

The Sound Reading System for a Youth Offending Team (YOT)

I have been using the **SRS** system for some years now off and on ...off and on because I work for the **Youth Offending Team** in Exeter and East Devon and literacy is not my principal job here though I am a qualified secondary school teacher. However, if a young person has a low reading age and wants literacy support, I offer it. I have learnt that although a chaotic lifestyle can seriously compromise the routine and consistency of regular sessions, even a few sessions of **SRS** can bring amazing results.

Here are some examples:

My most recent case is a 15 year old boy, a low level offender who is still just hanging on in mainstream though out of core lessons, working by himself or in small groups in the learning support centre. He expressed an anxiety about his reading – he is due to be taking a couple of GCSEs but with a reader and a scribe. He had a reading age of 8.00 three weeks ago. For various reasons, I was only able to offer him three sessions as a sort of very quick fast track and bingo.....he retested at 12.09. That's the beauty of the **SRS**, you can get quick results. The kids 'get it'.

One I will never forget...a 17 year old boy, with us in Devon for a very short time before he moved out of the area, with a reading age of 8.00. I did a taster session with him, starting with the very basic 'chopping up' of his name into sound/spelling units, going through some Foundation work – one sound one letter, segmenting, blending and building new words, moving on to some early Stage 1 sounds –/sh/ and /ch/, keeping up the pace with some multi-syllable work and finally ending, as I often do, with writing 'tion' on the white board. 'This is the sound 'shun'', I say. He looked at me incredulously. 'No, you're joking, that doesn't say that', he said, he really couldn't believe it. 'Yes, it does actually, surprising isn't it?' and we proceeded to look at 'nation', 'station', 'mention', then 'construction', 'situation', 'conviction' and so on. By the end of this one session, he was sounding out and reading lots of words ending in 'tion', and despite his certainty that he'd never be able to do it, correctly spelling them too. Any teacher will say that the 'penny dropping' moment in a classroom can be one of the most exciting and rewarding parts of their job. This was such a moment for him and for me - a sudden awareness of the accessibility of a whole group of words that had previously been off limits to him, that he could both actually read and write. Sadly, that was his only session, he moved away but I like to think that in that hour, something very fundamental shifted for him and that from then on he was able to make sense of those longer words.

Andrew, aged 15.04, a bright lad who had failed at school, was in a Pupil Referral Unit, in Year 11 doing a couple of GCSEs and hoping to go to college. He was on a Referral Order to the YOT. The figures speak for themselves. In February, his reading age was 8yrs 06. From then until the middle of July, we did 11 sessions using the **Sound Reading System**. We also read the book, *Holes* by Louis Sachar which Andrew had seen the film of and enjoyed. There was no availability of extra support between sessions and no parental involvement, just 11 one hour sessions spread over nearly 5 months. On the last session, his reading age was retested and it was 14yrs 06. He went on to college, saying that he still wanted extra support but within a couple of weeks, had recognised he no longer needed it. Not only did his reading age go up phenomenally, his self image as a reader was established.

My favourite quote is from a certain Bradley...'Yeh, I think I'm getting this shit'.

J.H Exeter, March 2014