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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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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education,
University of Auckland

1988

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Marie Clay and Stuart McNaughton for their guidance and assistance in the supervision of this thesis. In particular, I am indebted to Stuart McNaughton for his continual encouragement throughout the time that the study was undertaken and reported, and to Marie Clay for her understanding and support in the later stages of writing the thesis.

I am also grateful to the following people:-

The research assistants, without whom this study could not have been completed:-Jane Haskell, Christine Miller, Debbie Dunleavy, Natalie Toh, Elisabeth Ferris, Sally Lumsden and Marie Bowles;

Bryan Tuck, whose assistance with the statistical analyses was invaluable;

Vin Leonard, Acting-Principal of the Kelston School for Deaf Children;

The teachers, whose co-operation and interest was greatly appreciated;

My family and friends, who have supported and assisted me throughout the study;

And above all the children at the Kelston School for Deaf Children and associated Unit classes.

I would also like to acknowledge the financial support of the following:-

The Auckland University Research Grants Committee, The Federation for Deaf Children, British Hearing Aids Ltd, and the Department of Education, Wellington, (Research and Statistics Department).

CONTENTS

	page
ABSTRACT	i
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)

CHAPTER 5	RESULTS : LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT	148
CHAPTER 6	RESULTS : THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN READING AND LANGUAGE	170
CHAPTER 7	RESULTS : ANALYSIS OF THE READING PROCESS	
7.1.	The analysis of miscues across age	174
7.2.	The analysis of miscues across reading level	211
7.3.	The analysis of cloze passages	222
CHAPTER 8	RESULTS : READING INSTRUCTION IN THE CLASSROOM	
8.1	Teacher questionnaires	236
8.2	Observations of reading in the classroom	239
CHAPTER 9	CASE STUDIES OF INDIVIDUAL SUBJECTS	
9.1	Rationale for analysis	249
9.2	Selection of the subjects	250
9.3	Background characteristics	251
9.4	Reading and language development	253
CHAPTER 10	DISCUSSION	
10.1	Reading achievement as measured by a standardized test of reading	270
10.2	Explanations of low achievement :revisited	278
10.3	A description of the process of reading	289
10.4	A comparison with previous studies of miscue analysis with deaf children	322
10.5	Educational implications	327
CHAPTER 11	CONCLUSIONS	337
APPENDIX A	Procedures	342
APPENDIX B	Running records administration	344
APPENDIX C	Emergent reading analysis	346
APPENDIX D	Criteria for analysis of running records	347
APPENDIX E	Criteria for analysis of cloze substitutions	353
APPENDIX F	ANOVAS miscue categories: age	356
APPENDIX G	Miscues appropriate within sentence only	364

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
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LIST OF TABLES	page
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:

semantically, syntactically appropriate,	179
graphically similar, fingerspelt,	183
omission of inflect.morphemes, appeals,	187
sign error, self-corrections	191

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-McaGinitie: three adminsitration	133
2 Gates-MacGinitie: change across age:collapsed data	135
3 Gates-MacGinitie: means and range	138
4 GAEL- change over time for each cohort	150
5 GAEL- change across age:three administrations	154
6 GAEL- change across age- collapsed scores	155
7 GAEL- range of severely /profoundly deaf scores	157
8 GAEL-comparison with C.I.D. sample	164
9 GAEL-standard scores:prompted productions	167
10 Fingerspelled miscues:interaction	185
11 Omission of inflectional morphemes:interaction	189
12 Sign errors : interaction	192

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 ($r \geq .90$) 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.