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ABSTRACT

A tutor charged with the task of helping a third-grade child with good reading skills improve his writing skills developed a plan to move the student gradually from dictating stories to writing independently. The student had difficulty initiating and maintaining on-task behavior and disliked writing independently, although he had "written" a number of stories, dictating them to another tutor. The tutor's first step in reversing the problem was to copy down the student's stories as he made them up. In their second session, the tutor read the child's stories to him and asked him to write them down. When spelling was a problem, the student was encouraged to use approximated spelling and continue. In a later session, the tactic of cutting the boy's stories into separate words helped him focus on details of the print and revise misspelled words. As he re-read his stories, words he found difficult were looked up in the dictionary and revised, and he discovered that looking up core words, such as "cobra" gave him the spelling for peripheral words such as "snake" and "dangerous." The student came away with a structured way to write and revise his work, making him more confident about his command of writing skills. However, tutors of children who do not have good initial reading skills and vocabulary may have to adapt the program. (Six references and three writing samples are included.) (JC)

ACTIVATING LATENT WRITING STRATEGIES

Delayed readers are generally also delayed writers. Educators who insist that these learners improve their reading and listening skills often put little priority on helping them improve their expressive language abilities. The implied message to the student is that his ideas are not that important.

Dictated language experience stories are a functional beginning, but what about the student who balks at writing on his own? Is it possible to lead this child from the telling of stories (which most will do willingly) to the enormous tasks of penning, revising, proofreading and final drafting? I will outline a system of gradual shifting with such a student in a one-to-one tutoring situation.

Philip was a student who had automated many strategies in the receptive mode of reading. He was not aware when we met that the key to the autonomy he lacked in writing was within the very same processes he had developed so well in reading.

Why shift gears?

Philip was very pleased with himself when he came to his second class with me as his new tutor. He was armed with a notebook and proudly informed me that it contained stories

he had written for his last tutor. This was the beginning of his fourth semester at the SUNYA Reading Clinic, and upon inspection it was obvious that he had told, not written, the stories.

Through early contact with his third grade teacher, I was informed that Philip's main problem in school was "initiating and maintaining on-task behavior." When asked what jobs were harder for him in school, Philip readily confessed that writing time was a chore. I soon realized that to best serve my new client I had to find a way to make the difficult demands of writing less cumbersome.

The strength of his helpful reading behaviors soon became evident through a method devised by Marie Clay (1982) which captured his responses on oral reading passages. On these running records he displayed both the "read-on" and "reread" techniques when monitoring and self-correcting material at his instructional level. Philip had acquired a sense of control in his reading because his previous tutors had helped him to automate those behaviors (Johnson, 1985). My job was simply to convince Philip that each strategy could relate to our newer expressive mode -- that there is an equal response in writing for each of these positive reading behaviors. He loved to share his stories with me, but I had to build his awareness of the larger audience he could reach.

From "read-on" to "write-on"

As we discussed topics he enjoyed, Philip showed both knowledge and enthusiasm. With little practice he was able to choose a good topic sentence, support it with details and end with a summary. My role became that of "facilitator" as I helped Philip to see how his thoughts could fit into our model paragraph structure (Smith, 1982). He comfortably dictated while I wrote.

In a second session, Philip was asked to write his paragraph while I read it to him. His reluctance showed immediately. I reminded him of how well he read and understood stories even though he sometimes had to guess at the words he didn't know. I requested that he do the same in writing. Slowly at first, he began to tackle some approximations in spelling. After his initial paragraph attempt of five sentences about camping, he saw that his "invented" spellings were not only acceptable, but necessary to the flow of ideas (Clay, 1982). He learned to "write-on" when he came to difficult words and soon was not hesitating to take his best shot at them. Writing complete, he was then asked to read his whole story again to look for places where normal pausing meant that a punctuation mark was needed. Again he good-naturedly obliged.

