# The Applied Scholastics Reading Program

For over three decades Applied Scholastics has been working with underperforming, illiterate youth and adults, teaching decoding, vocabulary, writing and comprehension skills and bringing their literacy up to the required level and beyond. Systematic instruction in decoding, writing skills and vocabulary development combined with a high volume of reading along an appropriate gradient has been found to produce not only the necessary proficiency, but also a turnabout in attitudes toward the learning process itself.

As most illiterate youth have fallen behind in academic content areas, the crowning step in working with such youth has been to teach them the technology of how to learn. This technology, developed by humanitarian and educator, L. Ron Hubbard and known as Study Technology, provides the tools and strategies for learning and mastering any subject as well as the pedagogy to guide students in applying them. It extends reading ability with emphasis on vocabulary development and text comprehension strategies. It generates the metacognitive ability required for effective and efficient learning and results in the mastery of academic content. When the tools and strategies of Study Technology have been applied in the study of school subjects, deficiencies have been rapidly remediated.[1]

At the same time that illiterate youth and adults were benefiting from Applied Scholastics tutoring programs, beginning readers in Applied Scholastics schools and centers were learning to read and write by the same curriculum and

1 Reports of Applied Scholastics field studies are available upon request.
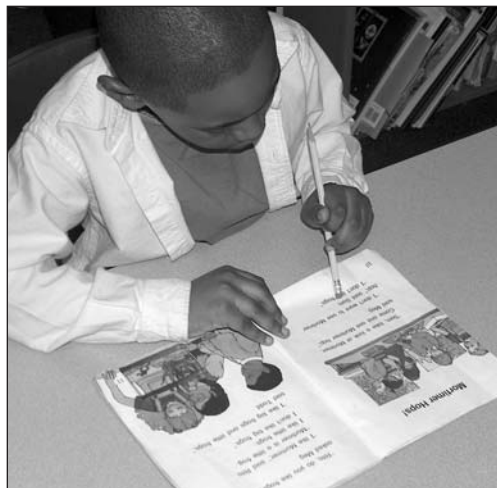
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pedagogy. In this program the ability to read books is commonly achieved by four- and five-year olds. As reading instruction continues with these students, their levels of literacy increase exponentially and far exceed national norms on standardized tests of vocabulary and reading comprehension.

The Reading Program

Overview. The program is designed to take any student from either beginning or struggling reader status to that of accomplished student who can read with understanding as well as learn any subject. The program consists of three major components: (1) systematic and explicit phonics and writing instruction and vocabulary building to establish basic reading and writing ability; (2) reading in quantity for fluency and vocabulary development; and (3) systematic training in Study Technology (how to learn) to assure continued growth in literacy and comprehension and prepare for more advanced academic tasks.

Applied Scholastics phonics instruction is highly explicit. It does not assume that students will acquire certain skills or knowledge on their own or that teachers will know what to teach. It leaves nothing to chance and every bit of phonics knowledge required for reading success is explicitly included in a validated instructional sequence.

Applied Scholastics instruction is systematic throughout, whether phonics or Study Technology is being taught and whether students are learning to read for the first time or receiving remedial help. Teacher materials present instruction in a clearly defined and logical sequence. Workbooks and other materials provide students with ample opportunity to practice what they are learning. Frequent assessment of student progress with curriculum-embedded tests ensures that any missed steps are handled promptly. With this systematic approach, students achieve 100% mastery. Though slight variations in the curriculum content and delivery structure differentiate the instructional and remedial versions of the program, the pedagogy is the same, whether beginning, intermediate or struggling readers.

