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EDITORIAL COMMENT

Ken VanderMeulen

Yesterday, when I read an editorial by Marvin Stone (U.S. News & World Report, September 7, 1981, p. 76) which claimed that American education is in trouble because we are not teaching phonics in beginning reading, I wanted to run and rant and rave. I was filled with anger. I wanted to shout "We have devoted our lives to learning what works in teaching initial reading, and you tell your readers this! U.S. News & World Report is a highly respected magazine, read by thousands of people with education, and the editor hands them a shibboleth!"

The idea that children are not learning to read because they have not been taught the sounds representing letter combinations is simply not true. To see cause-and-effect relationship here is illogical. To ascribe a cause for decline in the verbal section of a "standardized" test and blame the nation's teachers for allowing it to happen is to be unaware of the nature of education in America.

We have somewhere near 20,000 school districts in the United States. Therefore, any description of reading education must take our multiple societies into account. Great groups of immigrants, for instance, who used to study to become "American" now are retaining their cultural heritage. Can we blame teachers for that? And can we blame the teachers for the trend toward huge schools where teachers and students remain strangers to one another? Are teachers at fault for the bureaucracy and the impersonal technology that has resulted? Let's talk about the basic factors, the fundamental things on which learning to read and liking to read are really based.

Let me suggest this thought: "Children who read were read to." You see it on bumper-stickers. It is a basic truth. Parents set their child's attitude about reading, and all that teachers can do is to continue nurturing the enthusiasm for printed stories—or try to repair the damage in attitude that parents have done. Phonics rules can't build a rich and deep wanting to learn. Teaching phonics principles is not a way of making children excited about expressing their ideas. Phonics drill doesn't build a curiosity about little plants and animals. Nor can phonics teach children how to share time and attention, working together in security and harmony.

Research shows that the teaching of phonics is important at certain stages, when the child asks for help, and phonics generalizations can be brought in. The teaching or use of phonics rules never did literally disappear from educational practices, as stated in the Stone editorial. Many methods were evaluated and re-evaluated, as were the materials teachers used. Research relating to methods, materials, and the psychology of teaching,
has led to more reading, better reading, by more students (per 1000 enrollees) than ever before. We have come to learn, through research and experience, that the teacher's relationship to the student is much more important to that child's future in reading than any method or material that can be purchased.

Taxpayers, however, do not generally read research. They read popular magazines and newspapers, which carry columns that are injurious to the welfare of American education. Why is it that negative charges always get more attention than constructive truths? Marvin Stone's editorial will not solve problems, and will certainly not help teachers teach. For over thirty years, we have read these criticisms of the American education system (as if it were a single entity). Readers have apparently believed everything they read, because we are witness to the wrecking of the relationship between towns and their teachers.

Schools are instituted on mutual trust and respect; the child must be the recipient of guidance and affection at home AND at school, or the system DOES NOT WORK! Journalists who continually write about failure of the schools (when they are judging by a fraction of one area) are doing our nation a major disservice.
WHEN READING INSTRUCTION BEGINS AND IS TESTED IN 25 COUNTRIES THAT USE AN ALPHABETIC LANGUAGE SYSTEM

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The purpose of this article is to present results from one segment of an 18-month research project concerning beginning reading instruction. The project was designed to identify conditions under which initial reading activities were implemented in 25 countries that use an alphabetic language system: Argentina, Austria, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, England, Finland, France, Guatemala, Ireland, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Newfoundland, Nicaragua, Norway, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, United States of America, Virgin Islands, and West Germany.

Data were collected concerning:
1) the types of skills and tests used to assess beginning reading achievements;
2) the age at which formal reading instruction and remedial reading instruction begins in each of the alphabetic countries surveyed;
3) the characteristics of classrooms and the objectives of programs used for instruction;
and, 4) the most significant advancements made during 1975-1979 in the beginning reading program of each of the 25 countries listed above.

Comparisons were also made as to the percent of time each country reported to spend in reading readiness activities, basic sight word instruction, increasing positive attitudes and values toward reading, learning letter-to-sound correspondences and comprehension instruction. Answers to questions concerning improvement of beginning reading instruction in each of the 25 countries were also obtained.

The objectives of the project were to gain greater insight into the common bases of learning to read alphabetic languages and to identify successful programmatic elements in one national system that might strengthen an instructional program in other nations. This article focuses upon a discussion of the types of skills and tests used to assess beginning reading achievements and the ages at which formal reading instruction and remedial reading instruction begins in each of the 25 nations surveyed. Discussion of other data in the project will follow (in press).
The impetus for this project arose from Nila Banton Smith's 1974 analysis of the state of knowledge about beginning reading instruction. In her address to the Fifth World Congress of Reading, Smith stressed the need for an international effort to explore the theoretical and practical bases for reading readiness, assessment, and instruction. Durkin (1977) reemphasized the value of such a project. She based her argument on the continuing disjointed and segmental efforts of the past toward identifying and substantiating a definition of exactly what a child must be ready to do as s/he approaches the task of learning to read his/her native, alphabetic language.

The project began through a written request to 168 educational authorities from the countries listed above for 1) copies of curriculum documents and beginning reading tests, and 2) open-ended response to a three-page questionnaire concerning beginning reading programs. The questionnaire, shown in Table 1, was constructed by the author and Ms. Susan Tong, the Research Assistant. Educational authorities were selected on the basis of either their personal contribution to the field of reading or the position of responsibility they held in an exemplary educational institution in their country. The countries were randomly selected from a list of nations that have a national alphabetic language (as identified in Katzner, 1975) and an affiliate council of the International Reading Association.

Each of the 168 educators was asked to complete one questionnaire and to forward the five additional questionnaires, mailed to him/her, to two or three public school personnel and two or three university personnel within their country who would be most knowledgeable in beginning reading practices. In this manner, each country would have a potential representation of 36 separate respondents. Sixteen percent of all potential respondents from a single country, or six of the thirty-six respondents, had to return the information for the responses to be included in the project report. Twenty-five countries met or exceeded this requirement, with a total of 293 educators participating (as listed in the References) in the project. As shown in the References, project participants were presidents of IRA Affiliates, Ministers of Education in State Departments of European and Asiatic countries, educational researchers and psychologists, public school teachers, head teachers or leaders of teacher teams, speech therapists, reading resource teachers, principals, superintendents, professors of reading and education, and consultants.

Data Analysis

When the open-ended questionnaires (Table 1) were received, they were translated verbatim and classified by country under each of the 19 questions on the survey. Curriculum guides, tests and curriculum objectives, types of testing tasks and elements of instruction given in that country. The data and lists from the questions were condensed and often appear as tables in this article, and the companion article. In some instances, percentages were computed to make inter- and intra- country comparisons.
Table 1
Survey Used in International Beginning Reading Research Project of Office of International Research, Southern Illinois University of Carbondale, Illinois

Name
Position
Address

1. How many students do you have? __ boys __ girls
2. What standards do you use to decide when you begin to teach reading skills?
3. What is the average age when reading readiness instruction begins?
4. What percent (%) of your primary teachers are men?
5. What person is mainly responsible for giving reading readiness tests?
6. What measures and tests are used?
7. Do all children receive a test for reading readiness?
   When is the test given?
8. How are the results used?
   __ For ability grouping
   __ Promotion
   __ Reports to parents
   __ Individual instruction
   Please list others
9. Past research seems to indicate that there are several factors that relate to reading readiness. Some of these factors are listed below. Would you please indicate how you measure each of these factors now. Please list any other readiness factors you consider before teaching young children to read.
   Socioeconomic Status, by doing what ____________________________
   Home influence, by ____________________________
   Books in home, by ____________________________
   Hours parents read to child, by ____________________________
   Chronological age, by ____________________________
   Learning rate, by ____________________________
   Mental age, by ____________________________
   Maturity, by ____________________________
   Memory, by ____________________________
   Oral language abilities, by ____________________________
   Gaps in experiential background, by ____________________________
   Dialect, by ____________________________
   Student's best learning style (sight, hearing, touch), by ____________________________
   Please list others:
10. If a child does not do well on readiness tests, what do you do?
11. What reading authority has had the most influence in helping you decide which method of assessing reading readiness you use?
12. Are you aware of any research that indicates the best way to assess reading readiness? List this research.
13. At what grade level is a student referred to remedial help in reading if such help is available?
14. Do the students in your class read aloud? Do you read to them?
15. In beginning reading instruction, approximately what percent of time do you spend in:
teaching letter/sound correspondences
- teaching basic sight words
- teaching whole words as a reading unit
- teaching spelling patterns
- increasing comprehension skills
- increasing positive attitudes and values toward reading
- teaching study/reference skills
- teaching student self-directed reading skills

Others:

16. Are parents responsible for any reading readiness instruction?
17. What percent of a normal day would be spent in giving reading readiness activities to:
   - the entire class at one time
   - to small groups of 4-8 members
   - to individuals

18. If you could add anything to your present reading program and reading assessment, what would you add?
19. Would you please indicate below those changes in your beginning reading program that have taken place in the last three years?

Please attach one copy of each readiness assessment test you use.

RESULTS

Assessing Readiness for Initial Reading Instruction

Informal tests, observation of individual skills in oral language, tests of visual/auditory discrimination and demonstration of motor coordination are the standards most frequently used to determine when reading instruction should begin. Thirty-one percent of the countries use this standard, as reported in responses to questions 2 and 9 of the survey. Twenty percent of the countries used entrance into first grade and observations/reports of kindergarten teachers as the predominant criteria for the time at which reading instruction should begin. Four countries use neither of the above, but base time to begin on chronological age (Sweden, Norway, Korea, and Taiwan). Mental age, the interest a child has in reading, depth of prior background experiences, readiness checklists (mentioned specifically were the Barbe Readiness Skills Checklist and the Catterson Checklist of Reading Skills) and unidentified criterion referenced tests over single skills are each used 16% of the time as criteria for when to begin initial instruction. In the USA, Denmark, and England conferences with parents and educational specialists are used frequently as a criterion to determine when reading instruction is to begin. Canada uses mastery of the concept of "words and sentences"; Taiwan uses successful completion of a test of sound (pronunciation) after ten weeks of instruction; and in Argentina, a child's abilities to analyze and synthesize material presented orally, and to use temporal order and serialization to derive meaning.

To obtain more specific information about exact criteria used to measure a student's first level of success in reading-related activities, 41 tests for beginning reading assessment from 15 countries were collected, translated, and compared (Norway,
Finland, Denmark, Sweden, Newfoundland, Canada, South Africa, 
Virgin Islands, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Luxembourg, England, 
Argentina, Poland, and U.S.A.). In analyzing each test, a listing 
and tally for each task in the test was made. In the 15 "alphabetic 
language" countries we compared, 95 different testing tasks were 
present in one or more tests as determiners of beginning reading.

"Testing task" is defined as any task in a test that is differ­
ent from other tasks in either the skills needed or the activities 
used to complete the test being taken. Of the 95 task types, 52% 
or 49 tasks were unique to single tests. That is, more than half 
of the indices used to determine beginning reading skills in 
standardized tests from different alphabetic languages appear 
in only one of the 41 tests. One might reason that a wide variance 
between test tasks is logical because the tasks reflect the unique­ 
ness in the fifteen languages tested. As shown in Table 2, however, 
the 49 unique tasks, although variant in some ways (e.g., matching 
two shapes as opposed to matching two pictures) call upon skills 
that are applicable to learning more than one alphabetic language. 
In other words, most tasks are designed to test students' skills 
in performing very basic fundamental competencies such as vocabu­ 
larly recognition, visual discrimination/memory ability and auditory 
discrimination/memory ability and not the perceptual and cognitive 
processing unique to specific alphabetic languages.

In the comparison of tests, it became apparent that the types 
of tests included in beginning reading are less influenced by 
the characteristics unique to the language being tested than by 
the contents of tests published in other countries. In 1977 and 
1978, however, a trend toward developing language specific tests 
was beginning. As was suggested by project participants, when 
these country-specific tests are refined and validated, the former 
practice of verbatim translation of tests into the national lan­ 
guage of their own country will be less frequent.

When the total 95 test tasks were categorized according to 
the specific skills assessed, fifteen skill categories resulted. 
That is, on an international basis, fifteen different norm-re­
ferenced skills are used to analyze the degree of success beginning 
"alphabetic-languaged" readers are having, or will likely have 
as they begin to learn to read. Table 2 presents these skill cate­ 
gories from the two skills most frequently assessed to determine 
beginning reading achievements (visual discrimination, oral syn­ 
tactic language ability/vocabulary development) to the skills 
least frequently used (reading speed, oral phrase reading, and 
use of geometric symbols to represent ideas indicated by pictures). 
Five tests also included an informal checklist or observational 
information form. Three tasks appeared on 25% or more of all 
the tests. Those most commonly occurring beginning reading achieve­ 
ment measures were: 1) matching a word or letter to the identical, 
printed word/letter (stimulus); 2) marking the written form of 
a spoken letter name; and 3) copying a shape that is printed to 
the left of the copying space.
Uses of Beginning Reading Tests

The people responsible for giving the first tests of reading assessment are remedial specialists, psychologists, classroom teachers, teachers’ aides, nurses and speech therapists (question 5 on survey). No country gave a standardized readiness test to all students; when given, tests are taken during the last few months of kindergarten/nursery school, or during the first few months of the first grade.

