



# Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts

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Volume 27  
Issue 3 April 1987

Article 10

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4-1987

## Reading Horizons vol. 27, no. 3

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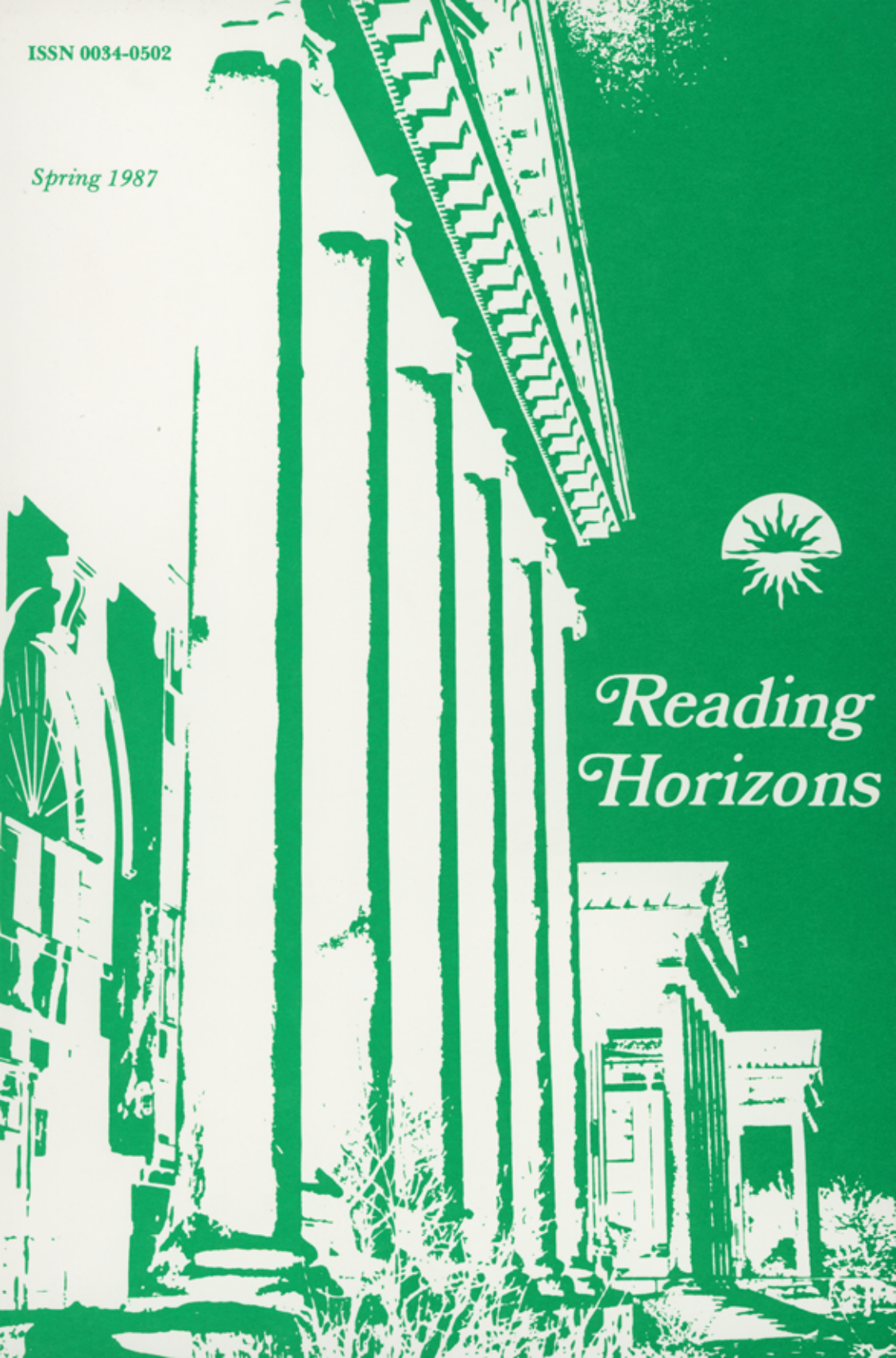


ISSN 0034-0502

*Spring 1987*



# *Reading Horizons*







Volume 27, Number 3

April, 1987

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

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READING  
HORIZONS

READING HORIZONS (ISSN 0034-0502) is published quarterly by the College of Education at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan. Second Class Postage is paid at Kalamazoo. Postmaster: Send address changes to WMU, READING HORIZONS, Kalamazoo, Michigan, 49008.

TO  
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Subscriptions are available at \$12.00 per year for individuals, \$14.00 for institutions. Checks must be made payable to READING HORIZONS, published October, January, April, and July, No. 4 issue containing Title and Author Index. Rates are determined by printing costs and are subject to change.

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## ANNOUNCEMENT

With this issue (Spring, 1987), HORIZONS is calling your attention to the third edition of its selected articles of the past four years of our journals. SELECTED READINGS will be published this summer. The purpose is to help the teacher who has responsibility for teaching reading, but has not had adequate course work. The editor, who had experience in those frustrating circumstances, selected the most practical and informative articles that have appeared in HORIZONS since the 2nd edition, '83, and will spend the next three years making this book available to schools and teachers in the country.

The full table of contents is printed in this issue, on pages 223-226. We will be taking advance orders as follows:

Institutions,	\$15.00
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Please make checks payable to READING HORIZONS and accompany with your mailing address. No agencies will be handling these books, and there is no mark-up along the way. It is important that every teacher sees reading as a basic component of mental growth. Nothing is as satisfying as having helped someone in reading.

# WHAT TEACHERS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT TEST-WISENESS

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(NOTE: In reviewing selected studies from three decades, the 1950's, 1960's, and 1970's, the author assembles support for teachers who would consider test-wiseness in dealing with their reading tests and others.)

There are very few states where testing in the public schools is not on the increase.

Data received from tests is also receiving more attention from a more diverse audience than ever before.

All educators should be concerned with what the research has said on the subject of testing and more specifically, test-wiseness.

Test-wiseness is just one aspect of the topic of testing; however, it is one that classroom teachers can help students with as a planned part of their evaluation process.

The research on test-wiseness is frequently oriented toward the substantive content of standardized tests. The literature reviewed here will deal more specifically with research studies like that presented by Oakland (1971) in which he states the following:

Familiarity with the format and language used in standardized tests and possession of the abilities which are prerequisite to taking standardized tests pertain to a person's test-wiseness. Deficiencies in one or more of the abilities prerequisite to taking a test will attenuate the results, thereby depreciating the test's effectiveness to discriminate validly only those variables it was designed to measure.

Oakland determined that there were thirteen specific skills that could be enhanced by curricular materials. Four

of these are presented here because they have value for classroom teachers. Each of these has to do with format awareness or format familiarization. Oakland lists the following as related to format awareness:

1. Begin with a few items and options per page and gradually increase them in number until the page is similar in appearance to an actual test page.
2. Gradually increase the number of options per frame from two through five.
3. Progress from big pictures and words with a few on a page to small pictures and words with several on a page, again until the final page is similar to an actual test page.
4. Use both dotted lines and heavy black lines to separate the criterions from the options.

While format awareness is only one aspect of the test-wiseness topic, it is one that classroom teachers can easily prepare to deal with in their classroom testing activities. Preparing students for the format characteristics of any test needs to be given special attention.

The investigators interested in test-wiseness instruction generally discuss, at some point in their research, the advantages which experienced examinees have over their inexperienced counterparts. This relationship is described by Vernon (1964) who supplies data revealing that students who are already somewhat sophisticated examinees gain about half as much from practice or coaching as do those who are less familiar with tests. Vernon writes: "Such familiarization probably improves performance partly by reducing anxiety and carelessness, partly by inducing the set of working quickly, taking careful account of instructions and not wasting time on the difficult ones." (p. 216)

An early study by Vernon (1954) provides insights into what some early studies have cited as possible deficiencies when distinguishing between practice approaches and coaching approaches to the improvement of test scores. Coaching is where the subjects are told the right answers. Practice is where the subjects learn only from their own experiences. The early literature on test-wiseness offers a great deal on both approaches. Many of these studies dealt with test repetition. Most used intelligence tests. Some of the investigations were designed to deal with repeated practices

over a few days' time while others used months or even years. Cronbach (1954) is typical of these earlier studies. He summarizes the data and states that practiced, uncoached groups gain about 6 IQ points after taking from four to eight tests without special explanation.

Gains in scores are also found on retesting with parallel forms of the same test (C.F. Peel, 1951 & '52; Muntyan, 1947; Snedden, 1931; Watts et al, 1952) although the effects of practices on parallel tests tend to be smaller than those of repeating the same test. Watts et al, for example, in an experiment involving London children, found that the mean IQ on the eight parallel test was only 6 points higher than on the first. More recently, Kreit (1967) examined the effects of test practice on the acquisition of test-taking skills of third grade pupils. Four different group intelligence tests were administered to the experimental group, while the control group received only pre- and post-tests. Significant improvement in test-taking skills was apparent for the experimental group, presumably due to its increased exposure to a variety of tests. The relationship between intelligence and increased test-wiseness was not significant. Investigations by Moore, Schultz and Baker, 1966; Wahlstrom and Boersma, 1968; and Slakter and Doehler, 1969, also found that test-wiseness skills can be developed through systematic instruction.

Millman and Setijadi's (1966) study demonstrated the disadvantage under which students operate when taking a test with an unfamiliar format. Comparisons were made of the performance of Indonesian and American students on tests using open-ended and multiple choice questions involving arithmetic computation and vocabulary. The Indonesian students did less well on the multiple choice items than they did on the open-ended questions. This differential performance presumably was due to their having had no prior experience with multiple choice items. Thus test-wiseness may be an important source of variance when comparing the scores earned by two groups whose test-taking experience differs markedly.

A publication by the Maryland Department of Education of 1975, provided booklets useful to classroom teachers in helping students acquire test-taking skills. Emphasis was placed upon overcoming format problems. The booklet provided instructional techniques to facilitate overcoming this

concern. Part IV of this report presented the following:

1. simulate test taking conditions,
2. establish a plan,
3. provide practice throughout the year.

An investigation by Sabers, 1975, also places priority on test-taking skills. In Part III of his research, test-wiseness is discussed; Part IV presents practice exercises on format. Item types used in the Metropolitan Achievement Test are presented. Crehan, et al, (1974) also considers the test-wisness skills needed for success on standardized tests. His study was a longitudinal one. Crehan, et al, investigated test-wisness with respect to (a) grade differences, (b) grade by sex interaction, and (c) stability. In summarizing the analyses of the matched longitudinal data, there appears to be no evidence for an interaction between sex and grade, and little evidence for a relationship between sex and test-wisness. Test-wisness is a stable characteristic over the grade levels studied. The educational implications discussed include the following: (a) the stability of test-wisness adds to the stability of aptitude or achievement tests, (b) students penalized on test scores because of low test-wisness tend to be penalized not only on different tests over time; i.e., the student low in test-wisness tends to be penalized every time he takes a test which includes a test-wisness component, and (c) since there seems to be little possibility of completely removing the effect of test-wisness from standardized tests, to say nothing of teacher-made tests, perhaps more thought should be given to the teaching of test-wisness to students low in test-wisness. This same concern for providing specific concern to standardized tests is discussed by Tinney (1968). He selected two schools on the basis of census information to represent high and low socioeconomic levels. Two classes of fifth grade students in each school were randomly assigned by sex to experimental and control groups. The experimental groups received five consecutive daily lessons of 30 minutes duration. Tinney selected five skills. One skill attended to the typical format and purpose of comprehension test questions. The instructional approaches were over the format characteristics of the New Developmental Reading Tests. Callenbach (1973) also developed lessons which considered specific skills and characteristics of a particular standardized test. In both of these

instructional situations, it was found that test-wiseness skills could be taught and that scores were increased as a result of instruction aimed at pre-selected test-wiseness skills.