Study Technology in the Curriculum. Study Technology is embedded in the curriculum of the reading program as well as in the methods employed by teachers, tutors and other helpers trained by Applied Scholastics to implement the program. Study Technology is evident in: (1) material that is precisely sequenced for success; (2) curriculum-embedded tests that support formative assessment; (3) a standard of one-hundred percent mastery; (4) practice of basic skills to produce mastery; (5) student activities that supply dimension and reality, such as modeling letters and objects in clay, drawing objects represented by words, using demonstration kits and looking at pictures; and

finally, (6) student activities that show the relevance of knowledge in the context of the student's own life. Not only the ability to decode and write words, but also the grasp of word meaning is explicitly developed through such student activities. This aligns with the very basic principle of Study Technology that words that are not understood prevent comprehension and application of the material being studied.

Pedagogy. Study Technology is the mechanism for tailoring instruction to meet specific needs. For example, if a student is struggling or not keeping up with the instructional program, a teacher trained in Study Technology will be able to quickly identify and handle the problem. Educators trained to implement this program are expert in spotting reactions in students that signify the presence of learning barriers and in using the precise formula to correct the problem. Furthermore, the monitoring of students to detect learning problems is done constantly and systematically by an Applied Scholastics-trained teacher so that students receive the help they need promptly.

The most common barrier, the misunderstood word or symbol, is handled differently at different points in the program. In the early stages, whether in decoding instruction or reading aloud activity, the educator spots the signs of a misunderstood word and handles the problem by looking up the word for the student and/or explaining the word to the student. Later, through Study Technology training, the student learns how to identify his own misunderstood words and to follow a systematic procedure

for gaining conceptual understanding. However, at any point the educator may use one or more special procedures for helping a student locate a misunderstood word when its identity is not obvious. Emphasis on the importance of word meaning from the very beginning of the reading program produces a gradual shift in responsibility from the teacher to the student. By the end of the program students actively monitor their comprehension of words and take responsibility for understanding every word they encounter. As a result they function as active partners with the teacher in the learning process. Students can fly along and comprehend more and more complex material.
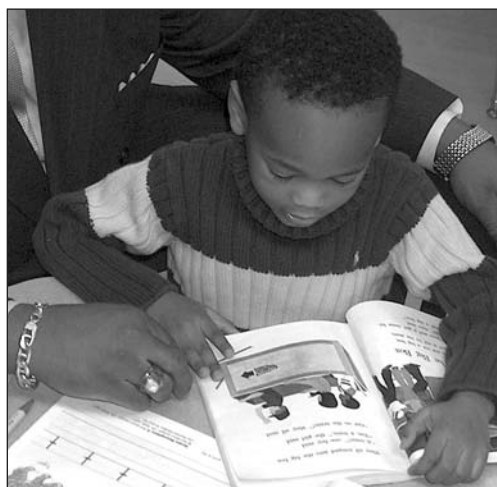
Program Components

Establishing Communication with Students. In Applied Scholastics programs, working with students begins with establishing rapport.

Actual content of the communication varies with the ages of students. In the reading program, the initial communication has three main goals:

The educator spots the signs of a misunderstood word and explains the word to the student.

1. Identifying a purpose or reason for the learning. This is important because when students see the relevance of learning to their personal goals they are more motivated.

2. Obtaining agreement on the importance and handling of misunderstood words. The student is informed about the effect of misunderstood words in the learning process and his agreement obtained to never go past a word he does not understand, but to speak up and ask for an explanation.

3. Obtaining agreement on the importance and necessity of good nutrition and adequate sleep. In terms the student can understand, the requirements of the body and how deficiencies impact on the ability to learn are explained to the student. As needed, students are encouraged to participate in any breakfast programs provided by the school.

Plan of Instruction, Classroom Reading Program. The students learn to read in a step-by-step manner, progressing easily from simply learning the names and sounds for letters of the alphabet to knowing how to sound-out words, to reading simple stories and knowing the meaning of the words. Children understand that the purpose of learning letter sounds is to apply these skills in their daily reading and writing. Books that students read at the earliest stage of learning include only words they have already learned and understood. Thus early success in reading is assured.

