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CLOZE ENCOUNTERS OF A DIFFERENT KIND

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One evaluation device currently receiving widespread attention from reading educators is the cloze procedure, or cloze test. A variety of recent research reports indicate that, although this interest is probably warranted, some modifications of the technique and its applications may be called for.

The cloze test usually consists of a graded reading passage from which words have been deleted according to some methodical strategy, such as every fifth word, every tenth word, every pronoun, etc. The deleted words are replaced with blanks of a uniform size, and the student is asked to fill in the blanks with the most appropriate word.

With its introduction to educators in the early 1950's, the cloze procedure became the focus of a large body of research. As Jongasma (1971) noted, most cloze research has been concerned with: (1) Cloze as a technique for measuring comprehension, (2) cloze as a measure of readability, and (3) cloze as a method of investigating language variables.

Perhaps the most prolific of these areas has been the first - using cloze as an indicator of literal reading comprehension. The validity of this notion has received especially wide empirical treatment; Jenkinson (1957), Ruddell (1963), and Bormuth (1965), for example, all found significant positive relationships between student performance on cloze tests and standardized reading comprehension tests. Bormuth (1969) stated that "cloze tests made by deleting every fifth word measure skills closely related or identical to those measured by conventional multiple choice reading comprehension tests" (p. 363).

The cloze test has not been without its detractors, however. Weaver and Kingston (1963) for example, concluded that comprehension did not play a significant role in cloze score performance and that what the test measured was a specific factor apart from verbal ability. Coleman and Miller (1968) also questioned the validity of the method, as did Carroll (1972) in assessing the cloze as "too crude" to measure comprehension (p. 19).

In a more recent study however, Bormuth asserted that "it seems clear that cloze tests do measure a person's ability to perform the comprehension processes" (1975, p. 66). Similarly, Horton (1973) postulated the construct validity of the cloze as an index of reading comprehension. Horton's conclusions, drawn from a factor analytic study, suggest that the cloze tends to measure "the subject's ability to deal with the relationships among words and ideas" (p. 250).

Recent Uses of the Cloze

Despite the wide range of authoritative opinions on the device, the cloze test has been growing in acceptance and application until it has become a

fairly common diagnostic and evaluative tool in the reading specialist's repertoire. This proliferation of the technique may be partially attributed to some inherent advantages of the cloze test when it is compared to a variety of commercial standardized instruments. The cloze is made by a relatively easy and mechanical process which can be applied to any passage in ordinary language selected by a teacher. Also, the cloze is considerably less expensive and generally more reliable than other methods of constructing tests on a selected passage.

One important but infrequently heard criticism of the cloze test is its affective impact on the student in the testing situation. In its conventional form, the cloze test can cause anxiety and frustration in a student who is suddenly presented with an unfamiliar reading passage riddled with blanks to be filled in. Even high-ability students, accustomed to performing well on tests, can become uneasy with a test requiring only forty or fifty percent correct answers for a "good" performance. Obviously, the cloze can be an especially threatening kind of test.

A potential solution to this problem is the post oral-reading cloze test, suggested by Page (1975). Using procedures and criteria developed by Bormuth (1975), this newer version differs from the conventional cloze test in that it is administered only after students have orally read the passage in its original form.

This post-reading version of the cloze technique is perhaps most useful in a diagnostic situation. It can be especially effective when used in conjunction with an informal inventory or a miscue analysis. The teacher or clinician simply uses the passage orally read by the student as the post-reading comprehension assessment device.

Besides the obvious advantages of a miscue analysis, the actual oral reading of the passage is important because it ensures the student's familiarity with the material before the cloze task. Since the student has already been exposed to the passage, the post-reading procedure seems to alleviate much of the anxiety and tension surrounding the administration of other cloze forms. The important advantages of the cloze, however, are maintained.

Research Support

Research suggests that the post-reading form loses little of the correlational or construct validity attributed to the conventional cloze tests. Page (1975) found a strong relationship between conventional and post-reading cloze scores. The post-reading scores tended to be about ten percent higher, but lacked any other significant qualitative differences. These results were corroborated by Ganier (1976) in a study using a different sample, a variant design, and much longer passages.

A recent study (Carey, 1978) demonstrates a direct link between student performance on post-reading cloze tests and standardized comprehension tests. The study further suggests a significant and persistent relationship among student performance on standardized tests, post oral-reading cloze tests, and comprehending scores. The comprehending score, a ratio of oral

reading miscues which indicate a successful search for meaning, has been demonstrated as a powerful predictor of the retelling score (Goodman and Burke, 1973).

These results suggest that the post-reading cloze score is related to both "process" and "product" indicators of reading comprehension. The scores can be used by the reading teacher or clinician to corroborate other assessments of comprehension, or they can be adjusted and interpreted using Bormuth's (1975) grade level equivalency tables.

Conclusion

This growing body of research results points toward the validity of the post oral-reading cloze test. Certainly, normative studies will be useful in interpreting the results of the scores and further research is indicated. But even now the newer post-reading cloze would seem to offer a reasonable alternative to the reading specialist interested in effective and humane methods of comprehension assessment.

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