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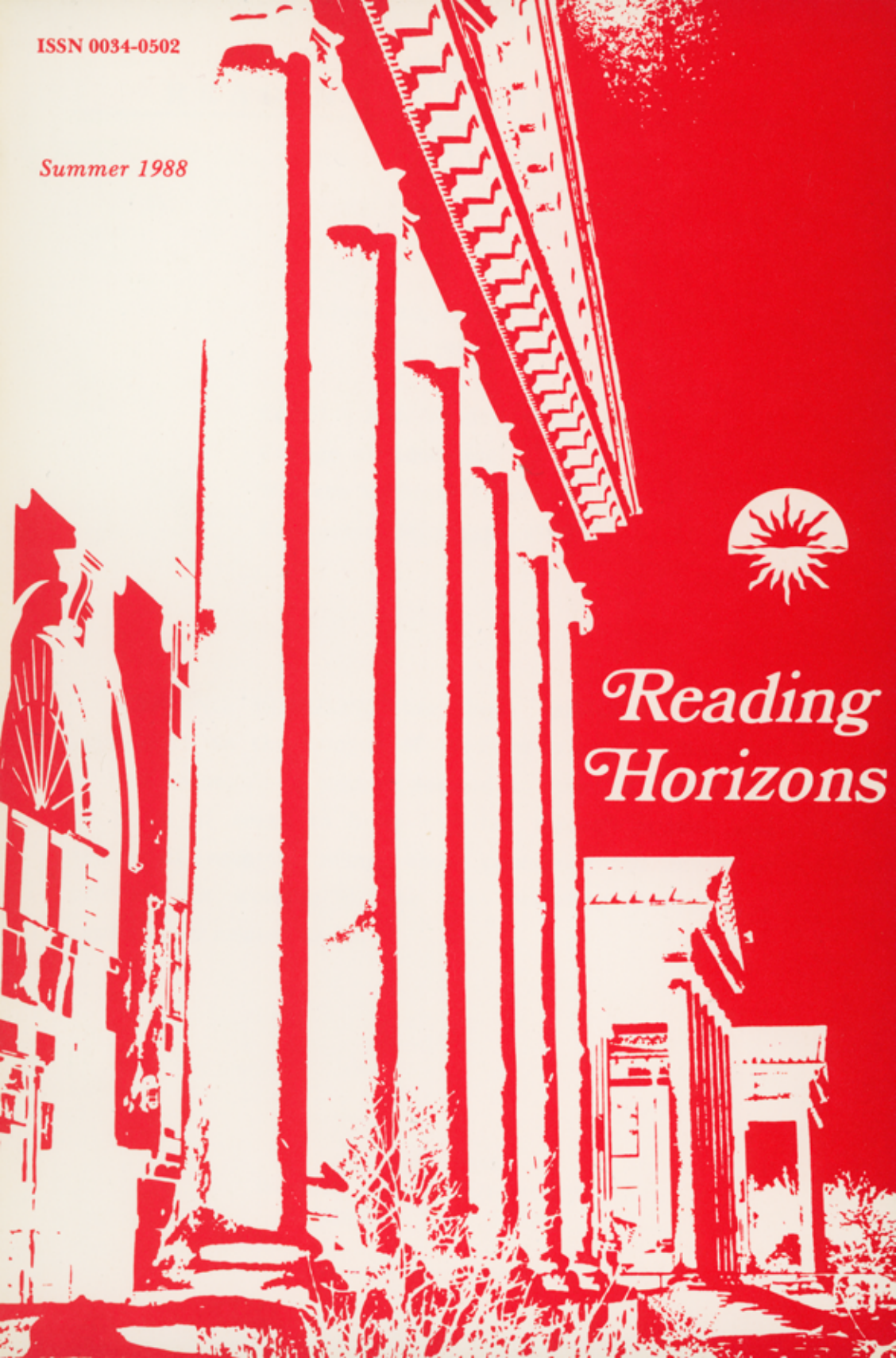


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READABILITY AND PARENT COMMUNICATIONS: CAN PARENTS UNDERSTAND WHAT SCHOOLS WRITE TO THEM?

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Rationale and Purpose of the Study

In the past two decades, much has changed in education. The civil rights movement in the 1960s focused attention on the unequal schooling of minorities and the poor preparation of those groups for school. At the same time Jerome Bruner and Benjamin Bloom were claiming that children can learn any subject at any age and that they attain half their intellectual ability by the age of 4, thus emphasizing the importance of early childhood education (Elkind, 1986). In the later 60s and early 70s, when it was becoming clear that new early childhood programs were not enough alone to meet the need, attention turned to the family milieu. New research showed that a child's achievement correlated strongly with parent interest in that child--with factors such as quality of maternal language, amount of reading and conversation, and appropriate play materials. When the federal government mandated guidelines for parent involvement in such preschool programs as Head Start, public school districts also began to add a parent component to their early childhood programs (Honig, 1982). This rationale has been validated not only by national research (Honig, 1982; Rich, 1985; Stallings and Stipek, 1986) but also by research conducted by the Department of Research and Evaluation of the Chicago Public Schools (Chicago Public Schools, 1985, 1986). In this latter case, children whose parents come to their schools and participate in school projects and who, especially, choose to work in their children's classrooms have shown significantly higher gain scores on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills than children whose parents were not

so involved. These differences in gain scores were as much as 3-4 months and appeared in linguistic areas such as vocabulary and language (1985) and word analysis (1986).

Therefore, in order to attract parents of educationally disadvantaged children to the schools, some all-day kindergartens and child-parent centers (CPCs) in one large Mid-western city have utilized a wide variety of appealing, interesting, and worth-while activities. Parents are invited to get-acquainted and school advisory meetings. They are asked to school assemblies such as gym shows, award celebrations, and African dances. They are urged to participate in fund-raising activities like Jump-Rope-for-Heart and a merchandise sale to benefit the School Children's Aid Society. They are encouraged to help their children's attendance, homework, and cleanliness and to strengthen their children's language skills by talking to them, reading to them, and making sure they bring things to school for Show and Tell.

Workshops are held for parents on a wide range of topics: sewing, hair care, crafts, physical fitness, domestic violence, nutrition and cooking, drug abuse, helping their children succeed, understanding their families. GED and city college classes are also organized for them to improve their own education.

Trips are planned for them--to museums, a bakery, a movie, a farm to pick vegetables, and they are asked to accompany their children on field trips. They are informed of CPC participation requirements--one-half or one day a week-- and warned that if they don't participate, their children will not be allowed to come to class, or they won't receive any kindergarten graduation tickets, or federal support for the program will be cut off. Special events are planned for them and their children: fashion shows, breakfast with Santa, puppet shows, a citywide Parent Action Fair, bake sales, book and art fairs, buffets and dinners. Many of the activities involve refreshments and door prizes.

Some of the all-day kindergartens have worked up special reading projects. One was a walking trip to the neighborhood library so that parents could get a library card in order to bring books home to read to their children. Another was a paperback lending library at school for children to borrow books and read with their families. A third library program had children's books for parents to check

out; when worksheets for 25 books were filled out by the parents and children, the children earned awards at graduation. In a parent/child literature program, small groups of parents met three times with a teacher in order to be introduced to an award-winning children's book, review the book, and make a project for the book. If parents attended all three sessions, they were given a copy of the book to take home. Such activities are designed to bolster the language development of these educationally disadvantaged children, who consistently score lowest on the Iowa Tests in vocabulary and language (Chicago Public Schools, 1984, 1985, 1986).