Phonics. Phonics instruction may begin in pre-school but should begin no later than
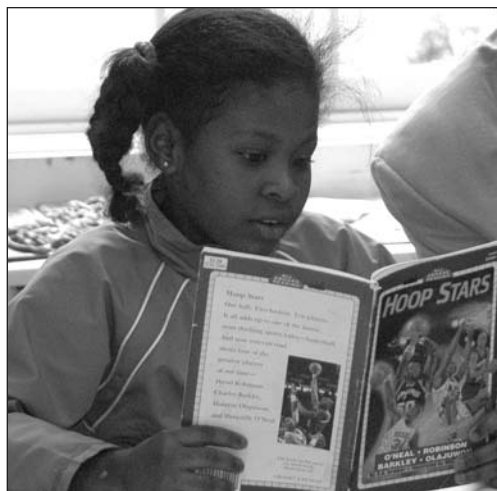
kindergarten. By the end of kindergarten children can read and spell more than 75 words and read and comprehend more than 200 words. As students move through first grade, they learn new phonics rules and new words. They master all sounds for every letter and major letter group, learn the phonics rules needed to sound out unfamiliar words and have the ability to spell an additional 500 common words.

In learning new words, students do not simply learn to mouth sounds; they learn the meanings of the words by engaging in purposeful activity. Words are practiced by listening to and reading over one hundred thirty-five poems, books and stories over the year as well as writing, drawing, speaking to the class and doing creative activities that involve using new vocabulary.

Phonics instruction continues through the second grade, where the final advanced rules of phonics are taught. At this level, reading instruction emphasizes that the purpose of reading is text comprehension and teaches the importance of knowing the meanings of words.

The assessment tests that accompany the phonics curriculum, placed at strategic locations in the instructional sequence, are another means for teachers to adjust instruction to specific needs. By grouping students based on the results of assessments for practice in sounding or blending letters or writing letters or words, reading aloud, etc, teachers can focus additional help in areas of need to assure complete mastery.

Reading Practice for Fluency. Reading practice begins as soon as

It is important for students to have fun with reading.

Kindergarten students have learned the sounds of five letters. They then begin reading simple stories in vocabulary-controlled readers. By the end of Kindergarten, children have read more than 100 age-appropriate books.

In the early stages of reading practice, students read aloud and are supervised in the activity. As fluency increases they sometimes read silently. In the classroom setting, reading aloud is accomplished by having students read to each other, or to older students, parent volunteers or other classroom helpers, while the teacher supervises the activity and gives help as needed. However, it is important for students to have fun with reading and not be overly corrected in the beginning. It is the quantity of easily read material that produces the result rather than minute perfection at the start. This having been said, help should be and is given with difficult words, whether the student is reading aloud or silently. Educators trained by Applied Scholastics observe students' reactions during reading and coach or help a student as required.

Daily reading practice is continued throughout the primary

grades along with practice in analyzing, interpreting and explaining story content for better text comprehension. The gradient to literacy is carefully maintained and students are never overwhelmed with unfamiliar terms because vocabulary expansion is systematically promoted with direct instruction. When students read, they understand what they are reading. Reading is a successful action and a pleasure.

Choosing from a long list of approved titles, first and second graders each read more than 75 fiction and non-fiction books and anthologies. Similarly, third graders read more than 65 anthologies and longer "chapter books." By the end of the primary grades, students have greatly expanded their reading vocabularies and acquired basic comprehension skills. Now they are ready for the third phase of the reading program, Study Technology training, which fully prepares them to make the transition from learning to read to reading to learn.

Remedial Instruction. With a remedial student, diagnostic testing is performed at the very start of the program to establish reading level and identify gaps in reading skills. As well as assessment tools developed by Applied Scholastics, nationally standardized instruments are administered as appropriate. Test results, along with information gathered from the student and from school staff are used to develop the initial plan of instruction. This is a customized program utilizing appropriate segments from the reading program and designed to bring the student to proficiency as rapidly as possible in targeted areas— phonics, writing, reading fluency, vocabulary, reading comprehension or all of these. As the great

majority of remedial students exhibit decoding failures, remediation usually begins with systematic assessment of phonics knowledge. Once the knowledge gaps are identified they are compiled on a checklist that is aligned with the phonics curriculum and is easily used to plan instruction. A remedial student is assessed frequently as instruction progresses. Results provide motivation to the student as well as information needed by the educator for systematic remediation.