All countries reported to use formal and informal test results to determine whole-class instructional programs, individualized and tutorial instruction, small group instruction, ability grouping and reporting to parents and promotion. (question 8)

Nine different programs are used for students who do not do well on their first reading assessments: (question 10) students were tutored, teaching to student-strengths in small groups (Newfoundland and USA); conferences were held with parents (Sweden, with nurse and principal also present, USA, South Africa and Argentina); students were placed in a special reading clinic called a Technical Orientation Center (Argentina, Taiwan, Norway); remedial reading programs were given in the child’s first year of formal instruction (Denmark, with remedial instruction including motor skill training, body concept awareness and vocabulary development through play, Argentina with individualized training, Canada with oral language development, Guatemala and Poland); special lessons are given in the regular classroom (Norway, Finland, Sweden, Virgin Islands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Guatemala, and USA); reading instruction of any type is postponed and entrance into formal schooling is delayed (Canada, South Africa with students being placed in nursery schools, Belgium, Guatemala, Luxembourg, Virgin Islands, USA where students may repeat kindergarten); more tests are given (by psychologists, pediatricians, neurologists and ophthalmologists in Luxembourg, USA, with more testing being conducted by psychological technicians; Britain, with tests being given primarily to determine if cause for first failure was emotional or physical; and Argentina, to conduct a deep study of the child including identification of learning difficulties, family history, I.Q. of individual children).

Questions 11 and 12 were designed to identify the most influential people and research studies being used (during 1976-78) to make decisions about assessment of beginning reading skills. Many project participants gave titles and/or author of specific research studies. Because complete bibliographical information of the research studies is not available, data from questions 11 and 12 were combined; authors of the studies are cited in Table 3. Specific names of educational authorities as well as citations of person and/or the research which predominantly influenced the assessment of beginning reading skills are given.

Conditions Surrounding Initial Reading Instruction

Although conclusive evidence has not been obtained concerning
the optimal age at which initial reading activities should begin, we found the largest proportion of countries beginning formal instruction in reading immediately upon completion of preschool experiences, and at the beginning of the first formal year of school (question 3). Also, the age at which children can enroll in preschool and kindergarten is younger than in any previous period in history. As a matter of fact, Belgium is designing legislation to provide formal, compulsory preschool experiences for all children two years of age and older. As the data in Table 4, fourth column, illustrates, six nations are allowing formal entrance into first grade reading experiences to begin at age five. None of the countries using an alphabetic language system has a policy to begin formal instruction later than age eight. As also shown in Table 4, during the time in which initial reading instruction most often occurs only three countries maintain an average class size of more than 29 students to one teacher.

Because all project participants did not have information about the number of students enrolled in kindergarten and first grade (question 1) and the percent of primary teachers who were male/female (question 4), data was obtained from the UNESCO Statistical Yearbooks of the United Nations Educational Council.

As shown in Table 5, with the exception of a 1% decrease in kindergarten and nursery school enrollments in Belgium, all countries have significantly increased the total number of students enrolled in their kindergarten and nursery schools between 1965 and 1978. The range of increase was 11% to 1100%, with mode of increase between 50 & 60%. Four nations showed significantly higher increases than others; these were France 100%, Saudi Arabia 500%, Panama 150%, and Denmark 1100%. The overall international enrollment in 1973 was 107% greater than the preschool enrollment of 1968.

In the 22 countries where data were available, only four nations have fewer than 1,000 preprimary educational institutions sponsored by both public and private sources. While Japan, Italy, Luxembourg, and Spain have increased in the percent of preprimary institutions supported by private funds, 15 nations either have no privately supported institutes or have decreased the number of privately supported preschools.

In the USA, the total population of children ages 3-5 years decreased from 12.5 to 10.4 million between 1964 and 1974 (a decrease of 17%). Despite the decrease in total number of preschool-aged children, however, the number of children who enrolled in preprimary programs increased from 3.2 to 4.7 million (an increase of 47%). In 1974, four and one-half times as many 3 year-old children were enrolled in preschools as the number enrolled in 1964. By 1975, 81.3% of all 5 year-old children in the USA were enrolled in preschools.

In every country but Japan, 95 to 100% of the teachers in preprimary educational institutions are women (question 4). Japan
alone has as many as 15 men in every 100 primary teachers. With the exception of Saudi Arabia and Belgium, 49–53% of the preschool students are boys. Saudi Arabia has a preschool population composed of 63% boys, whereas Belgium has only 36 boys in every 100 students.

Discussion and Conclusions

The data of this project suggest that the majority of the countries using an alphabetic language system are judging success in beginning reading as the ability to do tasks that demonstrate mastery of the same set of skills. The types of tasks used to measure these basic 15 skills, as well as the number of skills tested, vary considerably from language to language and from country to country, however. The four measures most frequently used to show beginning reading successes are remembering and discriminating visual and auditory units, and recognizing the meanings of numerous words presented auditorily and/or visually. Tests have not been widely used to assess children’s abilities to deal with semantic and syntactic features that distinguish one language from another.

One third of the nations surveyed also used a second criterion for beginning reading success, an informal checklist of skills that are not easily measured by paper and pencil tests.

If students are not successful in their first attempts at reading, one of nine types of programs could be used to help increase the students’ successes. The type of program used is not based upon the language the child reads, as several countries using different language systems use the same type of remedial reading program, and countries using the same language system use separate remedial reading programs.

Most children who speak an alphabetic language will learn to read their language after they leave their preschool and kindergarten classes. Because the age at which children in all the countries in this study are entering preschools and kindergartens is continuing to decrease, students in alphabetic language countries are learning to read at a younger age than did children as recently as ten years ago. Most of the beginning-reading instruction is also offered by women.

While there was a commonality between nations in the methods used to assess beginning reading successes and the time at which instruction begins, administration of and decisions concerning alternate approaches for less successful beginning readers vary considerably.

Each of the 25 nations surveyed appear to be making definite contributions toward attaining a unified goal: increasing the number of young children who become highly successful, beginning readers. Educators in this research feel that through this and continued cooperative research, we will enrich our understanding.
of the reading process. We are also confident that, in the near future, we will find more and better methods of reading instruction which can be shared among these nations. This project teaches that our bond is the objective of eliminating illiteracy in our world.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


EDITOR'S NOTE:

As the reader may note in the article, there is much more information which may be gleaned from the tables summarized here. We have made arrangements to print the tables in the Winter '82 issue, so that closer study of this interesting survey will be possible. We hope all beginning reading teachers will take the time to look at the tables.
Numerous children's books are available to enhance language growth and to develop reading and writing skills. These books can be coordinated with basal reader programs and are appropriate for use with both small and large groups and with individual students. We will discuss ideas in these categories: multiple meanings, skills reinforcement, repetition of sounds, patterned language, and interest in words. A number of the recommended books, however, are representative of more than one area. A bibliography, by category, is included at the end of this article.

Multiple Meanings

Several children's books emphasize multiple meanings of words and phrases. Fred Gwynne's The King Who Rained (1970), A Chocolate Moose for Dinner (1976), and The Sixteen Hand Horse (1980) present homonyms in an entertaining way. Both the sentences and pictures in these books depict the wrong meanings for the words or phrases. For example, in The King Who Rained, there is a picture of a child holding a huge train engine, with the caption "My big sister's getting married and she says I can hold up her train."

Multiple meanings are also humorously presented in the Amelia Bedelia series by Peggy Parish. Amelia Bedelia is the mixed-up maid who literally interprets all of her instructions. When told to "go fly a kite" she does just that; she "pots the plants" in kitchen pots, and makes a "sponge cake" from real sponges. Students might enjoy thinking of additional examples of words with more than one meaning, and developing their own books based on those by Gwynne and Parish.

In What Is a Seal? (Behrens, 1975), photographs in color illustrate two meanings for words. In the text a question is posed and answered: "What is a park? We have a picnic in the park. I park my bike at school." In similar fashion, Nailheads and Potato Eyes (Basil, 1976) deals with various meanings of words associated with body parts. For example, terms such as "head," "arm" and "elbow" are discussed in different contexts.
Simple rhymed verses utilize homonym pairs of varying difficulty in Your Ant Is a Which (Hunt, 1975). Homonyms placed next to each other form the basis for nonsense sentences in a more complicated book How a Horse Grew Hoarse on the Site Where He Sighted a Bare Bear (Hanlon 1976). Not only are these books helpful for building meaning vocabulary, but are also excellent for developing children's concepts.

Skills Reinforcement

A few children's books are available which assist with the review of basic skills. Basil's Breakfast in the Afternoon (1979) defines various compound words and explains how they are put together. "Tiptoe", for example, is shown as tip + toe and explained "When you want to move without making a sound, you walk on the tips of your toes. You tiptoe!" There are opportunities to involve children in the reading of the text as it asks for the first or last parts of compound words to be identified ("? + day = what each of us has once a year").

All Butterflies (1974), an alphabet book by Marcia Brown, offers a rudimentary introduction to alphabetical order. Exquisite woodcuts illustrate such phrases as "All Butterflies," "Cat Dance," and "Elephants Fly?"

A series of books by Hanson provides examples of several different skills through appealing cartoon-like illustrations. Included in the series are these titles: Plurals (1979), Possessives (1979), Antonyms (1972), Homonyms (1972), Synonyms (1972), Similes (1976), Homographs (1972), and Homographic Homophones (1973). Although text is limited, varying levels of difficulty are presented. In Plurals, both regular and irregular forms are included, such as "pig-pigs," "glass-glasses" "baby-babies," and "mouse-mice." Similarly, in Possessives, singular and plural examples are given, such as "monkey's banana-monkeys' bananas." Spelling changes are also incorporated, as in "puppy's bone-puppies' bones." Similes utilizes more text and humorously depicts "like" and "as" comparisons that are related in some way, for example, "Jake works like a beaver. Jan is slow as a turtle." and "Diane shakes like a leaf. Her cousin Jill grows like a weed."

Maestro's On the Go (1979) reinforces the concept of adjectives. Humorous illustrations tell the story of two circus performers who go on a vacation. The only text is a single adjective per page. The book may also be helpful with a review of antonyms, as the left and right-hand pages frequently illustrate opposite pairs.

Fast-Slow, High-Low (1972) by Peter Spier uses only
illustrations to show opposite meanings in a multitude of contexts. For example, "high-low" is depicted by high and low diving boards, chest drawers, slides, tree branches, fences, chairs, high-heeled and low-heeled shoes, mountains and valleys, and high and low notes of a musical scale. The variety of concepts presented in these books enhance their utility for review of the basic skills at several grade levels.

Repetition of Sounds

Books that emphasize the repetition of sounds in the text may be helpful in the development of auditory discrimination and phonics skills. Although it is intended to be a counting book, One Old Oxford Ox (1977) by Nicola Bayley makes extensive use of repetition of sounds in the text. Alliterative phrases such as "five frippery Frenchmen foolishly fishing for frogs" and "nine nimble noblemen nibbling nectarines" make the book excellent for reading aloud.

Hilgartner's Great Gorilla Grins (1979) is a collection of alliterative descriptions of a variety of animals. The clever verbal patterns such as "Large, lordly lion lounges limply on a limb. Lazy Lord Lion leaves Lady Lioness to land lunch and lovingly launder little lions," are further enhanced by the delightful animal illustrations. The book may also assist with vocabulary development among older students as they deal with such descriptions as "Camels act contentious, cantankerous, and combative, if crossed. But consistent concerned care can create cooperation conducive to capable, competent conveying of cargo and kings." Some students may be prompted to work at creative writing based on the format of the text.

Animals and alliterative phrases are also used in Eric Carle's alphabet book, All About Arthur (1974). Arthur, "an absolutely absurd ape," travels across the United States searching for animal friends--"In Denver down by a dingy drugstore he met a dapper Dalmatian dog named Danny." Illustrations give the book visual appeal. The animals are woodcuts in black and white; alphabet forms are photographs of letters in various environmental settings.

In addition to consonant sounds, these books contain examples of consonant blends and digraphs, hard and soft g and c sounds, diphthongs, and both long and short vowel sounds in the text. A possible source of difficulty for beginning readers might be the appearance of different sounds in the same sentence, as in "In Oklahoma he met an odd octopus named Otto, who was eating oysters with onions," found in All About Arthur. Therefore, these books might best be used as reinforcement of previously learned concepts, rather than in
the introduction of letters or sounds.

Two books by Peter Spier, Gobble Growl Grunt (1971) and Crash! Bang! Boom! (1972) explore sounds somewhat differently. Highly detailed illustrations exemplify a text comprised of sounds made by a wide variety of animals and objects from familiar situations. These books are ideal for use with small groups of beginning readers in which the children can dramatize the sounds. Oral language and classification skills may also be further developed.

Patterned Language

There are numerous books for children that use repeated phrases or sentences. The predictable language patterns offer the reader the security of "knowing" the words. These are ideal for beginning readers who are having their first experiences with reading books on their own. Patterned language books also provide excellent stimuli for creative writing for the older readers. Students can work their ideas into the framework of the language of the book. This is particularly good as a confidence-builder for those students who are reluctant to write.

Ipcar's I Love My Anteater With An A (1964) is an alphabet book, although it is probably more appropriate for older students than for children at the readiness level. The text follows a pattern for each letter of the alphabet:

I love my fox with an F because he is fascinating.
I hate him with an F because he is fickle.
His name is Fernandez. He comes from Formosa.
He lives on figs and fruitcake,
And he is a fire fighter.

There are almost unlimited opportunities for vocabulary study of positive and negative descriptive words, place names, foods and occupations, and animals. The book makes use of many unusual animals, such as bongo, ibex, narwhal, okapi, and xiphias. As students write their own alphabet books following this format, vocabulary development can be extended even further.

The Important Book (1949), by Margaret Wise Brown, reinforces the concepts of paragraph construction, main idea, and supporting details through a simple textual pattern. Various things are described like this:

The important thing about an apple is that it is round.
It is red. You bite it, and it is white inside, and the juice splashes in your face, and it tastes like an apple,
and it falls off a tree
But the important thing about an apple
is that it is round.

