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Author(s)	SEKI, Michiko
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## A STUDY OF PROCESS OF RESPONSE OF A SIX-YEAR-OLD TO REPEATED READINGS OF A PICTURE BOOK

Michiko Seki  
*Hokkaido University*

The purpose of this study was to describe the change of responses of a 6-year-old American boy to a picture book over time on one-to-one basis in a school setting. A qualitative approach was used for identifying the nature of repeated readings. The boy was read aloud the same picture book ten times and read it by himself ten times over a period of five weeks. The reading sessions were both video and audio recorded for transcription. Findings suggest that during the course of subsequent sessions, his response changed both quantitatively and qualitatively. His amount of responses increased from the first session to the fifth session and decreased dramatically in the sixth session. The content of his responses changed from simple identification to a more complex in-depth probing of the story after the book became familiar to him. The findings suggest the importance of one-to-one repeated readings in the classroom.

Key words: changes of responses to a picture book; nature of repeated readings

### INTRODUCTION

Reading aloud to children has been encouraged by many educators, researchers, and librarians (Cullinan, 1989; Huck, Hepler, & Hickman, 1987; Trelease, 1985). They also suggest that children should hear their favorite stories over and over again (Beaver, 1982; Huck et al., 1987; Morrow, 1988; Teale & Martinez, 1988). Reading to children increases vocabulary, oral language abilities, reading comprehension, and story awareness. It also helps them learn to predict and generates further interest in stories. Children who are read to regularly will also independently reread familiar books to themselves or others before they have learned to read in the conventional sense (Sulzby, 1985).

The consequence of the repeated readings to children is well known empirically, but less is known about the process of how they become familiar with a certain book. Previous studies dealing with children and picture books have been done in laboratory

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This paper is a brief summary of "An ethnographic study of process of response of a six-year-old to repeated readings of a picture book." (In *Bulletin of the Faculty of Education, Hokkaido University*, Vol. 54, in press.) Requests for reprints should be addressed to Michiko Seki, Research and Clinical Center for Child Development, Faculty of Education, Hokkaido University, Sapporo 060, Japan.

settings using illustrations or text removed from the context of the book. As Kiefer (1982) claims, we have to observe "how children look at real books in the real world" (p. 62).

Qualitative studies of picture book reading grew out of a dissatisfaction with the limitations of the quantitative, or correlational, approach to picture book reading research. Some studies have been done on children's response to picture books using ethnographic methodology since early 80's (Crago & Crago, 1983; Driessen, 1984; Kiefer, 1982). These studies enable us to depict what actually occurs in picture book reading in either home or school settings.

The purpose of this study is to examine and describe the changes of responses when a 6-year-old boy is read a picture book repeatedly in an individual reading setting.

## METHOD

### A subject

The subject for this study should have a positive relationship with the researcher to create naturalistic reading aloud sessions. Moreover, the child should be very verbally explicit when being read to, and have a long attention span for the literary work. Two week's pilot observation was done at a Montessori school in Dayton, Ohio in order to find a subject who met the above criteria. Eight children were selected out of 22 children through the observation. The researcher read aloud a book which was used for this study to these children individually. A six-year-old boy was selected as a subject because he responded to the book most frequently of all the children. The researcher negotiated with the mother to use her son as a subject.

### Selecting a book

In selecting a suitable book for this study, which must be initially unfamiliar to the subject, the researcher looked through all the books on the 1988 Children's Choices list. The yearly list of books chosen by a U.S. national sampling of 10,000 youngsters from kindergarten through grade eight, sponsored by the International Reading Association and the Children's Book Council, is published every October in *The Reading Teacher*. The researcher did not find that preschoolers and young readers of that year seemed to select aesthetically sound picture books. The book selected finally was *Fox's Dream* by Tejima (1987). It is a big format picture book with multicolored woodcut illustrations, and was awarded Special Mention in the Bologna Graphic Prize in 1986. The text is rather short, but it conveys a good story and profound meaning. The plot has flashbacks which are considered to be very hard for younger children to understand (Cullinan, 1989; Huck et al., 1987).

