

A VISUAL LITERACY AND LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE APPROACH:  
AN EXPERIMENT TO ATTEMPT  
TO DEVELOP POSITIVE ATTITUDES  
TOWARD READING IN SECOND- AND THIRD-GRADE READERS

HONORS PROJECT

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Introduction and Review of Related Literature

One area of primary importance in an elementary school academic curriculum continues to be the reading program. One particular program that is currently being investigated in several schools is the language experience approach to the teaching of reading. Underlying the language experience approach are four basic principles. These are listed by Robert Aukerman as:

1. "What I think about, I can talk about.
2. What I say, I can write (or someone can write for me).
3. What I can write, I can read ( and others can read, too).
4. I can read what I have written, and I can also read what other people have written for me to read." (1971, p. 303)

As can be deduced from the underlying principles, this approach to reading utilizes each individual's oral language in teaching him to read. The "whole-word" technique of reading instruction is effectively used in this type of reading program, with several advantages inherent in this approach. Aukerman summarizes these advantages:

"Meaningfulness related to the actual experiences of children, and clothed in the realistic language of the child who is reading the material provides the optimum conditions for learning through the whole-word approach. Consequently the number of repetitions necessary for whole-word learning through the language experience approach are significantly smaller, and the extent of vocabulary acquired through the language experience approach is far greater than the limited vocabulary of the ordinary basal-reader approach to beginning reading." (1971, p. 301)

One method of employing the language approach involves using pupil-written or pupil-dictated material. This method is necessarily a very individualized approach, incorporating the individual's own vocabulary and relating directly to his own experiences and needs, with the result that reading is caught rather than taught.

#### The Concept of Visual Literacy Applied to the Language Experience Approach

Visual literacy training is a technique that lends itself well to the language experience approach to reading. Before they are able to put their experiences into words, many children can become adept at putting their experiences into visuals -- pictures or photographs, for example. It is a short step, then, from using pictures to using words describing what is depicted in the pictures, words that can be recorded and used in the reading program.

The concept of visual literacy is one that has been the subject of continuing research, much of which has been done by Barley, Debes, Parker, Fransecky, and others. The members of the National Conference on Visual Literacy offer the following definition of visual literacy:

"Visual literacy refers to a group of vision-competencies a human being can develop by seeing and at the same time having and integrating other sensory experiences. The development of these competencies is fundamental to normal human learning. When developed, they enable a visually literate person to discriminate and interpret the visible actions, objects, and symbols natural or man-made, that he encounters in his environment. Through the appreciative use of these competencies, he is able to comprehend and enjoy the masterworks of visual communications." (Fransecky and Debes, 1972, p. 7)

One visual literacy approach to the teaching of reading that has been the subject of several research projects involves the use of photography as the visual medium. One such project, a demonstration project at the Sodus (N.Y.) School System, found a significant increase in reading ability as measured by pre- and post-test Wide Range Achievement Test results among an experimental group of first-, second-, and third-grade readers who used photographs they had taken as the basis for construction of individual student-made readers. Control groups of comparable ability showed no such increase with the use of more traditional reading material. (Fransecky, 1969, p. 117.)

In a comparable research study, Jacqueline Renee Westcott found that

"there was a significant difference between the mean gain scores on reading tests given to an experimental group of non-readers who created photographs and other student-made materials and a control group of non-readers, the results favoring the experimental group." (Parker, 1969, p. 25)

Studies which incorporate the affective domain within their scope are of particular concern within the focus of this paper. Such studies include those done by Strandberg

and Griffith, and by Howard Lee, formerly of the Ford Foundation Funded Educational Improvement Program. These studies documented evidence that indicated that the use of photovisuals often proves to be a motivating force in getting children to express themselves. (Parker, 1969, pp. 24-26)

Two particular characteristics of a visual literacy approach are of concern within the focus of this paper:

1. There is a "useful parallel between visual and verbal language that is helpful to explore in the teaching of ... reading." (Fransecky, 1969, p. 29)
2. There is a noted "turning on potential that learner-created photovisuals have ..." that can effectively be applied to the reading curriculum in the elementary school. (Parker, 1969, p. 24)

#### Statement of Problem

In any course of instruction, it is important not only to evaluate progress in terms of academic achievement, but also to evaluate the effectiveness of any given method of instruction in terms of its impact within the affective domain; that is, to evaluate a program or method in terms of its effectiveness in changing a student's attitude toward the subject in question. With this in mind, the problem that is the focus of this paper is as follows:

**PROBLEM:** to develop positive attitudes toward reading in second- and third-grade readers utilizing a visual literacy and language experience approach.

## Method

The project began with the administration of a reading attitude inventory developed by the experimenter and Dr. James Kirkwood. Items taken and adapted from a variety of primary and secondary reading attitude inventories were administered to a group of 17 second- and third-grade students in a class of first, second, and third graders at the Burriss Laboratory School in Muncie, Indiana. Students were instructed to circle five out of a total of 17 sentences which they thought best described their feelings about reading. Each item on the test was weighted, and scores were based on which items were marked by students. Scores ranged from 20.5 to 48, a high score indicating a more positive attitude toward reading, a low score indicating a less positive attitude. The lowest possible score was 11.5, and the highest possible was 48. A mean score of 40 was obtained, and, of those students whose scores fell within ten points of the mean, four were chosen randomly to be subjects of this project. Subjects included a second- and a third-grade boy and a second- and a third-grade girl.