Students could select any number of topics for group or
individually written stories.

A Scale Full of Fish and Other Turnabouts (1979)
by Bosom discusses multiple meanings in a simple pat­
tern that is appealing to children. On facing pages,
paired statements, such as "Box in a ring" and "Ring
in a box" are illustrated. The title phrase, "A scale
full of fish" shows fish being weighed, while the page
opposite "A fish full of scales" shows one fish. This
book could prompt children to write turnabouts of their
own.

The pattern is somewhat complicated in Hutchins' Don't Forget the Bacon! (1976). A young boy is sent
to the store with these instructions: "Six farm eggs,
a cake for tea, a pound of pears, and don't forget the
bacon." However, as he walks along, things that he
passes, such as "six fat legs" and a "rake for leaves"
and "a pile of chairs" become confused with what he
is to buy. As he repeats everything going to and from
the store, he finally takes home what was requested,
except, he forgot the bacon. This book allows children
to manipulate language by writing words and phrases
that are similar to the pattern in the text.

The repetitive language in the pattern books varies
greatly. Some repeated phrases are almost like a re­
frain, as in Sendak's Chicken Soup With Rice (1962).
In other books, it is the structure of a sentence that
is repeated. For example, in An Egg Is To Sit On by
Tanz (1978), humorous drawings illustrate this type
of sentence structure: "A nose is to wash your back
with (turn the page) if you are an elephant" and "A
house is to eat for lunch (turn the page) if you are
a termite." The wide variety of pattern books provides
children at many grade levels an opportunity to enjoy
the language and to manipulate it creatively.

Interest in Language

Stimulating an interest in words is often a goal
of the classroom reading program. This may be accom­
plished in part by a study of etymology. Many books
are available on word histories that are appropriate
for several grade levels. For lower and middle grade
students Steckler's 101 Words and How They Began (1979)
might be of interest. Common words are categorized into
simple groups, such as things that grow, animals, what
we wear, things we enjoy, and the like. The derivations
of the words are not difficult to read and are often
entertaining. Cartoon-like illustrations add to the
enjoyment.
Slanguage (1979) by Carothers and Lacey is a delightful collection of common expressions and how they originated. Included are the phrases, "cat's out of the bag", "sick as a dog", "apple pie order", "fit as a fiddle" and many others. Slanguage is an enjoyable source for all ages. Such a book may serve as a springboard for students to interview people of various ages in the community regarding expressions that were popular during their youth.

Another way of creating interest in language is through the use of books that organize words in different ways. Three books by Brian Wildsmith, Birds (1967), Wild Animals (1967), and Fishes (1968), describe groups of animals in almost poetic language. Exquisite paintings illustrate such phrases as "a stare of owls", "a tower of giraffes" and "a hover of trout."

Humorous manipulation of words is also appealing to children of all ages. Juster's The Phantom Tollbooth (1961) and Corbett's The Mysterious Zetabet (1979) make use of clever play on words. And, other books, such as Schwartz's A Twister of Twists, A Tangler of Tongues (1972) and Tremain's Teapot, Switcheroo, and Other Silly Word Games (1979), offer children games to play with oral and written language. Because language development and interests vary among students, books featuring verbal humor should be selected commensurate with the ability of the children to comprehend the text.

Conclusion

Building student interest in books is a vital part of the reading program. However, reading books is often separated from actual reading instruction. This need not be the case. There are many children's books which can assist with the development of basic reading skills and vocabulary as well as creating interest in language and the production of it.

Recommended Books

Multiple Meanings

Hanlon, Emily. How A Horse Grew Hoarse on the Site Where He Sighted a Bare Bear. Delacorte, 1976
Skills


Repetition of Sounds


Patterned Sentences

Cameron, Polly. I Can't Said the Ant. Coward-McCann, 1961.
Interest in Language


DOES CONTENT-AREA READING TEACH CONTENT-AREA LEARNING?

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The 1970s may be called the decade of content-area reading. From tentative beginnings in the 1960s and before, content-area reading instruction gained recognition during the '70s as a great means of furthering students' learning in the content areas.

But what real progress has been made? To what extent has content-area reading instruction actually furthered students' content-area learning? The answer seems to be equivocal. While there has been a growing acceptance by teachers of reading and study skills as important aspects of school learning (Jackson, 1979), a closer look at the directions for instruction given to teachers suggests that there remains considerable confusion over the purpose and practice of content-area reading.

This confusion is best exemplified in a number of recent textbooks dealing with teaching reading in the content areas (Dillner and Olson, 1977; Forgan and Mangrum, 1976; Piercey, 1976; Robinson, 1978; Thomas and Robinson, 1977). These textbooks all provide specific guidance in planning and implementing content-area reading activities. But they fail to link these activities with particular content-area learning objectives. Teachers are left to assume that somehow by teaching a wide range of isolated reading and study skills, content-area learning will be improved.

This assumption is open to question. It is reminiscent of the experience of remedial teachers who find retarded readers becoming increasingly proficient at performing the tasks required by various remedial programs, but remaining unable to handle assignments in reading outside these programs. Similarly, teaching content-area reading activities detached from a clear determination of the specific content-area learning which these activities are intended to improve will fail to result in student gains in content-area learning. The following four steps are suggested to teachers as a way of ensuring that content-area reading instruc-
tion does in fact teach content-area learning.

Step 1: Determine Content-Area Learning Objectives

Content-area learning objectives define what the teacher considers important for students to learn. The question for the teacher to ask is, "What is it about my content-area (geography, English, science, etc.) that I can realistically expect my students to gain from my teaching, given the resources and limitations under which we both must work?" For example, in a unit or lesson in geography, the content-area objective may be that students gain an understanding of how a watershed forms; in English, the objective may be an understanding of the ways in which a short story writer develops character through dialogue; or in science, the objective may be an understanding of the periodic table of the elements.

Step 2: Determine Needed Reading and Study Skills

Besides determining what content-area learning will be pursued, content-area objectives have the second function of defining the specific reading and study skills needed for their achievement. It is only after content-area learning objectives have been specifically determined that the particular reading and study skills needed by students for the achievement of these objectives can be identified.

This identification can be done by introspection. The teacher will "think through" the content-area task of learning from the students' point of view, taking such factors under consideration as students' previous learning, their general level of achievement, and the degree of mastery to be expected. This is both a difficult and a crude method, but, next to directly observing students' thinking while learning—a desirable but up to now impossible practice—teacher introspection is the best method available. For example, in "thinking through" the learning task presented to students in understanding how a watershed forms, the teacher may identify such needed skills as map reading, making predictions, and determining relationships of cause and effect.

Step 3: Diagnosis

The next step is for the teacher to determine which skills students already possess and which ones need to be taught. For example, the English teacher who wants to know the level of students' preparedness to understand how a short story writer develops character through dialogue will prepare an informal test based on short story material with questions measuring the
students' ability to perform the skills they need to gain this understanding. These skills might include such ones as identifying significant details, visualization, and interpreting connotative language. When students' ability to perform these skills has been assessed, the teacher will know in which skills areas students are weak, with specific reference to the particular content-area learning objective intended for instruction. In this way, subsequent skills teaching can focus directly on the exact areas of need thereby avoiding wasting time teaching skills which are not supportive of the specific content-area learning objective being pursued, or which students have already mastered. A number of writers have provided teachers with comprehensive directions in the preparation of group information tests, and these sources can be referred to for further guidance (Ahrendt & Haselton, 1973; Rakes, 1975; Shepherd, 1978; Taschow, 1967; and Voix, 1968).

Step 4: Skills Selection

An obvious outcome of diagnostic teaching is that not all skills are taught all the time. For example, the science teacher whose content-area objective in learning is that students gain an understanding of the periodic table of the elements will not concentrate on word attack skills since the information to be understood is presented by symbols (therefore making the comprehension of symbols a skill which will be assessed and taught if necessary), the level of comprehension required is literal (therefore making teaching critical and inferential levels of comprehension [Harker, 1973] unnecessary--although in teaching students to apply the information once comprehended, these levels of comprehension will probably be required).

The point is that teachers will not attempt to instruct students in the full range of the reading and study skills at any one time. But instruction in this range will ultimately result as students encounter skills instruction in the different content areas as the need for this instruction arises through the academic levels. And since this instruction will be in direct response to specific content-area learning objectives, the teaching of these skills will be highly functional, rather than being in some undefined way "comprehensive" with little or no direct reference to specific objectives.

Conclusion

In answer to the question, "Does content-area reading teach content-area learning?" the answer is "Yes" if teachers keep in mind the real purpose for teaching
reading and study skills in the content areas. This purpose is not to "get through" an arbitrary list of skills which has application to content-area learning in at best only a general sense. The purpose, rather, is to provide students with the specific skills of reading and study they require to achieve clearly defined content-area learning objectives. These objectives are the ones which content-area teachers have traditionally pursued, and which they have also seen as being intruded upon by reading and study skill instruction. It is probably the most important development of the 1970s for teachers of content-area reading that there is less likelihood now of viewing reading and study skill instruction as an intrusion, but that they are willing to admit the value of this instruction in furthering content-area learning. However, the direction currently being given teachers to teach content-area reading and study skills having no direct link to content-area learning objectives threatens to reverse this progress.

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THE READING SPECIALIST'S ROLE AS PERCEIVED BY READING SPECIALISTS, ADMINISTRATORS, SPECIAL EDUCATION INSTRUCTORS, AND CLASSROOM TEACHERS

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Do different school staff members agree on the importance of various roles a reading specialist may perform? This article reports the opinions of reading specialists, as well as beliefs of the administrators, special education instructors, and classroom teachers regarding roles of the reading specialist.

Duties of reading specialists certainly may be quite diverse, as outlined by Smith, Otto, and Hansen (1978), Stauffer (1978), and Wilson (1977). Examples of their duties include such responsibilities as being a diagnostician, a resource for other teachers, a parent educator, a remedial instructor, and a program evaluator. None of these functions, however, is stressed as more or less important in terms of their productive impact on students' reading abilities. We wondered which roles were valued as most effective by reading specialists. We also wondered how their beliefs compared with those of other staff members with whom they worked.

The Study

A questionnaire identifying 10 roles which a reading specialist might perform was first developed. These roles, which incorporated various roles discussed by the previously cited authorities, combined with the duties defined by a medium-sized Maryland County school system. Questionnaires were then delivered to elementary reading specialists, administrators, special education instructors, and classroom teachers in this same school system. They were asked to rank order the 10 roles in terms of each role's "ultimate productive impact on children's reading abilities." A total of 22 reading specialists, 12 administrators, 24 special education instructors, and 171 classroom teachers returned the form. The mean rankings of each of these four groups were then determined and are shown in the table on the next page.

The Reading Specialists' Rankings

The reading staff put a priority on diagnosing and special reading classes (remediation), a traditional role of many specialists. But, their second choice was to help teachers assess and plan instruction for their students. In this capacity, reading specialists can indirectly service many more children than when
Ranking of the Reading Specialist's Productive Roles
(a lower number indicates a greater priority)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roles</th>
<th>By reading specialists</th>
<th>By administrators</th>
<th>By special education instructors</th>
<th>By classroom teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diagnose and remediate students in special reading classes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help teachers assess students and plan instruction</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inform teachers about effective materials and methods</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutor students</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organize school's reading program</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide parents with suggestions</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach gifted students</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop materials with teachers</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate reading curriculum</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach reading in regular classrooms</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

they only work with students on individual or small group bases.

If a reading specialist spends some time working with six teachers who each teach 25 children, for example, the specialist could have an impact on 150 children in addition to those she normally works with in her reading center. The specialists' third choice of informing teachers about effective materials and methods nicely compliments their second choice, as both roles provide a service for teachers.

Their fourth choice of tutoring students, returns to a focus on direct contact with children again. Ranked in fifth position was organizing a school reading program, a finding which certainly was influenced by the fact that this school district generally determines major curriculum decisions at the county level, rather than at the individual school level. Many of the reading specialists probably felt that they had less impact on these decisions which were predetermined for them by the central office.

Working with parents, their sixth priority, indicated some faith that parents could affect students' progress. Their seventh choice of teaching gifted students is a role they are typically
not assigned in this county, but it was rated above three other duties they occasionally do perform: developing materials with teachers (eighth rank); curriculum evaluation (ninth rank); and, teaching reading in a regular classroom (tenth rank). The specialists may have believed that classroom teachers should conduct most of the developmental teaching in their rooms, relying on specialists for assistance in planning instruction on occasion or when necessary.

Administrators', Special Education Instructors', and Classroom Teachers' Rankings—Compared and Contrasted

Computing a Spearman rank correlation coefficient, a value of \( r_s = .56 \) was obtained for administrators and reading specialists. The degree of agreement between special educators and reading specialists was stronger \( (r_s = .74) \), while the strongest agreement about productive roles existed between classroom teachers and reading specialists \( (r_s = .93) \). Furthermore, the roles ranked in the top three positions by reading specialists were also rated in positions one, two or three by the administrators, special education instructors, and classroom teachers. Obviously a high level of agreement existed between the specialists' rankings of these 10 roles and each of the other three groups. This concurrence of opinion should positively affect students' progress.

Findings of this study were shared with educators in our graduate course. Although many of these individuals were not involved in this study, they expressed general agreement with the ratings made by the four specific groups.

A Recommendation

Discussions with the educators who participated in the study further emphasized the concern for the specialists' role of helping teachers assess and plan instruction for their students. This role was rated by classroom teachers and administrators as their number one choice, and by reading specialists as their second choice. Special educators also rated it as relatively important, in third place.

