personally involved in the learning of the children – (Scaffolded Instruction).** Ellen White (1903, p. 84) reminds us that Christ's teaching methods for developing the "infinite possibilities" within each human involved "personal association and communion". In modern educational thought this may be equated with an emphasis on the crucial role of "shared knowledge" in helping children develop the metacognitive insights necessary for conscious control of both "skill and will" (eg, Paris & Winograd, 1990). Shared knowledge is based on Vygotsky's (1978) theory of socially-mediated learning. This theory suggests that the emergence and development of self-regulatory activities has its roots in social interaction with others, and only gradually comes under the conscious control of the child. Thus the focus of intervention should not only be on task and performance factors but also on the personal involvement and impact of the teacher. Central to this socially interactive approach is the notion of "scaffolded instruction", ie, a process whereby the expert adult provides novices with enough support and guidance to achieve goals that are beyond their personal skill level. This support is provided until they can match the performance of the expert adult (Winn, 1994).

4.   **Encourage cooperation in the classroom – (Cooperative Learning).** The fourth factor which will be considered is that of encouraging cooperation and community within the classroom. Ellen White(1903) advocates, "Let the older assist the younger, the strong the weak; and, so far as possible, let each be called to do something in which he excels. This will encourage self-respect and a desire to be useful" (p 286). A great deal of modern educational research supports the value of cooperative learning techniques for improving both student achievement and motivation (eg, Nichols, 1996).

A review of the research literature reveals that the principles outlined above have been incorporated into a considerable number of metacognitive training programs designed to improve the comprehension skills of children with reading difficulty (eg Bruce & Chan, 1991; Palincsar, 1987). However, there has been very little parallel research into metacognitive approaches to teaching word identification skills to children with reading problems (Spedding & Chan, 1994), and as indicated above the vast majority of poor readers have problems in both comprehension and decoding. For this reason, the research project described in the next section of the paper (Bruce, 1998), aimed to use metacognitive techniques for improving both the word identification and the comprehension skills of upper primary poor readers. The project was based on a cooperative learning program known as reciprocal teaching, which will be described in more detail below.

What is Reciprocal Teaching?

Reciprocal teaching refers to an instructional method where an adult teacher and a group of students take turns in leading a dialogue aimed at revealing the meaning of text. The dialogue is structured by the use of four strategies which represent the kind of text engagement experienced by successful readers:

1.   *Predicting* - finding clues in the structure and content of the story which suggest what might happen next.

2.   *Clarifying* - discerning where there has been a breakdown in comprehension and taking the necessary action to restore the meaning (eg, reading ahead, rereading, asking for help).

3.   *Question Generating* - formulating questions pertaining to the information given in the text.

4.   *Summarising* - identifying and paraphrasing the main ideas in the text.

Each of these strategies has been selected as a means of aiding students in constructing meaning from text as well as a means of monitoring their reading to ensure that they are in fact understanding what they read. However, the four strategies do not constitute reciprocal teaching within themselves (Palincsar, 1987). Rather, reciprocal teaching refers to the collaborative effort between teachers and students as they talk to one another about the meaning of text, taking turns leading the dialogue. The dialogue acts as a kind of scaffold - a temporary and adjustable support to instruction, which allows the teacher to adjust instruction to students' needs and to gradually withdraw support as the student acquires and refines the strategies being learnt (Palincsar & Brown, 1989).

In reciprocal teaching the teacher initially models and explains how to use the four strategies, together with providing information about their importance and the context in which they are useful. After the initial days of instruction, students are asked to take turns being teacher by leading the text dialogue for one segment at a time, while the teacher provides feedback and coaching as necessary. The dialogue acts as a scaffold - a temporary and adjustable support to instruction, allowing the teacher to adjust instruction to the students' individual needs and to gradually withdraw support as the students acquire and refine the strategies being learned (Palincsar, 1987; Palincsar & Brown, 1989).