The studies reviewed support at least two generalizations: (1) test-wiseness instruction has been successfully carried out in various investigations and significant gains in scores have been reported, (2) format familiarization has been identified as operative in the instructional approaches dealing with test-wiseness.

Therefore, those teachers and others who administer tests and those who review the results should consider the degree to which test-wiseness characteristics might have been operative had a planned effort been undertaken to provide special instruction.

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# TEACHER-SET PRE-READING PURPOSES AND COMPREHENSION

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The move away from oral reading and toward silent reading early in this century emphasized that reading should not be a passive absorption of print but rather that "It must select, repress, soften, emphasize, correlate and organize, all under the influence of the right mental set or purpose or demand." (Thorndike, 1917. [Emphasis added.])

In directed (basal reader) instruction, however, students seldom have self-set reasons for reading the selections as Thorndike envisioned. Instead, an integral part of the Directed Reading Activity (DRA) in nearly all basal readers has been a teacher-set pre-reading purpose for which students are to read; e.g., "Read to find why Marie changed her mind about babysitting her younger brother." The implicit assumption behind this practice is that it will somehow facilitate comprehension. Does it?

A search of the literature (Hawes, 1984) discovered 28 studies from 1920 to the present on pre-reading purposes and related topics and adjunct questions. Some researchers (Wiesendanger and Wollenberg, 1978) found that the no-pre-reading question group scored higher on post-reading comprehension questions than did a pre-reading question group. Others (Distad, 1927) found just the opposite.

Some studies with adults (Anderson and Biddle, 1975; Ackerman, 1977) suggested that pre-reading questions focused attention selectively on the targeted information so that the reader somewhat ignored the rest of the passage and did not retain much of it. If true, in a DRA, this would seem counterproductive.

However, no set of overall conclusions could be reached because of the quality of the research, the disparity of the

subjects, the varying type of material used, and the varying kinds of purposes given. Andre (1979), in a similar review, reached similar conclusions. Particularly dismaying was the fact that few of the studies dealt with or seemed generalizable to elementary school students reading a basal reader selection in a DRA format.

Durkin (1978-79) questioned whether these pre-reading purposes should be in writing. By being only oral, she said, "the children could not refer to them before, during, or after they read. It also meant that they may have been forgotten not only by the children but also by the teacher." (p. 499) Research by Frase (1968, 1975) also raised the possibility that the oral purpose is likely to be forgotten and consequently have little or no influence on comprehension."

### Purposes of the Study

Because some basal reader teachers' guides recommend written pre-reading purposes while others suggest only oral ones, the major purpose of this study was to compare the comprehension of stories in the basal reader using three pre-reading purpose treatments: (1) written, (2) oral, and (3) no purpose (control).

A second purpose of the study was to compare intentional learning (information directly related to the pre-reading purpose) with incidental learning (information not directly related to the pre-reading purpose).

### Procedures

The pre-reading purpose was a literal, non-detail question written as an imperative statement focusing on the problem in the story; e.g., "Read to find out how Maria delivered the paper so that the dog could not get it." These purposes were stated to conform to Wilhite's study (1982) of the relationship of superordinate and subordinate pre-reading questions to text comprehension.

The stories were read by all pupils in three intact third-grade classrooms. To simulate grouping practices and to approximate pupils' instructional reading level, only the 36 pupils who had scored between the thirtieth and seventieth percentiles on the Nelson Reading Skills Test (1977) given a week before the study began were used in the study.



The three stories used were from basal readers not used in the participating classrooms. Stories were photoduplicated but illustrations were deleted to insure that comprehension was the result of reading and not of looking at the pictures.

Each story had a blank cover page followed by a page containing simple directions. On one set of materials the pre-reading purpose was printed on the direction page and the students followed along as it was read; on another set it was not printed but was read from a master copy while the students listened; and, on the control set, no purpose was given.

A set of six printed questions followed each story. One, an interrogative version of the imperatively-stated pre-reading purpose, was designed to measure intentional learning. The five others were both literal and non-literal and were designed to measure incidental learning.

One treatment was administered weekly to each classroom.

All students received all treatments and all stories in a randomized repeated measure design, in order to establish equivalency of stories, difficulty of pre-reading purposes, and difficulty of post-reading questions.

A one-way analysis of variance for repeated measures, with the .05 level of confidence, was used to analyze the results.

### Results

On total comprehension scores, there were no significant differences between the three groups. However, both the written-purpose mean (4.33) and the oral-purpose mean (4.19) were higher than the non-purpose mean (3.83). ( $F = 2.03388$ ,  $df = 2$ , 70  $p = .138$ )

There were no significant differences among the three groups on the intentional comprehension questions. ( $F = 1.46829$ ,  $df = 2$ , 70  $p = .23732$ )

There was a significant difference at the .05 level of confidence on the incidental comprehension questions. ( $F = 3.90294$ ,  $df = 2$ , 70  $p = .025$ )

## Discussion

As a result of examining the teacher's guides of five basal reader series, reviewing the literature on the topic, and conducting this study, we reached the following conclusions:

1. Teacher-set pre-reading purposes in a basal reader DRA have a definite value and should not be treated lightly nor implemented casually by teachers as they do seem to facilitate text comprehension. Regrettably, Durkin (1984) found that teachers rarely posed questions before their students read a basal selection.
2. Basal reader teacher's guides should do a better job with regard to such purposes. One, they should provide a clear rationale for them, thereby more adequately alerting teachers to their significance. And two, they might print them in a distinctive type style, thereby calling more attention to them.
3. With third-graders, it doesn't seem to make any difference whether the purposes are oral or written so long as they are definitely stated by the teacher and the students understand that they are to be taken seriously.
4. Purposes that focus on the larger elements of the story, e.g., the resolution of a problem, seem to produce bonus results. Such purposes don't seem to distract from the comprehension of important information that isn't directly related to that purpose. That is, the mental set established by the teacher-set purpose does not seem to focus children's attention exclusively on information related to this purpose. These kinds of purposes may establish a kind of schema prior to reading so that the reader's search is directed to other details as well as to the main character's attempt to solve the problem. Aspects of story grammar and story structure (Rumelhart, 1977) should be helpful in formulating appropriate kinds of purposes.
5. Teachers and authors of basal reader teacher's guides should carefully phrase these purposes. Durkin (1984) found that "manual questions. . . consistently revealed too much about a story's plot." Pearson (1985) has recommended a set of guidelines for developing questions

that invoke prior knowledge and help predict what will happen in the story.

6. Teachers and authors of teachers' guides should follow Pearson's (1982) advice that "There is no reason to give a purpose setting question if you do not follow it up. In fact, if you do not follow it up, students will learn not to take seriously the purpose setting question you give." (p. 10)
7. Teacher-set purposes may not promote the independence which truly mature readers need to develop; they would seem to make the student more dependent upon the teacher than is ultimately desirable. Pearson (1985) has alluded to this and called for a "gradual release of responsibility" from teacher to student. Teacher-set pre-reading purposes have some definite values but equally effective techniques need to be developed that promote reader independence and decrease reliance upon the teacher.

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# READING THROUGH THE CREATIVE ARTS

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A major problem in education today is that there are students who are deficient in many academic tasks because they do not have the necessary reading skills needed in order to complete those tasks. For this reason detection and remediation of reading problems should begin early, when the problem is identified. It is important that teachers toward rather than away from reading. This means having good motivators which will encourage the child to want to learn to read. Teachers might look away from the traditional methods of motivation, toward some more non-conventional methods. Using various aspects of the arts in motivation of reading is a primary example of a non-conventional method which can be used by the teacher. There are four major areas of creative arts which can be utilized in the reading classroom to enrich and enhance the reading program. These are music, poetry, puppetry, and graphic art.

## Music as a Motivator to Reading

It has been found that the use of music in the teaching of reading, especially in the elementary school, may motivate and build the ability of children, whether or not they are musically talented or intellectually above-average. Using music for the language deficient child is based on the idea that child-initiated language increases when creativity and imagination are stimulated. The affective domain serves as a bridge into the cognitive domain. The emphasis in a music-education curriculum for the language deficient child is on building language skills and English vocabulary while presenting musical concepts. Using music as a tool for teaching of reading not only secures music in the curriculum but also enhances the outcome of reading instruction.

Before setting up a music education program for the language deficient child it is important to recognize the

similarities between music and reading, also the advantages of introducing beginning reading activities through music. Music and reading are similar in that they have symbol structure which can be decoded into sounds which have meaning. They both are in a left-to-right plan or framework. They both require visual and auditory discrimination. Because of these similarities music can be used fairly well to enhance reading skills. The basic advantages of introducing beginning reading activities through music are:

1. it broadens reading into a multisensory experience
2. it heightens interest and involvement
3. it brings variety and pleasure to the experience
4. it reduces the tedium of repetition and drill

Music can be used in beginning reading programs for stimulation and inspiration. The beginning months of the school year can be spent in "whole child" activities, such as group singing, charades, and pantomime. At this point children use their whole body in participation and movement. Music can also be coupled with dance. This builds on the concept that movement may be the initial way in which a child begins the creative process. This can be linked to building better reading skills. As language use broadens and skills become further developed and expanded, specific language-oriented activities can be incorporated into the program. Some activities which the teacher may want to incorporate into the program are accompaniment of poetry and stories by rhythm instruments or having students plan small skits to include songs, music, and dance in their production, to be presented for each other or other classes. It is important for the teacher to recognize that the use of a different book, a different subject may catch a child off guard and cause him to sing words he would be reluctant to read if asked.

Little children use great amounts of poetry for their own purposes. They use borrowed poetry, or poetry of their own making in their games and dances. They adapt poems to the music they hum and sing or simply make up the words. In solitary play they mumble over learned snatches of verse and create vast amounts of rhythmic verbal patterns. Poetry comes easily to children. Although they don't call it poetry, they do use it more than they ever will at any

later period in their lives.

Take advantage of the natural interest and enthusiasm for poetry and apply it to teaching and enjoying reading in the classroom. Poems are excellent, readily available sources of literature for reading. Reading and writing poetry in the classroom can serve numerous purposes:

1. Plays a significant role in shaping behavior and attitudes of children.
2. Provides opportunities for children to share their thoughts and feelings in a non-threatening manner, and serve as a release for those feelings.
3. Heightens children's desire to read.
4. Sensitizes children to sound, rhythm, patterns, repetition, alliteration and melody.
5. Teaches plot and story.
6. Promotes an understanding of symbolism and imagery.
7. Sensitizes children to various writing styles.
8. Increases children's vocabularies, both oral and written.
9. Helps children develop a sense of humor, and find enjoyment through reading--here is an area in which nonsense and make-believe have a place in learning.
10. Takes children to far-away lands, different seasons, back to their earlier childhood or into the future.
11. Sparks creativity and imagination.

