

Anthony

Although the goal of this program is that all students learn to read and write, it is not expected that Anthony would reach the same level of proficiency at the end of kindergarten as, say, Russell or Denise. The specific accomplishment that is the goal for Anthony as a kindergarten student is that he learn to blend two sounds together to form a word. The two-sound level of activities is only the first level of activities at which any child is expected to operate independently within this program. Why, then, would the program have such seemingly low expectations for students like Anthony? Because the two-sound level is the most difficult level the program has to offer.

Anthony came to school knowing how to talk. This learning of language is the most difficult learning task he would ever have to face. Yet, despite the impression of a lack of capacity he may give at school, Anthony managed to begin learning how to speak within the first few months of his life.

To learn to speak, Anthony had first to figure out that some of the sounds he heard all around him as he lay in his crib were words. He then had to learn in succession that these words stood for something, that he, too, could make these same sounds or words, and that when he said the words, they would mean the same things as everyone else's words. Before Anthony reached kindergarten, he was already expressing his thoughts in full sentences. If his sentences were not as clear and as precise as, say, Russell's, it had much more to do with the sentences he had heard at home as models than it had to do with his own mind's innate ability to understand language.

Anthony had already amply demonstrated his own mind's capacity for learning before he came to school. But some kinds of learning are naturally encouraged by nearly all home environments, such as walking, or talking, or learning how to put on one's clothes. Other kinds of learning are not so universally encouraged in every environment, because the people in the environment do not necessarily know how to promote those forms of learning.

Parents who are not articulate do not encourage articulate children. Parents who do not read are not necessarily even aware of how little there is in their home environment that will encourage their own children to read. Parents who, themselves, have not learned that they are capable of learning, will not know how to pass on to their own children the feeling that what is unknown can be known.

Learning to talk was something Anthony's brain could do for him because his environment gave him the words to hear and the reasons to learn them. But learning to read, or learning how to go about learning at school, were not things his environment gave him. For Anthony to be able to learn about these things, he would first have to learn both that such learning was possible and that he was capable of doing it.

As a beginning reader in a first-grade classroom, Anthony would have been faced with the usual variety of problems encountered by students for whom learning to read proves difficult. He would have had perceptual difficulties in being able to distinguish one letter from another. He would have

sound-symbol association problems, since his lack of ability to tell one letter from another, combined with his poor memory, would make it difficult for him to match sounds to appropriate letter shapes. He would also have difficulty blending the sounds of a word into the word they were meant to form, because he could not even begin to know what it was he was expected to do with the sounds once he heard them.

For Anthony to be able to blend two sounds together to form a word that he could recognize, Anthony would have to learn what this reading game was that everyone else was playing. He would have to learn that words were made up of discrete sounds and that, when he said the sounds and blended them together, he, too, could hear the words they made. When he mastered blending two sounds together to make words, he would have learned that reading made sense and that he could make sense out of reading.

If Anthony could learn to blend two sounds into words in kindergarten, then he would enter first-grade with an understanding of what reading was all about. He would also have grasped the even more important concept of knowing he could know. He would not be in anybody's bottom group. The goal for Anthony, then, was that by the end of kindergarten, he would be able to blend two-sound words. This might not seem like much compared to the accomplishments of Russell or Denise, but for Anthony, it was all that would be necessary to ensure his future success.

Anthony was the kind of child who was apt to appear unintelligent, because he spent a good deal of time sitting in class with an apparently blank and uncomprehending expression on his face. Ms. X would find herself constantly annoyed with Anthony because he never seemed to be paying any attention to what she was saying. Ms. X would say, "Line up", and he would still be coloring on his paper. She would say, "Form a circle", and he would wander off. She would explain how to do a reading activity, and it wouldn't even occur to Anthony to ask the person next to him what it was he was supposed to be doing with all the materials in front of him. He was a constant source of exasperation. He did not pay attention and, on the few occasions when he did, he didn't understand.