Since the original Palincsar and Brown (1984) experimental studies, a great deal of research evidence has confirmed the effectiveness of reciprocal teaching techniques for improving reading comprehension scores for a wide range of age levels and instructional settings (Bruce & Chan, 1991, Carter, 1997; Kligner & Vaughn, 1996; Rosenshine & Meister, 1994). Moreover reciprocal teaching has proved highly motivating for many low-achieving students who had previously participated reluctantly, or even actively resisted participating, in teacher-dominated, worksheet-based forms of remedial instruction. In particular, it has been observed that these students enjoy the opportunity to be teacher during the reciprocal teaching dialogue and take their role seriously (Bruce & Chan, 1991; Coley, DePinto, Craig, & Gardner, 1993; Palincsar, 1987; Speece, MacDonald, Kilsheimer, & Krist, 1997). This is consistent with Ellen White's comments, noted earlier, that

when children are asked to work cooperatively in helping and supporting each other's learning, self-respect and a desire to be useful will be encouraged.

However, as noted above, one criticism of the original reciprocal teaching program is that it is designed for students who are adequate decoders but poor comprehenders (Palincsar & Brown, 1984), and thus may not be entirely effective for the many poor readers (described above) who are deficient in both word identification and comprehension skills (Rosenshine & Meister, 1994). It was decided therefore to develop and research the effectiveness of an instructional program which would use the reciprocal teaching format to teach metacognitive word identification strategies, prior to instruction in reciprocal teaching of comprehension skills. When reciprocal teaching of comprehension procedures was introduced the metacognitive word identification strategies were included as part of the clarification process. The resulting metacognitive instructional program was entitled the "Clever Kid's Reading Program". A description of the program, and the major findings of the research will be discussed below. (See Appendix A for a more detailed description of the program).

The Clever Kid's Reading Program

The Clever Kid's Reading Program trained children in the flexible and strategic use of three word identification strategies (or Clever Kids' Cues) commonly used by competent readers: (i) *Consider the Context* (semantic and syntactic cues), (ii) *Compare with known words or word parts* (phonemic and orthographic cues), and (iii) *Carve up the word parts* (structural and morphological cues). To help students monitor and control their use of those strategies (cues), children were taught to use the Clever Kids' Motto: (i) *Look for the cues*, (2) *Be flexible*, and (iii) *Ask: Does it make sense*?

Instructional materials consisted of a total of 30 short passages (200-400 words in length) written at the Year 4 to Year 5 readability level, and each containing factual material in narrative or descriptive form. Each of the passages was structured to target a particular word identification strategy. For example, some passages contained a number of words with the 'tion' spelling pattern, so that students had to make use of the *Compare with known word* parts strategy. Others contained a number of multisyllabic words which required use of the *Carve up the word parts* strategy. Each of the passages was accompanied by a short answer comprehension text consisting of eight questions. The questions were designed to probe both factual and inferential comprehension of text. Pupil workbooks containing the passages and comprehension questions as well as a list of the targeted words for each passage, along with a teacher's guide book, were developed in conjunction with the third study.

Instruction took place in small groups of 4 to 8 children with three 30-minute sessions per week. In general three days (ie, three 30 minute sessions) were spent on each passage. During the first two days the students were engaged in a number of activities designed to incorporate the targeted words into their automatic sight vocabulary and to build up confidence in their own ability to identify unfamiliar words. First, children were asked to read the title and predict what the passage might be about, thus cueing them into possible vocabulary to look for in the text. Next, children were encouraged to take turns to read orally one paragraph at a time. Every time an unfamiliar word was encountered, the group was encouraged to work

collaboratively in using the Clever Kids' Motto and Cues to identify the word, while the teacher (or teacher's aide) provided guided feedback and coaching as necessary. After this the children played flashcard games with the targeted words and then practiced reading the passage either individually or in pairs, in preparation for a "one-minute-reading test" in which they endeavoured to see how many words they could read fluently in the given time. On the third day the reciprocal teaching procedures of question generating and summarising were used to foster comprehension of the text, and children were given the short answer comprehension test.

Results of both the one-minute reading test, and the comprehension test were graphed and shared with the children each week, thus providing further motivation as they were able to see the improvements which resulted from their efforts and use of the strategies.