When reading or studying poetry, or having the children write their own, keep form in mind. There are various forms of poetry, so try to provide a wide variety of experiences with all types, for each has its own place and purpose. These forms of poetry include:

1. Single line - Exactly as its name implies, simply one line of verse.
2. Rhymed Couplet - Two lines of equal length, where the last word in each line rhyme.
3. Free verse - The most popular form, a free style with no set form or pattern. It may be as long, short, or rhythmic as its author chooses.
4. Limerick - A humorous, light form with a set pattern of rhythm and rhyme. ( They typically begin in the style, "There once was a doctor named Bill . . ."
5. Four Line Quatrain - Four lines of verse with the last words in alternating lines rhyming.
6. Haiku - A traditional Japanese form of poetry, usually

associated with one of the four seasons of the year. Most of their images come from nature or man's interaction with nature. It is made up of 17 syllables divided into three lines. Lines one and three have five syllables, and line two has seven.

7. Tanka - A Japanese form of poetry. The first three lines are the same as a Haiku, then there are two more lines of seven syllables each.
8. Sijo - A three sentence poem divided into six lines of seven or eight syllables each.
9. Cinquain - Has two forms: a) A five line poem in which line one is a one word title, line two is two words that describe the title, line three is three words that express action, line four is four words that express feeling, and line five is one word for the title; second form, also a five line poem in which line one contains five words, and each line following contains one less word.
10. Typographical - A form of poetry in which the poet arranges the words to add to the effect of the meaning, and imagery (i.e., a poem about snakes in the shaped of a snake).

When using poetry in the educational environment, either reading it or having the children create their own, make sure their contacts with poetry are meaningful and pleasurable experiences, especially initial contacts. There are several important aspects to keep in mind. Without a conscious effort in these areas, it is very easy to turn children off permanently to this rich and enjoyable facet of literature.

Provide poems with familiar content and words,  
especially in the beginning.

Don't over dramatize.

Practice reading poems before presenting them  
to the class.

Speak in a clear, moderate voice, with vitality  
and enjoyment.

Don't try to make a lesson out of every poem.

Don't be obsessed with finding hidden meanings  
in every poem.

Don't overstress rhyme.

Don't approach poetry solemnly or with an aura  
of awe and mystery.



Encouraging every effort the children make to express themselves through poetry.

Try to get a poet to come in and speak to your class, this will bring poetry to life.

Do incorporate other areas of the curriculum; drawing, painting, rhythmic exercises, drama and music accompany poetry quite naturally.

Childhood is a time when children need to experience the delight of listening to poetry. By reading several poems daily, children will share many pleasurable moments. Under the guidance of a teacher who shares a love of poetry, children will be free to write their own poems, and may even choose poetry as a form of expression as frequently as prose.

### Art

Using art as an enhancer of the reading program can provide the extra stimulation and motivation that many young readers need. Art provides an outlet for the creativity of the young child. By using their imagination and experiencing the "hands on" approach children become intrinsically motivated to read. Following are twelve ideas for art lesson plans that can be incorporated into a reading program.

1. Have students make sand table scenes, illustrating events in their books.
2. Have children work in small groups. Each group selects and reads a book. They discuss the different settings where parts of the story take place. The group designs and builds each setting in a shoe box. The bottom of the box serves as the back of the setting; cut away the top side.
3. Make a small peephole in each side of a shoe box. Place each hole at a different level. Cut out drawings of people, animals and objects. Arrange and paste them on the interior sides of the box so that they suggest a story. Tape the lid on the box. A child peeps through each hole and then writes a story for the pictures.
4. Tell a version of the "Tin Soldier" to the children. Show them pictures of the tin soldier. Supply each child with geometric shapes. Have the children arrange and paste the shapes to form a picture of the Tin Soldier. Then color additional features in with crayons.
5. Read a favorite story to the children. Help them make a

construction paper cylinder a little larger than an index finger. The children then attach construction paper head shapes. Using bits of colorful yarn, felt and paper, the children complete the finger puppet to represent a character in the favorite story. Have the children dramatize the story with their puppets as you read it again.

6. Read a story aloud. Have the children lie on large sheets of brown paper while other children trace their body silhouettes. Encourage them to assume positions representing the actions of the story character. The children cut out their silhouettes and draw or paste paper clothing on them to represent the characters in the story. Cut out the characters and tape them on the walls.
7. On the chalkboard list the following: Happy sound, sad sound, loud sound, summer sound, and strange sound. Have the children copy the phrases on separate sheets of paper and then find magazine pictures that suggest the sounds in the list. The pictures are cut out and pasted on the appropriate papers. Help the children fasten their papers together between construction paper covering. Decide on a title for the booklets. Place the booklets on a table, encourage the children to read each other's booklets.
8. Using discarded magazines, have the children cut 50 or more words that they know. Next, they arrange the words on black construction paper to form a short story. When complete, the short story is pasted in place.
9. Have the children fold 9x10 manila paper into two rows of three boxes each. Tell them to make up a story and draw a picture sequentially in each of the six boxes to illustrate the story. Have the children write a character's conversation in only one of the boxes to accompany the illustration. When finished, they paste their story boards on larger construction paper and exchange boards.
10. Collect newspaper comic strips. Each child selects and cuts out a comic strip that has two or more panels. They glue small construction paper scraps over the name of the strip and the conversations in the panels. Then the children cut the panels apart and arrange them in order on manila drawing paper. Have the class draw and add one or more panels on the paper, leaving space for their own panels. Have them give their strip a new title. Have children exchange and read each other's story boards.
- 11 & 12. Over a sheet of construction paper, have the children

hold a piece of crayon in position for drawing. Tell them to close their eyes and follow these and other directions: "Move your crayons around and around on the paper. Now move them back and forth, left and right. Now move them up and down, slowly."

Remind the children to keep their eyes closed as they doodle. After your final direction, they open their eyes and study their doodling for a story idea. They may add other lines to their paper, as they search for or think of a story idea. After coming up with an idea, the children can write their stories.

### Dramatics

Identifying with others, whether in real life, stories, or poetry, enables the child to reenact life patterns he sees about him. Culturally deprived children need help in this. So do some handicapped, some gifted, physically disabled, or mentally retarded. All children respond eventually, if not at once, to dramatics.

Today, dramatics is thought of, in educational circles at least, as an activity for the classroom. There children can play instead of giving plays, improvise scenes from favorite stories, and role play or pantomime characters. They can act out anger or fear or surprise, and blow off steam. They have fun, and for a few minutes they can step into the skin of another human being.

The best method is to let the children make up their own play based on a story they know well and like, one they have read together or one you have read to them. The story should have these two elements:

Both male and female characters.

Lots of characters since every child who wants to participate should have a part.

The simpler the plot the better. Fairy tales work extremely well and have two advantages; most children already know them, and they often include crowds of people.

It all starts when the class reads a story together or when you read one of them. The reading should be leisurely and pleasant. Afterward, ask which scenes the class like best. Have them retell that particular scene. If the children leave out something important do some prompting of your

own. Most likely, though, someone else will remember.

Now the acting comes out. First have the children think about the character's state of mind, whether he is young or old, bold or shy, mean or kind, and how these things affect the voice, walk and gestures. On the third or fourth day, act out the entire scene from beginning to end, with no stops.

The children will not only look forward to reading stories now, but will look at reading as being fun and somewhat challenging.

Poetry is also a possibility for dramatic play. Most children enjoy poetry. They are sensitive to the rhythm of it and enjoy the repetition of sounds, words, and phrases. For this reason, poetry can be used in creative dramatics, often with highly successful results. Folk tales, legends and fables are recommended materials for use on all levels. For younger children, stories should be simplified.

In conclusion, creative dramatics may be viewed as a way of learning, a means of self-expression, or an art form in which many learnings are possible.

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# READABILITY FORMULAS: A NECESSARY EVIL?

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## Introduction

The word "readable" can be defined in at least three different ways. Klare (1971) suggested that it could mean interest-value, legibility, or comprehensibility. Klare's third meaning, comprehensibility, is the one which readability formulas address.

A readability formula is usually a mathematical equation that strives to relate the comprehension of the reader and the linguistic characteristics of the text. The purpose of this paper is to reflect upon some readability formulas and to propose that they be used only in perspective. Although these formulas are often considered a 'necessary evil,' they need not receive as much attention as they do. Readability formulas certainly should not be thought of as the ultimate instruments in measuring texts for grade levels. Too many factors which readability formulas do not address are more crucial to reading comprehension.

## Readability Formulas

Many readability formulas exist, developed from research through two generations. Vogel and Washburne (1928) proposed the first readability formula by estimating the grade placement of children's reading materials. They made classifications of books based upon children's likes and dislikes, and the reading ability of those same children. The grade placements of these books then were representative of the children who read and enjoyed the books. Washburne and Vogel then set out to relate their grade placements to some characteristics of the book. They found that the following four factors were useful indices of grade placements: 1) the number of different words per one thousand words of text; 2) the number of uncommon words; 3) the number of simple sentences in seventy-five successive sentences; and 4) the number of prepositions per one thousand words. Vogel and Washburne did not intend for this formula

to be used for any one book or to appraise overall reading difficulty, although they stated that any book used in the elementary grades could be similarly analyzed "so far as structural difficulty is concerned" (p. 380).

Gray and Leary (1935) suggested a regression formula based upon the number of different hard words, the number of first-, second-, and third-person pronouns, average sentence length, percentage of different words, and the number of prepositional phrases. This formula failed to show differences in readability beyond a certain level of difficulty, however.

Lorge (1944) developed his readability formula using these variables: number of words in the sample, number of sentences in the sample, number of prepositional phrases per sample, and the number of hard words in the sample (using the Dale List of 769 Easy Words).

Flesch (1949) presented his Reading Ease formula which simply required counting the number of words per sentence (in one hundred word sample) and the number of syllables in one hundred words. The formula for this process is :  $\text{Reading Ease} = 206.835 - .846 \text{ wl} - 1.015 \text{ sl}$  (where  $\text{wl}$  = the number of syllables per one hundred words and  $\text{sl}$  = the average number of words per sentence). To assess interest, Flesch advocated the use of his Reading Interest formula. To find this score, a selection of one hundred words is evaluated in terms of personal words, including all first-, second-, and third-person pronouns, words that have masculine or feminine natural gender, and group words like "people". Also computed is the number of personal sentences. Personal sentences are spoken sentences (quotations), questions or comments addressed directly to the reader, exclamations, and sentence fragments whose meanings must be inferred from the context of the section. The formula for this process is:  $\text{Reading Interest} = 3.635 \text{ pw} + .314 \text{ ps}$  (where  $\text{pw}$  = the number of personal words and  $\text{ps}$  = the number of personal sentences). No other formulas attempt to measure interest level.

Spache (1953) created a readability formula for primary-grade reading materials, since most of the readability formulas in use were applicable only for reading levels of grade 4 and beyond (Flesch, 1943; Lorge, 1944; Dale-Chall, 1948). Two formulas that had been created for use with

primary-level reading materials (Lewerenz [1935] and Wilkinson [1936] were deemed too lengthy and complicated by Spache. Spache's formula was this: Grade level of textbook = .141 average sentence length per one hundred words + .086 words outside the Dale Easy Word List of 769 words + .839.

Fry's Readability Formula (1968) was designed to "save time." It called for the selection of three one-hundred word passages in the beginning, middle, and end of a book, using no proper nouns. The number of sentences is counted in each passage and averaged among the three selections. Syllables are then counted and again averaged among the three selections. Plotting these average numbers on Fry's graph gives an indication of the reading difficulty level. Fry created his graph grade levels from plotting publishers' graded readers and "smoothing the curve." Maginnis (1969) extended Fry's graph to include primer and preprimer levels, using books of commonly used basal reading series.