These schools are to be congratulated for their varied efforts at attracting parents to participate in their own and their children's education. In order to inform parents of activities especially designed for them, the schools must regularly send out to them numerous written communications. These can be newsletters, letters, notices, calendars, or special reports, sent out by principals, head teachers, classroom teachers, parent-resource teachers, school-community representatives, librarians, or an outside organization such as the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program of the local university. If parents are to effectively respond to these communications, they must be able to read them.

Studies of other kinds of public communications have been made: the Internal Revenue Service's Form 1040 (Pyrzczak, 1976), materials distributed by the Illinois Department of Public Aid (Mavrogenes, Hanson, and Winkley, 1977), automobile insurance policies (Kincaid & Gamble, 1977), newspapers' classified advertisements (Pyrzczak, 1978), and parent materials connected with the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Roit and Pfohl, 1984). These studies have pointed to a mismatch between the written material and its readers. That is, the written material was too difficult for the reading ability of the people who would be reading it. Therefore, in an attempt to further improve the communication efforts of schools with parents, the present study looks at examples of materials which six of these schools have sent to parents and analyzes them in terms of their level of difficulty for their recipients. The aim, as in the case of the other studies of public communications, is to "evaluate the appropriateness of material in

relation to the educational and literacy levels of the intended audience" (Roit and Pfohl, 1984, p. 498).

Procedure

The schools involved in this project were six all-day kindergartens for educationally disadvantaged children which are also part of child-parent centers. All the children in these classes are members of minority groups. Each head teacher was asked to submit ten typical communications with parents, written by anyone in authority at that school. Each piece was to consist of running text; that is, calendars, forms, or lists would not be appropriate. The six schools submitted a total of 71 appropriate communications. Many were one-page letters or notices, but some were newsletters of 6-7 pages. Four letters for bilingual parents were written in Spanish. The head teachers were also asked to make up lists of parents with their highest levels of education. This information is supposed to be available on the student intake assessments, compiled when students enter the CPCs at the age of three. This task turned out to be more difficult for the head teachers: only three submitted such lists, the others saying that they didn't have such information or that it would not be valid information.

In order to assess the readability of these communications, Fry's "Graph for Estimating Readability--Extended" was used (Fry, 1977). In this procedure syllables and sentences are counted and then entered on a graph in order to find the text's estimated readability level, which rises as the sentences and words become longer. This graph is recommended as a way of saving time and effort when no computer is available (Klare, 1974-1975; Rush, 1985). With some adjustments, it works with Spanish as well as English (Fry, 1986). It has been validated on a range of primary and secondary materials, and its scores correlate highly with those from other formulas as well as with comprehension scores and oral reading errors. (Fry, 1977; Klare, 1974-1975). Furthermore, sentence complexity, certainly an important factor in level of difficulty, correlates "very highly" with sentence length. One extensive review of readability assessment has concluded that simple word and sentence counts "can provide satisfactory predictions for most purposes" (Klare, 1974-1975, pp. 100-101).

However, studies of the Fry Graph have issued warnings.

For one thing, it has been shown to underestimate the difficulty of texts. The recommendation based on this work is to use an adjustment factor of $+ .865$ with the graph (Guidry and Knight, 1976; Rush, 1985). Therefore, in this study all readability scores are reported as adjusted by this factor. A second point is that three samples of 100 words each for any one text, as Fry has suggested, may not provide a reliable estimate of readability. The remedy is to use one-half or more of a text (Fitzgerald, 1981; Rush, 1985). In accordance with this advice, 72 percent of the communications in this study were analyzed in their entirety. For 13 percent, 50 to 90 percent of the entire text was used, and for longer pieces (2-6 pages) from three to seven samples were used. Such a sampling procedure should increase the reliability of this study.

A general complaint about readability formulas is that they are limited to only a syntactic (sentence length) and a semantic factor (vocabulary). They "do not address the interactive nature of the reading process" nor do they assess readers' "interest, experience, knowledge, and motivation" (Rush, 1985, p. 274). They do not take account of style, organization, punctuation, tone, sentence complexity, page density, or print size (Davison and Kantor, 1982; Dreyer 1984; Roit and Pfohl, 1984; Rush, 1985). All these factors enter into the readability of any text. Accordingly, they will also be considered in this study.

Results: Readability of Materials

The mean readability level of the 67 letters, notices, reports, and newsletters written for parents in English was mid 10th grade. The range went from 6th grade to off the graph (higher than college level). There was not much variation in the mean readability level for each school. The range was grade 9 to grade 11, with two of the six schools at grade 10 and two at grade 11. It is interesting to note that the lowest level of all was for a piece on how parents should read to their children sent out as "News for Parents" and written by a "reading and study skills specialist from Houston." The mean level of this letter was 5th grade, with the four samples ranging from 3rd to 7th grades. Since this piece was so unusual, it is not included in the sample means. Table 1 shows the distribution of the other

103 samples. The two samples in Spanish were written at the mid 8th grade level.

TABLE 1
DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLES BY GRADE LEVEL

<u>Grade Level</u>	<u>Percentage</u>	<u>Cumulative Percentage</u>
6	2	2
7	5	7
8	34	41
9	15	56
10	15	71
11	7	78
12	9	87
13	4	91
14	4	95
15	0	95
16	1	96
Over 17	5	101

As mentioned previously, other factors enter into readability besides the length of sentences and words. One obvious such factor is appearance. Many of these communications were decorated with attractive art work and included witty maxims and poems. Their print was typewriter size, either pica or elite, both within the range of satisfactory legibility. All the samples except one were in black or blue (mimeo) print on white paper, the most legible combinations of colors. The nutrition bulletin from the local college of agriculture was printed in black on blue paper, also providing adequate legibility (Tinker, 1965). However, some samples were written in italic type or entirely in capital letters; neither of these styles is as easy to read as the more usual lowercase roman type (Tinker, 1965). In addition, in some cases the mimeographed copies were very light and in other cases the text was handwritten and afterwards mimeo-

graphed; neither of these conditions provides the best legibility. Another point having to do with appearance is the placement of the text on the page (Roit & Pfohl, 1984). There are numerous examples when this was not considered; if the text is three lines long, for instance, it looks more attractive if it is centered on the page with wide margins all around instead of bunched up at the top of the page with narrow margins on three sides and a very large one at the bottom.

Other factors involved in readability have to do with the content of the message (Davison & Kantor, 1982; Dreyer, 1984; Roit & Pfohl, 1984; Rush, 1985). The tone of these communications was enthusiastic, persuasive, and cheerful or firm as the situation warranted. Often headings were used in a way to improve the organization of the message. In some instances, obscure terms were defined; probation, for instance, was explained in this way: "if you do not participate in the parent program, your child will not be eligible to attend the CPC." In other cases, however, terms were not defined. Words like dire, responsible adult, pertinent or scientific terms like antibodies, metabolism, riboflavin are probably obscure enough that the audience of parents might not know their meanings. Furthermore, complex sentences can hinder understanding. The following sentence is not only long and complex, with a subordinate clause containing three prepositional phrases and one adverbial phrase, but it also contains several terms which might not be clear:

"This is to inform you that as a consequence of your non-participation your children will be dropped from the program effective January 31, 1986." A final point concerning mechanics. On several pages there were as many as six mechanical errors such as misspellings or wrong punctuation.

