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ABSTRACT

This paper identifies three trends in reading research that reflect the shift from an emphasis on teaching method to the examination of individual and contextual variables, an interdisciplinary approach to the study of the reading process, and the effort to develop more comprehensive models of the reading process. Three studies of cross-age and peer tutoring are described; contributions from disciplines related to reading, apparent in this research, include a theoretical base to explain the tutoring interaction, measures of social interaction and related language variables, and a basis for behaviors taught to tutors. (KS)

RECENT RESEARCH IN READING AS REFLECTED IN PEER TUTORING RESEARCH

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by

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The diversity and sheer number of reading studies make it difficult to speak comprehensively of any one specific trend in reading research. However, drawing upon major widely discussed reading studies, one can identify three continuing trends in reading research. These trends will be discussed briefly in the first part of this paper. After tracing the effect of these trends in research on classroom practices, I shall summarize three peer tutoring studies to point out how they reflect the recent trends in research.

Trends in Reading Research

The three trends in reading research include: (1) the shift from an emphasis on method of teaching to an examination of personological and context variables and especially to studies on the nature of the reading process; (2) the interdisciplinary approach to the study of the reading process; and, (3) the efforts to develop more comprehensive models of the reading process. These trends are interrelated, for while once the main goal in reading research was to find the best method, currently most reading studies are in the areas of physiology and psychology (Weintraub, et al., 1976-77, p. 233). This basic research on the physiology and psychology of reading has in turn provided more insight into the reading process, clarified the need for input from related disciplines, and established an information base for the development of more comprehensive reading models.

The trend toward basic research and research on teacher, pupil and context variables has been stimulated by the First Grade Coopera-

tive Studies. This series of studies compared the effectiveness of a variety of reading methods (Dykstra, 1968). The much discussed implication drawn from the analysis of results of these studies was that something other than method was the crucial factor in achieving success in teaching reading. Attention in research has turned to a close examination of the reading process and to an analysis of characteristics of student, teacher, and school.

The practical impact of the switch of focus has been not only increased federal funding of basic research but local focus and pressure on the teacher. Teachers are being held responsible and accountable for the reading achievement of their pupils. However, the method controversy will not fade quickly and a new study (Bennett, 1976) comparing growth in reading achievement in structured and informal settings may well generate renewed interest in teaching strategies and methods.

Reading research continues to involve interdisciplinary efforts as reading researchers build upon the findings of sociologists, linguists, cognitive psychologists, and others in all areas of communication and learning behavior. For example, Smith (1975, pp. 1-2) states that he has drawn from a variety of disciplines to provide insight into the process of learning to read. The relationship of language, perception and affective factors in reading is explored in recent books of readings edited by Kavanaugh and Mattingly (1972) and Ekwall (1973). Moreover, the renaming of one English journal (Elementary English to Language Arts) reflects interdisciplinary focus and broader conception of the reading process.

This interdisciplinary focus and research is affecting classroom practices. The popular use of sentence combining and patterning ac-

tivities by reading teachers is an illustration of the influences of the O'Hare (1971) and Mellon (1969) research on language and composition. These studies not only speak to but have influenced reading instruction.

Related to the interdisciplinary trend in reading research is the growing effort to develop a global model of the reading process (Davis, 1971; Singer and Ruddell, 1976). While Gibson and Levin (1976) build on basic research on the physiology of reading behavior in developing their reading theory, other theory and model builders are attempting to clarify the reading and teaching of reading process in terms of social, cognitive, perceptual, affective and linguistic factors. These efforts, along with the work of Goodman, have to some extent stimulated teacher awareness of a wider, "meaningful" and "meaning-oriented" view of the reading process. The work of Kenneth Goodman (1969) and Smith (1975) has helped clarify interrelationships among thinking, reading, and language. Related work (Goodman, Y. and Burke, C.) may have had more influence on the reading teacher than the theory building. In practice the simple but important result of this view of reading is that a teacher's interpretation of a child's rendering of "He rode a horse" as "He robe a house" may lead to follow-up lessons with a focus on meaning (syntax, semantics) and not a total focus on more phonics (here / or /) or visual discrimination (here / b /, / d / contrast).

These three trends--the interdisciplinary nature of reading research, efforts to develop a more comprehensive model of the reading process, and the concern for factors in teaching reading other than reading method--are reflected in the research on children as reading tutors.

Tutoring St ies

Initial studies or reports on peer or cross-age tutoring tended to be enthusiastic case studies or testimonials. However, a series of field studies (Ellson, et al., 1965) demonstrating that even retarded children could tutor peers generated interest and studies on the tutoring process. Ellson's study and the earlier case studies apparently had a single (reading) orientation, did not relate a reading model (or even definition) to the research project and usually examined method (programmed materials) and not the interaction process. Recent tutoring studies have to varying degrees been more interdisciplinary in approach, built on or added to a broad reading model, and examined factors other than reading method. In my own research on peer tutoring, contributions from disciplines related to reading have provided (1) a theoretical base to explain and explore the tutoring interaction (Powell, 1975; Flavell, 1968); (2) social interaction measures (Baldwin and Garvey, 1973); (3) measurement tools to determine the impact of related language variables (Loban, 1976); and, (4) a base for behaviors taught to tutors (Rosenshine and Furst, 1971). In the three studies described below, these contributions are clear.

The long range goal of my peer tutoring research is to develop a tutoring program enabling a teacher to individualize reading instruction using any reading method. The focus on strategy and the behavior of tutors in the initial study reflects the trend to look beyond method and to use research findings from related fields. One of the first steps in developing a tutoring program is to establish specific behaviors for tutors since children who are not prepared for the task tend to be either over-domineering or fail to provide

any guidance.

