Competence in beginning reading: comprehension through language enrichment

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COMPETENCE IN BEGINNING READING:
COMPREHENSION THROUGH LANGUAGE ENRICHMENT

by
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B.A., University of the Pacific, 1962

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INTRODUCTION

The launching of Sputnik in 1957 created a new era in education in the United States. This new era focused on the importance of early learning, a revolutionary idea of language development, and a cry for re-vamping the educational curriculum. Reading, the underpinning of that curriculum, became a focal point. This propelled this nation into a turmoil during the second half of the twentieth century.

Knowledge is doubling at such a rapid rate that it is difficult to prepare our young for a society that no one can predict. Jobs they will hold, may not have been created yet.

Besides the uncertainty of these times, there is a continual press for literacy for all. Every child has a right to an education in this country. It is within recent history that the government has recognized the need for literacy for all people. It is in the context of the escalation of knowledge at an unbelievable rate and the press for universal literacy, that competence in beginning reading will be examined.
There are two major methods for the teaching of reading. One method is with a code emphasis and one is with a meaning emphasis. The code emphasis includes instruction in word recognition skills or phonics. There is little emphasis on comprehension in beginning reading. The meaning emphasis method stresses comprehension development in the early stage of reading, omitting phonics as a major component of the program. Each of the methods has features important for learning to read.

A code emphasis in beginning reading can include a curriculum for developing comprehension through language enrichment. It is the purpose of this paper to suggest that competence in beginning reading is aided by developing comprehension through language enrichment. It is further suggested that any effective comprehension development must take place in a social setting. Language skills must be functional and learned through social interaction in situations that evolve from the needs of the children.

This paper presents the major factors that need to be considered in the acquisition of reading. Each of the factors stresses the impact of social interaction in early learning and its relationship to the acquisition of reading. The factors explored are: the social nature of language, the perceptual and cognitive base, language as rule learning. In addition, a historical background is described in order
to present the acquisition of reading in perspective. The processes involved in reading competence are also considered. The discussion of decoding, semantics, and syntax are followed by factors that influence comprehension. The final section on comprehension discusses the role of oral language and literature on the comprehension of written discourse.
A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Two questions concerning the teaching of reading have been debated for decades (Chall, 1967; Durkin, 1980; Calfee and Drum, 1978). Researchers have questioned when children should begin reading instruction as well as the type of instructional program they should have. In order to understand the current state of beginning reading, one must view it from a historical point of view.

There are two periods in the history of the United States that are of significance in the field of beginning reading. The first period was in the late 1920s and 1930s. The second was in the 1960s. It was during the former period that the concept of reading readiness first appeared in professional journals.

The philosophy during this first period reflected the ideas of G. Stanley Hall (Durkin, 1980). Hall's emphasis was on the importance of heredity. He felt that the nature of man was predetermined, unfolding in stages. Gesell, a student of Hall's, was especially influential in setting the psychological climate. His works concerning growth and development directly related to the concept of readiness. Instead of thinking of development in terms of practice and learning, Gesell described development as an internal neural ripening. Gesell's writings were so influential that they were used to explain delaying of instruction as to the cause and the solution of beginning reading problems (Durkin, 1980).
It was during this same time period that individual
and group intelligence tests were developed. Group achieve-
ment tests soon followed. Educators and researchers were
very interested in using this empirical data to measure the
behavior and achievements of the children and to substan-
tiate their own perspectives on reading (Calfee and Drum,
1978). Of particular importance were school surveys which
revealed that many children were failing first grade, often
due to inadequate achievement in reading (Durkin, 1980).
From the empirical data gathered, several factors could have
been considered as possible causes of this failure in
reading achievement. The single issue that emerged in the
professional literature was the lack of readiness for
reading instruction (Durkin, 1980).

A report published by Merphitt and Washburne in 1931
was of utmost significance. The article suggested the post-
poenement of the teaching of reading until the child reached
the mental age of 6.5, so as to decrease discouragement and
possible failure (Merphitt and Washburne, 1931). This idea
about postponing beginning reading was taken very seriously
due to the temper of the times and the personal prestige of
Washburne (Durkin, 1980).

There was a major objection to the mental age requirement
of 6.5 in beginning reading, but it was mainly overlooked.
Arthur Gates in two reports, 1936 and 1937, suggested that
the burden of responsibility be moved away from the child
to instruction (Gates, 1937). From his studies he found that using certain methods, materials, and general procedures, some children could master the material at the chronological age of five years old and others found it difficult at seven. He concluded that the optimum time for commencement of reading instruction must be determined by the nature of the reading program in conjunction with the nature of the child. Although Gates was a giant in the field of reading, his conclusion was not accepted during that period of time.

With the birth of the concept of readiness, programs were devised to be used with the children as they were growing into readiness. Readiness checklists, tests, and workbooks were developed after the Merphitt and Washburne study.

In addition to cognitive assessment, physical development, especially motor skills, was evaluated in regard to readiness to read (Burkin, 1980). Being able to hop, skip, and tie shoes have been correlated with learning how to read.

Reading readiness tests, which appeared in the late 1920s, are a common vestige of the traditional interpretation of beginning reading. The readiness test is a paper and pencil test, usually divided into subtests of vocabulary, auditory and visual discrimination. The readiness workbooks that were developed during this same period were similar in content to the tests. It was a common practice to work on these skills at the beginning of first grade for a
couple of months, longer for those who did poorly on the test and in the workbooks.