Several reading specialists and classroom teachers lamented that they currently did not have much time for interaction, although they felt such time would be productive. One specialist summarized her situation as follows: "Unfortunately there just isn't enough time in the day to sit down with other teachers and jointly plan for many of the kids who need help. I feel it would be quite beneficial, but my schedule is already full just working with children all morning and afternoon. Yes, I do mention new materials to teachers, but I can quickly do that when we eat lunch or during recess. There's no way I can help plan instruction for all the other students who need help. Both the classroom teachers and I need some common meeting time for this, and with current budget cuts, I don't see myself getting a day off each week just to work with the teachers."
After listening to this specialist's comments, as well as similar statements by others, we understood that they believed this role was highly important, and that they would like to see it as more of a reality in their immediate teaching situation. We therefore suggest that this duty needs additional attention in order to further improve the services reading specialists can provide their schools.

In buildings where there is not time scheduled for contact between specialists and teachers, beyond the informal meeting at the coffee urn, is there any way to allow interaction time, and still reserve most of the specialist's time for direct work with children? We can suggest one possibility. If the specialist were freed from direct contact with children for just a half-hour period each day, s/he could see each classroom teacher at least once a month. Scheduling this half-hour release on a rotating basis (i.e., Monday 9:00–9:30, Tuesday 10:00–10:30, Wednesday 11:00–11:30, Thursday 1:00–1:30, and Friday 2:00–2:30) would allow the specialist to contact classroom teachers during their most convenient time preferences. Some time could similarly be scheduled with the administrator to keep him/her informed of joint work of the specialist and teachers.

This is only one possibility to encourage more interaction between classroom teachers and reading specialists. Certainly if a school is committed to the reading specialist's role of helping teachers, as they seemingly are, they will explore other options specific to their school.

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We enter the teachers' lounge at Woodmere School, where Mrs. Stephens and Ms. Kelly are asking Mrs. For­ester, the reading teacher, for advice in developing an effective program in reading comprehension. Mrs. Stephens describes the comprehension ability of each of her students. She is confident that she accurately diagnosed her students as either good comprehenders or poor comprehenders. To do so she administered a test and interpreted the results. Ms. Kelly administered the same test but she is not as comfortable as her colleague in categorizing her readers' abilities. Ms. Kelly, in an apologetic tone, explains to the reading teacher that several of her students did poorly on the test, but perform well in group discussion. She mentions that the lowest scoring student in her class is able to retell satisfactorily the contents of a story he has read on fishing. Ms. Kelly adds that she is particularly puzzled by two of her students who did well on the test yet contribute very little when asked questions in their small reading group discussions. After listening attentively, the reading teacher pauses for a moment. Her task is to find a way to rein­force and extend Ms. Kelly's intuitive notions about assessing reading comprehension, and simultaneously, to get Mrs. Stephens to realize that the test she gave is only one piece in the diagnostic puzzle she is con­structing. The reading teacher's task and the purpose of this paper is to inform or remind teachers that the comprehension product they elicit from their readers such as answers to questions or retelling a story is a very sensitive entity. It is chameleon-like in nature and it may change depending on the environment in which it is produced. In other words the context creating the comprehension product must be considered if the teacher is going to make the most sense out of the reader's responses and formulate an accurate diagnosis.
The Comprehension Process

Recent investigations of the reading comprehension process have indicated that it is a dynamic activity which demands that readers, based on their prior experience and knowledge of language, actually construct or reconstruct the author's intended meaning. Given this view of comprehension, the nature of the product of comprehension becomes more understandable. The product is the specific result of a reader's interaction with the text and the context in which the interaction occurs. Several features which might form the context of comprehension are: (1) methods of measurement; (2) the instructional environment; (3) the text itself; and, (4) individual differences within the reader.

The teacher, in assembling a diagnosis must be especially aware of the context of reading comprehension to avoid being misled by too limited a sample of products. Indeed, in order to improve the reliability of assessment, the teacher should systematically vary the contexts in which reading comprehension occurs. To do this, teachers need to recognize the effects of at least four major features of the context of reading comprehension shown in Figure 1.

![Figure 1: The Context of Comprehension](image)

This figure illustrates that comprehension assessment entails making judgments about the reader and his or her comprehension from a product, which is only an estimate of an outcome of a very complex interaction, while simultaneously considering a number of factors to be examined here. There are no recipes and no easy methods for completing this task. Yet, the difficulty of adequately assessing comprehension should not keep good teachers from giving it their best efforts. If readers must submit their comprehension to a teacher's scrutiny, they should have the right to perform for someone who can knowledgeably appreciate the subtleties
of their efforts.

Method of Measurement

The manner by which the comprehension product is elicited is a feature of the context of comprehension which can affect the product in a number of ways. The most commonly used technique for determining a reader's comprehension is asking questions. This would seem to be a straightforward way to monitor a reader's comprehension. However, there are several dimensions of this method of the measurement to be considered. The format, response mode, level, and quality of the question are four dimensions discussed here.

The format for the presentation of the question may be either oral or written. Giving the question to students orally helps eliminate the possibility that they had difficulty reading the question with satisfactory understanding, rather than a difficulty in understanding the text. Most individually administered reading tests and teacher led discussions present the questions to readers in oral form. Group tests and teacher-made exercises generally require the reader to read the question as well as the text. Misunderstanding or misinterpretation is always a potential explanation for an incorrect response, but it is most crucial when the reader has been required to read the questions. Therefore, children should be given opportunities to answer questions presented in both oral and written forms. It is instructive for the teacher to be observant of any differences in comprehension under the two formats, with each reader.

A second dimension of measuring comprehension which is frequently overlooked is the response mode. That is, must the reader recognize the answer to a question as in multiple choice tests, or must the answer be recalled? While the identical product may be elicited by both response modes, the recognition task is easier. Supplying the correct choice can act as a cue for the retrieval of the answer from memory. On the other hand, no such cue is available in the recall question and the inability to retrieve the answer is interpreted as a lack of comprehension. No case is being made here for the use of one response mode over another, as both are appropriate depending on the situation. The point is that teachers need to be wary of equating performances on tasks which have involved different types of processing. If a reader has difficulty answering a question where an answer must be self-generated, the teacher might get a more accurate picture of a reader's comprehension if the question is asked again in a recognition format. In doing this, the teacher can better determine if the comprehension of the idea occurred
or there was a problem in retrieving it from memory.

The level of a question is another dimension of the measurement feature which can have a significant effect on the comprehension product. Taxonomies have been constructed which theoretically represent higher levels of cognitive functions (Barrett, 1976). While the specific levels of cognitive functioning and the corresponding questions remain a source of argument, the principle of higher and lower level questions seems to be widely accepted. Observation of the classroom behavior of teachers and examination of most reading texts indicate a tendency toward asking questions concerned with literal level cognitive functioning, ideas which are explicitly stated in the text. More recently it seems that teachers are being urged to ask higher level questions more often. This increased emphasis on differentiating questioning levels places another responsibility on teachers who are attempting to assess their readers' comprehension. They must remain alert to the varied cognitive demands of the question, since it is quite conceivable that a reader might perform well on literal level questions but encounter difficulty on questions which call for inferencing behavior. Care must also be taken to ensure equal performance demands between instructional and testing settings. Difficulty arises when a reader is taught to read the material with the expectancy that lower level questions will be asked, yet in testing situations items attempt to elicit higher level processing. This problem may also occur in the reverse, as in the case of a reader who may be looking for general features of the text, such as main ideas, while the task demands attention to detail. In each instance the comprehension product may not accurately reflect the actual acquisition of information by the reader.

Quality is the final dimension to be considered in examining the effect of questions on the comprehension product. Some questions are so confusing that the reader's failure to answer the question may not be comprehension difficulty with the passage but an inability to understand the point of a fuzzy question. In a group discussion setting, questions can be rephrased, but in more formal testing situations, the reader is a victim of someone else's inarticulation. The passage dependency of a question is also important to its quality. If a question can be answered by common knowledge without reading the text, such as "Who was the first president of the United States?" it is not measuring informations gained from the passage. Questions, on tests and in discussions usually come in sets and occasionally the answer to one questions occurs in the context of a prior or subsequent question. All
of the characteristics of quality can interact, thus obscuring an accurate view of the reader's comprehension ability. An awareness on the part of teachers, of the quality of their own questions and questions on tests is a necessity. There are several helpful discussions which address the issue of good questions, such as Bormuth (1970), Ruddell (1974), and Pearson and Johnson (1978).

Instructional Environment

The teacher and the instructional setting are two dimensions which combine to form the overall instructional environment. This feature of the context of comprehension assumes importance because it is within the parameters of this feature that the who, what, when, where, why, and how of diagnosis occurs. Teachers make the initial decision to elicit the comprehension product. They often:

1. select the person to read,
2. select the text to be read,
3. select the response mode, the question format and cognitive level, and the type of instructional setting,

and

4. evaluate the product.

Given this amount of control, the teacher is highly influential in affecting the product either positively or negatively.

Teachers' ability to generate quality questions has already been emphasized. Closely related to this issue is their ability to frame and ask questions effectively. Often questions a teacher might ask are of a controlling variety and the reader is forced to give the teacher's answers.

Example: Controlling--
T: Don't you think the town's people in the story were being unfair to the new family?
S: Yes

Alternative:
T: How would you describe the attitude of the town's people towards the new family?
S: They weren't very friendly.

Nonverbal communication is another way teachers can render the comprehension product unreliable. Readers, through years of conditioning, become quite adept at interpreting the meaning of the most subtle movement of the teacher's eyebrow or mouth. Thus, readers become dependent on the cues from facial expressions and body movements to respond to questions rather than sharing their actual perceptions of the text.
An inaccurate picture of a reader's comprehension can develop if a higher level question is asked too soon in a sequence of questions. In this situation readers become confused and their performance may drop off significantly, unless appropriate follow-up questions are asked (Taba, 1965). On the other hand, some sensitive and judicious prompts from the teacher will frequently reveal a much deeper understanding by the reader than an initial response indicated.

Example:

T: How did the trainer feel about his animals?
S: I don't know.
T: Well, what do you think?
S: He liked them.
T: Can you tell me why he liked them?
S: Because they would do tricks for him.
T: And why were they able to do tricks for him?
S: Because they were smart and healthy; because the trainer fed them good food and took care of them when they were sick.

Teachers who uncritically accept "I don't know" answers may be overlooking a vast amount of information acquisition by readers who are unaware that they know the answer to the question or are too timid to take risks.

Perhaps one of the most powerful characteristics of teachers in forming the context for comprehension is the affective and intellectual atmosphere which is generated by questioning and discussions. Does the teacher force the reader to live under the tyranny of the right answer (Stauffer, 1975)?

Example:

T: Bill, what was the cause of the accident?
S1: John dropped the lantern.
T: No, can you tell us, Carol?
S2: John was careless and set the lantern on the floor where he was playing.

On the other hand, responses dealt with in a qualitative sense with follow-up queries are efforts made to gain insight into the way of the student's thinking.

Example:

T: Bill, what was the cause of the accident?
S1: John dropped the lantern.
T: How did he drop the lantern?
S1: Well it was on the floor.
T: After he dropped it?
S1: Well no—he kicked it over when he was playing and his Mother told him never to do that.
T: Carol, would you describe John's behavior?
S2: Careless.
If a teacher does not demonstrate respect for the intellectual integrity of responses which differ from the standard, readers will soon feel too threatened to respond unless they are totally certain of their answer. This type of teacher behavior raises the risk factor to the point where a reader will withhold legitimate responses for fear of being wrong. A no-win situation arises as the teachers cannot elicit accurate comprehension products and the frustrated readers cannot share what they think they have comprehended.

In the first example, the teacher was looking for a specific answer and switched to another child to find it. The teacher in this case did not have patience to pursue, with the first student, the quality of the response. The second example illustrates the sensitive teacher who is willing to probe the initial response of the reader. In this instance, the teacher finds that the student did realize that the lantern actually was on the floor and that the character was behaving inappropriately. Instead of calling quickly on another student, this teacher's persistence was rewarding for both—for the student, because he had a chance to demonstrate what he knew, and for the teacher, because she received a more reliable estimate of the student's comprehension. Also, the teacher built on one response in formulating a next question for Carol.

The specific setting in which reading occurs is a second important dimension of the instructional environment. Some readers perform differentially under individual, small group, or large group situations. It is hard to predict how any one reader might react. One can think of some readers who might be terrified when reading alone with the teacher, and other readers become debilitatingly upset when reading or responding in a group situation. In either case the anxiety, which the setting can generate, may grossly affect comprehension.

In addition to the particular setting, we must note whether or not the setting is teacher-controlled or student-controlled. Again, depending on the teacher or the group, a reader might perform better under one setting than another. How often have we all overheard a reader fluently share a retelling of some recently read text to another child, but under more formal class circumstances become more reticent about what has been read?

Similarly, some readers are more comfortable when reading silently as opposed to orally, and for some, the reverse is true. Oral reading is in a sense a performance and some readers direct so much attention to making themselves sound acceptable that they are not
able to reconstruct much meaning from the text. The reader's failure to obtain meaning under these circumstances is not a sign of inability as much as one of a different purpose. On the other hand, some readers apparently benefit in obtaining meaning by reading orally. Reading orally may help them attend to the text more closely. How many of us find ourselves reading a particularly difficult segment of text orally to aid in comprehension? Most likely we are using the oral reading as a rehearsal technique to aid our memory processing. While reading orally may hinder or help some readers, silent reading can be described in the same way. Silent reading does reduce the production problems of oral reading, and can reduce anxiety because of its privacy. However, some readers in the process of learning to read, experience difficulty in attending to text when reading silently. This behavior may be more a result of a lack of practice than any specific processing deficit, because some instructional programs emphasize oral reading to the exclusion of silent reading. Regardless of the reason, it is always wise to include both an oral and a silent task when assessing beginning and developing readers' comprehension.