Reading practice begins immediately with a remedial student, using vocabulary-controlled readers. To improve reading fluency, vocabulary and comprehension, a remedial student must read a high quantity of graded material, as in the classroom reading program, but in a shorter amount of time. A large supply of high-interest books, graded from elementary to complex, facilitates appropriate choices. For motivational purposes, as well as to assist the educator in monitoring student performance, a chart is maintained to visually display the upward progress of each student and the amount of reading accomplished. When the remedial student is able to read fluently at or near fourth-grade level, he begins instruction in Study Technology.

Learning How to Learn With Study Technology. As a student achieves the necessary reading fluency instruction in Study Technology begins either in self-paced or group format. At this point the student is beginning a new and important phase of his education. He has mastered basic decoding and comprehension skills and is moving into the stage of being

able to learn more significant amounts of information from reading. The texts are "primarily expository, complex, detailed and filled with difficult vocabulary" (Strauss and Irvin, 2000, p. 56). A student whose reading is progressing normally at this age continues to need instruction in reading comprehension, but the focus of that instruction should be changing from the acquisition of basic reading skills to the development of strategies necessary for dealing with more advanced academic texts.

In Study Technology, a student learns the three primary barriers to study and how to recognize and handle each of them, including misunderstood words. In the process of self-monitoring to identify any manifestations of learning barriers, the student gradually develops a metacognitive approach to learning tasks and becomes more skillful as a student. At the conclusion of this phase the student has made a full transition from the state of learning-to-read to the state of reading-to-learn. He is ready to use his skills to master academic content.

The student uses a demonstration kit to clarify the meaning of a word.

Program Evaluation. When available, school district achievement test data is used to evaluate the reading program. Aggregated[2] data can reveal program impact with a before and after design comparing two or more cohorts[3] at the same grade level. Disaggregated data may be used to track the gains of individual students such as those receiving remedial instruction. Usually standardized tests are administered as pre- and post tests specifically to track the reading, writing and spelling progress of individual students; the data can serve for overall program evaluation as well.

Through repeated implementation of the reading program in tutoring situations Applied Scholastics established a standard for reading improvement of one grade, on average, for each eleven hours of one-on-one tutoring.

How does the Applied Scholastics Reading Program Align with Current Research and Practice?

Comprehensive, Systematic and Explicit Instruction. Applied Scholastics' approach to teaching reading is comprehensive in that the program includes every aspect of reading development—phonemic[4] awareness (PA), phonics, vocabulary, oral reading and comprehension strategy. It is systematic in that a sequential set of elements have been delineated and it is expected these will be taught in the prescribed order.

2 Aggregated—averaged together and not separately identified.
3 Cohorts—persons grouped together as in a classroom or school grade.
4 Phoneme—the smallest part of spoken language that makes a difference in the meaning of words.

Conversely, an incidental approach would teach such elements only opportunistically, for example, when they appear in text. The instruction is explicit, in that it is formal and leaves nothing to chance. Every step is prescribed in the materials provided for teachers. A major analysis of reading research by the National Reading Panel resulted in the panel's endorsement of the systematic, explicit and comprehensive approach to teaching reading (2000).

…the characteristics of PA training found to be most effective in enhancing PA, reading, and spelling skills included explicitly and systematically teaching children to manipulate phonemes with letters…(p. 8)

…systematic phonics instruction produces significant benefits for students in kindergarten through sixth grade and for children having difficulty learning to read (p. 9)

…explicit or formal instruction in the application of comprehension strategies has been shown to be highly effective in enhancing understanding (p. 14).

