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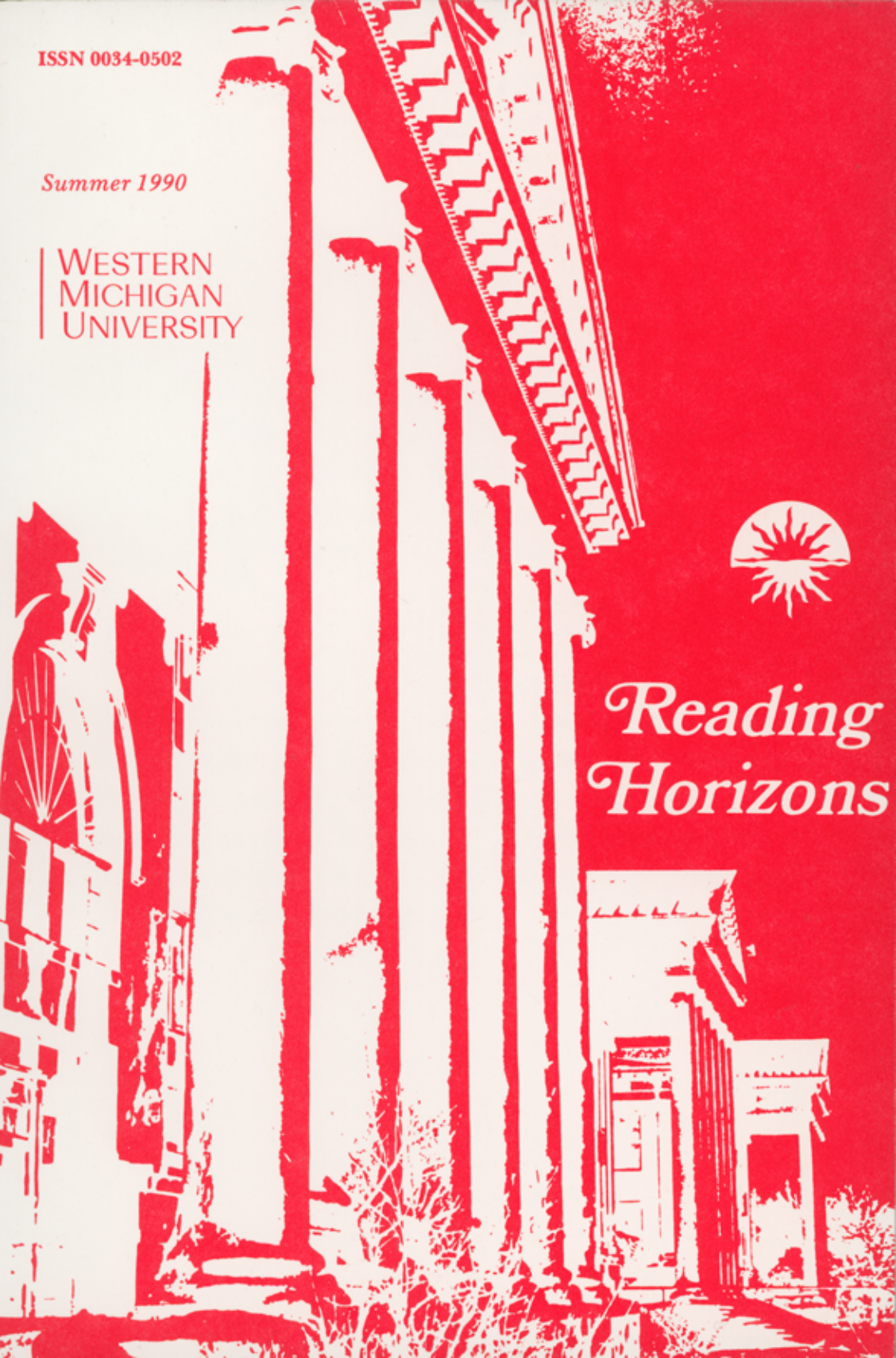
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Kalamazoo, Michigan 49008

READING HORIZONS has been published quarterly since 1960, on the campus of Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo. As a journal devoted to teaching reading at all levels it seeks to bring together, through articles and reports of research findings, those concerned and interested professionals working in the ever widening horizons of reading and related skills.

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Reading Fluency and the Novice Reader

Beverly B. Swanson

Recent research into the reading process has identified factors other than efficiency in word recognition which account for reading fluency. The automatization of decoding skills exhibited by better readers has been attributed to, among other things, opportunities. Olshavsky (1977), for example, found that poor readers used the same range of strategies as good readers, but had less opportunity to practice and develop them.

Successful beginning readers receive more opportunities to read and comprehend fairly easy reading material. The competent reader decodes with accuracy, but with fluency as well. Poor readers are slow readers; they generally try to read material which is far too difficult for them. What can be done to assist the poor reader? According to Chall (1983) the beginning reader or "Stage 2" reader, usually around seven or eight years of age, should be given plenty of practice so that attention is focused on content rather than decoding. Huey (1968) also said many years ago that "Repetition progressively frees the mind from attention to details, makes facile the total act, shortens the time, and reduces the extent to which consciousness must concern itself with the process" (p. 108).

Good readers also receive more encouragement to "read with expression" and to make meaning of what they have read. The slow readers are not assisted in the same way

(Allington, 1980). For one thing, they are not given as much time to think about what they have read before the teacher or another student helps them. Poor readers are also given fewer opportunities to engage in sustained reading of connected text. Because their reading opportunities are so limited, the meaning of print and the purpose for reading remain a mystery to the slow reader.

Focused comprehension instruction is generally lacking for poor as well as good students, in the beginning stages of reading instruction; actual reading, whether silent or oral, occurs in a piecemeal fashion, with very little sustained contextual reading taking place (Gambrell, 1986).

There is empirical evidence that reading fluency is trainable and training improves overall reading comprehension (Allington, 1983). However, it has been a neglected skill, an indicator being the lack of fluency activities and strategies in reading skills hierarchies or teachers' guides. Another reason fluency skills may not have been stressed until more recently (Allington, 1983; Miccinati, 1985) is that research has been inconclusive on the value of oral reading, which is used in many fluency training activities. Dahl (1979) found that a repeated reading strategy advocated by Samuels (1979) increased decoding speed and accuracy, but Juel and Holmes (1981) found that oral reading increased poor readers' overall processing time.

Although the purposes for oral and also silent reading activities need to be further examined, particularly in light of the needs of novice readers, reading fluency training is being implemented with a number of positive results. Some teachers are successfully using fluency strategies as alternatives to round robin reading.

Paired reading

In this strategy, students are paired in such a way that one is a slightly better reader than the other. During the oral reading phase of the directed reading activity, students take turns reading and asking each other questions. Three purposes are met here. Students are reading more during oral reading, the better reader is encouraging the slower reader to read at a faster pace, and comprehension is stressed as each student asks questions of the other.

Echo reading

Another method which can offer students more reading practice is echo reading. As another alternative to the round robin approach, all the students in a reading group echo or repeat a reading passage read by the teacher. For example, the teacher reads a sentence or two from the students' basal; the students model the teacher's reading. Intonation and expression will be modeled for the students through this method.

Mumble reading

Sometimes referred to as murmur reading, and sometimes as the impress method, this strategy requires the students and teacher to read in unison. This approach offers the students more reading practice, a less threatening environment for reading, and a fluency model — the teacher.

Chanting lists or stories

The use of read-alongs in which the whole class reads together encourages vocabulary growth and fluency. Word lists can be generated very easily by selecting a topic of general interest such as "Scary Words" or "Winter Words" and brainstorming with the students. At any given time three or four lists are in place around the classroom. These lists

attention to the task at hand should be planned on a regular basis. Memorization activities that involve students in memorizing simple nursery rhymes or short poetry provide opportunities for repeated readings and the development of longer attention spans.

Phrase boundary marking

Marking phrases lightly with a pencil in the students' text and asking the students to read as quickly as possible to the pencil mark have shown beneficial results by increasing some students' fluency. This technique works particularly well with the slower reader whom the teacher feels could read at a faster pace.

Reading and learning to read are difficult tasks for beginning readers. Meaningful fluency activities that can be easily incorporated into the regular curriculum foster comprehension skills which are often lacking in the beginning reading program.

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Call for Manuscripts

Reading Horizons seeks to publish articles about aspects of reading which will be of practical as well as theoretical interest to teachers and administrators from preschool through the university level. Our subscribers also include both undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in reading courses.

Articles which address topics of current interest in the field of reading, or are aimed at practitioners working at a particular level (preschool, kindergarten, elementary school, middle school, secondary school, college and university) are most useful. Reports of research should address questions of practical importance; explain the background, procedures and results of the study with clarity and a reasonable degree of brevity; and specify the statistical procedures concisely and without abstruse terminology.

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Text should be written using gender-free language; references should follow APA guidelines. Two stamped self-addressed envelopes should be included; manuscripts will not be returned. Send all materials to: Dr. Jeanne M. Jacobson, Editor, *Reading Horizons*, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI 49008.



Assessment: Stopping the Revolving Door at Rock Valley College

Richard L. Bernardi
K. Sue Castleberry

The concept of an open door for anyone who wants to attend a community college regardless of that person's educational background is an admirable one. The reality, however, is that the open door too often becomes a revolving door. Students from ages eighteen to eighty choose to attend community colleges for a multitude of reasons. These students often have the proper motivation, but they frequently face failure because they lack the requisite basic skills to succeed. At Rock Valley College, the decision was made to stop the revolving door.

Student Placement

Beginning with the fall semester of 1986, Rock Valley College implemented an assessment program to turn that revolving door into a guarantee that its students have a chance to succeed by prescribing mandated placement in developmental reading and writing courses.