Even though there are traces of these practices in the schools today, a revolution in thought concerning education occurred in the 1960s as a result of the Soviet Union's launching of Sputnik in 1957. The American public reacted immediately with an intense debate about the quality of the schools, not only in the field of science, but other subjects also. The civil rights movement also focused attention on social responsibility toward the minority (Elkind, 1976). Quality education for all young children was an outgrowth of the movement.

During the 1960s literature focused on the improvement of schools. Critical to the development of educational theories was Chomsky's description of language development in the mid 1960s (Reid, 1981). It was during these turbulent times that the importance of early experiences emerged. J. McVicker Hunt in his 1961 book, Intelligence and Experience, not only emphasized early stimulation, but contended that skill development was dependent on a great variety of practices and experiences. Benjamin Bloom in 1964 also stressed the importance of the early environment. He concluded that the most rapid period of development was in the first five years of life (Durkin, 1980).

Jean Piaget also has had a major influence upon education around the world (Elkind, 1976). Although he
began publishing his works in the 1920s, they did not receive recognition until the 1960s. He suggested that children progress through a fixed sequence of stages. The rate of progression is determined by a large number of factors, including social and physical environment.

During the first period, the 1920s and 1930s, the emphasis in beginning instruction was on readiness to learn determined by maturation, not practice or training. The new 1960s interpretation of growth and development, emphasizing early experiences and environment, challenged the traditional view of readiness. The aim of education in this new era was to help children to develop the mental ability to learn to think (Elkind, 1976). Factors that affect the acquisition of reading include thinking skills.

The next section focuses on the social nature of language as it relates to early experiences and environment of young children. In addition, the perceptual and cognitive base necessary for comprehension, language and reading acquisition or rule learning and prerequisites for beginning reading will be addressed.
FACTORS AFFECTING THE ACQUISITION OF READING

Social Nature of Language

In examining research concerning beginning reading, the development of oral language skills is paramount (Liberman and Shankweiler, 1979; Sticht, 1979; Resnick, 1979(a); Hopper and Naremore, 1978; Berry, 1980). Children learn language in order to interact with persons important to them for pleasure and information exchange. They also learn language to satisfy immediate needs and desires. Language for children must be useful and acquired in context to be pragmatic. Pragmatics is concerned with how language is used functionally to communicate. It has to do with the understanding of the rules of social interaction (Hopper and Naremore, 1978).

Hopper and Naremore (1978) discuss the effect that environment makes on language learning. They claim it is important in two ways. First, the innate capacity to learn language behavior must be instigated and stimulated by the environment. The child needs a model to learn; he will not learn language in complete isolation. Second, the environment is extremely important in the learned behavior of reading, writing, and speaking eloquently. Each generation must learn these skills for they are not transferred biologically.

Vygotsky (1962) says that words alone will not convey
the meaning. We must understand the thought and motivation that is intended. For instance, if someone were to say, "Here are some cookies I baked for you," that sentence could mean one of the following:

1. These are your favorite cookies made especially for you.
2. This is to thank you for helping me.
3. Here is my payment for what you did.
4. This ought to get me what I want.

In other words, we must not only look at the meaning of the words, how they relate in the sentence, but also within the context. The children are dependent upon the social group, family, and/or school, to provide them with pragmatic opportunities (Bruner and Connolly, 1973). Young children need to talk about immediate concerns. It is through experiences with many objects and actions that they can learn the effects of their own actions. Ideas need to be tested against each other, extended and modified within the non-threatening environment. With a motor skill such as writing or jumping, one gets constant feedback. With an intellectual skill such as language one must test it with reality (Carey, 1973; Smith, 1979). This must be done in social interaction.

Society's current change may be a negative environment
fer the further development of language skills (Berry, 1980; Connolly and Bruner, 1973). More mothers have joined the work force. More teenagers are the baby sitters of our young. Fast food restaurants take the place of our meal time conversations. The continuous television viewing produces intermittently passive participants in society. Bruner and Connelly (1973) suggest that we may need to give more support to the nurturing of children if we want a competent member of our society. In light of this changing society, it makes it imperative to view language pragmatically, as it is used functionally in varying social contexts.
Perceptual and Cognitive Base

In addition to the social aspects of language, the perceptual and cognitive base needs to be considered in beginning reading. During the early stages of reading acquisition the children are learning how to learn (Gibson and Levin, 1975). For this to be effective, the teachers need to help the children become aware of their own mental processes in learning (Vygotsky, 1962; Gibson and Levin, 1975; Flavell, 1977). Children need to be aware of what they know and the kind of strategies they use in learning. This develops very slowly, over an extended period of time.

Motivation, attention, and memory are interdependent and interactive in the acquisition of the knowledge process. "If a child is motivated he attends and if he attends with positive intent, recall is heightened." (Berry, 1980, p. 79)

The basic linguistic capabilities, the ability to construct rules and reflect on them, is an important cognitive process. The importance of this linguistic ability will be discussed in the next section.

