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A Look at Reader Response Instruction: Effects on Reading Attitudes and Comprehension

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A LOOK AT READER RESPONSE INSTRUCTION:
EFFECTS ON READING ATTITUDES
AND COMPREHENSION

THESIS

Submitted to the Graduate Committee of the
Department of Education and Human Development
State University of New York
College at Brockport
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science in Education

by

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Abstract

The present study examined the effects of a reader-response instructional program on reading comprehension and reading attitude, with fifth-grade students. It involved a comparison of a reader-response instructional group with n=23 students and a traditional reading instructional group with n=24 students. Each instructional group was subdivided into high, middle, and low level reading ability. Attitude toward reading and reading comprehension were measured before and after a six week instructional period for both groups. The results failed to establish any significant differences between teaching approaches for either reading attitude or reading comprehension. There was a significant increase in attitude for both instructional approaches, with the greatest increase occurring with the lower ability readers. Also, the results showed a significant relationship between reading level and reading attitude with higher level reading associated with more positive attitudes. The results seem to suggest that the reader-response program may be effective in improving attitude toward reading and improving attitude can improve reading performance.

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Chapter I

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Reading is the key tool that eventually affects proficiency in all academic learning. It is a developmental process and a necessary life skill. Educators today are moving away from teaching sub skills in isolation and are placing an emphasis on constructing meaning through the interaction of the reader and the text. Using student's background knowledge (schema), drawing on their personal experiences and their previous experience with the text is the focus in education today.

Advocates for whole language focus on constructing meaning from the text in a variety of ways (Tunneil & Jacobs, 1989; Bader, Veatch, & Eldredge, 1987; and Reutzel & Cooter, 1990). Students are engaged in the text through acting stories out, sequencing the events, read aloud, repeated readings, journal responses, and group discussions about a story. The goal is to get students actively engaged in the text. The skills are taught within the context of the literature rather than workbook drills of isolated skills as seen in the traditional classrooms.

One suggested approach for achieving the goal of student involvement is through the use of an affective (or aesthetic)

approach (Bleich, 1975; Chew, DeFabio, & Honsbury, 1986; and Lehr 1988). The emphasis is placed on the individuals' thoughts and feelings and what background knowledge they bring to the text. Response to literature involves the reader and the text. Duke (1977) placed great importance on the individual reader and his past knowledge when discussing response. "Without him it becomes something alive and responsive, but only because in the reading process the reader brings to the work all these personal aspects..." (p. 34).

Reader-response is one specific program designed for readers to draw on their personal experiences through the use of the affective domain to gain meaning from the text. The program uses a variety of teaching methods specifically intended to encourage students to become more involved and interact with the material they are reading.

Definition of Terms

Reader-Response: In the present study reader-response will be defined as an interaction between a piece of literature and the reader where by the reader draws on personal thoughts and feelings to gain meaning. The reader-response is implemented in the classroom by the teacher, who encourages the students to establish a personal relationship to the material

they are reading. In particular, students are encouraged to evaluate their own emotional responses to characters, situations, or events occurring in the material they have read. The goal of the reader-response instructional program is to provide a means for presenting literature in a way that will produce an internal motive for reading and thinking about literature through the use of the affective domain.

Comprehension: The basic definition of comprehension is to perceive or understand. In reading there are many processes involved in making sense of the text. The words with their meanings and associations, the syntax, the sounds and rhythms, and the images contribute to the whole of understanding. Traditionally comprehension has been measured by follow up question to a passage. Three elements of comprehension that have been examined are factual, inferential, and vocabulary questions.

Reading Attitude: In the present study reading attitude will be defined as a state of feeling or mind about the act of reading.

Traditional Reading Program: A teacher directed approach to teaching reading with an emphasis on vocabulary enrichment, cloze activities, sequence of events, character analysis, factual and inferential comprehension questions and

literary devices such as antonyms, synonyms, and colloquial speech.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of a reader-response instructional program on comprehension and attitude toward reading, with fifth-grade students. This study involved a comparison of reader-response instruction and traditional class instruction on comprehension and attitude.

Questions

1. Is reading attitude affected more by participation in a reader-response program than by participation in a traditional reading program?
2. Is reading comprehension affected more by participation in a reader-response program than by participation in a traditional program?
3. Are the results of questions one (1) and two (2) differentially related to the level of reading ability?