McLaughlin (1969) proposed a SMOG formula as another readability formula. (The title SMOG was McLaughlin's tribute to his birthplace, London, where the word 'smog' was coined). The SMOG formula is approached in this way: "1. Count ten consecutive sentences near the beginning of the text to be assessed, ten in the middle, and ten near the end. 2. In the thirty selected sentences count every word of three or more syllables. 3. Estimate the square root of the polysyllabic words counted by taking the square root of the nearest perfect square. 4. Add 3 to the approximate square" (p. 639). The number that is derived is the reading grade level of the book.

Elley (1969) suggested that grade levels for readability could be assessed using a mean noun frequency level. Three passages are selected from a text using at least twenty different nouns. These nouns are then evaluated using the NZCER (New Zealand Council for Educational Research) Spelling List of Levels of Difficulty and the frequency levels of the noun are written down. The mean of these frequency levels is then computed and checked with his readability scale. For example, a mean noun frequency level of 3 - 3.59 corresponds to Elley's suitable age level of seven to eight years.

Alternatives to Formulas Tedious counting is involved

in the formulas described in the previous section. Some alternatives to these formulas per se have been developed within the past thirty years.

Bormuth (1968) proposed the cloze readability procedure as a possible predictor of readability. The steps to this process are: 1) Randomly select six to twelve passages from a book. Each passage should begin at the normal beginning of a paragraph and should consist of at least two hundred and fifty words. Every fifth word should be deleted, allowing for fifty blanks. 2) Tests are then given to the grade level in question (twenty-five students are suggested for reliable results). 3) The mean of each test is determined and then an overall mean is calculated. 4) The test whose mean is closest to the overall mean score is then used for cloze readability. 5) Scores of 44-57% indicate instructional level, while scores above 57% would imply independent level reading materials. Advantages of this method are that the student him/herself manipulates the text and no abstract scale or model is applied.

Bormuth's proposal pointed out that although the cloze test is similar to a conventional test (i.e., fill-in-the-blank), there are three underlying differences. First, in a cloze readability test one word is deleted and in conventional tests whole phrases may be deleted. In addition, a cloze test allows for the deletion of structural words (conjunctions, prepositions, etc.) as well as lexical words (nouns and verbs). Secondly, cloze readability tests are made directly from the text, while conventional tests may use derived interpretations of the text. Thirdly, the cloze test is used before the reader has read the selection and thus a more valid indication of potential readability is attained.

Endicott (1973) proposed a scale of syntactic complexity using a unit of language analysis called the "T-unit" (Watts, 1948; Loban, 1963). His model considered the "extent of a child's syntactic organizational ability" (p. 16) and the complexity within the basic T-unit. The transformation of a child's sentences and embedding clauses allow for a complexity ratio which could be applied to readability formulas. Instead of a formula then, this scale looks at sentence structure.

Singer (1975) proposed simply matching paragraphs of unknown reading difficulty to paragraphs of known reading



difficulty and then attaching that reading difficulty score to the unknown scored paragraph. Since this technique involves visual comparisons of paragraphs it has been called the "Singer Eyeball Estimate of Readability" or SEER. Reliability and validity of this approach were arrived at through the use of thirty-two judges whose readability levels deviated less than an average of 1.0 grade levels when "eyeballing" and matching these paragraphs.

Carver (1975-6) described a similar technique for determining readability called the Rauding Scale. It involves the subjective rating of passages by qualified experts who used a set of established rating passages for references in their measurement of the concept difficulty of a passage. Duffelmeyer (1982) compared this scale and the SEER non-formula readability values to those determined by use of the Spache and Dale-Chall formulas. He found that the Rauding grade levels were closer to the formulated grade levels. Froese (1979), however, found the SEER scores to be more accurate than the Rauding scale.

Irwin and Davis (1980) proposed the use of a readability checklist as another alternative to readability formulas. The basic categories of this checklist are understandability and learnability. Understandability involves consideration of text information and the reader's conceptual and experimental background. Concept development, syntax, clearly stated main ideas, etc., are also factors of understandability. Learnability is based on the organization of the text, reinforcement of the text (including aids and elaboration), and motivation. Teachers can use the checklist to analyze a textbook and then can develop the necessary complementary materials to enhance comprehension.

Wheeler and Sherman (1983) suggested the following alternatives to using readability formulas with nonfiction texts. Considering the organization and content of the book is important, as well as looking for pictures or charts that enhance comprehension. Technical or new vocabulary should be printed in boldface print or in italics. Another critical factor is student reaction to the text. This judgment of students is very often overlooked in the area of readability, yet the students are the intended audience and thus should be a part of the selection process.

Comparison of Formulas    Some interesting studies com-

paring readability formulas have emerged. Brown (1965) found that his seventh- and eighth-grade students comprehended a science textbook that the Dale-Chall formula rated at the twelfth-grade level. He then questioned the validity of the Dale list of 3,000 familiar words as the vocabulary load. In addition, Walker (1966), again using the Dale-Chall formula, investigated textbook grade-level placement and found that the publishers' grade levels did not match the Dale-Chall computations. The Dale-Chall formula consistently placed textbooks at higher grade levels than did the actual textbook authors.

Froese (1975) compared the Dale-Chall formula and mean cloze scores among sixth-grade science textbook passages and found that the Dale-Chall formula was not a valid measure of materials when the cloze procedure was used as a criterion. Indeed, the cloze texts proved to be more congruently valid with reading vocabulary and comprehension sources.

Computations of the mean readability of fifty-three Newbery Awards books using the formulas of Dale-Chall, Flesch, Fry, and Lorge were made by Guidry and Knight (1976). They found that the Fry method showed lower graded levels than average and the Dale-Chall predicted higher-than-average grade levels. No two formulas were in agreement about grade levels for every book.

### Readable Writing

The authors of readability formulas often offer advice for writing in a more readable manner. This consideration of the audience in the writing process has been addressed differently by various authors.

Flesch (1951) said the writer should focus on the reader and the purpose for writing. Organization, breaking up sentences into shorter sentences, using simpler words, using lots of punctuation, and being brief are all seen as important factors to Flesch.

Klare (1963) suggested that for more readable writing the writer should use "words learned in early life, short words, words of Anglo-Saxon derivation, nontechnical words, words familiar in writing (for instance "pshaw" is used mostly in speech), words used in common meaning, and concrete or definite words, rather than abstract words" (p.19).

In addition, Klare proposed the use of few prepositional phrases and the use of simpler, less complex sentences.

These suggestions for more readable writing often focus on changing the text to make it easier (i.e., shorter words and sentences). This process, however, can make the text more difficult to understand.

Perera (1980) addressed this issue of word and sentence difficulty. She pointed to the fact that there are many difficult one-syllable words (like "adze, "carse", "gneiss") and many children do not know a simple word like "toy" when it is not used as a noun. In the area of sentence difficulty, Perera advised that readability formulas do not take syntax into account. Thus a short sentence with short words would receive a low readability score even if it were completely nonsensical. In addition, some syntactical variations are very difficult to read. Children often comprehend subject-verb-object or subject-verb-adverbial sentences, but adverbial-verb-subject, or object-subject-verb forms, which are much more difficult to read, would receive the same readability score. For instance, "Wagons rumbled down the city streets" is more comprehensible than "Down city streets rumbled the wagons." Both sentences would be scored the same in readability formulas, but the second version is markedly more difficult in terms of comprehension.

Cohesive long sentences may be easier to understand than short choppy ones. For instance, Reid (1972) found that given the following two sentences: "Mary's dress was neither new nor pretty" and "Mary's dress was not new and it was not pretty", students comprehended the second longer sentence much better than the first shorter one. This topic is also relevant to ESL students. Blau (1982) found in her study of ESL students that complex sentences with relational clues (i.e., "therefore") yielded higher comprehension scores than short simple sentences and complex sentences without clues. She suggested that these short simple sentences may actually impede comprehension. "Choppy, unnatural sentences are difficult to read and the relationships and meaning revealed by the formation of complex sentences are apparently lost" (p. 525).

#### Other Factors in Readability

Readability formulas are not the sole indicators of

readable texts. Klare (1976) reviewed thirty-six experimental studies of the ability of readability variables to predict comprehension and found that nineteen studies were statistically significant, eleven were not statistically significant, and six were mixed (had some significance). These inconclusive reports cannot be used to advocate the use of readability formulas, in fact, these results show that readability formulas cannot be used with a great deal of confidence about their success in predicting reading comprehension.

Many variables other than those mentioned in readability formulas account for whether or not a text is comprehended by a reader. Lorge (1949), himself an advocate of readability formulas, noted two great weaknesses of readability formulas --namely: "they do not directly evaluate conceptual difficulty, nor do they consider the way in which a text is organized" (p. 91). Certainly cohesion of text (Halliday and Hasan, 1976) is another critical factor in comprehension, yet readability formulas do not address it.

Content considerations may also have an effect on readability. New information, interest or value, the nature of the content (be it easy or difficult), and the maturity level of the content as it relates to reader maturity are all factors related to readability (Klare, 1976).

Some reader competence factors such as knowledge of subject matter, reading skill level, and intellectual level are also important. If the reader's knowledge of one subject is high, readability formulas often overestimate the text difficulty. Intellectual factors should be considered above and beyond the formulas as well.

Readability and relevance are two factors to consider together. "The alert teacher may begin an analysis of a work with a quick application of a readability formula, but will realize that the formula falls short when applied to literary prose. Hence, the teacher must consider qualities intrinsic to the work as well as the mental characteristics and interests of students to whom the work will be assigned (Beck, 1984, p. 49).

Readability formulas do not measure such critical factors as motivation, format, illustrations, and adult assistance. Manzo (1970) argued that these formulas are not

"people-oriented" (p. 963) and that there is "no measure of idea load and esthetic differences" (p. 962). Indeed, one scene may appear very different to different readers with diverse experiences and backgrounds, other variables that cannot be calculated with a formula.

Manzo (1970) has listed the following drawbacks to readability formulas: "1) readability formulas have certain inherent problems which make them extremely variable in their predictions; 2) the thrust of present research continues to be one-dimensional, i.e., linguistic; 3) even the best readability formulas are divorced from the influence of reader purpose and experience; 4) there are very few things which even the best readability formula can do which cannot be done almost as well without one; and 5) new insights might occur if researchers could back away long enough to reduce the present level of involvement from causing what appears to be tunnel vision" (p. 964).

### Conclusion

The dangers of readability formulas are many. Often the comprehension of materials is based upon the reader him/herself and the quality of the ideas expressed in the text. The interpretation of the text is based upon the motivations, experiences, and interests of the reader. Readability formulas may be useful as references but they should not be used exclusively as the decision-making device guiding classroom uses of reading materials. They may be a necessary evil in some situation such as textbook selection, but they should not be used as the underlying structure of a reading program. Reading is more than decoding easy words and short sentences. Linking the text to the reader's knowledge and experience so that meaning may be derived is the real goal.

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# SCHOOL-BASED READING PROGRAMS

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(Note: This is one in a series of four articles developed for parents, to help explain the reading process, school reading programs, reading tests, and reading resources for parents. This series is designed for use and distribution by teachers and administrators to provide a knowledge base for reading. This series is based on the premise that literate, knowledgeable parents can help their children, support the teacher and more adequately monitor their child's reading progress while in school.)

Some of the more common approaches to reading are presented in this article. Without a full understanding of a child's reading program, it becomes difficult to monitor how well your child is doing in reading.

