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The reading specialist is the appropriate person for administering and interpreting cloze tests and results

Some suggestions for the teacher's use of cloze

by Kathryn A. Treadway

and

Charles E. Heerman

The cloze procedure is a widely-known instrument developed by Wilson Taylor (1953). It has been subsequently touted as a teaching and a testing procedure which can contribute to a child's learning to read; it does not, however, seem to be widely used in the classroom. (Beil, 1977; Russell, 1978). Because of this reluctance we hope to describe some of the major difficulties in using the cloze which we have located in the literature and in our own research. We think some useful suggestions for educating teachers and reading specialists in the appropriate uses of cloze will result from analyzing these problems.

Using the Cloze:

Typically, the procedure used for constructing a cloze exercise includes deleting every *n*th word from a passage and substituting lines of the same length for every word deleted. The teacher then instructs the student to read the passage silently and supply the missing words. When this task has been completed, the teacher scores for percent of exact responses by the student. From these scores the teacher can evaluate the students and the passages as follows:

1. The student read the particular passage at one of three levels. (i.e., 60 percent correct identifies an independent reading of the passage, 40-60 percent correct identifies an instructional reading of the passage, and less than 40 percent identifies a frustration level reading of the passage.)

2. Having administered several passages to students, a series of passages can be placed in an order of increasing difficulty. (i.e., higher mean scores for a passage indicate an easier passage while lower mean scores indicate a passage which is more difficult to read.)

Though cloze evaluations are easy to learn and quickly rendered, they are limited to evaluating a student's reading ability; they do not provide interpretations which can help improve that ability. At times the evaluations can even mislead. In terms of teaching, cloze can be too cumbersome to use with large groups of students.

We found these observations to be true in the case of a group of middle-grade teachers who had been making extensive use of cloze exercises in working with their below-average readers on an individual basis. At the end of a 14-week period the 11 teachers were asked to provide feedback on the use of the cloze as an instructional device. The teachers reported that the students consistently scored at the instructional level in the cloze passages even though they were reading below the grade level mean. Further, the teachers were reluctant to instruct all students with the cloze. They suggested that instead, the cloze should be used with only a few children. Also, they suggested that lexical cloze would have facilitated more specific learning than the generalized context requirements of the any-word cloze. A follow-up was done with better readers. The teachers reported that this group found the cloze to be challenging and that it seemed to sharpen their critical reading skills. At the same time the teachers noted that interest in the cloze waned and they, therefore, merged it with other activities. In essence, teaching with the cloze became a task unto itself and was not directed to the specific needs of the children.

To be sure, recipes for constructing and using different cloze procedures for teaching abound (Blachowicz, 1968; Gove, 1975; Heerman, 1977; Lopardo, 1975; Rankin, 1977; and Schneyer, 1965) and many are very specific, however, Jongsma's (1971) skepticism of the cloze as an effective teaching device remains with us. In short, the uses of the cloze seem insufficiently refined and understood.

Clarification of cloze uses:

In order to clarify the usefulness of cloze it is important that its various uses which have been developed so far be explained. Rankin (1977) outlines cloze sequencing strategies by which a teacher can proceed from the very simple to the very complex in planning, constructing and using cloze exercises. Rankin's sequencing strategies represent a significant contribution; however, it should be noted that he includes what are commonly called, "context", exercises, under the rubric of cloze. Such indiscriminate uses of the term "cloze" have likely contributed to its being misunderstood by the classroom teacher.

Other aspects of cloze use which should be clarified are as follows:

1. Cloze is a procedure which can be used for ascertaining the difficulty level of various materials.
2. Cloze is a procedure for matching student reading level to material difficulty.

3. Cloze can be used to test student comprehension of a passage. In this instance, it represents a substitute for teacher questions.
4. Cloze can be used, along with other instruments, for reading diagnosis.
5. Cloze is a recommended teaching device, whose efficacy has not been clearly demonstrated.

Regarding these uses, it needs to be further understood that cloze, in itself, is not a total strategy for teaching or testing reading. It should be studiously integrated with other tools.

Aulls (1978) has made a contribution toward this integration. He identifies a specific disability, a good decoder (3.0-5.5), who is weak in comprehension. He then maps out a detailed, long-range strategy for instructing this type of reader which includes the following components:

1. Self-selected, independent reading.
2. Fluency training.
3. Imagery training.
4. Cloze training.

Cloze training represents only one part of the total strategy and has been assigned a definite place in the strategy. Secondly, the type of reader has been identified quite specifically.

In summary, one should be aware of the specific uses of the cloze and the specific needs of the children. The teacher must be very clear about why he/she is using the cloze, and what he/she will accomplish by using it. Finally, he/she must be able to integrate and sequence the cloze into a total instructional strategy.

Differing cloze criteria and scoring systems:

Another confounding aspect of the cloze is differing cloze criteria and scoring systems. Heerman and Treadway (1978) discovered much disparity in the literature among the different criteria for establishing frustration, instructional, and independent reading levels. Beyond differing criteria for establishing reading performance levels, variations in scoring which allow further analysis of cloze responses have been suggested (Heerman, 1977; Heerman and Treadway, 1978). Included within the scoring variations are systems for identifying the students' abilities in using semantics and syntax. In brief, it would seem that the classroom teacher would have to develop a keenly-honed, diagnostic mind-set, particularly in dealing with differing criteria and scoring systems, and relating these to the different uses of the cloze.

Suggestions:

The foregoing suggests that cloze is indeed a complex procedure. At the same time, classroom teachers seem to think of it as a simple but inconclusive procedure. It is small wonder that teachers who attempt the cloze procedure with their students find that it can be a frustrating and consequently short-lived experience.

Because of this complexity we suggest the following: 1) It should not be assumed that the regular classroom teacher can use the cloze for specific purposes beyond the two mentioned earlier. 2) The reading specialist, having a more in-depth knowledge of the reading process, and perhaps a more diagnostic approach to teaching reading, is the appropriate person for administering and interpreting cloze tests and results. These abilities should enable the specialist to provide instructional strategies to the classroom teacher. 3) Reading specialists should be trained to emphasize cloze as a substantiating diagnostic test and to convert the interpretation of the cloze results into meaningful classroom teaching strategies. 4) In-service programs which include the cloze should communicate the necessity of integrating this technique into a well-developed reading program. The procedure should not be proclaimed as a cure-all, nor as a separate task to be mastered by all learners.

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