Teaching for structure in Reading Recovery Lessons

An exploration of procedures and practice

Reading Recovery teachers know…

"that there can be a big practical payoff in talking, writing and reading if we understand how to strengthen children’s control over the structures of the language they use."

Talking, reading and writing, JRR Spring 2004

But that is not as simple as it sounds. (Clay, 2004)

Example:

Child: “Bill stand stood by the door”
Teacher: “Would you say Bill standed by the door?”
Bill: (obligingly) Bill standed by the door?
Teacher: Is that they way you’d say it?
Child (Aa ha! With expression)  Bill, standed by the door!

Pauline Smith, & Gwyneth Phillips

Teaching for structure is hard!

An invisible source of information

We tend to notice examples of faulty syntax or grammar rather than how structure is being used (the glass half empty rather than the glass half full)

Just saying “Can we say it that way?” will not do
But nor can we abdicate our responsibility as language teachers

What do we mean by structure?

Discuss these examples:

- Green ideas sleep furiously!
- Falled me. Markie me. Markie me pushed. Markie pushed me … falled me. (JRR, 2005)
- Her b’aint a-calling we: us don’t belong-a she. (Becoming Literate p.71)

In Reading Recovery lessons

We design literacy activities that

“enlist the language competencies which children already have, rather than put those competencies on hold while contrived tasks are introduced”. p.94

“And the children with the least preparation for literacy need such an integrated approach”. p.95

Change Over Time in Children’s Literacy Development
Practical teaching moves across a child’s lesson and lesson series

- Assessing control of structure
- Monitoring use of structure (running records)
- First talk with the child:
- Composing stories
- The cut up story
- Familiar text – phrasing in fast and fluent reading
- Selecting new texts
- Orienting the child to the language of the new text
- Teaching for structure as one source of information in problem-solving

Find out about the child’s use of structure

- For all children
  - Listen to the children, write down the longest utterance
  - Collect additional samples of text reading
- For particular children
  - Record of Oral Language and Biks and Gutches
  - Assess other aspects of language (vocabulary, articulation)
- For speakers of other languages
  - Learn something about their home language

Use some more formal language assessments

- RATK Lesson 3
  - I see a great white shark in the ocean.
- RATK Lessons 8
  - This week we are going to take a picture with our class. I am wearing a suit to go to picture day. I look very handsome.

Keep a record of the longest utterance

- Appreciating the child’s use of structure
  - Child says: Little Harry want his breakfast.
  - Child says: Baby Monkey wake up.

What led the child to say that?

- Child: Why you are sad?
  - Text: Why are you sad?
  - Text: Look where are you going.

- Text: Look where you are going.
In pairs: analyze the running record

1. First consider each error, asking “what led the child to give this response?”
2. Circle all the symbols (m s v) that apply.
3. Work together on a statement that will accurately capture the information the child uses and neglects in error substitutions.
4. Share

Language is learned by talking

“Language is learned by talking. The child draws….”

First talk with the child…

- To foster children’s language development, create opportunities for them to talk, and then talk with them (not at them).
- Children need frequent opportunities to test the rules of the language they are discovering.
- Be strong minded about talking with a child with whom it is difficult to hold a conversations. The human reaction… The educators reaction should be to create more opportunities for talking. Do not give up…

Becoming Literate, 69-73

Create space for talk

“A teller of simple stories at five or six years of age has a constructive control of oral language, will be able to compose a simple story for his writing task, and will not find it so difficult to reconstruct the author’s story he is reading.”

Create a common focus

- The child draws….
- Create a common focus
- Demonstrate, act out
- Foster linking (mussels, snapper)
- Use realia – objects the child can touch, move and interact with

Ground talk in experience
When it is difficult…

When it is difficult…

If the child’s language development seems to be lagging it is misplaced sympathy to do his talking for him. Instead put your ear closer. Concentrate more sharply, smile more rewardingly and spend more time in genuine conversation, difficult though it is.

*Becoming Literate, p.67*

The cut-up story: another opportunity to construct and compose

*Elaine: (After reading One cold wet night)*

*Story:* I just let the giant weta sleep …in a little bag on my pillow

*Assembly:* Hesitated before “in a little bag”

*Teaching:* You noticed something…

Look, you found two ways you could make up this story.

*Rereading:* in two different forms.

The child becomes more aware of language structure when they.…

- Listen to themselves reading (familiar books)
- Think about / evaluate ‘how is sounds?’
- Listen to their own composition (in talking and composing a story)
- Listen to the teacher reading simple little books during roaming around the known
- Listen to the teacher introducing a book
- Attend to individual words in sentences in order to write it – or check closely
- Attend to punctuation and phrasing

Writing helps strengthen control of structure…

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Child’s ideas and interests

Learning how to compose

Controlling more complex language structures

Language structure is learned through the ear….

Language structure is learned through the ear….

in meaningful contexts

Familiar reading

Familiar reading

- How does it sound?
- Are they listening to themselves reading?
- Do they know how to do that?
- Does is sound like a story they like to listen to?
- Do they know what that should sound like?
Listening to familiar reading

- What evidence do we have that the reader is drawing on language structure?
- What kinds of shifts would you still like to see?
- What kinds of teaching interactions might facilitate this?
- What teaching procedures might you use?

Selecting new texts - the challenge

Observant teachers notice how the texts children read draw upon and extend their existing syntactic knowledge.

Change Over Time in Children’s Literacy Development p 110

Introducing the story book to young readers

When the language and ideas of text are predictable from what the children already know about meaning and oral language they can give more attention to learning about features of the print itself.

Language and ideas:

- Look at Literacy Lessons, Pt 2, p 91
- Pull out all the references to language and ideas.
- Which recommendations relate specifically to language structures?
- Is there anything else we might want to think about when introducing a young reader to the language structures of a new book?

Examples of tricky language

- away went the cow
- off they went
- in you go
- hold on tight
- climbed out
- poked
- pulled back the covers
- middle-sized
- melt

Selecting and introducing texts

- Each teacher, select one text from those at your table
- Think about a student you are or have taught
- Consider whether you would select this book for that child
- If not, be prepared to say why not
- If so, prepare to talk about how you would orient that child to the book by linking to their experience and introducing them to the language and ideas in the book.
Massive practice on enchantingly interesting texts

Holdaway (1979) has written of how 'children not thoroughly familiar with the syntactic patterns, idioms and tunes of written English...require the joyful repetition of a rich literature through the ear and across the tongue... (so that) the patterns of the book dialect are running through the automatic language system of the child' (p. 194)

By Different Paths to Common Outcomes p. 177

Video clip of book introduction -Leishka

- The child learns to read by the successful processing that they carry out …
- Talk about how this book introduction facilitates successful reading