There are three basic types of reading programs that your child is likely to encounter; they include the basal reading approach, the language experience approach and the individualized reading approach. The major components, strengths and weaknesses of each approach are presented in Figure 1 at the end of the article. The basal reader approach is used in the majority of elementary classrooms.

## What Is a Basal Reader?

Many adults are familiar with basal readers and learned how to read with Dick and Jane. Even though Dick and Jane are no longer the central characters in those books, the books are still with us and your child is probably learning to read with them.

There are several components to a basal reading approach (BRA). Some are exclusively for the teacher, while others are primarily for the child. Each child has a basal reader textbook and typically is assigned a workbook. In addition, children are frequently assigned "dittoed" sheets and reading tests and may use other supplemental material such as filmstrips, cassette tapes, flip charts, and



flashcards. Each teacher has a manual that gives explicit directions for conducting the daily lesson.

A basal reading approach is a very systematic approach to teaching reading. The structure is built into all of the areas (students' text, teacher's manual, tests, etc.). The vocabulary of the reader is controlled in that only a few new words are presented in each story and each story builds upon the next. The materials are leveled so they proceed from easy to complex. Thus a first grade text would have shorter stories, fewer words and a more limited vocabulary than the second and third grade reader. Usually several books are part of each grade level. Some series use number levels, such as one to seventeen to identify their books; other publishers identify their books as 3 and 3; which means the first book of grade three (3) and the second book of grade 3 (3). Each basal reading series is based upon a "scope and sequence." This simply means that each book is built upon a framework of skills. Examples of skills include beginning consonant sounds, ending consonant sounds and vowel sounds. Here again, the skills proceed from simple to complex. Skills are often introduced at one level, reinforced at another level and expanded at yet another level.

Teaching a BRA lesson involves several steps for the teacher. The first step in the process is preparing and motivating students for the story. To do this, teachers will introduce new vocabulary words to the students, will help establish a purpose for reading the story and will try to make the story relevant to the students. For example, if the basal story centers upon children going to the zoo, the teacher will ask the students questions and conduct a brief discussion on their individual experiences at the zoo.

Once this motivation and readiness phase is complete, the teacher asks the pupils to read the story silently. Silent reading should occur before children are asked to read parts of a story orally. While the pupils are reading silently, they are searching for answers to questions that were presented in the first stage.

The third step, comprehension, involves a focused discussion that allows students to clarify their ideas and answer the questions that were presented during the readiness step. Those questions become a central part of this step.

The fourth phase involves having the children read orally.

During oral reading, the teacher will closely observe the manner in which the child reads. If the pupil stumbles on unknown words, the teacher will note if the child tries to sound out a word (a phonics approach) or tries to use the words that precede or follow the word (a context clues approach) or tries to identify a word by examining root words and endings (structural analysis). This gives the teacher important information to help plan the child's reading program.

The fifth phase of a basal reading lesson includes skill development. Though reading is more than acquiring separate skills, students need skills to learn to read. At this point, the teacher will provide instruction to children in a certain skill area. For example, students will need to learn how to identify the main idea of a paragraph or a story. A teacher will give students the information they need for this, will model this activity for them by showing them how to find the main idea and then will supervise them as they find the main idea. Once the teacher feels certain students have the necessary information, she will allow the children to go to their basal workbook or ditto sheet and practice this skill.

The final phase involves evaluation. In evaluating the student, the teacher may observe how the child is reading orally, may use the worksheet to check on the students' progress or may use a test that she has made or that was provided by the reading series.

Because the basal reading series is so widely used in this country, (authorities estimate that between 85-95% of all teachers use this approach) it is important that parents become familiar with basals. You may be asked to help or to check your child's homework. If the ditto sheet or workbook is sent home with your child, that means that your child has been instructed in that skill and that the teacher feels your child is proficient enough to work on their own to practice (reinforce) what was taught at school.

If you observe that your child is struggling with that worksheet, jot a note to the teacher to indicate your observation. Your written message provides the teacher with needed information that perhaps your child needs additional help with that skill.

#### What is the Language Experience Approach?

Another popular, though less frequently used, approach

is the language experience approach (LEA). This approach uses the child's natural language. All children come to school with a larger speaking vocabulary than reading vocabulary. The LEA builds upon the child's language and helps the child to use language to develop their own stories. The philosophy of this approach is built upon the theory that children can think, children can speak, and children can read what they write. This approach builds upon the child's past experiences and allows the child to discuss topics of interest. Emphasis is placed upon the child's natural language and expression.

LEA does not include the formal materials and structure of the basal reading program. In fact, only a chalkboard and chalk or paper and pencil need to be included in the list of materials for this program.

The children must first be prepared to share their experiences. Teachers frequently ask students to draw pictures or bring in pictures about specific events or things as "story starters". These pictures, drawings, etc., then serve to draw on the child's past experiences and serve as a motivation technique for the children. The concepts are then developed through class or group discussion. This gives all children an opportunity to learn and share information.

The children then move into step two which involves preparing the story draft. This can be done on the chalkboard or on a large flipchart. During this step, the teacher helps the students clarify the points and provides a cohesive, logical story. The teacher then serves as the recording secretary for the children and writes out the story as dictated by the children.

Once the story is complete, the teacher reads the story with the children. During this step, the teacher points to each word as she reads the story.

Steps four and five require the students to read the story to the teacher and to write the story on their own paper. This provides a permanent record for the students who have been observed reading and re-reading their stories.

Step six involves story illustration. The students will frequently draw pictures that illustrate their stories.

Step seven takes up skill development activities. Even though this approach is less systematic in skill development

than the BRA, students will be directed in a skill or skills for each story. No matter what approach children are introduced to reading, pupils still need to develop their reading skills. The words that children have difficulty with are frequently placed on word cards which may serve to develop children's sight vocabulary. General skills such as using phonic rules, structural analysis and context clues may be incorporated into this approach also.

### What Is the Individualized Reading Approach?

The last approach to reading is the Individualized Reading Approach (IRA). This approach is based on each child's individual need in reading. This approach allows a child or group children to read material of their own selection and at their own rate. Grade-level standards are not strictly adhered to using this approach and little formalized grouping occurs. Children are taught the needed skills as needed and useful for their needs.

This method requires much more preparation and organization by the teacher. Accurate records must be kept on each child and many reading materials, such as trade books, magazines, articles, and instructional materials must be identified for each child.

Diagnosis, conferences and self-selection are central to this approach. The diagnosis (testing) phase is on-going throughout the year, but initially each child must be tested to identify the proper reading level for the child. Much work must be done by the teacher prior to the diagnostic phase. Teachers must identify the skills they or their school district believe are important. This is frequently done through reading checklists or district curriculum guides. After general and specific tests are selected that match these skills, the teachers then assess and place each child with the appropriate materials.

The second step of this program, the conference, is central to the IRA. Frequent, intensive conferences are held with students to determine their reading needs and progress. This phase allows the teacher to focus on the individual child and is not shared with others. At this time, the children share what they have read with the teacher, the teacher checks on oral and silent reading and spends much time skillfully questioning the student. This conference period

also allows the teacher to update and review each child's reading records. At this time, the teacher may also prescribe reading skill work as needed. Though less emphasis is given to skills in the IRA, children are presented skills as needed. Additional reading skill packages may be needed for the children.

The third step is self-selection. Students are allowed to select stories, literature that they enjoy reading. If children enjoy mystery stories or science-fiction stories, for example, the teacher recommends particular books and additional materials for the child. Thus, the teacher must be well-versed in all areas of children's literature. Teachers who use an IRA generally have extensive classroom libraries that contain a variety of reading materials to deal with diverse interests and levels. They also frequently include newspapers and magazines in their collections. Frequent use of the library is made by children using an IRA.

Children read at their own pace. Slow learners and gifted children can be more easily accommodated using an approach that focuses on the individual child. Children are encouraged to read what is pleasurable and satisfying to them and to move at their own pace; thus there may be less pressure placed on some children who may have learning problems or who may read at a slower pace than others.

### Summary

The approaches to teaching reading, therefore, are varied, complex, and require much from teachers, children, and parents. Each system has advantages and disadvantages, requires different skill level on the part of the teacher and the child, and requires different materials for implementation. Though the focus of this article has been to present the differences among the three major approaches, the author wishes to stress that these programs are not mutually exclusive. In other words, because a teacher is using a basal reading approach as the primary tool for teaching reading, this does not imply that the teacher cannot use a language experience approach with children, or encourage students to read in supplemental books that interest children.

In fact, children would profit from the experiences provided in each approach. If we as parents and educators are interested in helping children achieve their reading

potential, enjoy reading and become literate, productive members of society, we should strive to become more knowledgeable in each approach and work to discover what works best for each child. Some children will respond positively to the freedom and independence they may encounter in the individualized reading approach, while other children may not be self-directing or motivated to pursue learning in a more independent fashion.

Your knowledge of your child, coupled with your knowledge of these approaches may help the teacher initially determine what might work best with your child.

Figure 1  
Overview of School-Based Reading Programs

1. Basal Reading Approach

Components--

- Student reader
- Teacher's manual
- Student workbook
- Student dittoes (practice sheets)
- Word cards
- Filmstrips
- Audio cassette tapes
- Tests

Strengths--

- Highly structured
- Many approaches--(phonics, structural analysis, context clues, etc.)
- Scope and Sequence of skills
- Stories may not be realistic

Weaknesses--

- May be too structured
- Students may get bored with the routine
- Language frequently artificial
- Expensive to purchase all components

Figure 1 continued on next page

## 2. Language Experience Approach

### Components--

- Flipcharts
- Chalkboard
- Paper and pencil

### Strengths--

- Uses child's natural language
- Students learn from each other and share experiences
- Integrates reading, writing, thinking, speaking and listening
- Encourages creativity

### Weaknesses--

- Not enough planned skill development activity
- Children may become bored
- More difficult to evaluate child's progress

## 3. Individualized Reading Approach

### Components--

- Many reading materials at varied levels and covering many different interests
- Skill charts and management materials
- Diagnostic (testing materials)

### Strengths--

- Children work at their own level
- Children work at their own pace
- Program is flexible and can be adapted to any group of children

### Weaknesses--

- Time consuming for the teacher
- Requires high degree of organization
- Much record-keeping
- Conferences can become cumbersome
- Limited emphasis on skill development
- No scope and sequence
- May not work well with very young children

# TURNING PASSIVE READERS INTO ACTIVE READERS

## IN CONTENT AREA SUBJECTS

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Learning disabled (LD) students have been typically characterized as being passiver learners (Torgesen, 1977) who demonstrate a lack of fundamental information processing skills (Brown, Campione, & Day, 1981; Torgesen & Kail, 1980). The LD adolescent has a particularly difficult task in the pursuit of learning. Compounding the academic deficits associated with learning disabilities are the normal, developmental problems of the "teen-age" years. The LD adolescent must deal with questions arising from dating, driving, and job seeking. Academically, the LD adolescent needs to actively engage in reading and studying to pass courses required for high school graduation. This active engagement may be particularly difficult for some LD adolescents due to an environment which bombards these students with television, movies, home videos, and "ghetto blasters". An environment which is "tuned-in" electronically may create a student who is used to passively receiving information (or entertainment).

Recent research has produced a variety of techniques to promote a more active approach to information processing. These techniques include mnemonic strategies (Hagen & Barclay, 1982), visualization techniques (Alvermann, 1983), geometric organizers (Derr & Peters, in press), and listening strategies (Alley & Deshler, 1979). The magnitude of high school course requirements, however, suggests that the resource teacher should have the capability to teach reading strategies while teaching course content.