The guarantee for a chance to succeed hinges on the stipulation that students are excluded from college level courses until they successfully complete the necessary reading courses. Every new student enrolling in a credit course is tested in reading, English, and math. Only students enrolled at Rock Valley College prior to the fall of 1986, students holding post-secondary degrees from institutions accredited

by recognized regional associations, students enrolling only in non-credit courses, or transfer students whose college transcripts indicate a basic skills proficiency at the college level are exempt from the assessment program. Students are allowed to take the assessment tests only one time, so the placement process is set in motion at the end of a one hour and thirty minute test session. Although students are tested in reading, English, and math, the cornerstone of the placement program is based on the results of the reading tests.

Reading

Students scoring at or above a tenth grade equivalent on the comprehension subtest of *The Nelson-Denny Reading Test*, Form E (Brown, Bennett, and Hanna, 1981) are allowed to enroll in any course they are otherwise qualified to take. Students scoring below the tenth grade equivalent are required to take a second reading test. Students may choose to take the second test immediately following the first test or they may return for testing at a later date.

The *Degrees of Reading Power*, Form PA-2 (College Entrance Examination Board, 1984) was chosen as the second test because it addresses reading as a process. The cloze format of the *Degrees of Reading Power* test is different from the multiple choice format of *The Nelson-Denny Reading Test*. Students have unlimited time for the test and are counseled not to take the test unless they are rested and at ease.

Only reading specialists, teachers with masters degrees in reading, administer the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) test. These reading specialists conduct a ten to twenty minute interview with each prospective student as he or she finishes the test to determine appropriate course placement. During the interview, the reading specialists ask the prospective students to describe themselves as readers, to discuss

any reading problems they may have had in schools they previously attended, and to describe any special classes or help they may have had to alleviate their reading deficits. The specialists describe the purpose of the placement procedure and the substance of the reading program.

Students scoring 95% or better on the DRP are exempt from the required developmental reading courses. For students with lower scores, reading course placement is mandated and students are allowed to take college level classes only when they have successfully completed assigned remediation courses. Students whose scores are between 94% and 50% are assigned to one of three reading courses:

- Reading 099 is for students with DRP test scores between 94% and 75%, and reading levels between grades 8 and 10. Students who place into Reading 099 and Reading 096 are allowed to enroll concurrently in courses on the Reading Limited Course List. This list is composed of performance music courses, studio art courses, physical education activity courses, mathematics courses, student orientation courses, a small number of technical and computer courses which require limited reading, and developmental English 098. For those courses which have textbooks or required handbooks, readability formulas have been applied to determine that the reading level and amount of required reading are within the ability range of the students.

- Reading 096 is for students with DRP test scores between 74% and 65%, and reading levels between grades 6 and 8.

- Reading 080 is for students with DRP test scores between 64% and 50%. Because these students are so under-prepared in their reading ability, they may not enroll in courses on the Reading Limited Course List until they pass Reading 080 and enroll in Reading 096. One English course and one math course are open to them.

Students who score below 50% are counseled to seek remediation through a literacy program or some other agency offering reading instruction at an appropriate level.

English and mathematics

Mandated placement in English courses is determined by students' performance on the *RVC English Placement Test* (Communications Division, 1979) as well as on the reading tests. The English test consists of eight sections testing such skills as making generalizations, sequencing ideas, language usage, grammatical rules, and proofreading. The test consists of 62 items in an objective format. Students must score 62% or better on the English test and test at a tenth grade equivalent on the reading test before they can enroll in English composition courses. If a student scores 62% or better on the English test, but has mandated placement in a reading course, that student is not allowed to enroll in an English composition course other than English 098 until the Reading 099 course has been successfully completed. Students enrolled in English 098 must achieve a grade of C or better in order to enroll in English 100 or English 101.

New students take the *Mathematics Placement Test* (Mathematics Division, 1984) and are then advised to take Math 090 (arithmetic) if they score 20% or below or Math 095 (high school algebra) if they score 20% to 44%.

Assessment and course completion results

Over eleven thousand new students have been tested since the assessment program began in the fall semester of 1986. Seventy-five percent of the students tested were exempt from taking developmental reading courses based on their performance on *The Nelson-Denny Reading Test*. Of the 25% who took the *Degree of Reading Power* test, 19%

were exempt from the reading courses. Fifty-four percent of the students who took the DRP were placed in Reading 099, 18% were placed in Reading 096, and 9% were placed in Reading 080.

The success rate of the students placed in the reading courses has been dramatic. Of the total number of students enrolled in the reading courses, 62% passed Reading 099, 55% passed Reading 096, and 40% passed Reading 080 with a grade of C or better. The success rate of the students who completed the course was considered a more accurate reflection of the students' progress because approximately 20% of the students who enroll in the reading courses are no-shows or drop out before mid-term. Of the number of students who complete the courses, 76% passed Reading 099, 69% passed Reading 096, and 57% passed Reading 080 with a grade of C or better.

Post-test results on *the Nelson-Denny Reading Test*, Form F, show an average gain of two years in one semester. Students average a post-test gain of nine points on the *Degrees of Reading Power*, Form PB-2. More importantly, the performance in college credit classes of the students who were required to take the reading courses was compared to the performance of students who had much stronger reading skills when they entered Rock Valley College. A sample of 219 students who had an average reading score of 7.3 grade equivalent and passed Reading 099 was compared to 219 randomly selected students who had an average score of 14.0 grade equivalent on *The Nelson-Denny Reading Test*, Form E. The average GPA in credit courses for students required to take reading courses was 2.25 and the average GPA in credit courses for students exempt from reading courses was 2.36. Clearly, students successfully completing

Reading 099 and continuing on at Rock Valley College are succeeding as well as students entering with much stronger reading skills. There has also been a high success rate for students enrolled in English 098. Seventy-seven percent of the students who passed English 098 with a grade of C or better passed English 100 or 101.

Conclusion

Rock Valley College faculty, administration, and students are pleased with the results of the assessment program. Faculty know that when a student enrolls in a credit course, that student has a minimum reading level of tenth grade, and, therefore, a chance to succeed. Administration has seen the revolving door turn into a series of doors to be opened one-by-one by the students to give themselves a good chance to succeed. Students entering Rock Valley College know their basic skills will be assessed and they will be placed in courses designed to help them succeed. At Rock Valley College, the door is open but has stopped revolving.

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Order of Processing and Attention Allotment Between Comprehending and Using Text Ideas

Gary L. Steinley

Several years ago Bertram Bruce, in a response to P. David Pearson's description of the "Comprehension Revolution," suggested that future studies will go beyond a focus on reading comprehension to a concern for the relationships between comprehension and more general thinking skills (1985). Bruce's comments were written early in what might be called a "Thinking Skills Revolution," and — given the manner in which this revolution has matured in recent years — they seem even more relevant today. Comprehending a text is one thing. Using comprehended ideas for such thinking tasks as evaluating, problem-solving, comparing, and so on is another. They're two different processes; but, at least when occurring in one reading act, they're interrelated. Researchers and teachers need to understand these complex relationships more thoroughly.

In the spring 1989 issue of *Reading Horizons* I reported the results of a study of one relationship between comprehension and thinking skills, namely the order of processing between comprehending a text and comparing/contrasting the ideas of that text with ideas external to the text itself. In that study (Steinley, 1989) the target text was about a word game, either doublets or crossword puzzles, and before reading the text subjects were instructed to compare/contrast that game with another word game (word search) which had been read about

and discussed earlier in the experiment. I questioned the extent to which two factors — the extent of a reader's background knowledge of the game described in the target text and the reader's self-reported processing style — might affect the relationship between comprehending and comparing/contrasting. Both factors had an effect. When readers had limited knowledge of the target text's topic, they tended to be more linear, attending first to comprehension of the text and then to the task of comparing/contrasting. When they had extensive knowledge, they were more parallel, attending to comprehending and comparing/contrasting more or less simultaneously. Moreover, those who self-reported themselves as typically linear tended to read in that fashion in this particular situation, and those who reported themselves as typically parallel tended to read in that fashion.

This study is a follow-up to the first. The same target texts and comparing/contrasting tasks have been used, but there is an essential difference. In the first study the data for the dependent variable, the order of processing, were collected retrospectively and subjected to quantitative analysis. In this study the data have been collected in one-on-one interviews using an "on-line" reporting procedure — that is, subjects reported on their reading during the process of reading — and the quantitative data analysis has been supplemented with a qualitative one.

I chose this repetition with variation for two reasons. First of all, converging quantitative data from the on-line measure would provide additional support for the original retrospective findings — or conflicting data would challenge the findings. The first research question for this study, therefore, combines the two research questions of the original study: Does the extent of a reader's background and/or a reader's typical

processing style affect the order of processing between the two processes of comprehending a text and using text ideas for a thinking task?

The second reason for repeating the experiment is more complex. The terms *linear* and *parallel* processing are gross labels for the attention allotment between any two processes in a single reading act — in this case the broad processes of comprehending and thinking. Though there is precedent for using these or compatible terms to describe processing styles (Dunn and Gould, 1981; Pask, 1976; Willis, 1985), the actual cognitive interaction between two broad processes, such as comprehending and thinking, with text ideas must certainly be more dynamic and complex as attention shifts from one process to the other during a given reading act. The second reason for repeating this experiment, therefore, is to explore — through an on-line measure and one-on-one interviews — this attention-shifting or maintaining in reading acts prefaced with a thinking task. Answers to the following question, however tentative, would add explanatory power to experimental results; in addition, they would help to guide future research of this phenomenon. The second research question for this study, then, is: How do readers explain their attention shifts or maintenance when reading both to comprehend and to use text ideas for a thinking task?