Vocabulary instruction, both direct and indirect and guided oral reading were also addressed by the National Reading Panel as elements of comprehensive reading instruction. The manner in which Applied Scholastics' approach to these elements is supported by the findings of the Panel, and by others, is discussed further in the ensuing sections of text.

Vocabulary Development. The Applied Scholastics reading program is focused on vocabulary development from the outset. In the very first meeting with students the importance of word meaning and the harmful effects of misunderstood words on learning and understanding is conveyed

emphatically. Thereafter, every new word encountered must be and is defined and understood. This occurs whether it is accomplished as part of the plan of instruction, where new vocabulary is directly taught, or is handled between the student and the educator as symptoms of a misunderstood word become evident, or, in the third phase of the program, is handled by the student himself during his Study Technology training as he assumes responsibility for clearing every new word or any misunderstood word.

A hallmark of Study Technology training and Applied Scholastics programs is students operating on the principle that misunderstood words must always be handled if one wants to succeed. Mr. Hubbard discovered that word meaning is the most important component of comprehension and he identified the "misunderstood word" as the major barrier to learning. Study Technology training produces a high level of word consciousness and includes a detailed, step-by-step procedure for achieving full conceptual understanding of any word. The strategy is applied by the student whenever he encounters a word he does not fully understand. It includes practice in use of the word and establishes the word with all of its meanings in the student's vocabulary. This depth of understanding of a word in its multiple uses enhances text comprehension in many content areas and leads to greater fluency for reading, speaking, listening and writing.

Today's learning research confirms both the importance of word study and the explicit, systematic and multi-faceted approach to vocabulary development employed in the Applied Scholastics reading program. "Vocabulary should be taught both directly and indirectly.

Repetition and multiple exposures to vocabulary items are important." (National Reading Panel, 2000, p. 14) "Learning, as a language-based activity, is profoundly dependent on vocabulary knowledge" (Baker, Simmons & Kameenui, 1995). Furthermore, vocabulary instruction should be explicit and systematic and include word-learning strategies (Armbruster et al., 2001). Also, using a multi-faceted approach to vocabulary development is recommended. It should include extensive reading and the teaching of word cosciousness along with word-learning strategies (Nagy, n.d.).

Fluency. Correlational studies reveal that the more children read, the better their fluency, vocabulary and comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000). The Applied Scholastics reading program emphasizes oral reading for beginning readers because it provides both feedback to the teacher and vocabulary assistance for the student, while also promoting fluency and comprehension. This emphasis on oral reading practice is well supported in the research literature. The National Reading Panel Report concludes that "guided repeated oral reading practices that include guidance from teachers, peers or parents had a significant and positive impact on word recognition, fluency and comprehension across a range of grade levels" (2000, p. 12).

Strategic Reading. The literature of reading instruction agrees with Applied Scholastics. That is, that strategic reading (reading with the purpose of improving comprehension) is essential for comprehension of school subjects and success in school. Strategic reading, although taught in Study Technology training, is not usually learned

during basic reading instruction in the primary grades. Thus, after the primary grades students still do not have "well-articulated concepts about effective strategies to enhance comprehension," and they need to develop "more detailed knowledge about what strategies are available, how they function, when they should be applied and why they help comprehension" (Paris, Wasik, & Turner, 1991, p. 619). Furthermore, strategic reading includes the repairing of failed comprehension. When comprehension failed, strategic readers were able to "use a variety of strategies to repair their understanding" (Dole, 2000, p. 56). Study Technology provides tools and strategies not only for repairing failed comprehension when it occurs, but also for preventing comprehension problems in the first place. Students learn to spot comprehension barriers quickly and handle them promptly with precise strategies. "…explicit or formal instruction in the application of comprehension strategies has been shown to be highly effective in enhancing vocabulary" (National Reading Panel, 2000, p.14). In Study Technology for young learners only three comprehension barriers with their corresponding "fix-up" strategies must be learned to prepare an individual for success in the elementary grades. This simplicity is consistent with evidence that it is best to teach students a small repertoire of strategies they can practice in depth over a long period of time (Pressley, 2000).