The purpose of this paper is to detail a metacognitive strategy which has exhibited the ability to improve the reading comprehension of poor readers (Brown & Palincsar, 1982) and LD adolescents (Elrod, 1984). Metacognition has been defined as "one's knowledge concerning one's own



cognitive processes and products" (Flavell, 1976). Metacognitive reading strategies have been effective in enhancing the reading comprehension performance of LD adolescents in the resource room while concurrently demonstrating the transferability of that performance to the regular classroom (Elrod, 1984). The metacognitive strategy outlined below could be an effective approach for a high school resource room teacher who has several mainstreamed LD students.

### Procedure

The techniques discussed should be viewed as a total instructional package. All component steps would be used during the course of one reading assignment. Initially, teachers may want to have students write down responses to specific steps until the students master the entire strategic process.

Step 1: Establish a Purpose for Reading. Poor readers have been shown to demonstrate a characteristic of reading words without reading for meaning (Myers & Paris, 1978). To succeed in content areas, LD students must process important information that is contained within the text. Content area tests and assignments are structured so that the students will recall relevant information, not to have students remember or pronounce every word of the text. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that the teacher establish a foundation for reading--that is, we read to gain information.

Step 2: Skim for Relevant Cues (Pre-reading. Before reading the assigned passage, students should be directed toward picking out overt textual cues that provide clues to the information the passage contains. Examples of these cues are: (a) chapter title, (b) major heading, (c) subheads, (d) photos and illustrations, (e) maps, (f) charts and tables, and (g) words in italics or bold-face type.

Step 3: Predict Textual Content (Pre-reading. Using the textual cues obtained in Step 2, the students and the teacher should brainstorm some possible predictions as to the content of the reading passage. Depending on the skill level of the students, the teacher may have to define prediction and model possible predictions using the textual cues.

Step 4: Read. Having made a set of predictions, the students read the assigned passage, silently or orally.

Step 5: Verify/Alter Predictions. The teacher now directs the students to recall the predictions made in Step 3. Based on the actual content of the assigned passage (gleaned in Step 4), the students check their predictions and verify them if they are correct, or alter them if they are incorrect. In either case, specific evidence from the text should be cited as a reason to verify or alter.

Step 6: Clarification. During this step, students are asked if they had problems with terms, concepts, or information contained within the passage. Since LD adolescents are often reluctant to admit that they do not comprehend, the teacher may have to model appropriate clarification questions by asking "I was not quite sure about . . . Could someone help me? Was anyone else confused about this?"

Step 7: Question Formation. Using both the verified predictions (Step 5) and the material gleaned from reading (Step 4), the students are asked to "pretend that you are teachers and make up a test." As with previous steps, the teacher may have to model appropriate question-formation techniques. Students could be cued into precursor words that precede questions such as: "who," "when," "where," "how," and "why." After the questions have been brainstormed, each should be answered and discussed. As a possible motivating technique, the students' chapter tests could include a representative sample of student-generated questions.

Step 8: Summarization. During this step the students will paraphrase the content of the assigned reading passage. Students should be encouraged to recall the verified predictions and the self-generated questions and answers (Step 7). Again, the teacher may have to model appropriate summaries and relate which cues were used to generate the summary.

Step 9: Self-Check and Monitor. The teacher should inform the students that if they cannot complete Steps 5, 7, or 8 on their own, they do not full comprehend the material. In this case, the students may wish to carry out one or more of the following alternatives: (a) re-read a portion of the assigned passage, (b) re-read the entire assigned passage, (c) check the glossary or dictionary to clarify unknown words, (d) re-examine the textual cues (Step 2), (e) consult with another student, or (f) consult with the teacher.

## Discussion

The strategic steps outlined in this article are designed to assist high school resource teachers in answering that perplexing instructional question: "How do I teach reading when I have to teach content?" When applied in a resource room, the metacognitive strategy has demonstrated its utility in increasing LD adolescents' comprehension abilities in content area subjects.

The structure of the high school curriculum places unique demands on resource teachers who must assist their students with a variety of content requirements. With the limited material that often reflect a resource teacher's instructional environment, the metacognitive strategy would appear to be an inexpensive and efficient means to enhance students' comprehension performance. The strategic package could be used for any content course in which reading comprehension is a key to success. Examples of such courses would include history, science, economics, health education, and driver's education. The metacognitive approach could ultimately transfer the responsibility for reading comprehension success to the student. This transfer may alleviate the problems of having LD adolescents failing to apply techniques learned in the resource room to regular classes.

Future methodological research in reading comprehension should consider that some teachers do not have the luxury of teaching reading in a "reading" class. High school resource room teachers usually have to contend with ensuring the success of their students based on the demands of regular classes. Instructional strategies which address psycho-educational processes such as memory, or prerequisite educational skills such as reading, should consider the instruction of these process and skills within a content area framework. This approach may not only prove beneficial to high school resource teachers, but to regular teachers, as well.

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# A POOR ATTITUDE: A DETERRENT TO READING IMPROVEMENT

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Today's teachers are confronted with children who display a poor attitude toward school in general and reading in particular. This situation is anxiety-producing for the teachers, as well as for the administrators. The Dictionary of Education defines attitude as "the predisposition or tendency to react specifically towards an object, situation, or value; usually accompanied by feelings and emotions" (Good, p. 49). Attitudes vary among students and cause children to respond to a situation either favorably or unfavorably. Thus children's attitudes serve as guides to behavior and profoundly affect the progress made toward educational goals and the level and degree of children's participation in educational activities. A positive attitude produces a motivational stimulus that promotes and sustains learning. On the other hand, a negative attitude results in a lack of persistent effort, a lack of motivation, an abundance of avoidance maneuvers, and various misbehavior problems.

Some educators believe that the child's positive attitude is the foundation upon which reading growth and improvement are built. For example, Alexander stated that "if attitude, the first prerequisite for reading, is not positive, then it is likely that the others (motivation, attention, comprehension, and acceptance) will not occur at all or will occur haphazardly" (Alexander, p. 6). Likewise, Groff found "that the relationship between general reading ability and attitude toward reading as a school activity approached a substantial level" (Groff, p. 314). Obviously, the teacher must take steps to ensure the development of constructive attitudes among the children if progress is to be made in attaining the goals of reading.

Attitude Development

Children are not born with positive or negative attitudes, for attitudes are developed as children become involved with people and things in their environment. Interests, tastes, and habits cause attitudes to evolve as children grow, mature, and interact with others during the preschool years. Therefore, attitudes are developed during the preschool period and condition the children to like or dislike reading. These attitudes become evident as the children enter the elementary classroom. Although modification is difficult, teachers can bring about change in children's attitudes. Consequently, "one of the most important aims of the beginning reading period is to help the child develop a positive attitude toward reading" (Heilman, p. 29).

Because the environment has such a big impact, the home life is all-important in helping children develop a positive attitude toward reading. Carter and McGinnis stated that the "attitudes of parents of superior readers emphasize the value of communication and the development of language skills" (Carter and McGinnis, p. 65). Children who see individuals reading books and enjoying the activity will have a different attitude toward reading from children who never see their parents, brothers, sisters, or playmates looking at or reading books. Over a period of time, children gradually assimilate attitudes from the actions and beliefs of those with whom they regularly come in contact. Significant others--children and adults held in high esteem by children--play important roles in attitude formation. No doubt, children who have developed a positive attitude toward reading have "probably acquired that attitude over a long period of time in direct contact with books and people who read" (Harris and Smith, p. 111).

The home life can have a very negative effect upon the attitudes of children. Self-fulfilling prophecy works for parents as well as for teachers. Parents who constantly confront their child with his/her inability to perform educational tasks help produce a poor attitude, as well as a negative self-concept. Some parents do not understand how their child can make so little progress in developing reading skills and are not "able to see how the home and patterns of overprotection, psychological rejection, excessively high standards, perfectionism, or unfilled psychological needs stemming from the family configuration, are related to reading failures" (Heilman, p. 31). The parents become ego-involved in the child's lack of

educational progress. One spouse accuses the other of causing the child's failure and an argument ensues. Tragically, the child is caught in the middle; and, as a result, the child develops a negative attitude toward classwork and school.

Sometimes attitudes are grounded in children's emotions. The emotional state of children impacts reading performance. The emotional state has been described as "a hypothetical state that is the predisposition to act in a certain manner that is the function of circumstances in the individual's history" (Wolman, p. 118). Therefore, children who have been mistreated as a result of their lack of reading skill or achievement develop strong negative emotions concerning reading. Negative emotions can also develop if children set educational goals that are too high. For example, children may expect to begin reading upon entering school. The parents could also have the same unrealistic goal. The children become distraught when they are unable to read immediately upon school entrance, and the parents become distressed when their children make no significant progress in learning to read. As a result, the children may then avoid or withdraw from reading activities. The children resort to this evasive action to keep from having a confrontation or an emotional outburst. The more negative confrontations the children have, the more that their emotions are built-up. A vicious circle has been established, and the children, instead of improving, tend to get worse. They become bewildered with their inability to resolve the enigma. The best and most used escape route is withdrawal from, or the avoidance of, any type of reading activity. Thus, a negative attitude toward reading has been established or sustained.

### Symptoms

Children with poor attitudes toward reading reflect a number of characteristics. Headaches, upset stomachs, or other psychosomatic illnesses become excuses for nonparticipation. For some children who not only have poor attitudes but are also poor readers, oral reading may subject them to embarrassment and peer ridicule, thus resulting in an even poorer attitude toward reading, causing them to evade reading activities. After withdrawal, these children may daydream or just stare into space. On other occasions, children with poor attitudes may become aggressive, antisocial, and belligerent toward classroom peers, especially those who may have gained

success in reading and who frequently make fun of their less adept classmates. Peers frequently taunt poor readers by laughing at their misreading of textbook passages and their inability to answer comprehension questions.

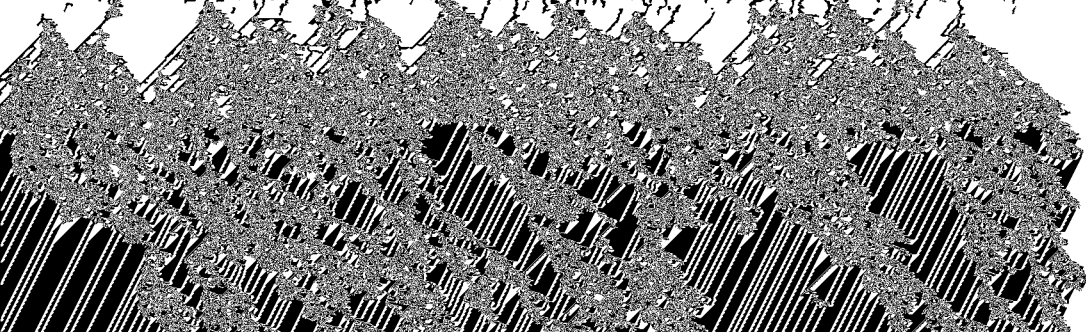
### Remediation

Children can be asked how they feel about reading and their perceptions of their reading abilities and achievement. If teachers show sincere interest and concern, many children will avail themselves of the opportunity to share their true feelings about their reading problems. This action by teachers could increase the children's receptiveness to learning.

Problems in reading should be perceived as opportunities for teachers to meet children's needs. Children readily change their attitudes when teachers show a concerned interest and provide rich and rewarding educational experiences. Teachers should select reading materials that are of high interest to children. Interest inventories have been recommended by researchers to enable teachers to select materials that will satisfy the needs of children (Burns, Roe, & Ross, p. 240).

