“Reconceptualizing the Simple View of Reading (SVR) Model of Reading Difficulties”

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Abstract: This presentation summarizes key findings from two studies that have implications for the structure of the Simple View of Reading (SVR) model of reading difficulties. The first study investigated the hypothesis that, in addition to having a direct relation to future reading comprehension performance, early vocabulary knowledge contributes to the development of both decoding and word recognition skills (in alphabetic orthographies) indirectly through “set for variability,” the ability to determine the correct pronunciation of approximations to spoken words. The second study investigated the hypothesis that the contributions of oral language comprehension (C) and word recognition (D) to reading comprehension (R) in the SVR model are not entirely independent because a component of C (vocabulary knowledge) directly contributes to variance in D. The findings may provide the basis for resolving differences between the lexical quality and phonological processing accounts of reading acquisition and reading disabilities by specifying linkages between the development of oral language knowledge, phonological processing skills, and word recognition ability. The findings also suggest that prevention programs for children at risk of reading failure should focus as much attention on improving these children’s oral language skills, especially vocabulary knowledge, as on improving their phonological and alphabetic coding skills. Greater attention may also need to be given to promoting the development of set for variability in beginning readers.

Biographical Note: William Tunmer is Distinguished Professor of Educational Psychology at the Massey University Institute of Education. He has published over 100 journal articles, book chapters, and books on early literacy development, literacy learning difficulties, and reading intervention. Major addresses include the 1998 Mdonnell-Pew Research Seminar at Oxford University, the 1999 Herbison Lecture (New Zealand), the 2001 Schonell Memorial Lecture (Australia), the 2009 Crickshank Memorial Lecture (IARLD), as well as invited scientific addresses at the 1996, 2000, and 2012 International Congresses of Psychology and three NATO Advanced Studies Institutes (1991, 1994, 2001). He currently serves as scientific adviser to a 5-year (2010-2015), 20 million dollar literacy research project at Harvard University funded by the IES. In 1999 Professor Tunmer was co-winner of the International Reading Association’s Dina Feitelson Award for Excellence in Research.