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JOURNAL
OF READING
BEHAVIOR

THEMED ISSUE: BEGINNING STAGES OF LITERACY

A JOURNAL OF LITERACY

VOLUME XIX NUMBER 1

PUBLISHED BY THE NATIONAL READING CONFERENCE

JOURNAL OF READING BEHAVIOR (ISSN 0022-4111) is published by the National Reading Conference, 1070 Sibley Tower, Rochester, NY 14604. O. Allen, Publisher.

1070 Sibley Tower, Rochester, NY 14692 with additional office of entry

Address changes to: Journal of Reading Behavior, 1070 Sibley Tower, Rochester, NY 14604.

Subscription rates: \$40.00 domestic or \$50.00 foreign, per year, or \$70.00 for a combination subscription with NRC's *Yearbook of Reading Research* (\$70.00 foreign). Available to professional individual, \$5.00 per year, as part of membership in the National

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VOLUME XIX NO. 1

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A Themed Issue: Beginning Stages of Reading

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JOURNAL OF READING BEHAVIOR

VOLUME XIX NO. 1, 1987

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spent with all involved, and the sheer work that went into children in an English city learning language and using ways they are Everychild, and in other ways they are only able to help us discern these commonalities, the bonds to some States, without sacrificing or ignoring too much of the

bility of the study, for me, is where I feel his advocacy goes wrong. It's one thing to communicate understandings, while the two sit uneasily with each other for the most part. For me, Wells really "pulled off" was in William Labov's "The Logic of Standard English" (Labov, 1973), a fine blend of advocacy and discussion based on linguistic assumptions. But, all in all, Wells did an effective job with implications for both parenting and teaching, especially

of the study itself is that in the researchers' search for universals impelling language and literacy development, they excluded minority groups, from other cultures. Nor did they include the mother who worked outside the home or children involved in families not typical of families in the United States. I'm concerned that the cultural families of the study may well not be as "universal" as the "mainstream" culture specific, even though different classes were included. A familiar problem here in the United States as well, and both close and far from the nonmainstream groups in contact. Certainly the ethnography of communication in Maintown, Trackton, and other areas. A fine-grained analysis we need more of to determine what is group/culture specific, especially in terms of literacy failure, and how it is one of the most crucial tasks facing reading researchers in

Reading Makers we can get help in understanding the situated nature of literacy as a process, some help in framing our questions for data analysis, and help in balancing case study with significant generalization. It may be wary of making a blanket application of the Bristol study in the United States until we have our New York City or San Diego or St. Louis or Columbus studies to help us understand the situation in which our schools and teachers operate and our

In the interim between the beginning and putative conclusion of the study, which is worse than carefully studying this more generally oriented national studies of the connections between language in home and school and the real world. For all its faults, Wells and his colleagues' study is a kind of research we badly need in order to understand the need to better inform practice in literacy education.

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The Early Detection of Reading Difficulties (3rd ed.). Marie M. Clay, 1985. Heinemann Publishers (70 Court Street, Portsmouth, NH 03801). Paperback. 136 pp., \$13.50.

It is rare that one reads a review of the third edition of anything, especially of a text that has, in its previous editions, received critical analysis and research attention. Nevertheless, Clay's book should be reviewed at this time. It consists of two parts, one on testing and one on an early intervention instructional program. Only the testing portion of the book has received previous attention, and the book now includes several additional research studies intended to validate the instruction recommended. This review will describe the entire text, but it will critically analyze only the material on teaching.

In the first half of this text, Clay describes a diagnostic survey, the purpose of which is to identify children who fail to learn to read after one year of schooling, and to provide diagnostic information that can be used to plan appropriate instruction. The diagnostic procedures emphasize informal, but systematic, observation of student behavior. These measures assess students' knowledge of letter names, oral reading ability, print concepts (Clay's widely noted *Sand* and *Stones* tests), writing, vocabulary, and ability to transcribe dictation. Examples of student performance are given, and validation and reliability data are provided for some of the measures.

The second part of the book stresses an early intervention program designed to help children overcome difficulties in learning to read. This instruction is based on what appears to be a reasonable set of principles or underlying assumptions. Clay believes that, because these students are behind their classmates, this instruction must be intensive enough that there is some possibility of catching them up. For example, the instruction recommended here is taught in a one-to-one fashion, on a daily basis. The instruction focuses only on those aspects of reading with which the individual child has evidenced failure, and instruction is offered only from those texts that the student can read with at least 90% accuracy.