NEED FOR THE STUDY

The trend in education in the past few years has shifted from an emphasis on skills, in which decoding and comprehension skills are identified and taught in isolation, to an emphasis on meaning, in which students predict meaning based on all available clues (Klesius, Griffith, & Zielonka, 1991). The use of schema and background knowledge is examined and emphasized in the developing reader. What students know before entering the text has been the focus for prediction and comprehension. Through the use of whole language, literature based, and individualized instructional programs the emphasis is placed on the reading process rather than skills broken down into subskills. The reader is an active participant using prior knowledge and context clues to make sense of the text.

Reader-response instruction also relies on the reader as an active participant with the text. Response to literature is an active involvement, and requires interaction between the book and the reader (Bleich, 1975; Harding, 1968; O'Neil, 1984; Rosenblatt, 1938.) This interaction comes from "the associations, feelings, attitudes, and ideas that words and their referents arouse" (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 25). In simple terms, "response is what the reader feels at the time he reads the story" (Holland, 1975, p. 42).

Responding to literature is a complex process involving readers, texts, and contexts. It has to do with what readers make of a text as they read it, how it becomes alive and personal to them, the pleasure and satisfaction they feel, and the way in which they display those feelings. The way in which a reader responds to a book or a piece of literature is influenced by many factors and those responses come in many forms. Rosenblatt (1978) describes the reading process as a transaction between the reader and the text. In aesthetic reading a reader's attention is focused on what is being "lived through" during a reading. For example, reading Charlotte's Web, by E.B. White, the reader is focused on the fear for Wilbur, the comfort of Charlotte, and the peacefulness of the barn, rather than focusing on whether a pig can talk, or a spider can write. The emphasis is on evoking meaning through the transactions that occur between the reader and the text.

As Rosenblatt (1978) has pointed out the interaction of the reader and the text comes from attitudes as well as feelings. If one has a negative attitude toward reading he/she is likely to read less often. The importance of a positive reading attitude has been supported by many authorities in the reading area. (Alexander & Filler, 1976; Estes, Johnstone & Richards, 1975; Koe, 1975). However, teachers spend the majority of their time on comprehension and study skills.

When teachers ranked the components of reading importance, attitudes were second, but only 8.6% of their instructional time was allocated for the development and assessment of attitudes (Heathington & Alexander, 1978).

It was the purpose of this study to look at the reader-response instruction as a means for developing positive attitudes of the students involved. Also this study examined the effect of reader-response instruction on students' understanding or comprehension of what was read.

Limitations of the Study

1. The quality and genre of the literature that was chosen could have an effect on particular responses.
2. The time frame involved in this study may limit the findings.
3. There is no control for two different teachers' personal experiences and their effects in the classroom.

Summary

The nation has been concerned about the inadequate reading abilities of its graduating students. Standardized tests measure reading comprehension and ability. The tests do not determine whether students value reading, nor do they show what students think and feel about what they are reading.

Educators have placed an emphasis on reading attitude and the importance of attitude to the whole reading process, yet little instructional time is given for the development and assessment of attitudes. Impressions of childhood last a lifetime.

Educators want to create and nurture a reading habit for all students so they may cultivate a nation of adult readers and learners. This study examined a technique that could be used to meet these goals. It also attempted to demonstrate that responding to literature on a personal level would increase comprehension and meaning of what was read.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of a reader-response instructional program on comprehension and attitude toward reading, with fifth-grade students. This study will involve a comparison of reader-response instruction and traditional class instruction and its effect on comprehension and attitude.

Overview

Reading is the key tool that eventually affects proficiency in all academic learning. Currently educators are placing an emphasis on the cognitive components of reading, focusing on the results of the reading process, rather than the internal processes that take place while a person is comprehending. Researchers point out the need to work in the affective domain, giving insight into the processes and individual experiences for making sense of what is read. Incorporating affective dimension into the curriculum may aid students in developing positive attitudes and good reading habits which are a

necessity if reading is to become a means by which students can discover insights about themselves and their world.

Reading has been defined by Robeck and Wilson (1974, p. 83) as "a process of translating signs and symbols into meanings and incorporating new meanings into existing cognitive and affective systems."

