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Dixie D. Sanger  
*University of Nebraska, Lincoln*

Sheldon L. Stick  
*University of Nebraska, Lincoln*

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# A WORKSHOP TO INCORPORATE LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN TEACHING READING

*Dixie D. Sanger and Sheldon L. Stick*  
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA, LINCOLN

Speech-language pathologists and educators in Elementary Education are becoming increasingly aware of the need to include specific speech and language activities as a part of regular classroom instruction (Andrews & Brabson, 1977; England, 1973; Jones, 1972; Pickering & Kaelber, 1978; Simon, 1975). This increased interest is related to: (1) the relationship between language and reading skills (Mattingly, 1972; Smith, 1975; Snyder, 1981; Stark, 1975; Stark & Wallach, 1981; Wiig & Semel, 1976); (2) the relationship between language development and academic success (Carlson, Gruenwald, & Nyberg, 1981; England, 1973; Nelson, 1981); (3) the relationship between reading skills and cognitive development (Gallagher & Quandt, 1981; Jenkins & Heliotis, 1981; Sawyer and Lipa, 1981); and, (4) the documentation that phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics are integral components to a reading program (Anastasiow, 1970; Goodman, 1974; Magee & Newcome, 1978; McDonnel, 1975; Monroe & Rogers, 1964; Smith, 1975; Snyder, 1980; Vogel, 1977; Wiig & Semel, 1976).

It is the purpose of this paper to describe a workshop designed to teach elementary school teachers how to incorporate language development activities during reading instruction, particularly with children who have language-based reading difficulties. This integrative reading-language program is carried out in a regular classroom setting and illustrates how teachers can help students improve their language skills and concomitantly gain more meaning from their printed texts by improving the use of predicting, confirming, and integrating strategies during reading instruction. The main themes of the workshop are: a rationale for the relationship between reading and language; the integrative language activities; general guidelines for implementing the integrative reading-language approach; and a workshop evaluation.

## A Rationale for the Integrative Language-Reading Approach

Many students have reading problems because of covert associated or primary language deficiencies despite an apparent ability to communicate with peers and family members. Such children might not understand how given lexical units can be used and combined in multiple linguistic contexts, and therefore be unfamiliar with the vocabulary and the complexity of the syntax in their reading books even though they can read words and use them in restricted contexts. The result is a failure to understand the printed text

despite relatively good communication ability. Such language problems may interfere with the intake of information, the development of propositions, utilization of given and new information, matching the new information with the given information in long-term memory storage, and subsequently storing the new information in memory (Clark & Clark, 1977).

Illustrations of the importance of language in the reading process are the following statements which appear in children's textbooks: (1) "John went to the circus with his sister and father; there he saw elephants and clowns"; (2) "How do you think Betty and Tom feel about what father is doing for Susan?"; (3) "We are going to pick a card from each set and write a number sentence to tell the number of circles on the cards we have chosen." These three sentences involve concepts of space, time, classification, seriation, number, social knowledge, and physical knowledge. Additionally, the syntax is complex and tends to be confusing, because of abstract concepts such as: think, feel, about. Examples of other abstract concepts which frequently appear in children's reading texts include before, below, between, bottom, closed, fewer, fifth, inside, longer, last, more, smaller, top, up, and zero. Children with language problems might experience varying degrees of frustration and/or failure with reading because of unfamiliarity with some words, or because of confusion or inability to comprehend the underlying meaning of phrases and/or sentences.

The relationship between language and reading becomes more evident as one examines some of the correlates of reading. Correlates are not synonymous with causes but rather are conditions which often accompany an inability to read. They can be grouped into three broad categories: physical, environmental, and psychological, and include visual processing and sensory deficits, poor school experiences, cultural differences, language differences or disorders, emotional and social problems, and auditory processing and sensory deficits (Kirk, Kleibhan, & Lerner, 1978).

It is also interesting to note that many factors important for reading readiness are important for normal language development (mental maturity, visual and auditory abilities, thinking skills, social and emotional group, and interest and motivation). Menyuk (1973) states that language is the foundation for reading and there is a similarity in the acquisition of both abilities. To normally acquire spoken language, children must have the capacity for perceiving, storing, and retrieving information which then is arranged into a system of verbally articulated symbols. The ability to process auditory perceptions meaningfully is dependent upon the conventional knowledge of lexicon and sentence formation rules. Becoming a proficient reader requires a similar process but uses the visual modality.

