Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts

Volume 27
Issue 1 *October 1986*

Article 2

10-1-1986

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LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF CLINICAL INTERVENTION: AN IN-DEPTH STUDY

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Numerous longitudinal studies attest to the concern regarding the long-term effectiveness of remedial programs (Balow, 1965; Balow & Blomquist, 1965; Buerger, 1968; Muehl & Forell, 1973; Robinson & Smith, 1962; Shearer, 1966). While short-term improvement has been demonstrated repeatedly, the majority of the reported studies fail to demonstrate maintenance of achievement gains (Spache, 1980). The fact that follow-up studies persist (Bessai & Cozac, 1980; Gottesman, 1979; Ito, 1981; Miles, Foreman & Irwine, 1978) demonstrates an intuitive belief that remedial treatment should have lasting beneficial effects.

The variables typically used to investigate the effectiveness of these programs include standardized reading tests (Balow, 1965; Buerger, 1968; Gottesman, 1979; Ito, 1981), teacher judgment (Buerger, 1968; Jackson et al, 1968), length of time clients remained in school (Preston & Yarington, 1967; Robinson & Smith, 1962) and sometimes attitude (Cashden & Pumfrey, 1969). What is lacking in these studies is an analysis of the types of programs used in the first instance, and for the most part, information regarding clients' perceptions of problems and range of coping strategies. There is a need for intensive follow-up examination of individual clients with respect to current achievement status in relation to range of strategies for self-monitoring and "repair", perceptions of themselves as readers and writers and perceptions of instructional strategies that have been useful to them as learners. Further, there is a need to examine these variables in relation to the remedial program initially designed for the client in a search for instructional elements that may be identified as sources of

potential transfer and strategy maintenance. The present study was designed to investigate these problems.

Method

A case study format was used for an in-depth examination of the status of seven former clients from the University of Calgary Language Education Clinic program. Four subjects were ten years old, two were eleven, and one was sixteen. The subjects were randomly selected from the files from 1977 to 1983. (Considerable program changes have occurred since 1980 reflecting increased emphasis on language-based instruction, metacognitive development and writing processes.) Informal reading and writing measures were administered to all subjects. The purpose was to obtain information about text processing as well as general levels of performance to be used for comparative purposes. Structured interviews conducted with subjects were recorded and transcribed for analysis. An interview was structured to elicit information about current processing strategies, metacognitive abilities, recollections of what was most helpful from remedial instruction, present reading/writing problems and the way in which he copes with them, and his concept of himself as a reader and writer. Interview questions pertained primarily to reading or to writing. Every effort was made to parallel topics in the reading and the writing sections.

Qualitative analysis of the interview and achievement data was conducted. A further level of analysis involved examination of this information in relation to aspects of the original Clinic program.

Results

The data gathered from the administration of the Informal Reading Assessment (Burns & Roe, 1980) would suggest that six of the seven subjects are at or above the instructional level for their current grade placement. In all but one case written recall protocols demonstrated sensitivity to passage macro-structure. The one exception in each instance was the same subject. His instructional reading level was one grade below his grade placement, and he was able to produce only the first sentence (almost verbatim) of a six sentence passage.

These findings were supported by the subjects' expressions of self-concept. Most considered the reading and

writing they do in school as easy or just right for them, and all considered themselves average or good readers and writers. When asked about the ease or difficulty of material to be read in school, Ciara (age 10) said, "Well, I wouldn't say it's difficult and I wouldn't say it's easy, because it's just...it's perfect." She went on to say, "...sometimes I get a bit stuck, but like...if it's too difficult then you can't read it properly, you won't understand the words, and if it's too easy, well then you're not learning anything." All read for their own enjoyment with the majority of material being fiction. Over half wrote for their own purposes at home. Most seemed to have difficulty deciding what they would like to do better as readers, and the most frequently desired writer improvement seemed to focus on mechanics and form. Three subjects said they no longer have problems in reading, but only one said writing is problem-free.

All subjects do some independent reading and writing of fiction. Although only half are required to read independently in the content areas, most write reports. Teacher "help" for reading consists mainly of post-reading questions with discussions. Half, however, said that their teachers did nothing before assigning the reading. Writing assistance is much more prevalent but centered on correcting mechanics either by the teacher or a peer. Regarding getting teacher help with story writing, Cathy (age 11) said, "He just says he wants smooth, and to start the subject off in an interesting way, and that's all really. He doesn't say very much. He thinks we should know it now we're in grade six." Most subjects said they read their peer's writing, usually for editing, and this is perceived as most helpful.