Metacognition.
Metacognition is an emerging construct in educational research for which there is not yet a uniform definition.

It refers generally to the awareness of one's thinking and the strategies one is using as a means to comprehension. Comprehension monitoring, a critical part of metacognition, has received a great deal of attention in the reading research on text comprehension. "Good readers use metacognitive strategies to think about and have control over their reading." Comprehension monitoring instruction teaches students to be aware of what they *do* understand, identify what they *do not* understand and use appropriate 'fix-up' strategies to resolve problems in comprehension (Armbruster et al. 2001 p. 49). Metacognition has been shown to have a significant positive effect on vocabulary learning as well (Chamot and O'Malley 1994).

Metacognition was built into Study Technology by its developer long before it became known as "metacognition." Furthermore, consistent with current findings about what works best, metacognition is not taught directly in Study Technology, but is <u>induced</u> through the manner in which learning tasks
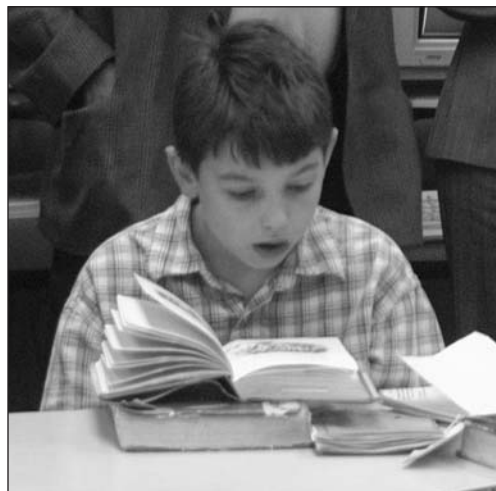
By reading many books students graduate from simple to more complex reading material.

are presented to the student (Palincsar et al., 1991). Applied Scholastics students are routinely taught methods of correcting comprehension when it fails, such as clearing misunderstood words. Learning tasks are presented to students in a sequence that tests comprehension and generates feedback to the student promptly and frequently. Through this routine the student learns to be aware of and monitor his comprehension. He has been induced to adopt metacognitive strategies. Applied Scholastics students test comprehension continuously during study so as to be fully aware of what they do understand and what they do not understand. Students who can do these things are truly independent learners and no longer dependent upon a teacher as the gatekeeper of knowledge.

In the Applied Scholastics reading program, the development of metacognition occurs in the third and crowning phase of the program when students, having completed decoding instruction and developed the required degree of reading fluency, enter into Study Technology training. By learning and applying Study Technology the students continue to expand their vocabularies and comprehension proficiency and develop the ability to master any subject.

Best Practices. The guide, *Put Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read* (Armbruster et al.) describes the findings of the National Reading Panel Report (2000) on what works best in the teaching of reading. Applied Scholastics reading instruction incorporates these practices, specifically the following:

1. Students are taught to manipulate phonemes.

2. Only one or two types of phoneme manipulation (working with phonemes in words) are taught, rather than several types.

3. The plan of instruction includes a carefully selected set of letter-sound relationships that are organized into a logical sequence.

4. The program provides teachers with precise directions for the teaching of the letter-sound relationships.

5. Student progress in reading fluency is monitored.

6. Vocabulary is taught both indirectly (when students read books) and directly (when students are explicitly taught both specific words and word learning strategies).

7. Text comprehension is taught through explicit instruction.

8. Instruction can easily be tailored to meet specific needs.

Summary. The Applied Scholastics reading program is congruent with current educational research and thought about what works best in the teaching of reading. It is designed to handle remedial, beginning or intermediate readers and to carry each student along through the stage of learning-to-read to the stage of reading-to-learn. Students who complete the program can read with understanding and master all school subjects. They are willing and able partners in the instructional process. They have become strategic, self-regulated learners who continue to grow in literacy and in comprehension of the world around them.

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