Every opportunity was taken to provide attributional training, so as to encourage students to attribute their success (or lack of it), to factors within their control, such as effort and efficient (or inefficient) use of strategies. For example, when students successfully used a strategy for identifying an unfamiliar word, they were encouraged to verbalise which strategy they had used, eg, "I carved up the word parts – pro-tect-ed." Also when students made gains (or maintained their scores) on the weekly tests, they were encouraged to verbalise the fact that they had succeeded because they tried hard and used the Clever Kid's Reading Strategies. If their scores dropped, the reasons were examined, eg, lack of effort or inefficient use of strategies.

As the students became more proficient with the word identification strategies, less time was devoted to the oral reading activities, and more time to the reciprocal teaching of comprehension skills. After 8-10 weeks of instruction, the majority of the time was spent on reciprocal teaching of comprehension strategies with the word identification strategies being incorporated into the clarifying phase of the reciprocal teaching dialogue.

Major Findings of the Research

An ongoing series of three major studies was conducted, designed to examine the effectiveness of the proposed program and to examine efficient ways for implementing the program in the regular classroom. A total of 176 poor readers was involved (32 in Study One, 70 in Study Two and 74 in Study Three). Study One took place over a 28 week period, while Studies Two and Three lasted for 33 weeks each. During each study experimental subjects received metacognitive instruction in both word identification and comprehension strategies as described above. Subjects in the control conditions received either reciprocal teaching of comprehension combined with traditional methods for identifying unfamiliar words (ie, merely listing difficult words on the board and discussing their meaning), or normal classroom word study and comprehension activities (in some cases combined with remedial phonics-based instruction). In the first study the experimenter was responsible for all instruction. In the second study the experimenter set up the program and then gradually ceded reponsibility for its implementation to the class teachers, and in the third study school-based personnel were responsible for conducting the program from the beginning. Measures of improvements in word identification and comprehension, attributions of success and

failure and self-perceptions of academic ability (among others) were taken on several occasions during each study.

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the analyses of these measures.

1.   Reciprocal teaching procedures using only traditional methods of word identification as originally developed by Palincsar and Brown (1984), can produce significant gains, not only in comprehension scores but also in word recognition of scores of students who are poor readers. This was an interesting finding in view of the fact that there have been questions about the efficacy of reciprocal teaching of comprehension for students who are inadequate decoders (Rosenshine & Meister, 1994). On average the word recognition reading age of control students improved by about 9 months during each of the studies. It may be that the indirect methods of word study provided in reciprocal teaching procedures are sufficient for promoting significant improvements in word identification skills which in turn enables more cognitive resources to be devoted to construction of meaning (Näslund & Samuels, 1992).

2.   However, a combination of metacognitive word identification strategies and reciprocal teaching of comprehension was clearly more effective than reciprocal teaching of comprehension with traditional methods of word identification or normal classroom instruction for improving both word identification and comprehension scores. The word recognition reading age of of experimental subjects improved by an average of 17 months during each of the studies. In addition, comprehension scores improved at a significantly greater rate for experimental subjects than for control subjects. Once again a cyclic effect may be involved, with significantly greater improvements in word identification skills resulting from metacognitive strategy instruction, allowing increased attention to be directed to comprehension (Näslund & Samuels, 1992; Spear-Swerling & Sternberg, 1994; Stanovich, 1986, 1992).

3.   Subjects who received metacognitive training in both word identification and comprehension strategies tended to attribute success and failure to factors under their control, such as effort and efficient use of strategies, and tended to report improvements in their self-perceptions of academic ability. Subjects receiving only comprehension training or regular classroom-based activities were less likely to do either. The greater measures of success experienced by subjects receiving both word identification and comprehension training may account for these more positive outcomes. This is also consistent with Ellen White's (1977) suggestion that self-respect will be increased if individuals are provided with the skills and resources necessary for the development of personal competence.

4.   A classroom-based model of implementation appears to be more successful when teachers have responsibility for its implementation from the beginning (Study Three), rather than taking over responsibility after the program has been set up by the experimenter (Study Two). This may have been because teachers who had entire responsibility felt a greater *ownership* of the program, leading to more faithful implementation of each of its components.

5.   It was found that the structured format of the program allowed it to be carried out equally effectively by the classroom teacher, a teacher's aide, or a parent volunteer.

