DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 043 458 RE 002 939

AUTHOR Furr, Oneta R.
TITLE Improving Flexibility in Reading for the Advanced Student.
PUB DATE May 70
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the conference of the International Reading Association, Anaheim, Cal., May 6-9, 1970

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.95
DESCRIPTORS *Advanced Students, Cognitive Processes, *Reading Comprehension, *Reading Instruction, Reading Processes, *Reading Skills, *Reading Speed

ABSTRACT

Reading as thinking, the key to reading maturity, flexibility, and efficiency, is dependent upon the reader's purposes and his repertory of reading skills. Instruction should begin with the teacher's evaluation of the reader's functioning skill level, his psychological characteristics, and the nature and quality of his stored information. Skillful reading instruction from the beginning and at all levels contributes to this essential objective--reading as a thinking process. The flexible reader, as a result of his attention to purpose, difficulty of material, complexity of theme, and background knowledge must make adjustments in his reading approaches. Variability in rate does result from this reading-thinking process. Therefore, teachers should present their students with varied reading material, provide exercises in reading for a variety of purposes, and frequently assess progress in developing reading flexibility. References and applications of the reading as thinking concept to the classroom are included. (Author/CL)

Dr. Onota R. Furr
Professor of Education
Midwestern University
2615 Bretton Road
Wichita Falls, Texas 76308

Section Topic: Problems in Reading for the Advanced Student

Speaker's Topic: "Improving Flexibility in Reading for the Advanced Student"

All planning for elementary reading instruction should begin with the student. Teachers may need this special reminder today because of the present influx of materials, gadgets, and equipment. Identification of student needs requires careful diagnosis which determines levels of achievement, types of interests, and sources of motivation among the group. The skillful planning of a meaningful program of reading instruction can then be accomplished in terms of the information revealed by the diagnosis.

Identification of the Advanced Student

The advanced student, who is the special focus of this discussion, is in special need of early identification. This task is not particularly difficult for an alert teacher. Such a student is usually reading above grade level, often having learned to read before starting to school. He has an elevated score on intelligence tests. Standardized reading tests indicate intellectual superiority, especially in the area of comprehension. The advanced student will likely have learned by many different methods. An example was Stephen, 5½ years, who said, "I didn't have to learn to read--I just always knew how." On investigation the mother revealed that she first noticed Stephen reading the titles of the records as he played them on his record player at 3½ years. Stephen had associated the words in the titles with the words he heard on the records. He soon was reading stories that had been read to him several times. Thus, his keen interest in words and his retention, both visual and auditory, provided clues to his intellectual potential and his advancement as a reader.

Classroom observation, which may confirm test results, is another useful means by which the advanced student can be recognized. Students who demonstrate unusual powers of concentration, have superior command of language, enjoy a keen sense of humor, learn quickly, recall

accurately, exercise exceptional powers of observation, see relationships, and can effectively approach the solution of practical problems are likely to be mentally above average. In addition, a survey of favorite television programs, books, magazines, and leisure time activities will often identify individuals with broad, mature interests and a marked desire to learn (11). Although there are some over-achievers in reading, they are comparatively few. The large majority of advanced readers tend to come from the advanced student group. It is for this reason that the present discussion will give major consideration to the advanced student as the primary source from which advanced readers are developed.

Quality diagnosis is the beginning of quality instruction. As Whipple points out, "No good plan for reading can be carried out until the teacher knows his pupils well" (8). To become truly acquainted with pupils requires time, effort, interest, and proper evaluation. Teacher diagnosis of student needs involves the accumulation of information which leads to the development of insights regarding the reader's functioning skill level, the nature and quality of his stored information, and his psychological characteristics. Valuable information for instruction may be gleaned from a knowledge of the makeup of the child's own private world. The type and breadth of his interests and the economic, educational, and cultural levels of his home and community are highly important

factors. The extent to which he is accepted as a worthy member of his family and his peer group, as well as the state of his physical health and wellbeing, must likewise be considered. Such elements are of great significance in the planning of reading instruction for all students, whether advanced or not.

