READING IMPROVEMENT

VOLUME 35 WINTER 1998 Number 4

TEACHING CHILDREN TO IDENTIFY AND RESPOND TO PRAGMATIC LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS IN NARRATIVE TEXT

MONICA GORDON PERSHEY, ED.D., CCC-SLP

Visiting Assistant Professor
Department of Specialized Instructional Programs
College of Education
Cleveland State University

This study investigated the effect of direct instruction in awareness of four pragmatic language functions (heuristic, imaginative, regulatory, and personal) on first graders' ability to detect and comprehend functions embedded in narrative text and use functions in response to text. Results: Experimental group performed significantly better than controls on two of three dependent measures: 1) objective testing of metalinguistic knowledge of message function ($p = .0005$); 2) use of functions in drawing/writing/dictation responses to text ($p = .02$); and significantly better than a maturation group on objective testing ($p = .005$). Significant findings were not attained for a third dependent measure, increased awareness of pragmatic language when retelling narrative. Pretest-posttest comparisons within the experimental group were significant for objective testing ($p = .0097$). Implications: Cultivating pragmatic awareness to promote comprehension of and response to narrative was shown to be useful.

Pragmatic language theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) explores the dimensions of meaning of spoken or written messages. The use, purposes, and/or intentions of spoken or written language are examined. Pragmatics looks at the intent a message conveys and how a message functions in a verbal interchange or in the ongoing prose of a text. Pragmatic study rests on the assumption that spoken or written language is used to interact purposefully with others. The functional purposes of language are many, such as to inquire, amuse, inform, persuade, or direct.

Readers who comprehend well are aware that text messages are crafted to deliver their intended purpose. Readers who are metalinguistically aware of message function comprehend the interactional purposes established by an author. Such readers can reflectively use language to examine language itself. Metalinguistic awareness of pragmatic language is a vital part of transaction with text.

Readers responding to text (Rosenblatt, 1978) are not passive recipients of an author's intended meaning; rather, readers engage in a reciprocal relationship with text. Response to text involves an understanding of the author's intended meaning as well as personal awareness of how that meaning is seen through the reader's own unique perception of that message. Readers contemplate text as input, which must be acted upon cognitively to be understood.

Thus, response to text requires pragmatic language skill, in the sense that readers comprehend more thoroughly when they perceive the function and purpose of an author's language. Further, this receptive awareness of language functions can enrich readers' own store of meaningful language pur-

poses. Internalizing examples of how authors choose words, formulate sentences, and arrange text passages in order to deliver their intended effects can serve as models for students who are learning how to comprehend a variety of texts as well as to write or speak effectively (Morgan, 1989).

Smith's View of Language Functions

In the September 1977 issue of *Language Arts*, Frank Smith wrote that teaching language as it is purposefully and meaningfully used must be a constant concern for language teachers. Children learn language because they need it to function and interact in the world. A child experiments with his ability to express his intentions in functional or purposeful (real life) situations, refining over time what he says and how he says it. With this refinement, a speaker comes to know (although often unconsciously) that linguistic forms (involving syntax or morphology) must be selected which best serve the speaker's purpose.

The function that a message serves dictates the grammatic form that it will take. For example, because a speaker wishes to ask a question, she structures an interrogative phrase, such as "Is your coffee hot?" The speaker has refined the ability to place the verb before the noun when asking a question. The speaker chooses this grammatic structure for purposes of functional inquiry, perhaps to be polite or helpful. It would be absurd to suggest that the speaker asked this question in order to practice forming grammatic constructions that begin with a verb.

Yet language arts instruction has at times aspired to teach the use of syntactic structure and word meaning in artificial practice exercises that ignore the pragmatic aspects of language acquisition. Smith (1977) maintains that young natural language users are not learning a system of grammar as much as they are learning to use a tool to understand and impart meaning. This tool works best when the rules of function and form are both understood. Children do not talk or write so that they can demonstrate that they know how to use verb forms. Children talk or write so that they can express their intentions and have some effect on a listener or reader. Language is developed because it gives children the power to influence their surroundings and enact their intentions. Smith (1977) and Halliday (1973) thus agree that in language acquisition form follows function.

Purpose of the Present Study

At what age can children be taught to be metalinguistically aware of language functions? This investigation has centered on whether six and seven year-old children, who demonstrate the ready use of numerous message functions in their natural speech (Pershey, 1994), can be taught to be metalinguistically aware of message function and consciously use this realization in their emerging ability to appreciate author's purpose and personally react to text.