For children the reading process is like playing detectives decoding messages. They translate the symbols they see into words they know, creating a "sight word" vocabulary. Words that are not immediately identified require more work. The use of context analysis, phonetic analysis and structural analysis are necessary skills needed to help decode "messages". A child's ability to comprehend is dependent on the size of his or her reading vocabulary, background knowledge, and metacognitive awareness (the ability to recognize loss of comprehension and to employ strategies to try to comprehend) (Adams, 1991; Durkin, 1978; Richek, List & Lerner, 1989; Wilson & Hall, 1972). Thorndike (1973) gathered information in 15 countries on 100,000 students and found that there is a fairly high correlation between students' scores on reading vocabulary and comprehension. Those who scored high on the vocabulary tend to score high on the comprehension and vice versa. Mallet (1977) concluded that his results on such a

comparison showed "how completely reading performance is determined by word knowledge." (p. 62).

Comprehension

Durkin (1978) suggests that how a piece of material is written is one relevant variable to reading comprehension. The words an author chooses, the complexity of the idea, the rate at which these ideas are presented are all significant and play a role in every instance of successful or unsuccessful comprehension. In addition a child's past experiences and the vocabulary and information that they accumulated along with his level of intelligence and capacity for remembering are relevant to the process of comprehension.

Entwisle (1971) and Goodman (1965) found that the relationship between the material and the reader also comes into play because factors like motivation and interest in content affect comprehension ability. Also discussed was the possible relevance of the reader's dialect in relation to the author's dialect.

In summary, past research suggests that the ability to comprehend is affected by many different variables that have to do with the reader, with what he or she is reading, and with the relationship between the two. Comprehension is an internal process and has to be inferred from a reader's

behavior. So much of today's comprehension testing is measured not by the process but rather the product.

There are three different elements of comprehension that will be addressed in this paper, vocabulary, inferential, and factual (literal). The first one is vocabulary. As mentioned earlier, words that are not immediately identified have to be worked on. Often times vocabulary questions are asked to find the meaning of a word that perhaps may not be familiar. The use of context clues and other strategies help students find meaning to the text. An attempt to increase the student's reading vocabulary is one way to increase his ability to comprehend.

The next element is literal comprehension, which is "the retrieval from written discourse of what is explicitly stated." (Durkin, 1978, p. 434). Literal comprehension is essential in content area reading. Literal comprehension is needed to follow directions in a science lab or looking up information about other nations in social studies. In people's everyday lives they read for details with materials like cookbooks, plane and train schedules, the yellow pages in the phone directories, menus and the newspaper, in which the articles use descriptive details to report current events. Literal comprehension is the "concrete" understanding of what is in the text.

Finally there is inferential comprehension. Making inferences goes beyond the details that the author gives. It is the child's ability to read between the lines in order to understand the text. Students must apply their background knowledge as they make hypotheses about the author's message. They must infer what the author didn't actually say, fill in the "empty slots," (Goldman & Murray, 1992). The story of The Three Bears provides an example of inferential comprehension. "One morning mother bear put some hot porridge into three bowls, a great big bowl, a middle-sized bowl and a wee little bowl." The empty slots that the author does not fill in are where were the bowls? *Inference*: On the kitchen table; and who were they for? *Inference*: Daddy, mommy, and baby bear, in that order. The author does not tell us everything in the story. Students draw upon their knowledge of the setting, the actions, reactions of the characters, the events that have taken place, and piece them together to find meaning in a story.

Response to Literature

Readers responding to literature use many cueing systems to develop comprehension. Sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and cognitive psychology all take a stance on the processes involved in reading.

Response to literature is an active involvement, an interaction between the book and the reader (Harding, 1968; O'Neil, 1984; Rosenblatt, 1938, 1978). Rosenblatt looks at this interaction as associations of feelings and attitudes that the written words and their meanings arouse in the reader (1978). Holland (1975) implies that response is what the person is feeling at the time he or she is reading the text. Hepler and Hickman (1982) believed that response also applies to listening to literature. Bleich (1975) examines our feelings and associations when interacting with the text to elicit emotional responses, the affective response. Individuals can grow through response, and for some, response is a necessity for them to assure their understanding of what is read. Chew, DeFabio, and Honsbury (1986) state that students cannot verify for themselves or for others a full understanding of a work of art until they can "resymbolize" it in other terms, which is usually verbal.

Mikkelsen (1989) explained that one child's narrative exploration of a text enabled her to create her own text. First the child "reads" the pictures in a book and then picturing certain words on the page she has heard, she is able to create or reinvent her own text. By using her own experience of the world together with the pictorial text she views, she creates

her own sign-symbol system. She is therefore able to create a 'text' out of the text, to produce her own gestalt.