Working with the Advanced Reader

The advanced student in reading, at whatever level, poses a challenge even to a discerning teacher. There is the ever-present threat of a tendency on the part of the teacher to neglect the individual who "can make it on his own". The development of a versatile or flexible reader, however, requires careful attention. Although the able student may forge ahead on his own initiative, his progress can be enhanced by the skillful direction of a capable, understanding teacher. For example, the advanced student may tend to memorize the beginning reading vocabulary. By the time he reaches the third or fourth grade the reading vocabulary load becomes too great for memorization, with the result that the individual is in danger of becoming disabled in spite of his beginning potential. A student's ability to proceed satisfactorily "on his own" becomes substantially limited under such circumstances. He begins to suffer the consequences of having to proceed without the benefits of skilled direction by a capable teacher.

Likewise, in developing study skills and critical reading skills the advanced reader may profit greatly from the benefits of skillful instruction. Although he may be reading satisfactorily at his own level, he is more likely to progress toward reading maturity when he is properly guided. What we do with students does make a difference! Teachers must provide challenging and enriching reading experiences. A creative and imaginative teacher who has instructional expertise in reading is essential if the capable student is to fulfill his reading potential.

The need of the advanced reader is not for less guidance but rather, for guidance of a somewhat different nature than that given to his less gifted fellows. If the development of poor attitudes and habits of reading is to be avoided, frequent and careful evaluation is required. Fundamental skills should be developed sequentially, but at a faster rate than usually expected. Vocabulary development, word recognition skills, oral reading, comprehension, purposeful reading, and the reading study skills must all move forward in a spiral fashion with no limits set by grade level. The important consideration in teacher and/or student evaluation is whether there has been progress since the previous evaluation.

Caution should be exercised in planning reading activities for the advanced student. Assignments must be

purposeful and appropriate to the achievement level and interest of the student. Opportunities to participate in group discussions, to profit from the insights of classmates, to check the validity of the reader's own thinking, and to learn to express ideas in a social situation are very important. The use of basal readers makes it possible for the advanced student to react at a high level of interpretation because of his awareness of implied meanings. Supplementary reading activities can extend ideas acquired in basal reading and can enrich class discussions.

Time should be provided for the advanced reader to read self-selected materials that satisfy his personal needs and curiosities. He can be guided in the selection of many types of materials and at different levels of difficulty. At no time should the advanced student be allowed to settle for minimum requirements and to fritter away his time (8).

The advanced student in reading needs exposure to materials of great number and variety. Today's commercial market offers promising assistance in meeting this need. A pressing question facing teachers today is: Which materials can best be utilized to serve a particular student's need? The library has become a materials center or learning center where books and magazines are only a part of available resources. Audio tapes, filmstrips,

and programmed learning materials are especially useful in challenging the capable student.

Certain responsibilities for promoting optimum development of advanced readers rest with the school. The general school environment should allow reasonable freedom of functioning for (students in) a cooperatively-developed reading program. The school schedule must accommodate teacher-student conferences, as well as formal and informal evaluation. Such evaluations can result in the refinement of skills, the setting of further goals, and the selection of procedures and materials to be utilized.

Flexibility in Reading

Analysis of the characteristics of advanced readers indicates they have a repertory of reading skills and that they use these skills as appropriate to their purpose and to the material (11). They are skillful in adjusting method and rate to their purposes for reading, thus showing unusual flexibility. Flexibility in reading is a key to the reading maturity and efficiency which characterize the able reader. According to Arthur McDonald there are at least three identifiable characteristics of the flexible reader: (1) He reads with a definite purpose. (2) He adapts his reading approaches to variations in style, content, difficulty of vocabulary, and his own background of knowledge. (3) He is emotionally free to look beyond the printed lines to the meanings that are

implied (1).

In order to improve flexibility reading experts recommend that students be made aware of certain rate adjustment approaches. The characteristics and application of each approach should be part of the fundamentals of a basic reading program. The four identifiable techniques include: skimming (reading swiftly and lightly), scanning (reading rapidly for main ideas), study reading (reading with maximum understanding), and reflective reading (following directions, enjoying poetry, etc.). Planned instruction and assessment should provide an understanding of each approach, together with opportunities for declaring purposes and practice in applying different techniques to different materials. With frequent assessment students are thought to become increasingly flexible and efficient in all their reading. The steadily enlarging store of knowledge in all fields necessitates a careful appraisal of possible ways to improve reading efficiency.