Recent research in schema theory is applicable to general cognitive ability rather than to just reading comprehension (Pearson and Spire, 1981). Schemata have been called the building blocks of cognition. Pearson and Spire (1981) described schema as a "hypothetical knowledge structure," that binds concrete experiences with specific instances of things to abstract entities.
There is a hierarchical structure and a relational network in schema structure. Pearson and Spiro (1981) give several examples. The schema for "canary" is embedded within the schema of "bird." The schema for "birthday party" is embedded in the schema "party." The schema "football game" is embedded within a "sporting function," which is also embedded within "attending large social events." The cross-over processing becomes quite complex (Pearson and Spiro, 1981) as the categories extend and intermingle, subordinate and generalize.

As learning takes place additions are made and shifts occur. If the new information fits into the existing structure, the information is assimilated. If the new information does not fit, it will be ignored, modified to fit the existing structure, or accommodated. A new category will then be added (Gibson and Levin, 1975; Pearson and Johnson, 1972). Schemata form the background knowledge or prior experience that the reader brings to the text. Comprehension, simply stated, is building a relationship between what is new to what is known.

Establishing a relevant context for interpreting the author's message has become important in comprehension (Jenkins and Heliotis, 1981). The reader's schema interact with the meaning elicited from the textual cues. Recall of the text is integrated with the script from the reader's knowledge of the world. The reader constructs an
interpretation that fits culturally based preconceptions of what matches the situation (Calfee and Drum, 1978). Rather than being a receptive process, comprehension seems to be a constructive process (Jenkins and Helietis, 1981).

The importance of experiential knowledge cannot be overstated. Even if children have the necessary decoding, semantic, and syntactic skills they may be devoid of the pertinent information the writer assumes they have. For example, a reader from the southwest may not be aware of the snow schema that include cold fronts, snow pellets, and hypothermia. Whenever the schema are too sketchy, accurate comprehension may suffer. If one does not have sufficient prior experiences to bring to the task, a consequent reduction in motivation, attention, and memory will further restrict comprehension.

In addition to an inadequate schema structure, there are at least two other possible breakdowns in comprehension (Jenkins and Helietis, 1981). The first could be due to a failure to use the stored data and relate it to the text. Some children may not have learned to use their world knowledge to relate to the material they read. They may need to restate the text, be teased into elaborating upon the text, and continually prodded into making inferences. The second is that some children may be satisfied with less elaborate structures and relationships. They do not recognize the inconsistencies between the text and their formulation. They
need help in developing strategies of rectifying the comprehension breakdowns.

Overall, it can be concluded that the perceptual and cognitive base is an important factor in the acquisition of reading. Jean Piaget, a renowned psychologist, studied and described the cognitive development of children. His description of active learning and egocentric behavior gives information concerning comprehension.

When discussing active learning, Piaget (1972) encouraged teachers to let children discover and experiment guided by appropriate materials. Children must re-invent for themselves. If we let them construct on their own, the concept will be incorporated within their schema and remain with them.

Piaget (1968) observed behavior described as egocentrism in an activity-oriented school. Very young children were working in a group, but it was unclear from the conversation and action whether they were working individually or collectively. This was a description of egocentric behavior. Around the age of seven, many children have progressed to the stage where they can concentrate on an individual project or effectively collaborate in a group. In this case the children have progressed to social behavior. Social behavior can also be observed by listening to a discussion among children. There is a true discussion, if children can comprehend another point of view. They will then search for proof or justification in examining their own point of
Active learning and the vestiges of egocentric behavior have a great deal of influence upon comprehension of oral and written language learning. This will be further discussed again in the section on comprehension.

Language and Reading Acquisition as Rule Learning

Before a child can benefit from actual reading instruction he needs to have developed a certain competence with his native language. He acquired a knowledge of the language as he matured that allowed him to understand and produce sentences that had never been written or spoken previously. In order to understand this phenomenon, the following question needs to be explored. What is the nature of the information that has been acquired by the child?

The child does not draw upon a memorized list of sounds, letter patterns, words or sentences. A majority of the sentences he forms have never before been spoken. The child was not taught the rules of language and would have difficulty stating them. And yet, the child can create his own sentence, spoken or written, using the rules that he understands implicitly about sounds, letter patterns, words and sentences. Language acquisition then is rule learning, continually constructing and revising as the child matures (Chomsky, 1972).

The two systems that must be examined in order to
understand the acquisition of language as it pertains to reading are, phonological knowledge and orthographic knowledge (Gibson and Levin, 1975). In addition, the children’s metalinguistic awareness, their ability to reflect upon what they know about language, will also be examined as a basis for understanding language and reading acquisition (Fischer, 1980).

Oral language can be divided into its components: sentences, phrases, words, syllables, and phonemes. Also, written discourse may be analyzed into the same components, with the exception that the phoneme is spoken (part of phonology) but letter or letter clusters are written (part of orthography). A primary task in beginning reading is learning the appropriate correspondence between spoken and written forms. If the child has not internalized the underlying phonological system, then it will be almost impossible to teach him to analyze it (Gibson and Levin, 1975).

Those children who learn letter names early may develop a progressive differentiation of orthographic knowledge (Chomsky, 1979). This knowledge concerns the awareness of letter patterns in words. With this information the children construct tentative rules and apply these rules to the spelling of words (Beers, 1980).

Several researchers suggest that the introduction to print should be through writing (Hall, 1976; Chomsky, 1979), using and developing further their orthographic knowledge.
Phonics instruction also draws attention to the regularity of orthographic patterns, due to its emphasis on regular letter-sound association (Venezky and Massaro, 1979). Most phonics programs teach the phonetically irregular words (called sight or memory words), utilizing different strategies than those used with phonetically regular words. This discourages the reader from generalizing from these orthographic irregularities (Venezky and Massaro, 1979).

