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September 22, 2004 - 11:45am EST

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Kalispels promote Read Right

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Posted: [September 16, 2004](#) - 11:14am EST

by: [Jack McNeel](#) / Correspondent / Indian Country Today

SPOKANE, Wash - Reading ability has been shown to benefit self esteem and change behavior. Improved reading can boost grades in virtually all subjects. It can enhance career advancement for adults. A program called Read Right has proven to increase a youngster's reading ability by a full grade level in 13 to 20 hours of tutoring and even quicker improvement with adults.

The Kalispel Tribe, working through their Camas Institute, purchased the Read Right program. Bonnie Varner has been with Camas Institute since its inception and was named to head up the Read Right program. A year ago they entered into a cooperative literacy program with the Cusick school district, a district that contains nearly 50 percent Indian students. Varner gushed with enthusiasm when discussing Read Right and relates outstanding successes in just its first year at Cusick.

The only obligation to the school district was to provide the room and two pairs of professionals which would be trained with two from Camas Institute. Teaching started last November and by January the progress was so good that the tribe added four more tutors for the spring semester. It's a small school district of about 300 students but 139 of them received some tutoring and 97 received 20 hours or more with an average of 44 hours of tutoring.

The year-end report just arrived and the numbers are astounding. Of those 97 students receiving 20 or more hours of instruction, 80 percent gained two or more grade levels in reading and 24 percent gained four or more grade levels.

"It's like, how come everybody's not doing this! It's unheard of," Varner exclaimed. The other significant item pertained to the special education youngsters. Varner explained, "Typically if they're doing well they will gain half a grade level a year. This year one youngster was in that bracket and all the rest exceeded those expectations. In fact 22 percent of them gained four or more grade levels. You almost become a cult member when you see it works and you see the magic that happens with these kids. Their behavior changes. They don't have low esteem anymore so they're not afraid when the teacher calls on them to read in class."

Approximately 180 sites are now using Read Right. It's expensive and that's likely kept more school districts from using it and it's also a new concept utilizing an approach different from phonics or whole word reading. Schools may be reluctant to try something so different from traditional teaching. It was developed by Dr. Dee Tadlock in the late 1970s and first utilized with industry rather than schools. Simpson Timber Company was the first. A pilot study in a Shelton, Wash. sawmill produced amazing results and they expanded the program to 19 manufacturing plants across the country.

It's difficult to explain but works by correcting the neural network in the brain utilized when the brain learns to read. Once this network is completed, the process is completed and reading happens. A simple comparison can be made with riding a bike. The brain learns which muscles to move and how they must move in order to stay upright on a bike without consciously thinking about it.

Camas Institute is unique in that they have formed a partnership with a school district but at least

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two other tribes are utilizing Read Right. The Institute is also using it to teach English to a number of foreign employees at Northern Quest Casino which is owned by the Kalispel Tribe. The Navajo Tribe has used it and is now using it to teach the Navajo language. The Yupiks in Alaska are also using this system.

"Every tribe that can afford to do this should be in a partnership with their school district and working with them. Reading is a key to education," Varner said.

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