Selection of Message Functions for Study

Halliday (1973) identified seven fundamental language functions. Smith (1977) proposed three additional functions. The present study suggests that there are four pragmatic functions

defined by Halliday (1973) which appear to coincide with abilities that have been identified in the literature on response to text (Rosenblatt, 1978) as necessary for personal transaction with literary text. Rosenblatt describes both aesthetic and efferent responses. Aesthetic response involves the use of one's imagination in order to be diverted by character and story, to suspend disbelief, and to be mentally transported to the place and time in which the story is set. Aesthetic response may include an empathetic response to story, when a reader identifies with the story characters and their situations. Efferent response is evoked when the reader takes on the role of explorer or information seeker and applies her capacity to retain and analyze information so that she can draw conclusions and arrive at solutions to problems posed within the text. The four pragmatic functions defined by Halliday (1973) which best correspond to these abilities are:

1 *Imaginative language* (language used to express fantasy, to pretend, or to create drama, poetry, or stories)
2 *Heuristic language* (language used to seek out information and acquire knowledge)
3 *Regulatory language* (language used to control the actions or influence the thoughts of another person)
4 *Personal language* (language that expresses one's personal reflections or that makes statements about one's self).

Statement of the Problem

This study examined the effect of direct instruction in four pragmatic features of language on first graders' ability to detect and comprehend these functions when they are embedded in extended narrative. The hypothesis under study is: Children who receive instruction in four specific language functions will evidence awareness and recognition of these functions in their response to stories read aloud to them to a statistically significantly greater degree than uninstructed children. (Null Hypothesis: There will be no significant difference in awareness and recognition of language function in narrative text among children who receive instruction in four specific language functions as compared to uninstructed children.)

Methodology

Design. This pretest-posttest experimental study attempted to evaluate whether direct instruction in the pragmatic language functions of text can result in increased understanding and use of these functions by 45 first graders, ages six and seven. The posttest data analysis indicated whether instruction induced the experimental group to perform significantly better than the control group on three dependent measures: a) retelling simple stories read aloud; b) answering multiple-choice questions about the functions of the language in the text; and c) generating their own drawing/writing/dictation about stories. A maturation group of subjects was also pretested and posttested to demonstrate whether maturation over time and familiarity with the testing procedure impacted upon test performance.

Instrumentation. Conducting this study required the development of three types of language measures. These measures were devised based on the

children's books *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble* (Steig, 1969) and *Solomon the Rusty Nail* (Steig, 1985). The measures were: Pragmatics in Narration (PIN), which analyzed story retelling; the Drawing/Writing/Dictation (DWD) sample; and the Pictorial Assessment of Functions (PAF), a multiple-choice test.

The PIN was developed in accordance with naturalistic language sampling practices (Bloom and Lahey, 1978; Brown, 1973; Bruner, 1975; Cole, 1982; Dore, Gearhart, and Newman, 1978; Garvey, 1975: Laminack, 1990; Pellegrini, 1984; Pinnell, 1975; Pinnell, 1985). This method of data display and analysis is also common to whole language research on retelling (Feathers, 1988; Kalmbach, 1986; Marshall, 1983). Thus, accepted practices in the analysis of retellings and in the analysis of language samples have procedural commonalities that were employed to facilitate data collection in this study. Written transcripts of recordings of children's spoken story retellings were analyzed and coded for evidence that certain aspects of the pragmatic language of text were being responded to in the retellings. Retelling allowed the child to summarize text as well as to express a variety of reactions to it, including alertness to the author's use of language. The PIN scoring form (Figure 1, providing a posttesting example) provided a convenient format for displaying written transcription and coding of the child's utterance.

The DWD and PIN are similar types of measures. Drawing and writing about text are response tasks that have been used in naturalistic study of children's comprehension and response to text (Morrow, 1986; Strickland, et al., 1989). Sampling the children's drawn, written, or dictated responses attempted to reveal whether their responses to text featured a demonstration of noticeable processing of the text's use of the four Halliday (1973) message functions under investigation. These drawn text responses, accompanied by children's written or dictated comments, revealed whether subjects processed as salient the imaginative, heuristic, regulatory, and personal messages that occurred in the text, and then applied their tacit knowledge of these message functions as they responded to text in drawings and comments. The language sampled by the PIN and DWD revealed how the children referenced the pragmatic functions of text messages. These written or dictated statements were later coded on the Pragmatics in Drawing/Writ-

Figure 1

PIN-Pragmatics in narration

#	Transcription of Retelling Utterance	Regulatory	Personal	Heuristic	Imaginative
03	...he turned himself into a nail.				1
03	His mother said, "What is this rusty nail doing on a bench?"			1	
04	And then he sat by the house thinking should he or shouldn't he			1	
04	...he turned back into a nail				1
04	His grandfather wondered what he would do			1	
06	Hold up your paws.	1			
06	And then the cat told him to walk forward.	1			
06	He said, "I'm not going to take this. I going to do out freedom."		2		
06	turned himself back into a rusty nail				1
06	And the cat wondered if he was there			1	
06	Then he turned himself back into a rabbit				1
07	...then he turned back into a rabbit				1
10	He said, "I'm doing a back flip."		1		
11	Then his family watched him turn back into a rusty nail.				1
Totals		2	3	4	6

Figure 2

DWD-Drawing/Writing/Dictation

Transcription of Writing/Dictation	Regulatory	Personal	Heuristic	Imaginative
Where is that cat?			1	
Totals			1	

ing/Dictation (DWD) form (Figure 2, providing a posttesting example).

