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STRATEGIC PREFERENCES OF
GOOD AND POOR BEGINNING READERS

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Reading research has discovered some differences between good and poor readers in comprehension monitoring skills (Garner & Taylor, 1982). Poor readers tend, for instance, to remember less of the stories than the better readers and to exhibit less awareness and organized memory (Paris & Myers, 1981). Poorer readers also concentrate more on decoding strategies, whereas the better readers construct meaning from print (Stanovich, 1986).

Studies, to date, have encountered difficulty in detecting specific comprehension strategies in novice readers. Methodological problems have contributed to the sparseness of processing research. Young readers appear to use a variety of skills but are unaware what they are doing and how to verbally recall (Markman, 1979; Clay, 1973; Brown, 1980).

Since self-monitoring and self-interrogation are believed to be important components of cognitive functioning (Flavell & Wellman, 1977) research should identify, first, whether strategies can be identified in novice readers and, second, which strategies differentiate good and poor beginning readers. Information gained will facilitate instructional procedure research aimed toward assisting young readers to develop self-monitoring skills.

The protocol analysis method may elicit process information from the beginning reader. The data-gathering procedure places the novice reader in a natural interactive format, whereby the subject reads a sentence and then talks, similar to the oral reading, questioning diad. Derived from the field of cognitive psychology (Newell & Simon, 1972), protocol analysis, a "talk aloud" procedure has recently been adapted to reading comprehension research. The technique

identifies comprehension strategies used by readers by having the subjects verbally report behavior after reading a passage (Olson, Duffy, & Mack, 1983).

The purposes of this study, then, are the following:

(1) Can the "talk aloud" procedure elicit a variety of responses from students as young as first grade? . . .even poor readers?
(2) Can strategic preferences be differentiated between the poor and good beginning readers?

The Study

Twenty-four first graders, twelve good readers and twelve poor readers, were selected from an eastern North Carolina school system in May of the school year. The operational definition for good readers was on and above grade level and for poor readers below grade level on the California Achievement Test (CAT). The total scaled reading scores on the CAT were compared for the two groups ($t(22) = 4.48$; p $<$ .001). The mean and standard deviation for the good readers was 382.00, 47.86; for the poor readers, 306.25; 33.77. The reading instruction received by the subjects was the basal approach.

The subjects were trained on the "talk-aloud" procedure before the experimental session. Each session took approximately twenty minutes. During the actual assessment each subject was read the following directions:

I am going to tape record your reading so that we
can listen to it later. Please read this story out
loud to me. Stop when you come to a red dot
(at the end of each sentence) and tell me what
you are thinking about. Are there any questions?
Okay, begin.

The text was divided into sentences since the "period" is thought to be a salient aspect of text for the beginning reader. The examiner refrained from comment or assistance as much as possible. When assistance was given it was usually in the form of encouragement, i.e., "Good, now there's the red dot, what are you thinking about?"

So that the subjects were not reading familiar material the text passages were selected from a supplemental reading

series (Scott Foresman Basics in Reading, 1978). The text were matched for readability.

To analyze the data, each response was classified by strategy-usage. Some strategies were defined in previous studies (Bowling & Laffey, 1977; Mason & Swanson, 1983; Alvermann, 1984). Others were given, as in Olshavsky's study (1976-77), a descriptive name if it occurred more than five times. Using the twelve identified strategies, an independent rater classified three randomly selected protocols from the two conditions (good readers; poor readers) with 90%reliability.

Table 1. Strategic Preference of Good and Poor Beginning Readers.

Strategies	Total		Proficiency Good		Poor	
	%	#	%	#	%	#
Personal Identification	8	54	10	46**	4	8
Background Experience	3	19	3	15	2	4
Mental Image	4	26	3	14	5	12
Literal	15	99	12	54	21	45**
Restatement	11	73	14	64***	4	9
Text Expansion	4	28	4	16	5	12
Prediction	7	45	6	28	8	17
Inference	12	82	13	59	10	23
Memory	6	43	7	31	5	12
Tunnel Vision	5	33	2	7	12	26***
Haphazard	4	25	3	12	6	13*
No Response	21	145	23	104	18	41
TOTAL RESPONSES	100	672	100	450	100	222

The good readers had more responses due to longer passages.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

In addressing the first research question, the "talk aloud" procedure was able to elicit a variety of responses from first graders (see Figure 1). Only 23 percent of the good

reader and 18 percent of the poor reader responses were classified as "no response" (see Table 1). Since 80 percent of the responses could be given a strategy-type, it appears that the "talk aloud" procedure could be a viable tool for comprehension process research with young readers. To this examiner's knowledge, the youngest group of students to have used this procedure is second grade (Alvermann, 1984). And these students were reading at grade level.

