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AN INVENTORY FOR ASSESSMENT OF ORAL LANGUAGE PRODUCTION

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How can teachers measure the untapped resources of a child's oral language? What tool can the teacher use to observe language patterns that may enhance or retard the student's reading achievement? Questions as these are asked, studied, and the results observed. The tests devised to answer these questions have led to one definitive statement: In terms of specific behavior, reading achievement and subsequent learnings are determined by the effect of a language pattern influenced by appropriate or inappropriate cognitive thought.

The various cognitive levels of oral language production have been examined and it has been found that the construction and formation of word associations gauge development and facility. The language development of children denotes a sequential pattern of word association developing from unrelated, to divergent (syntagmatic), to convergent (paradigmatic) responses. The possible effect of a child's language pattern on his reading achievement is not equivocally known; however, it may ultimately enhance or retard learning performance. Deficits in prior experience or prior learning can handicap a child in developing oral responses needed in language development.

The teacher must keep in mind the possibility that it may be the child's background experiences, physiological development, or other factors hindering the development of language, and not the child's innate cognitive ability.

Development from the concrete level of cognitive thought to the abstract level is that process which enables the child to successfully process information through language levels and thus facilitate achievement in reading.

It has long been this educator's thought that there must be an informal test instrument that could help the teacher determine a student's level of language development. In this way, the teacher would be assisted in teaching to those deficits in a particular child's language production.

A tool to aid the teacher in determining students' level of language development is presented here. An example of a teacher-made test using the four levels of cognitive (paradigmatic) language responses to aid in reading achievement are as follows:

The first level of language responses involves the relation of *contrast*: hot-cold; up-down.

The second level of responses to be evaluated is the relation of *whole-part*: hand-finger; head-eye.

Relations are used to evaluate the responses which are used to produce an observable product of the intellect. Does the child respond to a stimulus word from experience (in - the kitchen) or from the language level (in - out)?

The third level of language responses is the *coordinate* class: car-truck; cat-dog. The coordinate class of responses are units of language that have been compared and found to have observable similarities, i.e., car-truck are vehicles.

The fourth and highest level of responses is that of *super-ordinate* responses: morning-time; oak-tree. The super-ordinate system of responses tie together several classes because of a broader relation.

These four level of products of the intellect enable the child to successfully perform on tests measuring reading achievement.

The preliminary studies conducted using this Oral Language Inventory indicates that those children with achievement scores on or above grade level also exhibit appropriate language level scores. Conversely, those students with predominantly syntagmatic responses had below grade level achievement test scores.

The results of this preliminary study indicate positive correlation between achievement test scores and oral language production. It is felt that scores obtained on the Oral Language Inventory can provide the classroom and special reading teacher with an instrument for more accurate evaluation of oral language production. Thus, the teacher can provide more effective instruction in reading skills.

This observation began with two questions: How and with what can the teacher measure a child's oral language? The Oral Language Inventory is proffered here as an aid for the classroom teacher in an attempt to answer these questions.

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