An Integrative Reading-Language Approach

Dixie D. Sanger
Kent State University

Sheldon L. Stick
University of Nebraska

Una A. Lange
University of Nebraska

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
Dorothy J. McGinnis
Reading Center and Clinic

AN INTEGRATIVE READING-LANGUAGE APPROACH

Dixie D. Sanger
Sheldon L. Stick, Una A. Lange
Department of Special Education
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Reading instruction is considered one of the most important instructional activities in elementary grade classrooms, because it provides children with knowledge about the world. Positive relationships between ability to read and language development have been reported by a number of authors, who say classroom teachers could help many children become more effective readers by incorporating selected principles of language development into reading instruction (Anastasiow, 1970; Goodman, 1974; Lundsteen, 1977; Monroe & Rogers, 1964; Stark, 1975). Some authors claim that reading is based upon oral language competence and performance (Hall & Ramig, 1978). Others (Smith, 1978) point out that reading and oral language share a common core of vocabulary items, grammatical forms, and speech perception skills such as phoneme discrimination and sound blending (Hillerich, 1978; Venezky, 1970).

Wiig and Semel (1976) indicated that reading problems might be related to difficulty in understanding the ideas being expressed by complex syntactic structures. Rupley (1974) suggested that while the concepts were within a child's level of understanding, the vocabulary used in reading texts might be too complex, and Vogel (1974 & 1977) reported that poor readers might be deficient in the use of morphological skills.

Clearly there are many researchers who underscore the importance of language-based skills as precursors to efficient reading ability (Gleitman & Rozin, 1977; Vellutino, 1977; Liberman & Shankweiler, 1979; Liberman, 1982; Wren, 1983). However, it is still doubtful that adequate attention has been directed to incorporating language-based activities into reading instruction (Goodman & Goodman, 1977). Although some programs have addressed the importance of such activities, the effectiveness of such programs has not been well documented.

This study sought to determine whether third-grade children identified as poor readers (6-12 mos. delay) were able to improve their reading performances after being provided instruction using an integrated reading-language

approach. It was speculated that the basis for some or most reading difficulties were language problems resulting from deficiencies in constructing meaning from a spoken or printed message, difficulty understanding and/or remembering the message proposition(s), and incongruities between a child's knowledge of language and linguistic information presented.

METHOD

Subjects

The 47 third-grade children were identified as low readers by their classroom teachers according to criteria (informal observations, criterion referenced tests, and California Achievement Test) established in their school district. Twenty-seven children with a mean chronological age of 106.5 mos. were in the three experimental groups and twenty children with a mean chronological age of 105.2 mos. were in the three control groups. All subjects were without known handicapping conditions and all were considered to be from middle socioeconomic families.

Procedures

A quasi-experimental design involving three intact experimental groups and three intact control groups, in self-contained third-grade classrooms, was implemented in three public schools during the regularly scheduled reading instruction. One experimental and one control group was located in each of the three schools. The study involved 14 weeks of treatment with another two weeks required for pre- and posttesting. The integrative treatment consisted of four language activities based upon research findings of Sanger, Stick and Lange (1984): 1) following verbal directions; 2) retelling stories; 3) describing objects or pictures; 4) defining words. The dependent measures included the Informal Reading-Language Test (Lange, Sanger & Stick, 1983; Sanger, Stick & Lange, 1982) and the Test of Reading Comprehension (Brown, Hammill & Wiederholt, 1978). A 2 x 3 analysis of variance was applied to the data. A 90-minute training workshop (Sanger & Stick, 1984) was held prior to implementation of treatment for the three experimental teachers. The experimental teachers were instructed to select and integrate the activities with reading instruction when the children appeared to have difficulty following directions, understanding and expressing ideas or vocabulary, or were unable to retell stories.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A t-test on the means of the dependent measures was computed for pretest scores to determine if the composition of the combined three experimental and control groups differed significantly in performance. Respective mean pretest scores for the main groups were not statistically different. An analysis of variance on the posttest subtest scores from the two dependent measures did not indicate statistically significant difference between the mean scores for the two main groups. However, it was determined that there was a statistically significant interaction between group and teacher. Therefore, the results of main effects are not reported.

Significant interactions between group and teacher were noted only for the subtests General Vocabulary (F = 7.41, df = 2/41, p < .05), Syntactical Similarities (F = 4.56, df = 2/41, p < .05), and Reading Directions of Schoolwork (F = 13.46, df = 2/41, p < .001). As a result, the posttest scores were graphed and plotted for further examination. It was noteworthy that two of the experimental groups outperformed their control counterparts; however, the third experimental group did not reach the level of performance of its control group. Although the three experimental teachers were exposed to the identical workshop, they apparently varied in their abilities to successfully integrate the four language activities into the reading instruction. It was concluded that the success of the treatment was due to the efforts from two of the three experimental teachers. These differences might have been related to individual teacher styles of instructing reading, to teachers' backgrounds in reading and in language development, or to the extent to which the treatment was provided during the study. Also, it is possible that a particular school philosophy encouraged listening and retelling of stories as a skill to be taught in reading development.

