

7-1-1983

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## Recommended Citation

Baghban, M. (1983). The Return to Process: The Reading Example. *Reading Horizons*, 23 (4). Retrieved from [https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading\\_horizons/vol23/iss4/5](https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol23/iss4/5)

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# THE RETURN TO PROCESS: THE READING EXAMPLE

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A growing number of reading educators are adjusting the primary focus of their attention from learner performance to learner competence. The rationale of this shift from a product to a process orientation lies in the assumption that even the youngest humans are able to observe, categorize, associate, hypothesize, revise, integrate information, and solve problems. These learning strategies enable humans not only to think and to talk, but also to become literate. Oral language and reading are viewed, therefore, as constructive processes, reflective of the particular culture which gives rise to them. These processes develop in response to meaningful experiences, and they in turn aid in the cultivation of the learning strategies. With its roots in psycholinguistics, this perspective has gained acceptance at national levels.

Demonstrating such an orientation, the 1979 & '80 conventions of the International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English co-sponsored workshops relating research on child language development to language arts curriculum in the schools. By capitalizing on what learners know, these workshops proposed that educators nurture positive encounters with print much the same as parents facilitate early oral language growth. Based on the belief that good teachers are perceptive observers of children, each session also produced a training and sharing period termed "kid-watching" (Goodman, 1978). As the name suggests, the objective of this experience was to provide teachers with the opportunity to exchange their observations of children's live or videotaped reading and of particular writing samples. The conference participants' child-centered experience is indicative of a significant trend in research methodology in the field of reading.

The case study is a similar, more formalized methodology which has frequently been used in language acquisition research and which is gaining popularity in reading research (Bissex, 1980; Baghban, 1979; Andrews, 1976; McKenzie, 1974). This type of naturalistic inquiry relies on observations of few children by trained researchers. In fact, the Annual Summary of Investigations Relating to Reading (July 1, 1979 to June 30, 1980, p. viii) notes an increase in the number of intensive studies of individual subjects,

so much so that the study of one child is no longer suspect or even unusual. The concentration on the individual has also produced an informative classroom technique for analyzing a child's ability to handle print.

The Reading Miscue Inventory focuses on the kinds of interpretations a person makes when reading. A teacher tape-records a pupil's oral reading and compares the version on tape to that of the written text. The resulting pupil profile indicates patterns of strengths and weaknesses on which an instructional program may be based. The growing body of theoretical knowledge evolving from miscue analysis conducted by researchers (Goodman, 1979) is impacting the standard definition of "the good reader". The very term "miscue" as opposed to "mistake" underscores differences in the reader's interpretation of the author's intent rather than rigid judgments about accuracy. Therefore, the good reader is one who successfully uses the cues in print and matches personal experiences and world view to those of the author in order to predict the intended meaning.

Reflecting a similar point of view, schema theory assumes that a spoken or written passage does not in itself carry meaning, but rather provides directions for listeners or readers as to how they should reconstruct the intended meaning (Hacker, 1980). In particular, the refinement of the story schema as it develops in children who have been exposed to a rich oral tradition or who have had books read to them is considered crucial for the prediction in reading and listening and for the composition inherent in writing and speaking (Brown, 1977; Applebee, 1978). Teaching reading through storybooks (Butler and Clay, 1979) and encouraging children to make books in the classroom (D'Angelo, 1981; and Shea, 1981) are two of the many conspicuous examples of reading activities which support the theoretical implications of current language arts research.

The developing story schema is further refined through the type of materials selected for reading. Predictable books such as the folktale The Three Little Pigs, Margaret Wise Brown's The Runaway Bunny, and Tolstoy's The Great Big Enormous Turnip demonstrate formulaic content expressed in repetitive syntactic patterns. Their stories are self-contained units, unlike natural science texts which have self-contained pages as units. Since the ease with which we handle print depends on the extent to which the materials match our previous experiences and our model of language, the use of predictable reading materials at school and at home promotes literacy by helping readers make this match as quickly and as easily as possible.

The language experience approach in which the teacher acts as a student's scribe also proves successful because it avoids the mismatch between spoken and written language patterns, provided the adult maintains the integrity of the child's language when recording. Since the successful reader has a model of language in which the oral components support the written and vice versa (while maintaining relevance to understandings of the world), lan-

guage experience destines learners to find a place for literacy in their lives.