Many instructional activities are proposed for teaching children the directionality of print, locating procedures, spatial layouts of pages, story writing, oral reading, correspondence or spoken and written words, and letter names. There are procedures for teaching children to read fluently and for helping them to develop self-monitoring and self-correcting strategies during reading. The activities provided seem very good throughout, although the book might be more useful if a greater number of activities was provided. Although Clay managed to anticipate many of the instructional trends of the 1980s (i.e., metacognition, fluency, reading-writing connections, print awareness), the new edition does not reflect the many instructional procedures that have been proposed that emphasize these aspects of teaching. The descriptions of the techniques are more conceptual than prescriptive, because Clay believes, correctly I think, this to be the only legitimate way to direct teachers.

Clay provides several studies, most of them new in this edition, that analyze the effectiveness and efficiency of the instructional program. All of the studies reported were conducted in Clay's native New Zealand during a period from 1976-1981. Clay is cognizant of the fact that early intervention programs are among the most expensive to adopt, especially a program such as hers which requires daily instruction of individual children. Unfortunately, the research evidence provided here is woefully lacking; it was designed in such a way that it is impossible to know whether or not the program was successful.

These validation efforts include a pilot study that describes how the program was established initially; a field trial that took place in 1978 (both the pilot study and field test appeared in the previous edition); a one-year follow-up study conducted in 1979; a replication in 48 additional schools; and a three-year follow up that examined the delivery of the original program and a measurement of how well these subjects were doing in 1981.

Rather than review each of these studies separately, some general concerns underlying the entire corpus of research will be presented. Of greatest importance is the issue of "false positives." Research on the early prediction of reading ability has demonstrated the difficulty of predicting later achievement in reading. Although reasonably high correlations of pretests with outcome measures are easily obtained, many students who are predicted to fail in reading actually do quite well, even without intervention. Care must be taken in evaluating early intervention programs to assure that the gains that occur are not due to the onset of schooling, maturation, or the accumulation of instruction.

Clay's work differs from other research in this area in that her program of intervention does not begin until after one year of instruction. This approach probably reduces the "false positive" problem, but it is doubtful that it overcomes it altogether. Because Clay made no attempt to randomly select from the sample of children deemed to be eligible for the program, it is impossible to estimate how well these children would have done without any

intervention subjects, or so well after might have about 15% literacy rate of reading f

Another studies does of gain score of the statist the pretest u In the one- had made e instruction) regression e higher for participated the special p regular inst compares g who were intervention made no im artifact of t

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intervention. No matter how many times she conducts follow-up studies with these original subjects, or replicates the findings, this basic problem remains. The subjects who have done so well after the intervention, about two thirds of those who received the special instruction, might have done well without the costly assistance. This seems especially possible given that about 15% of the total population of these classes continued to lag behind. I don't know the literacy rates in New Zealand, but this 15% figure seems very similar to the national average of reading failure in American schools.

Another serious problem is the issue of regression to the mean. In only one of the studies does Clay acknowledge this problem. Despite this, she makes repeated comparisons of gain scores throughout, usually with multiple independent *t* tests. The inappropriateness of the statistical treatment aside, it should be noted that those subjects who do poorest on the pretest usually will appear to make the greatest gains because of regression to the mean. In the one-year follow-up study, she did control for this and found that the children who had made enough progress in the program to be discontinued (i.e., returned to regular instruction) performed significantly better than would be expected on the basis of the regression effect alone, and the difference between the expected and actual gains were higher for this group than for the intially higher achieving children who had not participated in the experimental program. Another sample of students, those who were in the special program but who were unable to improve sufficiently to merit their returning to regular instruction, did not do as well as expected. The problem with this analysis is that it compares gain scores of normal-achieving subjects with a subset of experimental subjects who were identified on the basis of the size of their achievement gains. If the two intervention samples are combined, which Clay did not do, it appears that the treatment made no impact beyond the regression effect. In other words, the gains might be due to an artifact of the design rather than to achievement gains due to the intervention.

The studies seem to indicate that differences in amount of treatment, level of materials, and initial levels of student performance did not necessarily lead to differences in achievement. Clay attributes these differences to the robustness of the treatment, but it could be concluded that the treatment itself was ineffective. Learning may have been the result of other, unaccounted for, factors.

Clay has constructed an instructional program that reflects her sensitivity to the needs of children and her knowledge of the reading process. All of her recommendations seem reasonable, and many of the teaching activities were ground-breaking at the time that they were proposed. The problem of reading failure continues to plague our schools, and it would appear that a program as well grounded as this would merit serious experimental evaluation. The studies described in the text do not provide such an analysis, however. On the basis of these studies, it is impossible to conclude that the program works, only that it might. This is provocative but not enough to recommend the adoption of such a costly intervention.

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