END OF PART I

In the next issue of READING HORIZONS, the second part of this study will discuss the probable level of these parents' education in order to make reasonable inferences about the match between the readability of these materials and the ability of the parents to read them. Parents' own statements about their education will be examined as well as state figures on the education of public aid recipients.



A PLEASANT REMINDER: THERE IS AN ESTABLISHED CRITERIA FOR WRITING ALPHABET BOOKS

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Since alphabet books are usually entertaining, as well as colorful, they continue to be favorites of young children. Teachers select them to develop language and to teach sound-symbol relationships.

Illustrators and authors of alphabet books, however, continue to violate the criteria for these books established by Huck and Kuhn. According to Huck and Kuhn, a good alphabet book should have:

1. One or two easily identifiable objects--objects meaningful for the age level of the child for whom the book was written--should be presented on a page.
2. Objects such as rabbit, having several correct names, should be avoided.
3. The common sounds of the letters rather than the blends, digraphs, and silent letters should be utilized.

During the month of January, the Caldecott Committee named the winners for 1987. Suse MacDonald's alphabet book, Alphabatics, was named a Caldecott Honor Book. The fly sheet on the cover aptly depicts the book as "An imaginative and energetic romp through the alphabet . . . which introduces an original and exciting way of looking at the world. Suse MacDonald shrinks, expands, and manipulates each letter of the alphabet, changing it into something entirely new; the letter A becomes ark, C a clown's grin, S a swan." While MacDonald's book is indeed beautifully, boldly, and cleverly illustrated, it falls short, like so many other published alphabet books, of Huck and Kuhn's established criteria.

Huck and Kuhn's first criterion states that all objects

must be easily identifiable and meaningful to the child. MacDonald used insect as the symbol to represent I, but she boldly printed a large, beautiful, yellow flower on the page with the insect. After identifying the I, one five-year old child said, "Flower!" A kite is the symbol used to represent the K in MacDonald's book; however, the five year-old thought the kite was a butterfly; the kite looks like a butterfly. MacDonald cleverly turns the P into a plane. The five-year-old yelled, "Airplane", a fine example of confused symbol choice since airplane begins with an a, and the letter being represented was p.

The second criterion states objects having several correct names should be avoided. MacDonald chose to represent Q with a quail. When shown the quail, the five-year-old said "Bird", and he wasn't wrong, only confused by the illustrator's work. Numerous veg~~e~~t~~a~~b~~e~~s were used to represent v; there are beets and dominant, large drawn carrots on the page. The first thing the five-year-old saw were the carrots; so he made the association of v and carrots. The yak was used to teach the y letter, he identified it as a buffalo.

The last criterion may have been considered by Huck and Kuhn to be the most important. It states: "The sounds of the letters rather than the blends, digraphs, and silent letters should be utilized." Unfortunately, MacDonald has violated this rule six times in her Caldecott Honor Book:

C is represented by the blend in clown;

D, by the blend in dr~~a~~g~~o~~n;

P, by the blend in pl~~a~~n~~e~~;

S, by the blend in sw~~a~~n;

T, by the blend in tr~~e~~e;

W by the digraph in wh~~a~~l~~e~~.

In addition, other phonic principles have been violated. A is represented by the word ark; a poor choice since the r following the a makes the a sound neither long nor short. The e is represented by the word elephant; another poor choice since the sound heard is l and not e. The o is represented by the diphthong ow in owl. Teachers and authors of reading textbooks would select key words to represent the vowel sonds -- a, e, i, o, u -- that begin with short vowel sounds as a in apple, i in inchworm, o in octopus, u in umbrella.

Far too many children have trouble establishing directionality of letters. MacDonald's book further encourages such errors by playfully turning the n of nest upside down so that it looks like a u

This article is not meant to be a scathing review of an obviously talented author/illustrator's work nor of Caldecott Committee's selection; it was written for constructive purposes. Our children deserve the best! This includes correctly written alphabet books. There are established rules for representing the sounds and symbols in the English language. Please, let us adhere to them when writing and illustrating an alphabet book.

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DISCUSSING READ-ALOUD FICTION: ONE APPROACH FOR MOTIVATING CRITICAL THINKING

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and

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Reading fiction aloud to junior high and middle school students is an excellent way to communicate the value of reading (Read, 1985). Stopping from time to time to discuss what has been read aloud communicates to students that we value their reactions to a good story. Taking time to read good fiction aloud during a busy school day also affords opportunities to exercise students' critical thinking skills.

Learning to think critically about fiction need not conflict with aesthetic reading (Rudman, 1985). Students can enjoy comparing and contrasting points of view or questioning their beliefs and convictions without jeopardizing the opportunity to enjoy an author's artistry.

This article describes how one middle school teacher used Paula Danziger's (1986) This Place Has No Atmosphere to motivate a group of adolescents to think and respond critically to read-aloud fiction. Included are examples of the discussion strategies the teacher used to stimulate students' interest and facility in dealing with the following: a) judging the effectiveness of the author's word play, b) recognizing different points of view, and c) evaluating the author's ability to relate to her audience.

Word Play

In This Place Has No Atmosphere, Danziger tells the life of Aurora Williams, child of the 21st century, who must leave her Earth friends behind and move with her family to the first colony on the moon. The author provides her audience with numerous opportunities to play with

language as she introduces unusual names for people, foods, and places--all with a familiar ring. Opportunities also exist to explore puns and the hidden meanings of words.

The teacher whom we observed read parts of the book aloud a few pages at a time during the last five to ten minutes of her fifth period class. On one of the days we observed, students were discussing whether Danziger's penchant for word play had been effective. Had she been successful in appealing to the students' sense of humor? To guide this discussion, the teacher sketched on the chalkboard an adaptation of Duthie's (1986) analytical web.

Figure 1

Duthie's (1986) Analytical Web (Adaptation)

Is the author's word play humorous?

NO

YES

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

(Conclusion)

The outline of the web consisted of a question, a "yes" and a "no" strand to encourage students to discuss both sides of the question, and a line for a briefly worded conclusion. As we entered the classroom, students were recalling some of the unusual names that Aurora and her friend Matthew had invented for new flavors of ice cream.

Nancy: There was lizard lemon, fingernail fudge, and.

Reese: (interrupting) How about toejam tofu?

Teacher: (pointing to web) Are your examples of Danziger's imaginative use of language intended for the "yes" or the "no" side of the question?

Students: (several in unison) The "yes" side.