A notable observation, after the study was completed, was that the three experimental teachers reported they believed the treatment was effective and that it would be continued with future reading instruction. Retelling stories and defining words were considered the most beneficial activities, while the emphasis on vocabulary development, sequencing of ideas, and the focus on language development were viewed as advantages of the integrated reading-language approach. Similar findings had been

reported earlier (Sanger, Stick & Lange, 1984). However, the data did not clearly support the value of incorporating verbal language activities into reading instruction. Perhaps the relationship between language and reading involves more of the temporally static elements found in written language components. Hammill and McNutt (1981) reported that good verbal language skills are not a guarantee of good reading abilities. Instead, there are strong correlates between reading and written language because reading is the receptive form of written language.

This study showed that it was feasible to include selected expressive and receptive language activities (focusing on syntactic-semantic relationships) into reading instruction. Although there are several factors to consider when teaching reading, interventions must be tailored to meet the needs of each student, based on a profile of individual strengths and weaknesses. It would seem that if teachers used an integrated reading-language approach they would be helping children better understand a writer's intentions by providing opportunities for experimenting with different types of meaning and differentiating meanings according to context and form (Olson, 1982). Consideration also should be given to the possibility that all aspects of oral language may not be equally strong correlates of reading.

REFERENCES

Anastasiow, N.J. Oral language and learning to read. Paper presented at the I.R.A. Conf., Anaheim, CA, 1970.

Brown, V.L., Hammill, D.D., and Wiederholt, J.L. The Test of Reading Comprehension: A Method for Assessing the Understanding of Written Language. Austin, TX: PRO-ED, 1978.

Gleitman, L.R. and Rozin, P. The structure and acquisition of reading. In A.S.Reber and D.L.Scarsborough (Eds.), Toward a Psychology of Reading. Hillsdale: L. Erlbaum Associates, 1977.

Goodman, K.S. Effective teachers of reading know language and children. Elementary English, 1974, 51, 823-828.

Goodman, K.S., and Goodman, Y.M. Learning about psycholinguistic processes by analyzing oral reading. Harvard Educational Review, 1977, 47, 317-333.

Hall, M.A. and Ramig, C.J. Linguistic foundations for reading. Columbus, OH: Chas. E. Merrill, 1978.

Hammill, D.D. and McNutt, G. The Correlates of Reading. Austin, TX: PRO-ED, 1981.

Hillerich, R.L. A Diagnostic approach to early identification of language skills. The Reading Teacher, 1978, 31, 357-364.

Lange,U.A., Sanger,D.D., and Stick,S.L. An informal reading-language test. Reading Horizons, 1983, 23, 278-282.

Liberman, I.Y. A language-oriented view of reading and its disabilities. In H. Myklebust (Ed.), Progress in learning disabilities. New York: Grune & Stratton, 1982.

Liberman, I.Y. and Shakweiler, D. Speech, the alphabet and teaching to read. In L. Resnik (Ed.), Theory and practice of early reading. Hillsdale, L.Erlbaum Assoc., 1977.

Lundsteen, S.W. On development relations between language-learning and reading. Elementary School Journal, 1977, 3, 193-204.

Monroe, M. and Rogers, B. Foundations for reading, informal pre-reading procedures. Chicago, IL: Scott Foresman, and Company, 1964.

Olson, D.R. The language of schooling. Topics in Language Disorders, 1982, 2, 1-12.

Rupley, W.H. Vocabulary development and instruction. The Reading Teacher, 1974, 27, 428-430.

Sanger,D.D.,Stick,S.L., & Lange,U.A. A workshop to incorporate languagea development in teaching reading. Reading Horizons, 1984, 24, 264-273.
----- Identification of language based problems--an informal measure. Paper presented at the Amer. Speech-Language-Hearing Assoc. Conf., Toronto, 1982.
-----Integrating language activities into reading instruction. Reading Horizons, 1984, 25, 7-13.

Smith, F. Understanding Reading. NY:Holt, Rinehart & Winston 1978.

Stark, J. Reading failures: A language based problem. ASHA, 1975, 17, 832-834.

Vellutino, F.R. Alternate conceptualization of dyslexia: Evidence in support of verbal-deficit hypothesis. Harvard Ed. Review, 1977, 47, 334-354.

Venezky, R. Skills required for learning to read. Language and Reading, an Interdisciplinary Approach, Center for Applied Linguistics, 1970.