A number of studies suggest that most children by kindergarten age have internalized most of the rules of the sound system (Gibson and Levin, 1975; Chomsky, 1972). Their implicit knowledge of phonology helps them know that sounds are position dependent. The sounds are pronounced differently according to the letter preceding and/or following it (Berry, 1980).

Listening to someone speak, it appears that words are spoken consecutively. Actually, there is no apparent connection between the word boundaries and the break in speech continuum. Pauses are not usually made between words (Hopper and Haremore, 1978). Lindsay and Norman (1977, p. 269) give the example of the phrase, "She uses standard oil." There are actually three breaks in this phrase when it is spoken—after the second "s," then "n," and then "r." Not one of the breaks is at a word boundary.

The syllable and the phoneme are considered elementary units of sound. Normally one is not aware of speech sounds.
although they are readily produced. The syllable is easier for most children to discern in spoken English, but some children do have difficulty. It is the phoneme in speech that is usually not perceived or expressed, phoneme by phoneme (Berry, 1980). It is a unit of speech smaller than one to which people usually attend. This will be discussed in more detail in the next section under metalinguistic awareness.

Reading involves the ability to reflect on certain features of the language, which is metalinguistic awareness. Understanding the rule system of language is one level. Being able to abstract and reflect on the language is a higher level. The ability of the child to follow the linguistic rules of language used in speaking is not the same as the conscious knowledge which may be necessary for learning to read (Fischer, 1980). If the child has not acquired these linguistic rules he will not be able to reflect on them (Fischer, 1980; Gibson and Levin, 1975).

The two factors of metalinguistic awareness that directly affect beginning reading are segmentation and concept of word. Segmentation of speech sounds, which has been alluded to previously, will be examined first. Many researchers have recognized that segmentation of speech sounds is a possible area of difficulty with children beginning reading instruction (Calfee, 1972/78; Gibson and Levin, 1975; Liberman and Shankweiler, 1979; Chall, 1979; Chomsky,
Although a child can tell you that "cat" and "cap" are two different words he may not understand what is meant by the same beginning sound. He may be unable to tell you that one word ends with a "t" and one with a "p." Difficulties with segmentation of speech can be apparent at this basic level for some first graders approaching reading instruction.

Many children learn to read quickly with the traditional training of listening for beginning sounds, then ending sounds, and finally medial sounds. Also, there is considerable work with rhyming and later consonant substitution in words. Some children may need extra time and training at that basic level of beginning sounds and additional work in other aspects of segmentation (Gibson and Levin, 1975). These same children will probably need help with concept of word, and the accompanying problem of language instruction (Resnick, 1979(b); Liberman and Shankweiler, 1979).

Young children are confused about the notion of word (Gibson and Levin, 1975; Henderson, 1980; Templeton, 1980). Robinson (1972) cited Verner's study which indicated that many children in beginning reading may have difficulty perceiving and recalling accurate details of shape. They may have difficulty in discriminating the relevant and the irrelevant. They need to know the direction of the script.
They need to notice the small spaces between letters and
the large spaces between words. There may be confusion
over terms when the teacher talks about words, letters and
sounds. Many children are not clear about the meaning of
beginning, starts with, ends with, sounds like, same and
different. They may not be familiar with the language of
instruction (Johns, 1980). Children may have difficulty
knowing where to focus attention, on the beginning or end of
the word (Schell, 1978). A mature concept of word is a
prerequisite to learning to read.

Prerequisites for Beginning Reading

In reviewing the literature it has been stated that
reading readiness tests correlate with reading achievement
at the end of the first grade (Downing and Thackray, 1971).
Also, it has been stated that knowledge of the alphabet
correlates with success in learning to read (Calfee, 1972;
Bond and Dykstra, 1967; Hillerich, 1978). This correlation
does not imply that learning the letters upon commencement
of formal instruction will insure success in reading.

Traditionally reading readiness tests are given in the
spring of kindergarten or in the fall of first grade.
Although several researchers claim that the test correlates
highly with success in reading achievement, many children
who do poorly on the test already know how to read. Con-
versely, those who practiced the auditory and visual skills
in kindergarten and knew the language and the format of the test may do well on the readiness test but have difficulty learning to read (Durkin, 1980). Also, coping with the readiness test may be more difficult than the beginning instruction in reading. The test deals with all the skills at once, whereas beginning instruction deals with one step at a time (Durkin, 1980).

To understand this, an examination must be made of two of the major components of the test, visual and auditory tests. The research on visual discrimination suggests that training in visual perceptual tasks improves scores on the tests that measure that aspect of the curriculum. They do not necessarily improve in reading though (Calfee and Drum, 1978; Liberman and Shankweiler, 1979; Fisher, 1979). Children are not accustomed to looking at the orientation of the letter. A stick is a stick, regardless of the direction in which you turn it. Dog is dog regardless of position or reflection in a mirror. With letters, that is not true. If one understands that a letter may be called by a different name because of its spatial orientation, it is not quite as difficult (Savin, 1972). Depending upon the orientation, a "b" can be a "d," "p" or "q."