At home, no one talked to Anthony very much. His parents loved him, as they did all of his brothers and sisters, but there was always so much washing and shopping and cooking and cleaning up to do. The work seemed never-ending, and his mother was always busy. His father was away much of the time. The money his mother had to spend went into clothes for the children and food for everyone. There weren't many toys in the house. His mother didn't like Anthony playing outside too much, because he got his clothes dirty and sometimes tore holes in them. She didn't have much time for sewing. It was always better if he stayed in, watched T-V and didn't bother her.

Anthony spent a lot of time in front of the T-V not bothering his mother. Whenever there was something on the T-V that he didn't understand, he didn't have anyone to ask about it, so he just accepted that he didn't understand. Sometimes his mother would tell him to do things or not do things. She hardly ever said why. If he didn't do the things she said to do, she would scold him,

so he always did them. He didn't ask why.

There were no books or magazines in Anthony's home. He had seen people reading on T-V, but he had never seen his mother or his father read. Until Ms. X read stories to the whole class at school, no one had ever read to Anthony. He hadn't even known that reading was something real people did.

Anthony's parents wanted very much for him to learn all he could at school. If he learned, then he could make more out of his life than his parents had made out of theirs. They hadn't learned when they were in school. They wanted Anthony to be different. Among the things Anthony's parents hadn't learned in school was how to set up an environment in their own home that would help prepare Anthony to do all the learning they had never done. Instead, all they had learned was how to pass their own non-learning onto Anthony, and they didn't even know they had learned that.

Although Ms. X was exasperated with Anthony, she had a good sense of why he was the way he was. Knowing why Anthony was so inattentive and unable to follow simple instructions did not make his failings any easier to live with, but at least Ms. X could give him some specific activities that would help him build a readiness for school learning.

When Anthony was introduced to preliminary learning stations at the start of the school year, the station activities consisted of Tinker Toys, books, puzzles, clay, and coloring. Once everyone understood these basic activities, Ms. X added a special set of activities called Workjobs. Although all of the students in class were taught to use the Workjobs, they had been added to the learning station primarily to meet the needs of Anthony and other students who needed specific training if they were to become ready for school learning.

Workjobs are learning activities made up of commonly available household or classroom materials. Each Workjob is usually designed to teach a particular concept. Workjobs may be used in isolation. They may also be used successively to relate a series of concepts to one another. Ms. X selected Workjobs for use with Anthony partly because she felt they would help him acquire the background he needed to begin learning how to go about learning, and partly because she had already made and used a number of Workjobs with her students in previous years. This meant she already had them available for use in her classroom.

Ms. X had four purposes for using Workjobs with Anthony. The first purpose was to teach Anthony how to work on his own. The Workjobs she selected for Anthony would usually take him only five minutes or so to complete. This time frame was comfortably within his span of attention, especially since he found the activities themselves to be both interesting and entertaining. Since each activity took so little time, Anthony had several opportunities each period to repeat the process of selecting a Workjob, working it through to completion, cleaning it up, putting it away, and selecting another one. Through the use of Workjobs, Anthony learned that he was capable of performing schoolwork.

The second, third, and fourth purposes for which Ms. X chose to use Workjobs with Anthony were to give him training in perception, auditory

discrimination, and pattern recognition, respectively. Anthony needed a strong background in each of these three skill areas if he were to be successful in learning to read. Ms. X made sure the Workjobs she set out for Anthony were ones that emphasized the development of these areas.

In October, when Ms. X began introducing her students to the Picture Packets, she made the decision to have all of her students begin the two-sound activities at the same time. She did not wish her kindergarten students to begin thinking that some of them were capable of learning and others were not. If Anthony did not start the Reading Program at the same time as everyone else, he would be marked as someone whom the teacher felt could not learn. The E.H. component of the program allowed Ms. X to introduce Anthony to the activities at each learning station at the same time everyone else in his group was exposed to them.

Anthony could not yet remember more than the first five sounds from *Dekodiphukan*, so Ms. X disassembled two of the Triangle Level Picture Packets and reassembled two special packets composed of the two-sound words and accompanying illustrations that made use of only these first five sounds.

Ms. X then selected a sampling of two-sound worksheets and two-sound stamping sheets at the triangle level that only made use of these same first five sounds and set them aside for Anthony's use at each of these two stations.

