

Acceleration

- 1 The child requiring help with early reading and writing has been making very slow progress and has been dropping further and further behind his peers. In order to catch up *he will have to progress faster than his classmates for a time*. Acceleration refers to this increase in the rate of progress.
- 2 To say that the slow-progress child who cannot be pushed or placed under stress should now learn at an accelerated rate seems to be a puzzling contradiction. I have already discussed two important factors that help this to occur.
 - The child will get one-to-one teaching, and
 - the lessons will start with his strengths and proceed according to what he is able to learn about reading and writing.
- 3 In addition, whenever possible the child will read and write continuous texts. He will not be diverted from printed texts to pictorial material or puzzles but will be taught what he needs to learn in the context of continuous text. Any new letter, high-frequency word or spelling pattern, attended to in isolation, is used in the same lesson in text reading and writing, and the learner interacts with the teacher about the relationships of the new detail to the familiar texts that he has been working on.
- 4 Acceleration depends upon how well the teacher selects the clearest, easiest, most memorable examples with which to establish a new response, principle or procedure. For example, the child trying to recall how to use the verb ending *ing* may be helped by the first example of an *ing* word that he learned. The teacher will select reading and writing opportunities that reiterate the child's new learning in the context of his learning history. She will choose examples that occur often or relate easily to many other things. Productive examples are those that lead to further reading or writing control in a number of different ways.
- 5 With problem readers it is not enough for the teacher to have rapport, to generate interesting tasks and generally to be a good teacher. The teacher must be able to design a superbly sequenced series of lessons determined by the particular child's competencies, and make highly skilled decisions moment by moment during the lesson.
- 6 The child must never engage in unnecessary activities because that wastes learning time. If the teacher judges that a child can make a small leap forward, she must watch the effects of this decision and take immediate supportive action if necessary. An expert teacher will help the child to leap appropriately. She will not walk the child through a preconceived sequence of learning, step by step.
- 7 Acceleration is achieved as the child takes over the learning process and works independently, discovering new things for himself inside and outside the lessons. Therefore, what the teacher attends to and how she interacts with the child, change noticeably across the lesson series. The child must continually push the boundaries of his own knowledge, and not only during his lessons. The teacher must watch for and use this personal searching on the part of the child to shift the emphases in her teaching.
- 8 Achieving acceleration is not easy but it must be constantly borne in mind. During Reading Recovery training a teacher is challenged if she seems to be wasting the learner's time, especially when her colleagues notice that she is teaching something the child has already shown that he can do!
- 9 Two kinds of learning must be kept in balance: on the one hand performing with success on familiar material strengthens the decision-making processes of the reader, and on the other hand independent problem-solving on new and interesting texts with supportive teaching extends the ability to problem-solve. The teacher chooses texts with both kinds of learning in mind: she wants to maximize the advantage of *knowing what* and *knowing how*. With a measured dose of opportunities, she steadily lifts the level of challenge. Working with both familiar and new material contributes to acceleration.
- 10 The teacher will foster and support acceleration as she moves the child quickly through his series of lessons, making superb decisions and wasting no unnecessary time, but the teacher herself cannot produce or induce acceleration: she cannot decide that the time has come and that she will now accelerate the rate of progress. It is the learner who accelerates because some things no longer need his attention and are done more easily. Things that are familiar come together more rapidly and allow the learner to attend to novel things. When this happens at an ever-increasing rate, accelerated learning occurs.