Part V. Contributors

Contributors to the Fourth International Forum on Research in School Librarianship

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The Relationship Between Listening Comprehension and Reading Comprehension:
Implications for Reading Aloud and Learning

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This paper describes the listening and reading comprehension skills of elementary school students, presents a classroom action research project that concludes that listening skills may transfer to reading skills, and recommends indirect teaching methods to enhance listening comprehension and learning during story hour. The study was designed to test whether instruction in three listening comprehension skills improved reading comprehension using those same skills. The recommended generic lesson plan for story hour is based on theory and research in listening and reading comprehension as well as the suggestions of teachers and librarians. It can be used by teachers, public librarians, school librarians, and parents.

Introduction

One of the goals of the school library program is to contribute to student learning. This goal may be pursued with instruction in library, research, and information skills, but student learning may also occur during recreational reading and listening. Since story hour is often an important component of the elementary school program, those who read to children may justifiably ask how reading aloud contributes to student learning and, more particularly, to student reading ability. Will experience or instruction in listening comprehension skills improve reading comprehension? If there is a link between listening comprehension and reading comprehension, reading aloud may make a valuable contribution to student learning rather than be just a pleasant literary experience.

Researchers have noted that reading aloud correlates with children's success in school (Smolkin, Conlon, & Yaden, 1988; Strickland, Morrow, Feitelson, & Iraqi, 1990) and that "the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children" (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985, p.33). It also creates "a pleasure connection between the child and print" (Trelease, 1995, p.46). Schools have encouraged parents and teachers to read aloud to their children every day, and articles in journals for librarians promote reading aloud in the library (Burns & Flowers, 1997; Cart, 1996; Freeman, 1992; Guardia, 1995; Hilchey-Chandler, 1997; Kids & reading, 1996; LeLoup & Stone, 1991; Mazzoco, 1993; Trelease, 1995; Wells, 1993; Wiley, 1996; and Wilson & Brown, 1999)

Underlying these views is an assumption that the listener and reader are similar. Since both are receiving messages through words, it seems that the intellectual component of comprehension would be the same once the words are individually understood. Improving listening comprehension, while avoiding the mechanics of reading, would therefore be likely to improve reading comprehension in the long run. If this is so, then improvement in listening comprehension would lead to improvement in reading comprehension and student learning.

Developing a testable question means analyzing and operationalizing the original question. First, while research has shown that instruction in reading skills can improve reading comprehension (Fitzgerald, 1989; Paris, Wasik, & Van der Westhuizen, 1988; Schmitt, 1988), can instruction in listening skills improve listening skills? This needs to occur before listening skills can be applied to improve reading comprehension. Second, which listening skills will benefit from instruction and can be tested? And finally, how can one confirm or disconfirm the transfer of comprehension skills learned in a listening mode to comprehension in a reading mode?

A Review of the Literature on Listening and Reading Comprehension

A review of the professional literature and texts in the field of reading and reading instruction supports the interrelation of listening and reading as well as the conclusions that listening comprehension and listening enjoyment of literature can be enhanced by reading aloud and direct instruction in listening skills (Boodt, 1984; Brownell, 1986; Choate & Rakes, 1987; Friedman, 1986; Hanks, 1988; Lundsteen, 1971; Pearson,& Fielding, 1982; Ringler & Weber, 1984; Simpson, 1986; Smith, 1963; and Walcutt, Lamport & McCracken, 1974; Warren & Fitzgerald, 1997). Literacy research documents the benefits of reading aloud on vocabulary, general linguistic ability, concepts of print and books, sense of story structure and genre, world knowledge, reading comprehension, and positive attitudes towards books and reading (Burns & Roe, 1976; Cooter, 1991; Dennis & Walter, 1995; Elley, 1989; Fitzgerald, 1989; LeLoup & Stone, 1991; Meyer, Stahl, Linn, & Wardrop, 1994, 1994; Morrow, 1989; Rosenhouse, Feitelson, Kita, & Goldstein, 1997; Strickland et al., 1990; Trelease, 1995; Warren & Fitzgerald, 1997). This is consistent with Vygotsky's theory of literacy as developing in social contexts with modeling and guidance by adults (Morrow; Rosenhouse et al.).

Story time has been a secure component in the kindergarten and primary grade classroom curriculum over the years (Dennis & Walter, 1995; Hoffman, Roser, & Farest, 1988; Meyer et al., 1994). One study found, however, that reading aloud to students correlated negatively or not at all with reading comprehension in the first grade (Meyer et al.), and another found that simply reading aloud is not enough to develop the specific kinds of comprehension skills needed by third grade students (Warren & Fitzgerald, 1997).