There was no need to make a special selection of books for Anthony at the Book Station, because there was no measure of whether or not anybody was actually reading the books as they thumbed through the pages. Anthony had enjoyed turning the pages of library books that nobody but Russell could read. He would enjoy himself as well, thumbing through the two-sound books, whether he could read them or not.

There was also no need to make any special allowances for Anthony at the Handwriting Station, since tracing letters required no memory, and the perceptual training provided by the station was exactly what Ms. X would have prescribed for him in any event.

When Russell and Denise began the independent level of the reading activities, Anthony went right along. His pace of learning meant that they would rapidly pull away from him, but then the faster runners always pull away at the start. What was important, though, was that everyone was now running and, in time, everyone would make it across the field.

In October, when Ms. X began introducing the learning stations to her students, she paid very little specific attention to Anthony. Her assessments and observations had told her that Anthony had not learned very many sounds and did not really understand what was going on. Apart from reducing Anthony's workload at each appropriate station to only five sounds, however, Ms. X did not have the time yet to worry about Anthony's specific needs. She was too busy teaching the individual groups at each station how to proceed through the reading activities.

The lack of time Ms. X had at this point to devote to individual children did not bother students like Russell and Denise because they understood enough of what was happening to make effective use of the materials to which

they were being introduced. As they were exposed to the activities at each station, their learning began at once. Anthony, too, was not bothered by the lack of attention he received from Ms. X. Except for his Workjobs activities, Anthony was not learning much of anything at any of the stations, but he was completely unaware that he was not learning.

The fact that Anthony wasn't yet learning how to read and was oblivious to his own lack of progress is an intentionally designed element of this program. Anthony could take out the word cards to match with his Picture Packets, say the sounds for each word, then say a word, and then lay the word card on one of the illustrations in front of him. If the word card happened to end up matching the correct illustration, it was only by chance. Anthony hadn't the slightest idea which sounds blended together to form which words. Anthony knew to say the sounds, then say a word, then match the word with an illustration. This is what he saw Denise, Russell, and everyone else in his group doing. He hadn't the foggiest notion that they were, in reality, doing something altogether different.

Since Anthony felt he was doing the same work as everyone else, he was not building a feeling about himself as a non-learner. He might not find the process of saying sounds, saying words, and matching word cards to illustrations particularly exciting. However, he did not find it frustrating, either. Since Anthony was of the opinion that he was doing whatever it was he was supposed to be doing, he did not hound Ms. X to provide him help he might otherwise have felt he needed. Ms. X would soon have ample time to work with Anthony. But, while Anthony was waiting for this time to come, he was already gaining the feeling that whatever this learning was that was supposed to go on when you were at school, he could do it, too!

Although Anthony was not really learning when he began his reading station activities, the environment that would eventually cause this learning to take place was already enveloping him. We do not know exactly how, or at precisely what moment the mind achieves understanding, but we do know how to surround the child with the experiences that will lead to this understanding.

Anthony's experiences with the Workjob activities helped him learn how to work independently in a school setting. He had learned to select a task, work it through to completion, put it away, and make another selection. The Workjobs activities themselves helped him to begin to learn to listen for sameness and differences in sounds and to look for sameness and differences in letter shapes, cloth patterns, and simple drawings, as well. They also helped him to develop and refine an assortment of fine motor skills.

The whole-class lessons conducted each day by Ms. X exposed him again and again to the sounds from *Dekodiphukan* and the two and three-sound combinations that formed the words she kept reading from the Flipbooks. The models for learning provided by the whole-class lessons were repeated again and again by the other children in his group, with whom he was in constant contact at each learning station. Almost all of his fellow group members would read the sounds from each activity aloud and say the word that they believed followed from the sounds aloud, as well. Their reading aloud was not done for

Anthony's benefit but it was an inescapable and beneficial part of the environment to which he was daily exposed.

Learning is not confined to the reading period. Anthony began to understand that recess came at the same time every day. Other things in his school day seemed to come with a predictable regularity, as well. Nap time, snack time, play time, going home time, and so on, became things he could count on. In fact, if there were any deviation from the day's regular routine by an assembly that eliminated a recess, or a minimum day that sent him home early, Anthony's initial response was apt to be one of dismay, because the changes in what he was learning to rely upon confused him.