The PIN and DWD are both divergent tasks in that an open ended task was presented and any response was acceptable. Conceivably, a subject could retell and respond to the story and never demonstrate an awareness of any of the four functions under investigation, although the stories chosen are laden with heuristic, imaginative, regulatory, and personal messages.

In contrast, the PAF is a convergent task that presented the four language functions in a forced-choice response format. The PAF is a criterion-referenced multiple-choice test developed to measure children's metalinguistic awareness of message functions. This test assessed whether a child can correctly recognize text statements that represent the author's use of the four functions in question. It is possible to analyze separately any one of the four functions or to study functions in combination. The PAF was developed in the tradition of informal, teacher-made achievement tests (Gronlund, 1988; Lindeman, 1967).

The PAF (Figure 3) was administered by first introducing the examinee to the four language functions, described in simple language that a child is likely to understand: "Using words to tell someone what to do" (regulatory); "Using words to talk about yourself" (personal) "Using words to find something out and to learn" (heuristic); "Using words to imagine and pretend" (imaginative). Four representative pictures serve to guide and cue the child's attention to language functions. Twenty-seven text statements were individually read to the child, who had to decide if the message function, as used in the text, is

Figure 3

PAF Example Statements

From Sylvester and the Magic Pebble	
Regulatory:	He looked at her as if to say, "How could you ask such a question?"
Personal:	From now on, I can have anything I want.
Heuristic:	He guessed that the magic must be in the remarkable-looking red pebble.
Imaginative:	He could have wished that the lion would turn into a butterfly or a daisy or a gnat.
From Solomon the Rusty Nail	
Regulatory:	Freeze! Up with your paws!
Personal:	I'm no nail, I'm a rabbit.
Heuristic:	What is this rusty nail doing on the bench?
Imaginative:	When he scratched his nose and wiggled his toes, he became a rusty nail.

imaginative, personal, heuristic, or regulatory. Eight of these statements are included as examples in Figure 3.

The PAF attempted to measure children's awareness of the function of messages taken from deconstructed text. The PAF thus endeavored to assess metalinguistic skill, in that analysis of the function of a message, in addition to comprehension of its meaning, was required of the child. The examinee must personally determine the intent of a message as it occurred in text.

Pretesting Procedures and Results

Procedures. Working alone with the

Table 1

Mean Pretest PIN Results

Average Number of Statements Made	10.11
Range of Statements Made	1-27
Average Number of Imaginative Statements	5.88
Average Number of Heuristic Statements	2.16
Average Number of Personal Statements	1.1
Average Number of Regulatory Statements	1.04

examiner, each child heard one of two stories read aloud, either *Solomon the Rusty Nail* or *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble*. A nearly equal number of children heard each story (23 heard the former, and 22 heard the latter).

After the story was read, the child was asked to retell the story to the examiner. During retelling, wordless picture book prompts (xerox copies of the text with all words cut off) were provided. Each subject was audio taped. Later, professionally prepared transcriptions of these tapes were coded by the examiner on the PIN form.

Immediately following retelling, each child either individually took the PAF or produced the DWD sample. To guard against order effects, a random half of the subjects drew first, while the other half were administered the PAF first.

Results. PIN: On the average, children produced 10.11 statements during their retellings that evidenced response to text messages that serve the regulatory, personal, heuristic, or imaginative function. Results are summarized in Table 1.

The children who heard the story *Solomon the Rusty Nail* tended to reference more statements (an average of 12.74) than the children who heard *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble* (an average of 7.09). This difference is significant ($p = .0002$, Mann-Whitney U Test). Most of the retelling statements reflected the imaginative elements of these stories. Subjects produced an average of 5.88 statements that reflect awareness of the imaginative elements of the text. All 45 subjects responded to at least one of the text's imaginative statements.

It may be that the nature of the story of Solomon the rabbit, with his repeated transformations into a rusty nail, allowed for more opportunities for the children to mention the imaginative transformations described in the text. Children who heard 'Solomon' during pretesting heard 'Sylvester' during posttesting, and vice versa. Any inherent differences in the stories themselves have thus been given a chance to be offset.

Subjects produced an average of 2.16 statements per retelling that evidenced response to heuristic language as it was used within the text. Credit was given when students reiterated the narrator's or a character's use of a state-

ment designed to serve the purpose of inquiry. For example, a child who said, "And the grandmother asked, 'Where did he go?'" received credit, as did a child who said, "And all of the animals looked around and wanted to know where he went." Ten of the 45 children did not produce at least one reference that would be codable as response to heuristic language.