Teacher: (writing the category label "ice cream flavors" under the "yes" side) Okay, what's another

- example of the author's play on words?
- Jessie: Today when you read about the first breakfast on the moon--when Lenny Mendez had just hit his sister Henny on the head with a biscuit--um --(looking to Reese for help)
- Reese: Oh, you mean the part where Aurora's father looks up from his freeze-dried eggs and says, "People who live in glass bubbles shouldn't throw scones"?
- Jessie: (groaning) Yeh.
- Sue: I don't get it.
- Anthony: Me either.
- Reese: Oh, you know, the old saying--"People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones." The author just made a pun.
- Sue: I still don't get it.
- Anthony: What are scones?

By the time the confusion over the use of a pun had been cleared up, the bell was about to ring. The teacher drew a box around the web and wrote "SAVE" in big letters on the chalkboard. She suggested that the students gather additional evidence before drawing a conclusion about the author's success or failure in appealing to their sense of humor.

Besides providing a quick and easy way to structure a discussion, the web highlights imbalances in students' thinking and points out places where their argument is weak. The web also supports writing activities that may grow out of a group discussion.

Different Points of View

The setting for This Place Has No Atmosphere is in the future, sometime around the year 2057. Consequently, the story presents interesting possibilities for exploring different points of view. For example, in the passage that follows, Danziger contrasts Aurora's and her parents' impressions of living conditions on Earth in the 21st century.

The Monolith Mall is so wonderful. We're on the fifteenth floor, the one where most of the junior and senior high kids hang out.. There are one hundred and forty-four floors at the Monolith. The top twenty are for recreation and are taken care of by the government. They are there to make up for the loss of

public land that was sold to private industries by politicians years ago. The space is really great. There are swimming pools, roller and ice skating rinks, hiking trails, a zoo, a bird sanctuary. My parents say it used to be better when the wilderness was outside the malls, but how should I know? Forty floors are filled with stores. Condominiums and cooperative apartments are on the rest. There are all these stories about people who spend their whole adult lives in the malls . . . living . . . working. . . playing. They never leave. "Mole Minds" is what my parents call them. (p. 8)

After the teacher we were observing read this passage to her class, she stopped to enlist students' thinking on the different points of view presented. This time her discussion strategy involved substituting statements for questions (Alvermann, Dillon, & O'Brien, 1987; Dillon, 1983).

Teacher: Paula Danziger agreed with Aurora that the Monolith Mall was a wonderful place to live, I presume. (Pauses deliberately in anticipation of students' responses)

Reese: Yeah, I guess she would. I mean, she is the author, and we did talk about authors usually--um--making the characters like themselves, like they feel and. . .

David: (interrupting) The author has the main character tell all about the mall--the swimming pools, roller skating rinks, hiking trails. She says they're wonderful.

Teacher: So you think that the author is speaking her feelings through the main character, Aurora Williams.

Reese: Yeah, and besides, who wouldn't want to live in a place like Monolith Mall!

Darlene: Aurora's parents didn't like it.

Sara: That's right. It says they thought life was better when there were trees . . . when the wilderness was outside the malls.

Teacher: (addressing the class) I'd like to hear more about your thinking on the different points of view the author expressed. I expect that some of you may agree with Aurora and some may agree with her parents.

The discussion continued for another three minutes before being interrupted by the passing bell. During that brief time, several different students offered their opinions. Generally, students seemed more willing to elaborate on each other's ideas when the teacher made statements about the story as opposed to when she asked questions about it. Perhaps they felt freer to explore their own views and less confined to giving pat answers.

Ability to Relate to Audience

On two occasions we observed the teacher interrupt her reading of This Place Has No Atmosphere to draw students into a discussion about Danziger's ability to relate to teenagers. One time the class discussed the authenticity of the dialogue between the characters in the story. On another day the discussion centered on Danziger's ability to portray teenage conflicts realistically. Did her characters behave in a way that was true to life? In the following discussion, the teacher set the stage for role playing, a strategy that enabled her students to answer that question for themselves.

Teacher: How many of you have had disagreements with your parents at one time or another?
(All hands go up) What about?

Jack: Staying out late.

Kathy: My clothes.

Sue: My grades.

Jim: The friends I choose.

Teacher: Remember in the story where Aurora argues that her mother knows nothing about being a teenager because she hasn't been one for years?

Kathy: And she doubted her parents really loved her?

Anthony: Or that she could ever please them.

Teacher: Have you ever experienced any of the same feelings?

In the remaining class time, students were involved in a role playing situation that required them to identify a conflict in the story and then to alternate between speaking as one of the teenage characters in that conflict and as one of the parents. In assuming both roles, students were able to evaluate how realistically Danziger had portrayed

her characters. The teacher was able to make her point about the importance of judging the author's ability to communicate with an audience, and she made the point without becoming preachy or pedantic.

Summary

Reading fiction aloud and following up with even the briefest of discussions can provide students with invaluable opportunities to think and respond critically to text. In this article we have shown how one teacher used a Paula Danziger novel to motivate a group of adolescents to engage in three areas of critical thinking: a) judging the worth of playing with language, b) recognizing different points of view, and c) evaluating the author's ability to relate to her audience. We have also described briefly the three easy-to-use strategies that the teacher employed in getting her students to think and respond critically.

The success this teacher experienced was due in part to her effectiveness in pacing the discussions. She kept them brief and focused. The novel was one that she liked, and her enthusiasm for Danziger as a young adult author spilled over to her students.

In part, however, the teacher's success must also be attributed to her belief in the worth of fostering higher level thinking. Like Ericson and her colleagues (1987), the teacher whom we observed was dedicated in her efforts to move beyond the literal level of the text. She encouraged students to give reasons for their thinking and to become involved personally with the decisions that they made about Danziger's effectiveness as an author.

Through discussion the students learned about the necessity of maintaining a critical perspective so that an author's often unconsciously projected biases are "exposed (and then) scrutinized rather than subliminally ingested" (Rudman, 1985, p. 103). In short, they learned that to experience literature is to take the first step in becoming a critic of it (Sloan, 1986).

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READING DIFFICULTIES: ERADICATION OF CAUSES OR TREATMENT OF SYMPTOMS?

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A Complexity of Variables

The reading performance of school-age children can be adversely affected by any number of causative factors, almost always operating in some combination (Robinson, 1946). For example, parameters of a physiological nature--like visual or auditory deficiencies, neurological problems or perceptual deficits, sex differences or poor general health--can be inextricably linked with such psychological factors as limited intelligence, emotional instability, or low self-esteem. Then, too, there is a legion of socioeconomic variables which frequently militate against normal reading progress; e.g., impoverished economic conditions, strained social relationships, or a dearth of printed materials for inciting interest in reading. Moreover, the foregoing and other factors are in alignment repeatedly with poor or inappropriate reading instruction, inordinate class size, insufficient language development and other conditions regarded as unpropitious for educational development.

While physiological, psychological, socioeconomic and educational reasons for disablement in reading cannot be gainsaid, in actuality it is the symptoms of those causes which indicate the presence and nature of a particular disability. A hypothetical case in point is the child whose visual handicap--be it hyperopia, imperfect fusion or another defect--is made manifest by recurrent scowls while reading, reddened eyes, or complaints of headaches. To most teachers the need for a vision examination would be all too obvious. Nevertheless, when diagnosing the reading needs of a group of children from a general population, one encounters any number of interrelated symptoms and possible causes of

disability. Yet, with respect to these variables, what constitutes a sensible *modus operandi* for classroom teachers of reading? In other words, should efforts be geared to an eradication of causes or treatment of symptoms?