The other major component of reading readiness tests is auditory discrimination. This test assumes that the children understand the concept, that words are made up of separate phonemes, or sounds. Researchers suggest that many
children lack the ability to analyze phonetic sounds at this level (Gibson and Levin, 1975; Calfee, 1978). Auditory discrimination contributes significantly to learning to read (Robinson, 1972).

Durkin (1980) concludes that the reading readiness test used as a whole or used as subtests to make instructional decisions is unwarranted. An alternative to using the reading readiness test is the use of informal measures to assess the child’s ability. A visual, auditory and speech screening test should be a priority. Many of these informal assessments would be made during the regular course of instruction and with the use of diagnostic teaching. The following items are suggestions to be noted and evaluated for non-readers in the first grade.

1. eye contact in an instructional situation and knowing where to attend
2. persistence at tasks perceived to be enjoyed and those perceived to be distasteful
3. extent of social interaction with others on playground and in the room
4. interest in books and reading
5. listening during story time
6. questions or lack of questions
7. understanding of the basic routines and rituals in society (Wilson, 1970; Hopper and Naremore, 1978)
8. obvious use of learning strategies
9. vocabulary and concepts mentioned
10. spontaneous practice without direction
11. understands concept of word
12. phonemic analysis and segmentation
13. sample of alphabet knowledge (oral, written)
14. sample of sounds of alphabet (point to and elicit from)
15. sight word knowledge, if any
16. sample of writing, if any
17. naming of classmates (Wilson, 1970)
ACQUIRING READING COMPETENCE

**Introduction**

This paper presents the major factors that need to be considered in the acquisition of reading. Each of the factors demonstrates the impact the social environment has on the commencement of reading. The factors explored were: the social nature of language, the perceptual and cognitive base, language and reading acquisition as rule learning, and prerequisites for beginning reading. A historical background was described in order to highlight present practices and put them into perspective.

The processes involved in achieving reading competence will now be addressed. The discussion of decoding, semantics, and syntax will be followed by factors that influence comprehension. The final section concerns the acquisition of reading competence including the importance of promoting comprehension of written discourse through oral language and literature.

This paper is the result of a debate that has raged in reading journals for over fifty years concerning the proper mode of introduction into reading (Chall, 1967; Calfee and Drum, 1978; Durkin, 1980). Jeanne Chall (1967) in her book that became popular throughout the United States, *Learning to Read: The Great Debate*, explored the problem. Being an emotional issue and an issue of great importance, most investigators and people in the field of reading take sides.
Some researchers and teachers espouse a meaning emphasis, that is, initially learning sight words and stressing comprehension from the beginning. Other researchers and teachers advocate a code emphasis, also called decoding. This method builds from a sound-symbol relationship into words. Comprehension skills are gradually added as the decoding skills become automatic. Comprehension is taught through the short stories that the children read.

This paper posits that a code approach combined with a meaning approach should be used for the initial instruction of beginning reading. A description of this process will be made within the next section. The description includes decoding, semantics, syntax, and comprehension.

Decoding

The emphasis in beginning reading ought to be through a systematic teaching of the code (Chall, 1979; Calfee and Drum, 1978; Resnick, 1979(a); Deverell, 1974; Perfetti and Lesgold, 1979). Decoding refers to the process whereby the student must map his phonological knowledge to the orthographic knowledge (Gibson and Levin, 1975; Liberman and Shankweiler, 1979). Informally, this is called sound-symbol correspondence.

Decoding not only requires children to understand and speak English, but also be able to abstract and analyze a segment of the structure of language (Liberman and Shankweiler,
Being able to say a word is quite different than being able to reflect on a part of that word.

As soon as children learn which symbols correspond to particular sounds, they join them orally in a process called blending (Savin, 1972). This process may be quite difficult initially for some children. Although the English language does not have a one-letter to one-sound correspondence, there are letter patterns which correspond to a sound (Calfee, 1972; Chomsky, 1970). The relationship is one of spelling to meaning (Chomsky, 1970).

In the very beginning stages usually the controlled vocabulary in the basal reader assures regular orthography in respect to pronunciation. As the child progresses to more complex reading, he is introduced to written symbols that correspond to the more complex lexical patterns (Chomsky, 1970; Calfee and Drum, 1978).

Automaticity, the ability to recognize words rapidly and accurately, signals the transition from beginning to skilled reading. It is the primary goal of initial reading instruction to become automatic decoders (Perfetti and Lesgold, 1979; Chall, 1979; Gibson and Levin, 1975; Calfee and Drum, 1978). Some students will learn the code easily. Those children who can acquire the code with little instruction are probably children who just lacked exposure to print, but had quite extensive learning capability (Resnick, 1979(b)). They are children who can organize information.
more effectively, practice and remember what they are taught. They seem to absorb whatever is presented (Rosner, 1979), regardless of the presentation.

Other students, at the other end of the continuum, will require more time to become automatic decoders. They will have difficulty recognizing the salient information. They will need direct assistance organizing the information and learning strategies for remembering it. They will need to be directed to the specifics that are important to attend to. These children will need extensive drill and practice in a variety of situations and formats (Rosner, 1979).

The role of vocabulary and understanding of concepts has a direct relationship to automaticity. It is difficult for children to learn to read words that are not in their listening vocabulary (Rosner, 1979). Rapid access to word meanings and conceptual structures is a necessity for automaticity (Perfetti and Lesgold, 1979).