For the personal language function, statements were coded that reflected the student's ability to assume the character's role and produce an I-statement personally relevant to the character, as in "The mother donkey said, 'I miss Sylvester so much.'" By contrast, a child who said "The mother donkey misses Sylvester," would not have received credit for this utterance. Overall, subjects responded to an average of 1.1 personal statements in each retelling. Of the total sample of 45 children, 22 children produced no statements referencing this function.

Even fewer statements responding to the regulatory function were issued. Retelling statements were coded if the child noted that a directive, regulation, or command was present in the text, as in "The cat said, 'Turn back into a bunny at once!'" or "The cat told the nail to turn into a bunny" or "He wasn't supposed to do that any more." The children averaged 1.04 statements referencing regulatory language in text.

PAF. The PAF had a total possible score of 27. Pretest mean score was 9.8, with a range of 4-25 (see Table 2). As the number of items per function varied on the two test forms, scores have been converted to percentages for purposes of comparison across test forms.

Table 2

Pretest PAF Results: Mean Percentage Scores

	Total Sampling	'Solomon' Form	'Sylvester' Form
Number of Items		27	27
Maximum Possible Score	100%=27	27	27
Score Range	4-25/27	4-25/27	4-12/27
Average Score	9.8	12.43	7.22
Average Percent Correct	36.29%	46%	26.7%
Ave. % Imag. Score Correct	36.35%	30%	42%
Ave. % Heur. Score Correct	31.50%	42%	21%
Ave. % Pers. Score Correct	44.00%	58%	30%
Ave. % Pers. Score Correct	30.63%	61%	0.27%

Mean percentage scores for the 'Solomon' group were generally higher. Significance testing (Mann-Whitney U-Test) revealed that this difference is significant ($p < .0001$). Specifically, the two forms of the PAF differed sig-

nificantly only on the items regarding the heuristic ($p < .0001$) and regulatory functions ($p < .0001$).

Students were fairly well able to identify imaginative statements, and the difference in performance across stories was not significant ($p = .13$, Mann-Whitney U-Test). The average PAF score for the personal language function was higher than for any of the other three functions, and the difference across stories was not significant ($p = .37$, Mann-Whitney U-Test).

DWD Results. The children tended to dictate one to five sentences for transcription. All 45 children incorporated letters, word fragments, or whole words as messages or as a part of their drawings. When asked what these letters or words were meant to express, most children elaborated and the examiner transcribed their remarks.

Analysis entailed the researcher's review of each child's picture and any writing (child's or adult's) on the page. For example, if the child drew the rabbit turning into a nail and said, "The rabbit said, 'What's going on here?'" the score would be heuristic. If the child drew Solomon in the cage and said, "Solomon said, 'I'm sad in there,'" this would be scored personal. If the child drew Solomon in the cage and said, "He feels sad," or if the child drew the book cover and said "This is my favorite book," these utterances would not be scored or used in data analysis.

Overall DWD mean score was .733. More realistically calibrated, of the 45 subjects, 16 were scored at zero, that is, there was no reflection of the four language functions in their DWD samples. Nine of these students were in the 'Solomon' group and seven were in the 'Sylvester' group. Twenty-five children scored 1, having produced one statement that reflected one of the four language functions. Of these 25, 10 were in the 'Solomon' group and 15 were in the 'Sylvester' group. Four children produced two codable statements: one child from the 'Solomon' group and three from the 'Sylvester' group. Interestingly, in a trend that differed from the PIN and PAF group performance, the 'Sylvester' story afforded subjects generally greater scores. When compared using the Mann Whitney U-Test, the difference between the 'Solomon' and 'Sylvester' groups was marginally significant at the $p = .06$ level.

Analyzing the DWD samples for each of the four language functions, virtually all utterances were coded as imaginative. The 22 students who heard

Table 3

Mean Pretest DWD Results

Average Number of Statements Made	.733
Range of Number of Statements Made	1-5
% of Children Using Imaginative Statements	50%
% of Children Using Heuristic Statements	.088%
% of Children Using Personal Statements	0%
% of Children Using Regulatory Statements	0%

the 'Solomon' story responded to a total of 11 imaginative statements and the 23 students who heard the 'Sylvester' story referenced a total of 17. There was a nonsignificant difference in the performance of the 'Solomon' and 'Sylvester' groups on the imaginative language function (p = .11, Mann-Whitney U-Test).

Two 'Solomon' subjects and one 'Sylvester' subject referenced one heuristic statement each and one child from the 'Sylvester' group referenced two heuristic statements. No regulatory or personal utterances were referenced in the DWD samples.

Correlation Matrix of Pretest Scores. The relationship between scores (Table 4) was determined using the Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient, a non-parametric ordinal measure of association. This test revealed the magnitude and direction of the relationships between each of the pretesting measures of student performance.

A modest and significant correlation

Table 4

Correlation Matrix of Pretest Scores

Comparison	Correlation	P=
PIN with PAF	.53	.0001
PIN with DWD	-.006	.49
PAF with DWD	-.27	.035

Note: $\alpha \leq .05$

tion between the PIN and PAF scores was attained. This supported the contention that children can manifest a degree of pragmatic competence in different testing behaviors, and that these performances are comparable.