Teachers can establish a warm classroom environment where children can find security, get rewards and recognition, and feel accepted and successful. Attitudes can be modified when there is a change in teacher-pupil rapport and the classroom atmosphere. Therefore, teachers should approach reading activities with a high level of enthusiasm, and this enthusiasm should be readily noticed by the students. Motivated teachers usually find that their students are motivated also.

The students' self-concepts have an impact upon the attitudes and the resultant effort applied to reaching educational goals. A poor self-concept "is a set of perceptions that interferes with reading ability or with the ability to learn to read" (Quandt & Selznick, p. 2). Tragic as it may be, "students with low self-concepts frequently expect to





according to each child's level of achievement; that is, reinforcement of the student's performance should be judged on evidence of individual progress. Therefore, the level of success must be measured by individual standards and not group standards, for the growth rate would be much slower for some children than for others. For the low-achieving child, this means giving positive reinforcement for any change in learning that reflects effort, growth, or persistence. Thus, teachers should realize that a child who misses five words while reading orally may be making considerable progress; whereas, a child who misses two words may be making little, if any, improvement. Successful reading teachers strive to improve their pupils' attitudes as the pupils improve their reading skills. Research has shown that there is a significant relationship between positive attitudes of children and their progress toward achieving educational goals (Groff, p. 314).

Also, the children's self-concepts are related to their self-esteem. Self-esteem is "the judgment and attitude an individual holds toward himself (sic)" (Good, p. 525). Positive attitudes are generated from having self-esteem and a good self-concept -- the self-concept being a more generalized perception of total worth or value. For example, low self-esteem is a "conviction of inferiority, fear of social encounters, self-consciousness, sensitivity to criticism, lack of confidence, remaining in the shadows, and listening, not participating" (Zintz, p. 522). Therefore, teachers must provide opportunities for children to experience success and to get peer recognition; this should bolster children's self-worth. The success and resultant peer approval are inconsistent with a lack of self-esteem and a low self-concept. Hopefully, this inconsistency will cause children to change their attitudes toward their level of growth, development, and performance in academic activities.

Children's attitudes are related to success, and teachers should recognize the fact that all children have the potential for success in reading. The degree of success, however, must be interpreted by the child's capacity to learn. Instruction should be adjusted to individual needs. Consequently, teachers must select different methods and materials to meet student needs. Probably those teachers who "are not committed to using any one program--the language-experience, the basal-reader, or the Individualized Reading approach--exclusively"

(Dallmann, Rouch, Char, and DeBoer, pp. 68-69) will experience the most success in meeting the varying needs of their students. The teacher's role is of prime importance in bringing about a change in attitude. In fact, "the role of the teacher . . . is to foster positive attitudes so that children will want to read" (Alexander, p. 7). If a teacher will plan reading lessons which enable the students to be successful, the students' attitudes will improve and the teacher's efforts will be more productive. If a child develops a positive attitude, then the child's level of motivation could change also because "the child who has a positive attitude toward the school [and school activities] will more likely be academically motivated" (Briggs, p. 3).

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# COMPUTERIZED SEARCHES ON ARTICLES

## REPORTING READING RESEARCH: A CLOSER LOOK

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Like other scholars, college professors of reading education rely on the journal literature to report their research and to incorporate other research results into their own teaching and research. Reports on computerized databases have been appearing in reading journals. Thus, specialists in reading have become familiar with the computerized retrieval counterparts of the traditional print services which abstract the relevant journal literature. They take advantage of search services in their area of interest, such as the following (print format in parenthesis): ERIC/CIJE[1] (Current Index to Journals in Education), LLBa/Online[2] (Language and Language Behavior Abstracts), and PsycINFO[3] (Psychological Abstracts).

When establishing the originality of a proposed research project, reading researchers may believe that the thoroughness of their literature search has resulted in retrieval of the articles relevant to their interest. This article, which draws on examples supplied by previous studies involving fifty articles in the psycholinguistic literature[4], [5], [6], explores how the choice of terminology used in database records and in searches may actually impede retrieval, and it suggests compensatory measures.

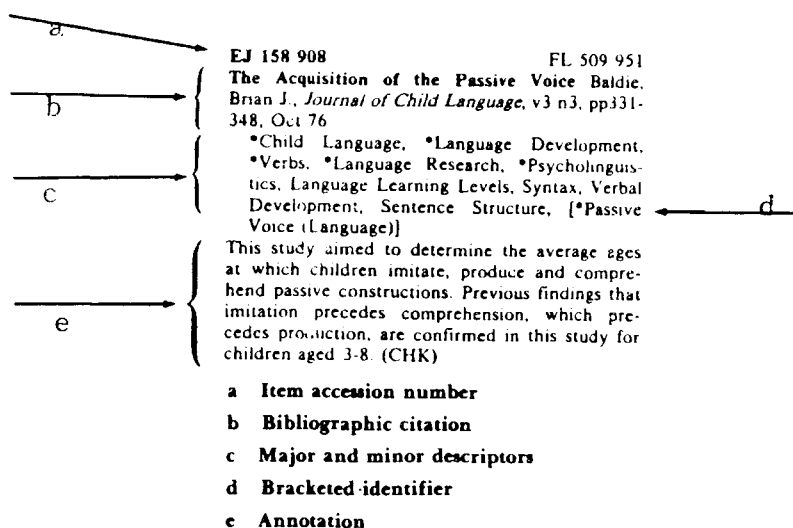
### Field Structure of Bibliographic Records

Before discussing database records and the search process, it will be helpful to review the field structure of the records. Bibliographic records that act as surrogates for articles in computerized abstracting services are composed of an accession number, abstracts, bibliographic citations, and terms signifying a study's subject content and design. These manually-composed records in the machine-readable

databases of the abstracting services are organized by fields which vary from one database to another. A designated field, several fields, or the entire bibliographic record may be accessed in a search, depending on the desired comprehensiveness of the retrieval output.

The bibliographic record in Figure 1 shows the location of the index fields included in the ERIC/CIJE database: (a) item accession number, (b) bibliographic citation including author(s), title, journal, volume, issue, pages, and date, (c) major descriptors (distinguished by an asterisk) and minor descriptors (access by computer only), with both sets taken from an identical thesaurus of terms, (d) bracketed identifiers, which is another type of descriptor reserved for proper names and concepts not yet represented by approved descriptors, and (e) annotation, or abstract, supplied either by the author of the article or contributed by the database service ("abstract" will be used in this article).

Figure 1  
Location of the index fields  
included in the ERIC/CIJE



LLBA/Online and PsychINFO also include a broad content classification, or "section heading," such as "psycholinguistics," at the bottom of the record. In addition, the indexers provide a phrase field describing the research. The phrase field is located below the descriptor field and consists of phrases or word strings that indicate major independent and dependent variables, as well as sample population, study sites, and type of research. For example, the following phrases, separated by a semicolon, appear as shown in LLBA/Online for an article on the acquisition of deictic verbs: Index Phrase: acquisition of deictic verbs of movement, location; 15-33 month olds.

Following are the phrases for the same item as shown in PsychINFO, separated by commas and introduced by "Identifiers."

Identifiers: movement & location contexts, spontaneous use of verbs "come" & "go," 2 year olds.

There is no corresponding phrase field in ERIC/CIE. However, the descriptor field in this database does incorporate some study design features, such as education level of a study's subjects. Excepted are proper names which appear in the identifier field. These ERIC/CIE identifier terms are not to be confused with PsychINFO's "Identifiers," a word used to introduce its phrase field, as shown above.

#### Database Records and the Search Process

With the bibliographic field structure in mind, terminology problems that impede retrieval and which are inherent in the database records and in subject search statements will now be considered. The bibliographic record displays subject content on three levels, exemplified below, each providing greater specificity of approach than the previous: section headings, the descriptor field, and the phrase field. Subject search statements applied to the desired fields may use Boolean logical operators (and, or, not) to combine concepts, like the following four-set statement: COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT (first set) and LANGUAGE ACQUISITION or READING PROCESSES (second set) and ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS (third set) not ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM (fourth set).

"Section headings," assigned by LLBA/Online and PsychINFO, represent the broadest grouping of subject designa-

tions. The use of section headings focuses the scope of a search on one or more of the determined categories to the exclusion of other section headings. The technique may be combined with the use of more specific approaches. Each article in the databases that assign section headings is placed in at least one major category. Table 1 exemplifies the section headings assigned by LLBA/Online and PsycINFO to two articles on the acquisition of comparative adjectives.

Table 1

### Section Headings Assigned by LLBA/Online and PsycINFO to Two Articles

		Section Headings	
		<u>LLBA/Online</u>	<u>PsycINFO</u>
Art. 1	Child language acquisition		Developmental psychology
Art. 2	Child language acquisition		Cognitive and perceptual development

Problems arise, however, when the indexer and searcher do not think in similar fashion concerning the appropriate category for an article. With reference to the studies cited above, only twenty-seven articles, or 54%, of the fifty on the application of psycholinguistics to the teaching of reading and language arts were assigned to section headings in LLBA/Online that both the searcher and a reading specialist judged to be most appropriate to the content after studying the articles. In the case of the same fifty articles also present in the PsychINFO database, the result was twenty-three articles, or 46%. Reading specialists who desire to obtain articles in the area of a section heading should remember that not all relevant articles may have been assigned to that section heading. Additional searches under one or two other related section headings may be in order.

## Descriptor field

In contrast to the broad grouping provided by section headings, the descriptor field identifies the content of an article through vocabulary terms assigned from a thesaurus at the article's judged level of specificity. Table 2 shows the descriptors assigned by ERIC/CIJE, LLBA/Online, and PsycINFO to the two articles mentioned above on the acqui-

sition of comparative adjectives.

Table 2

Descriptors Assigned by ERIC/CIJE, LLBA/Online,  
and PsycINFO to Two Articles

Article 1

<u>ERIC/CIJE</u>	<u>LLBA/Online</u>	<u>PsycINFO</u>
PSYCHOLINGUISTICS	ADJECTIVE	PRESCHOOL AGE
LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT	CHILD LANGUAGE	CHILDREN
CHILD LANGUAGE	COGNITIVE PROCESSES	SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN
COMPREHENSION	CONCEPT FORMATION	LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT
LEARNING THEORIES	AND IDENTIFICATION	COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT
EXPERIMENTS		
COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT		
TABLES (DATA)		

Article 2

CHILD LANGUAGE	PSYCHOLINGUISTICS	ADJECTIVES
LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT	CHILD LANGUAGE	PRESCHOOL AGE CHILDREN
ADJECTIVES	ADJECTIVE	
LANGUAGE RESEARCH	AGE DIFFERENCES IN	WORD MEANIN LANGUAGE
PSYCHOLINGUISTICS	LANGUAGE	DEVELOP- MENT
COMPREHENSION DEVELOPMENT		
VOCABULARY SKILLS		
SEMANTICS		
WORD RECOGNITION		
PRESCHOOL CHILDREN		

Problems arise, however, from terminology chosen when abstracts are prepared, insufficiency in number and kind of descriptors assigned by indexers, and the nature of psycholinguistics itself. With respect to the articles in Table 2, terms available in the thesaurus for each of the three



databases were not necessarily assigned. For example, the term "adjectives" is in the thesaurus of both ERIC/CIJE and PsycINFO. Failure on the part of these databases to assign this term as a descriptor may have resulted from the fact that the author of the first article used the word "adjectives" in the first sentence of the article but did not use it in the abstract. Indexers depend on abstracts for assistance in assigning descriptors. The abstract of the second article included the word "adjectives," and all three databases selected it as a descriptor. This example points out the problems of abstracts that miss key concepts. It illustrates how a searcher could have failed to retrieve the first article in the ERIC/CIJE AND PsycINFO databases if a search had been conducted on the term "adjectives" in the descriptor field.

