Neurological Impress method (NIM)

A Whole Language procedure

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[Topics: NIM (Neurological Impress Method)]

Young children in literate societies often learn to read without formal teaching. How do they do this? Some people think they learn to read by a process called the Neurological Impress method (NIM). NIM was developed to teach brain-damaged soldiers to read again after WWII. It has been used successfully with those who have had strokes and with others recovering from traumatic damage to the brain. Though it has never entered the mainstream of teaching techniques in public schools, it is sometimes used by “special education” teachers working one-on-one with students in the United States.

R. C. Weckelman and George Earley have researched the Neurological Impress Method for years. Weckelman has found that remedial students who are placed in the proper reading level and who are consistently taught by this method will make as much as a year’s growth after 7.5 hours of reading. Earley found the method helpful in working with Downs Syndrome children and with others who had learning problems.

I have not personally found students to improve as fast as Weckelman said, but I have observed gains in vocabulary, a changed attitude toward printed materials, an improved comprehension level, and reading level gains using only this method. When I met a reluctant reader who had no innate desire to read, this is the method I used. To my knowledge, though, no studies have been done on this method in nonprint cultures.

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One good point about this procedure is its ease of use. A literate person in a print society can easily learn the steps needed to implement NIM. For adaptation to nonliterate cultures, the graded material must already exist in the language of instruction and there must be a fluent reader to tutor the learner.

This might be a technique to try in a family setting where literate family members could teach others to read within the home. To follow the NIM method of reading instruction, the steps are:

1. Determine the student’s instructional reading level, if possible.

2. Select a set of books with a graded reading range, preferably which will interest the student and cover reading levels from one year below his/her instructional level to one year above the level you want the student to obtain. If reading level is not known, use whatever materials are available.

3. Prepare to work consistently with the student for 30 minutes each day for a period of several months.

4. Sit side by side in a manner comfortable for the student. The way you both sit is very important.
   a. Determine which hand is the hand the student writes and eats with. If it is the right hand, sit on that side. If it is the left hand, sit on that side.
   b. Place your body slightly behind his/hers, so that your mouth is in line with his/her ear. This is
      1. to keep him/her from reading your lips, and
      2. to place your words in his/her ear.

5. Jointly hold the book being read between you. You hold one lower corner and she/he holds the other lower corner with his/her nonwriting and noneating hand.

6. Take his/her writing hand in yours and have him/her form a fist with the index finger extended. Place your hand around his/hers so that you can guide his/her index finger to keep it just below the word you are saying.

7. Read orally together the words keeping your voice about one and one-half beats ahead of his/hers. This allows him/her to do the following:
   a. Hear the word just before she/he says it.
   b. Correct any miscued word before she/he finishes saying it.
   c. Intone the language correctly by imitation.

8. Stop every few paragraphs and ask comprehension questions to be sure the student is understanding the text being read. The more interaction about the text, the better. Developing visual imagery while reading is important.

Be sure to supplement this technique with creative writing. Combining NIM with writing should produce a good balanced program for reluctant learners. When you try it out, let me know.