Method and subjects

Data were gathered from 39 students over one semester. Although this experiment took place one year after the first, subjects shared characteristics of the first group of subjects. That is, most were college juniors, they represented a variety of content areas, and they had — by virtue of being admitted to the teacher education program — met relatively high GPA and competency requirements.

Materials and instrumentation

In the first experiment the two independent variables, background and style, were operationalized through materials constructed for the experiment. The same materials were used here. Background, classified as limited or extensive, was controlled by the target texts. It had been established through previous surveys that subjects who read the text about doublets had, in effect, limited background of the text topic because they had neither heard of nor played the game before; in contrast, those who read about crossword puzzles, because of their familiarity with the game, were considered to have extensive topic background. Style, as in the first experiment, was measured by the "Processing Style Inventory." This instrument asked subjects to classify themselves as typically more linear or parallel; each style was explained in direct, non-technical terms on the inventory.

Since the dependent variable — order of processing — was measured by a retrospective instrument on the first experiment, a new instrument, allowing an on-line measure, was constructed for this experiment. Each target text, the doublets text and the crossword puzzles text, was altered so that it contained one set of boxes to the right of each of the six paragraphs. The result was two columns of boxes which were respectively labeled "Comprehension" and "Compare and/or Contrast." This provided a paragraph by paragraph instrument for subjects to record where their primary attention was directed while reading that paragraph; and, when completed, it constituted a profile of their attention allotment in terms of the two components.

Procedure

Since each subject had to be tested and interviewed individually, subjects were assigned their 45 minute appointment

time over the semester on a draw basis.

After the subjects were provided general information, they read the word search text. As with the first experiment, there was a brief discussion to assure familiarity with the game. Then subjects read the target text — texts about doublets or crossword puzzles were assigned on an alternating basis — prefaced by these instructions: “You’ve read about a word game called *word search*. Now you’re going to read about another word game. What I’d like you to do is comprehend this text *and* compare and/or contrast this word game with word search. You’ll notice on the text you are about to receive that there are two boxes after every paragraph and that the two columns are labeled. (A mock sample was displayed.) Mark one of the boxes after you finish each paragraph. If you think that, while reading the paragraph, your attention was more on comprehending the paragraph, then put an X in the first box. If you think your attention was more on the task of comparing and/or contrasting with word search, then mark the second with an X.” These instructions were at times repeated or supplemented with further explanation or responses to questions.

After subjects completed reading the target text and marking the boxes, they were asked to comment on each marked box in the Profile they had created. The probe question was, “I see you’ve marked the [first, second, etc.] box. Can you tell me more about why you marked the box the way you did?” At the end subjects were asked to offer any general or overall comments they had about their reading Profile. All discussions were recorded for later reference.

Subjects were then given the “Processing Style Inventory,” the same style measure used on the first experiment, and

asked to categorize themselves as *typically* a linear or parallel processor. After further discussion of their choice on the "Processing Style Inventory," subjects were dismissed.

Quantitative analysis. Research question #1

The primary statistic for this analysis was a "parallel processing score" which was determined by the percentage of boxes marked in the compare/contrast column. Though they are only gross approximations of actual processing complexities and attention allotment, these scores provided a means for comparing groups. In this experiment there were four groups, each set of two representing different levels of one of the independent variables. Their mean parallel processing scores were as follows:

TABLE 1
Parallel processing scores for reader categories

Limited background	19.4	(N=19)
Extensive background	42.5	(N=20)
Linear style	21.8	(N=20)
Parallel Style	41.2	(N=19)

Clearly those with an extensive background of the text topic (readers of the crosswords puzzles text) and those who considered themselves typically parallel processors received higher parallel processing scores than the other two groups.

The data were further submitted to a 2 x 2 ANOVA with background (limited and extensive) and style (linear and parallel) as the two independent variables. The results disclosed that there were significant differences between the parallel processing scores of the two background groups

($F=8.26$, $df=1$, 35 , $p=.006$) and the two style groups ($F=5.40$, $df=1$, 35 , $p=.02$). The interaction between background and style was not significant.

This analysis provided further support for the results of the first experiment. Readers with limited background of the text topic (the doublets group) read in a more linear fashion. Those who had a more extensive background (the crossword puzzle group) were more parallel. Similarly, those who self-classified themselves as typically linear or parallel tended to read in that manner for this particular reading task.

Qualitative analysis — Research question #2

In the previous analysis each subject's profile was reduced to a percentage which was the primary statistic for the descriptive data and the ANOVA. In this analysis the profiles were left intact and represented a sort of track record of the reader's attention maintenance or shifting between the two processes as s/he read the text. These profiles, and the subsequent discussions of them, were the basic data for exploring the question of how readers explain their attention allotment.

Readers with limited background

Of the 19 subjects in this group, 11 had 6-0 profiles. That is, 11 marked only the comprehension boxes. In explaining why they never shifted their attention from comprehension, the 6-0's offered reasons that fell into one of three categories. They either claimed limited knowledge ("I had never heard of it before so I had to concentrate on understanding it"), the complexity of the game or text ("It [the scoring of doublets] is very hard. I had to read closely"), or a need to have a certain amount of information before moving on to comparing/contrasting ("I had to mark comprehension because I was reading to get more information so I could compare").

There were only eight readers with mixed profiles, such as 5-1 or 4-2. When explaining their comprehension marks, these readers did as would be expected. They offered reasons that fell into the same categories. But, surprisingly, they tended to use the same categories when explaining many of their compare/contrast marks and shifts from comprehension to comparing/contrasting. One said, for example, "It was new to me. I had to figure out what it was about so I could compare" (category #1). According to another: "I finally understood the rules so I began to compare. I tried to compare" (category #2). And another: "I started comparing here because the more information I had the easier it would be to compare" (category #3).

In short, in this group of limited background readers the primary attention allotment was to comprehension and the predominant explanations — even when explaining a shift to comparing and contrasting — were based on limited background, text or game complexity, or insufficient information for comparing/contrasting.

Readers with extensive background

It might seem that when readers were very familiar with the topic of the target text, there would be extremes in the 0-6 direction, a logical counterpart to the 6-0's of the other group. But there were no 0-6's among the extensive background group; in fact, there was only one 1-5 and one 2-4. Almost half (9 of 20) had 3-3 profiles, and one was even a 6-0. In other words, it appears that these readers too felt a considerable allegiance to the process of comprehension. But did they?

Apparently not, at least not in the same way the readers in the other group did. Their explanations were, for the most part, qualitatively different, and they relied on three kinds of

explanations that either directed them to, returned them to, or kept them on the comprehension process. First of all, readers seemed often to attend to details, such as specific rules or exact scoring procedures, for no other reason than that they *were* details. In fact for crossword puzzles readers, attention to detail was the most common reason given for marking a comprehension box. Even in a game they understood well, even with details, examples, and rules they knew, many readers focused on comprehension. It was, in my judgment, the details themselves which cued many of these crossword puzzles readers to shift attention to comprehension, not the degree of familiarity with the topic.

Moreover, most of the subjects used what I labeled a “first paragraph strategy.” Of the 39 subjects, 35 marked comprehension on the first paragraph. Their explanations, such as “I wanted to find out what it was about first,” support the common sense notion that readers initially put their thinking skills purpose in abeyance in order first to get an idea of what they’re reading about. To a lesser degree many of the readers also used a “final paragraph strategy.” That is, they shifted back to comprehension on the final paragraph for no other reason than that it was the final paragraph, where, as one reader put it, “everything’s tied up.”

I noted a pervasive third cognitive phenomenon which doesn’t seem quite so obvious or logical, a phenomenon I’ve labeled “default comprehension.” That is, readers would frequently shift their attention to comprehension not because they needed to understand but because there was nothing they judged significant for comparing. “That paragraph didn’t have anything to do with the game [word search], so I didn’t care. I just read it to understand it.” “There wasn’t anything worth comparing or contrasting, so I just worked on comprehending.” Statements like these, which represent negative

judgments that readers have made about the significance of text ideas to the thinking task, indicate more of a choice not to compare/contrast than a commitment to comprehension.

In short, readers in this group spent more of their time attending to comprehending than might be expected. But their reasons for this attention allotment were different from the reasons offered by those in the other group. The extent of a reader's background apparently affected not only the order of processing but also the kinds of strategies these readers used.

Discussion

The answer to the first research question — *does the extent of a reader's background and/or a reader's typical processing style affect the order of processing between the two processes of comprehending a text and using text ideas for a thinking task?* — is yes, at least with the texts, tasks, and subjects of these two experiments. The answer to the second research question — *how do readers explain their attention shifts or maintenance when reading both to comprehend and to use text ideas for a thinking task?* — provides more information about what occurs in the minds of readers when they maintain attention on one process or the other, or when they shift between the two. Obviously, in order to generalize with much confidence, this line of research needs to be extended to other kinds of texts, a wider range of thinking tasks, and more readers representing different age and skill levels.

The results from the investigation of the two questions within this experiment, however, shed some light on the complex relationships between reading comprehension and more general thinking skills and, I believe, have something to say to classroom teachers. Teachers, especially those in subjects where students are expected to think about or work

with ideas they've comprehended, typically preface reading assignments by suggesting such purposes as "evaluate the author's proposed solution to the population problem" or "compare her solution with other solutions." This research suggests that such assignments are not as straightforward as they might seem — that when, or even whether, students follow such directions depends upon several factors. The more teachers know about these possibilities, the better they will be able to prepare for and follow up reading assignments.