The findings related to question two, "Can strategic preferences be differentiated between poor and good beginning readers?" revealed significant differences in both type and frequency of strategy-use (see Table 1). The good readers used personal identification and restatement strategies significantly more than poor readers. The poor readers tended to respond literally and use tunnel vision, focusing on a limited amount of text. The poor reading group also had slightly more haphazard responses than good readers.

The types of strategy-use appear to substantiate previous mentioned research related to differences between good and poor readers. The good readers, in this study, appeared to pursue meaning more than the poor readers by relating print to their everyday experiences. The poor readers, on the other hand, responded in ways which reflected decoding difficulty and limited memory (Smith, 1975). Instead of "parroting back" the better readers either paraphrased or restated the text. This would, of course, suggest better memory capabilities and fewer decoding difficulties (Paris & Myers, 1981).

Although not significantly different. The better readers used higher level strategies, such as inference and memory, more than the less skilled group. Perhaps, these are comprehension skills which distinguish good and poor readers more in the later grades. Not to be overlooked, however, is the important fact that poor readers also strive to make meaning of the text by using higher level comprehension strategies. It's just that better readers are more successful at it.

These findings support, as in August, Flavell, and Clift (1984) and Paris & Myers' studies, the notion that young beginning readers do improve in their pursuit of meaning as they become better, more mature readers. And there

may be a hierarchy of strategy-usage as readers become more proficient at decoding and memory capabilities. The question is -- are there instructional strategies to effectively assist the younger and/or poorer reader with cognitive monitoring skills, i.e., modeling of strategies, reading fluency activities, even the use of the "think-aloud" procedure for instructional purposes.

Implications

Several instructional procedures need to be tested experimentally. Training may have an impact on strategy use of beginning readers. As stated by Flavell & Wellman (1977) "we must find ways to assist young readers in techniques that foster self-monitoring skills." Future research should move in this direction. For instance, student and teacher modeling of successful strategies may facilitate more effective strategy-usage. And activities that require young readers to focus more on written material, such as memorization of poems and nursery rhymes have possibilities for increasing young readers' memory span.

Another area worth investigating is the complexity of basal stories designed for young readers. The "think-aloud" procedure allowed the researchers to get close enough to discover some misconceptions about dialogue cues, dialogue users, and idiomatic expressions used in the basals, i.e., "Let me see."

Limitations

The study needs replicating with other texts as well as other subjects. It is possible, for instance, that the text stimuli itself affected strategy-use. Varying lengths, structure, and complexities of the reading passages may have affected the findings, particularly in comparing the strategy-use of good and poor readers. Thus some differences between good and poor readers may simply be due to the texts read. It is also possible that the strategies reported are not a fully accurate reflection of all the subjects did cognitively. And the categories used may be interpreted somewhat differently by other investigators.

FIGURE 1. Strategy Definitions and Examples of Subjects' Think-Alouds.

TEXT	"Once there was a princess named Jean."
Strategy-Type	Example of Response
PERSONAL IDENTIFICATION Places self in story	"I'm thinking that I'm the princess. I wish I was."
EXPERIENCE Refers to past experiences	"This is another story about a princess."
MENTAL IMAGE Describes images not illustrated	"The prince was named Jean and the prince was like a man with a red feather in his green hat"
LITERAL Verbatim response	"Once there was a princess named Jean."
TUNNEL VISION Focuses on specific word/s	"She's the only one that's the prince."
TEXT-EXPANSION Elaborates by extending text	"Once there was a princess names Jean who was special because whe was a princess"

TEXT	"The king and queen always tried to help her."
RESTATEMENT Rewords text slightly	"One time there was a king and queen who helped their daughter, the princess."
INFERENCE An addition of of interpretation	"I think she didn't need any help. She did need help, but not with her playing."
PREDICTION Predicts future events in story	"They will try to help her with everything."
MEMORY Relates present to past text	"She already said she could do it herself."
HAPHAZARD Unclear connection to text	"She help."

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