Several questions present themselves. Is a story just read aloud or is it read effectively? Is the story read aloud quality literature or an excerpt from a basal reader? In what ways does a story read aloud contribute to student learning?

With regard to reading aloud effectively, Hoffman, Roser, and Farest (1988) found that teachers tended merely to read aloud and employed few read-aloud strategies. After training in seven read-aloud strategies, teachers incorporated many of them into their story hour with the result that the average time for story hour increased from 10 to 23 minutes. The researchers noted evidence of a greater level of student engagement and participation when these techniques were used, but they did not explore whether there was also enhanced learning (Hoffman, Roser, & Farest).

To determine which story-hour techniques may be effective in increasing learning in the listening mode, it may be helpful to examine which specific skills are part of the listening process and which may be improved by instruction. What is known about listening may suggest read-aloud techniques that can contribute to student comprehension and learning during story hour.

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Brownell (1986) presents several models of the listening process, a synthesis of which reveals three underlying factors: hearing, cognitive processing, and responding. Hearing is dependent on interest, curiosity, concentration, and the absence of distractions. Included in the cognitive processing of messages received are selecting, understanding, interpreting, evaluating, organizing, assimilating, and remembering what is heard. The listener's response is the final phase of receiving a message.

Brownell (1986) believes that listening is "a learned skill" (p.2) that can be improved. Her book presents methods to improve each of the six facets of the HURIER model in order to become a better listener: Hearing, Understanding, Remembering, Interpreting, Evaluating, and Responding to messages. Those who read aloud can help improve children's listening skills by providing an environment, experiences, and indirect instruction that promote each facet of the model. Of greatest relevance for children's story hour are Hearing, Understanding, Remembering, and Responding since Piaget's model of cognitive development would indicate that Interpretation and Evaluation are more appropriate cognitive skills for the high school and adult listener (Elkind, 1994).

With regard to listening as a skill that can be learned in school, Hanks (1988) argues that listening comprehension skills should be practiced as listening skills in the listening mode. On the other hand, Pearson and Fielding (1982) say that cross-modal transfer of skills between listening and reading is possible but not likely before the time when students are mature readers, those whose reading comprehension is equivalent to or greater than their listening comprehension, which usually occurs in grades five or six. Reading stories aloud offers an obvious opportunity for both repeated practice in listening comprehension skills and possible cross-modal transfer to reading comprehension skills.

The many similarities between listening and reading would suggest that there may be some justification for assuming the possibility of the cross modal transferability of skills between them. First, the listener/speaker interaction is the same as the reader/writer interaction (Ringler & Weber, 1974); both the listener and the reader are receiving a message (Lundsteen, 1971; Burns & Roe, 1976), and for both the ultimate goal is comprehension of the entire text rather than individual words (Lundsteen; Paris, Wasik, & Van der Westhuizen, 1988; Ringler & Weber). Further, both listeners and readers tend to remember in the same order (first, last, middle) and improve their comprehension by taking notes (Lundsteen).

Second, there is in reading a connection between sight, sound, and meaning. Reading may indeed be the converting of written symbols into oral language that can then be understood. Auditory discrimination is needed for decoding written words; especially for beginning readers, mispronouncing a word prevents comprehension of the word. Pearson and Fielding (1982) make this point even more clearly when they state that the reader must infer prosody (the inflection, rhythm, and melody of spoken language) from the written text in order to comprehend it. Lundsteen (1971) concludes that oral vocabulary determines reading vocabulary because words in reading are the visual counterpart of words heard.

Third, the similarity between listening comprehension and reading comprehension is an implicit assumption held by those who argue for the use of reading comprehension skills to teach listening skills or vice versa (Aarnoutse, Van den Bos, & Brand-Gruwel, 1998; Choate & Rakes, 1987; Cooter, 1991; Cunningham, 1975; Fitzgerald, 1989; Hanks, 1988; LeLoup & Stone, 1991; Pearson & Fielding, 1982).

Fourth, research has verified that listening ability correlates with reading ability (Aarnoutse, Van den Bos, and Brand-Gruwel, 1998; Boodt, 1984; Burns & Roe, 1976;

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Friedman, 1986; Smith, 1963; Walcutt et al., 1974). Others note that reading aloud to a child promotes reading readiness by enhancing comprehension skills and developing a sense of story structure (Burns & Roe; Fitzgerald, 1989; LeLoup & Stone, 1991; Morrow, 1989) and that poor listening ability is the cause of reading disability (Smith, 1963).