In the first study on tutoring, working with Dr. Amy Allen from John Carroll University, a program was developed for tutors based on research on teacher behavior. Previous tutoring programs seemed to have evolved from an empirical base (Niedermeyer and Ellis, 1971) and from requirements dictated by the method used (Ellson, 1965). In developing our program for tutors, we referred to studies on teacher behavior. Rosenshine and Furst (1971) reviewed studies of naturally occurring teacher behavior related to student achievement and identified clarity, variability, enthusiasm, task-oriented behavior, and provision of opportunity to learn material taught as the behaviors most strongly correlated with high achievement. Incorporated into a tutoring program, these behaviors were taught to fifth grade children who were able to utilize them effectively (Boraks and Allen, 1977).

In that initial study we found that "ego" problems developed when same-age peers tutored fellow students. The tutees wanted a chance to tutor. Because research suggested that the tutor gains more in reading skill than the tutee and because the theoretical base for peer tutoring (role-playing) supports the concept that the opportunity to act as tutor is crucial, we undertook a second study in which children switched roles. In this study a child tutored and then was tutored by a same-age, same-ability peer. The goals were (1) to determine if children could tutor each other effectively in a reciprocal dyad using highly structured reading materials or tasks, and, (2) to determine if this tutoring would be as effective as direct adult instruction. Education undergraduate students were randomly divided into two groups and randomly assigned to a same-age, same-ability dyad. College students worked with this dyad two days a week, an hour each day for

twelve weeks. One group of college students (Group A) gave direct reading instruction to their dyad (grades 2-5) and for a specified time provided each child with individual instruction. The second group of college students (Group B) provided some direct instruction. Then for a specified period of time Group B students taught the children tutoring behaviors and provided the children with an opportunity to tutor each other. The results (based on pre- and post-test Slossen Oral Reading and the oral reading paragraphs from a commercially produced Informal Reading Inventory) were educationally and statistically significant. Children in Group B or dyads involved in Reciprocal Peer Tutoring (RPT) made greater gains in reading than did the group receiving direct instruction. It was not possible to pinpoint the reasons for the gain; it may have been the variety in instruction (peer plus college tutor), an increase in self-esteem gained from playing tutor, the opportunity to rethink instructions as they were presented to a peer or simply the opportunity to speak more.

Since the results of this second study suggested teacher time might be best spent in organizing an RPT program than in direct instruction for at least one phase of reading instruction (practice), several classroom teachers were encouraged to try this approach. The teachers found it best to start with a small group or one reading group. Materials or assignments (such as listen to your partner read and ask follow-up questions) had to be carefully structured. A new unit (how to end the session, switch roles) was needed. Moreover, teachers discovered it best to have children rotate partners daily so conflicts did not develop. The study of RPT in the classroom has been informal. Formal analysis of RPT in the classroom was delayed in order to find if it were possible to develop a measure of a child's

potential success as a tutor.

This was the goal of the third study. The studies of Flavell (1968) and Baldwin and Gavey (1971) suggested that social interaction and language skills would be the basis for success in a tutoring interaction. Language and reading models were examined but as Athey (1971, pp. 3-6) concluded, "we are a long way from achieving a comprehensive model of either reading or language or from an integrated model of the two processes."

An interaction task based on one developed by Baldwin and Garvey (1971) was used. This was a series of abstract drawings which a child had to have a partner sequence while visually separated from the partner by a screen. Behavior was analyzed in terms of social interaction measure (responds to questions, seeks feedback, etc.) and oral language (the average length of communication unit, Loban, 1976). These measures were correlated with ratings of tutor effectiveness and reading change scores. While the final analysis of this data is not complete, it appears that children who were originally able to work effectively on the interaction task were also rated as effective tutors and also made greater gains in reading and language achievement.

The reason that communication ability may to some extent predict potential language and reading growth and potential success as a tutor is revealed in an examination of the tutoring protocols. Analysis of protocols of children tutoring each other demonstrates that children often do what an effective adult does with a child--namely expand language. The fifth grade tutor below is flashing words at his peer and asking for a definition.

Joey (tutor): Do you know what this word means?

Terrance (tutee): Yes.

Joey: What?

Terrance: Tea that you drink.

Joey: What's this one? (flashes: tease)

Terrance: Make fun of someone.

Joey: Yeah, like you say here and give it but don't give it.

Terrance: Yeah, when someone is trying to pretend they are nice.

Here, essentially both tutor and tutee are expanding the concept "tease" for each other.

In another instance, we find the tutor "learning" from the tutee:

Janice (tutor): Read the word and make it . . . um--you say the word. (flashes: pretty)

Tutee: Pretty, the girl is pretty.

Tutor: Okay, yes, now . . . you say the word and put it in a sentence (flashes mean).

Tutee: Mean. The girl was mean to him.

Children are able to keep each other on task and do not seem threatened by each other as demonstrated by this interaction. Here third graders are flashing words. The tutee is to say the word and state if this is a meaningful word.

Tutee: Spar . . . k . . . It don't spell a word.

Tutor: Yes it do.

Tutee: Spark, . . . oh, spark.

Tutor: Good.

The examples given are not meant to show that children can help "practice" skills with each other more effectively because they share a common dialect, or a common system of communication, although this may have been true in some cases. The examples do suggest the RPT interaction allows more structured and organized communication. Both children are talking more and the increased opportunity to use language provided a needed opportunity for language growth. However, if the social interaction is a key to potential growth, then future peer tutoring programs must provide opportunity to evaluate and develop this skill.

Studies on peer tutoring have only recently been influenced by the trends in other areas of reading research. It would appear that as researchers in peer tutoring utilize the work of related disciplines and strive to place their research within theoretical models of reading, they will gain insight into the teaching of reading.

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