The one significant negative correlation happens to involve the DWD measure. Notably, this effort to allow children to react to text yielded a wide variety of responses which did not generally serve the four functions under study. The children's responses to the text were varied. Examples of the four targeted message functions, as well as other messages functions, accompanied their drawings. Only some of the children's responses represented these four pragmatic functions. Evidently the fanciful nature of the stories provoked the dictation of a response to imaginative language in a sizable number of the children, though overall DWD performance was not great enough to correlate significantly with group performance on the two other measures.

Treatment of Experimental Subjects

Pretesting was used to establish the existence of equivalent groups. The 45 subjects were matched and divided into three groups based on the correlation of their PIN and PAF scores. Also taken into account were gender, classroom assignment, and which of the two stories the child had heard. In this fashion, balanced groups were established, con-

sisting of 18 control subjects, 18 experimental subjects, and 9 maturation subjects.

To further ensure that the groups were not significantly different from one another, a comparison of the pretest scores was made using the Mann-Whitney U-Test. Comparisons revealed no differences between the experimental and control groups (p=.89), the experimental and maturation groups (p=.74), and the control and maturation groups (p=.74).

Experimental Subjects. To provide instruction in four specific language functions, a 10-session treatment phase was presented to the 18 experimental subjects. These children left their classrooms weekly for 30 minutes of specialized instruction provided by the researcher, wherein subjects were read a grade appropriate trade book followed by book discussion and opportunities to verbally respond to text. Modeling of response to the text and discussion of how awareness of language functions enhances understanding and appreciation of the story were provided. Direct teaching and discussion of how and where the author's prose conveyed the personal, regulatory, heuristic, and imaginative language functions were provided. The children were encouraged to share their responses to text and their views of the language functions in the narrative.

Control Subjects. The 18 control subjects met for 10 weeks with the same adult for 30 minutes per week. This group heard the same stories read aloud and discussed, however modeling of the awareness of language functions was not provided. General literary awareness, such as discussion of word meanings and story elements, was part of these sessions but this group received no direct pragmatic language instruction.

Maturation Subjects. The 9 subjects in the maturation group were pretested and posttested but did not meet with the examiner for any sort of intervention during the treatment phase of the study. Any effects of factors such as maturation, previous testing experience, and classroom language and literacy lessons were potentially revealed by the scores of this group.

Posttesting Data

Posttesting essentially followed the same procedure as was used for pretesting and required the computing of the same battery of descriptive statistics as was compiled for the pretesting data. Analysis focused on 1) PIN, PAF, and DWD scores across language functions and across story groups; 2) the changes in scores within the control, maturation, and experimental groups; and 3) the measurement of the effect of the experimental treatment that can be noted by between group comparisons.

PIN Results. On the average, children produced 9.18 statements during retelling that referenced text messages that serve the regulatory, personal, heuristic, or imaginative function. This represents a very slight decrease in the average number of statements referenced by all subjects as compared to pretesting. Results are summarized in Table 5.

PAF Results. The results of the PAF

Table 5

Posttest PIN Results: Score Means and Changes from Pretest

	Pretest Score	Changes from Pretest
Ave. # of Statements Made	9.18	-0.09
Range of # of Statements Made	1-32	1-27
Ave. # of Imaginative Statements	4.47	-1.41
Ave. # of Heuristic Statements	2.25	+.09
Ave. # of Personal Statements	1.4	+.31
Ave. # of Regulatory Statements	0.084	-.096

revealed a mean score of 12.7, with a range of 6-21. The mean percentage score for all 45 subjects was 47% correct. Table 6 details posttest PAF results and changes from the pretest.

DWD Results. Children tended to dictate one to five sentences for transcription, as on pretesting. Many children wrote whole words as messages or as a part of their drawing, or wrote sentence fragments, whole sentences, or a few related sentences. Each child read any writings aloud and the examiner transcribed these remarks. The overall DWD mean score was .644, down from .733 on the pretesting. Analyzing the DWD samples for each of the four language functions, a great number of pretest responses were coded as imaginative but a greater diversity was evidenced upon posttesting. (See Table 7.)

Table 6

Posttest PAF Results and Changes from Pretest

	Pretest	Changes from Pretest
Number of Items	27	27
Score Range	6-21	4-25
Ave. Score	12.7	9.8
Ave. % Correct	47.0%	+10.71%
Ave. % Regulatory Score	52.8%	+22.12%
Ave. % Heuristic Score	32.1%	-0.6%
Ave. % Personal Score	59.4%	+15.4%
Ave. % Imaginative Score	49.5%	+13.15%

Table 7

DWD Results: Pretest-Posttest Changes in Scores

	Pretest	Posttest
Range in # of Statements	0-2	0-3
Total Ave. # of Statements	.733	.644
Total # Regulatory Statements	0	3
Total # Heuristic Statements	0	4
Total # Personal Statements	5	6
Total # Imaginative Statements	28	15
# of Students Scoring Zero	16	21

Within Group Comparisons. Within the experimental group pretest and posttest PIN, PAF, and DWD scores were compared using the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test. The same comparisons were made on the control group's scores and the maturation group's scores. The within group comparisons are given in Tables 8, 9, and 10.