Response to literature can also be beneficial if shared with a group. In a group, a student compares his response to others, and sees that there may be more than one reasonable interpretation of text (Rosenblatt, 1938). Langer (1982) expressed that participating in discussions may help students focus their thoughts and explain their ideas clearly and sharply in ways which can benefit them in both academic and non-academic setting.

Attitude

There is little disagreement in the literature about the importance of positive attitudes for successful reading and learning. Alexander and Filler (1976) consider attitudes as systems of feelings related to reading which cause students to approach or avoid reading situations. A student's attitudes may vary with his personal predispositions and may be affected in unique ways by variables within the learner and his environment. Wilson and Hall (1972) stated that a positive attitude was "essential for successful mastery of the printed page" (p. 11).

The importance of a positive reading attitude has been supported by many authorities in the reading area (Alexander

& Filler, 1976; Estes, Johnstone & Richards, 1975; and Koe, 1975). However, teachers spend the majority of their time on comprehension and study skills. When teachers ranked the components of reading importance, attitudes were second, but only 8.6% of their instructional time was allocated for development and assessment of attitudes (Heathington & Alexander, 1978).

Adequate definition and conceptualization of the construct of reading attitudes is still a major problem in the field of reading. Summers (1976) states that school and reading activities are appropriate areas for attitudinal assessment because they are salient factors in the life of every student. Research on attitudes will be an important dimension in the study of affective functioning. Therefore the present study will compare reading attitudes resulting from two different teaching approaches. One of these two approaches will focus specifically on the affective domain.

Summary

Researchers support the view that attitude and response to literature are both important factors involved in reading comprehension. The present study will compare reading attitudes and reading comprehension resulting from two

different teaching approaches. One of these specifically emphasizing response to literature.

Chapter III

DESIGN

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of a reader-response instructional program on comprehension and attitude toward reading with fifth-grade students. This study involved a comparison of reader-response instruction and traditional class instruction on comprehension and attitude.

Questions to be Answered

1. Is reading attitude affected more by participation in a reader-response program than by participation in a traditional reading program?
2. Is reading comprehension affected more by participation in a reader-response program than by participation in a traditional reading program?
3. Are the results of questions' one (1) and two (2) differentially related to the level of reading ability?

Methodology

Subjects

The subjects included students from two (2) fifth-grade classrooms in a suburban western New York public elementary school. The experimental group had 23 students that received reader-response instruction and the control group had 24 students that received teacher directed traditional instruction. Fourth grade Iowa Test of Basic Skills Comprehension scores for these students were obtained, along with teacher verification, to determine reading levels. Each of the student groups was subdivided into three categories of reading levels as follows: group one was students with special education needs, as defined by the school district committee on special education; group two was lower ability students with scores <72; and group three was higher ability students with scores >72. A median split was used to divide the higher and lower ability students.

Material

For pre and post attitude assessment the tool used was the Kennedy-Halinski Measure of Attitude Toward Reading (Kennedy & Halinski, 1975), which was shortened and modified for the use of language more suited to fifth-graders. The format was a fifty-item inventory measured on a 5-point scale,

(from strongly agree to strongly disagree). Sample items are; "Reading entertains me." or "I am seldom in the mood to read."

Reading comprehension was measured by the Ekwall Reading Inventory (Ekwall, 1986), which consists of a series of short passages followed by a series of factual, inferential and vocabulary questions. Within both the control group and the experimental group, roughly one half of the group received Ekwall passage 5C, with ten follow up questions, and the other half received passage 5D, with ten follow up questions for a pre assessment. In the post assessment the reverse was used. The half that received passage 5C in the pre assessment received passage 5D for post assessment, while those who received passage 5D for pre assessment received passage 5C for post assessment.

The reading materials used for instruction for both groups were as follows:

Picture Books: Piggy Book, Anthony Browne; The Sweetest Fig, Chris Van Allsburg; The Fortune Tellers, Lloyd Alexander; A Chair for My Mother, Vera Williams; Chicken Sunday, Patricia Polacco; Spinky Sulks, William Steig; Tunnel, Anthony Browne

Novel: Bridge to Terabithia, Katherine Paterson

Procedure

Both groups met for language arts for 40 minutes a day over a six week instructional period. Students in the experimental group participated in the reader-response instructional program and students in the control group participated in the traditional instructional program. The teacher for the control group was given no special instructions for teaching the material.

