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ECHOES FROM THE FIELD

Joe R. Chapel and Ronald A. Crowell

One of the outstanding reading conferences in the nation is held annually at the Reading Clinic of Temple University. The theme of the conference this year (the 26th annual) was Thought-Language-Reading. The southwestern Michigan area was represented by Mrs. Dorothy Smith of Western Michigan University.

Mrs. Smith reports that the conference was informative and relevant for reading clinicians and reading teachers. She gives us the following report.

The program, practices, and materials for reading instruction were considered for all educational levels—elementary, secondary, colleges, and adult. The entire program this year was flavored with a substantial taste of linguistics, in theory and in practice.

One of the keynote speakers was Dr. Kenneth Goodman from Wayne State University. He stated that language is much more than words; that language has system. A word means what it means because of the context. We can have grammar without meaning but not meaning without grammar. Language is rule governed and children have control of these rules by the time they go to school. Most children, by the time they are three years old, have mastered the inflections of the English language. He concluded that we must learn how the child intuitively knows the language system so that we can teach language and reading more appropriately—therefore, more effectively.

Another keynoter was Dr. Coleman Morrison of City University of New York. Dr. Morrison is a well known researcher in the field of reading. His major point was that research shows there is little difference in achievement or attitude of children who have learned to read with the language experience approach or the basal reader approach. However, the range of ability is much greater with the language experience approach. He feels that content should control vocabulary rather than vocabulary controlling content.

The last major resource person was Dr. Carl LeFevre, author of *Linguistics and the Teaching of Reading* (and an alumnus of WMU). He also stressed a linguistic approach to beginning reading through the use of teaching words only in the context of a sentence—never in isolation. He seemed to have two major remarks regarding the current practices of teaching reading through a linguistic procedure; (1) teachers do not sufficiently understand the sound-symbol relationship and (2) such linguists as Fries and Bloomfield do not belong in the field of reading because they are scientific specialists, not practitioners.

The conference lasted five days and included, in addition to these general sessions, plenty of time for discussion and idea sharing with the participants.

Mrs. Smith's general reaction to the conference was that the understanding of linguistics is very important to the teacher since thought-language-reading are integrated elements. However, linguistic principles should be incorporated into other reading programs rather than superseding them.