Fifth, the skills needed for extracting meaning from language may be the same for both listening and reading. The factors in listening comprehension presented by Lundsteen (1971), Freedman (1986), Hanks (1988), Pearson and Fielding (1982), Ringler and Weber (1974), Scollon (1988), Smith (1963), and Walcutt, Lamport and McCracken (1974) are the same factors as those in reading comprehension: schema, prior knowledge, linguistic ability, active engagement, structure of text, inferencing, summarizing, and evaluating (Duffelmeyer & Duffelmeyer, 1987; Fitzgerald, 1989; Gordon, 1989; Morrow, 1989; Mosenthal, 1989; Nelson-Herber & Johnston, 1989; Paris, Wasik, Van der Westhuizen, 1988; Rosenhouse et al., 1997; Schmitt, 1988; Scollon, 1988; Tobin & Pikulski, 1988). Others note that both listeners and readers of stories construct mental models of story structure to facilitate their comprehension (Bower & Morrow; 1990; Fitzgerald, 1989) and that retelling enhances the comprehension of both listeners and readers (Morrow, 1989). Chall's theory of the developmental stages of reading posits that once readers can easily identify written words, reading achievement is based on existing language skills and knowledge (Tobin & Pikulski, 1988). The similarities between listening comprehension and reading comprehension make explicit the reason for Pearson and Fielding's (1982) statements that once lower level reading skills are mastered, both reading comprehension and listening comprehension are controlled by the same set of cognitive processes (the unitary process view). Sinatra (1990) and Carlisle (1991) note that much research supports the unitary process view.

Pearson and Fielding (1982) believe that cross-modal transfer of comprehension skills between listening and reading is possible after students are mature readers if the training is effective in the mode of delivery. They conclude that in a mature reader what benefits the reader will benefit the listener and vice versa. More recently, Aarnoutse, Van den Bos, and Brand-Gruwel (1998) found, however, that cross-modal transfer from listening to reading comprehension occurred in their study of 9-11 year-old poor readers whose reading comprehension was less than their listening comprehension. Their research suggests that cross-modal transfer is possible before students are mature readers.

There are, nonetheless, some important distinctions between listening and reading. Most importantly, the reader has to decode written symbols into words, and this may account for the normally differing levels of listening and reading comprehension associated with different ages. Listening comprehension exceeds reading comprehension in early elementary school, begins to become equivalent with reading comprehension in the fifth and sixth grades, and finally is surpassed by reading comprehension in the seventh grade and beyond (Carlisle, 1991; Cunningham, 1975; Lundsteen, 1971; Pearson & Fielding, 1982). Differences from this pattern have been used as indicators of reading disability and general linguistic disability (Carlisle, 1991; Dymock, 1993; Miller & Smith, 1990).

Even after words are decoded, however, there remain important differences between listening and reading. First, the listener has abundant verbal and visual cues to aid comprehension whereas the reader has few (Carlisle, 1991; Pearson & Fielding, 1982; Ringler & Weber, 1984; Sinatra, 1990). The reader has to infer prosody (stress, rhythm, and pitch) and develop mental images. Second, there are differences in control and time pressure: the reader controls reading speed and can vary the rate, whereas the speaker controls speaking speed and the listener often cannot affect it (Cunningham, 1975; Ringler & Weber, 1984; Sinatra, 1990). On the other hand, the time lag between speech

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and listening allows for more distractions to attention (Lundsteen, 1971). Third, written text is usually more complex than spoken, but text permanence allows the reader to review. On the other hand the listener can ask questions of the speaker. Fourth, the level of emotional involvement is usually greater for the listener because both parties are present (Lundsteen). And finally, there are also developmental differences: all children naturally listen to learn language but they must be taught to read (Sinatra, 1990).

These differences between listening and reading affect attentiveness, interaction with the material, and review--three of the most basic components of comprehension. Because some favor listeners while others favor readers and because circumstances differ, it is difficult to determine whether the reader or the listener has the net advantage. Sinatra (1990) notes that these differences have led some researchers to postulate separate cognitive processes for listening and reading (the dual process view).

The unitary and dual process views have important implications for reading aloud. If the process is unitary, then greater facility in general linguistic skills attained through listening will enhance reading once decoding is mastered and cross-modal transfer of comprehension skills between listening and reading would be possible. If the process is dual, then cross-modal transfer may not occur and improved listening may not lead to improved reading.