Reader-response instruction consisted of students reading the material in a variety of ways. These included: partner reading, teacher read aloud, student read aloud, small group instruction, silent reading and reading with a partner. After the assigned material was read, students responded in writing. They could use one of three techniques to respond about what the story meant to them. Those were; 1. Pointing; "I noticed...", "I like the way...", "I feel myself getting..." 2. Feeling; "I felt...", "I was disappointed when...", "I was amazed when..." 3. Remembering; "I remember...", "I was reminded of...", "I know the feeling..."

After their responses were written, students separated into groups of 3 or 4 and read their responses aloud to each other. They discussed the differences (if any) and the similarities between their individual responses. In a whole group a brief discussion took place about what they had

discovered in their small groups. The teacher provided a closure statement about those differences. This procedure was followed for all 7 picture books and for each of the chapters in the novel.

The goal of the control group classroom was to enhance comprehension through traditional, teacher-directed means. These included vocabulary enrichment, cloze activities, sequence of events, character analysis, factual and inferential comprehension questions and literary devices such as antonyms, synonyms, and colloquial speech.

The reading instruction consisted of teacher read-aloud, partner reading, small and large group oral reading and silent reading.

Analysis of Data

The data collected consisted of attitude scores (pre-post) and reading comprehension scores (pre-post) for each student. For each of these two variables the pre and post mean scores were computed for each of the six sub groups (3 reading levels for the experimental group and 3 reading levels for the control group). Mean differences between groups were evaluated using a 3 factor analysis of variance, for the attitude scores and a second 3 factor analysis of variance for the comprehension scores.

Evaluation of question one involved a comparison of the pre-post difference in attitude for the experimental group versus the pre-post difference for the control group.

Evaluation of question 2 involved a comparison of the pre-post difference for the control group. Evaluation of question 3 compared the pre-post differences at each reading level for the experimental group versus the control group.

Chapter IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of a reader-response instructional program on comprehension and attitude toward reading, with fifth-grade students. This study involved a comparison of reader-response instruction and traditional class instruction on comprehension and attitude.