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READING HORIZONS EXPANDS TO FIVE ISSUES ANNUALLY

Beginning with the first issue of Volume 31, *Reading Horizons* will expand to offer its subscribers five issues a year, published bimonthly during the school year, from October through June. The publication of all issues during the school year will, we believe, make the journal even more useful to all our subscribers.



Effects of a Secondary Reading Methods Course on Students' Attitudes toward Teaching Content Reading

Bruce A. Lloyd

It takes a lifetime for individuals to master the reading process, and high school teachers play an important role. Moreover, high school teachers, who are subject matter specialists, are the best persons to teach students the reading skills unique to the various content areas (Shepherd, 1984). Many secondary teachers are aware of this opportunity and responsibility; others are not, so efforts are underway to help them *all* believe in the need for teaching reading skills in their special subjects (Lloyd, 1986; Roe, Stoodt and Burns, 1987). Activities such as inservice workshops and formal courses in reading are valuable for practicing teachers because these experiences do change high school teachers' attitudes about the need for teaching reading skills (O'Rourke, 1980; Stieglitz, 1983; Patberg, Dewitz and Henning, 1984).

But what about the preservice educator? The teacher-in-training now is usually required to take at least one undergraduate reading methods course for certification. The rationale is that such a course will help preservice educators become aware of the need for teaching reading skills. Will it? Welle (1981) says "yes." She reports using the Vaughan Scale (1977) to measure preservice teachers' opinions about the value of her reading methods courses. Over a three year period her students expressed positive views about the need

for teaching reading skills. Christiansen (1986), using his own questionnaire, reports positive results from his research. His students were in favor of the reading course requirement and thought themselves to be well prepared to teach reading skills to their students.

The purpose of this research was to investigate the impact of a required secondary reading methods course on pre-service teachers' attitudes regarding the need to teach reading skills to high school students, using an objective measure to assess attitude change during the course. The duration of the study was for one academic year (two semesters) and utilized six class sections (three each semester). The data gathering instrument was "A Scale to Measure Attitudes Toward Teaching Reading in Content Classrooms" (Vaughan, 1977), whose author specified that it might be used without violation of copyright by anyone seeking to "alleviate the problems of secondary readers" (p. 608). Scoring was done using a 10-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

At the beginning of each semester, on the first day of class before the course outline was distributed, all students were given a copy of the Vaughan Scale and told to fill it out anonymously. These papers were collected and coded by course meeting day and time, the responses were quantified, and means and standard deviations were computed for each item. This process was repeated on the last day of class at the end of the semester. The significance of the differences between means (pre/post survey) was calculated for each of the six classes, then for the three fall classes as a group and the three winter classes as a group. Finally, all groups were combined and the results examined for pre/post survey test significance. These data are reported in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Pre-test and post-test means, and significance of differences
between means for all groups attitudes' about the need to teach
reading skills to high school students (Vaughan Scale)

	MEANS		Significance
	pre	post	of Difference
	N=182	N=171	
1. A content area teacher is obliged to help students improve their reading ability.	7.59	8.91	.000**
2. Technical vocabulary should be introduced to students in content classes before they meet those terms in a reading passage.	7.40	9.24	.000**
3. The primary responsibility of a content teacher should be to impart subject matter knowledge.	6.94	7.42	.060
4. Few students can learn all they need to know about how to read in six years of schooling.	5.90	7.52	.000**
5. The sole responsibility for teaching students how to study should lie with reading teachers.	2.56	1.65	.001**
6. Knowing how to teach reading in content areas should be required for secondary teaching certification.	7.02	8.02	.000**
7. Only English teachers should be responsible for teaching reading in secondary schools.	2.67	1.52	.000**
8. A teacher who wants to improve students' interest in reading should show them that he or she likes to read.	7.54	8.35	.000**
9. Content teachers should teach content and leave reading instruction to reading teachers.	2.95	1.57	.000**
10. A content area teacher should be responsible for helping students think on an interpretive level as well as a literal level when they read.	8.18	9.09	.000**
11. Content area teachers should feel a greater responsibility to the content they teach than to any reading instruction they may be able to provide.	5.78	5.49	.323
12. Content area teachers should help students learn to set purposes for reading.	7.34	8.73	.000**
13. Every content area teacher should teach students how to read material in his or her content specialty.	7.32	9.02	.000**
14. Reading instruction in secondary schools is a waste of time.	0.82	0.57	.127
15. Content area teachers should be familiar with theoretical concepts of the reading process.	7.85	8.36	.008**

* p<.05; **p<.01

This table contains the fifteen statements in the Vaughan Scale as well as pre/post survey means, and significance of the differences between means, based on *t* tests. An examination of the table reveals significant changes in opinions for most of the statements in the survey. After having had the course, these students believed that they should help *their students* improve their reading ability, preteach technical vocabulary, teach study skills, help their students think on an interpretive level, set purposes for reading, and be familiar with the theoretical processes of reading.

A further examination of the table reveals no significant changes of opinion regarding the primary responsibility of the content teacher. Participants in the study had no strong feelings of loyalty to their content area vis-a-vis reading instruction. This was not entirely unexpected because the course was designed to explain to these preservice educators how to teach reading skills concurrently with their subjects. The one is the base for the other, so students were not forced to make a choice between teaching their content specialty and providing instruction in reading. Finally, students' strong disagreement with the statement in item 14 ("Reading instruction in secondary schools is a waste of time") on both pre- and post-measures, was enlightening and heartening. They entered the course feeling that such instruction is valuable and did not change their opinions at the end of the course.

The purpose of this study was to discover if preservice educators would change their opinions about the need for teaching reading skills to their students after they themselves participated in a required undergraduate reading methods course. The responses of the participants indicate that students' attitudes underwent significant changes during the course, and that they became more aware of the need for

teaching reading skills in the secondary program. Despite these gratifying results, there is no room for complacency. As Ratekin, Simpson, Alvermann and Dishner (1985) and Patberg and her colleagues (1984) have written, changing teachers' attitudes and knowledge about reading in subject matter areas is no guarantee that new attitudes and knowledge will be practiced in the classroom. What takes place in content area teaching, after education students become teachers themselves, is a topic for further research.

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Comparing Recreational Reading Levels with Reading Levels from an Informal Reading Inventory

Lawrence L. Smith
C. Rosanne Joyner

When children pull a book off the library shelf for recreational reading, what are they considering — length? ...jacket appeal? ...difficulty level? ...relation to their experiential background? All of these probably enter into consideration when the selection is made. The determining factor, however, for a freely chosen book, is quite likely to be the interest level of that selection for a particular child (Breen, 1967). Teachers acknowledge the importance of a motivating interest when they teach a directed reading lesson or prepare a child for an Informal Reading Inventory selection. Advocates of individualized reading programs have long stressed the importance of the interest factor in the child's self-selection of reading materials.

When a child selects a book purely for pleasure reading, to what difficulty level does the book correspond? It is not difficult to find writers suggesting that children's recreational reading levels should be the same as, or at least based upon, their independent reading levels as identified by an Informal Reading Inventory.

Several published IRI's (Ekwall, 1979; Johns, 1981; Silvaroli, 1982) equate the IRI's independent level with the

level at which a child should read books for leisure reading. Betts (1946) describes his basal level (which corresponds to the more recent IRI-designated independent level) as "the level at which 'free,' supplementary, independent, or extensive reading can be done successfully" (p. 446). In *A Dictionary of Reading and Related Terms* (Harris and Hodges, 1981) the independent level is described as the level which is "especially useful" when selecting material for leisure reading.

In his *Diagnostic Reading Scales* (1972), Spache describes that level at which to choose recreational reading materials as being *higher* than the instructional level and one which can be influenced by experience and interest. Powell (1971), on the other hand, speculates that the independent level is not static, but "floats."

Several research studies have investigated the correlation between recreational or independent reading choices and cloze levels. Breen (1967) investigated the choices of second and fifth grade students involved in an individualized reading program and found that over 50 percent of the students did not select materials at an instructional level, and 25 percent consistently chose materials which were at the frustration level. Ferguson (1977) studied the trade books freely selected by a group of sixth graders and used a cloze test to determine the level of difficulty of the books chosen (the cloze tests were administered before the children were allowed to read the books). The resulting data revealed that more than 50 percent of the students' selections tested by cloze procedures were within the independent level range (that is, students correctly supplied more than 57 percent of the deleted words), while 35 percent of those involved chose books within their instructional level range. Stockton (1982)

compared the recreational reading choices of Title I and Honor Roll junior high students. She found that 2 percent of the Title I students chose books at their independent level, as compared with 23 percent of the Honor Roll students (p. 4-8).

Belloni and Jongsma (1978) gave low-achieving seventh grade students limited choices of widely-ranged material. They found that the students showed better comprehension of material that they considered highly interesting than of material they rated as having low interest value.

While there are some who believe that a child's recreational reading is generally done at a level higher than the independent level, we were able to find no references in the literature to either substantiate or refute the equating of a recreational level with that of the independent level. Prompted by the thinking of those who do not view recreational reading as a limiting endeavor in terms of difficulty levels, and realizing that interest and motivation are not variables generally assessed with an Informal Reading Inventory, we decided to conduct a study regarding the recreational reading level.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to compare recreational reading levels in relation to the independent, instructional and frustration levels as determined with an Informal Reading Inventory.

Procedure

For the purposes of our study, 20 second graders and 20 fifth graders, from an elementary school in a southeastern state, were selected to participate. The *Basic Reading Inventory* (Johns, 1981) was administered to all students to

determine their independent, instructional, and frustration reading levels. Powell's (1978) differentiated criteria were then used to determine those levels.