Cross-modality studies have explored the impact of information processed in listening on its processing in reading. Sinatra's (1990) study of processing at each of four levels (nonwords, words, nonsense phrases, good sentences) indicates that the listening and hearing processes converge at the lexical level. This research supports the unitary process view that once words are processed aurally or visually the cognitive process of understanding is the same. Her findings lend credence to the view that reading aloud improves general language skills that can be applied to reading once words are decoded.

The Research Question

Despite the differences between the listening and reading processes, both theory and research reported in the professional literature generally support the unitary process view and conclude that improved listening comprehension should lead to improved reading comprehension. The author designed this study to test whether instruction in three specific listening comprehension skills (sequencing, literal recall, and main idea) will improve reading comprehension using those same skills. If so, story hour may be not only a pleasurable experience but also one that contributes to children's reading skills and learning.

Methodology

The subjects were a class of 20 fourth grade students of varying reading levels in an elementary school in a medium-sized city in Pennsylvania (USA). The author selected fourth graders as appropriate to test the possible impact of listening comprehension skills on reading comprehension skills because (a) these students have already mastered basic decoding skills and their attention has turned to using these skills for comprehension and (b) they are likely to have slightly better listening than reading skills since they are not yet mature readers in the fifth and sixth grades.

The basic research design consisted of (a) a pre-test of silent reading comprehension using the three specific skills, (b) a unit of instruction in listening skills including the same three skills in the listening mode, and (c) a post-test of silent reading comprehension using the same three skills. The author selected the three specific skills

(sequencing, literal recall, and main idea) because they are within the reading abilities of average fourth grade students. The author did not mention reading comprehension skills during instruction in listening skills and did not mention listening skills during the two tests of reading comprehension.

The classroom teacher divided the students into two reading ability levels (Group A and Group B), and each Group took its own silent reading pre-test of expository text from SRA reading materials on similar topics. The reading level of the text selected for the tests was below the instructional level for each Group so that the text would present no decoding difficulties and students could direct their efforts toward comprehension. The text content was similar in each Group to control for performance related to interest in the subject matter. The test questions, taken from SRA materials, were similar for each Group and for both pre-tests and post-tests. The test for each Group consisted of five multiple-choice questions: one sequence-of-events question, three literal questions asking for recall of detail, and one main idea question. Titles were brief and illustrations were omitted so as not to facilitate comprehension. The test was not timed and students could refer to the text while answering questions. The students were told that this was a diagnostic test that would not be part of their grade in school but that they should do their best; performance on the test was therefore not related to pressure for grades.

The author presented 17 lessons in listening comprehension, 30-45 minutes daily, over a period of four weeks. She developed a generic lesson plan, designed to achieve maximum listening comprehension, that was organized around pre-listening, during-listening, and post-listening activities. Each day the author presented a story that illustrated one or more listening comprehension skills. Materials used included nine SRA stories, each one followed by an orally delivered written SRA test of six multiple-choice questions and class discussion on all relevant skills. The SRA test questions dealt mostly with recall of detail, main idea, and some inferences; and class discussion tended to focus on summarizing and questions of a convergent, divergent, and evaluative nature. There were also two SRA taped stories followed by similar SRA tests and four stories from trade books followed by class discussion but no written test. Since there were no sequence-of-events questions on the SRA post-listening tests, there was one sequence-of-events writing assignment. At the end of the unit the class as a whole reviewed the listening skills and the relevant stories.

The post-test for each reading ability Group had similar reading level, content, and administration as the pre-test. The intervening instruction in listening skills was not mentioned.

Findings

The analysis of the pre-test and post-test scores was based on four parameters: reading levels (independent, instructional, frustrational), a comparison of the total number of incorrect answers to the total number of possible answers, the distribution of incorrect answers according to the type of question (sequence-of-events, literal recall, main idea), and the scores of individual students. The number of students included in the analysis of data was 19, since one student moved away during the project.

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Pre-test Scores

Analysis of the total scores for each Group showed that 36% of Group A and 45% of Group B were reading at the independent level on the pre-test; 36% and 33% respectively at the instructional level, and 28% and 22% respectively at the frustrational level.

In comparing the total number of incorrect answers to the total number of possible answers (number of students times number of answers), each Group performed about equally well. In Group A 10 of 55 possible answers (18%) and in Group B 7 of 45 possible answers (16%) were incorrect. The distribution of incorrect answers according to the type of question, however, revealed differences between the Groups: on the sequence-of-events question, Group A made its most errors (40%) whereas Group B made its least errors (16%). On the three literal questions, each Group scored about the same over the three questions with Group A averaging 40% of its errors and Group B averaging 42%. On the main idea question, Group A made 20% of its errors and Group B made 42% of its errors. These pre-test results indicated there would be room for improvement in all three skills as well as in all parameters of analysis.