**Semantics**

Semantics deals with the correspondence between a label and a thing and the correspondence between a label and a concept (Hopper and Naremore, 1978). Development of a concept indicates that the child has gone past the knowledge that a word stands for an object. He has associated semantic markers with the object. For instance, the word "cat" might include "furry," "claws," "four legs," and "purrs" as
semantic markers. Also, when we speak of the concept of "desk," it is not a particular desk, it is the quality shared by other desks, "deskness." These concepts seem to be developed by trial and error, as the child interacts with people and the environment (Hopper and Naremore, 1976).

Most all measures of word knowledge correlate highly with reading achievement (Gibson and Levin, 1975; Calfee and Drum, 1978). Development of vocabulary and concept is very important in beginning reading to extending the schema structure. During the initial stages of decoding instruction, additional time can be spent attending to vocabulary and concept development as part of the language enrichment program. The schematic structure is extended and modified through rich experiences in scientific exploration, role-taking, literature adventures, and many different language experiences. When the children read the words that they used in discussion or heard in meaningful situations, the material is more likely to be understood. Development of an adequate schema structure is foremost.

Syntax

Syntax is the understanding of the sentence structure. This structure demonstrates what the child has done to mentally organize language (Hopper and Naremore, 1978). When the children come to first grade most of them have acquired the major portion of their syntactical development.
They will continue to develop and refine, but essentially they have the important rules mastered.

For the purposes of this paper there are two considerations. One is what the linguists discuss in terms of deep and surface structure (Hopper and Haremore, 1978; Berry, 1980). Examine the difference in the example below:

1. The boy hit the ball.
2. The ball was hit by the boy.

The two sentences look different. The surface structure is different. The meaning is the same; so they have the same deep structure. Sentence complexity such as number two may make comprehension difficult in the beginning stages of reading.

The second possible difficulty is children who do not readily use the "wh" (what, who, where) words in speech may have difficulty when they begin to read. They may not be aware of the predictive nature of the markers and thus miss the intent of the message (Miller, 1981).

Factors that Influence Comprehension

Automaticity of decoding skills, a rich network of semantic webbing, and a strong syntactic structure are prerequisites for adequate comprehension. In addition, a purpose for the activity is important, clarified by either student or teacher (Spache, 1977). Comprehension is influenced by the interest of the student. The interaction
of attention, motivation, and memory are involved in the learning event (Berry, 1980). It could be called the learning set. Persistence is also related. If a child does not understand something in a discussion, he will question the speaker. With written discourse, he will regress to the point of confusion. This may be what Berry (1980) calls drive.

The two factors that have been selected for further discussion are the development of a schematic network and the necessity of wide experiences to encourage the growth from egocentric to social behavior. The development of these two factors is dependent on the characteristics which follow. The amount of "live" language directed to the child is an important indicator of later cognitive and linguistic achievement (Anselmo, 1980; Blanchard, 1981; Elkind, 1974). Since written language is more complex than speech, children need to be read to a great deal for an adequate exposure to this linguistic complexity. Books should become increasingly complicated (Chomsky, 1979; Johns, 1978; Elkind, 1974). Important also is experience with adults who will be proper role models. Children emulate the reading and speaking habits of those they respect (Elkind, 1974; Hall, 1976; Berry, 1980).

Comprehension of written discourse develops through experiences with oral language and literature. These two areas aid in the development of schema and growth in social
Speaking and listening, primary activities, normally are learned without formal instruction; whereas, reading and writing, secondary activities, usually do require formal instruction (Deverell, 1974). Speech appears to be an essential basis for the acquisition of reading. Children, such as the congenitally deaf, who do not acquire speech, usually have great difficulty learning to read (Liberman and Shankweiler, 1979). Skill in listening also precedes the acquisition of reading (Sticht, 1979; Durkin, 1980). Oral language and reading are related. It is the intention of this paper to demonstrate how language enrichment through oral language enhances the comprehension of written discourse.

In language development, researchers emphasize the importance of prosody, the melody patterns of oral language. Prosody is the pitch, stress, intonation, and duration of tone that makes each person's speech unique (Berry, 1980). Berry (1980) indicates that young children depend on prosody to a significant degree for perceiving meaning, phrasing, and syntax. She also states even further that prosody is a little understood signaling device that may be very decisive in learning not only language, but reading and writing (Berry, 1980). Other investigators have indicated that written discourse is lacking the expressive and situational supports that are present in oral speech (Vygotsky, 1962; Kantor, 1980). Some children may rely on
the melody patterns of the language more than is realized and thus have difficulty with only the expressed context within written material.

Related to the topic of prosody is that of chunking. Many researchers suggest that oral language is easier to understand because the speaker organizes it with intonation patterns and pauses between phrase boundaries. Many children do not chunk the written material into meaningful phrases but rather read it as a string of words. Sticht (1972) in his study of comprehension of rapid speech found that chunking of the oral material made a difference in comprehension (Perfetti and Lesgold, 1971; Thorndike, 1917).

Another aspect to consider is syntactic development. Some children use tone of voice and sentence order to indicate an interrogative statement rather than the "wh" words such as where, what, and who. In reading they would not have the advantage of these markers to facilitate comprehension (Miller, 1981).