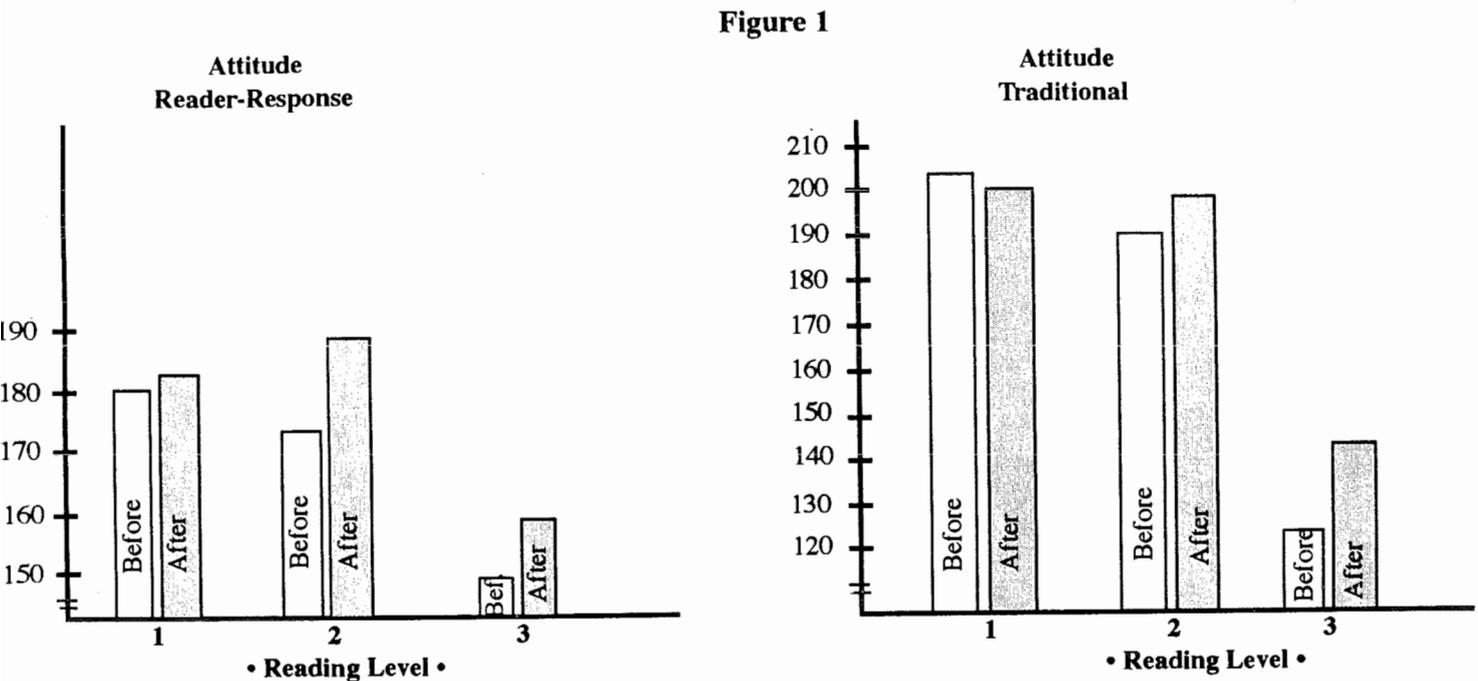
Results

Separate analyses were conducted for attitude and reading comprehension.

Attitude

Attitude was measured on a 50-item questionnaire where each item was rated on a five-point scale. The items were adjusted so that a rating of five was most positive and a rating of one was most negative. Each subject's score was obtained by summing over the 50 items. The maximum score of 250 indicated a very positive attitude and a minimum score of 50 indicated a very negative attitude. A score of 150 indicated a neutral attitude.

The mean attitude scores, pre and post assessment, were computed for each of the six groups in the study. The mean attitude scores are shown in Figure 1.



An analysis of variance for the attitude scores produced the following results:

1. The analysis showed a significant difference between the three reading levels, $F(2, 41) = 10.67, p < .001$. The mean scores for the three reading levels were as follows; high reading level group was $M = 191.79$, the middle reading level group was $M = 185.98$, and the low reading level group was

$M = 141.08$. The results indicate a consistent relationship between reading level and reading attitude, with higher level reading associated with a more positive attitude.

2. The analysis showed a significant difference between the pre and post assessment for reading attitude, $F(1, 41) = 11.45, p < .01$. The mean pre-assessment score was $M = 168.67$, and the mean post-assessment score was $M = 177.22$. These results indicate that attitude improved significantly over the course of the study for both instructional approaches.

3. There was a significant interaction between reading level and pre/post assessment. There was a small pre/post difference (0.07 points) for the high reading level group, a moderate pre/post difference (9.92 points) for the middle group, and a substantial pre/post difference (15.65 points) for the low group. These results indicate that although attitude scores increased for all three groups, the greatest increase occurred in the low reading group.

4. There were no other significant differences found. Specifically, there was no significant difference found between teaching approaches overall, or for any of the individual reading level groups.

Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension, in this study, was assessed using a 10 item comprehension test and the score was obtained by the number of items answered correctly for each individual.

Mean reading comprehension scores were computed for each of the six groups in the study. The means are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Mean Reading Comprehension Scores

	Reader-Response	
	Pre	Post
Level 1	7.57	6.85
Level 2	6.50	7.50
Level 3	6.50	6.17

	Traditional	
	Pre	Post
Level 1	6.55	8.00
Level 2	7.11	6.55
Level 3	4.67	5.50

For the reading comprehension scores an analysis of variance showed the following results:

1. The only statistical significance found in the analysis was between reading level groups, $F(2, 41) = 6.84$ $p < .01$. The mean score for the high level was $M = 7.25$, the mean for the middle level was $M = 6.92$, and the mean for the low level was $M = 5.72$. These results indicate that the higher reading level group scored the highest mean for comprehension and the low reading level group scored the lowest mean for comprehension in both instructional approaches.

2. There were no other significant differences found. Specifically, there was no significant difference found between teaching approaches overall, or for any of the individual reading level groups.

Discussion

Question one in this study asked, Is reading attitude affected more by participation in a reader-response program than by participation in a traditional reading program? The results showed that reading attitude improved for both teaching approaches but there were no significant differences between the two teaching approaches. However, examination of Figure 1 indicates a consistent increase in attitude for all three reading level groups for the reader-response approach.

For the traditional program attitudes decreased for the high-level readers and show an increase for the other two groups. Thus the results provide some support for the conclusion that reader-response produces a more consistent increase in reader attitude than is obtained in a traditional program.

Question two asked, Is reading comprehension affected more by participation in a reader-response program than by participation in a traditional program? The results indicate no significant changes in reading comprehension for any group over the course of the study. One of the limitations of the study was the length of time which limited the potential to observe any change in reading comprehension. The only significant difference obtained was between the three reading groups which simply indicates the three groups differ in reading level. It confirms that there were three reading levels, high, middle, and low.