In the literary treatment of causes and symptoms pertaining to reading disability, it is obvious to this writer that a rather consequential shift has occurred over the past two decades or so. This perceived change has not been one of semantics involving "cause" and "symptom" but, seemingly, has reflected some modulation in expectations articulated about the two. For all practical purposes in reading diagnosis and for clarification here, "symptom" is regarded as an indicator of probable causation of a problem; and "cause," a factor actually responsible for some difficulty. Before proceeding, however, two questions must be addressed: (1) Concerning symptoms and causes of reading disability, what basic recommendations were oftentimes given classroom teachers in the 1960's and 1970's? and (2) How consistent was the advice of noted reading experts during this period?

Advisement in the Sixties, the Seventies

While not discarding the use of symptoms to help identify children with reading problems, Schubert and Torgerson (1969), Dechant (1968), and Cushenbery (1977) were among recognized authorities who either directly stated or implied in their reading methods textbooks that classroom teachers should make some attempt to identify, study, eliminate or alter as many of the factors as possible which contribute to reading disability in their pupils. It was clear that Strang also supported this position:

In the past, diagnosis of reading problems tended to neglect conditions in home, school, and neighborhood that might be giving rise to the reading problem. Having recognized the influence of these environmental factors, the teacher or clinician may try to change them rather than to focus his attention on changing the individual directly (1969, p. 24).

From the foregoing one can deduce little, if any, distinction between a classroom teacher's role and that of clinician in probing causation. Conceivably, the onus for handling etiological variables in reading diagnosis could fall on either adept, depending on particular conditions or circumstances.

By standards of Gallant (1970), however, the burden was almost wholly the teacher's. It was the contention of Gallant that if classroom teachers did not appraise and adjust to factors affecting students' learning capabilities, chances were that most school children would receive only minimal or no help at all in overcoming their reading deficits. Bammann, Dawson and McGovern were obviously of like mind, stating:

While there are some children who benefit most from being removed from the classroom for special help from a specialist, it is still the classroom teacher who has the benefit of prolonged observations of each child and who is in a good position to offer help throughout the day. The factors of reading disabilities are neither so complicated nor so esoteric that every teacher cannot word effectively with those problems ('73, p. 246).

In marked contrast with preceding viewpoints was the position espoused in professional textbooks of Otto and McMenemy (1966), Harris (1970), Kennedy (1971), Bond and Tinker (1973), and others. The perspective of these writers, on the whole, required some differentiation between youngsters with mild reading disabilities and those besieged by more serious problems. For students in the former classification, diagnosis and correction were viewed as being reasonably within the purview of classroom reading teachers. Any incidence of moderate to severe reading disablement, on the other hand, necessitated referral to a reading specialist, clinician or school psychologist for the help that was needed.

With these prospects in mind, then, were classroom teachers advised to investigate and assuage etiological factors or circumstances, before instituting procedures among children diagnosed as having mild reading problems? No, not really. Educators like Otto and McMenemy typically persuaded classroom teachers to focus their attention on determining the nature, not causes, of reading disability. Even though an awareness of causes was viewed as advantageous for teachers, underscorings were nonetheless on symptom identification and programmatic adjustments for mildly impaired readers. Wilson epitomized the basic sentiments of this group of textbook authors when he wrote:

The classroom teacher will utilize his time and efforts most effectively in diagnosing patterns of symptoms to

adjust his classroom approach to the child with a reading problem. The reading specialist, in clinical diagnosis, will be more thorough in attempting to arrive at a cause (1967, p. 26).

Without question, teachers of the sixties and seventies were confronted with divergent, and perplexing, notions about what their focus should be when diagnosing reading needs of boys and girls. Certain scholars left little doubt that classroom teachers could, or should, attempt to tackle many of the contributory elements of reading disability. Other writers, so it seems, relegated the probing into causation to clinicians, specialists, or others. Furthermore, while some experts presumably advocated that teachers use symptoms only as indices for scrutinizing causes of reading disability, others encouraged the implementation within classrooms of corrective instruction geared wholly to symptoms. From these inconsistencies, does it come as any surprise that more than just a few teachers found no real direction for themselves, when plotting appropriate courses of action for reading-handicapped students? Does the same hold true for this decade? Let us take a glimpse.

Advisement in the Eighties

In contrast with the two preceding decades, the eighties are witnessing a mounting emphasis on several concepts which tend to restyle the earlier diagnostic-remedial role for classroom teachers. Among recommendations to reading teachers, an increasing number of textbook writers bring into focus (1) the difficulties and, perhaps more often than not, the impossibility of identifying actual causal factors in reading disability; (2) the necessity for gaining a working knowledge of the many potential causes of reading failure; (3) the need to identify, and use, recurring patterns of symptoms of reading difficulty when planning corrective measures; and (4) the advisability of providing classroom instruction for mildly disabled readers, and referring children with moderate or severe problems to other professionals for assistance. Keeping these four points in mind, let us proceed with a brief commentary.

In the first place, precision in identifying the cause of a reading problem is thwarted by the inevitable overlapping of socioeconomic, educational, physiological and psychological factors. Furthermore, difficulties arising from the aforemen-

tioned tendency are complicated by the occurrence of concomitant factors that have only a close, but not causal, relationship to the reading handicap (Ekwall and Shanker, 1983; Richek, List & Lerner, 1983). The oftentimes confusing and indeterminate nature of an etiological search can be sensed when one considers, for example, the theoretical case of a girl suffering from chronic stomach-aches. To begin, these pains might be traced to the child's poor self-image which, in turn, could have resulted from her below-average reading performance. Likewise, the youngster's reading difficulties might have stemmed from her high absenteeism from school, particularly on days when crucial skills were taught. The girl's absences, by the way, possibly were a consequence of her father's loss of jobs time and again, requiring the child and her family to move from one place to another. Repeated use of "might" and other grammatical markers of uncertainty alludes to options, speculation, and the inevitable aura of indecision which enshrouds various aspects of any investigation into causation.

Howards (1980), Brown (1982), Wilson & Cleland (1985) are among experts who advocate that diagnoses by classroom teachers should typically require very little, if any, investigation of factors responsible for problems in reading. Nonetheless, familiarity of classroom teachers with causes of reading failure is commonly seen as an asset, either for expanding their knowledge of possible reasons for deficits in reading (Rupley and Blair, 1983), making them more efficient when analyzing patterns of symptoms related to reading disability (Wilson & Cleland, 1985), or providing necessary adjustments in the reading instruction for certain children (McGinnis & Smith, 1982). With reference to the latter concept, McCormick emphasizes that "for many students, early accommodations . . . prevent reading problems from becoming severe or may even eliminate the problems entirely" (1987, p. 34).