Treatment effects were evidenced

Table 8

Within Group Comparisons-Experimental Group

	Pragmatics in Narration	
Pretest Mean Score	Posttest Mean Score	p=
9.83	10.88	.44
	Pictorial Assessment of Functions	
Pretest Mean Score	Posttest Mean Score	p=
9.5	16.27	.0097
	Drawing/Writing Dictation Sample	
Pretest Mean Score	Posttest Mean Score	p=
.66	.94	.449

Note: $\alpha \leq .05$

Table 11

Between Group Posttest Comparisons

Experimental Group as compared with Control Group

	Pragmatics in Narration	
Experimental Mean Score	Control Mean Score	p=
10.88	6.61	.1789
	Pictorial Assessment of Functions	
Experimental Mean Score	Control Mean Score	p=
16.27	10.11	.0005
	Drawing/Writing Dictation Sample	
Experimental Mean Score	Control Mean Score	p=
.94	.5	.0272

Note: $\alpha \leq .05$

Table 12

Between Group Posttest Comparisons

Experimental Group as compared with Maturation Group

	Pragmatics in Narration	
Experimental Mean Score	Control Mean Score	p=
10.88	9.55	.0708
	Pictorial Assessment of Functions	
Experimental Mean Score	Control Mean Score	p=
16.27	10.55	.0057
	Drawing/Writing Dictation Sample	
Experimental Mean Score	Control Mean Score	p=
.94	.33	.0647

Note: $\alpha \leq .05$

Table 13
Between Group Posttest Comparisons
Control Group as compared with Maturation Group

Pragmatics in Narration		
Experimental Mean Score	Control Mean Score	p=
6.61	9.55	.3319
Pictorial Assessment of Functions		
Experimental Mean Score	Control Mean Score	p=
10.11	10.55	.0918
Drawing/Writing Dictation Sample		
Experimental Mean Score	Control Mean Score	p=
.5	.33	.6383

Note: $\alpha \leq .05$

tistically significant gains in performance of the experimental over the control subjects on the PAF and DWD. The experimental group, as compared to the maturation group, showed significant gains on the PAF and very nearly significant gains on the PIN ($p = .07$) and DWD ($p = .06$). Comparison of the control and maturation groups' posttest scores reveal no significant changes in performance.

Summary and Analysis of Research Findings

Summary. Children who received instruction in four specific language functions evidenced greater recognition and awareness of these functions in narrative than uninstructed children. While the average number of retelling statements that reflected the four language functions remained essentially unchanged, scores on the PAF revealed that experimental subjects were able to identify the message function of excerpted text statements significantly better than control subjects ($p = .0005$, Mann-Whitney U-Test) and significantly better than maturation subjects ($p = .005$, Mann Whitney U-Test). The experimental subjects' posttest PAF scores were significantly better than their pretest scores ($p = .0097$, Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test).

The posttest DWD samples produced by the experimental subjects reflected a significantly greater number of statements referencing the personal, regulatory, heuristic, and imaginative functions than the samples produced by controls ($p = .02$, Mann-Whitney U-Test).

Analysis of The Results of Structured Elicitation Tasks (PIN and DWD). Subjects' performance has allowed for an increased understanding of how message functions in text are processed as salient by children.

Retellings. Transcriptions of subjects' story retellings have shown that the children responded to the imaginative, transformational aspects of fiction. The children were thus comprehending that transformation was a prominent idea in each story. According to Bettelheim and Zelan (1982), fantasy gives

children something to contemplate. The children devoted considerable regard to the portions of the texts that involved magical transformations (Solomon the rabbit into a rusty nail, Sylvester the donkey into a rock, and back into their original forms). Virtually all retellings included a recollection of the outlandish fantasy that was central to the story.

To a lesser degree, the children demonstrated that they were responding to the personal statements made by story characters by reiterating how these were used in the story exposition. Some of the more competent retellers conveyed awareness of this function by changing their vocal quality to portray the speech of story characters. Other children overtly stated that they were quoting what a character said to tell about himself.

Children also responded to heuristic messages within the text, noting how characters express wonder, uncertainty, or a need to verbally mediate their way through a quandary. Again, this was often done by dramatizing or quoting characters.

Response to regulatory messages within text was also observed during retellings as children noted how characters issued verbal directives.

Significance Testing for Retelling Skill. As a group, the children sampled for this study did not make appreciable gains in their overt reference to the four message functions under study when they were retelling stories. As language sampling research (Preece, 1987; Umiker-Sebeok, 1979; Wolf, 1984) has shown, children's spontaneous verbalizations or retellings may yield the type of utterances that the research is targeting or may not. The naturalistic study of children's verbal output is the observation of something that cannot be controlled, and its findings are almost serendipitous.

