

**Subject Area:** English/Language Arts (Reading/Literature)

**Grade Level(s):** Primary K-5

**Title of Instructional Method:** Using Manipulatives and Stimulating Tasks in Reading  
Instruction

**Description of Instructional Method:**

The idea behind using manipulatives to teach reading in early elementary is that it provides student's with the kind of hands-on, tactile and kinesthetic activities which is often overlooked in reading instruction. Many children up till the age of 8 are this type of learner and do better with activities that involve touching, doing, and moving. It is also thought that including hands-on tasks with reading will improve student's motivation to read, their reading comprehension as well as create a long term interest in reading.

**Conditions Under Which the Approach was Successful:**

One type of popular reading manipulative known as Reading Rods was proven to be successful with research conducted at two Texas elementary schools during the 2003-2004 school year. One of the elementary schools was a socioeconomically advantaged school, while the other was a socioeconomically disadvantaged school. The first school consisted of primarily Caucasian students, while the second had an even distribution of Caucasian, Hispanic and African American. Every child in the first grade test group who used Reading Rods for a nine month period increased his/her Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) score by over 284%. Their mean pre-score of 4.0 increased to a mean post-score of 15.375. The DRA score is an aggregated score that measures fluency, comprehension and reading rate.

A more broad use of manipulatives and stimulating tasks was researched at an elementary school in a mid-Atlantic state. The 98 3<sup>rd</sup> graders broke down into 53% Caucasian, 24% African American, 6% Asian, 6% Hispanic, and 11% other. 18% of these students qualified for special education, and 3% were in ESL classes. Half the students were provided with a high number of stimulating activities in reading, and the other half were provided with a low number of stimulating activities over a 12 week period.

### **References:**

- Laird, T, & Shamma, T. Impact of Reading Rods Manipulatives on Reading Skills. *Learning Resources*, Retrieved January 14, 2007, from <http://129.33.210.100/text/pdf/readingrodsresearch.pdf>.
- Guthrie, J, Wigfield, A, Humenick, N, Perencevich, K, Taboada, A, & Barbosa, P (2006). Influences of Stimulating Tasks on Reading Motivation and Comprehension. *99*, 232-245.
- Weldon, W (2007). Correlations/Research. Retrieved January 16, 2007, from ETA CuisenaireWebsite:[http://www.eta-cuisenaire.com/pdf/reading\\_rods/rrphonic\\_effektss.pdf](http://www.eta-cuisenaire.com/pdf/reading_rods/rrphonic_effektss.pdf)

### **“How-To” Information**

One way to make this work in the classroom is to combine reading instruction with other subjects such as science. It is easier to make a student interested in reading when they are reading something that they can relate to something they like or something else they are doing. For example, if as a teacher you were reading a story about dinosaurs, you might want to include a hands-on activity that combines the story with an art activity. This could be something like making predictions about what might happen next in the story by writing and/or illustrating what they think should be the next few pages, or chapters. This hands-on activity would aid in their reading comprehension

skills, as well as their ability to make predictions. The students can do this individually or in groups. If they work in groups it would help encourage cooperation and team learning.

Other ways to use manipulatives to encourage reading skills is the use of Reading Rods. These are color-coded interlocking manipulatives, which are combined with instruction and activity books, activity cards, or readers. The rods are color-coded to define the functions of the letter, word parts or words and are designed for whole class or small group instruction to help build proficiency in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, text comprehension, and writing. When you use them in your classroom students will depending on their needs use them to build and create words using consonant blends and digraphs (ch, ck, ph, ee), as well as create diphthongs (/aʊ/, /eɪ/) and common two to four letter rimes. The interlocking style of the rods is designed to reinforce the left to right sequencing of letters and words. There are also directional markings on the rods to indicate the directionality and sequences of letters and words in sentences. A good way to bring these into the classroom could be to create a learning station or center where students can use the Reading Rods during free time, or if they finish working on other tasks early. They can also be used in the station as a one on one activity with a student who is struggling while the other students work on a different assignment. Alternatively, they could be used in partners so the students can help each other and give one another feedback.

One other way to make reading more hands-on and exciting is to incorporate the use of the internet. There are tons of websites, which have games to encourage and help students become better readers. One website that is particularly good is [Starfall.com](http://Starfall.com),

which has sections for introduction to letter sounds, early beginning readers, intermediate beginning readers, and beginning to advanced readers.

**Implications for Practice/Other Considerations:**

Pros:

- Endless possibilities for creating stimulating tasks and hands-on activities.
- Appeals to a wide variety of learners.
- Relatively easy to incorporate into the curriculum, as well as relate to learning standards.

Cons:

- Possibly time consuming depending on the extensiveness of the activity, and amount of preparation required.
- Cost because many hands-on activities may require some use of extra materials not always present in the classroom.
- Cost because manipulatives such as Reading Rods must be purchased. Although, most of the Reading Rods activity sets are around \$30 which is not necessarily breaking the bank.

**Additional Links:**

[www.Readskill.com](http://www.Readskill.com)

[www.Learningresources.com](http://www.Learningresources.com)

[www.etacuisenaire.com](http://www.etacuisenaire.com)

[www.starfall.com](http://www.starfall.com)

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