Rather than make attempts to identify and alter or eliminate etiological factors, classroom teachers are being advised to concentrate on remedying symptoms of reading difficulty (Rupley & Blair, 1983; Wilson & Cleland, 1985; Gillet & Temple, 1986). One apparent reason for this recommendation is that contingencies of causation are so complex and difficult to pinpoint. A large majority of teachers have neither the training or expertise for coping with sinuositities of causal phenomena. Moreover, the inordinate amount of

time presently required for effective classroom teaching doubtlessly hinders most teachers in giving additional time to researching possible determinants of reading disability among students. In any case, the most workable classroom approach to diagnosing reading deficiencies is perhaps one which capitalizes on patterns of symptoms. Consider, by way of example, an initial diagnosis which uncovers word-by-word reading in a young man. Without question, continuous repetition of this condition is indicative of a problem, perchance one which stems from trouble with one or more word-recognition skills, a bad habit or comprehension difficulty. Each of these, in turn, is symptomatic of some constellation of interacting factors related to causation. By heeding current thought on a matter of this sort, the teacher of the young man will avoid pursuing reasons for the word-by-word reading. Instead, efforts will be directed toward correcting the most likely symptom(s) of some causal complex.

Classroom teachers' employment of a diagnostic-prescriptive approach, not unlike the one of Collins-Cheek and Cheek (1984), reveals pupil differences in functional reading levels and reading-skill deficiencies. Those identified as mildly disabled readers, on the one hand, typically have little difficulty in working alongside peers in normal-sized class groups. Teachers are indeed fortunate that this is the case, for the intensity of instruction, motivational efforts, and degree of individualization necessary for youngsters with mild reading problems do not differ significantly from similar pedagogical concerns for most other children in regular classrooms.

Much in contrast are the preconditions for teaching boys and girls with moderate or severe reading deficits. To illustrate this point, class size for the moderately disabled probably should not exceed eight students; for the severely disabled, three (Brown, 1982). The incapacitation resulting from serious reading impediments, aggravated by a prototypal poor self-image and host of related problems, justifiably mandates thorough diagnoses and intense, highly individualized instruction. Yet, for many of the seriously impaired, reading progress is impeded until such time that probable reasons for disablement are identified and corrected. Since a plurality of classroom teachers fall short of either the required time, scholarship or know-how for

successful work with seriously handicapped readers, the only plausible recourse appears to be the referral of these young people to other professionals. This draws attention to a pressing need for highly competent reading specialists who can spearhead diagnostic-remedial efforts and, by working in concert with teachers, school psychologists and others, bring about the in-depth diagnoses, factorial adjustments and distinctives of instruction that are so essential for children with serious reading problems.

How credible is advisement of the 1980's, over that communicated to teachers in the sixties and seventies? The advice, as perceived by many, comes as a boon, a refreshing "switch-on" to reality. Others, for whatever reason, sense bewilderment. One imperative does remain clear, though: The reading needs of school children must be met. For some, this requires an eradication of causes; for many others, a treatment of symptoms.

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MAKING REPEATED READINGS A FUNCTIONAL PART OF CLASSROOM READING INSTRUCTION

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Reading instruction, in recent years, has not been overly concerned with the development of reading fluency in students. Although seen as a crucial element in proficient reading (Allington, 1983; Harris & Sipay, 1985), it is often a neglected part of the reading curriculum. Survey just about any basal reader series and you will find relatively little attention given to fluency development. Indeed, Allington (1983) has called fluency the "neglected goal" of reading instruction, and Anderson (1981) has identified it as the "missing ingredient" in the reading program. Thus, to a large extent, if fluency is to be a part of the reading program it is up to individual reading teachers to see that it is included.

One successful strategy for developing fluency has been Samuels' (1979) method of repeated readings. The method essentially has children reread a particular text until a criterion level of speed and word recognition accuracy is achieved. The method embodies the old saying "practice makes perfect." Several studies have demonstrated the usefulness of repeated readings as a way to improve fluency. Repeated Readings has been associated with more accurate and faster reading (Carver & Hoffman, 1981; Samuels, 1979), more sophisticated textual phrasing (Schreiber, 1980), and better comprehension (Samuels, 1979).

The method works, there is little doubt about that. The problem, however, arises when teachers are asked to implement repeated readings in a regular classroom setting. In talking with teachers about repeated readings, I am often asked the question, "How can I get my students to

reread a text that I have trouble getting them to read one time through?" or "Won't they get bored having to reread passages over and over?" The typical response to this dilemma has been some sort of reinforcement strategy. Students monitor their own or a classmate's performance, graph changes in fluency, and thus provide demonstrable and motivational evidence of reading progress. A more behavioral response has been to reward students for each reading or each passage for which the criterion levels were achieved with some sort of token or prize.

In each of these cases, however, the novelty of the motivation often wears off in short order, students balk at having to read something more than once, and the teacher is back on square one. The central problem with the previously mentioned motivational devices is that they fail to take into account the real purpose for reading--to learn, to enjoy, to gain meaning. Students often fail to connect the rereading they are asked to do with some purpose that is functional and meaningful within their real life experiences. Because of this students often see repeated reading as a meaningless school task.

Making It Meaningful

Fortunately, repeated readings does not need to be tied to some extrinsic reinforcer. There are ways that teachers can set up repeated readings so that it is done within a meaningful and purposeful context. It is essential that students do repeated readings in ways they see as natural and functional in their school lives. I would like to share some alternative ways for inviting students into the repeated readings experience.

1. Repeated read-aloud. Anyone who has read a text aloud in front of a group knows that practice is required for a good performance. One of life's most embarrassing moments can be reading something aloud without the benefit of a rehearsal.

Creating real situations in which students are asked to read texts aloud to a group requires repeated readings of the text in order to gain fluency for the performance. Students may be asked to share a short story or passage with the class or a small group each week during story hour. The students might also be asked to read a particularly

well-suited story to a group of students at a lower grade level.

2. Storytelling. Many people enjoy listening to stories, but few people are actual storytellers. The stories that storytellers tell often come from books. In order to be able to tell the story well, storytellers have to read the particular story they intend to tell several times through.

Encourage students to become storytellers. Have a storytelling hour every week so that students can share the stories they practice. In the process of learning their story, the students will be involved in repeated readings. They will also develop a greater affection for stories.

3. Poetry. One part of the reading curriculum that is often overlooked is poetry. Children need to learn an appreciation for this special form of language. And, when children are asked to share a poem with the class through an oral presentation other good things happen. Reading poetry requires an attention to phrasing and expression. In order to read a poem with proper use of stress, tone, juncture, and phrasing repeated readings of the poem are a must.

4. Drama. In order to put on a play, actors need to know their lines very well. This can only be done by numerous readings and run-throughs of the script. Actors willingly invest plenty of time in reading and rereading their lines. Even the youngest students enjoy a good play. They will like it even more, and learn to appreciate this art form as well, if they are periodically and actively involved in a school or classroom play.

Readers' theater is another way of enacting a play in which the actors sit in a group or circle and read the play from the scripts that they hold. It offers a less formal alternative to putting on a play. Readers' theater lets those students who are less inclined to participate in a play get actively involved in theater and repeated readings.

5. Cross-age tutoring. Students in the upper grades can be the best helpers a lower grade teacher has. These students (including those who are reading below grade level) can be employed to tutor, read with, or read to individual students in lower grades.