Because the PAF and DWD scores were significantly higher for the experimental group, it can be stated that treated subjects were taught to recognize and be aware of message function. The posttest story retelling was not significantly higher, perhaps for several reasons.

First, at pretesting as well as at posttesting, many children took measures to retell the storybook as accurately as they could. Their desire was apparently to recount the text without editorial. As detailed by Purves and Monson (1984), children in the primary grades tend to retell the literal aspects of story including character names and plot events. Children at this stage are just beginning to analyze elements such as story structure, point of view, and language use within stories.

Accordingly, the subjects of this study seemed to perceive the retelling activity as a test of literal recall. Commenting was minimal, although while engaged in the read alouds during experimental treatment children often interrupted to offer remarks that would signal awareness of message function. Children learned how to respond to the researcher's questions about message function and readily noticed and volunteered their knowledge of the message function of additional text passages that the researcher did not present for analysis. It may have been possible to gather additional data on their awareness of message functions if read aloud sessions were taped and children's remarks were analyzed.

A second reason for the lack of gains

in performance in the experimental group may be that subjects were not instructed to make reference to aspects of the text where they observed message functions in use. The children were not told to talk about the language functions in the text; they were simply told to retell the text. As the students apparently desired to faithfully recreate the text, and as subjects were not directed to apply their metalinguistic awareness and to consciously reflect upon and attend to language functions while retelling, retellings were accurate and detailed although generally unembellished by statements of pragmatic awareness.

A third reason for the overall lack of increase in statements of message functions may have been an artifact of the texts themselves. The stories only allow for a limited number of statements of awareness to be made. Perhaps the averages that were obtained, which were so close both times, may be all that these texts can yield.

A final reason for the general lack of increase in retelling scores is that almost no practice effect was evidenced. This is perhaps related to the fact that students retold texts quite faithfully at both pretest and posttest sessions.

Drawing/Writing/Dictation Samples. Examination of subjects' performance on the spontaneous drawing/writing/dictation task reveals that subjects displayed diverse response to the many pragmatic functions of the language of narrative text. The samples gathered did not always reflect the four functions under study. This may be explained in part, however, if writing is seen as a developmental task that in some respects mirrors children's acquisition of oral language.

Early writers may tend to use more simple message functions in their writing. Thomas and Rinehart (1990) report that subjects in their investigation produced writing that reflected the sequence of their prior development of oral language. While children's oral language may reflect the complete range of Halliday (1973) functions, many children who are grappling with the difficulties of learning to convert spoken messages into written text may revert to the earliest, easiest language functions when attempting to write. Vygotsky (1978) noted that children frequently first use writing to symbolize objects and people and events. Thus, children's early writing often serves a labeling function, a simplified or prototypical version of the informative function. An exception to this is the fact that so many of the children dictated an imaginative message to the examiner. When they were not challenged by the act of writing, they were free to respond verbally to the significance they placed on the magical transformations that occurred in the stories.

The ability to reproduce a greater variety of more difficult written message constructions was seen, such as quoting characters' personal or regulatory statements or heuristic inquiries, although only to a small degree, in the subjects' posttest writing samples.

Analysis of The Results Forced Choice Task. This study demonstrated that children who use a variety of language functions can be taught to be aware of how these functions can be found in prose. Features of these functions are discernable by young children engaged in the comprehension of nar-

rative passages. Subjects' participation in reading and listening tasks placed them, as Britton (1984) would state, in "spectator roles"—a spectator experiencing the language used by another communicator. Performance on the PAF, a test of comprehension of messages taken from deconstructed text, suggests that even young children can objectify the message that has just been received and thus view the "verbal transaction" as a "verbal object"—an "artifact" to be held up for different types of analysis—in this case, the function of the language of the message. The subjects performed what Britton (1984) would term "constructive/reconstructive reflection."

The experimental subjects performed significantly better than the control and maturation subjects on this measure of metalinguistic awareness of a message's intention and purpose. Experimental subjects were trained in a type of analytical reasoning that untrained subjects were not familiar with, that is, building conscious awareness of some metacognitive aspects of reading comprehension. The successful experimental students learned to be sensitive to the intention of written messages. Results indicate that even very young children can be taught to be metalinguistically aware of the function of language in narrative text.

The fact that the PAF was the strongest indicator of gains in student performance may be due to the fact that the PAF is a recognition or "slot-filling" task. All subjects, even upon pretesting, quickly understood the idea of message purposes when they were explained as "using words to tell someone what to do/talk about yourself/find out and learn/imagine and pretend." While a certain amount of inferencing is required, it is nevertheless possible that recognizing message functions is an easier task than encoding awareness of language functions in retelling or drawing/writing/dictation. This finding would be in accordance with the general principle that young language learners tend to have better receptive language skills than expressive language skills (Bloom and Lahey, 1978).