Post-test Scores

The results showed that 80% of Group A and 78% of Group B were now reading at the independent level, 20% of Group A and 22% of Group B were reading at the instructional level, and none were reading at the frustrational level. In comparing the total number of incorrect answers as a percentage of total possible answers, each Group performed equally well on the post-test. There were only two incorrect answers in each Group, making for 4% incorrect in each Group. In each Group, one incorrect answer was to a sequence-of-events question and one to a literal question. There were no incorrect answers to the main idea questions.

Comparison and Analysis of Pre-test and Post-test Scores

There was marked and similar improvement in each Group from pre-test to post-test in each of the skills and parameters of analysis. This is reflected in the distribution of grades: all but two students in each Group achieved a score of 100% on the post-test (see Figure 1):
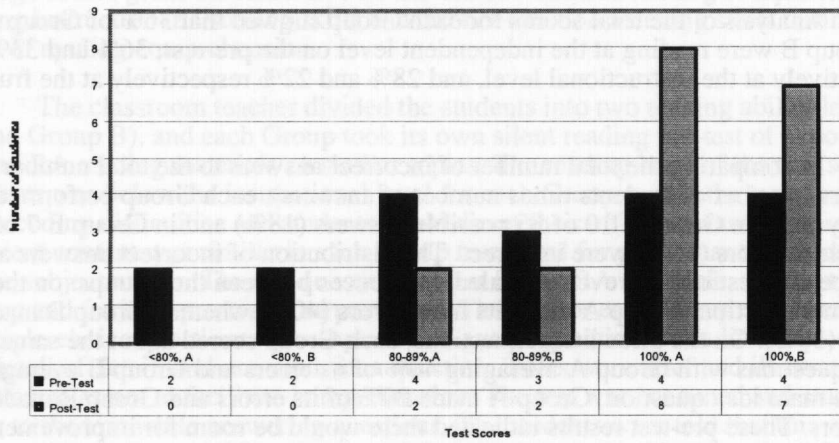
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	<80%, A	<80%, B	80-89%,A	80-89%,B	100%, A	100%,B
■ Pre-Test	2	2	4	3	4	4
■ Post-Test	0	0	2	2	8	7

Test Scores

Figure 1. Student Scores on the Pre-Test and Post-Test

The class as a whole improved its reading ability levels. Individual students moved from the frustrational to the instructional levels and from the instructional to the independent levels. On the post-test no students were reading at the frustrational level and all but two students in each Group were reading at the independent level (see Figure 2):
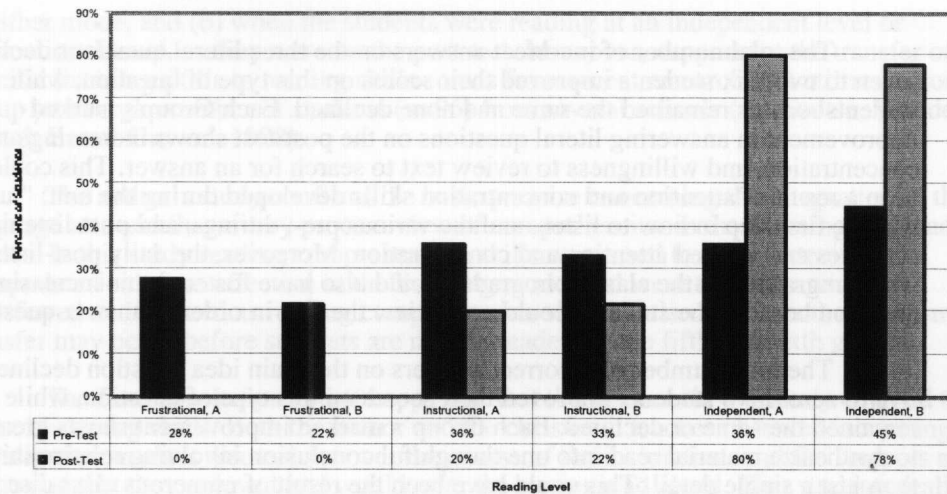
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	Frustrational, A	Frustrational, B	Instructional, A	Instructional, B	Independent, A	Independent, B
Pre-Test	28%	22%	36%	33%	36%	45%
Post-Test	0%	0%	20%	22%	80%	78%

Figure 2. Student Reading Levels on the Pre-Test and Post-Test.

