



A Few Words on Sight Words: Needs and Solutions

by Betty Kracht Johnson

Approximately 75% of all words that a beginning reader encounters are sight words. Young children sometimes have difficulty learning to read because of an inability to recognize or decode them. Comprehension depends on the student's ability to recognize the words in a story. Sight word recognition is also needed for the skill of anticipating what the succeeding words will be. Many beginning students have poor language skills and cannot determine which words should naturally fall into place. They need the support of knowing what the words say. In order to read fluently, children must learn to recognize sight words without hesitation.

Many students need to see a word repeatedly in order for it to be remembered. In many classroom materials, basic sight words are not a priority. Each word may appear only once or twice in a text and not be repeated again in succeeding stories. The problem of remembering sight words may be based on the type of instruction received. Patterned books allow children to begin reading quickly and develop good feelings about themselves. We want students to feel confident, but also to experience the joy of recognizing a word outside of the repeated patterns. Seeing and knowing a word in different contexts requires the student to really know it.

Giving a child an interesting way to learn words increases motivation. Hands-on activities such as manipulating word cards into sentences, adding capitals and periods, and changing the content with various rebus pictures, keeps the interest of the most reluctant pupils and improves language and writing skills in the process.

Betty Johnson worked for 36 years with students in grades K-6, Title 1, and Special Education.