Insufficiency in number and kind of descriptors assigned by indexers may explain the fact that identical terms assigned to an article by all three databases were few in number. A total of only eight descriptors was assigned in common to the same article by all three databases: READING MATERIALS, VERBAL LEARNING, SEMANTICS, SYNTAX, VOCABULARY, PHONETICS, COGNITIVE PROCESSES, and WRITTEN LANGUAGE. To compensate for descriptor assignments that may insufficiently represent articles, the searcher would be advised to use a variety of Boolean sets in a series of searches. Consequences of problems in matching search terms with assigned descriptors are more serious for the researcher who seeks as comprehensive an output as possible in order to establish the originality of a proposed research project.

Searchers should access the term PSYCHOLINGUISTICS with special caution. Authors of psycholinguistic research studies often fail to make explicit use of this word in their own articles. In regard to the fifty articles studied that dealt with psycholinguistics, ERIC/CIJE assigned the term PSYCHOLINGUISTICS to twenty articles, thirteen times as a major descriptor. Twelve times it was the only database of the three to assign the term. LLBA/Online assigned the term to eleven articles, three times uniquely. Interestingly, although the term appeared in its Thesaurus, PsycINFO did not assign the term PSYCHOLINGUISTICS to any of the fifty articles.

On the other hand, assigning the term PSYCHOLINGUISTICS to a large number of articles may burden the searcher with unmanageable output. The term would appropriately be applied to those articles that deal explicitly with psycholinguistic theory and research findings. However, it did not appear at all in the bibliographic record of two articles in which the authors did make the psycholinguistic nature of the content explicit. The first author placed the article in the context of "a growing body of psycholinguistic research," but the term PSYCHOLINGUISTICS did not appear among the descriptors. Neither was it found in the abstracts of the three databases, nor within the phrase fields supplied by LLBA/Online and PsycINFO. The second author began with a statement that psycholinguistic research workers in the early 1960s reached a consensus that children's grammatical competence is mostly acquired before age five. The author placed the article in the context of that psycholinguistic research and the research that followed. However, the term PSYCHOLINGUISTICS was entirely absent from the bibliographic record as in the previous example.

Adverse effect on retrieval is obvious from these examples of practices by authors and indexers regarding use of the term PSYCHOLINGUISTICS. Searchers desiring articles on this subject should avoid the use of PSYCHOLINGUISTICS as a required component of Boolean search statements. The reason is that they may avoid missing a number of articles that rightly fall under the term but which have not been assigned the term.

#### Phrase field

In contrast to both the section headings and the descriptor field, the phrase field permits retrieval, as noted above, on a study's independent and dependent variables and design features through the use of word strings on a more specific level. It is a valuable field that tends to be overlooked in the search process. Along with the title and abstract fields, the phrase field may be accessed in what is called a free text search using natural language provided by the searcher. Table 3 displays the phrase fields supplied by LLBA/Online and PsycINFO for the two articles mentioned above on the acquisition of comparative adjectives. (see next page)

Problems arise, however, when searchers approach a phrase field at what they consider to be an appropriately

specific level, whereas the indexer has provided instead a still more specific level. For example, the first article,

Table 3  
Phrase Fields Supplied by LLBA/Online and  
PsycINFO for Two Articles

<u>LLBA/Online</u>	<u>PsycINFO</u>
Article 1	
language comprehension;	comprehension of
understanding of more, less;	"more" & "less,"
three to seven year olds;	3-7 yr olds
replication	

Article 2	
children's difficulty with	interpretation of
"marked" comparative	marked comparative
adjectives;	adjectives,
children ages 2.6-4 years	2-4 yr olds

which treats the adjectives "more" and "less" throughout, explicitly refers to them as "comparative adjectives," but the broader term "comparative adjectives" does not appear in the phrase field. It is also lacking in all other fields of the bibliographic record provided by LLBA/Online and Psych-INFO for that article. Thus, a search on the adjacent words "comparative adjectives" would retrieve only the second article. This would occur only through a "phrase field" search that would reveal the presence of "comparative adjectives" imbedded in the specific term "marked comparative adjectives."

On the other hand, the level of specificity expected in the phrase field may not be found in the phrases that have been assigned by the abstracting service. With respect to the earlier example of a phrase field concerning an article that treats the verbs "come" and "go," a search on these specific verbs in the LLBA/Online phrase field would not have retrieved the article. Searchers would be advised to approach their subjects at various levels of specificity to compensate for possible inadequacy of indexing at any one

level.

### Conclusion

Although the items retrieved from the computerized services located on various campuses may appear to be very adequate, a simplistic conception of what is adequate does not further the purposes of scholarship. Further exploration is needed concerning whether researchers would assign different section headings, descriptors, and phrase fields to their articles than do the indexers of computerized database services. Although terminology problems may never be fully resolved, results would undoubtedly influence indexing practices and database retrieval.

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(Authors' footnote-- We acknowledge the assistance of Marylouise Meder, Publications Specialist, School of Library and Information Management, Emporia State University.)

# A CONTRIBUTION TO READING: THE NEBRASKA GOLDEN SOWER READING/AWARD PROGRAM

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Child-choice state book awards are a double-edged sword. On one hand they are popular with children and librarians and they provide an invitation to reading. (Jordan, 1979) On the other hand, they are criticized for being popularity contests with lists of nominees that often overlook the better books. Detractors feel that titles in state book award programs are assumed to be of lesser quality than the national winners such as Newbery or Caldecott books. Opponents also believe that children are incapable of making decisions/judgments regarding literary quality when voting for a state book award winner. (Kaye, 1984) One critic noted that "if the matter were food and the children selected 'Twinkies' over fresh fruit, no nutritionist would be asked to kowtow to the choice." (Gerhardt, 1982) However, inasmuch as there are some 23 state and one regional child-choice award programs, the issue gains importance.

## The Survey

While the debate rages, how do librarians/media specialists on the "front lines" perceive the outcomes of a state book award program? In order to ascertain attitudes toward the Nebraska State Award: The Golden Sower, participants in the relatively new program (begun in 1980) were asked to respond to questions regarding how they evaluated related aspects of the program. The survey questions were posed to ascertain whether or not there was some value in Nebraska's Golden Sower Reading/Award Program beyond hypothesized popularity.

## The Program

The Nebraska Golden Sower Reading/Award program has two divisions: K-3rd grade and 4-6th grade. In both divisions a separate list of nominees is supplied to the

schools. The children as well as adults have an opportunity to nominate books for the program. During the school year children must read or hear at least four books to be eligible to vote. In April the youngsters vote for the book to win in a selected grade category.

### The Population

The 75 who responded (from 150 surveyed) were librarians/media specialists selected at random from the 1985 list of 350 Golden Sower registrants. The respondents represented public schools in Nebraska with populations ranging from four students to a maximum of 520 pupils. The average media specialist/librarian had participated at least three years in the five year old 4-6th grade Golden Sower Program and at least two years in the three year old K-3rd grade program.

### The Responses

All respondents were asked to indicate their opinions in terms of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (U), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The responses regarding the Golden Sower Program (G. S.) were reported in percentages.

#### Survey Questions

#### Responses in percentages

	SA	A	U	D	SD
The G.S. Program is really a popularity contest	1	32	18	44	5
Children consider the literary quality of a story when voting for a winner		21	23	51	5
Children have developed better reading habits due to the G.S. program	17	55	27	1	
Children read literature more frequently due to the G.S. program	20	46	27	8	

Children recognize  
certain authors to a  
higher degree due to  
the G. S. Program

13      72      11      4

Children check out other  
books by nominated  
authors/illustrators due  
to the G.S. Program

15      60      17      8

Children feel pressured  
into reading more  
literature due to the  
G. S. Program

1      13      12      66      8

### The Findings

An overwhelming number of the librarians/media specialists surveyed felt that better reading habits were developed by the youngsters due to participating in the Golden Sower Program. The opinion of the respondents appeared to be that children read more frequently due to the program. However, while readership was up, participants feel that the program did not make students feel pressured into reading the books in the program.

Another positive attribute of the Golden Sower Program was the cross-over reading and literary awareness exhibited by the children. The respondents perceived youngsters were reading other books by the nominated authors/illustrators. This aspect was also related to the high incidence of reader recognition of nominated writers and artists thought to be due to participation in the program.

When children are asked to vote for the book that should win the Golden Sower Award, they are instructed to take artistic/literary merit of a book into consideration. However, a majority of those surveyed maintained that Nebraska children were not employing such guidelines when making their selection. Although this appeared to be the status of voting patterns, a majority of the respondents felt the Golden Sower program was not a popularity contest. However, those who felt the selection of a winner was based on popularity, made the popularity contest notion less of a clear cut issue in Nebraska.

## Discussion

Child-choice book awards are developed and promoted for a number of reasons. In a statement of goals for the Nebraska Golden Sower Reading/Award Program, it was noted that the award was created "in an effort to promote reading among Nebraska school children . . . It gives the students an opportunity to designate what is 'good reading' material by letting them vote for their favorite book." (NEMA News, 9) Thus, quality and popularity were both expected influences and desired outcomes of the program from the start. It was hoped that children would become engaged in recreational reading, critical reading, and literary analysis.

The issue of literary/artistic quality must be considered in the eye of the beholder. By having both adults and children nominate books different perspectives are represented. "When children endorse a book, they simply mean it is the kind of book they like to read. When professional reviewers endorse a juvenile title, they tend to focus on the literary aspects, favoring the kinds of books they think children should read." (Carter, Harris, 55) Because a board of adults selects the final list of books to be placed under consideration for the Golden Sower Award, the question of artistic/literary merit is partially tempered before children come into contact with the proposed reading material. Thus popularity (and perhaps reading level) and literary merit seem to be factors that warrant the reading of the nominated books.

A number of aspects of the Golden Sower Program could influence reader interest and participation. First, the media specialists/librarians are actively engaging children in the process of nominating, discussing, and balloting during the program. Secondly, the sheer numbers of voters (over 20,000 Nebraska school children in grades K-6th voted in 1985) indicate that children are reading or listening to the nominated books and sharing the experience. Thirdly, knowing the Golden Sower Program is a state reading program could give the children a sense of identity. They are reading what others across the state are reading and they are all jointly responsible for selecting a winner. Lastly, the reading level or interest level of the nominated books could also be a positive factor in that the average children could read or



understand at a recreational or instructional level.

### Conclusion

The number of state book award programs is increasing which "is indicative of the library profession's growing interest in children's literature." (Jordan, 1979) Whether the winners and nominees of state book award programs should be viewed as material that is of lesser artistic/literary quality than that of national award books is another matter. The important thing is that children are reading, and reading more due to the Nebraska Golden Sower Reading/Award Program. Thus program goals to "stimulate children's reading, introduce them to different types of literature. . . and help them begin to make comparisons between novels" (Jones, 1983) appears near to being met. As a result the Nebraska Golden Sower Program is seen as a positive force in influencing reading habits and awareness of literature. Hopefully, other state book awards could provide a legacy of reading interest and reading habits that could have an affirmative impact on readership and attitude toward other books.

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