6.   Pupil interest in the metacognitive word identification strategy instruction appeared to be best maintained when it was combined with some reciprocal teaching from the beginning of instruction. This finding grew out of observations in Studies One and Two that many students lost interest after several weeks of the metacognitive word identification activities, and it was not until reciprocal teaching of comprehension was introduced in the second phase of the studies that their interest was reactivated. When reciprocal teaching of comprehension skills in a modified form was introduced in the first teaching phase of Study Three, along with instruction in metacognitive word identification strategies, interest appeared to be sustained throughout the intervention. This is consistent with reported evidence of the highly motivational nature of reciprocal teaching procedures, where students cooperate to enhance each other's learning.

Some Final Considerations

For the church school teacher seeking to improve the performance of at-risk readers, the application of each of the four principles for nurturing self-esteem described above (ie, metacognitive instruction, attribution training, scaffolded instruction and cooperative learning) can have powerful and positive effects. However, there is one further principle advocated by Ellen White, which in many ways is foundational to all the others. This principle is to:

5.   Help children understand that they are inherently worthwhile and valuable because of Christ's infinite sacrifice for them – (An understanding of the grace of God). As Ellen White (1956, p. 15) explains "The price paid for our redemption, the infinite sacrifice of our heavenly Father in giving His son to die for us, should give us exalted conceptions of what we may become through Christ....What a value this places on man!" When children (and older persons) understand that they are all equally valuable in God's sight, it removes the burden of seeking to obtain value and worth by comparing one's achievement (or lack of it) with that of another, or by seeking to find some way (whether socially acceptable or not) of proving that one is worthwhile, which is a legacy of a humanistic view of self-esteem (Berlach, 1998).

The church school teacher has many opportunities not readily available to her public school counterpart for developing this principle. Worship and Bible lessons which emphasise the grace of God are an ideal place to begin. Bulletin boards depicting the love and grace of God can serve as a constant visual reminder for the children. An emphasis on the fact that our response to God's great love can take many different forms depending on our varying talents, can also be of assistance. While some may be able to read extremely well others may have artistic talents which can be used in His service, or they may have the gift of bringing joy and encouragement to others. Other excellent ideas may be found in an article by Rice (1999) entitled 'Teaching God's Grace in Your Classroom'.

Sometimes otherwise humanistic self-esteem enhancement activities can be adapted to have a Christian emphasis. One which I have personally found very helpful in a primary school classroom involves asking students who is the most important person in the world and then getting them to individually look into a small mirror (a humanistic activity). Next I ask students to discuss what makes them so important, and then tell them that they will find the answer when they look at the mirror again. In the meantime I have secretly attached a cut-out picture of Jesus to

the mirror, thus providing a powerful focus for a discussion of the real source of the value and worth of each student.

In conclusion, the five principles for nurturing self-esteem which have been described in this essay can provide a very effective means for integrating the faith and learning of children with reading difficulties. Not only is there likely to be an improvement in motivation and performance, but it is also more likely that there will be a wholistic development of the physical, mental and spiritual powers.

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Appendix A

Instructions Contained in the Teacher's Guide Book for the Clever Kid's Reading Program

Using the Clever Kid's Cues and Motto to Teach Word Identification Strategies

1.   Revise Clever Kid's Motto and Cues with children and make sure they understand what each part means, and why it is important to use the cues when working out words.

2.   Draw attention to the heading and illustration for each story and predict what the story might be about. This can help cue them into words to look for in the story.

3.   Model the use of the targeted cue/s as you read the story orally. In the initial days you should read all or most of the story. As pupils become more confident they can take turns at reading a paragraph each during their turn at being teacher.

4.   When pupils read a difficult word correctly, ask them to verbalise which of the cues they used to work it out. For example, "I noticed that you paused for a while as you worked out the word 'threaded'. Tell me what you did to work it out." The answer might be, "I read the rest of the sentence and then I knew what it was" (context); or "First I tried it with an 'ee' sound like in dream, but that didn't make sense, and then I tried it with an 'e' sound like in dead, and that did make sense

(*compare with known words; be flexible*); or "I carved it up - thread/ed" (*carve up the word parts*).   .

