

IMPROVING INSTRUCTION THROUGH USE OF THE CLOZE PROCEDURE

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Students who cannot read pose a particularly frustrating challenge to the vocational teacher. Increasing class sizes and little if any preparation of the teacher to cope with such students complicate the situation. In many cases the vocational teacher represents a last chance before the student drops out of school. Occasionally the poor reader learns to read because of his interest in the vocational subject area. Most, however, approach material in the vocational subject area with little better chance of comprehension than they had for English or history.

Can the vocational teacher do anything to improve his students' reading ability?

Procedure

Two variables need be considered, the reading ability of the students and the appropriateness of the reference and text material available.

A one-step method for assessing the reading difficulty of specific material would be invaluable. Fortunately, such a simple method does exist, and it can be used by teachers who have had little or no instruction in teaching reading. The Cloze procedure was developed by Wilson L. Taylor in 1953 and had been found to be valid¹ and reliable.²

The first step in using the Cloze procedure is to decide whether your purpose will be to evaluate a section of the text in question or the whole text. If the reference seems to be written at a rather uniform difficulty level (as it should be) then the following procedure should be followed:

1. Beginning with the first complete paragraph found on each of five randomly selected pages delete every fifth word until ten deletions have been made.
2. Replace the deletions with underlined blanks of a standardized length.
3. Ask subjects who have never read the passage to fill in the blanks with what they think the deleted words are.
4. Score exact replacements correct (spelling errors are not scored incorrect).

5. The difficulty level of the passage will be the mean of all the subjects' percentage score.³

Interpretation

A Cloze readability rating (determined in step 5 above) has little value unless a teacher knows whether it represents a satisfactory level of performance. A standard suggested by E. L. Thorndike⁴ has long been accepted. He asserts that material to be read is suitable for use by a given group if the members correctly fill in 75 percent of the blanks. This converts to 44 percent with the Cloze test.

To permit independent study, material must earn a Cloze score of 57 percent. For general usage, materials to be read are at the level of difficulty felt to be appropriate when the scores fall between 44 and 57 percent. The writer's experience indicates that many references commonly used in Vocational Agriculture classrooms are too difficult for significant numbers of the students. This situation inevitably constrains effective individualized instruction and even group instruction.

Treatment

A search for alternate, less difficult texts and reference materials is an appropriate first step toward a solution. Short of rewriting all reference materials, a number of teaching strategies can increase your students' successful use of difficult but irreplaceable materials. Difficult passages may be tape recorded, played in class and then discussed. A "big brother" system might be used with advantage to let your good readers help those less able.

If a single class encompasses a variety of reading skills, the teaching approach might be structured as follows:

1. Pre-teach difficult vocabulary.
2. Present study questions that provide purpose for the reading assignment.
3. Have the more important and difficult passages read orally both to motivate students and to provide another approach to materials that are difficult to read.
4. Design groups during study periods that allow you to work with the less able students on their basic skills and comprehension.
5. Emphasize study skills - survey, question, read, recite, review (SQR³) relentlessly throughout term; direct student attention to increasing reading speed with no loss of comprehension (use easy materials for timed speed-reads; compute words per minute; ask comprehensive questions to make sure understanding isn't sacrificed).

Take advantage of each student's interests to provide reference material and class time for him to study and read within his vocational interest.

An example of the Cloze procedure applied to The Stockman's Handbook follows:

"If rigidly adhered to, _____ system will eventually produce _____ desired results, but it _____ the following limitations: (1) _____ retaining carrier cows in _____ existing herd for bull _____ purposes, thus giving doubting _____ breeders an opportunity to _____ the entire herd; and (2) _____ is always the temptation _____ retain outstanding calves although they are likely carriers. 6

Although unfrozen semen has _____ successfully stored for several _____, most operators felt that _____ maximum periods are very _____. Thus, for every sample _____ unfrozen bull semen capable of _____ producing _____ at the _____ of a nine to ten-day storage period, there _____ dozens of samples that _____ worthless in less than half the time.

Animals inherit certain genetic _____, but how well these _____ develop depends upon the _____ to which they were subjected; and the most important _____ in the environment is _____ feed. Also, the feeding _____ animals constitutes the greatest _____ cost item of livestock _____. It is important, therefore, _____ the feeding practices be _____ satisfactory and economical as possible. 8

The so-called "square _____" (or the Pearson Square _____) is one of several _____ that may be employed _____ balanced rations. The same _____ is used for many _____ things, including milk plants _____ it is employed to _____ the proportions of milk _____ cream, the fat percentages which are known, to mix in order to make cream or milk of a desired percentage fat content. 9

Recognition must also be _____ to the fact that _____ do not graze uniformly _____ a range unit-that _____ areas are more attractive _____ them. Consequently, some _____ produce most of the _____ forage, while others may _____ practically unused. Cattle tend _____ congregate on fairly level _____ bottoms, ridge tops, and around water and shade; whereas sheep, especially if herded, can be moved more uniformly over a unit. 10

Summary

Research indicates that the relationship between reading ability and successful performance in school is as real as most practitioners long ago surmised. Until high school teachers fuse reading instruction with subject matter instruction, many students who need help will not receive it. The vocational teacher must not be satisfied to present

his subject matter without giving careful thought to the reading difficulty of the material. The easy-to-use Cloze procedure is an efficient way to improve teaching effectiveness. This procedure provides enough information about each student to allow the teacher to develop effective instruction. The modern vocational teacher must view reading skills development as an essential part of his work.

Footnotes

¹Earl Rankin, Eighth Yearbook of National Reading Conference, National Reading Conference, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. 1959. p. 135.

²John R. Bormuth, "The Cloze Readability Procedure," Elementary English, p. 431, April 1968.

³J. R. Bormuth, "Development of Readability Analyses." Project in Progress at the University of Chicago, Sponsored by the U.S. Office of Education, 1967.

⁴E. L. Thorndike, "Reading and Reasoning: A Study of Mistakes in Paragraph Reading," Journal of Educational Psychology, pp. 323-332, Volume 8, 1917.

⁵M. E. Ensminger, The Stockman's Handbook, 4th ed., The Interstate, Printers & Publishers, Danville, Illinois, 1970.

⁶M. E. Ensminger, Stockman's Handbook, p. 30.

⁷M. E. Ensminger, Stockman's Handbook, p. 36.

⁸M. E. Ensminger, Stockman's Handbook, p. 65.

⁹M. E. Ensminger, Stockman's Handbook, p. 118.

¹⁰M. E. Ensminger, Stockman's Handbook, p. 362.