## PROCEDURE

The data was collected over a period of five weeks from February 8th to March 10th, 1989 in the principal's office, which was next door to the subject's normal classroom. A time schedule was set with a total of ten sessions. They were three times a week (one at a time), Monday and Wednesday afternoons and Friday mornings. Each

session was both video taped and audio taped. The boy and the researcher sat side by side on a couch. The video camera was set on the desk in front of the couch. The microphone of a SONY Recordable Walk Man was used for monitoring his speech through earphones. Throughout the ten reading sessions, he voluntarily read the book. Accordingly, he listened to the story ten times and he read it ten times.

Each session lasted approximately twenty minutes. Word-for-word transcription of the sessions was made with audio tapes, and where necessary, the boy's non-verbal behaviors were added by watching the video tapes.

## FINDINGS

Throughout the ten reading aloud sessions and the subject's reading sessions, the following four characteristics of responses were observed:

1. How the quantity of the subject's responses changed over time.
2. How the quality of the subject's responses changed over time.
3. How the subject's responses focused on print and book convention.
4. The subject's attempts to memorize the text.

### *Changes in quantity of responses*

The researcher and the subject talked about the book before each session began, in between each reading and reading aloud session, and after each session ended. The subject even commented and questioned frequently during his reading session.

In order to see quantitative changes of subject's responses, his utterances in each reading aloud session were divided roughly into two categories: comments and questions.

Table 1 shows the subject's total number of comments and questions in each reading aloud session. His comments increased rapidly from the first session to the fifth session. In the fifth session, he commented three times more than in the first session. On the other hand, his questions decreased from the first session to the third session and increased from the fourth session to the fifth session. In the sixth session, his comments decreased dramatically, so did his questions. From the sixth session to

**TABLE 1**  
Jared's Total Comments and Questions in Each Reading Aloud Session

Session	Comments	Questions
1	21	8
2	32	6
3	42	2
4	44	6
5	64	10
6	19	3
7	20	2
8	24	0
9	35	6
10	26	2

the ninth session, his comments increased again. His questions decreased from the sixth session to the eighth session, but increased again in the ninth session, and decreased in the tenth session.

In Martinez and Roser's (1985) study and in Morrow's (1988) study, these researchers described changes of quantity and quality of children's responses after the same book were read three times. In their studies, repeated readings increased the number and complexity of questions and comments. From this table, if we look at the effects of repeated readings, only by comparing the the amount of responses session to session, can we conclude that, for the subject, ten reading sessions might have been too many. However, he changed the strategy of his interpretation of the story from the sixth to the tenth session.

#### *Changes in quality of responses*

In the initial reading session, the subject identified and predicted what would happen. He also gave reasons for his statements. His questions were mostly literal ones. He asked the meaning of the words, such as ice foxes, vixen, and wildflowers. His comments and questions were simple and short.

In the second session, his attention focused on the different parts of the book other than the characters. For example, pages in which the moon was depicted, or one illustration that looked like the cover page.

From the second session to the fifth session, his attention focused on the different parts of the illustrations other than the characters. His comments became longer and more complex for the wordless illustrations from the first session to the fourth session. As for the text, he predicted phrases and sentences, echoed, and told some of the sentences in unison with the researcher. Trying to memorize, his questions became more like confirmation, or questions about where he was, such as, "Am I right?...What does it say?...Am I on this page?...Where am I?" At one point, he corrected the researcher's misreading of the text. He tried to recite without looking at the text. He mixed up the sentences and phrases of other pages. He told one sentence and corrected himself several times. At this point his confusion reached a peak.

In the sixth session, the subject's telling the story from memory became closer to the text and he appeared to listen more attentively. His comments cosequently decreased dramatically during the session.

In the seventh session, he created sound effects for every illustration, acting out the story when he almost memorized the text.

In the tenth session, he covered up the text with his hands when the researcher was reading. He told the story for her when she could not tell it from memory. His comments again decreased during that session.

