

Sociocognitive Perspective of Reading-writing Connections

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Abstract: Before the 1980s, reading and writing was separated in most American schools. However, the 1980s were a watershed decade for research on reading-writing connections. Today, there has been a broad and diverse body of research focused on reading-writing integration. The fundamental idea of these studies is that if the connections exist, students may be spurred by being taught reading and writing together. Therefore, this article acts as an introduction of Sociocognitive Perspective of reading-writing connections, and aims to throw some light on the reading-writing connection teaching in China.

1. Introduction

According to Rubin (1984), social cognition was a term which meant the ability to consider others' viewpoints and to assume about what they wanted to gain from literate activities. The sociocognitive perspective conceptualizes the relations between reading and writing as taking place in the transaction space between readers and writers. Researchers from this perspective investigate how authors expect their audiences' needs and how audiences improve reading comprehension by considering their authors. As Shanahan & Tierney (1991) mentioned, studies from this perspective usually highlighted the communication between readers and writers by considering reading-writing relations as the negotiation between authors and audiences. According to this view, we can't separate reading and writing because both readers and writers engage in the communication progress.

Research from this perspective has been reviewed comprehensively (Tierney & Shanahan, 1991; Schriver, 1997; Shanahan, 2015). According to the conclusion from the past synthesis, readers have author awareness that they utilize to improve reading comprehension, writers have audience awareness during writing and they can compose better writing if they think about audiences' needs and the writing quality can be improved by enhancing the writers' audience awareness. Many of these sociocognitive investigations employ self-report, think-aloud and interview during reading and writing studies.

The following part will introduce with more details about two main avenues for the research into the sociocognitive aspects between reading and writing relationships.

2. Author awareness studies

According to Nelson (2008), proficient readers tended to read the author, creating inferences and assumptions and their author awareness could affect their reading comprehension. Studies have showed that author awareness developed in diverse disciplines. Geisler (1991) observed philosophers when they read with professional strategies and found that by using author awareness, these philosophers attributed to authors to determine positions of their reading topics. The same also happens to scientists, who read a text with the strategy to read the author. Bazerman (2015) who focused on the discipline of physics, found that the physicists in the study adopted author attributions to catch up with what other experts were doing in their research area. Author awareness assisted them to find the new development in their field. As for literary discipline, Graves and Frederiksen (1991), through think-aloud approach, found proficient readers had a pattern of author-oriented reading contrasted with students, who paid little attention to the author in their reading.

These studies have demonstrated that author-focused way characterized experts' reading in their disciplines and their reading is quite opposite from students who read for facts. Then what is the development patterns as readers move from the fact-driven reading to more sophisticated reading? Shanahan's study (1991) revealed that author awareness tended to arise from the social development of students. Specifically, older students (age 13) were more likely to have author awareness than younger students (age 7) and they constructed authors more during reading comprehension. This may be the reason why most author-awareness studies focus on high school or university students since they have already got a clear visibility of author.

Empirical studies also propose information that author conception does not always provide a positive support for text interpretation. For examples, one experimental study adopted author awareness in statistics texts accomplished by author self-references and using first-person writing style (Nolen, 1995). Readers who did well in understanding the text, welcomed the visible authors and considered them as supportive to their text comprehension. However, for students who had difficulty getting the meaning of the reading, the visible authors were considered as an obstruction. That is to say, author awareness raises the possibilities that readers may accuse an author for the complexity of a text, but they should take more responsibility by themselves for understanding texts when the author was not so visible.

3. Audience awareness studies

Audience awareness, in other words, writing for readers, refers to the process in which writers consider their readers' needs such as their understanding, misunderstanding or even disagreement with what the writers write (Nelson 2008). The author-audience relation became a research object since the 1970s and since then studies have been made to explore the writers' ability to think about their readers while writing. Continuously, there have been much more studies on audience awareness than on author awareness.

Studies from this perspective often focus on disciplinary discourse. For example, as for academic texts, such as research article writing, audiences were usually knowledgeable persons in this field. So writers adopted proper ways to build relationships with these expert readers and it was important to pay attention to the disciplinary and genre differences who has done a number of studies into this aspect, has emphasized the significance of audience awareness: "Readers can always refute claims, and this gives them an active and constitutive role in how writers construct such claims" (Hyland, 2001, p.549) and "To be convincing, arguments must anticipate readers' expectations, difficulties and responses, as writers seek to balance their claims for the significance, originality and certainty of their work against the possible convictions or confusions of their audience" (Hyland, 2001, p.531).

The more recent findings of research on audience awareness is quite consistent with the older ones. Scholars continuously verified that considering readers during planning stage enhanced the composition quality (Green & Sutton, 2003). Ability of thinking about the readers can be developed by writing according to assigned audiences. These interventions have contributed to better persuasive writing and improved counterarguments (Moore & MacArthur, 2012). However, the way children consider audiences are different at various age levels. Specifically, older students seemed to highlight audience awareness more often and thus benefited more than younger ones, maybe because they were better at transacting the awareness into changes in their compositions. (Sato & Matsushima, 2006). One development study (Lindgren, Leijten, & Van Waes, 2011) compared 10-year-olds, 14-year-olds, and professional writers. According to its findings, younger writers had only a quite vague audience awareness, in contrast, the older ones, age14, had a clearer awareness while still needed to be trained more so as to adapt their writing to address their readers' needs. As for the professional writers, which meant adults in this study, both a clear audience awareness and skills to respond efficiently to their readers' expectations contributed to their better writing quality. However, even though students could transact audience awareness to better writing performance, it did not translate into future writing (Moore & MacArthur, 2012). Obviously, longitudinal studies on the long-term impact of any of the effective audience awareness

interventions would be needed.

4. Limitations of the Sociocognitive perspective

A great number of studies from this perspective get their findings by judging the holistic writing quality or reading scores but the main traits of the author/audience awareness. Thus these studies haven't conducted a very different way from those which are based on the share-knowledge and cognitive perspective. In addition, the method adopted by these studies is usually think-aloud, which greatly restrains the generalization of these judgments. Besides, most of the studies from this perspective are short of a lucid picture of the factors that influence the transactions between reading and writing as time passes and also lacks of descriptions of how these various factors, such as maturity, impact the this transaction over time.

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