The project program involved the subjects' creating visual stories from photographs they had taken and developed themselves, ordering those photographs in a meaningful sequence, and dictating the accompanying verbal story into a tape recorder. The taped story was then transposed into a typed account, which the subjects then used as reading material.

To introduce the necessary skills for the creation of the photo-stories, the subjects began by ordering comic strips so that a logical sequence portrayed a visual story. It was then explained to them that, just as someone else had made a series of pictures that told a story, they could take pictures of their own that would tell a story. Possible themes for their stories were discussed to generate ideas, and they were instructed in the use of the simple cameras they were given, and supplied with black-and-white film and flash cubes.

For the first of two rolls of film, each subject created two photo-stories, made up of four to six pictures each. They developed the film themselves, an activity designed to place emphasis on the value of involvement and a feeling of personal achievement on the part of the students, and to develop skill in creating photo-visuals of their own. Then they ordered the pictures in sequence, and recorded their stories on tape. The stories were then typed up and used as reading material, which the students read and, if they so chose, exchanged and read. This procedure was repeated with the second roll, except that, because of a time limitation, only one story was required from this roll. By the conclusion of the project, each subject had created, developed, and read three photo-stories.

At the conclusion of the project, the four subjects were again administered the reading attitude inventory with which they had been pre-tested, to determine if the project had aided in developing a more positive attitude toward reading.



## Findings

Subject	Pre-test Score	Post-test Score
male second grade	39.5	38.5
male third grade	39.5	38.5
female second grade	39.0	39.0
female third grade	43.5	46.5

## Interpretation of Findings

Test results show that, of the four subjects, two received lower scores on the attitude inventory at the close of the project, one received the same score, and one a higher score. No statistical analysis was made due to the small number of subjects. Assuming that the attitude inventory given was a valid test, the results would indicate that the project was successful in developing a more positive attitude toward reading in only one subject. However, since all scores reflected only an apparently minor change, results must be interpreted with caution. It may or may not be significant that the subjects with no change in score and a positive change in score, respectively, were both female.

A factor which may have invalidated the test results of one of the male subjects was the fact that he copied the answers given by the other male subject until he could be prevailed upon to express his own opinion, with the result that

three of his five responses must be open to question.

One problem that occurred near the end of the project, and which seemed to have had a negative effect on the subjects' attitudes at the time, was the fact that four rolls of film did not turn out, either because of mistakes made in the process of development, mistakes made in the operation of the cameras, or temporary malfunction of the cameras. In any case, each subject was required to shoot and develop another roll of film in order to complete the project. The additional work required and the limited time available in which to finish that work may have had some bearing on the resulting test scores.

It must be noted, too, that all subjects came from families of high socio-economic status and that their teacher is one who is noted among her peers as an excellent reading instructor, so that the possibility that the subjects were motivated readers to begin with is not one that can be excluded.

#### Summary

In a project designed to develop a positive attitude toward reading in second- and third-graders, a visual literacy approach was combined with a language experience approach. A group of 17 second- and third-graders were administered a reading attitude inventory, on the basis of which four subjects were chosen to participate in the project. In a period of eight weeks, the four subjects, consisting of a male and a

female second-grader and a male and a female third-grader, took pictures of subjects of their choice which were made into a story. They then developed the pictures, and tape-recorded a final total of three stories, which were transposed from tape into typed stories. The stories were then used as reading material. The subjects were then post-tested with a reading attitude inventory. A comparison of pre- and post-test results did not indicate that the project had been effective in developing more positive attitudes toward reading in the subjects.

#### Conclusions

Because of methodological limitations, such as lack of a control group, possible invalidation of at least one of the test scores, and the small number of subjects participating in the project, and conclusions that can be drawn are, at best, open to question. However, from the test results, it must be tentatively concluded that the project was ineffective in developing more positive attitudes toward reading in three of the four second- and third-grade subjects participating in the project.

#### Suggestions for Future Research

In order that any future research attempt based on this report not be rendered invalid by methodological limitations, the following measures are suggested:

1. Sample size should include at least 15 subjects.
2. The Hawthorne effect should be controlled by the use of an equal-sized comparison group, which will engage in some specified reading-related activity for the same amount of time given to reading-related activity on the part of the experimental group.
3. A control group must be used.
4. The attitude inventory used should be validated, and the testing situation should be carefully monitored. It should be made clear to each individual that he or she is to indicate how he or she feels about reading, and that there are no wrong answers.
5. For primary readers, it is suggested that an attitude inventory of no more than 10-12 items be used, since their reading level prohibits use of a longer inventory.
6. There remains the possibility that different results will be obtained if both experimental and control groups are made up of unmotivated readers.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX  
READING ATTITUDE INVENTORY

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_

Boy    Girl    (Circle one)

1. I dislike reading very much.
2. I like reading very much.
3. I hate reading.
4. I dislike reading.
5. Reading is fun.
6. I love reading.
7. Sometimes I dislike reading.
8. I don't know whether I like or dislike reading.
9. I like reading.
10. I don't care for reading.
11. Sometimes I like reading.
12. I am a fast reader.
13. Sometimes I can't remember what I have read.
14. I am a slow reader.
15. I often lose my place.
16. Reading bothers my eyes.
17. Sometimes I get so interested in what I'm reading that I forget where I am.

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