The subject asked consistently the same questions at the certain points of the book. "Where is the father fox?" was one of them. These questions led to longer conversations as the sessions progressed.

The subject kept trying to find which one of the three foxes was the father, inferring and stating many reasonings. His responses reflected Piaget's (1967) pre-operational thinking. Sometimes he made decisions, focusing on only one aspect, forgetting

totally about other aspects or the sequence of the story. When the researcher asked him what did the fox see (from the fox's perspective), forgetting that the fox saw the frozen animals, instead, he answered, "He (the fox) saw me." This example is explained by both centering and egocentrism because he only saw the matter from his own perspective. One example of his animistic thought was found in his poetic expression as, "The moon is carrying his fox." For him, frozen animals in the trees were real animals which had climbed up the trees and got frozen.

Above all, the subject could not understand the flashbacks. All his questions about the "father fox" were stemmed from this fact. He interpreted the mother fox with three cubs on the first flashback illustration as the protagonist (male) fox, "father fox," because the color and the shape of the mother fox was very much like the father fox. On the next flashback illustration, three young foxes with the same color and shape as the "father fox" were leaping against the sun. He was perplexed. In the second session, by the researcher's question of what the babies were doing, his attention moved toward the cubs. The adult fox with the babies should be a mother fox. With his schema of identifying the protagonist fox by color and shape, he faced a contradiction.

In the fifth session, the subject changed his strategy, or he accommodated his existing schema into a new schema in order to solve the new problem. He tried to find out which one was the father by looking at the size of the foxes. In the illustration which preceded the first flashback scene, there were four foxes of the same size, including the protagonist fox. He found only three cubs with their mother on the next illustration. He pointed to the mother fox's belly, and said, "It doesn't make sense because on the other side, there might be one more." In the sixth session, when he saw there were only three foxes on the next flashback illustration, he thought that "the father" had already jumped over the sun. In the ninth session, he measured the size of the foxes, moving his finger gradually upward from the rear foot to the head of each fox, as if he were counting imaginary numbers. He guessed the left fox was the father because, "usually the fox father weighs the most." The problem was solved, but he faced another contradiction. From the text, he knew that three foxes had to be two sons and a sister. Then, there was no room for the "father." If he counted one of them as the father, the rest should be two brothers. Where was the sister? Maybe she was not born yet. This was his new question in the tenth session. He had to seek a new strategy again to solve this problem. His questions may continue until he acquires a new schema to cope with the flashbacks.

#### *Responses focused on print and book convention*

The subject responded verbally and/or physically to the print of the text. He read the story word by word at the beginning. He put his finger under each line when the book was not familiar to him. He noticed that the word *suddenly* looked and sounded like *Sunday*. He mentioned the location of the text on the pages. He noticed the book was not paginated. He wondered about the relationship between the author and the city where the publisher was located. When he became familiar with the book, he tried to read it from back to front.

### *Memorizing the text*

It was not the researcher's intention to have the subject read the text or memorize all the sentences. He did that spontaneously. By the tenth reading session, the subject learned one third of the sentences from memory accurately. Figure 1 shows his pattern of how he came to tell the text from memory, which was very difficult for him to read at the beginning.

In earlier sessions, phase 1, he listened to the text attentively, identifying the characters and/or objects and predicting what happened next. He also read the text word by word very carefully, putting his finger under the line. In the subsequent sessions, phase 2, he repeated or echoed final phrases of the sentences right after the researcher's reading. He also predicted first phrases of sentences. Then, phase 3, he said the beginning and/or end of the sentences, and after a while, the middle of the sentences, in unison with the researcher. He memorized easy sentences at this point. In phase 4, he got confused by other text language, conventional usage, and his own grammatical rules. In phase 5, his errors became very few and he corrected himself. In phase 6, he recited the sentences from memory without deviating from the text.

The shift from phase to phase is dependent on the sentences. The subject memorized sentences which had fewer undecodable words faster than those having many difficult words to decode.