The third question asked, Are the results of questions one and two differentially related to the level of reading ability? The results of this study do not indicated that reader-response was significantly different from the traditional approach for any of the three reading levels. However, the attitude scores did indicate significantly greater change for the low level readers than for the average or high level readers.

Summary

The results overall failed to establish any statistical significance for the three specific questions. The results showed significant improvement in attitude from pre assessment to post assessment for all groups, with the largest improvement occurring for the low ability readers. In addition the results do provide support for the general goal of the reader-response program. Specifically attitude is directly related to reading ability. The more positive the attitude the better the reader.

Chapter V

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of a reader-response instructional program on comprehension and attitude toward reading, with fifth-grade students. This study involved a comparison of reader-response instruction and traditional class instruction on comprehension and attitude.

Conclusions

The present study failed to establish any significant difference between reader-response and the traditional teaching approaches for either reading attitude or reading comprehension. It was determined, as shown in Figure 1, that there was an overall increase in reading attitude over the course of the study. Although there was no significant difference between the two teaching approaches, it was shown that increases in attitude was more consistent in the reader-response group.

The results in this study indicate a consistent relationship between reading level and reading attitude, with higher level

reading associated with a more positive attitude. As indicated in the results there was a significant interaction between reading level and pre/post attitude assessment. There was a small pre/post difference for the high reading level group, a moderate pre/post difference for the middle group, and a substantial pre/post difference for the low group. These results indicate that although attitude scores increased for all three groups, the greatest increase occurred in the low reading group.

The only statistical significance found for reading comprehension was between reading level groups. The results indicate that the high reading level group had the highest mean level of comprehension and the low reading level group had the lowest mean for comprehension. This is consistent for the way the three reading groups were divided.

There was no other differences found for reading comprehension. Specifically, there was no significant difference found between teaching approaches overall, or for any of the individual reading level groups.

Discussion

Question one in this study asked, Is reading attitude affected more by participation in a reader-response program than by participation in a traditional reading program? The

results showed that reading attitude improved for both teaching approaches but there were no significant differences between the two teaching approaches. However, examination of Figure 1 indicates a consistent increase in attitude for all three reading level groups for the reader-response approach. For the traditional program, attitudes decreased for the high level readers and show an increase for the other two groups. Thus the results provide some support for the conclusion that reader-response produces a more consistent increase in reader attitude than is obtained in a traditional program.

Question two asked, Is reading comprehension affected more by participation in a reader-response program than by participation in a traditional program? The results indicate no significant changes in reading comprehension for any group over the course of the study. One of the limitations of the study was the length of time which limited the potential to observe any change in reading comprehension. The only significant difference obtained was between the three reading groups which simply indicates the three groups differ in reading level. It confirms that there were three reading levels, high, middle, and low.

The third question asked, Are the results of questions one and two differentially related to the level of reading ability? The results of this study do not indicate that reader-response

was significantly different from the traditional approach for any of the three reading levels. However, the attitude scores did indicate significantly greater change for the low level readers than for the average or high level readers.

Implications for Further Research

One of the limitations of the study was the short time frame in which it was conducted. A long-term study may reveal differences between teaching approaches for attitude and reading comprehension. There was no statistical difference between the two teaching approaches, but the results showed a more consistent increase in attitude in the reader-response group. This supported the foundation for the reader-response instructional program.

A second limitation of this study was the reading material selected. The quality and genre of the literature that was chosen could have an effect on particular responses. Each reader may emphasize different aspects of the text. Reader-response instruction is based on the reader responding to the text to make sense of it. Comprehension involves the assimilation of new concepts with personal beliefs and conceptions. In limiting the genre, students' responses may be limited simply because they lack background knowledge in a particular genre. In a long-term study many different genres

of literature could be used. It would be interesting to see if a variety of genres would affect the results of both attitudes and comprehension.

Future research could include a manipulation check to see if the reader-response program really affects the readers' responses. This would require focusing on the students' responses and listening to the way they talk about books to see if the reader-response program influences those responses. Reader-response is a developmental process that attempts to get the students to go beyond the text and interact with the material. Ideally the program should increase discussion to a higher level and change the quality of the students' specific responses.

Another aspect of the reader-response instructional program was students' writing responses, and further research could investigate the influence of this program on students' writing ability. Would they use more descriptive language, elaborate more, or develop their thoughts in a more organized fashion? It would be interesting to measure their writing samples pre and post to see if there is any impact on students' writing.