For the tutors to be effective they must know the

texts they are using with their tutees. To listen to the tutee read or to read with the tutee, the student tutor must read and reread the passages prior to the tutoring experience in order to know the texts well.

Cross-age tutoring can be especially helpful when the student tutors are reading below their assigned grade level. Cross-age tutoring gives less able readers natural and functional opportunities for working with texts that are written at a lower readability level. Fluency is promoted when students read passages that are at a student's independent reading level. By having the tutors work with texts at a lower readability level, practice on texts will help build power and fluence in their reading.

6. Taped readings. If an older student is unable to directly tutor a younger student, he or she may still be of help. Older students can be recruited to make taped oral readings of the books appropriate for younger students. As with cross-age tutoring, the older student must repeatedly practice the story prior to getting it on tape so that a fluent rendition of the story is recorded.

7. Songs. Good songs beg to be sung over and over. Teachers can capitalize on this by bringing songs into the classroom and providing students with written versions of the lyrics. If the students like a song, it can be one that is sung (and read) daily for several days. Students can also be asked to write their own lyrics to popular melodies. These, too, can be sung repeatedly. Repeated choral readings of appropriate and interesting passages such as limericks or song lyrics can promote fluency.

8. Shared book experience. Don Holdaway (1980) has shown the value of using big books or the shared book experience in the early elementary classroom. When students are given interesting stories to read, they demand to read them over and over. The big book setting allows students to read texts chorally as well as individually. It also gives the teacher greater flexibility in demonstrating important aspects of the text to the group. Using the shared book experience allows individual students' infatuation with certain stories to spread to the group. That infatuation often leads students to ask to read the story over and over again.

9. Read aloud. Teachers who read daily to their classes know that students enjoy hearing their favorite stories read

aloud more than once. There are many benefits to reading good stories to classes. In terms of fluency, repeated readings of a story by a teacher models fluent reading for the students. It also demonstrates concretely to children that repeated readings is a natural and enjoyable part of the reading experience and that deeper levels of understanding can be gained with each repeated reading.

10. Games. One of the striking characteristics of games is that children like to play them over and over again. Ingenious teachers can create games in which the players must read short texts in order to play the game. Board games, in the tradition of Monopoly, which have reading material on the board and in special "pick-up" cards offer students activities that are entertaining and that lead into repeated readings of the game texts.

The ideas presented here bring repeated readings to students in ways that will motivate them to reread texts in a naturally occurring way. Good readers reread texts often. They know that there is value in rereading a passage more than once when there is a real reason for doing so. Students see that, at times, repeated readings are necessary for the successful completion of a functional task. Repeated readings are a natural and integral part of real literary activities. It is the job of informed and dedicated teachers to shape functional situations that foster a motivation in students to reread texts.

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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	Proficiency					
	Total		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.

<u>TEXT</u>	<u>"Once there was a princess named Jean."</u>
<u>Strategy-Type</u>	<u>Example of Response</u>
PERSONAL IDENTIFICATION <u>Places self in story</u>	"I'm thinking that I'm the princess. I wish I was."
EXPERIENCE <u>Refers to past experiences</u>	"This is another story about a princess."
MENTAL IMAGE <u>Describes images not illustrated</u>	"The prince was named Jean and the prince was like a man with a red feather in his green hat"
LITERAL <u>Verbatim response</u>	"Once there was a princess named Jean."
TUNNEL VISION <u>Focuses on specific word/s</u>	"She's the only <u>one</u> that's the prince."
TEXT-EXPANSION <u>Elaborates by extending text</u>	"Once there was a princess names Jean who was special because whe was a princess"
TEXT	<u>"The king and queen always tried to help her."</u>
RESTATEMENT <u>Rewords text slightly</u>	"One time there was a king and queen who helped their daughter, the princess."
INFERENCE <u>An addition of of interpretation</u>	"I think she didn't need any help. She did need help, but not with her playing."
PREDICTION <u>Predicts future events in story</u>	"They will try to help her with everything."
MEMORY <u>Relates present to past text</u>	"She already said she could do it herself."
HAPHAZARD <u>Unclear connection to text</u>	"She help."

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TURNING CONTEMPORARY READING RESEARCH INTO INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICE

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If the 1960s and 1970s were the years that reading educators discovered that comprehension was really being tested, not taught, and that the "Great Debate" between phonics and whole-word instruction didn't matter much anyway, then what have we learned in the 1980s? Many things, of course, thanks to a quantum increase in the amount and sophistication of reading research. The past era of reading research, which focused on more global aspects of instruction such as the effectiveness of the general approach the teacher used or the books the children read, might be likened to viewing reading instruction with a low-powered objective of a microscope. While this perspective might have been helpful for teachers choosing between instructional approaches which were markedly different from each other (e.g., i/t/a, synthetic phonics, and the linguistic approach), such benefit is now limited because, as noted by Pearson (1985) and Goodlad (1983), both instruction and instructional materials have become homogeneous and eclectic to a high degree.

Contemporary reading research, as through the microscope's more high-power objective, sheds light on finer aspects of reading instruction, providing viewpoints on reading and teaching which teachers can use in making smaller but still significant modifications in their instructional practices. Two of these "finer" aspects, modelling and direct teacher explanation, seem to be the key mediators of research and practice. This article highlights four promising areas of contemporary reading research as well as the instructional practices implied by recent findings.

Direct Teacher Explanation

Paris and his colleagues (Paris, Libson and Wixson, 1983; Paris, Oka and DeBritto, 1983) assert that any type of instruction should provide students with three kinds of knowledge; (a) declarative - knowing that a skill works, (b) procedural - knowing how to perform the skill, and (c) conditional - knowing when and why a skill should be used to accomplish different purposes (Paris, Lipson and Wixson, 1983, pp. 303-304). Paris contends that of the three, conditional knowledge is the most important because it provides the metacognitive insight necessary for skill transfer. Since research is documenting that commercial materials teachers use often do not include the how, where, when, and why for skill learning (Hare and Milligan, 1984; Johnston and Byrd, 1983), Roehler and her colleagues trained teachers to use direct explanation as a basis for skill instruction (Roehler and Duffy, 1984; Roehler, Duffy and Meloth, 1984). In addition, students in these studies were asked, what were you learning to do today, how do you do that, and why is it important? Positive results of these training studies suggest that direct explanation fosters greater student awareness for skill learning and nudges the teacher to model and practice a skill before students apply it to a text.

The instructional implications from the previous discussion are evident. Skill instruction should now include the how, why, when, and where of skill learning and application. Contemporary research helps us see that good teaching involves the teacher directly modeling for the students the thinking processes required for a skill. For example, suppose a teacher wanted to determine the explicitly stated main idea of a paragraph. A possible instructional script would be as follows:

Today, class, we are going to learn how to find the main idea of a paragraph when it is stated in a sentence somewhere in the paragraph. The main idea of a paragraph states in a general way what the whole paragraph is talking about. It is important to know how to find the main idea because the main idea tells us the most important information that we should remember from a paragraph. Let me show you how I find the main idea in the paragraph I have written on the board.

Many kinds of products are made from different parts of the bamboo plant. Paper and animal food are made from bamboo leaves. Buckets, flutes and fishing rods are made from bamboo stems. Medicine is made from bamboo juice.