Professionals need to recognize that the processes involved in reading include a number of skills, and many of them are influenced by a child's development of language. Children with adequate or better language abilities usually become good readers through subconscious applications of language strategies, and they can benefit from teaching approaches that do not maximize

the consistent use of selected language activities. However, for children with speech and language deficiencies or differences, a deliberate effort to interweave language activities oftentimes is needed to teach reading skills. Such children might have different learning strategies, variable rates of linguistic development because of inconsistent cognitive maturation, or be at a disadvantage because of acquired attitudinal and/or environmental factors. A program which provides for dynamic interactive growth in language must attempt to integrate, not separate reading lessons and language development (Squire, 1972).

Professionals studying the reading process have advocated a need for adopting innovative language and reading enrichment programs which help strengthen children's thinking and verbal language skills (Athey, 1971; Kirkland, 1978; Rakes & Canter, 1974; Smith, 1975), but literature references to such programs are scarce. Simpson-Tyson (1978) reported on the earlier research of Francis, Loban, Labov, Hall, Turner, & Chomsky who all urged professionals to consider the benefits of oral language activities when planning elementary curricula. Other authors (Schneyer, 1970) urged that children be afforded opportunities to expand their cognitive and linguistic skills when learning to read, while Kirk, et. al. (1978) stressed that educators be concerned with the variables of motivation and interest; factors that are difficult to manipulate but that can be addressed by involving children in oral language activities during reading instruction.

#### Integrative Language Activities

"An Integrative Approach to Reading, Incorporating Language Spelling and Math", developed and implemented by Sanger and Doyle (1976) was described during the workshop. The approach illustrated how the following language activities could be incorporated systematically into reading instruction: following directions, practice speaking in sentences, using correct grammatical structures, increasing vocabulary development, identifying nonsense statements, recognizing cause and effect, problem solving, dramatization, categorization and interpreting action in pictures. The activities were designed to be suggestive rather than prescriptive. Speech-language clinicians and other professionals were encouraged to creatively modify them to meet their children's needs.

Based upon the Sanger & Doyle (1976) initial work, and several subsequent applied modifications, the protocol and materials for the current workshop were developed. It focused on integrating four language activities into children's reading lessons by using the stories and information from their reading texts. Following Verbal Directions was defined as listening and following the verbal message given by a teacher. Describing Objects or Pictures was defined as looking at selected pictures from a reading lesson and providing a verbal description. Defining Words included telling what designated words meant. Emphasis was on describing function, shape, size, color, composition, synonyms, naming parts, comparison and categorization. Retelling Stories required a child to listen to or read a story and retell it to a teacher. Based upon an evaluation (Sanger, 1981) of the techniques recommended by Sanger and Doyle (1976), the above four activities were found to be most

successful for providing teachers with a means for simultaneously stimulating language development while teaching reading.

#### General Guidelines for Implementation

Several types of training activities were utilized to help the workshop participants understand and apply the integrative reading-language approach. First, background literature illustrating the relationships between language and reading was reviewed. Second, definitions of the four language behaviors and examples of how they could be integrated with curriculum texts were distributed. Third, the participants used their school's reading texts and practiced developing activities for each language behavior. Initially they wrote their ideas. Later, they orally described how they could incorporate the activities into the children's reading lessons and practiced by role-playing. Fourth, using transparencies the participants were afforded many opportunities to identify activities. Following this exercise they were tested on their knowledge of the material presented during the workshop. Participants were given examples of language behavior and were asked to identify whether the activities were examples of following directions, describing pictures or objects, defining words, or retelling stories. At the conclusion of the workshop each participant was provided with a document containing descriptions of all materials covered during the workshop including a review of literature, definitions of the four language behaviors and examples of how to incorporate them into a reading lesson, sample lesson plans, and guidelines for implementing the approach which included:

1. Use of simplified instructions which the children could understand;
2. Use of visual cues coupled with the verbal counterpart;
3. Opportunities and time for verbal responses;
4. Use of moral support and verbal cues whenever necessary;
5. Initial acceptance of short or concrete answers from the children;
6. Rephrasing the children's responses into concise and descriptive words through the use of modeling;
7. Providing the children with opportunities for achieving success rather than having them participate in activities that would result in failure (Sanger & Doyle, 1976).