Text

The third feature of the context of comprehension is the text itself. It seems when we set out to elicit a comprehension product from a reader, the particular value of the information contained in the text is of small consequence. Intuition says it makes sense to assume that a reader may produce a different product on a topic that is of interest as opposed to uninteresting or even aversive ones.

The specific content and style of the text are also important considerations. For example, if the material is heavily loaded with factual material some readers become overwhelmed and their performance breaks down. For other readers, textual material with much dialogue might be a problem. Generous portions of figurative language can affect a reader's ability to reconstruct the author's meaning. Finally, the simple fact that the text might be poorly written is a factor teachers must keep in mind. Some authors fail to effectively convey their intended meaning because of poor organization, vocabulary selection, or sentence structure that is unusually complex. The reader should not be blamed for the failure of the text to fulfill its part of the communication process.

Every reader will encounter many differing texts, contents, styles, and qualities. The cautions stated above are not meant as suggestions for shielding the reader from simple reality. Rather, they are factors
which the teacher must keep in mind while assembling the description of the reader's comprehending behavior. The reader should be asked to demonstrate comprehending ability within a number of textual situations if an accurate picture is to be formed. One way to do this is through thoughtful teacher selection of texts. It is also vital that readers be given the opportunity to generate a comprehension product from a selection of their own choosing.

Reader

All of the features of the context of comprehension which have been discussed thus far are external and frequently beyond the readers' control. The context for comprehension would not be complete without considering the reader as a feature, and a particularly complex one at that. The reader comes to the text with a host of individualities such as intelligence, interests, specific background experiences, prior success or failure with reading—to list a few. All of these differences interact with the external features of the context of comprehension to ultimately yield a reader's comprehension product. To adequately describe all of these differences is far beyond the scope of our work, and such descriptions are readily available in the literature. However, to interpret the reader's product qualitatively, the teacher needs to be familiar with and sensitive to as many reader individual differences as possible.

Summary

The reading teacher, Mrs. Ferguson, can respond most effectively to Mrs. Stephens and Mrs. Kelly by emphasizing the need to approach the diagnosing of readers' comprehension one a number of features simultaneously. In particular she can point out that the context in which a comprehension product is elicited is important to the teacher in assessing that product. To draw sensible instructional implications from the product, teachers need to be: aware of the measurement technique; sensitive to the instructional situation within which the product was fostered; cognizant of type and quality of the text; and, alert to the personal and intellectual characteristics of the reader. Comprehension is a dynamic process and the reader's product is a sample of the representation of the current state of the comprehension process. However, comprehension is fundamentally unstable. It varies as the context varies. Consequently, before a reliable comment can be made to summarize a reader's comprehension, the following features must be considered:

I. Type of Measurement
1. Were questions used?
2. Were they recall or recognition?
3. Was the level of question appropriate?
4. What was the quality of the question?

II. Instructional Environment
1. Was it a teaching or a testing situation?
2. Was it oral and/or silent?
3. Was it teacher controlled or student controlled?
4. Was it elicited in a group, with a teacher, or without a teacher?

III. The Text
1. Was the text interesting to the reader?
2. What type of content was in the text?
3. What was the text style?
4. Was the text well written?
5. Was the text within the conceptual ability of the reader?

IV. The Reader
1. Is this a fluent reader?
2. How does the reader interact with the dimensions of the instructional setting?
3. What is the reader's background?

REFERENCES


The oral sharing of a personal experience or an object with a peer audience is often a regular part of a student's school day. This sharing time is usually called show-and-tell in the elementary grades and personal reporting or monologuing in the intermediate and upper grades.

Show-and-tell is important as a school learning activity. The oral language and thinking abilities that are developed during show-and-tell enhance success in reading. Pilon (1978) views the development of oral language abilities as critically important for success in reading. Moffett and Wagner (1976) point out that formulating and presenting ideas during show-and-tell provide students with necessary practice to help build continuity of thought, sequencing of information, and clarification and extension of concepts—all of which are essential for success in reading.

In addition to improving their communication skills and organizing their thoughts during show-and-tell activities, students learn how to put themselves at ease before an audience. Show-and-tell is one oral language activity which helps prepare students to meet the more complex and demanding tasks of making school announcements, giving reports, narrating exhibit explanations and slide shows, and presenting stories, plays, and panels.

More than merely a pleasant and interesting time for sharing, show-and-tell can be used as a diagnostic setting to informally assess a student's oral language abilities. To do so requires structure, of which one kind can be provided through a focus on the skills of language elaboration. It is elaboration before a peer audience which is the intent of show-and-tell.

Elaboration is defined by Moffett and Wagner (1976, p. 6) as "...the flowering of an idea...the unfolding of a given..." and "...a tool for finding out fully what one means." The demands of show-and-tell require that the speaker elaborate to: 1) communicate an ex-
perience or describe an object; 2) maintain continuity concerning a topic; and, 3) structure a sequence of information. The competencies of language elaboration become a practical tool for defining, clarifying, and qualifying an incident or a description to an audience of one's peers. As such, show-and-tell can be used as a diagnostic setting to obtain an informal assessment of a student's language elaboration abilities.

A Diagnostic Setting

Questioning is the important condition for establishing show-and-tell as a diagnostic setting. This allows the interests of the peer audience to influence the speaker's elaboration. Questioning also gives the speaker feedback to help him or her stay on the topic and maintain a sequential continuity. Peer questioning helps in organizing and stating the information the speaker has begun to elaborate (Moffett and Wagner, 1976). Teacher questioning challenges the speaker's thinking about the subject chosen (Smith, et al, 1976). Peer and teacher questioning makes both the audience and speaker think a little more.

The informal assessment of the student's ability to elaborate depends on the questions, for they provide the defining, clarifying, and qualifying format. The following guidelines help to establish a questioning framework for show-and-tell:

1. The best classroom climate for showing-and-telling is when students talk, knowing that others are listening with interest.

2. A small conversational peer group is best. A small group enables everyone to have a turn without group
loss of interest.

3. The time should be kept short. Show-and-tell as a diagnostic setting is intended to be friendly but purposeful.

4. The speaker begins to show-and-tell on a topic of his or her selection.

5. After the speaker has told and shown all that he or she wants, the audience is encouraged to ask questions. At first the teacher takes the lead in asking questions but as soon as the peers begin to understand the possibilities they are given the first questioning opportunities.

The accompanying Show-and-Tell Questioning Guide for Language Elaboration can be used to help the peer audience and the teacher form questions which encourage further elaboration from the speaker. Likely questions for the guide were developed from Boyd (1970), Chambers and Lowry (1975), Moffett and Wagner (1976), and contributions from practical use.

SHOW-AND-TELL
QUESTIONING GUIDE
FOR LANGUAGE ELABORATION

Directions:
Use the appropriate (or similar) questions after the speaker has completed the initial remarks. The guide may be used with something the speaker brings to show, or with telling about an experience.

ELABORATION

Defining (an object)

How does it work?
What are the major parts?
What have you done with it?
What is it made out of?
How long will it last?
Where can you get another one?
& Others

Clarifying (an object or experience)

Can you give another example?
Will you explain that some more?
How did you feel about that?
How did you get there?
Why were you doing that?
Where did you go then?
Is there any place you can keep it?
What did your parents want you to do?
Who helped you?
& Others
Qualifying (an object or experience)

Would that always happen?
Would that be so for everyone?
What might happen if you really did that?
What other possibilities are there?
Why did you do that?
Would you be willing to do it again?

Assessing Elaboration Abilities

After a speaker has finished showing-and-telling, and after the audience has had questioning opportunities the teacher can informally assess the speaker's elaboration abilities by using the Language Elaboration Checksheet. Items on the checksheet were developed from information presented by Moffett and Wagner (1976), Pilon (1978), and Smith and others (1976) and modified from practical use. The checksheet enables a teacher to focus observations on the elaboration competencies of defining, clarifying, and qualifying.

Language elaboration strengths and weaknesses can be recorded on the checksheet. The checksheet Assessment Scale is numbered from "1" to "5" with "5" as the highest rating. A "1" indicates inadequate performance. The standard used for the first assessment should be a comparison of the student's performance to that which might logically be expected from the peer group. Thereafter, the standard should be a comparison to the student's own abilities as previously checked.

Periodic assessments can be rated on the checksheet by using a different colored pencil for each of the various assessments. Periodic assessments enable the teacher to compare individual performances and note the progress of a particular child. Instructional objectives can be set, based on weaknesses identified on the checksheet.

LANGUAGE ELABORATION ASSESSMENT CHECKSHEET

Directions

Note the listed competencies as the student is showing-and-telling about an object or experience, placing a check (✓) in the assessment column to indicate student strength or weakness.

Assessment Scale

1—Inadequate  2—Fair  3—Good  4—Very Good  5—Excellent
**LANGUAGE ELABORATION ABILITIES**

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<tr>
<th>Competency</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<tr>
<td>Defining</td>
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<td>Chose words that made images</td>
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<td>Accurately extended concepts</td>
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<td>Tried to stick to the topic</td>
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<td>Tried to answer questions fully</td>
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**Outcomes**

Responding to audience questions provides practice for language elaboration competencies of increasing complexity. Practical use of the questioning format has indicated that speakers begin to anticipate likely questions and present more information without waiting for the audience questioning. Elaboration abilities
grow as students learn to show-and-tell at increasing levels of difficulty.

Summary

Show-and-tell is an important school learning activity. Show-and-tell gives students an opportunity to practice and improve their oral language abilities. A command of oral language is an essential foundation for success in reading.

A teacher can use the show-and-tell activity as a diagnostic setting for assessing a student's oral language abilities. One might structure show-and-tell to focus on language elaboration competencies. Questioning serves as a diagnostic prompt for assessing elaboration through defining, clarifying, and qualifying. The show-and-tell Questioning Guide for Language Elaboration and the Language Assessment Checksheet are two aids which a teacher can use to informally assess a student's oral language abilities. Weaknesses of elaboration can be identified; the teacher can focus questions to help students develop their oral language abilities during upcoming show-and-tell sessions.

Note:
Photograph #1 - Earlington Heights Elementary School, Miami, Florida
Photograph #2 - Pines Middle School, Ft. Lauderdale, Florida

REFERENCES


DIVIDE AND CONQUER:
SYLLABICATION ASSESSMENT AND OLDER STUDENTS

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The teaching of reading, if it is to be effective, depends upon skillful assessment in order to determine a student's specific strengths and weaknesses. To make this possible, reading specialists must have at their disposal a variety of formal and informal measures which tap comprehension, vocabulary, rate, and word recognition abilities. However, as Ahrendt (1975) suggested, one of the major problems of the secondary reading specialist is the lack of a variety of standardized and informal diagnostic tests.

Because many disabled secondary students lack consistency in applying word attack skills to unfamiliar words, there are occasions in which it is necessary to determine these students' ability to use syllabication as an aid for accurate word recognition. Durkin (1976) states that "once a context has been scrutinized for possible help with an identification, the next step in attempting to decode a totally unfamiliar word is to consider its likely syllabication." And, in similar fashion, Kottmeyer (1974) has recommended that "it is evident that most pupils who do not subconsciously or intuitively develop their own generalizations will profit from instruction in methods of syllabication."

It should be noted that the authors are acutely aware of the present controversy concerning the usefulness of teaching syllabication generalizations (Johnson and Merryman, 1971; Zuck, 1974; Canney and Schreiner, 1977). The position taken here is that, despite their imperfections, certain generalizations can be exceedingly useful aids for students to recognize unfamiliar polysyllabic words, particularly if they are applied judiciously and with flexibility. The primary justification for teaching syllabication generalizations with acceptably high degrees of utility is to provide the reader with additional tools to recognize hundreds of words that fit those patterns, thus giving him valuable tools for working out words independently (Cooper and McGuire, 1973). Most secondary students with minimal reading skills (6th grade and lower) do not have the required repertoire of word attack skills which allow them to attack unfamiliar words and consequently, are
prevented from comprehending printed materials which are appropriate for their grade level placement. As such, these readers have an inconsistent method of word attack—they do an adequate job with beginning portions of words and "umble" or "mumble" through longer, more intimidating words (Floriani, 1979).

With this recognition, the authors describe the development of an informal syllabication instrument which has been useful in determining strengths and weaknesses of secondary students' word attack ability.

Test Development

One test that has proven useful for assessing syllabication skills has been the syllabication subtest of the Silent Reading Diagnostic Test (Bond, Balow, and Hoyt, 1970), hereafter abbreviated SRDT. This subtest has been especially helpful since each test item is keyed to one of six syllabication generalizations that have been found to have high utility. However, based upon past observations, particularly of secondary students' performance on the syllabication subtest of the SRDT, their true word analysis skills seemed to be disguised by their familiarity with frequently occurring words (that is, with words appearing in a test that was intended for students in the intermediate grades). Consequently, it seemed necessary to examine the respective grade level equivalents of the words which appear on the SRDT syllabication subtest. Based on the EDL Core Vocabularies in Reading Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies (Taylor, et al., 1979), it was found that at least 60% of these words were sixth grade or below. With the majority of these words lacking an appropriate degree of difficulty, they do not allow older students to demonstrate their true syllabication abilities.