When I read the second, third and fourth sentences, I see that each of these sentences tells about a specific product made from a specific part of the bamboo plant. These sentences that state specific information are called detail sentences. But when I read the first sentence, I see that it says "many kinds of products", not just a specific product, are made from bamboo. I now see that this sentence states in a general way what the whole paragraph is talking about because the phrase, "many kinds of products," includes animal feed, medicine, etc. Therefore, this is the main idea sentence of this paragraph. So, the most important information that I want to remember from this paragraph is "many kinds of products are made from bamboo." This is how I determine the main idea of paragraphs when I read chapters in my health, science and social studies texts.

But not all main ideas are found in the first sentence of a paragraph. Sometimes they are found in the middle or at the end of a paragraph. Watch as I read the next paragraph that I have written. . . (same explanations but the main idea would be located in another position).

This script makes explicit what is to be learned, why the learning is important, how the learning is acquired, and when/where it is used. Although time consuming, this type of instruction readily demonstrates process as well as relevancy of the learning.

Direct teacher explanation is an instructional practice suggested by three other areas of contemporary reading research: reading-writing connections, top level test structures, and main idea identification. In each instance, both modeling and direct teacher explanation seem to provide the necessary link by which practices recommended by research can become methods which work in classrooms.

Reading-Writing Connection

Like reading, writing is a language/thinking process

which involves the structuring of meaning. The movement to emphasize writing concurrently with reading has received impetus from Smith (1982) and Karlin and Karlin (1984), who have shown that acquiring writing skills assists student development of reading comprehension skills. The federal government through NEH grants for integrated language arts projects and the media, through positive reports of successful writing projects (e.g. Time, 1980) have helped to sustain this momentum.

Parallel to developments in content reading instruction, which aims to help students read to learn, research in writing has focused on helping students also see writing as a tool for learning. Studies by Rhea (1985) and Edelsky and Smith (1984) have shown that when students write for "natural" or "authentic" purposes, their writing was more truthful, more varied, and much more satisfying to both teachers and students. Authentic writing can be contrasted to the bland, decontextualized writing that too often goes on in schools in that authentic writing frequently has another audience in mind beside the teacher (e.g., parents, peers, editors, media personalities, etc.). Authentic writing may also be thought of as writing which is done by people in the world of work, from business memos to scientific journals.

Authentic writing seems more likely to occur when a writer has been reading the same type of text s/he is trying to write. Smith's (1982) research suggests that a developmental step of "reading like a writer" takes place before an author can realize and use all the conventions required in producing a certain type of text. Just as children writing "The End" at the conclusion of an original story shows they have been reading or listening to stories, when children write "The End" at the conclusion of a different type of text (essay, poem), it is evident that they have not been reading these types of texts.

To develop this sense of "authentic" writing, teachers need to explain and model the type of writing expected from students. For example, suppose a teacher wanted her students to write fables. Using the direct explanation model, the teacher would read several fables to her class. Following the reading of the fables, the teacher would explain the basic components needed for this style of writing. After the explanation, the teacher would write a

fable on the board modeling the necessary writing processes. This explanation and modeling should make explicit the critical components needed for this type of writing. The fables previously read should be examined in the light of these critical components to point out the room for deviation from as well as conformity to the pattern. This modeling and analysis can help students view a genre as a set of possibilities for writing instead of a set of limits.

Top-level Text Structure

Recent research has demonstrated that students who display a sensitivity to a text's top-level structure (e.g., sequence, description), tend to (a) recall more important detail information (Elliot, 1980; McGee, 1982; Taylor & Samuels, 1982), (b) organize their recalls (either oral or written) according to the text's overall structure (Hiebert, Englert and Brennan, 1983; Meyer, Brandt and Bluth, 1980; Taylor, 1980), and (c) show a transfer from text-structure training to their own writing of expository prose (Taylor and Beach, 1984). Since expository prose assumes increased importance as students progress through their school years, instruction regarding these top-level structures should be considered: Description, sequence, enumeration, compare-contrast, and problem/solution.

Text structure training should begin by using "pure" examples of each text structure. If examples cannot be located in texts, then examples will need to be generated by the teacher. Each text structure should be explained by the teacher. The teacher would stress how certain key words in a text (e.g., first, second, same, different, etc.) signal a specific structure, enumeration. Once a text structure has been identified, the teacher would model how she uses this structure to identify the most important information in a text. S/he would then model how s/he rehearses this important information to prepare for class discussions of texts as well as writing research reports. Following teacher explanation and modeling, students would be given another text (same text structure) to practice identifying and rehearsing the most important information.

Once students are familiar with this text structure strategy, they should be expected to apply the strategy independently when reading content-area texts. The teacher should continually reinforce the use of this text structure

strategy by helping students to organize their writing (papers, essay questions) as well as class discussion and/or questions according to this strategy.

Main Idea Identification

A text strategy taught throughout all grade levels is identifying the main idea of expository text. Baumann (1982a) suggests that many students find this to be a difficult task. A possible reason for this difficulty is that commercial materials used by teachers seem to vary in how main idea is defined (Winograd & Brennan, 1983).

Hare and Milligan (1984) analyzed four well known basal reading series to evaluate instructional explanations for main idea identification. Although all the series agreed on what main ideas are, where they are found and how they are useful, all the series seemed to avoid the issue of how one determines the main idea of a text. Overall, main idea instruction was characterized by mentioning rather than by true explanation.

Baumann and Serra (1984) analyzed various social studies texts to determine how often main ideas are directly stated in these texts and if most main idea statements are found at the beginnings of paragraphs. They found that for all texts surveyed, 44% of the passages contained simple main ideas, 30% contained delayed completion main ideas, and 26% contained inferred main ideas. Concerning main idea placement, 63% of the simple main ideas were found in the first sentence, 21% appeared in the middle of the paragraph, and 12% appeared in the last sentence. But when all passages were analyzed, only 29% had main ideas stated in the first sentence position.

Because of the many problems inherent in commercial programs and texts, direct explanation of this skill by teachers is crucial. Using natural text (paragraph or passage), the teacher needs to explain how s/he determines if a paragraph has an explicitly stated main idea sentence. Instruction should begin with texts that do have directly stated main idea sentences. Following sufficient teacher explanation and modeling as well as student practice sessions, implicit main idea instruction should be given. Using natural texts also will sensitize students to the fact that main ideas are not always found in the first sentence

position and many times students will need to generate their own main idea statements.

When students are competent at this strategy, they could then be shown how their strategy assists in writing a text summary, developing a chapter outline and in taking notes for future study.

Conclusion

The four areas of contemporary reading research which have been the focus of this article--using direct explanation to enhance the reading/writing connection as well as to teach top-level text structure and main idea identification--are not the only promising or interesting ideas under scrutiny by reading professionals. Nor do they offer to reading teachers the guarantee that, if taught, all comprehension problems would be resolved. Rather, the implication is that teachers do not need to substitute one whole approach to teaching reading for another, like phonics for linguistics, as was done so often in the past to improve reading instruction. Improvement will more likely be the result of teachers modeling and giving direct explanations of specific reading strategies which have been demonstrated to be effective for improving comprehension.

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