Implications for the Classroom

This study showed that the lower ability group had a substantially more negative attitude than the other two reading groups. Therefore the low ability group has the greatest potential for change. This study also showed a strong positive relationship between attitude and reading level, with more positive attitudes associated with higher levels of reading. Although the present study cannot establish a causal relation between attitude and reading level, the results suggest that an increase in attitude would be a good first step in increasing reading ability. A teaching method affecting reading attitude could also affect reading performance.

Perhaps the reader-response program could be focused on lower ability readers to foster more positive attitudes and ultimately better reading. It was observed by the researcher the students would discuss the book or parts of it during non-reading time. They were able to express their own experiences and identify with the situations or characters in the story. It is the belief of the researcher that although reader-response may focus on the lower ability readers, it is important to integrate reading level abilities and use peer modeling to help others see the thought processes of the higher ability students.

In general reader-response addresses the affective components of reading, and the results indicate that this

improves attitude toward reading. It is important that teachers look at the affective needs of students as well as the cognitive processes involved in the reading. It seems likely that significant changes in attitudes must occur if lasting changes in reading proficiency are to become a reality.

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Appendix
Kennedy-Halinski Reading Attitude Survey

NAME: _____ CLASS CODE _____ DATE _____

ATTITUDE SCALE: READERS AND READING

Directions: This is a survey to tell you how you feel about reading. The score will not effect your grade in any way. You read the statements silently as I read them aloud. Circle the one which best represents how you feel about the statement.

	<u>Strongly Agree</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Undecided</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Strongly Disagree</u>
1. Reading is difficult for me.	SA	A	U	D	SD
2. I read only what I have to.	SA	A	U	D	SD
3. I would rather read than do anything else.	SA	A	U	D	SD
4. Authors seem to like words that are to hard to understand.	SA	A	U	D	SD
5. I dislike reading because most of the time I'm being forced to read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
6. It takes me a long time to read anything.	SA	A	U	D	SD
7. Learning to read has been easy.	SA	A	U	D	SD
8. There are very few things that I find interesting to read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
9. Reading entertains me.	SA	A	U	D	SD
10. Whenever I have some free time I read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
11. I read too slow.	SA	A	U	D	SD
12. Reading excites me.	SA	A	U	D	SD
13. It's hard to just sit and read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
14. I have very little trouble understanding what I read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
15. I don't make time to read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
16. I can learn easily just from reading something.	SA	A	U	D	SD

17. Reading is easy.	SA	A	U	D	SD
18. Reading bores me.	SA	A	U	D	SD
19. I usually do not understand what is happening in a story.	SA	A	U	D	SD
20. Reading is a fun way of learning.	SA	A	U	D	SD
21. Reading is too complicated.	SA	A	U	D	SD
22. Reading improves my vocabulary.	SA	A	U	D	SD
23. I have never found an assigned reading to be boring.	SA	A	U	D	SD
24. Reading turns me off.	SA	A	U	D	SD
25. I have never learned anything about life from reading.	SA	A	U	D	SD
26. When I read I can't keep my mind on the subject.	SA	A	U	D	SD
27. Reading helps me understand my life better.	SA	A	U	D	SD
28. Reading makes me think.	SA	A	U	D	SD
29. Most of what I read I find interesting.	SA	A	U	D	SD
30. Learning to read has been difficult for me.	SA	A	U	D	SD
31. Reading is difficult because of those big words.	SA	A	U	D	SD
32. I am seldom in a mood to read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
33. I get tired when I read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
34. When I read I understand most of the words.	SA	A	U	D	SD
35. Reading relaxes me.	SA	A	U	D	SD
36. I have to read something over and over to get anything out of it.	SA	A	U	D	SD
37. I am a very fast reader.	SA	A	U	D	SD

38. By reading I meet people and visit places that intrigue me.	SA	A	U	D	SD
39. It's hard to get interested in reading things which are assigned.	SA	A	U	D	SD
40. I read for hours at a time.	SA	A	U	D	SD
41. I never feel forced to read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
42. I hate to read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
43. I seldom get any new ideas from reading.	SA	A	U	D	SD
44. I am always in the mood to read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
45. Reading is always an exciting experience.	SA	A	U	D	SD
46. Reading is frustrating.	SA	A	U	D	SD
47. No one ever had to force me to read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
48. Reading helps you think about things in a new way.	SA	A	U	D	SD
49. I like to read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
50. I would rather visit somewhere than read about it.	SA	A	U	D	SD