Recent research challenges the widely prevalent concept that the reader can deliberately and consciously vary his reading approach and reading rate. In one study of 6000 elementary-to-adult readers 90 per cent maintained a characteristic approach to almost all types of reading, despite instructions for changes in purpose and variation in material (1). Research done by Spache, Sheldon and others emphasizes the great complexity of the reading

characteristic known as flexibility. Further research on advanced readers may furnish clues as to how efficiency, flexibility, and maturity in reading are attained. Can each of these goals be taught as a separate act? At present, research suggests that flexibility is a very complex reading activity which involves a number of differing but related factors. This view is in contrast with the concept of flexibility as being one inclusive ability or skill. It may be possible that reading efficiency, flexibility, and maturity are by-products of the reading-thinking approach to instruction. That is, the key is possibly to be found within the cognitive process, rather than in the conscious use of flexibility as a learned skill.

Reading as Thinking

Reading and thinking cannot be divorced from each other. Recognition of this fact may give new light in which to consider the nature of flexibility. Reading and thinking are mental processes. In terms of the written word, both are necessary to an understanding of the writer's message. Reading is a process based on the experience and knowledge of the reader and his desire to find out. Reading, like thinking, involves continual change (10). The reader interacts with the printed ideas, sequence, problems, and solutions. He reads to test his purposes and his assumptions. His ability to perform critically and creatively, his level of maturity, his declared purposes,

and the nature and difficulty of the material are all important elements of the cognitive aspect of the reading-thinking process.

Flexibility results when an individual reader knows what he wants, knows how to get what he wants by reading, and is willing to persevere to accomplish his purpose. Hence, the most urgent need of students today is to acquire compelling motives for worthwhile personal reading (10). It can be seen that the reader's purpose reflects his experience, his knowledge, and his motivation. Sound reading instruction must elicit maximum student participation and vigorous intellectual effort at all levels.

In light of the apparent present knowledge and experience, the teacher's task is that of giving emphasis to reading as thinking, while at the same time insuring a sound reading foundation. For the advanced student--and all others--the basic reading foundation will include the following: First, efficient tools--word analysis, location skills, study skills, organization skills, etc. Second, many and varied reading materials--books, visuals, auditory items, graphics, etc. Third, guidance of the reader into experiences both in and out of school which will broaden his life space and extend the content of his mind. Finally, guidance by the teacher which will not only stimulate thinking and involvement, but will likewise free the student's mind to function according to his purposes, interests, needs, and level of achievement.

Classroom Practices

In an attempt to make application of the reading-as-thinking concept to the classroom situation some successful instructional techniques are here presented. Restrictions of space will limit the number of examples given. The suggestions are by no means intended to be prescriptive. They are offered in the hope that they may stimulate imaginative adaptations on the part of teachers.

Word analysis

The advanced student is often interested in the history of words. Resources are available in some of the new basal readers, spellers, and special books devoted to word origins. (All Through the Year, Harper & Row, Publishers; Basic Goals in Spelling, Webster Division, McGraw-Hill). Examples taken from such sources are:

> CIRCUS is a Latin word meaning "circle" and is related to the Greek word for "ring". When we talk about a three-ring circus, we are really repeating ourselves. (All Through the Year)

> Alarm comes from the Italian All'arme which means "To arms!" Later it came to mean the "fear" felt by the people when they heard that order. Today alarm may also mean the mild warning of an alarm clock. (All Through the Year)

Many aids are available for promoting independent word study. Scott, Foresman has a dictionary program which includes six different dictionaries to serve different levels. The series begins with My Little Pictionary and advances to a High School Dictionary. The latest publications, In Other Words, I and II, are thesauruses that explore word meanings, synonyms, antonyms, and words representing sets or collections of things. The able student can work independently with such tools, and can develop clarity and precision as he extends his vocabulary.

Harper and Row, Ginn, and Macmillan also have good children's dictionaries.

Varied materials

Weekly newspapers such as My Weekly Reader and Scholastic can become multi-level if a teacher will order a range of levels, such as kindergarten through eighth grade, suited to the range in reading comprehension in the classroom. It does not seem wise to order 30 identical copies of a given publication for a given grade level when the reading achievement varies from three grade levels below to three levels above. This variation within a class is not unusual.