Within a two-month period, the school's librarian kept track of the next three books chosen by each student. Those books were freely selected; the children did not know that their choices were being monitored. After the books had been returned to the library, the researchers estimated the books' difficulty level with the Fry Readability Graph (1977). (The Fry Graph was used because it was one of the means employed to estimate the readability levels of the *Basic Reading Inventory*.) By this means, we estimated the difficulty level of the books chosen for recreational reading by each child. (It should be noted that no procedure was used to determine if the students actually read each book.)

Subjects

Although 34 second graders were administered the *Basic Reading Inventory*, only 20 (9 girls, 11 boys) were used in the study. The 14 students were eliminated because they read at such a low level that neither an independent nor an instructional level could be determined for them. All 20 (8 girls, 12 boys) fifth graders to whom the *Basic Reading Inventory* had been administered were used in the study.

Results

Second grade students selected books for recreational reading within their independent reading level 40 percent of the time, within their instructional level 27 percent of the time, and at their frustration level 33 percent of the time.

Fifth grade students selected books for recreational reading within their independent reading level 42 percent of the

time, within their instructional level 30 percent of the time, and at their frustration level 28 percent of the time.

TABLE 1

Percent of books for recreational reading selected by second and fifth grade students at their various reading levels

	INDEPENDENT	INSTRUCTIONAL	FRUSTRATION
Second Grade	40	27	33
Fifth Grade	42	30	28

Second grade students, when they could select books to read for pleasure, selected books above their independent level 60 percent of the time. Fifth grade students selected books above their independent level 58 percent of the time.

Discussion

The purpose of our study was to determine whether students who had the opportunity to select their own library books for recreational reading would select books at their independent reading level. Or, as others have argued, would the students choose more difficult books due to such variables, perhaps, as personal experience, interest, and motivation? Based on the information gathered in this study, it appears that recreational reading varies so much that it is not legitimate even to discuss a recreational reading level — certainly not as synonymous with the independent reading level as determined from an informal reading inventory.

Powell (1971) appears to be correct in his statement that there is no empirical data to support the ranking nor the limits

of the independent reading level. It is sometimes below, sometimes at, and some times above the instructional reading level. Interest, value, motivation, and/or background for what is being read may very well be the main determinant(s) for a so-called recreational reading level. According to Breen (1967), Wrightstone (1957) and others have suggested that children do not read for instructional or independent purposes. They "read to fulfill personal purposes of [their] own. If given the opportunity to choose books which satisfy a purpose for [them, they often go] from a difficult book to an easy book and back again to a challenging book" (p. 25).

Since reading for pleasure is so personal, it is inappropriate for educators to base statements about the difficulty level of books students should select for recreational reading on the concept of the independent level as determined by an Informal Reading Inventory.

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.... EXPANDING HORIZONS

Pass the Read

This teaching idea is shared by Toni S. Walters, a faculty member at Oakland University, Rochester, Minnesota



Maintaining interest and involvement is frequently a challenge when the teacher elects to have students read orally. *Pass the read* is an instructional strategy for reading orally, which encourages high levels of student participation, decision making, and active listening because students have direct input as to when they will read orally, how much they will read, and if they want to read. Yet the teacher retains the instructional roles of facilitating and monitoring comprehension.

Implementing *Pass the read*

Pass the read, a group oral reading strategy, works like this. Following initial prereading discussion of the passage or story title, the teacher initiates the oral reading for the class or group. After reading a few paragraphs, the teacher selects a student to *Pass the read*. The student selected has the option of accepting or not accepting the opportunity to read orally. When a student accepts the "pass," she must read at least one paragraph, or up to two pages of text, before passing the "read" to another student. Within the one paragraph to two page parameter, the reader must decide how much oral reading she will do before passing the read to another student. Again, the next student has the opportunity to accept or refuse the reading. The pass to various students, regardless of whether they have already read, or back to the teacher continues throughout the story or passage. Yes, students may pass the read back to the teacher.

Pass the read can readily be applied within an instructional Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA) format. Briefly, the DRTA involves predicting and citing evidence to justify the predictions, as well as reading to confirm, disprove, or reformulate predictions. The DRTA technique can be applied to all types of written information including fiction and nonfiction stories and content area textbooks. When *Pass the read* is coupled with the DRTA technique the teacher is able to interject stops for the students' predictions, clarifications, modifications, and summarizations, while still allowing students to control how much, when, and who should read.

Advantages of *Pass the read*

Following are several instructional advantages for using *Pass the read*: the teacher can model fluent oral reading; the technique encourages students to be active listeners and decision makers; the monotony of teacher controlled round robin reading is eliminated; reluctant and less able readers can maintain a level of dignity because they have some control in their involvement; classroom oral reading times become experiences shared by the student and the teacher.

What about the reluctant or less able reader?

Reading aloud can be a very uncomfortable experience for some readers. Thus, a natural question is *What about the student who always refuses to accept the opportunity to read for the group?* When the pass strategy is implemented in a non-threatening environment, even the most reluctant or unskilled readers tend to come around and become participants. It may take a while, but is not wait time a real factor of teaching and learning?

Suitability of strategy

Pass the read works well with students in high school, middle, and upper elementary grades where students are reading to learn. I have used it at those levels comfortably and successfully. My graduate students and teacher inservice groups have modified *Pass the read* and used it successfully with children who are just learning to read.

Variations of the strategy

Pass the read can be used when oral and silent reading are combined. It also works well for partner or paired reading and cooperative groups. Sometimes the shortness or difficulty of a passage may warrant setting the parameters for oral reading at one to three paragraphs.

It takes several friendly sessions for students to feel comfortable passing the read. Initially, the teacher begins the oral reading. However, once *Pass the read* is embraced by students, it becomes natural for a student volunteer to begin the oral reading.



"Expanding Horizons," enables *Reading Horizons* readers to share practical teaching ideas with one another. Have you a suggestion to submit? Send two typed copies of your idea to Editor, *Reading Horizons*, Reading Center & Clinic, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI 49008; include two stamped self-addressed envelopes.



Using the Media to Stimulate Writing

Honré Frank Gitelman

How do magazines and newspapers inspire students to write? They are timely, familiar, readily available, imaginative, and touch their lives in personal ways. Advertising in particular fires students' imaginations. Students can be encouraged to write by responding to a wide variety of familiar images having high visual and verbal impact and appeal. In addition to the advertisements, illustrations and photographs enhance comprehension and help students formulate mental imagery for written descriptions.

Using stimuli from the media, fourth and fifth graders wrote extensively in structured sessions conducted by the reading/writing teacher, and supported by classroom teachers. Prior to the writing sessions, the teachers met to discuss the topics, goals, and special materials needed. The classroom teacher prepared the class for each session, listened to discussions, and circulated among the students to offer additional help when they were writing, and provided extra time for students to complete their writing assignments later in the day.

Topics inspired by ads and pictures included food, sports, pets and gifts. A newspaper feature was the basis for writing about environmental pollution. Each theme was designed to increase students' ability to create original compositions from familiar material using persuasive, narrative or descriptive techniques. Initially, detailed guidelines were provided as frameworks for students' writing, but the specificity of the

directions was decreased as students became more proficient.

In one assignment, in order to motivate students to write about improving their immediate environment, a newspaper feature titled "Ugly Spot of the Week" was displayed and discussed. Some of the issues raised were the discarding of unsightly and dangerous items, and methods of enforcement of safety and environmental rules. Students were then given these directions:

- Describe an ugly place such as a house, building, store, car lot, field, woods, alley or roadside, so that the reader can picture it clearly.
- Tell why the ugly place bothers you, your family or neighbors. Explain why it is dangerous.
- Describe what needs to be cleaned up to make the place look appealing.
- Do not write about a place which may embarrass others. Use good judgement.

Structuring the writing sessions

Activities during the writing sessions, based on current practices for teaching the writing process (Fuller, 1983; Graves, 1982; Hansen, Newkirk and Graves, 1985; Kirby and Liner, 1981; Simmons, 1988), included discussion, rough drafts, sentence lifting, editing, revision, and publication. Illustrating the compositions added a broader dimension to the written assignments. The lessons were conducted every other day; the time between sessions provided students with extra time to complete their compositions. Students kept their writing assignments in pocketed, laminated writing folders.

During an initial writing session, students wrote a composition in class and a composition for homework, based on a

variation of the theme. The purpose of the additional assignment was to provide a choice. In a later session, the students selected the one composition they thought could be revised successfully. During the rough draft process, students were encouraged to write their ideas on paper quickly, telling enough to make an interesting detailed story which a classmate would understand. Emphasis was on communication. Students were told not to concern themselves with perfect handwriting or grammar. They were encouraged to spell words the way they thought the words should be spelled and to circle words when they were unsure of the spelling (Sowers, 1988). The students were also instructed to write on every other line to make space for future additions and corrections. They were encouraged to select titles which would give the reader a clue about the entire story and make the reader eager to read it.

The purpose of the second session, sentence lifting (McCrary, 1984), was to discuss and correct common errors found in the rough drafts. Seven to ten anonymous sentences were printed in black ink on acetate sheets for use with an overhead projector. A blue pen was used for contrast. Students were directed to discuss positive aspects of each sentence, such as subject, predicate, punctuation and capitalization. Next, they were assisted in explaining reasons for correcting errors. This lesson provided students with a natural purpose for clear communication, rather than an artificial drill session. The session was also designed to heighten awareness of various ways of expression. It was not designed to correct all the mistakes encountered in the themes.

