

REACTION: THE USE OF COGNITIVE
SELF-INSTRUCTION AS AN INTERVENTION
FOR METACOGNITIVE FAILURE

EUNICE N. ASKOV

The Pennsylvania State University

Sarah D. Weidler's paper presents an alternative means of studying children's reading. By using a single-subject design with multiple base-lines, she was able to study the effect of her intervention treatment, cognitive self-instruction. A large-scale study with many subjects responding to a standardized reading achievement test would not be sensitive to the effects upon individuals. The fact that her treatment worked more effectively with some of the children than with others showed up with this type of design. The reasons for this differential effect can be determined only by studying the individual children.

In selecting children who might receive this type of treatment in a clinic setting, it would be important to consider the child's stage of reading development (Chall, 1983). The child should be in Stage 2, "Confirmation, Fluency, Ungluing from Print" which the average child goes through in grades 2-3 or at ages 7-8. At this stage the child needs to read to develop fluency, reading widely in familiar materials. S/He is not reading to learn new content, but simply to confirm what is already known. The child's sight vocabulary expands and s/he practices application of various word attack skills. Hence, the selection of reading material is important since at this stage the child should be using the familiar, not the new.

During this stage the child gradually begins to focus on meaning. Cognitive self-instruction might indeed help the child who seems to be "stuck" in Stage 2—the child who can decode adequately at his/her instructional level but who does not attend to the meaning. The technique would probably be of little value to a child in Stage 1 where the focus is upon decoding or learning the letter-sound correspondences.

Weidler attributes some of the differential effect of her treatment to the grade level at which the children in her study functioned. Cognitive self-instruction seemed to work better with those children reading at lower levels. In addition to the factor of shorter, less complex sentences, which Weidler suggests, one wonders whether the lower-level selections are of more

familiar content, as in a basal reader series. Although most SRA kit selections present expository writing, those at lower levels might be about more familiar subjects. A follow-up study should control for the effect of familiarity of content.

Instructionally, the technique of cognitive self-instruction appears to be effective in a clinic setting. It would be difficult to adapt the technique to a group setting since the teacher models the correction process for individual's miscues. Selection of appropriate children as well as use of familiar reading materials at an instructional level are important considerations. Instructionally, this technique should be combined with eliciting prior knowledge about the topic from the child so that the content of the passage can be tied to existing schemata (Schallert, 1982).

Weidler's study suggests a direction for further research in the application of cognitive self-instruction to develop metacognitive processes. Further investigations into the factors that make the technique more effective with some children than with others are necessary. Research using a single-subject design holds promise of sorting out these factors.

REFERENCES

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