In describing the "best reader" from their classes, most subjects included "reads a lot" as a predominant characteristic of their best readers. "Being read to or with" was the most pervasive suggestion for how a hypothetical "non-reader" could learn to read. Three or four subjects when asked to select the most helpful reading strategy from their Clinic program chose reading with the clinician. The fourth subject was in Clinic six years ago in the pre-schema era, at the start of the acceptance of the psycholinguistic framework. Considerably greater attention was given to "exercises" to facilitate reading as opposed to involvement in reading extended discourse.

With regard to reading strategies, subjects were asked to state their own strategies for various problems, those they thought their best reader would use, those useful with a beginning reader, and those they would suggest to peers who were having specified reading problems. A summary across tasks shows several trends. Lack of understanding was the overriding reason for rereading--both for themselves and a hypothetical "best reader". All subjects cited two or more common strategies that they used themselves and would advise a peer to use. The most frequent first-cited strategies for single word decoding were to ask the teacher, to use a dictionary, or to ask a peer, followed by reading ahead or back in the sentence. When asked if it was really important to know every word in content area reading, all said it was important because they needed to understand to get the work right. For fiction, most said it was not essential as long as the general idea was clear.

When asked how they remembered what they had read, most subjects gave two or more strategies. Reading over and memorizing were most common, followed by association strategies.

All subjects thought their best readers would reread, primarily when they had not understood the material. Most thought their best writers would revise, but revision was considered useful mainly to upgrade mechanics and form in a final copy. Although half the subjects did mention mechanics and form in their descriptions of their best writers, two of those also mentioned ease of expression.

The strategies cited for dealing with independent writing problems were fewer and commonalities between their own and recommended strategies were less frequent. These subjects were all tutored before the reading/writing interdependence came to the fore, so their awareness of writing strategies must come mainly from their school experiences. To solve writing problems for themselves and others, the most frequent aid was the dictionary. This is not surprising since the most commonly stated problem was spelling. When asked about the importance of spelling, all were aware of the importance of audience in that they would accept approximate spelling in rough copies but not in final draft.

Although subjects were not asked about any reciprocal

effects of reading and writing, several comments were offered. Four subjects gave "read more" as a writing help, and two were aware that their best writers were also their best readers. Ciara said in reference to her chosen best writer, "He knows how to read, and if you know how to read, and you understand words, you can probably write well." When asked what one could do to become a better writer, Cathy said, "I think if you read more you can figure out how the writers write and then it'll give you more good ideas. And if you read more, you can see more of the words, so you can know how to spell them if you see them more." This type of response is especially remarkable since none of the subjects had been given a Clinic program in which such an interdependence was fostered.

To obtain information about the subjects' interest in the meaning of what they read and wrote, they were given examples of reading miscues and writing samples and asked for their reactions. In the reading samples, all accepted the syntactically and semantically appropriate miscue as "making sense". With the writing samples, less than half were able to focus on the meaning and overlook the various mechanical/spelling errors. Both these responses reflect the subjects' desire for meaning when they read, and for correctness when they write as expressed earlier.

When asked to reflect on their clinical experiences, all were readily able to recall aspects of their tutoring. The most useful reading-related activities were "just practicing to read" and reading with someone. Most remember only writing stories, not surprising considering their programs. There was an obvious contrast between the subject tutored six years ago and those tutored more recently. He remembered flash cards, syllabication and the controlled reader, and had done no witing at all.

Discussion

It would seem, then, that all of these former Clinic clients have developed a variety of reading and writing strategies to enable them to succeed during their Clinic term, but which also have enabled them to maintain their processing, apparently (at least in some instances) in spite of questionable classroom practices. Even the one subject who seemed to show some lag on the informal assessment measures seems to use strategies which have gained success

in school endeavors. All read outside school, and several write for themselves.

It might be suggested then that consideration of the clients' perceptions of problems and coping strategies should be an important part of any attemp to monitor long-term effectiveness of remedial programs. Although most of these students were only ten and eleven years old and might not be expected to be metacognitively aware, they were able to make explicit many strategies they find useful.

In summary, it would seem, from this limited study, that the expectation of long-term maintenance of skill and strategy is much more realistic than expectations conveyed by earlier studies. It is reasonable to hypothesize that such maintenance can be attributed to the increased emphasis on reading and writing as broader, language-based processes, the emphasis on development of positive self-concept as a learner, and the general thrust to develop metacognitive skills of learners.

It is intended to extend this study to include more subjects from other Clinic years. An area for further research would be to explore further perceptions of students (and perhaps their teachers) of other strategies their teachers use to help them read and write independently. To obtain information about strategies considered most helpful by the students and their reasons for their choices might be especially useful, particularly to classroom teachers who want to help their students become literate.

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