The total number of incorrect answers declined from 17 on the pre-test to 4 on the post-test (see Figure 3):

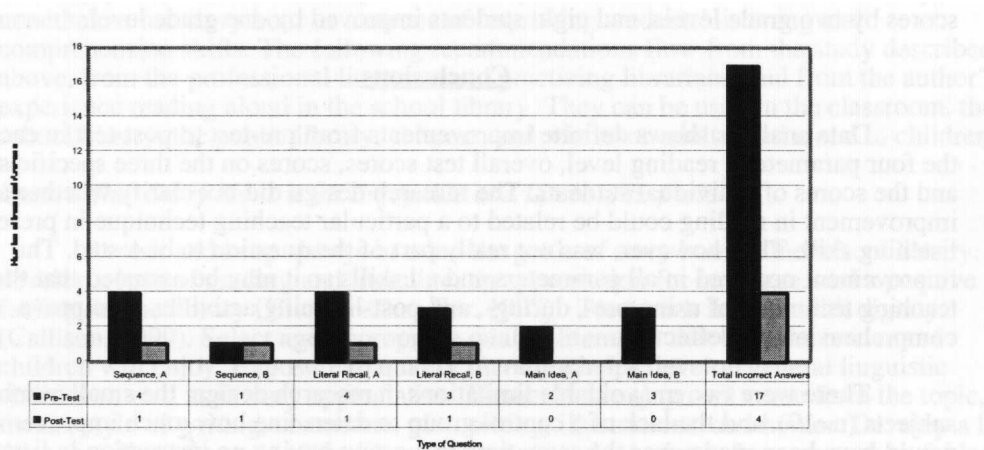|	Sequence, A	Sequence, B	Literal Recall, A	Literal Recall, B	Main Idea, A	Main Idea, B	Total Incorrect Answers
Pre-Test	4	1	4	3	2	3	17
Post-Test	1	1	1	1	0	0	4

Figure 3. Number of Incorrect Answers on the Pre-Test and Post-Test.

Incorrect answers also declined for each type of question. On the sequence-of-events questions, the total number of incorrect answers declined from five to two. Four students improved their scores on this type of question, while one student's scores remained the same and another's scores declined. Group A also improved its performance on these questions. Although this improvement might have been related to general improvement over time, the intensity of presentation of sequencing skills during the listening skills unit may have also contributed. Sequence of events were discussed in seven of the stories and were the basis of one writing assignment although they were not included on the daily post-listening tests.

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The total number of incorrect answers on the three literal questions declined from seven to two. Six students improved their scores on this type of question, while two students' scores remained the same and none declined. Each Group's marked improvement in answering literal questions on the post-test shows increasing attention, concentration, and willingness to review text to search for an answer. This could have been a result of attention and concentration skills developed during the unit: "tune-in" was the first step in how to listen, and the various pre-, during-, and post-listening activities encouraged attention and concentration. Moreover, the daily post-listening tests, while ungraded for the classroom grade, would also have fostered this increasing attention because the students could not review the text in order to answer questions.

The total number of incorrect answers on the main idea question declined from five to zero. Five students improved their scores on this type of question, while none remained the same or declined. Each Group's marked improvement shows greater ability to synthesize material read into one thoughtful conclusion involving relationships rather than just a single detail. This could have been the result of numerous class discussions emphasizing the difference between topic and main idea and plot versus theme, a distinction made in nearly all of the stories.

With regard to the improvement of individual students on each type of question, 15 students improved from pre-test to post-test, 3 remained the same, and 1 declined. Another way to look at the improvement of total scores from pre-test to post-test is to measure the improvement of the 11 students who did not score 100% on the pre-test. The improvement in these individuals' scores was dramatic: three students improved their test scores by two grade levels, and eight students improved by one grade level.

Conclusions

Data analysis shows definite improvements from pre-test to post-test in each of the four parameters: reading level, overall test scores, scores on the three specific skills, and the scores of individual students. The research design did not clarify whether any improvement in reading could be related to a particular teaching technique in presenting a listening skill. This, however, was not really part of the question to be tested. The improvement occurred in all parameters and all skills so it may be assumed that the teaching technique of using pre-, during-, and post-listening activities to improve comprehension was effective.

There were two unavoidable limitations in research design: the small number of subjects (n=19), and the lack of a control group to determine how much improvement would have been made over the same time in a group having no instruction in listening skills. Only one classroom was available for the research project, and there was no way to remove a group of students from the classroom in order to create a control group. The small number of students allows only limited generalizabilty from the case study. The lack of a control group prevents the drawing of definitive conclusions regarding the dramatic improvement from pre-test to post-test and the possibility of cross-modal transfer.