Prosody, chunking of material, and syntax have been discussed as being important to comprehension. Active learning is also important (Piaget, 1968). With active learning in mind, the development of schema and egocentrism will be considered. Children need to talk to learn, to add new vocabulary and concepts into their schematic structure (Hart, 1978). They must verbalize whatever they are doing. They can also learn from others in a discussion or
problem solving situation as long as they can be involved in the thinking process (Gibson and Levin, 1975). They need to be involved in real situations, genuine conversations, and deal with real objects. As children mature, they manipulate ideas instead of things (Hart, 1978; Berry, 1980; Hopper and Naremore, 1978). These verbal interactions should evolve out of the children's experiences. Science or social studies concepts that are important to the children could be explored. It is through oral language with ideas important to the children that the thinking skills would develop (Deverell, 1974). Working in teams on a project gives children an opportunity to sharpen their thinking skills and test out their ideas against their peers (Berry, 1980; Hopper and Naremore, 1978). Through discussions and active learning children would be assimilating and accommodating information into their schema.

The other area that concerns comprehension through the medium of oral language is egocentrism. Most children in first grade are still in the egocentric stage (Piaget, 1968), seeing the world from a single viewpoint. The child seems unaware of any knowledge that there are perspectives other than his own (Stauffer, 1969). Many children have difficulty understanding how their behavior affects someone else. They also may have difficulty predicting an action or a result, if they cannot step into the character's shoes and see the situation from his point of view. Elkind (1977)
considers this an important point in reading comprehension. Being able to take another point of view, to see how one's idea and behavior might be viewed by others, is a critical factor in thinking (Russell, 1968) and reading.

The goal of reading instruction for most children should be to develop avid and responsive readers. A teacher who will accompany children in laughter, sorrow, suspense, wonder and delight is more apt to entice children to become "hooked" on books.

Literature is a natural medium for expanding vocabulary and concepts. It is an ideal mode to experience vicarious adventures and for problem solving. As the children relate to the feelings of the characters, they have a chance to examine other viewpoints and feelings. It is the intention of this paper to suggest that the oral reading of literature should be used to encourage the building of schema and the exploring of other ways for the child to view the world.

An appropriate and dynamic literature program needs to be carefully planned (Huck, 1971; Sutherland, 1981). "While enthusiasm and interest in good books may be caught, appreciation and discrimination are almost always taught." (Huck, 1971, p. 37) Appreciation of literature evolves from the knowledge and understanding that is gained through in-depth reading. Discrimination develops over time, responding sensitively to the ideas and modes of expression. Nevertheless neither appreciation nor discrimination are possible
without the interest gained through wide experiences and personal involvement of the child (Sutherland, 1981; Huck, 1971).

A well planned program is a necessity in order to promote comprehension of written discourse through literature. Two important components of the program are variety of reading matter (Veatch, 1978) and style of the works (Huck, 1979). Initially the program should be sequenced according to complexity of vocabulary, concepts and plot. In addition, until children are captive listeners a great deal of eye contact is necessary. Story telling is a good way to begin. Flannel board stories provide a visual prop for children to re-tell the story. This is a good medium to get children telling stories from the very beginning. With the flannel board left up all day, the story could be re-told over and over. Books that have recurring language patterns provide a rhythmic flow that children like to repeat long after story time is over. The stories should become increasingly more complex (Chomsky, 1972) in plot, vocabulary, concepts and sentence structure. This will be discussed further in a subsequent part of this section.

Each day there should be a story time (Huck, 1971), a time to read orally, and a time to read silently as soon as the children are capable. In addition to regularly scheduled periods that can be depended upon, there ought to be spontaneous readings for clarification, information, or
relaxation. Children need to see reading in different contexts. One might need adventure, levity, humor, or mental stimulation. These feelings and desires need to extend beyond the intuitive level, so the children can deal with them. They need to be aware of what they know and the purpose for the activity. If the children are exhausted from mental effort, the class could decide to "escape" in a story.

Differences and similarities in peoples, cultures and individuals can be explored through literature (Sutherland, 1981). During a discussion something could be clarified with an episode in a book. A dialogue among the children could ensue concerning how one of their favorite characters might have reacted in a similar situation. Literature allows children to observe from a safe distance the reactions of the characters, getting involved at the level cognitively and emotionally that they are able. The intensity of this involvement should directly affect the level of comprehension.

The understandings that are gained through literature are a stimulus to a variety of responses (Odland, 1980). These may vary from a delayed response to an activity that consumes children for a whole week. The delayed response may concern a happening or character in a story read earlier and remembered. The activity could be in any subject area, such as drama, illustration, or radio play. There are innumerable possibilities and the direction of response
would vary with the class. Wordless books allow children to create their own dialogue.

A positive result of being absorbed in a story together and then sharing experiences is the communal experience, as the class functions as a group (Lickteig, 1981; Taba, 1966). This is important for free expression in the oral and written mode. It not only creates a greater awareness, but affords a freedom. All experiences that children have had help them to view themselves in relation to others. This is how they discover who they are. Children need to be secure in who they are to be able to see another point of view. Being able to see another point of view influences their level of comprehension (Mayhew, 1980).

The first part of this section examines a type of literature program designed for beginning readers and proposes that literature could help children move from egocentric behavior to social behavior. The second part deals with the development of schema through linguistic development and understanding of story structures.

Language develops rapidly during the pre-school years, but does continue through the elementary years as the children become more adept at complex language (Chomsky, 1972). Children progress at very different rates, actively learning new constructions on their own.