The next session built on previous progress. Students were helped to improve the content of their compositions and

to proofread for errors. Each segment of the lesson was timed for intense concentration on a specific task. First the students revised their titles to tell just enough to captivate a person's interest to read the story through to its completion. Next, they checked for capitalization and ending punctuation. Finally, they were encouraged to add and improve adjectives throughout the compositions, and to substitute vivid adjectives and verbs for bland ones. A *bad* child might be changed to a *mischievous* child; a *nice* surprise might become an *unexpected* surprise; *ran* might be changed to *fled* or *raced*.

Toward the end of the session, students concentrated on correcting circled words they did not know how to spell. Direct assistance was given to students who needed it; the writing teacher wrote the beginning two or three letters on their papers to enable them to use the dictionary with greater ease. Students were then given proofreading checklists, and finally checklists and compositions were given to nearby peers for examination and discussion. The signatures of both students indicated that the students were satisfied with the completed compositions. The writing teacher corrected only items discussed during the editing session. The compositions were not perfect, but they did reflect the students' careful efforts.

For the next session, illustrating, students were taught some techniques for graphic art work to use in printing the title and drawing a picture which best represented the main idea of their compositions. A variety of type styles were displayed from magazines, newspapers, textbooks, library books, and advertisements.

Student presentations

The final session was the oral presentation. Before students volunteered to read their compositions aloud, guide-

lines for audience and speaker were established. The responsibilities of the audience were to keep hands free of distractions, and to focus attention on the presentation. The responsibilities of the speaker were to speak loudly and clearly at an unhurried pace, and to hold the composition below mouth level. Questions and comments were encouraged after each presentation to promote feedback and interchange among peers.

The final activity was selecting the overall title for the compositions. Approximately five to seven suggestions were written on the chalkboard, and students voted for their favorite choice. This was a valuable experience for students because it encouraged decision making, and provided a natural method for generating the main idea of the stories.

Student compositions and illustrations were displayed in hallways and classrooms, placed at children's eye level so that all students benefited from viewing the work. Students' work was also published in a booklet which was exhibited in the media center.

Student and teacher evaluations

Toward the end of the school year, students and teachers evaluated the writing program by completing questionnaires. The students were encouraged to sign their names, so that they would respond in a serious manner, and to enable the writing teacher to contact a student if further clarification of a statement was needed. Students responded positively to the survey. Their comments about the process included "gave me confidence," "helped me be more creative," "helped me be more detailed," "helped me think and write faster," "made writing easier for me." Suggestions for future writing topics included My Favorite Sport, Funny Things We Did When We

Were Very Little, Our Teachers' Lives At Home, An Embarrassing Situation, Our Worst Nightmare, Places We've Studied in Social Studies, and Inventing Something New.

There was strong positive response to the illustration session, suggesting that even in the intermediate grades, students need the visual to support their text, and demonstrating that students are eager to express themselves through what they know. The response further indicated a need to collaborate with the art teacher, whose specialized skills could refine students' design concepts.

There was high interest in oral reports. Almost every student enjoyed the special attention and the opportunity to discuss compositions with classmates. Responses also showed that students are eager to share their interest and understanding of various academic subjects through writing. This was indicated by their favorable comments regarding social studies, science, book reports, and poetry. On the negative side, it was evident from the questionnaires that some students did not regard the sentence lifting sessions as beneficial. Perhaps these sessions were unpleasant because they were similar to English lessons.

How will student comments affect future teaching methods? Students will initially select writing topics from the list of suggestions and later on, plan their own topics. Students will be provided with more frequent opportunities during class time to write about the exciting books they have read and the topics they have studied. In regard to sentence lifting, the session will be directed toward correcting errors through individual student conferences.

The teachers regarded the writing program as an extension of their own programs. They believed that the additional

writing lessons improved the students' compositions. In contrast to students, teachers requested the continuation of the sentence lifting sessions because the sessions reinforced skills students acquire and refine in the intermediate grades.

In summary, media techniques evoke imaginative responses. Capitalizing on the media's expressive characteristics is one natural and important way to inspire students to write. Once students understand how to write about pictures, they can write about topics which are not so obvious. Every student has something important to say. Students write more effectively when they have a choice, when they have input, and when they have a purpose for writing.

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Testing Reading: We Need a New Perspective

W. John Harker

In their recent study of reading assessment, Farr and Carey (1986) observe that over the past several years "testing programs...have exploded on the educational scene" (p. 6). Those familiar with reading instruction and the assessment of children's reading development must agree. Testing programs at the district, state, and national levels have proliferated recently as more and more pressure is brought to bear on teachers to demonstrate in some quantifiable fashion their success (or lack of it) in teaching children to read.

An instance of this trend is *A Nation at Risk* (1983), published by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, where it is argued that "standardized achievement tests should be administered at major transition points from one level of schooling to another" (p. 18). Public and political receptivity to such arguments and the testing programs that follow from them can be seen, for example, in a bill passed by the Indiana Senate in 1984 which decreed that "student test scores would indicate a school by school ranking of Indiana's school corporation" (UPI, 1984). The frequency of use of standardized tests is indicated in a recent study by Carey (1985) which found that students going through the Rhode Island school system could normally expect to take between twelve and fifteen major test batteries during their school career. More generally, Anderson (1982) has estimated that students in American schools typically spend from two to six hours each year taking standardized tests. The *English*

language arts framework (California State Department of Education, 1987) contains the statement that "school districts may find useful the overview of students' skills and their use of language conventions provided by such objective instruments as criterion- and norm-referenced tests" (p. 36).

Teaching and testing

The frequency and growth in the use of standardized tests raises the question of their validity in measuring reading achievement. Put another way, do tests measure reading as we conceive it and teach it?

As educators know, our understanding of the reading process has undergone dramatic change over the past two decades. As teachers became familiar with the writings of Kenneth Goodman (1967) and Frank Smith (1971) in the late 1960's and early 1970's, their thinking about reading began to alter. There developed a growing recognition that reading does not involve the simple decoding of meaning represented in the text, but that it involves an interaction between background information the reader brings to the text and information the reader finds there. Through this interaction, the reader constructs meaning. This constructive emphasis has gained increasing support from research during the 1970's and 1980's (van Dijk, 1987; van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983; Just and Carpenter, 1980, 1987; Perfetti, 1985; Perfetti and Lesgold, 1977; Rumelhart, 1977) with the result that the traditional skills approach to teaching reading with its emphasis on basal readers and workbooks has been replaced by an emphasis on teaching specific comprehension strategies, replacing the limited content encountered in basal readers with literary selections and trade books, encouraging more independent reading, and combining reading and writing activities. In all of this, process has taken precedence over product.

But has it? Or has it when one examines standardized tests intended to determine reading achievement? The answer has to be "no." Despite the millions of dollars spent annually on tests, their pervasive use in determining student achievement, their influence on curriculum planning, and the enormous public and media attention given to the outcomes of testing, standardized reading tests remain locked in a concept of reading which does not coincide with current knowledge of the reading process.

Perhaps the most obvious example of this lies in their skills emphasis. Rather than assessing the underlying processes through which readers construct meaning, the majority of standardized tests measure children's performance of various arbitrarily prescribed reading skills which research has shown to have little or nothing to do with reading or learning to read. The result is that these tests measure an artificially fragmented and contrived construct of the reading process rather than the highly integrated interactive one which research repeatedly reveals reading to be.

Another way standardized tests differ from our current understanding of the reading process is by trying to eliminate the effect of background information. As Johnson (1983, 1984) has shown, test makers do this by including a broad range of topics in test passages, by eliminating questions which they think students with greater background information can answer more easily, and by using statistical models based on estimates of subgroups' knowledge of the topic included. And yet, in doing so, test makers attempt to eliminate one of the most important elements in reading comprehension. Although background information clearly influences test performance, it does so because it is a fundamental component of the reading process. The removal of its influence is therefore impossible in the valid measurement of reading.

A related shortcoming of standardized tests is the contrived nature of the reading passages which they employ. Rather than relying on excerpts from authentic language sources such as children's literature and nonfiction, test makers often use reading passages which are specifically designed for their tests. However, as Nystrand (1987) has shown, these passages are frequently unrealistic and trivial in their content. Moreover, as revealed in the research of Fillmore and Kay (1983) and Langer (1987), these passages are often puzzling, inconsistent, and conflicting in the information they contain. The result is that the reader is misled, forced to second-guess meaning, and to adopt separate test-taking strategies which are unlike those employed in normal reading.

Another difficulty with standardized tests is their insensitivity to inferential understanding. This shortcoming has long been recognized, even before constructivist models of reading evolved. However, with the evolution of these models and the research which supports them, the emphasis of standardized tests on the measurement of literal comprehension over inferential comprehension is an even more serious shortcoming. Research into the nature of reading and learning to read has repeatedly shown the importance of inference in constructing meaning (Dewitz, Carr and Patberg, 1987; Hansen, 1981).

Problems

The major danger in the use of standardized tests which vary so markedly from what we know about the reading process is that they limit instruction rather than further it. This limiting influence shows itself in several ways. One of these is through the almost ritualistic fashion in which standardized tests are administered, and the manner in which their results

are received and interpreted. It is not uncommon to witness the administration of a standardized test when the purpose for testing has never been clearly established and the relationship of the particular test used to the instructional program has never been considered. And, often, when the results come in, they are accepted as truth, as a commendation or condemnation of the instructional program regardless of the validity of the test for evaluating that program. Such testing wastes time of teachers and students alike since it reveals little or nothing about reading achievement in the particular educational setting in which it is used.