Nevertheless, the degree of improvement made in overall test scores, reading ability level, three specific skills, and individual performance on individual skills, when combined with the intensity and multiplicity of presentation of these same skills, strongly suggests that listening comprehension skills were utilized by both Groups A and B as reading comprehension skills in the following circumstances: (a) when those comprehension skills were not beyond the cognitive ability of the students to comprehend

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in either mode, and (b) when the students were reading at an independent level or instructional level, as they were on the post-test. Moreover, support for the transfer of specific listening skills to reading skills comes from recent research that utilized a control group on a larger number of students (n=96) from several schools (Aarnoutse, Van den Bos, & Brand-Gruwel, 1998).

The author's study confirms the basic premise concerning the integration of the language arts and the unitary process view of comprehension in the listening and reading modes. In this study reading comprehension skills were used to teach listening comprehension, were effective in the listening mode, and were then apparently transferred and utilized as reading comprehension skills. It also confirms that cross-modal transfer may occur before students are mature readers in the fifth and sixth grades.

The final conclusion is that happy one that the students in this study enjoyed the unit of listening skills. Both the author and the classroom teacher observed increasing participation in class discussions over the course of the instruction, and the students noted at the end that they enjoyed and would miss the stories read aloud. That students realized that oral language is a source of enjoyment is an important result. That they could both learn from and enjoy the materials used for teaching listening skills was also a step toward understanding that learning itself can be both rigorous and enjoyable.

Implications for Teachers, Librarians, and Parents

While it may be both impossible and undesirable to replicate the rigor and intensity of this classroom study in the library or at home, those who read aloud can nonetheless use story hour as a means of improving students' listening and comprehension skills. The following recommendations flow from the study described above, from the professional literature and practicing librarians, and from the author's experience reading aloud in the school library. They can be used in the classroom, the school library, the public library, at home, and wherever adults read aloud to children.

Ensure That Story Hour is an Enjoyable and Literary Experience

Revisit and keep always in mind the goals of story hour in the school library: to develop a love of reading and literature, an appreciation for language, and a positive feeling for the library (Hilchey-Chandler, 1997). Treat each listener with dignity (Callison, 1999). Select age-appropriate quality literature that both the reader and children will enjoy. Exposure to quality literature helps develop general linguistic abilities as well as literary appreciation. Elements of enjoyment come from the topic, theme, style of writing, characters, plot, setting, illustrations, and humor. Develop a list of titles that illustrate each of the literary elements and a variety of genres such as fables, folk tales, legends, and poetry. Read several stories from a series that the children enjoy (Rosenhouse et al., 1997).

Provide an Environment That Promotes Active Listening

A stimulating but warm and comfortable physical environment enhances both listening comprehension and participation (Brownell, 1986; Burns & Flowers, 1997; Freeman, 1992). Personal warmth results from eye contact, a positive expression on the face, a relaxed and open body posture, attractive attire, and positive words (Brownell). Remove distractions (Brownell).

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Develop an Age-appropriate Topic for Each Story Hour

A topic for each story hour provides structure to the whole program and unity to the individual session that may include a variety of genres. Topics may support the curriculum when the reader selects stories related to what the students are studying in the classroom. This offers school librarians an opportunity for collaboration with teachers.

Pre-read Every Selection Before Reading It Aloud

This enables the reader to decide how to introduce and read the story aloud, which literary and/or curricular elements to emphasize, and which post-listening activities are relevant (Burns & Flowers, 1997; Cooter, 1991).

Develop a Generic Lesson Plan That Enhances Listening and Comprehension

Research provides some general recommendations about activities before, during, and after reading aloud (Rosenhouse et al., 1997). What appears to be significant for listening comprehension during story hour are (a) expressive reading that encourages attention to and interaction with the material (Morrow, 1989; Scollon, 1988) and (b) activities that encourage interest, review, and analysis (Morrow; Rosenhouse et al.). Merely reading aloud may or may not be effective (Morrow; Strickland et al., 1990; Warren & Fitzgerald, 1997). This research project and another study (Warren & Fitzgerald) suggest that if improvement in specific comprehension skills is desired, the reader must model and discuss those skills during story hour.

The author developed the following generic lesson plan of activities for use during the study. It includes Brownell's (1986) recommendations for improving listening skills with the HURIER model, and it uses indirect teaching techniques that encourage the attention, interaction, and review that are essential to both listening and reading comprehension. It is also consistent with the pre-reading, during-reading, and post-reading activities used by expert readers (Callison, 1999). Those who read stories aloud can adopt and model some of these same activities for listeners in order to enhance their comprehension.