Because of this inadequacy, it was necessary to develop a syllabication instrument that was sensitive to a more mature reader in terms of grade level and experience. To achieve the desired sensitivity, words were selected for consideration on the basis of difficulty ranging from grade nine to grade thirteen. In order to select words within this range, words were examined and sampled using the EDL Core Vocabularies (Taylor, 1979). The specific word selection procedures were as follows:

1. Words, in the grade nine to grade thirteen range, were examined and placed into categories according to five syllabication generalizations thought to have the highest utility (Burmeister, 1978; Evans, 1967; Bailey, 1967). These generalizations included a) divide between compound words, e.g., heirloom; b) divide between double consonants, e.g., squander; c) divide before the consonant in the VCV pattern, e.g., robust;
d) prefixes and suffixes form separate syllables, e.g., reclaim; and, e) consonant plus -le forms a separate syllable, e.g., foible.

2. All words that fit into two or more categories and had to be divided through the use of a combination of generalizations were eliminated, e.g., conversation.

3. Five words from each category were selected at random. Care was taken to ensure, as closely as possible, an equal distribution of words between grades nine and thirteen.

4. Words were listed in a format similar to that used in the syllabication section of the SRDT.

The Delaware Syllabication Survey appears at the end of this article. Readers have the authors' permission to reproduce and use as needed. As with the SRDT, each test item is keyed to a syllabication generalization. These include:

1. Compound generalization, items 5, 7, 13, 17, and 18
2. VCCV generalization, items 2, 10, 15, 20, and 25
3. VCV generalization, items 3, 6, 16, 21, and 24
4. Prefix-suffix generalization, items 4, 9, 12, 14, and 22
5. C + le generalization, items 1, 8, 11, 19, and 23

As is recommended in the SRDT, if a student correctly answers three of five items, it is suggested that review of that generalization is advisable. Fewer than three correct answers indicate an apparent need for additional instruction on that particular generalization. If a student correctly answers four out of five items for a given generalization, one may assume that he has a working knowledge of that generalization.

Because there is little evidence to demonstrate that a reader's ability to divide words on paper necessarily reflects his/her ability to pronounce the words, additional significant information can be gained by asking students to pronounce choices which they have marked. Pronouncing "stə-pend" as "stɪ-pend", for example, would illustrate a student's inability to see the vowel in an open syllable as having a long vowel sound.

Obviously, no test provides an absolute measure of a student's performance. The Delaware Syllabication Survey is no exception. It is informal in nature and was developed out of a need for a more sensitive instrument for use with secondary students with less than adequate word attack skills. The survey has frequently
been used with secondary students and has the following advantages: 1) the test items allow the students to demonstrate their knowledge of syllabication with words that correspond more closely to their age and school experiences; 2) the survey allows the reading specialist to pinpoint areas of strength and weakness since each item is keyed to a specific syllabication generalization; 3) the survey allows for the assessment of student application of vowel generalizations to syllabication generalizations with acceptably high utility; and, 4) the survey can be used in both individual and group assessment.

Delaware Syllabication Survey
(Grade 7 and Above)

Directions: Look at the first word in each row. Then find one that is correctly divided into syllables. Mark the circle in front of it.

Example: asset  O ass-et  ☒ as-set  O a-set

1. wrangle  O wran-gle  ☒ wra-nge  O wra-ngle
2. curtail  ☒ cur-tail  O cur-tail  O cu-rtail
3. stipend  ☒ sti-pend  O stip-end  O stipe-nd
4. onslaught  O onslaught  O ons-laught  ☒ on-slaught
5. forgo  O for-go  ☒ for-go  O f-or-go
6. caucus  ☒ cau-cus  O cauc-us  O ca-uc-us
7. spendthrift  O spe-nd-thrift  ☒ spend-thrift  O sp-end-thrift
8. dwindle  ☒ dwin-dle  O dwind-le  O dwi-n-dle
9. beguile  O beg-ui-le  O begu-ile  ☒ be-guile
10. squander  O squa-nder  ☒ squan-der  O sq-uan-der
11. supple  ☒ sup-ple  O supp-le  O su-p-ple
12. reclaim  O rec-la-im  ☒ re-claim  O recl-aim
13. heirloom  O he-ir-loom  ☒ heir-loom  O heirl-oom
14. chronic  O chr-on-ic  O chr-on-ic  ☒ chron-ic
15. languish  O lang-uish  O lan-gu-ish  ☒ lan-guish
16. bogus  ☒ bo-gus  O bog-us  O bogu-s
17. namesake  ☒ name-sake  O nam-es-ake  O nam-e-sake
18. scapegoat  O scape-goat  ☒ scape-goat  O sca-pe-goat
19. foible  O foible  O foib-le  ☒ foi-ble


The basal reader approach has been used for many
years by elementary teachers. Findings of a survey
conducted by Groff (1962) indicated that basal readers
were the prime source of reading material and that
children were not mobile in their groups. This study
was replicated by Hawkins (1966) in a different part
of the country, and substantiated Groff's findings.
Hawkins theorized that since teachers depend heavily
on the program specified in basal materials, and did
not want them to miss some essential skill, they were
reluctant to move children. He stated that teachers
may lack some factor (adequate time, diagnostic tools,
administrative support) to properly identify specific
reading needs of their pupils. Additionally, Hawkins
found that pupils were grouped for reading instruction
on the basis of "general" reading ability. Results of
a New England survey conducted in 1969 showed that 95%
of the classroom teachers in the primary grades used
this approach. In more recent years, however, the ad­
vantages of other approaches such as the individualized
and the language experience have been pointed out by
reading experts.

The survey reported here was conducted to determine
the most common reading approach currently used by
elementary school teachers in grades 1, 2, and 3. An
important goal of the survey was to gain more informa­
tion regarding primary teachers' grouping practices
during reading. The authors also made special efforts
to determine whether or not teachers regroup children
according to the child's more immediate needs.

Method

Subjects

Two hundred and twenty-five teachers from 100 ele­
mentary schools representing 50 school districts in
New York State took part in the survey. The sampling
represented the middle socioeconomic class. Of the 50
school districts, 38 consisted of a population above
20,000. Six consisted of a population of between ten
and twenty thousand, while the remaining six had a
population of less than 10,000. The total number of teachers, 225, were divided evenly among first, second, and third grade, and all of the teachers taught in self-contained classrooms.

Procedure

The examiners either personally delivered or mailed the following questionnaire to over 450 teachers of grades one, two, and three. Of the 150 questionnaires sent to each grade, 81 were returned for grade 1, 80 were returned for grade 2, and 75 were returned for grade 3. The first 75 questionnaires returned at each grade level were included for use in the study, for the purpose of balance. The survey occurred four months after the beginning of the school year and included the following questions:

1. Grade level 1 2 3
2. I use the following reading approach in my classroom.
   a. Basal
   b. Individualized
   c. Language Experience
   d. Other
   e. Mixed
3. I have divided my class into the following number of reading groups.
   a. one
   b. two
   c. three
   d. more than three
4. After the reading groups were firmly established, I changed a child from one group to another during this particular year.
   a. have b. have not
5. I _____ allocated a certain amount of time every week to regroup children in order to work on a specific reading problem.

Scoring

The total number of tallies were divided according to the grade level of the respondent and responses were converted into percentages. Responses to questions two, three and four were counted only if the respondents had indicated using the basal reader approach in the first question (see Table A).

Results

As the survey shows, a high proportion of children in the primary grades are in classrooms using the basal reader approach. In addition, the vast majority of children are assigned to a high, medium, or low group. Once this assignment is made, it becomes difficult for
a child to be reevaluated and placed in a different
group. Further indications are that few teachers allo­
cate time on a regular basis to regroup the children
according to immediate needs.

Findings indicated (see Table A) that nine out of
ten teachers, randomly sampled from the first three
grades use the basal reader approach. In grade 1, 70
of the 75 respondents used basal reader. In grade 2,
65 of the 75 teachers used the basal approach. In grade
3, 68 of the 75 teachers used basal reader approach.

As shown in Table B the most common organizational
pattern used by teachers who had adopted the basal
reader approach was to divide the class into three
subgroups. Approximately 84% of the responding teachers
divided their class into three reading groups.

Statistics further showed that, once the groups
were established, few children were changed from one
group to another, even though they had been in school
for five months. The responses obtained from teachers
(see Table C) indicated that once a child was assigned
to a particular group, he/she would most likely remain
in that group. Of the 203 teachers who had used the
three group plan, only 21 had changed children from
one group to another. Ninety percent of the teachers
had not changed a child from one group to another even
though school had been in session for five months.

Table D shows the amount of regrouping of children
for specific skill development done by teachers using
the basal reader approach. Findings indicate that about
ninety-five percent of the teachers surveyed who used
a three group organizational pattern did no regrouping
of children.

Implications

Obviously, most teachers still rely heavily on the
basal reader approach. One may speculate that teachers
feel more secure with an approach that provides a se­
quence of reading skills rather than one that does not.
A primary objective for the teacher becomes one of
organizing the classroom to permit each child to pro­
gress "in the acquisition of sequenced developmental
reading skills" (Zintz). The results of this survey
showed that most teachers use the three group concept
where an entire class is divided into low, medium,
and high subgroups.

The collected data raised a number of questions.
Even though school had been in session for four months,
only ten percent of the teachers had moved students
from one group to another. Can this be called flexible
grouping? Why have nine out of ten teachers chosen not
to move students from one group to another? Could the same reasons mentioned by Hawkins fifteen years ago account for the lack of mobility today? Do teachers still depend too heavily on basal material and are they afraid children will miss an essential skills if they are moved?

A final major observations relates to the finding that 84% of the teachers did not allot a certain amount of time every week to regroup children in order to work on a specific reading problem. Hawkins (1966) inferred that "teachers may lack some factor to identify the specific needs of pupils." This could be a possible reason for the lack of regrouping. However, teachers may teach to specific needs informally or individually rather than regroup children according to these needs.

In summary, the findings of this study seem to indicate that grouping within classrooms is no more flexible today than it was fifteen years ago. While "rigidity" is difficult to define, it appears that educators should reexamine their grouping practices to determine if their procedures allow for maximum growth for the individual child.

### TABLE A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Basal</th>
<th>Individualized</th>
<th>Language Experience</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Percent of tchrs using basal rdg. approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of teachers using each of the reading approaches in grades one, two, and three.

### TABLE B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gr. 2 Sub groups</th>
<th>3 Sub groups</th>
<th>More than 3</th>
<th>No set groups</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% of tchrs. using 3 grps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above graph indicates the number of subgroups each teacher who used the Basal Approach organized in each classroom.
TABLE C
Of the 203 teachers using the Basal Reader Approach in the survey, number of teachers who moved children from one group to the next.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Have</th>
<th>Have Not</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% of tchrs who have not moved students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>.91 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>.90 -</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE D
Of the 203 teachers using the Basal Reader Approach, number of teachers who regrouped children to meet more specific needs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Have</th>
<th>Have not</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% of tchrs who have not regrouped children to meet needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>.97 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>.88 -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>.95 -</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Hawkins, Michael L. "Mobility of Students in Reading Groups," Reading Teacher, Vol. 20, November 1966, 136-140.


When children have trouble comprehending what they read, teachers are faced with an especially difficult responsibility. It is not always easy to improve the comprehension of problem readers. There is no magic method that will work for all teachers and for all children. The teacher's responsibility is made even more difficult by some of the suggested methods of teaching reading comprehension, which often are vague or else limited to simple questioning of children after reading. The comprehension ability of problem readers will not be helped a great deal by relying entirely on questioning.

The teacher's specific task is to help problem readers translate the thinking they do in speaking and listening situations to the written language before them. Techniques teachers use must tap the thinking of the problem reader, and help to organize it in such a way as to result in understanding. This goal cannot be accomplished without continuous guidance. Teachers must be keenly aware of this so that they do not leave the understanding side of reading to chance. What can teachers do to improve comprehension ability? What are some specific procedures, techniques, and strategies that will help problem readers develop a systematic approach for getting meaning from what they read?

Here are ten suggested approaches for increasing the reading comprehension of problem readers.

1. Develop Listening Comprehension
The most logical step in helping students to understand what they read begins with oral language experiences. Helping pupils to think about what they have heard will help prepare them to comprehend what they read. Listening is closely related to reading, for both are receptive communication processes. In listening activities, children should focus on the spoken message so that they can understand more mature
and interesting material than if they were silently reading the text. Listening comprehension activities can develop concentration and thinking, which are prerequisites for comprehending what is read. Tape stories for listening or use the tapes that accompany books. Students need not have the books in front of them to follow as they listen. Another listening comprehension activity is suggested by May and Eliot (1979). One student reads to a group of students who do not have books. Before the reader can pass on the book to the next reader, all of the students in the group have to agree on what the first reader said. This exercise forces students to not only listen for understanding but to read for understanding as well. If the message was not understood by the group, then the pupil reads it again, this time trying to communicate (and therefore read) more clearly.

2. Use Pictures or Photos
Taylor (1978) suggests the use of pictures or photos for improving comprehension ability. Pictures are valuable in developing the reading-related language skills of observing, thinking, listening and speaking. In analyzing pictures, students will be practicing the thinking skills required in reading for understanding. The following activities provide a framework for improving the specific comprehension skills of locating details, identifying main ideas and making inferences. Have students:

a. Look at a picture and write or tape-record as many details as they can see.

b. Compare two pictures that are alike in some way. Explain how they are alike and why.

c. Classify pictures according to topics, characters, themes, moods, and settings.

d. Suggest titles for pictures. The titles should express the idea the picture communicates.