### CONCLUSIONS

The descriptions of the changes of the subject's responses over time revealed several implications about the nature of repeated readings. Quantity and quality of his responses to the picture book changed over time. During the initial reading, he appeared to be intent on listening to the story and looking at the pictures. He put his finger under each line as a guide. This practice decreased in subsequent sessions. As the reading sessions progressed, and the story became more familiar, he often did not look at the book. Instead he would engage in trying to memorize the story.

*Fox's Dream* was difficult for the subject at that cognitive developmental level. He could not really understand the flashbacks in the story. Nevertheless, he developed his own ideas and constructed a meaning for the story. Many characteristics of pre-operational thought described by Piaget (1967) were observed throughout the ten ses-

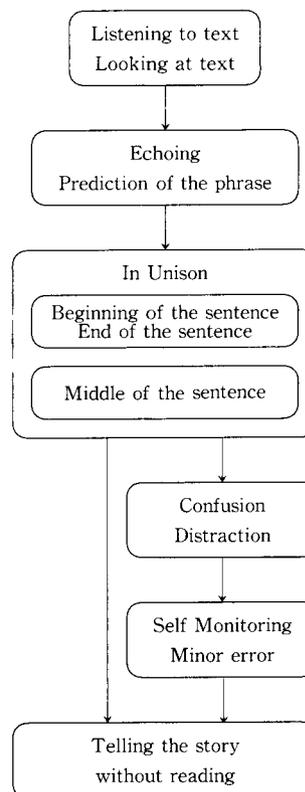


FIGURE 1 Jared's changes of responses to the text over time.

sions.

The subject went back to the same questions again and again at certain points. For example, he asked in subsequent sessions many times where the father fox was. As Teale (1987) states, repeated picture storybook readings are "both repetitive and innovative...", they provide, "a facilitative framework within which the child can operate" (pp.61-62). The subject did not merely repeat the same questions but asked questions from different perspectives, and answered questions by himself with various reasonings. He was confused by the color, shape, and size of the foxes. He focused on one dimension and ignored other. It took time for the subject to solve his problems, and it also took time for the researcher to understand what had been puzzling him. His comments lessened when he got into a new phase of mental operation. When he almost accomplished his assimilation of the story, his comments lessened dramatically. They became even less than those in the initial reading session.

The stability of text and illustrations played an important role in his cognitive development. It allowed him to think and rethink about the same problems. The stability of the book also served as a hypothesis-testing device. His hypothesis was either confirmed or denied when the page was turned. This mental operation seemed to bring him enjoyment and motivated him to learn the text from memory. As a matter of fact, his student teacher said, "Every time he came back to the classroom after the reading session was over, he looked very happy. So I asked him every time, 'Did you do anything different today?' He answered, 'No. We did the same thing.' I don't believe he was so happy with the same book."

If the book had been read only once to the subject, and in a group reading setting, these responses reflecting his mental operations and the development of his thinking could not have been observed. He needed to turn pages back and forth in order to seek answers to his questions. The one-to-one repeated readings enabled him to examine the illustrations and the meaning of the story much more closely.

According to Morrow (1988), repeated readings led low socio-economic children to focus on print and story structure and were most effective with lower ability children. In the classroom group reading, usually children are seated far from the book. This situation limits both physical and visual contact with the book. This subject turned the pages back and forth again and again, and looked closely at the illustrations in order to find the answers to the questions he raised. Much of the subject's behavior relating to print was seen after the book was read several times. Again, the one-to-one repeated readings allowed him to examine the book closely and to have contact with the book. This, in turn, led him to focus on print and book conventions.

During the course of learning the story from memory, the subject deviated greatly from the actual text. His deviation from the text occurred mainly because of the following three reasons: distraction by other parts of the text; distraction by conventional usage; and reorganization of the text into his own grammatical rules. One example of his reorganization of the text can be shown by his interpretation of the sentence "Snow covered trees glisten in the moonlight." In this sentence, "snow covered" modifies "trees" which is the subject, and "glisten" is the verb of this sentence. Whereas, when he took "snow" as the subject and "covered" as the verb, he needed

the object of the sentence. At first he said, "Snow covered ice and snow." Then from the sixth session, he added "the" after "covered" and he consistently said, "Snow covered the trees..." Another example of the subject's reorganization was shown when he consistently said, "But he is in a place *where* he had never *been* before," instead of saying, "But he is in a place he had never seen before." This illustrates his distraction by the conventional usage.