Another problem comes from the reaction to test scores by teachers who are unaware of the tests' shortcomings or who, because of administrative and public pressures, feel inhibited from challenging their validity. These teachers teach what tests measure without regard for the incompatibility between what they actually measure and current knowledge of the reading process. They remain bound by a skills approach which does little more than prepare children for success on subsequent reading tests. An associated problem lies in the way test scores are interpreted. Students who have been taught to use the contrived skills set by standardized tests may well achieve higher test scores than those who have been taught constructive reading strategies. The result is to discredit the teaching of these strategies in the eyes of those for whom test scores are the beginning and end of reading instruction, and to further entrench instruction in the meaningless reading skills which tests measure.

A further difficulty with standardized testing is that the range of reading skills measured by any single test is significantly less than the range of skills taught through the traditional skills-building basal program. This has been a criticism

of standardized tests for decades. However, it becomes even more telling in light of what we now know about the reading process and the fallacy of measuring specific skills in the first place. The question which faces us now is, given the complexity of the reading process as revealed through recent research and theory, can any one standardized test or even battery of tests provide an adequate total picture of children's reading behavior?

Another limitation of standardized tests is that, due to their perceived authority, they diminish teachers' confidence in using informal tests they make themselves. However, teacher-made tests are often better at revealing children's reading performance in the context of the particular tasks demanded of them in normal classroom learning situations. The artificiality of standardized test administration — the tension created by the unusual situation of test administration with its strange-looking booklets, the pressure of timing, the stilted instructions, the unnatural content of the reading passages, and so on — reduces the validity of these tests. Informal tests overcome much of this artificiality through the natural and informal manner in which they are administered, and the similarity between their content and the reading material children normally encounter in the classroom. Through informal testing teachers are able to integrate the process of instruction with the process of evaluation so that the two become almost indistinguishable. But pressure for the formal quantification of reading performance through the authority of standardized tests often leads teachers to defer to these tests and diminish the value of their own tests.

Solutions

In the face of these problems, it is not surprising that informed teachers have become increasingly disillusioned with the use of standardized tests in their classrooms. And yet it

seems clear that testing in some form is here to stay. Not only is testing frequently represented as the only sure way to guarantee quality in education, but this belief is at least tacitly encouraged by test publishers for whom standardized tests are profitable big business.

Given this situation, the challenge facing reading teachers is not to eliminate testing, but to make it more responsive to valid educational goals as represented in our current understanding of how children read and learn to read. There are many ways this can be done, and although none of them is easy, what follows are some suggestions.

First, teachers must become knowledgeable about current concepts of the reading process in order to be articulate and informed agents of change in testing. Little will be gained by advocating change when teachers themselves are not clear as to what the nature of this change should be, in terms of what is currently known about the reading process. Therefore, self-education is a necessary first step toward strong and informed advocacy.

Once a sound knowledge base for advocacy is established, teachers should not remain confined to an audience of their peers in expressing dissatisfaction with standardized testing. Support for standardized testing most often comes from uninformed public opinion, and teachers' opposition to this testing must therefore be voiced in the public arena. Speaking to service clubs, church groups, parents' organizations, and similar audiences is a role teachers should actively assume if they expect their side of the testing argument to be heard. What all this means is that teachers must become more vocal advocates of valid testing. Too often teachers voice their concerns among themselves without "going public."

Within their professional activities, teachers can resist the tendency for testing to determine the reading curriculum. When testing establishes the ends and means of instruction, when what tests measure constitutes the goals of instruction, and when deficiencies revealed by tests determine instructional objectives, the process is circular. This circle is even more insidious when what standardized reading tests actually measure under the designation "reading" is in fact something quite different from what current research and theory reveals reading to be. The fundamental issue here is whether standardized tests, or teachers, should determine educational outcomes and educational practice.

In recognition of the fact that to ignore the call for testing of some type is unrealistic in today's educational climate, teachers should insist on the validity of their own informal tests and the information these tests provide. Informal tests can combine process and product information to a far greater extent than standardized tests. These tests can be designed so that the particular reading strategies demanded of children in specific learning situations can be observed, and the outcome of this learning can be determined. Gone is the artificiality of standardized tests and their distance from the normal instructional procedures of the classroom. Rather, what can be called "situational validity" is established as children work in normal learning situations performing test tasks in such a way that they are often not even aware they are being evaluated. Yet, as a result of such testing, teachers gain insights into the process through which children are learning as well as the product of this learning. Suggested formats for the development of informal tests are available from numerous sources including Ahrendt and Haselton (1973), Flint-Ferguson and Youga (1987), Royer, Greene, and Sinatra (1987), Simpson (1987), Voix (1968), and Wood (1985).

Closely related to the use of informal tests is a needed emphasis on the teacher as observer. Observing children's reading behavior, their ease and attention when performing reading tasks, the kinds of material they like to read, the manner in which they communicate their feelings about what they have read, and the choices they make in response to new reading material of varied difficulty and content — all provide the observant teacher with a wealth of information about children's reading. This information, combined with information derived from teacher-made tests, can serve as the basis for qualitatively rich reports of children's reading progress which can be made to answer even the most persistent demands for testing.

In all of this, a new perspective on testing is called for. The responsibility for bringing about this perspective lies primarily with teachers, with a clear recognition of their central role in evaluating children's reading, and an understanding of the necessity to test reading in ways which are consistent with what we know about how children read and learn to read.

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IRA DELEGATES SPEAK OUT ON ASSESSMENT

At the 1990 conference of the International Reading Association, held in May in Atlanta Georgia, the 389-member delegate assembly voted unanimously to oppose "the proliferation of school-by-school, district-by-district, state-by-state, and province-by-province comparison assessments," noting specifically the biennial assessments by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), and congressional mandates for comparison studies of NAEP test results which will further increase the cost of the estimated \$19 million allotted for the 1992 assessment.

Judith Thelen, of Frostburg State University in Maryland, who is IRA president-elect, stated, "Reading educators are not opposed to measuring progress. But outmoded tests are not testing what we are now teaching." Current IRA president, Carl Braun, of the University of Calgary in Alberta Canada, asserted, "External control over assessment, especially inappropriate use of large scale assessment data, is recognized as a threat to the work of teachers and ultimately the welfare of our children. This action by our delegates attests to the determination of our members to stand firm on issues that directly impact the lives of teachers and children."

Probably the most incisive comment on the current emphasis on mandated, extensive, continuing testing came from Heather Fehring, IRA delegate from Australia: *"As any wise old farmer will tell you, you don't fatten your lambs simply by weighing them."*

THEMED ISSUE ON READING RECOVERY CALL FOR MANUSCRIPTS

In the spring of 1991 *Reading Horizons* will offer a special issue on the theme of Reading Recovery. Contributions in the form of case studies, commentaries, and articles about all aspects of the Reading Recovery program are welcomed. All manuscripts will be evaluated anonymously, following *Reading Horizons* standard review procedures. (See *Call for Manuscripts* on page 270 in this issue.) Prospective contributors may, but are not required to, send a letter of inquiry describing their proposed article to Dr. Jeanne M. Jacobson, Editor, *Reading Horizons*, Reading Center and Clinic, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI 49008, enclosing a stamped, self-addressed envelope for reply.

The co-editor for the themed issue will be Dr. Jim Burns of Western Michigan University. Manuscripts submitted for this issue should be postmarked no later than December 15, 1990.

THANKS TO REVIEWERS

Reading Horizons has benefited from the energy and expertise of its reviewers throughout the production of Volume 30. These reviewers include members of the Board of Editorial Advisors, the *Reading Horizons* staff, and also Dr. Dorothy McGinnis, editor emerita of *Reading Horizons*; Dr. Sarah L. Dowhower, of Miami University, Oxford, Ohio; and Dr. Timothy V. Rasinski of Kent State University, Kent, Ohio. It is a pleasure to announce that Dr. Dowhower and Dr. Rasinski will be joining the Board of Editorial Advisors, beginning with the first issue of Volume 31.



READING: THE CONFERENCES

Jeanne M. Jacobson

Improving Reading Programs and Strategies for At-Risk Readers

***American Educational Research Association
Annual Meeting, Boston, April 16-20, 1990***

The importance of addressing the needs of at-risk readers in demonstrably sound ways was the theme of a number of presentations at AERA's annual meeting. In one session, Rita M. Bean, of the University of Pittsburgh, presented the report of a study in which she and her colleagues investigated in-class and pullout settings for remedial instruction.

An impetus for the research was the current interest in returning remedial instruction to a classroom setting, rather than using pullout programs. The purposes of the study were to compare the kinds and amount of reading instruction which those students identified as in need of remedial help receive when the remedial program is conducted in a regular classroom, with the instruction given in programs which move students to a specially designated remedial reading classroom; and to observe how teacher and student time is spent during reading sessions in both settings.

Subjects for the study were 119 fourth and fifth grade students from 12 schools participating in Chapter I reading programs. Structured observations of teachers and students

occurred over a four month period. Data were analyzed to determine the average weekly time students experienced different teacher behaviors (e.g., giving information, giving instructions, questioning and answering); the average weekly time students spent on different aspects of lessons (e.g., before, during and after reading activities; skill-related activities; independent work); the percent of weekly time students spent with different types of materials (e.g., basals, tradebooks, content texts, writing, workbooks and worksheets); and the percent of weekly time students spent attending to different levels of text (e.g., word level, sentence and paragraph level, selection level).

A discouraging finding was that the category of teaching behavior designated by the researchers as "noninstructional" — time the students spent in transition from one activity to another, or in situations where there was no student-teacher interaction — was the most frequently observed in both settings, although this category was observed significantly more often in in-class settings than in pullout settings.

In both settings, the focus of lessons was predominantly skill-based, and materials used were heavily oriented toward basal readers, workbooks and skillsheets. In both settings, the use of tradebooks and content texts, combined, accounted for approximately five percent of the time; and less than five percent of the time, in either setting, was spent by students in writing. In both settings, approximately one-third of reading instruction was focused on the selection level, between one-fifth and one-fourth at the word level, and slightly less at the sentence and paragraph level.

