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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN READING AND THINKING: ONE TEACHER'S VIEWPOINT

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What is the relationship between reading & thinking? Are they interdependent with or independent of each other or is one a function of the other? To explain this relationship, consider Diagram One.

This diagram offers that reading is one function of thinking. Reading is wholly within the realm of thinking. If a person is reading, he is thinking; if he is not thinking he cannot be reading. As Wellman (1974) states, Reading ". . . . is sequentially and developmentally dependent on the fundamental foundation of logical thought process."

Focusing now on only the relationship between reading and thinking, consider the illustration in Diagram Two.

In this diagram, reading consists of the areas of decoding and comprehension. (Others may add that reading includes other skills like vocabulary, study skills, critical thinking, etc. However, this teacher contends these areas to be functions of comprehension. Nevertheless, to disagree with this viewpoint will have no effect or bearing on or relevance to the theme of this paper.)

To be able to decode without comprehending (i.e. to verbalize) is not reading. It means pronouncing written words and sentences correctly but meaninglessly. On the other hand, to be able to comprehend without decoding is impossible. Decoding is the obligatory first step in learning to read and the necessary foundation of comprehension. To decode is to think insofar as sounding out written words. Thus, one cannot decode without thinking. Additionally, to comprehend is also to think. In fact, the terms are synonymous. Moreover, decoding and comprehension = reading = thinking (verbally).

A pupil can respond to a reading exercise in a number of ways. Those ways will be examined with reference to the second diagram and to the following example:

Every drink is _____. Select one: wet, warm, window. Although there are three possible answers to this fill-in, there are actually four responses, one of them being the pupil's giving no response at all. In looking at pupil number one mentioned in the diagram, the pupil is not responding to the reading exercise question because he is not thinking about it. In fact, he is not attending to, concentrating on or even looking at the exercise. The exercise may be physically in front of him, but is not mentally. Thus, the pupil is not decoding the reading exercise and is, of course, not reading.

The number two child is, on the other hand, thinking about the reading

Diagram One

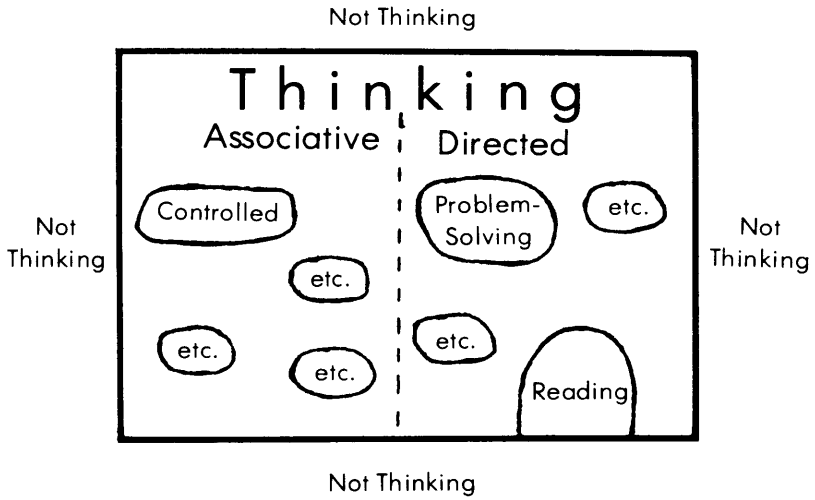
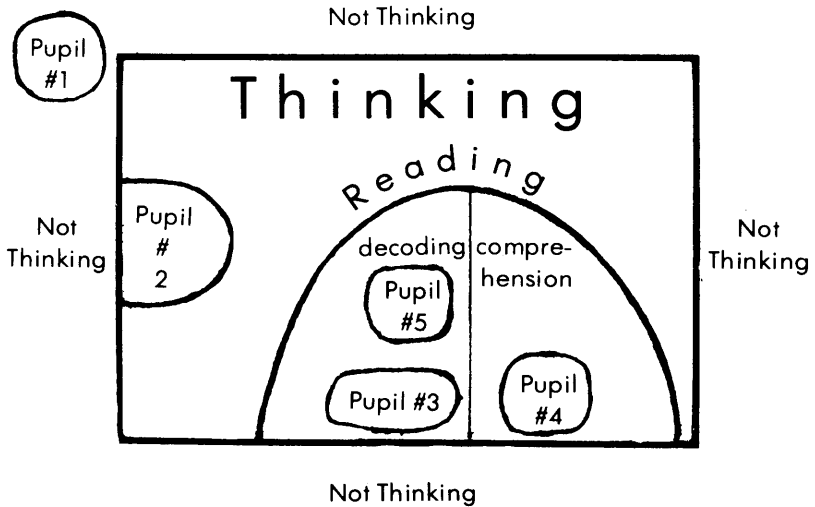


Diagram Two



exercise but is also not decoding. The reason he is not decoding is simple: he does not know how. He is diligently concentrating on his work but he just cannot crack the code. On the reading exercise he may write no answers or guess wildly.