An interim approach

Philip had shifted from first to second gear, from telling to writing, but now he needed to coast for a while. To accomplish this we cut the original story I had written for him into words (Clay, 1979). As he matched this with his new version, he made comparisons which forced him to focus on the finer details of print besides just the initial letters he was accustomed to using. He discriminated differences, removing as he did only those words matching in spelling. He left the correctly spelled models which differed from his equivalents. Proofreading complete, the revising was easy since the needed spellings were provided.

Although he had spelled the words "friends" as "finsd" and "beach" as "bech," Philip saw his proficiency in communicating his ideas when his first sample was viewed holistically (Mc Gill-Franzen, 1979). Of the entire first paragraph, only nine of the total thirty-two words remained to be respelled. His initial attempt at writing was seen as a success.

Rewriting with the dictionary

In his second and third paragraphs, Philip had spelled correctly 17 out of 30 and 14 out of 23 words respectively. As he attempted to spell harder words, he displayed an awareness of his inability. He would not mutter his usual "I

know this one," or "that's easy." When he came to the difficult words he would hesitate, articulate and sometimes look at me. That's when rereading became rewriting. Philip knew that it was often necessary to go back and read something again to make sense out of it. Now he recognized the need for a similar procedure in writing. I suggested that he underline the spellings he was unsure of as he went along. I also explained that we would no longer be using a cut-up model. He graciously obliged since the word matching had become tedious to him and he was ready for an easier method. Underscored words became his prompts for later monitoring. His penned production was not hampered while in process, but he was aware of just exactly what to check upon completion. He would use the dictionary when finished for his self-regulated word models.

Philip had demonstrated the ability to isolate the first, second and sometimes even the third sound of a word. This made scanning for the needed words enjoyable. Since he was searching for words from his lexicon, the definitions became a cross-check. Best of all, when he decided to look for the more important word first, he saw a payback. In the definition for cobra in his story about snakes he found the spellings of three

other words he had underlined -- snakes, dangerous and Africa. The strategy of looking for the core words first had proven to be helpful.

As Philip set about rewriting his story for the final time, his penmanship visibly improved. He knew that he now had a workable formula to use when writing was assigned in school. He had the added confidence of knowing that his thoughts were valuable and informative. Not being the expert on snakes that he was, I and many others would benefit from his new found skill for sharing his knowledge. Watching his first audience recoil at the details of the dreaded reptiles, Philip realized the power he held in authorship. Most important, he was again made autonomous in his efforts (Johnson, 1984).

Broader view and cautions

Structuring the writing task so it would be successful for Philip depended a great deal on the automation of his reading behaviors. This was accomplished through much groundwork laid previously in Clinic. The importance of routinization of learning behaviors is made glaringly evident in Philip's case. Having become the keeper of his reading tactics, Philip was easily convinced that the writing task was reasonably within his grasp.

Although this method worked splendidly for one child, it bears mentioning that other prerequisites were necessary for the triumph. Our ratio of total words to words spelled correctly initially hinged on the fact that Philip had done a great deal of reading at his instructional level. In his previous Clinic sessions, he had read enough to make the simplest sight words part of his spelling vocabulary.

If these two conditions had not existed, Philip's introduction into the world of writing might not have gone as smoothly. Children who fit Philip's description might well benefit from this program. For those who do not, I would hope that separate components of this system may be adapted to their instruction.

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(1A)

When I go camp. I slpee in the camper alot. I go at on the beck I make new fiend Katie and I rude are dark I & like camping very mack

(1B)

Then I go camping I sleep in the camper a lot. I go out on the beach I make new friends. Katie and I ride our bikes.

(2 A)

Snak are great becaus they eat rat. Gardn snak help you whet your gardn. They kell the mol. Some snak da nice thing.

2B

Snakes are great because they eat rats. Garden snakes help you with your garden. They kill the moles. Some snakes do nice things.

(3A)

All snakes aren't good. You
der watch out for the king cobra
heres poisonous in Africa there
a snak called a boa constrictor
see you. Those snak are dags.

3B

All snakes aren't bad. You better watch out for the king cobra. He poisonous. In Africa there's a snake called a boa constructor. He can squeze you. These snakes are dangerous.