In summarizing the research findings, Bean noted, "Results indicated that these low achieving students, regardless

of setting, were not receiving much opportunity in their reading program to participate in actual reading or writing activities."

"We need continuing efforts to plan good instruction for low-achieving students. We need an innovative model for such instruction, not simply changes in structure and form."

Rita M. Bean, AERA annual meeting, 1990

Instructional strategies used to assist struggling readers include efforts to help them engage in the kinds of strategic reading used by skillful readers. A paper presented by Gloria E. Miller, of the University of South Carolina, reported on her research investigating a strategy which incorporates cognitive, metacognitive and affective components.

Self-instruction, or SI, is a method in which students monitor their own understanding of text during the reading process. In SI, students are taught to set a reading purpose prior to reading ("I have to see if this makes sense.") to self-question during reading ("Does this make sense?"), to evaluate their own progress ("How am I doing so far?") to reinforce the strategy ("I'm doing a good job of asking myself if this makes sense; it seems to be helping me; I'll keep on asking my question as I finish reading.") and evaluating the passage and their understanding of it on completion ("What was this about? Did it make sense to me, or was there something that did not make sense?").

In the research study reported by Miller, 44 fourth and fifth graders classified as reading disabled were taught a form of the self-instruction strategy. For half the children, the self-instruction method was altered to a didactic approach, in which the children were not taught to question themselves or

evaluate their own progress; rather the questions were posed and the task set by the teacher ("I want you to find out if this story makes sense to you by asking if this story makes sense as you read." "OK, what was the story about? Did you find any problems? Did the story make sense to you?") Subjects were divided into those taught to use the self-instruction and given didactic instruction in small groups, and those who were taught SI and received the didactic teaching individually.

After four teaching sessions, all given within a one-week period, students' reading comprehension was individually tested. Each student read a series of short expository passages, some of which contained conflicting information; answered literal questions about the passages; and responded to questions designed to indicate awareness of anomalies. A similar assessment was done a month later.

The results of the study indicated that when students were taught to use the self-instruction strategy individually, their reading comprehension surpassed that of students who were given didactic instruction, or who were taught the SI strategy in a group. The same results were manifested in the delayed testing session, suggesting that the beneficial effects of individual SI training persist over time.

The next annual conference of the American Educational Research Association will be held April 3-7, 1991, in Chicago. For information, write AERA, 1230 Seventeenth Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036-3078.

Correction: The spring column, "Reading: The Conferences" contained two errors which have been called to our attention by Dr. Violet J. Harris, whose NCTE presentation was described: *The Brownies Book* was published for two years, 1920-21; Emma Akin, incorrectly identified in the column as black, was a white educator and author.



REVIEWS

Professional Materials

The Child and the English Language Arts. (Fifth edition) (1990). Mildred Donoghue. California State University, Fullerton CA. William C. Brown, Publisher, 2460 Kerper Boulevard, Dubuque IA 52001. ISBN 0-697-10403-6. Softcover, 562 pages. US\$34.07.

Reviewed by Kathy Seeley
Western Michigan University

Mildred Donoghue's goals in revising her text are threefold: to provide a basic understanding of the language arts as individual entities, to address implementation concerns, and to provide a sound basis for professional decision making. It is clear in reviewing this text these goals have been accomplished. The fifth edition of *The Child and the English Language Arts* combines current research findings, traditional theoretical foundation and suggestions for instructional techniques in a comprehensible and practical format.

As an undergraduate-level guide for pre-service classroom teachers, the revision of this text presents the *what* and *how* of an integrated language arts program. Included are examples of daily plans, learning centers and bulletin boards to provide the novice with a "birds-eye view" of classroom organization.

The complexities involved in the teaching and learning of the English language arts are explored in depth in the book's

fourteen chapters. From readiness concerns and the "tools of writing" to the "Limited English Proficient student," language acquisition theory and practical application are covered in a comprehensible, yet sophisticated manner. Informal assessment techniques, ready-to-use evaluation forms, and diagnostic teaching are the cornerstones of this edition. Photographs of children and teachers at work in the classroom and media center are interspersed with reproductions of actual student work, observational checklists, and samples of published instructional materials.

The five appendices include an extensive listing of Caldecott and Newbery Medal books and honor books and evaluation aids for both computer software and basal reading programs, as well as answers to the chapter "anticipation guide" questions. Features such as the "Discussion Questions," "Suggested Projects," and "Related Readings" found at the conclusion of each chapter help bridge the gap between the theoretical aspects of the college classroom with the practical concerns of inservice language arts teachers.

Overall, this is a well-developed text and teaching resource worthy of consideration in language arts instruction and methods courses.

Materials reviewed are not endorsed by *Reading Horizons* or Western Michigan University. The content of the reviews reflects the opinion of the reviewers whose names appear with the reviews.

To submit an item for potential review, send with complete publisher's information to Kathryn A. Welsch, Reviews Editor, *Reading Horizons*, Reading Center and Clinic, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI 49008.

Books for Children

The Talking Eggs. Robert D. San Souci, author. Jerry Pinkney, illustrator. 1989. Dial Books for Young Readers, A Division of Penguin Books, 2 Park Avenue, New York NY 10016. ISBN 0-8037-0619-7. Hardcover, 29 pp. US\$12.89.

Reviewed by Sue Coker
Western Michigan University

The Talking Eggs is a new offering in an area that is much neglected in children's literature, that of the Afro-American folk tale. According to the author, the story was originally published in the late nineteenth century in a collection of Louisiana folktales by Alcee Fortier. In a new and enchanting way, this book tells the fable of two young Afro-American sisters grappling with the familiar issues of good and evil. The two sisters, Blanche and Rose, are each given a chance for wealth and treasures by a black-shawled, mysterious woman in the forest surrounding their home. Only Blanche, with her honesty and kindness, succeeds, while the cynical Rose is punished for her pettiness by forest animals that many children fear — snakes, spiders, and wolves.

The illustrator, Jerry Pinkney, provides the reader with lush, beautifully detailed, and colorful drawings. The treasures capture the imagination of the reader, and scenes of the forest and the animals are intriguing, but should not be frightening to young readers or listeners.

The Talking Eggs is a valuable addition to a fable collection on its own merit, as well as a fairy tale with realistic portrayal of Afro-American children. Readers, both children and adult, will immediately warm to the story of the two little girls, one "so bad" and the other "so good."

***How Joe the Bear and Sam the Mouse Got Together
and I'm Calling Molly***

Reviewed by Cindy Overly
Western Michigan University

I'm Calling Molly. Written by Jane Kurtz; illustrated by Irene Trivas. 1990. Albert Whitman & Co., 5747 West Howard Street, Niles IL 60648. ISBN 0-8075-3468-4. Hardcover, 27 pp. US\$12.95.

"It's not fair, not fair." Christopher's next-door neighbor, Molly, who has red hair and "knows everything about dragons," is making gorilla stew with Rebekah and won't let Christopher play. This familiar scenario in which popular but fickle Molly excludes her friend from her adventures offers the reader an opportunity to explore a frustrating social situation, and learn how the magic of books can provide a solution.

The enchantment of Christopher and Molly's imaginative games is enhanced by Irene Trivas' fanciful illustrations of sand dragons and camel rides. But the reader is pulled back to reality with Christopher's dilemma: Mother is busy and no one wants to play. Finally, Christopher's mother reads him a story which takes him to a world where he has power over Molly. *I'm Calling Molly* is a story which shows how a book can sometimes be just as exciting company as your best friend.

How Joe the Bear and Sam the Mouse Got Together. 1990. Beatrice Schenk De Regniers. Lothrop, Lee and Shepard. 105 Madison Avenue NY 10016. ISBN 0688-09079-6. Hardcover, 28 pp. US\$12.95.

Although they try many times, Joe the Bear and Sam the Mouse can't agree on what to do. Will they ride bikes fast or slow? Will they play football or baseball? A simple story about an emerging friendship between two different personalities

offers a great deal of insight about relationships. Joe and Sam's discussions about their recreational preferences demonstrate that relationships sometimes take a lot of effort, and friends don't always agree. But that's okay, because if you keep trying to communicate and are patient, eventually you might have a wonderful new companion.

Bernice Myers' new illustrations for De Regniers' classic 1965 fable vividly express the contrasting emotions shared by Sam and Joe, ranging from laughter to tears. The tale is ideal for Readers' Theater. Joe's and Sam's lines are printed in different styles of type, and we can imagine both the big, booming bear's voice, and the tiny squeaky mouse voice. Young readers will love both story and pictures.

National Worm Day. Written and illustrated by James Stevenson. 1990. Greenwillow Books, 105 Madison Avenue, New York NY 10016. ISBN: 0-688-088771-X (trade); 0-688-08772-8 (library). Hardcover, 40 pp. US\$12.95.

How is National Worm Day celebrated? "We elect a president," Herbie tells his friends Dawn the mole and Amelia the snail, "and we sing the worm national anthem." Dawn can join in by burrowing underground with Herbie — but sometimes friends need to create their own excitement. Thanks to Amelia, snails now have a national anthem, too.

The second story in Stevenson's delightful trilogy introduces a rhinoceros, struggling to be happy in the midst of insensitive fish, frogs, turtles and beetles. "Want to be a real friend?" says the beetle. "Probably," says Rupert, with a caution based on experience. Finally, in "Herbie and Rupert and Dawn," large and small creatures use good will and imagination to create a basis for mutual satisfaction. The moral lessons don't overpower the fun; children and adults will enjoy stories, pictures, and language play. (JMJ)



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