Implications

Tompkins and Hoskisson (1995) and Cullinan (1993) recommend that even young students learn the vocabulary and terminology that will allow them to process and analyze the language and structure of text in order to be equipped to respond to reading, as Rosenblatt (1978) proposed, both efferently and aesthetically. The acquisition of "literate language" (Van Dongen, 1986) provides students with the verbal means to examine a variety of linguistic features of text, including the analysis of message function within text.

The results of this study indicate that even beginning readers possess the ability to analyze the function of text messages. The metalinguistic awareness demonstrated here suggests that very young learners may be receptive to building conscious awareness of some metacognitive aspects of reading comprehension. With task variation, specific teaching, and frequent repetition, the base of information acquired here can be usefully transferred to increasing awareness of other sorts of metacomprehension skills, such as recognition of non-literal meaning, inferential thinking, comprehension of metaphor, and analysis of author's pur-

Educational Research, 84(1), 13-21.

Feathers, K. (1988). *Analyzing Retellings to Assess Comprehension*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Reading Conference, Tucson, AZ, Nov. 29-Dec. 3, 1988.

Garvey, C. (1975). Responses and requests in children's speech. *Journal of Child Language, 2*, 41-63.

Gronlund, N.E. (1988). *How to Construct Achievement Tests*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Halliday, M.A.K. (1973). *Explorations in the Functions of Language*. London, United Kingdom: Edward Arnold.

Hildyard, A. & Olson, D.R. (1982). On the comprehension and memory of oral vs. written discourse. In D. Tannen, (Ed.), *Spoken and Written Language: Exploring Orality and Literacy (Vol. IX of Advances in Discourse Processes)*. (pp. 19-34). Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corp.

Kalmbach, J.R. (1986). Evaluating informal methods for the assessment of retellings. *Journal of Reading, 30*(2), 119-127

Laminack, L.L. (1990). "Possibilities, Daddy, I think it says possibilities": A father's journal of the emergence of literacy. *The Reading Teacher, 43*(8), 536-540.

Lindeman, R.H. (1967). *Educational Measurement*. Scott, Foresman and Company.

Marshall, N. (1983). Using story grammar to assess reading comprehension. *The Reading Teacher, 36*(7), 616-620.

Morgan, A.L. (1989). Reading between the lines of dialogue in children's books: Using the pragmatics of language. *Children's Literature in Education, 20*(4), 227-237.

Morrow, L.M. (1986). Effects of structural guidance in story retelling on children's dictation of oral stories. *Journal of Reading Behavior, 18*(2), 13S-152.

Pellegrini, A.D. (1984). The effects of classroom ecology on preschoolers' functional uses of language. In A.D. Pellegrini & T.D. Yawkey (eds.), *The Development of Oral and Written Language in Social Contexts. (Volume XIII of Advances in Discourse Processes)*. (pp. 129-141). Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corp.

Pershey, M.G. (1994). *Children's Awareness of Pragmatic Language Functions in Narrative Text*. Doctoral dissertation. Lowell, MA: University of Massachusetts-Lowell.

Pinnell, G.S. (1975). Language in primary classrooms. *Theory into Practice, 14*(5), 318-327.

Pinnell, G.S. (1985). Ways to look at the functions of children's language. In A. Jaggar & M.T. Smith-Burke, (Eds.), *Observing the Language Learner*. (pp. 57-72). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Preece, A. (1987). The range of narrative forms conversationally produced by young children. *Journal of Child Language, 14*, 353-373.

Purves, A.C. & Monson, D. L. (1984). *Experiencing Children's Literature*. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman.

Rosenblatt, L.M. (1978). *The Reader the Text the Poem*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Searle, J.R. (1969). *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language. London*: Cambridge University Press.

Smith, F. (1977). The uses of language. *Language Arts, 54*(6), 638-644.

Steig, W. (1985). *Solomon the Rusty Nail*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux.

Steig, W. (1969). *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble*. New York: Windmill Books/Simon and Schuster.

Strickland, D., Dillon, R.M., Funkhouser, L., Glick, M. & Rogers, C. (1989). Classroom dialogue during literature response groups. *Language Arts, 66*(2), 192-200.

Thomas, K.F. & Rinehart, S.D. (1990). Young children's oral language, reading, and writing. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 5*(1), 5-26.

Tompkins, G.E. & Hoskisson, K. (1995). *Language Arts Content and Teaching Strategies* (3rd edition). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Merrill.

Umiker-Sebeok, D.J. (1979). Preschool children's intraconversational narratives. *Journal of Child Language, 6*, 91-109.

Van Dongen, R. (1986). "I like the long name": Young children using literate language. *Insights into Open Education, 18*(8), 3-17.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind and Society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wolf, D. (1984). Learning about language skills from narratives. *Language Arts, 61*(8), 844-850.