What I can think about, I can talk about.  
 What I can say, I can write (or someone can write for me),  
 What I can write, I can read (and others can read too),  
 I can read what I have written, and I can also read what  
 other people have written for me to read (Lee and Allen,  
 1963).

Although every example of print is not necessarily first spoken, teachers find language experience activities valid in themselves for promoting an integrated language model and as necessary supplements to phonics programs. As learners become their own scribes, they continue to compose according to their developing theory of the world.

Writing is in fact gaining emphasis as a support system for the reading process. Research in developmental writing demonstrates that early readers are usually early writers (Durkin, 1966; Clay, 1977), and that early writers spell according to phonological generalizations they make about the language they speak (Read, 1971; Gentry, 1981). First and second grade teachers are learning to read invented spellings for the messages the students convey, and to expect visual spellings as student reading competence increases. When teachers focus on student messages, they can cultivate in students the concept of audience awareness. Moreover, the concept of a contract between the reader and writer results in better readers and writers (Tierney and LaZansky, 1980). Given appropriate opportunities, learners are demonstrating that they know a great deal about language and how language works. Sentence-combining proves to be a successful technique for capitalizing on learners' intuitive knowledge of language. By reading combinations of short sentences, students develop awareness of variability in written language which results in more sophisticated writing styles. Awareness of language and style are also refined in the conference approach to writing which treats a written product as unfinished and developing through reading with peers, teachers, and oneself, editing, and rewriting (Graves, 1980). The Bay Area Writing Project and its subsequent state writing projects continually emphasize the need for more writing in the classrooms by both students and teachers, and recommend that writers share by reading aloud what they have written (Moffett, 1979). Apparently teachers are taking such advice to relate writing and reading within a total communicative model.

In summary, the kid-watching, the model of the successful reader, the story schema, predictable materials, language experience, and supportive writing are indicators of the return to common sense in reading education. Two well-known axioms permeate the aspects of language learning discussed: "Begin where the child is" and "Teach to the strengths of the child." We all have life experiences, and while these experiences may not match middle class expectations, an understanding gained through observation, reading and writing samples, and the recordings of stories shows

the strategies with which learners come to school. If we learn based on what we already know, then this point is where to begin each child's educational program, and because experience is the great leveler in learning, we provide numerous and varied experiences through our classrooms which all our children share and on which all our children may build.

The classroom teacher these days is caught in the bind between process-competence and product-performance approaches. Teachers often express that what they believe they must do is not working, but they are afraid to do anything differently. Life in America changes quickly and grows more complex. Daily we face explosions of knowledge in the society at large, yet "...we still try to use the 'factory' scheme of age-graded classes that Horace Mann popularized, though it never did work well" (Hart, 1981, p. 444). The system was designed for rote, product-learning and has not changed. Teachers, under pressure from schedules, lesson plans, principals, and parents, race from worksheet to multiple-choice test to remediation, complaining that a principal faced with the choice of supporting a teacher or a parent will now more often support the parent. When individuals feel they are sinking in quicksand, accountability can have no meaning. Case histories of teacher burnout are accumulating at a frightening rate.

We have fractionalized the field of reading into reading versus reading skills. While both approaches may claim to aim at the attainment of meaning, "Reading comprehension can reliably be tested as one skill only; the testing of smaller elements is not only counter productive but generally unreliable" (Pearson, 1980, p. 30). Good readers can score low on standardized tests and poor readers who are testwise often do very well. How many of us crammed for exams to get degrees only to forget the information the day after the exam? How many of us now require pupils to learn 20 spelling words by Friday? If we continue to give lists of 20 words, our pupils will know only these 20 words and probably for only 48 hours. With a new perspective, even within our old time frame, we can affect the ways of thinking of our students. As a single example, if we teach spelling according to families of words, we equip students to handle the words they need for the rest of their lives (Chomsky, 1970). And a process orientation accomplishes one more marvelous achievement. The relevance and joy which motivated oral language development becomes obvious in the acquisition of literacy. Good teachers need to be like good parents. We provide experiences that promote problem-solving and growth, but the learner has the ultimate responsibility for the integration of old and new information in order to handle experiences that come along in life. Our job is to foster independent, creative learners who are able to enjoy the composing that goes with speaking and writing as well as the understanding that accompanies listening and reading. For these are the human beings who are going to one day assume our roles as teachers and parents. Let us continue to aim at their humanity. Such a target inherently includes their competence.

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