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CLASSROOM AND THE CLOZE PROCEDURE: INTERACTION IN IMAGERY

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Teachers do not listen to children's strategies for interacting with their language, often preferring to dominate the lesson with questions of factual recall (Guszak, 1967). To make matters worse, when asking recall questions they tend to give good readers more time than poor readers to formulate answers (Sucher, 1967). Teachers react in this manner even though many of them instinctively know that children need to interact with language in order to clarify cognitive structure. They do this, according to Frank Smith (1975), by constantly creating new categories of learning and/or redefining learned categories. Smith calls language the major medium through which children learn of the existence of new categories of learning (p. 127). He further states that children learn of categories through an elaborate yet innate scheme of hypothesis testing which children will take part in intuitively if given the right opportunity. With this theory in mind, a technique has been developed called the Interactive Cloze Procedure. The authors feel the technique gives students the all-important time they need to explore language in its rich and varied forms, make hypotheses concerning why certain words are chosen by authors to create images in the mind of the reader, and interact with peers and the teacher about words and the categories those words represent. The paper will give the background research concerning cloze techniques, detail the steps teachers would follow to use Interactive Cloze, report behavioral observations within the classroom setting, and indicate direction for research into the efficacy of this procedure.

Background

The cloze procedure (Taylor, 1953) is recognized as a means of determining level of comprehension and readability. Research efforts, however, have not consistently supported the cloze as an effective instructional procedure for facilitating comprehension of prose material (Jongsma, 1971). As early as 1962, Blommer used the cloze as a remedial teaching technique for students enrolled in a college reading program. Although cloze exercises were concluded to have a positive effect on comprehension and college grade point average, faulty experimental designs and threats to internal validity rendered the results tentative at best. The point must be made that the "teacher" served only as a record-keeper

and made no effort to interact with students. Martin (1968), however, asked students in a class setting to verbalize reasons for deletion responses. Both experimental groups (instruction in the cloze strategy and transformational grammar) scored statistically significant differences over the control group. The cloze group made significant gains in word meaning, paragraph comprehension, and selection of key words.

In an effort to extend Martin's verbalization strategy into a structured teaching paradigm, the Interactive Cloze Procedure has been developed. The procedure is designed to 1) promote close attention to the structure and patterns of print resulting in increased comprehension, 2) enable students to effectively use context clues and grammatical syntax to ascertain the appropriateness of a response, 3) provide a setting for positive interaction among students concerning material read, and 4) encourage students to become active rather than passive participants in classroom reading activities.

The following steps make up the Interactive Cloze Procedure teaching paradigm:

- 1) Select a 100-500 word passage from a textbook. The passage should be one that students have had difficulty comprehending or one that the instructor feels is important for them to fully understand.
- 2) Make appropriate lexical deletions of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and/or adverbs accordingly. The form of, and number of speech deletions can be varied according to purpose of teaching.
- 3) Ask students to complete the cloze passage individually, filling in as many blanks as possible. The teacher can decide appropriate time limits for the task depending on the difficulty level of the passage.
- 4) Divide students into small groups, three to four students per group. Instruct them to compare answers and come to a joint decision as to the best response for each blank.
- 5) Reassemble into a large group setting. The instructor reads the selection intact from the text. Students are given opportunity to express opinions as to the suitability of the author's choice of terms as compared to their choices.
- 6) Test over cloze passage to strengthen short-term recall.

Recognizing that use of imagery in prose writing is difficult for the novice as well as the experienced English student to fully comprehend, the paradigm has been incorporated into an instructional model for developing awareness and understanding of imagery in a literature selection. The technique, however, can be adapted to any content or reading selection.

In an effort to observe the effect of the Interactive Cloze Procedure the authors field-tested the strategy in two eighth grade English classes. The selection chosen to be read was that of Truman Capote's "A Christmas Memory." The class received pre-reading activities focusing on the definition of "imagery" as a concrete detail that appeals to the senses. They were also told that by using specific images, an author establishes mood and arouses emotion in readers.

Students were then given a 250 word cloze passage utilizing an every

fifth-adjective lexical deletion strategy. The Interactive Cloze Procedure teaching paradigm was then followed.

Behaviorial observations reported lend credence to the paradigm in an instructional setting.

While the students were in groups they justified their choice of words in a positive way, using grammatical elements to support their choice of response. Comments were noted such as:

“You can’t use that word.”

“It isn’t an adjective and it HAS to be an adjective.”

“You can’t use the same word twice.”

“That’s too simple.”

“The author meant it different than that.”

Additionally, students used the Thesaurus and oral reading to stress their points. When interacting in the large group setting, students challenged the appropriateness of usage, and on occasion, felt their choice constituted a more visual or sophisticated use of imagery than that of the author.

Students were asked to rate how much they enjoyed reading the story on a three-point scale. Ninety percent (90%) of the cloze experimental group indicated they liked the story; 6% thought it was average and 4% did not like it. In contrast, from the group who had not used the cloze, 73% liked the story, 15% thought it average and 12% disliked it.

Conclusion

On the simplest level, the Interactive Cloze Procedure appears to be an easy discussion motivator. In addition, the authors feel that the strategy possesses a more heuristic value in that it requires close attention to print, promotes verbalization of the reading act, and in some instances, expands word-recognition and knowledge of vocabulary. Most important, students seem to enjoy the technique more than traditional methods of teaching reading in content areas.

In interviews with poor readers, Penty (1959) found a significant amount of negativism toward textbooks with feelings of hostility and defeat generalizing to the courses in which textbooks and teacher lecture were central features. New techniques like the Interactive Cloze Procedure must be used by teachers to overcome textbook hostility and improve student attitude. Empirical research should be conducted to substantiate this belief.

It is also felt that the Interactive Cloze Procedure should not be limited in content usage. Because the teaching paradigm was originally devised to be used with college freshmen having difficulty comprehending material in a biology text, research is being conducted with college reading classes not only to substantiate an intuitive belief in the efficacy of the procedure, but to examine the effect of the Interactive Cloze on different levels of readers. Additional empirical research, however, should not be limited to the cognitive domain. A study needs to be undertaken to determine if use of the Interactive Cloze Procedure significantly changes students’ attitude toward

reading in general and the study of language in particular. The authors are engaged in such a study and would welcome the research of others interested in this area of investigation.

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