Pre-listening Activities. Get the children's attention and get rid of distractions (Brownell, 1986; Burns & Flowers, 1997; Freeman, 1992). Then stimulate their interest by (a) referring to previous stories, personal experiences, or knowledge, (b) generating curiosity about the current topic or title, or (c) setting a purpose (Callison, 1999; Rosenhouse et al., 1997). These activities get the attention and activate the prior knowledge and interest necessary for comprehension.

During-listening Activities. Present the story in ways that sustain attention and enhance listening comprehension: maintain eye contact, read with expression, infer and model prosody, and define new or unusual words as you read them (Brownell, 1986; Callison, 1999; Cooter, 1991; Elley, 1989; Freeman, 1992; Rosenhouse et al., 1997). Optional activities include (a) making paragraph summaries and predictions at key points (Cooter, 1991; Hoffman, Roser, & Farest, 1988), (b) encouraging students to visualize by giving them the time and purpose to close their eyes (Brownell, 1986), (c) providing a few props that represent characters, themes, plot, or setting (Cooter, 1991; Wilson & Brown, 1999), and (d) encouraging students to participate in repetitive story language (Freeman, 1992; Tompkins & McGee, 1989; Wilson & Brown, 1999). At least one experienced pre-school story reader prefers not to allow any interruptions to the story itself (Mazzoco, 1993), and the omission of illustrations and props may even have a positive effect on children's imaginations (Strickland et al., 1990). Pre-reading the story

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will help you select those optional activities most appropriate for each title. While these activities keep children attentive and develop their linguistic abilities, it is important not to let the number or duration of such activities break the continuity or enjoyment of the story.

Post-listening Activities. These include a discussion of the story and an age-appropriate related creative activity. When posing a question, be sure to allow adequate wait-time so that several children have time to complete their thoughts before calling on one (McKay, 1988). Enhance comprehension by asking the children to (a) consider literary elements and structure such as character, plot, setting, style, and mood (Gordon, 1989; Nelson-Herber & Johnson, 1989; Schmitt, 1988); (b) identify the topic and main idea (Brownell, 1986; Callison, 1999; Duffelmeyer & Duffelmeyer, 1987; Paris, Wasik, & Van der Westhuizen, 1988; Rosenhouse et al., 1997; Warren & Fitzgerald, 1997); or (c) summarize or retell the story (Brownell; Dennis & Walter, 1995; Morrow, 1989; Paris, Wasik, & Van der Westhuizen; Rosenhouse et al.; Schmitt). The goal of these activities is to develop a sense of story structure and main idea through a brief review. One discussion topic may be enough for each story, especially with primary students, and sometimes they may be omitted so as to avoid over-analyzing (Guardia, 1995; Nelson-Herber & Johnston). Although analytical discussion facilitates comprehension, story hour should remain fun and not become an obvious lesson (Freeman, 1992).

A creative activity related to the story encourages personal expression and improves the retention of what is heard (Brownell, 1986). The educational benefits of artistic activities include the development of eye-hand coordination and small motor skills, following directions, and learning geometric shapes. Written creative activities enhance the understanding of literary elements and reinforce skills in vocabulary, spelling, and grammar.

Select an age-appropriate number and type of these pre-, during-, and post-listening activities that are most relevant for each title, for the particular students, and for improving listening comprehension by increasing vocabulary, identifying the main idea, and understanding the organization and literary aspects of the story. School librarians may collaborate with teachers on the selection of these activities. The use of different pre-, during-, and post-listening activities provides variety within a structure that enhances listening comprehension. The goal for story hour is the introduction or reinforcement of listening skills with a few questions rather than direct instruction (Gordon, 1989; Nelson-Herber & Johnston, 1989).

Enjoy the Stories, the Experience of Reading Aloud, and Being With Children

The reader's enthusiasm for literature and children is contagious!

Conclusions

In order to contribute to children's learning during story hour, readers should employ effective indirect teaching strategies. The preceding recommendations are based on teaching and learning strategies that improve listening and reading comprehension, and they are consistent with what researchers and theorists have learned about listening comprehension, reading comprehension, pedagogy, constructivist learning, and cognitive development. They also offer an opportunity for the school librarian to collaborate with teachers to improve student learning and enjoyment of story hour.

Although teachers, librarians, and parents may not see the results of such a program of enhanced listening skills in the absence of research, they may nonetheless feel

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assured that they have contributed to the increased literary appreciation, linguistic ability, listening and reading comprehension skills, and cognitive and affective development of their students while the children think they are just listening to a story!

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