The number three child may likely write on his paper, "All drinks are windows." His answer is not only wrong, it is illogical in spite of the fact that he *is* concentrating on the exercise and successfully decoding it. He is thinking insofar as he is decoding but not beyond that. His problem, unlike pupil two, is not with reading necessarily. His problem is with thinking logically. And logic is the heart of thinking. If a person cannot use logic he is not thinking. As Moffett (1968, p. 16) states, "If a reader can translate print into speech . . . and still fails to grasp the idea or relate facts or infer or draw conclusions, then he has no *reading* problem, he has a *thinking* problem, traceable to many possible sources, none of them concerning printed words." Moreover (p. 501), ". . . the growth of logic . . . influences the growth of language. . ." Thus, the number three child is not thinking insofar as he is applying insufficient logic to the meaning of the passage.

The number four student may feel, "Every drink is warm." He is decoding successfully and, unlike the number three pupil, is thinking logically. However, his thinking is incomplete. He is not "thinking things through" in realizing, for example, that some drinks are cold. Or else he may just be careless and write down the first seemingly-correct answer he comes to. In any event he has no incorrigible thinking problem. It might be added parenthetically that pupils must be made to realize that a logical answer is not always a correct one although correct answers are always logical. Thus, pupil number four is comprehending and is thus reading *for the most part*. He is just not comprehending completely.

The number five pupil is really "together." He knows all drinks are wet. He is decoding sufficiently and understanding what he is decoding. He is using logic and thinking things through.

One tree does not a forest make. Similarly, one logical answer does not a thinker make. That is, a teacher cannot judge the reading or the thinking ability of a pupil from just one sample of either his reading or thinking. The teacher is in a position to draw worthy conclusions about a pupil's reading, only by detecting a *pattern* of his reading behaviors. In other words, in a fill-in reading-thinking exercise of which "Every drink is wet" is an example, the teacher can make no accurate assessment of the child's cognitive or linguistic abilities by looking only at one sample of the child's responses. The teacher must look at as many samples as possible. If the pupil gets at least 75% of reading exercise questions correct *consistently*, one can safely say the child is reading; less than 75% consistently and the child is not. In the latter case, it is necessary for the teacher to detect patterns of errors. Are most of the wrong answers wrong logically (Every drink is warm.) or illogically (Every drink is window.)? Is there a problem in word analysis or in comprehension? Is there a reading problem or a thinking problem? Finding patterns of errors, where they exist, gives the answers to these important questions.

Consider the five hypothetical students again, but now assigned to do a reading exercise on which there are 25 items like “Up is to down just as east is to _____.” Add to this exercise that the answer to this and the other 24 analogies are printed on the bottom of the page. The pupil is directed to locate the correct words and write them in the appropriate missing spaces. Pupil number one is not doing the exercise and may be daydreaming, walking around the room, etc. Pupil number two is trying to do the exercise and is either not writing in any answers (out of embarrassment over putting in foolish answers) or putting in randomly a few correct but mostly incorrect answers. Pupil number three is doing the same thing as number two even though the former *can* decode. Number three’s problem is that he is not thinking logically though he is trying to. Pupil number four is getting many of his answers correct but is having difficulty (inexplicable to himself) with problems like this:

Warm is to hot just as good is to _____.
(Maney, 1965)

Whereas the correct answer is “wonderful,” the pupil may believe it “bad,” a logical wrong answer. The pupil is using logic (“‘good *is* the opposite of ‘bad’ and ‘warm’ is not the same as ‘hot,’ isn’t it?” the pupil may ask.) but he is not thinking the problem through. If he were, he would realize that “good” and “wonderful” are not antonymous but are variants of the same concept. (The same explanation goes for “warm” and “hot.”) Nevertheless, pupil number four may be getting up to 75 % of his answers correct because of his limited use of logic and compounded, maybe, with a knowledge of the process of elimination.

Pupil number five is doing better than 75% and is exhibiting no *pattern* of errors.

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