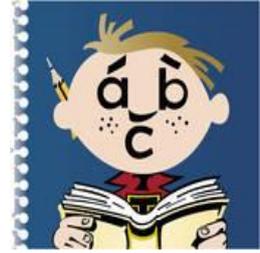


SOUNDS: An engaging approach to literacy

By Brenda Erickson, Rotary Club of Peachtree City, Georgia, USA

Beyond building little readers, the Souns program helps Rotarians by exposing them to the surprising readiness of young minds. Children want to read more than we want them to acquire these basic skills. As projects go, the Souns program is:

- ✚ Simple to implement
- ✚ Cost effective
- ✚ Measurable in its results



Through the Souns early literacy program, early childhood educators and parents acquire tools to help children build early literacy skill by introducing a *concrete* letter in association with its most common sound *in the child's language*. The child first learns the individual letter sounds, then how to build words by listening to spoken sounds, and finally to read words by sounding out the letters.

While Souns is easy to implement, does not require extensive training, and utilises durable materials, sustainability has been the key to progress. From observations – seeing a child delight in sharing their first written “story” or gleeful about sounding out their first sentence at age 5 – is the greatest assurance of sustainability. A teacher who feels empowered in his or her teaching is going to want to continue the successful method. We even hear anecdotes of teachers taking the Souns materials with them when they leave one school to go to another. Preschools with a long history of using Souns have assimilated the program so well that their experienced teachers train new teachers. Ultimately, success in the classroom – building little readers – is the greatest assurance of sustainability.

An evaluation of over 6000 preschool students using Souns in the USA and Puerto Rico found that 96.5% met or exceeded expectations in letter-sound knowledge and only 3.5% were below expectations.

What is happening now with Souns?

My club and clubs in my district have joined other clubs in the USA and international clubs to expand the reach of Souns, sometimes getting together as Rotarians to review and/or train...building *Rotarians* as well as little readers. Global grants such as the project in South Africa reaching township children have escalated into additional Rotary Global Grants. Since Souns is not language-specific, Peace Corps in South Africa has embraced Souns to help their education volunteers bridge language barriers. Interestingly, most letters have the same sound across languages.

Souns is in many Head Start programs across the U.S., from Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, to Texas. Head Start is well established and is the greatest access point to disadvantaged children in the United States.

Where is Souns going next?

Namibia, Guatemala, Haiti, and India, with escalating projects in South Africa and Puerto Rico. A Peace Corps volunteer is seeking a Rotarian help to bring Souns to Namibia. Souns left the Rotary Convention in Atlanta in the hands of a Rotarian going to Guatemala. Those involved with a project in Haiti want to add Souns to their program, and India is having Souns introduced by Rotarians from Colorado. Puerto Rico has just had a grant approved that will reach 815 classrooms.

Growth means more volunteer trainers are needed. There are no special qualifications to being a Souns trainer, except a willingness to learn. If you are interested in becoming a volunteer Souns trainer, please let me know. It is a hands-on experience that keeps on giving.