5.   Call attention to the word building pattern targeted in the story, eg, 'au' words in Megan's Blindness, and ask children to circle all the words in the passage with that particular spelling pattern.

6.   Build up a wall chart of other words with that particular spelling pattern. (This could sometimes be a whole class activity, eg '-tion' words for Story 2 or 'Wicked Mr W' words for Story 3).

7.   If a pupil who is reading orally cannot work out a difficult word, ask the other pupils in the group to suggest which cue they would use, or suggest one yourself. Discourage pupils from just telling each other the word.

8.   Pupils take turns at reading a paragraph each to a partner. (You may be able to use selected normally-achieving readers as the partner for this activity. The partner should always encourage the use of the Clever Kid's Motto and Cues for working out difficult words).

9.   Play flashcard games and/or practise reading the word lists on the back of the question sheet for each story. (I have found in the past that children particularly enjoy playing 'stepping stones' with the flashcards. Lay out 6-8 flashcards on the floor and then time children with a stopwatch as they step over the cards and say the words. Then they have a second go to try and beat their own time).

10.   Do a 'one-minute reading test'. Pupils read to the teacher or to a partner for one minute, then count and graph (in the back of their reading books) the number of words read correctly. (You may be able to use selected normally-achieving readers as the partner for this activity).

Note: These activities do not necessarily need to be carried out in the order listed above, and not all the activities need to be used for each passage. Get to know what suits your class best.

11.   Use reciprocal teaching procedures for questioning and summarising in each paragraph. (Initially the teacher models the procedures but later the children take turns at being *the teacher*).

12.   Do the comprehension test. Mark and graph the results. Give stickers to those who get six or more correct.

Note: It doesn't particularly matter if you don't always get to the comprehension step in the initial stages. In phase two of the intervention, when the children have become more proficient at word identification, we will spend a lot more time on comprehension.

13.   Get children to verbalise the reasons for their successes, eg, "I was able to read that long word correctly because I used the *Carve up the word parts* cue", or, "I did well in the comprehension test because I tried hard and I used the reciprocal teaching strategies".

14.   Remind children to use the Clever Kid's Motto and Cues and the Reciprocal Teaching of comprehension strategies whenever they are doing silent reading in school, in the library, at home, etc.

Using Reciprocal Teaching Procedures plus the Clever Kid's Cues and Motto to Improve Comprehension

1.   Always begin a new passage by having students *predict*, based upon the title and/or any illustrations, sub-headings, etc, what they expect the text might be about or what they might like to learn from the text. Encourage the group to share information they already know about the topic. Refer to their predictions as you proceed through the passage, interweaving what they have suggested with what the text offers.

2.   The teacher assigns a segment of text to be read (usually only one paragraph in the initial stages) and either indicates that it is his/her turn to be the teacher or assigns a student to be *teacher*.

3.   Children read the paragraph silently and underline key words, which they can use later for framing questions and summaries. If desired, the assigned *teacher* (or other selected pupils) may also read the paragraph orally, either before or after the silent reading.

4.   In the initial stages you may wish to discuss the key words that were selected. This should not be so necessary later on, as children get the idea of what to look for with key words.

5.   The assigned *teacher* (with your help if necessary) discusses and *clarifies* any difficulties, such as unknown words, metaphoric or idiomatic expressions (eg, "Look sharp now"), or unclear referents (eg, you, it, he, etc). For example, students can use the *Clever Kid's Motto* and *Cues* to identify unknown words. They can also try and discover the meaning of an unknown word by reading the sentences before and after it. Sometimes "or" signals the meaning of an unfamiliar word. If a phrase or a sentence is not clear they may try rereading it to see whether they left out a word or misread a word. If, after rereading something is still not clear, they should be instructed to ask for assistance. Note that not every paragraph contains something that needs clarifying, and that clarifying can take place at any stage during the dialogue. For example, sometimes when a child attempts to ask a question it becomes obvious that he or she has misunderstood something and that clarification will need to take place.

