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THE READING AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT OF SEVERELY AND
PROFOUNDLY DEAF CHILDREN IN A TOTAL COMMUNICATION ENVIRONMENT

BY

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ABSTRACT

CHAPTER 1. A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE
1.1 Historical perspective. 1
1.2 Explanations of low achievement in the deaf. 5
1.3 Studies of the reading process 48

CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY
2.1. The design of the study 72
2.2. The subjects 74
2.3 Procedures: standardized measures 77
2.3.1 Assessment of reading achievement 77
2.3.2. Assessment of language achievement 85
2.4. Establishing high and low progress groups 94
2.5. Procedures: process measures 95
2.5.1. Analysis of miscues 95
2.5.2. Cloze procedures 108
2.6. Reading in the classroom: influence of the classroom environment 113

CHAPTER 3 INTER-RATER AGREEMENT
3.1 Standardized reading assessment 115
3.2 Standardized language assessment 116
3.3 Signed and oral reading 119
3.4 Cloze 123

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS: READING ASSESSMENT
4.1 Standardized reading assessment 129
4.2 Assessment on classroom material 140
4.3 Comparison of standardized and classroom material 145
CONTENTS (continued)

APPENDIX H  ANOVAS of miscue categories: reading levels  366
APPENDIX I  ANOVAS of cloze substitution categories  369
APPENDIX J  Questionnaires: i)parents; ii)teachers  372
APPENDIX K  Case study details of six case studies  374

REFERENCES  409

LIST OF TABLES

1. Design of the study  73
2. Numbers of severely and profoundly deaf subjects  76
3. Inter-rater agreement: language assessment  118
4. Inter-rater agreement: analysis of miscues  122
5. Inter-rater agreement: cloze analysis (i)  126
6. Inter-rater agreement: cloze analysis (ii)  128
7. Standardized reading: reading age  132
8. Standardized reading: standard scores  134
9. Assessment of reading: reading levels (i)  143
10. Assessment of reading: reading levels (ii)  143
11. Comparison of reading age on Gates-MacGinitie and independent reading level  146
12. GAEL: Mean percentage over three years correct; mean annual increase and mean cohort difference  149
13. GAEL: Prompted and Imitated productions over three years  153
14. Language scores for severely and profoundly deaf  160
15. Ratio of severely and deaf subjects  161
16A/B. GAEL standard scores: Simple and Complex  166
17. GAEL standard scores: transformed  168
18. GAEL: correlation between Simple and Complex Sentence Levels  171
19 Correlation between standardized reading and language scores  172
20. Miscue categories: means  176
21. Miscue categories: significant differences  176
LIST OF TABLES (continued)

22 Miscues categories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>semantically, syntactically appropriate,</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>graphically similar, fingerspelt,</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>omission of inflect.morphemes, appeals,</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sign error, self-corrections</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

23 Fingerspelt miscues: interaction | 185 |

24 Omission of inflectional morphemes: interaction | 188 |

25 Sign errors: interaction | 193 |

26 High and Low progress readers not self-correcting | 195 |

27 Self-corrections: miscue categories | 196 |

28 Miscue categories across reading levels | 213 |

(continued) | 218 |

29 Semantically appropriate miscues: T-tests | 214 |

30 Syntactically appropriate miscues: T-tests | 215 |

31 Graphically similar miscues: T-tests | 216 |

32 Fingerspelt miscues: T-tests | 217 |

33 Appeals: T-tests | 220 |

34 Cloze substitutions in each category | 224 |

35 Cloze substitutions: 
   Totally appropriate, semantically appropriate, | 224 |
   syntactically appropriate, adjacent, | 227 |
   peripheral association, context | 229 |

36 Engaged time in reading instruction | 240 |

37 Teacher interactions | 241 |

38 Teacher behaviours | 243 |

39 Case studies: standardized assessment | 256 |

40 Case studies: reading analysis | 256 |

41 Comparison of reading achievement N.Z./U.S.A. | 271 |
LIST OF FIGURES

1. Gates-McGinitie: three administrations
2. Gates-McGinitie: change across age: collapsed data
3. Gates-McGinitie: means and range
4. GAEL - change over time for each cohort
5. GAEL - change across age: three administrations
6. GAEL - change across age - collapsed scores
7. GAEL - range of severely / profoundly deaf scores
8. GAEL - comparison with C.I.D. sample
9. GAEL - standard scores: prompted productions
10. Fingerspelled miscues: interaction
11. Omission of inflectional morphemes: interaction
12. Sign errors: interaction
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this two year cross-sectional and longitudinal study was to examine the reading and language of severely and profoundly deaf children over two years. The focus was on reading and language achievement, measured by standardized tests and the process of reading demonstrated when engaged in reading prose.

The children were the entire population of severely and profoundly deaf, aged from 5 to 10 years at the commencement of the study, who had no other educational handicaps. They were being educated within a Total Communication programme at the Kelston School for Deaf and associated unit classrooms.

Reading achievement was assessed by the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Assessment Test on three occasions, each one year apart. Reading achievement was also assessed by documenting accuracy and comprehension (retelling) when reading natural language texts. Language achievement was measured using the Grammatical Analysis of Elicited Language (Moog and Geers, 1979, 1980). The relationship between reading and language achievement was established.

The reading of natural language stories was analyzed to establish the pattern of errors (miscues) on text at two levels of difficulty for the reader. Categories of semantically appropriate, syntactically appropriate,
grammatically similar, the omission of inflectional morphemes, fingerspelt miscues and signing errors were established. Comparisons were made between age groups, proficiency groups (High and Low) and across developmental levels. Cloze passages were also analysed to assess the use of contextual information by these readers.

Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) were undertaken for each miscue category in the signed reading, classified by age and proficiency of the reader, and difficulty of the text. Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) were undertaken for the miscue categories classified by reading level, and the cloze exercise substitution classified by age and proficiency of the reader.

Observations of classroom reading instructions were included to document the environment within which the children were being educated.

Six individual case studies, three high progress and three low progress, were also analyzed.

The findings suggest that reading achievement of these severely and profoundly deaf readers is still low. This is consistent with previous studies but achievement in comparison with earlier New Zealand data and data from surveys in the U.S. was slightly higher. This study supported previous research that suggested that standardized
tests of reading do not adequately measure the reading achievement of deaf readers.

High positive correlations (r ≥ .90) between reading and language achievement were interpreted to be bi-directional and suggestive that higher rates of engaged time in reading could facilitate greater reading and language development.

An integrated/interactive model most appropriately described the process of reading for these deaf readers as for hearing readers. Like hearing readers these deaf readers, at all ages and both high and low progress, were able to utilize contextual cues, and textual cues as they interacted with text. However, several unique differences in the process of reading have important implications for instruction. Low levels of syntactic cues during signed reading, it was suggested, reflect the readers use of their language in use and sensitivity to task factors. Fingerspelling was demonstrated to be a potentially useful strategy that was used at a significantly higher rate by High Progress readers. High Progress readers were more able than Low Progress readers to use strategies ensuring fluency in order to construct meaning from texts.

Observations of classroom reading indicated that the rate of engaged time in reading was not high and that although the teachers espoused a meaning-emphasis some practices in the classroom did not foster independent problem solving readers. The educational implications of the data were discussed.