Since written discourse is usually more complex in vocabulary and syntax, the child can benefit from the rich
and varied linguistic input available in literature (Chomsky, 1980). Word segments are more highlighted in speech due to the slower pace of the story language (Henderson, 1980).

Chomsky (1972) studied the linguistic development of school age children and compared their knowledge of complex language structures to the amount and type of reading in which they engaged. She found that the independent reading appeared to be related to their linguistic level (see Table 5, p. 37). Chomsky (1972) suggests that the more complex language is available in literature and may enhance linguistic development (Durkin, 1980).

The child who reads or listens to stories rich in language and complexity is benefitting from the style, content, and language used in the book (Terry, 1980). It does not seem to matter whether the child reads the story to himself or whether he listens to the story. The exposure to the language seems to be just as effective in both cases (Chomsky, 1972). In other words, Chomsky seems to suggest that reading increases linguistic development. This in turn increases the capacity to understand even more complex stories (Chomsky, 1972).

The table on the following page shows the results of the children participating, who were near the beginning reading level. The study had a small sample so the results are only suggestive. The table depicts the linguistic stage
of three kindergarten children (Chomsky, 1972, p. 29).

TABLE 5
Mini-comparison 1 Measures that Vary as Linguistic Stage in Three Young Children of Uniform Age and IQ

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ling. stage 1</th>
<th>Ling. stage 2</th>
<th>Ling. stage 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>age of child</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grade in school</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ (WISC)</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES (Census Bureau scale 01-99)</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>father's occupation score (Census Bureau scale 01-99)</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>father's years of education</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WISC comprehension subtest</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>books named on parent and child questionnaires, weighted total</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>books named on parent and child questionnaires, average level</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reading to child in experimental week, total number words read</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6,700</td>
<td>17,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reading to child in experimental week, number words read multiplied by complexity factor</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17,700</td>
<td>62,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reported on parent questionnaire:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>books named by parent, weighted total</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>numerical score on parent's questionnaire</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of people at home who read to child</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>amount of time child is read to per week</td>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>&gt;2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at home</td>
<td>hr.</td>
<td>hr.</td>
<td>hrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>average level of books cited by parent as reread to child many times</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>does child visit public library?</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>average number public library books taken out each visit</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>subscriptions to children's magazines</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>years nursery school attendance</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number books from mother's own childhood cited as read to child</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results do seem to indicate exposure to more complex language in literature, couched in stimulating situations, does increase knowledge of language.
SUMMARY

Many children come to the first grade expecting to read. Some of these children are already reading far beyond the level of their peers. Other children are unsure of what is meant by reading. They might even tell people they read, and yet have no notion of the concept of a word or how you know what to say. These two extremes are usually found within each first grade classroom.

The children who have this nebulous concept of reading, nevertheless, may readily learn to read once they have the opportunity. This paper explores the factors that affect the acquisition of reading. It has become quite clear how much the development of language directly affects the acquisition of reading and eventually the depth of comprehension. One of the important factors in beginning reading is the social nature of language. Language skills evolve from visceral needs and desires. Children learn language in order to interact with persons important to them for pleasure and information exchange. Language for children must be useful and within a social context. Ideas need to get tested, modified, and extended within a receptive environment. This must be done within social interaction.

The second major factor that affects the acquisition of reading is the perceptual and cognitive base. It is important that children are cognizant of what they know and the various strategies that they use in learning. Development
of a rich schema structure is very important to comprehension of oral and written language. The importance of experiential knowledge cannot be overstated. Even if children have automatic decoding skills with sufficient semantic and syntactic skills they may have inadequate information that the writer or speaker assumes they have.

The third factor is language and reading acquisition as rule learning. In order to benefit from reading instruction children need to have a certain competence with their native language. As children develop they acquire a set of rules that allows them to create sentences using the rules they understand implicitly. This paper examines the phonological system of the spoken word and the orthographic system of the written word and views them in their relationship in the acquisition of reading. To become competent readers children need to reflect on these processes, thus developing metalinguistic awareness. It is through metalinguistic awareness that children develop segmentation and the concept of a word.

The acquisition of reading involves the process of decoding, semantics, syntax, and comprehension. Some children may have difficulty with decoding skills because they are unable to abstract the language and analyze it. The aim of teaching decoding is to provide automaticity, the ability to recognize words rapidly and accurately.

Comprehension is facilitated through semantics and
syntax. They provide the framework or structure through which vocabulary and concept development expand. Word order and complexity of the sentence influence the level of understanding the reader experiences. All these factors are organized by the learner into schema. Schema are enhanced through a language enrichment program.

During the decoding stage comprehension is developed orally through activities important to children, that engage them in investigations and discussions that develop thinking skills. Some children may rely on the melody patterns of the language more than realized and thus have difficulty with only the expressed context within written material.

Literature, as well as oral language activities, is used to facilitate comprehension through language enrichment. The different genre and styles of writing to which children are exposed, expand their knowledge and vicarious experiences. Literature allows children to sample life in many areas and observe the reactions and feelings of the characters, while remaining somewhat removed from them. The emotional involvement of the reader is important to the comprehension of print. In addition, children who are introduced to the more complex language in literature advance more rapidly in linguistic development.

It is concluded that to become effective readers children must have many rich experiences with oral language and literature. These activities will provide them with
opportunities to build schema structures and to read stories that increase their background of information. Therefore, a code emphasis program should include comprehension development with language enrichment through oral language and literature.
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