Initially many children do not like to admit that there is something they don't understand, and you may need to point out that you have observed something that is unclear or confusing. Also, sometimes students are more responsive if they are asked to point out something which could be unclear to a younger student.

6.   The assigned *teacher* asks *teacher-like questions* concerning important information in the text. The question should be clear and stand by itself. Fill-in-the-blanks questions should be discouraged unless that is all that students can do initially. Tell students to select important information from the text and use the words "who," "where," "when," "why", "what", and "how" to make up questions.

The assigned *teacher* then calls on somebody to answer the question, indicates whether he or she is satisfied with the answer, and perhaps prompts for more information. There may be further discussion and dialogue at this stage as other children challenge the answer, provide a different answer, or want to ask a related question.

If the student *teacher* is having trouble framing a question, the adult teacher should provide whatever support is necessary, eg, provide the question word to start the question, identify the topic that might be appropriate, or perhaps ask them to summarise first.

7.   The assigned teacher *summarises* the gist of the paragraph in his or her own words. You may wish students to just tell you the "main idea", eg, "This paragraph is mainly about what dolphins eat", or to add some supporting details as well, eg, "This paragraph tells us that dolphins eat small sea creatures." Further dialogue can take place at this stage as the *teacher* and other children attempt to refine the summary.

Encourage students to attempt their summaries without looking in the passage. This is particularly helpful if you have a student who summarises by reading sentences from the paragraph or reiterating every point in the paragraph.

Remind the students of rules they can use to generate summaries: look for topic sentences, make up topic sentences if one is not available, name lists, delete what is unimportant or redundant.

Note: Students usually find it very difficult to make a good summary and will initially require a lot of modelling and support from you.

8.   The assigned *teacher* attempts to *predict* what is in the next paragraph, or else asks someone else to predict. Show children how they can often use the structure of the text to predict what may come next, eg, "This paragraph talked about Maria looking for a comet, so maybe in the next paragraph she will find one."

Use the prediction strategy in a flexible and opportunistic manner. If there is not enough information to generate a prediction then leave this strategy out.

9.   Assign another *teacher* for the next paragraph and begin the cycle all over again.

10.   When the passage has been completed, students answer the written comprehension questions in their Clever Kid's Reading Books, without any further assistance. Mark and graph the results. (The graph is at the back of their books).

11.   Draw attention to the motto under the graph, "Strategy use + effort = success", and discuss with students the reasons why they are doing so well in the comprehension tests. Get them to verbalise the fact that they can do well when they try hard and they use the reciprocal teaching comprehension strategies. The idea is to help the children overcome attitudes of "learned helplessness" whereby they attribute their successes and failures to factors beyond their control, such as luck or an attitude of "I'm dumb". Instead we are endeavouring to train students to attribute their success and failures to factors under their control such as effort and strategy use.

Note: It usually takes 2 days (sometimes even 3) to complete the reciprocal teaching dialogue and answer the written comprehension questions.

General Points to Remember

1.   When first introducing reciprocal teaching, discuss with the children why it is important to be a strategic reader, then explain each of the strategies and discuss how and when they can be used to improve comprehension.

2.   In the initial days of teaching, you take your turn as teacher for the first several segments, modelling how each of the strategies works.

3.   For the initial days of teaching, review the four activities with the students, recall why they are learning the strategies, as well as when and how they might be helpful.

4.   For the initial student *teachers* choose students who you feel will be successful with the activity so that the others have more opportunities to see the strategies being modelled.

5.   When a student is acting as *teacher* you can take the role of *student*, answering some of the questions, contributing to the discussion on word meanings, helping to form the summary, etc.

6.   Always give the students plenty of specific feedback that is informative, eg, "That was an excellent summary, since you included the most important information", or "You worded that question well, but it concerned a minor detail. Can you ask a question about more important information?"

7.   While you will <u>not</u> expect the <u>same</u> kind and level of participation from all of your students, you should expect them all to participate at a level appropriate for each.

8.   Reciprocal teaching works best in small groups of 4-8 pupils, although it has been adapted successfully for larger groups, and even whole class groups.

9.   Some teachers prefer mixed ability groups so that poorer readers can see the better readers modelling the use of the strategies.