3. Introduce Unfamiliar Vocabulary
Vocabulary deficiencies are often associated with difficulty in comprehending. Before children can comprehend what they are reading, they must know what the individual words mean, particularly words basic to the meaning of the reading passage. To eliminate vocabulary difficulties, help students understand unfamiliar words before they read them. Teachers should search the reading selection for words likely to give trouble. These words can be written on the chalkboard, pointed out in the reading selection, and then explained. After explaining what the words mean, the teacher can give additional help by reading sentences in which the student will encounter the words. In some cases, it may be necessary to go a step further and have students use the words in other ways, such
as making up sentences using key words, breaking words into meaningful parts, creating new words based on inflectional endings, affixes and roots, or simply keeping a word bank of key vocabulary.

4. Use a Structured Instructional Procedure for Guiding Student Reading

A procedure for directing the problem reader through the comprehension of a story is suggested by Schwartz and Sheff (1975). Children are guided through three specific steps as they read: posing a problem, reasoning while reading, and verifying. The posing of a problem is initiated by the teacher. The title or a representative picture may be the stimulus that encourages the students to think about what they are going to read. After students have speculated about the title or picture, they read a short portion of the passage. The teacher then asks literal questions about the portion read, and the students answer the questions. Following this discussion, another problem is posed which relates to the literal information discussed. The students then read another portion of the passage to identify information that will solve the new problem. This procedure continues throughout the reading of the story, and new problems can focus on higher level comprehension skills. This procedure actively involves students in shifting their attention from one piece of meaningful information to another as they read through the reading selection.

5. Develop Visual Imagery

Improving visual imagery has been shown to improve reading comprehension (Levin 1973, Lesgold, McCormick, and Golenkoff 1975). Begin by having students try to visualize a few specific things—a favorite object, a place they like, or an event. Then, in small groups, have students tell about their visual images and listen to the descriptions of others. After this introduction to visual imagery, stimulate students to form visual images by reading stories to them. For example, before reading a story, ask students to visualize in their minds as they listen to the words. As the reading continues, occasionally stop to pose questions, but not to seek answers. Next, have students describe the visual images they see after they have read the story. Encourage pupils to supply details not mentioned in the story. Help students by asking specific questions about details not contained in the selection. Another exercise is to have students draw or sketch the visual images formed during reading.

Students should be encouraged to form visual images based on their specific comprehension strengths and weaknesses. For example, students who have problems representing character traits should be encouraged
to form visual images of what a story character might look like. Students having problems with inferring cause-effect relationships would be urged to visualize such information. Through incorporation of each piece of story information into a summary picture, students should begin to understand how to visualize relationships between ideas within a story.

6. Use the Retelling Technique

Asking pupils to elaborate on what they read by retelling story content aids comprehension. This technique is based on the assumption that students will develop the mental set to read for more meaning if they see reading lessons as activities in which they will have the opportunity to share and discuss what they have read in a story. Students will, in effect, develop the attitude that they have some valuable ideas to share with the other students and the teacher. In this procedure the teacher simply says to students after they have read a selection, "Tell me everything you can remember about the story." When pupils stop or hesitate, ask for more information. The teacher might say things like "Is there anything else you can remember?", "Go on.", or "What happened next?". After students finish telling all they can remember, follow with more specific questions so they have a chance to expand or clarify what they said. Whenever appropriate, ask students to give reasons for their answers. The retelling technique, or asking students to elaborate on what they read, works best if teachers practice active listening. Teachers must wait patiently and quietly without interjecting a comment or a question.

7. Use Cloze-Type Exercises

The strict cloze procedure involves copying a reading passage and deleting every fifth word for students to fill in after reading the passage in its entirety. Lopardo (1975) suggests that modifications of this technique can be used to improve reading comprehension. The initial step calls for students to dictate a story to the teacher who transcribes it on an experience chart. Before meeting with students again, the teacher rewrites the story on another chart—this time deleting every fifth word. The students then read the new version putting in words that make sense to fill the blank spaces. The students check their work by comparing the two experience charts. This technique forces students to think about what was read rather than just reading word-by-word from memory. Other variations of cloze-type exercises might involve copying a reading passage from a book, using a multiple-choice format and deleting only nouns and verbs. The difficulty of cloze exercises can be gradually increased by furnishing more items to choose
from, eliminating all answers which force the reader to supply words, using higher level reading materials and omitting a larger percentage of words. It is essential in this technique for the teacher to discuss with pupils the answers that are or are not acceptable. The teacher should not require the exact word but should accept all reasonable answers. Selections should also be self-checking for immediate student feedback. This can be accomplished by letting students compare their answers with the original reading passage.

8. Use the ReQuest Procedure
The purpose of a reciprocal questioning procedure (Manzo 1979) is to improve pupil questioning behavior and reading comprehension. The procedure involves four steps. First, the teacher and students read the first sentence of a selection. The pupils then ask the teacher as many questions as they wish, and the teacher answers the questions. The teacher should answer each question as fully and honestly as possible and should not pretend not to know the answers to try to draw out responses from pupils. In the third step, the teacher asks questions of students. The students should not say "I don't know" since they could at least explain why they cannot answer the question. The reciprocal questioning is repeated for successive sentences until pupils can provide a reasonable response to the question "What do you think is going to happen in the rest of the selection? and why?" Finally, pupils read to determine whether their prediction is accurate.

9. Use the Structured Comprehension Procedure
The structured comprehension procedure (Cohn 1969) is useful for students who have difficulty understanding sentences or paragraphs from content area or factual reading materials. Have students read the first sentence and answer the question "Do I know what this sentence means?" This forces the reader to be an active participant rather than a passive reader. If students do not understand part or all of the sentence, they should ask the teacher as many questions as are necessary to fully comprehend the meaning. After all student questions have been answered the teacher asks one or more questions about the sentence. Students are to write the answers to questions asked by the teacher. This again forces students to actively participate. After all answers are written, the questions are then discussed and answers checked. When ten questions have been answered and discussed, the exercise is concluded and scored so pupils can compare their current effort to those done previously. When students can get three consecutive perfect papers, they can recognize their progress and go on to the next step, which is reading two sentences at a time
and answering questions based on them, leading finally
to a whole paragraph. After students do two sentences
at a time well, the teacher can begin to add higher
level comprehension questions.

10. Use Repeated Readings

The method of repeated readings (Samuels 1979)
consists of rereading a one hundred word meaningful
passage several times. The passage must be at students'
reading instructional level. Students are next given
the passage and told to read it silently so they can
read it orally with few errors and at a comfortable
rate. After silent reading, the passage is read to
the teacher, who counts oral reading errors per one
hundred words. If the passage is too difficult, an
easier one should be chosen. If not more than five
errors per one hundred words are made, the teacher
tells students the time it took, and suggests that
they practice the material silently again so they
can read it more fluently next time. This process
is repeated until students have read the passage three
or four times with an increase in rate and fluency
each time. The repeated readings method enhances com­
prehension because with each reading the reader is
required to give less attention to decoding and more
attention is free to be used for comprehension. An
additional technique for improving comprehension is
to ask students a different comprehension question
after each rereading of the passage.

In summary, teaching reading comprehension is
an important part of any classroom reading program.
Helping problem readers derive meaning and understand­
ing from what they read is a real concern for teachers.
Since they are the key to success in comprehension
of reading, teachers must be aware of specific methods
and approaches that have proven effective in developing
children's comprehension. The ten approaches described
in this article can be successfully utilized for
improving the comprehension skills of most readers.
REFERENCES


When reading current research, one is overwhelmed by the proliferation of "new" theories of the reading process. The purpose of this paper is to present the prevailing theories of reading comprehension, to examine their similarities and differences, and determine whether they are distinctly different or represent a general theory of cognitive development specifically applied to reading.

SKILLS MODEL

The traditional definition of reading comprehension as it is interpreted by the authors and writers of basal readers and literature anthologies, results in the teaching of reading through "separately defined" comprehension skills, and could be called a "skills model." Skills, separately taught in a logical and sequential order, is thought to result in the improved comprehension of textual material.

The traditional skills model view of reading is a bottom up or data driven processing model. In this view of reading, letters are perceived in a left to right sequence until a word is perceived as a whole, meaning is obtained and related to other words in the sentence, thus activating the dominant schema and its particular concepts.

PSYCHOLINGUISTIC THEORISTS

About ten years ago, the "psycholinguistic model" of reading began to assert that contrary to this view of reading as a sequence of skills which one could teach, reading is in actuality a process of predicting meaning based on the reader's knowledge of oral language syntax, semantics, and phonological cues. In other words, based on the reader's store of information about how language works from his knowledge of oral language, a reader already knows something about how words are ordered and what kinds of meaning words possess in certain contexts.

The early psycholinguistic model is primarily a top down or conceptually driven model where the emphasis is on prediction of meaning. Ultimately, it is the
concepts which generate a search for the data or words to confirm these predictions. (Goodman) Within this perspective Smith defines reading comprehension as making sense out of what you read by using what you know, or the theory of the world which you have in your head. Essentially the reader is expected to use prior knowledge and experience with language to get meaning from print.

A characteristic in the development of both the skills and psycholinguistic theories of reading comprehension is the use of paradigms or models from computer science. (Goodman; LaBerge and Samuels; Ruddell) Rummelhart's information processing model integrates both the top-down and bottom-up processing concepts into his interactive theory of reading comprehension. In this view, while the reader is processing features, letters, spelling patterns, etc., at the same time he or she is also attending to general context, syntax, and the semantic and syntactic environment in which the words occur and from which an interpretation of meaning is made.

SCHEMA THEORY

A more recent theory of reading comprehension is called "schema theory" or the "schema perspective." The goal of schema theory is to describe interaction between what is in the text and how that information is shaped and stored by the reader. (Adams and Collins) The underlying assumption is that meaning does not lie solely in the print itself, but interacts with the cognitive structure or schemata already present in the reader's mind. These schemata represent, in Ausubel's terms, the "ideational scaffolding" or framework for understanding new information. Thus the reader has present in cognitive structure schemata which constitute a cognitive filter through which one views the world and from which one predicts or makes inferences about what is read.

Schemata, according to Rummelhart and Ortony, represent generic concepts which are stored in memory. The way in which a particular concept is stored is not by remembering that isolated event in its totality down to its most basic components, but by identifying those aspects of the event related to other concepts already stored. We make connections between the information in the text and what we already know.

A particular schema would be analogous to a play with its integral structure corresponding to the script of the play (Rumelhart and Ortony). So a schema represents generalized knowledge about a sequence of events and, as a play has a cast of characters and a sequence of scenes, a schema has its parts and sequenced events.
We comprehend the message in a text when we are able to call up the appropriate schema, fitting it into an interpretation which allows us to see the text in a certain way. What we store is the interpretation of the text, which we then call up to make inferences about author's purpose, specific characters, and so on in other similar texts.

Generalized schemata allow us to learn or make sense of a wide array of information or very abstract ideas, and these generalized schemata can be modified or adapted as we learn new information. This idea is almost identical to the Piagetian concepts of assimilation and accommodation except that schema theory limits the input to printed material. In Piaget's definition assimilation takes place when new knowledge is integrated into a preexisting knowledge base. Thus, accommodation occurs when the knowledge base, or a schema is changed in order to fit in new information.

We can construct very specific schema to account for situations and events which occur frequently in our environment. This allows us to process this information faster and easier by helping us focus on a pattern of elements which occurs both in the stored schema and in the text.

A particular reader's interpretation of a printed message is influenced by the reader's personal background and history, knowledge, and the beliefs which are brought to bear in constructing schemata to provide the interpretative framework for comprehending discourse. The effect of prior experience can be so great that a reader may perceive only one interpretation for a text to the exclusion of other possible interpretations. (Anderson, July, 1976)

Anderson and others (July, 1976) conducted an experiment with college students from two different disciplines. Each group was asked to read two passages each of which was sufficiently ambiguous so that it could be interpreted in ways related to either of the two disciplines. Scores on multiple choice and other tests indicated that there was a striking relationship between interpretation and professional discipline. Most subjects were unaware that more than one interpretation was possible for each of the passages. The experimenters stated that the results indicated that high level schemata influenced the interpretations of these passages.

Schemata serve as the basis for making inferences or reading between the lines and for making predictions based on observation of only part of the input. Schemata also serve as the vehicles for searching memory
for previously read material and reconstructing meaning.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR INSTRUCTION**

We can see that schema theory has placed new emphasis on various parts of the teaching process, particularly the importance of utilizing preexisting knowledge and experience of the reader, setting purposes for reading, and asking appropriate questions before and after reading.

While we have always deplored the teacher who instructed students to "read from pages 91 to 124," the importance of motivating and building interest as well as assessing the knowledge and experience of the reader before having the student read is more important in light of the schema theory. The secondary reading teacher needs to determine whether the students have the general background knowledge or experience to understand what they are reading as well as how to use it. For the remedial student with limited experience in reading, relationships or similarities to vicarious or real-life situations need to be drawn. Students also need to become aware of their personal attitudes and beliefs which can shape their interpretation of a text, giving it a meaning unlike that which the author intended. When an existing schema is inappropriate to account for the information in the text, teacher will need to help students modify the schema or shift gears to another more appropriate schema.

It seems rather evident that if we want students to comprehend a text in a particular way, that we must assist them in setting up a cognitive structure for doing so. It should also be apparent that we cannot presume that students have schemata for all possible purposes for reading. Instruction should provide appropriate models or exemplars so that students can develop schemata which can be used as the basis for inferring when faced with the purpose in another context.

Vocabulary development becomes more than simply introducing words, looking up definitions in the dictionary, and using the words in sentences. Developing vocabulary means developing concepts for words, and seeing how they are alike or different from other words.