Variety in reading materials is a key to instruction for the advanced reader. Garrard Press and Continental Press offer interesting crossword puzzles. Pictorial encyclopedias (Children's Press), beautifully illustrated books on the several states and regions of America by the same publisher, human interest stories about authors (Walch), the development of folk tales from ancient times to the present (Compton's), a series on the childhood of famous American citizens (Bobbs-Merrill), filmstrips on different holidays (Society for Visual Education, Inc.), and the Newbery and Caldecott selections are representative of the wide selection of materials to which the advanced reader should have ready access.

Broadening and Enriching Student Experience

Wide reference reading is valuable for building background of information. In this regard the following classroom activities were considered successful:

After a study of Old English, students collected words and listed them. Sentences were then written in which Old English spellings were used: "The yonge Squyer's kyngdom is ferre in the hielands."

Research on different languages was presented in illustrated oral and written reports to the

class. Sometimes students combined their efforts:

> "The Greek alphabet is a branch of Indo-European family of languages. It is related to the Latin and Sanskrit, Slavic, Celtic, and Germanic languages. It is thought to be the most beautiful and effective language ever spoken. Many of our words came from this language."

Commercial materials can enrich listening experiences and strengthen concentration. Science Research Associates Listening Tapes are especially popular. These are programmed lessons in listening that can make a real contribution to the individualization of instruction for the able reader.

Stimulating Student Involvement

One research project grew out of the reading of a story in a basal text. The story, "Death Trap of the Ages", (Bright Peaks, Houghton-Mifflin), presented the springboard for a study of a favorite prehistoric animal. The resource center, family libraries, and the city library provided reading materials. Fossils were brought in. Skills which were involved in the project included locating information, taking notes,

comparing resources, and writing reports. The illustrated reports were shared with the class.

Wide reading of good books can be encouraged by providing time for children to share their favorite books. The method chosen should be left to the individual. Posters or diaramas that depict a scene from the book, stick-type puppets of favorite characters, book jackets, panel discussions and dramatized scenes are common choices of ways to share a favorite story. Writing a radio script, preparing a book talk, and writing a play based on a favorite book are other possible ways to encourage wide reading and response to what is read.

Reading poetry can stimulate interest in writing poetry. Many subjects interest children, such as weather, seasons, emotions, and pleasant experiences. Limericks provide another stimulus for writing and for humor. Safety limericks can be encouraged:

"There was a young boy from the wood
Who set fire to all that he could.
If his parents find out
He better look out
'Cause boards don't feel very good."

Summary

Reading as thinking, key to reading maturity, efficiency, and flexibility, depends on the reader's purposes and his repertory of reading skills. Instruction begins with the teacher's evaluation of the reader's functioning skill level, his psychological characteristics, and the nature and quality of his stored information. The advanced reader makes many adjustments in reading approaches as the result of his attention to purpose, the difficulty of material, complexity of theme, and background of knowledge. Variability in rate is the result, not the cause, of the reading-thinking process. The Seventies offer new materials and techniques which can be particularly profitable to the advanced reader.

REFERENCES

1. Beery, Althea, Thomas C. Barrett and William R. Powell (eds.). Elementary Reading Instruction. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1969.

2. Carter, Homer L. J. and Dorothy J. McGinnis. Diagnosis and Treatment of the Disabled Reader. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1970.

3. Durkin, Dolores. Teaching Them To Read. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1970.

4. Durr, William K. (ed). Reading Instruction, Dimensions and Issues, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1967.

5. Figurel, J. Allen (ed). Improvement of Reading through Classroom Practice. Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1964.

6. Frost, Joe L and G. Thomas Rowland. Curricula for the Seventies. Dallas: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969.

7. Johnson, Terry D. "A Bibliography for Self-Directed Practice in Reading," Journal of Reading, 13 (Feb. 1970), 370-378.

8. Schubert, Delwyn G. and Theodore L. Torgerson (eds). Readings in Reading: Practice, Theory, Research. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1968.

9. Spache, George D. and Evelyn B. Spache. Reading in the Elementary School, second edition. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1969.

10. Stauffer, Russell G. Directing Reading as a Cognitive Process. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1969.

11. Strang, Ruth and Dorothy Kendall Bracken. Making Better Readers. Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1957.