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USING THE WORD PROCESSOR TO CLARIFY TEXTUAL PHRASING

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This article briefly reviews the literature relevant to investigating the effects of textual phrasing on the efforts of children to comprehend, and then addresses the question, "Is there evidence in the reviewed literature that the use of word processors could have an impact on helping children improve their comprehension?" Some suggestions for use of word processors, based on the reviewed literature, are made.

The Literature Implications

The literature has shown that dealing with syntax, which includes the phrase groupings in text, to be a developmental learned process. Miscues can be caused because the reader anticipates the phrasing, or, because the reader is unfamiliar with the author's phrasing, punctuation, or other structure. An initial miscue caused by confusion over phrasing, punctuation, or structure will frequently cause surrounding text items to change their grammatical function. Phrasing which is unexpected can change grammatical structure, and therefore change the meaning of a passage.

The literature relevant to phrasing of text indicates that text should be printed in meaningful units to facilitate school children's reading comprehension (Weiss, 1983; Raban, 1982; O'Shea & Sindelar, 1983; Cromer, 1970; Stevens, 1981; Carver, 1970). Chunked text should not be broken due to lack of space at right margins, and punctuation should be used to determine the boundaries between chunks of texts (Carver, 1970). Modified terminal punctuation should be used for less proficient developing readers who tend to benefit from terminal punctuation cues at the ends of lines of text, rather than appearing randomly in the text (Gutknecht,

Apol, & Morton, 1982). Line breaks should be made between phrases, if at all possible, or toward the ends of sentences (Raban, 1982). Finally, sentences causing confused intonation should be eliminated from textual materials for young children (Coady & Baldwin, 1977). Since young developing readers are affected by confusion over intonation, some information should be given in manuals accompanying children's readers, for dealing with intonation of text (Coady & Baldwin, 1977). It appears that text should be presented with special attention to keeping natural phrasing together, and only breaking sentences at the most appropriate places in lines of text.

Research information on how children are affected by text phrasing, such as the information summarized in this article, coupled with factors of intellect, language background and ability, and physical and emotional stability, allow children to make the most of the events and situations that enhance the transfer of learning. Goodman and Burke's miscue analysis (1972) gives insight into how children regress and look back to clear up inconsistencies produced while reading, and highlights children's use of syntactic and semantic features. Teachers should make themselves aware of the relationship of phrasing of text and children's reading comprehension. If phrasing is related to improvement in developing children's reading comprehension, it might be worthwhile to redesign some material for children. It might also be worth the time it takes teachers to redesign instructional strategies to work with children who are still unsophisticated readers, to help them develop strategies to deal more effectively with phrasing.

Word Processors

The reviewed literature indicates that comprehension of unsophisticated and low ability readers is often affected by the phrasing boundaries of text. It is possible that the use of word processors could have an impact on assisting these readers with comprehension efforts. For instance, use of language experience techniques with a word processor could make children more aware of sentence structure, word groupings, phrase boundaries, and terminal punctuation. Additionally, of course, the process of inserting, deleting, and rearranging, are all part of the process that students should go through as they develop control over written language. This revising process is most easily done with use of a word processor (Barber, 1982). The word processor frees the stu-

dent and the teacher to easily move phrasing about and to pay attention to the visual presentation of the text.

Most of the summarized literature findings indicated could be addressed by use of a word processor. Word processing can be structured to attend to the Gutknecht et al (1982) findings. Beginning readers could be shown the "word wrap" capability of computer programs. Materials could be more easily rewritten and programmed so that the ending punctuation could be placed at the end of the line of text (Gutknecht et al, 1982; Flippo, 1980, 1982) and line breaks and phrasing could be put in appropriate chunks and locations (Carver, 1970; Raban, 1982; and others). Additionally, the word processor could be used to prepare materials for miscue analysis (Goodman & Burke, 1972). This would facilitate easier use of miscue analysis in teacher and reading education. The study of miscue analysis could enhance teachers' understanding of punctuation, intonation, and other textual cues and miscues that affect cognition. Finally, investigation into this area, summarizing what we know about the effect of phrasing on comprehension, and experimentation with the word processor as a means of dealing with phrasing and resulting comprehension confusion, could have a positive impact on elementary children's comprehension of text.

Reference Note--This article is from a paper "Evidence of the Cognitive and Metacognitive Effects of Punctuation and Intonation: Can the New Technologies Help?" presented at the Annual United Kingdom Reading Association Conference, 1984. For a complete and current review of the literature and research, please refer to Punctuation and Intonation: The Effects on Young Readers' Comprehension and Perception



of Text (1984), Rona Flippo, under review. This 1984 review is an update of earlier reviews (Flippo 1980, 1982). The update was made possible by the work of Hazel Campbell (1984), one of my graduate students, who carried out the update under my guidance and direction.

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