Since Socrates (if not before) teachers have recognized the importance and value of questioning. To a somewhat similar end, reading materials have attempted to generate questions at a variety of comprehension levels following a taxonomic mode. The structure of a comprehension taxonomy presupposes that higher order
understandings are based on the acquisition of lower order knowledge. Yet we have all had experiences of students answering so-called higher order or evaluative questions about a text without recalling some literal facts in the story, and giving a low level response to a high level question. As we begin to focus on reading comprehension in a more wholistic way, the overlapping nature of comprehension skills as well as the importance of knowing which to use and how to integrate this into one's cognitive structure becomes more the issue.

Hopefully the most significant result of recent research on comprehension would be to see the demise of the practice of teaching skills in isolation. Anyone who has worked with remedial readers has noted that some of them are unable to transfer the knowledge of skills developed in isolation into context while reading.

The situation of students trying to outguess the teacher must be changed. A teacher must first assess students' mental background, so that new material can be related to what is known.

The process of learning from written material must be made more efficient. Students need to be compensated for taking risks and speculating about meaning. If the teacher will give trust and confidence to students, s/he will find them more willing to relate how a passage may have a specific meaning for them. This process leads to free exchange of ideas about why passages have various interpretations for different people. The class may thus avoid the numbing process of the teacher's evaluating interpretations by "absolute" authority.

CONCLUSION

In examining the various theories of reading comprehension one is struck by the proliferation of different terms, and what superficially appear to be different theories. There seems to be a tendency for researchers to coin a new term whenever they propose a new perspective on the reading comprehension process, leaving it up to the reader to discern whether and how this is different from or similar to other theories. We are beginning to integrate the reading process into larger theories of cognitive development and learning. For the mature reader, reading is an active process and understanding what you read is as much what is already in your head as what is on the page.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


The traditional common-sense way to teach reading has been viewed as a process of helping individual children "sound-out" unrecognized words as they read orally with their peers and teacher following along in a text. If a word is miscalled or not attempted, both the teacher and children are eager to offer the pronunciation. Besides the embarrassment which accompanies such a practice (Holt, 1969), this simplistic mechanistic approach tends to condition children to view reading as a word-centered oral activity. Perceiving reading as a visual meaning-centered process is the last thing many children think of (Doake, 1976; Tovey, 1976).

This problem is not a new one. Similar concerns were voiced by Huey in 1908:

"Reading as a school exercise has almost always been thought of as reading aloud, in spite of the obvious fact that reading in actual life is to be mainly silent reading. The consequent attention to reading as an exercise in speaking, and it has usually been a rather bad exercise at that, has been heavily at the expense of reading as the art of thought-getting and thought manipulating."

Even though these understandings have been available since the beginning of this century, indiscriminate oral reading practices (where the reader's purpose is other than communicating an author's message to an audience) continue to be used in many classrooms. In a recent study, Tierney (1976) compared Australian and American reading teachers. One of the conclusions of that study was "Oral reading, in lieu of silent reading, was the most frequent, directed, instructional activity in both the Australian and American classrooms." Obviously, children must become aware of the relationships that exist between their oral/aural language and the visual patterns they see in print. It would appear, though, that this is best accomplished by the teacher reading orally as the children follow the text, not the reverse (Smith, 1979).
Why does "round-robin" reading continue to be so popular in spite of research results dating back approximately three-quarters of a century? Do we doubt that beginning readers have the ability to process print silently? Such questions seem to imply that silent reading is more difficult than oral. Goodman (1971), however, claims the opposite. He views silent reading as a one-step process of associating meaning with print, while oral reading requires not only the derivation of meaning but also the encoding of the author's message into oral language. In written language, meaning is triggered by visual patterns, not sound.

Therefore, it would appear that beginning readers need many opportunities for observing/processing the visual features of written language as they listen to someone else read the text orally (Doake, 1979). In this way, meaning is emphasized as children silently utilize their nonconscious language-learning abilities to associate the visual information they see on the page with the oral-aural language rules they have already acquired.

Much has been written about the appropriate use of oral and silent reading. Few researchers, however, have considered students' thoughts related to this issue. The purpose of this exploratory study then was to determine certain boys' and girls' perceptions of oral and silent reading. In order to ascertain their thoughts, the following two questions were used:

1. Would you rather read "out loud" or "to yourself"?
2. Do you think it is easier to read "out loud" or easier to read "to yourself"?

Each of these questions was followed in turn with a "why-question" to determine why students believed as they did.

In order to generate data regarding the questions, the following procedures were followed:

1. The researcher interviewed 18 first-grade and 12 third-grade children the first week of October. The first-graders were being taught to read by the use of individual dictation stories and preprimers with a strong emphasis placed on silent reading. Third-graders were involved in a basal reading program. During these interviews, children were asked the questions of the study. Their responses were written on a prepared form.

2. Following these interviews, preservice teachers worked with the given children in language arts and reading in groups of three from 12:30 to 2:00 PM each
Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday for eight weeks. During this experience, first-grade nonreaders dictated two stories each meeting and were involved in many silent activities related to their dictation stories and books. In addition, they were encouraged to take a number of books home for their parents to read to them. Readers on the other hand were encouraged to read as many books as possible, reading only those books they wanted to read and were able to read. Other than the initial echo-reading of dictation stories, the only time children in either group read orally was when they wanted to share a particular passage with someone. Teachers, however, read to students every day. Great emphasis was placed on meaning, i.e., communicating with an author visually/silently.

3. Following eight weeks of such instruction, the children were interviewed again, using the same questions and procedures employed during the first interview sessions.

4. The data were then analyzed.

5. Implications for instruction were stated according to the findings of the study.

The subjects involved in this study were not randomly selected but were students of teachers who would allow university students to work with their children. These children lived in an above-average socio-economic community near a midwestern city of 55,000 residents.

Question 1: Would You Rather Read "Out-Loud" or "To Yourself?"

During the first interview, first-grade children indicated a strong preference for reading silently (83%), while the third-graders interviewed were much less enthusiastic about reading to themselves (58%). The second interview revealed an even greater enthusiasm on the part of the first-grade students when all (100%) said they would rather read to themselves. On the other hand, fewer third-grade students (42%) favored silent reading during the second interview.

It should be noted (Table 1) that during the two interviews, first graders generated 32 reasons for preferring to read silently with only 4 reasons given for preferring to read orally—a ratio of 8 to 1. (Children's comments in the first and second interviews were not significantly different and were therefore analyzed together throughout this discussion) Third-graders, however, produced more reasons for reading orally (9) than for reading silently (7) – a ratio of 1.3 to 1.
When first-graders were asked why they preferred reading to themselves, their responses referred to the level of noise in the classroom. Below are sample responses: "Cause you have peace and quiet."
"So other people can get their work done."
"It's nice and quiet."
"So I won't bug nobody."

While 69% of the responses referred to quietness, an additional 16% of these first-grade responses indicated an enjoyment of reading silently ("It's funner", etc.), but only 9% of such responses were defensible ([Defensible reasons were judged to be in keeping with current psycholinguistic understandings of the reading process.] "To learn", "You learn to read by reading to yourself," etc.).

Table 1
Reasons Certain First and Third-Grade Children Gave for Preferring Silent and Oral Reading (by Type, Number and Percentage).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Silent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Oral</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st &quot;So it will be quiet&quot;</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>Indefensible reasons</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gr. Social reasons</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;It's funner&quot;, etc.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defensible reasons</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd &quot;So it will be quiet&quot;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Indefensible reasons</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gr. Social reasons</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>72</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Defensible reasons</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interestingly, 72% (5) of the third-grade reasons for reading silently referred to or implied social concerns related to reading "out-loud." These comments were:
"Sometimes I'm embarrassed to read out-loud."
"So the other kids don't hear me."
"Because I don't like to read out-loud."
"Cause I don't like to read out-loud."
"I don't like to read out-loud."

One third-grader did provide a defensible response, saying, "If I make a mistake, I can figure it out myself."

Note also (Table 1) that none of the reasons children gave for preferring oral reading were defensible. They were:
First Grade
"Want them to hear it."
"So everybody can hear me."
"Because it's easier."
"Because I 'sound-out' words better when I read out-loud."

Third Grade
"Get help."
"Because it's more funner and the teacher tells me when I make a mistake."
"Because the teacher can know whether you know your words right."
"So you can learn to read better."
"That way the teacher can tell me if I make a mistake or not."
"I just like to do it."
"Easier to remember stuff."
"I just like to have kids hear me read aloud."
"So other people can hear you."

Observe that most of these third-grade responses seem to imply that the purpose of oral reading is to give teachers the opportunity to help students with unrecognized words. That is, "sound-them-out."

Question 2: Do You Think it Is Easier to Read Out-Loud or Easier to Read To Yourself?

Most children interviewed in both grade levels indicated that they believed it is easier to read silently than orally. In the first interview, 72% of the first-grade responses indicated that it is easier to read "to yourself." During the second interview, after experiencing eight weeks of instruction which stressed silent reading (described previously), 94% of the first-grade responses supported the belief that silent reading is easier than oral. Conversely, more third-graders believed silent reading to be easier than oral during the first interview (75%) than during the second (67%).

Also note (Table 2) that first graders offered 15 reasons for believing it is easier to read silently, with only 5 given for believing that oral reading is easier—ratio of 3 to 1. The third graders also produced more reasons for believing it is easier to read silently (8) than orally (5)—ratio of 1.6—1.

Table 2 also shows that of those first and third-grade children who thought silent reading was easier, 46% (7) and 63% (5) of their responses (respectively) were "Defensible reasons." Those responses were:

First Grade
"If you make a mistake, you can read the line again and see what it says."
"To learn to read." (Reading process inferred)
"Because your eyes can move faster when you read."
"So you can think about what you're reading."
"Because you can read more words when you read to yourself."
"It just seems easier."
"Just easier."

Third Grade
"Sometimes you don't know every word but you can still go on."
"Cause you can read faster when you read silently."
"So when you read silently you can figure out the words yourself."
"Because if you're reading out loud and get stuck, you're holding up time."
"Just easier."

Table 2
Reasons Certain First and Third-Grade Children Gave for Believing That It Is Easier to Read Silently or Orally (by Type, No., & %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st &quot;So it will be quiet&quot;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Indefensible reasons</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social reasons</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Social reasons</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other indefensible reasons</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Other indefensible reasons</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defensible reasons</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Defensible reasons</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, Table 2 shows that of the reasons for believing that silent reading is easier than oral, 40% (6) and 25% (2) of such responses (respectively) were Other indefensible reasons. Most of these responses (given below) failed to deal with the question, but rather referred to feelings about reading silently—reasons for not reading orally (first grade) and to socially related concerns (third grade).

First Grade
"Cause it's nice."
"Cause it's still funner."
"I like to read to myself."
"I really don't feel like reading out-loud."
"Because my mom and pop won't correct my mistakes."
"Other people make noise and you don't hear too good."
Third Grade

"If I read out-loud and get mixed up on some words, they'll laugh at me."
"Cause I 'screw-up' and I don't like to in front of people."

Note once again (Table 2) that all children who believed it is easier to read orally gave indefensible reasons for believing that way. These responses were:

First Grade

"Because I get mixed-up when I read to myself."
"Then other people can hear you."
"People can help you if you have trouble."
"Because you can talk."
"Because my mother helps me."

Third Grade

"When you read by yourself you skip some lines."
"Because you're saying it out."
"You can say the words better and it helps you learn to read."
"Can spit it out."
"I don't skip as many lines."

Becoming "mixed up" or skipping lines while reading silently might reflect children's lack of experience with silent reading rather than the difficulty of the task.

In Conclusion

The degree and dramatic increase of the percentage of first graders preferring to read silently (83-100%)—as indicated in the first two interviews—becomes even more striking when compared with the third-graders' lesser and decreasing desire to read silently (58-42%). It is equally impressive to note the ratio of the number of reasons first graders gave for preferring silent reading to oral—ratio of 8 to 1. Third graders, on the other hand, gave more reasons for reading orally than silently—ratio of 1.3 to 1. Qualitatively, the particular reasons children in the two grades gave for preferring to read silently did not seem to be significantly different, except for first-graders' preoccupation with "So it will be quiet" (69%), and the embarrassment third graders apparently associated with reading orally—"Social responses" (72%).

However, of the reasons given for preferring to read orally, the third-grade responses did seem to be significantly different. Responses such as "Get help" and "That way the teacher can tell me if I make a mistake or not", seem to suggest that the third graders had been conditioned to view oral reading as "sound-it-out" process which gives teachers an opportunity to correct their "mistakes"—not a communicative meaning-centered activity.

Even though most children in both grades believed that it is easier to read silently than orally, the percentage of first graders holding that point of view (72-94%) surpassed
the percentage of third graders who believed that way (75.6%). There was also a significant difference between the ratios of the number of reasons first and third-graders gave for believing that it is easier to read silently than orally (3 to 1 and 1.6 to 1 respectively). The specific reasons children in each grade gave for believing it is easier to read silently/orally, though, were not significantly different.

What implications do these findings hold for reading instruction? It would appear that if teachers encouraged their students to process print silently, as the first-grade teacher and college students did in this study, children would not only learn to read silently but would prefer reading that way. Perhaps the third-graders' confidence in silent reading regressed because the silent reading stressed by college students did not match the "sound-it-out" view of their "real" teachers.

Doak (1979) stated: Many children have survived what we have done to them in the name of reading instruction because of an intrinsically motivated drive towards achieving literacy and because they have refused to allow their already well-developed language learning strategies to be distorted and destroyed. Those who fail to achieve a functional level of literacy are frequently those who have tried to follow the teachers' instructions precisely. Their "sounding-out" skills simply do not work for them.

More teachers need to understand and appreciate the phenomenal language abilities children possess for silently processing print. Furthermore, it would appear that if learning to read were viewed as a nonconscious language-learning task rather than "sounding-out" letters and words, more children would perceive reading as a silent process.

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