The reading knowledge that Anthony first mastered was his learning of a few of the sounds. He started with his secure group of five sounds, and this group never tricked him. The  sound he learned was always the  sound. It never changed. None of the first few sounds he learned ever changed. As he added new sounds to the ones he had already learned, the old ones stayed constant. Each time Ms. X pointed to a sound picture on the wall and said its sound, it was always the same. Anthony eventually found that many times, he already knew what sound Ms. X would say for a picture before she said it. She did not trick him. He could even say some of the sounds along with her. Anthony was learning that he could learn.

As Anthony developed his belief in the regularity and predictability of the sounds he had learned, he began to hear these sounds in a few of the words Ms. X read to the class from her Flipbook. He heard, for example, when she said  and then  and then said the word **ear**, that he thought he might have heard the  sound and the  sound in the word.

As he worked at the learning stations, sometimes Ms. X would sit with him and help him say the sounds, and then say a word, and then match the word to an illustration. Sometimes, Ms. X had Russell or Denise or some other child help him say sounds and words and do the matching. As Anthony grew more confident in saying the sounds, and as he became better at understanding that the sounds were supposed to relate to the words, he sometimes could say the sounds and then even say the word. Sometimes, but not yet all of the time.

The constant repetition of the whole-class lessons, the constant modeling from others in his group, and the steady individual attention from Ms. X and other occasional helpers gradually allowed Anthony's mind to make the connection between the two sounds he had been saying over and over since October and the words that these sets of two sounds formed. He was quite literally surrounded by the concept of reading, and his mind was gradually making sense out of the process of blending sounds into words, just as, when he was an infant, it had allowed him to make sense out of language itself.

Anthony's understanding of two-sound blending was not dramatic. He did not, for example, come back from Christmas Vacation knowing how to read. He had too much to learn about learning to make such rapid advances. When he could blend the word "ear", he did not immediately connect this

knowledge to any other two-sound words. For a while, each new word he learned to blend had to undergo its own unique process of discovery.

Anthony was learning that he could read words, meaning specific and unique words. Only time, practice, and experience would allow Anthony to generalize what he was learning about individual words to something he could apply to all words. The sounds did not trick him. Soon, he would learn that the words would not trick him either. Soon, he would find it all made sense and, even more importantly, he could make sense of it all.

Anthony first began to understand that he could read some two-sound words in about January. It was not until April, however, that Ms. X felt ready to move Anthony on to the three-sound level. By the end of the school year Anthony was just becoming comfortable, though not as proficient as Ms. X would have wanted, at reading three-sound words.

In June, when Ms. X made her final assessment of how far her students had progressed through the course of the school year, she was disappointed that Anthony had only been able to reach three-sound blending. It seemed like such a slight gain for a whole year's work. Three-sound blending was only a few lines down on her evaluation sheet, and so many other students had moved ahead so many more steps.

Ms. X had, of course, forgotten the difficulty Anthony had experienced back in October in remembering any more than five sounds. She had forgotten he once could not blend any sounds at all. She had forgotten, too, that the goal for Anthony as a kindergarten student had only been two-sound blending. Anthony had made it all the way across the field. Anthony had learned.

Perhaps Ms. X would have felt better about Anthony's progress had she been able to know that he was now quite certain to become a reader in his first-grade year. Without her help, reading in first-grade was not destined to be his fate. But with the assistance she had provided, Anthony was to be such a good reader, in fact, that if he were placed in a classroom of first graders, none of whom had shared his reading experiences in kindergarten, he would rank among the middle range of readers in the class. If, on the other hand, he moved on to first-grade with his present classmates, he might still disappoint his new teacher by bringing up the rear, because there will always be a "last". There would be no disappointment, though, if his next year's teacher could remain content with how much Anthony knew, and not be concerned with how many other children might know more. Where competition is concerned, there will always be a loser, but where learning is the goal, everyone can be a winner.

Assessment Sheets

On the following four pages are:

1. Anthony, Denise, and Russell's monthly progress for the year
The Reading Program Assessment Sheets for Ms. X's kindergarten classroom
2. The Month of November
3. The Month of February
4. The month of April