The subject's deviation from the text became narrower toward the last phase. Although he added some words to the several sentences, or changed some words into different words, the meaning of the sentences did not change. Furthermore, he mostly substituted words from the text. The words in the parentheses show those used in the text.

Once again the fox is *all* alone.

Suddenly he finds a trail of footprints *lying* in the snow.

It is *silent* (still).

A fox *wanders* (walks) alone in the moonlight.

A snow hare *leaps* (soars) across the frosty hill...

Goodman & Burke (1972) state that "All readers do deviate from the text" (p. 5). They call the deviations in oral reading *miscues* which suggest that they are not random errors but are cued by the thought and language of the reader in his encounter with the written materials. The subject's miscues reflected his experience of the language of the text. He assimilated the meanings of words and used them in the appropriate situations.

At the initial reading session, he learned several new words. In repeated readings, he started to decode difficult sentences quickly, and furthermore, learned to use some words in the different situations. Above all, through the confusion, he assimilated the text grammar and accommodated his own grammar to it. He even changed the text grammar to fit his own grammatical rules. Repeated readings thus helped his language development. He will be able to use his acquired words, phrases, and sentences from the text language both in oral and written language.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

It is very difficult to generalize the findings to other contexts because of the nature of qualitative studies. However, the findings regarding the changes of responses over time suggest that repeated readings on a one-to-one basis in the school setting play an important role both in the child's cognitive development and in his/her literacy development. Suggestions might be made for classroom practice and for future study from these findings.

### *Recommendations for teaching*

In order to stimulate and enhance the child's cognitive development as well as literacy development, teachers should :

1. Read the same story many times to the child. It takes a long time for him/her to appreciate a whole picture book because of the constraints of his/her cognitive ability. Repeated readings are necessary for him/her to understand and construct the

meaning of a story. It also takes time for the adult to understand the child's perception of the story or interpretations.

The amounts of repetition necessary for the individual child to construct the lines of a particular book can be expected to vary. The teacher should at least continue reading the same story until the child learns it from memory.

2. Make the print accessible to the child. Reading stories to large groups of children, or even to relatively small groups (six to eight children), may not give the child access to the print needed to learn words by sight. A one-to-one reading situation generates awareness of print, story structure, and book convention. Especially for a beginning reader, learning to decode needs to be assisted by a patient and supportive adult reader.

3. Read a book with a child or with a very small group of children. The child constructs the meaning of the story through interaction with adult. Each child has different experiences and different needs. It may be difficult for a classroom teacher to put one-to-one story readings into practice, because it can be time-consuming. The teacher should ask aides, volunteers, and older children to read to youngsters.

#### *Future research*

From the findings of this study, future studies should clarify the following aspects.

1. Whether or not the same characteristics of the changes of responses are found in other children using the same book? Do similar quantitative changes occur over time? Do other children repeat the same questions over time? Does similar confusion occur during the course of learning a story from memory? Descriptions of several children's changes of responses over time need to be obtained from above perspectives.

2. Do repeated readings affect other children's literacy development?

3. Does the knowledge gained from repeated readings of the same storybook transfer to new books which they have never heard before?

4. What is the adult role in the repeated readings?

5. An ethnographic approach to repeated readings using *Fox's Dream* enabled the researcher to describe the subject's changes of strategies when he encountered cognitive challenges. The book appeared to be a suitable tool to explore how young children think. Many of the previous developmental psychological findings were based on the short term test settings. Most of the materials and situations were unfamiliar to the child. As this study describes, the subjects responses were different from the initial ones, once the book became familiar to him. A close examination of the data focusing on the child's cognition might reveal a new insight into understanding children's cognitive development.

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