#### Evaluation of the Workshop

On two separate occasions quasi-experimentally designed studies have been conducted with teachers who implemented the integrative reading-language approach described in the 90-minute workshop. The subjects included a total of 43 second and third grade low-reading students who were instructed with the integrative reading-language approach, and 39 children who served as the controls. These two studies involved participation from five elementary schools each having an experimental and control subgroup

from different classrooms. Each experimental and control subgroup had been instructed by a different teacher resulting in five experimental and five control teachers. During both experiments the treatment in the experimental subgroups was implemented over a fourteen week period.

Observational findings, descriptive and inferential statistics, and informal interviews have provided supportive evidence that the workshop has been successful. Charted data collected on fixed-interval schedules for both experimental and control teachers revealed that the teachers who participated in the workshop initiated more than twice as many language behavior opportunities during reading instruction as their control counterparts. Interestingly, the primary activity the control teachers implemented, despite the fact they had not received the training, was following directions. Also of interest was that the control teachers frequently used the teacher manual that accompanied a reading text, and gave directions to the children that often contained lengthy and complex syntax in addition to many abstract concepts.

Analyses of covariance have revealed that statistically significant differences existed between the experimental and control subgroups for subtests measuring vocabulary development, syntactic skills, reading directions of schoolwork, and retelling stories. However, in several instances statistically significant interactions occurred between the experimental and control subgroups. These findings suggested that the relative degree of success or nonsuccess of the workshop was accounted for by a teacher variable. Furthermore, observational recordings suggested that the positive results with the integrative reading-language model was related to the extent and amount of treatment provided throughout the duration of a study. (See Table, next page)

Based upon information obtained during informal interviews conducted with the experimental teachers after the studies, and a number of others who did not participate in controlled studies, the following conclusions have been drawn. The workshop was instrumental in heightening their awareness to the importance of language development in teaching reading. Second, the language behavior activities were developed readily by the teachers and incorporated into the reading lessons. Third, retelling of stories was viewed as the most beneficial language behavior for improving reading skills. Fourth, the teachers reported that children who received the instruction demonstrated the greatest improvement in their attending, listening, and verbal skills.

#### Summary

Controlled research supporting the approach described in this paper is in an incipient stage, and the results are encouraging. The approach illustrates compliance with the legislative act PL 95-561; Title II; The Basic Skills Improvement Act which advocates that efforts be made to facilitate the development of the basic reading, mathematics, and oral and written communication into an academic curriculum. The approach allows children who are low readers to use their existing language and develop meaning from what is heard or read during their reading lessons. Further-

Table I

Groups	Following Verbal Directions	No. Obs.	Understanding Action in Pictures	No. Obs.	Describe Objects or Pictures	No. Obs.	Define Words	No. Obs.	Use Correct Grammatical Structures	No. Obs.	Retell Stories	No. Obs.	Total	No. Obs.
Experimental (N=43)	1,734	57	143	34	356	57								
Control (N=41)	1,633	51	13	34	55	51								
Experimental (N=43)	324	57					324	57	201	34	403	57	3,161	296
Control (N=41)	113	51					113	51	23	34	126	51	1,963	272

Event observation recordings of the behavioral language responses from 45 third grade and 39 second grade subjects who were low readers—Recorded 9-16-80 to 11-25-80 and 1-27-80 to 4-14-82.

the approach encourages teachers to develop students' existing language potential, to monitor their logical thinking, and improve their sequential memory skills through the retelling of stories. Finally, by providing opportunities for participation and use of existing language, children tend to become more motivated toward the reading experience. This reading instruction model allows teachers to use any reading text and create many opportunities for language-based low readers to improve their reading skills while building vocabulary and understand content through exposure to a variety of listening, thinking, and communicative situations. It is believed that implementation of the information in the workshop could lead to the creation of more dynamic teaching with more actively involved learners.

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