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A Comparison Between a Trade Book and Textbook Instructional Approach in a Multiage Elementary Social Studies Class

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SUNY COLLEGE AT BROCKPORT

**A Comparison Between a Trade Book and Textbook
Instructional Approach in a Multiage Elementary Social
Studies Class**

By

Michael McGrain

A Thesis submitted to the Department of Education and
Human Development in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Masters of Science in
Education

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of using trade books in a multiage social studies class on students' ability to answer targeted higher level questions.

The subjects were 23 students made up of third, fourth, and fifth graders in a multiage classroom. The students were taught a 3-week unit on Native Americans using the provided social studies textbook from the school district. When they were completed with the unit they were given a 5-question essay test that consisted of targeted higher level questions about that unit that the district provided. Upon completion of this unit the students were then taught a 3-week unit on the American Revolution using only trade books as references. These books consisted of both fiction and non-fiction. Once again, at the end of the unit the students took the same test but the questions this time revolved around the American Revolution.

At the end of the two units the researcher examined the students' test scores and found that there was a statistically significant gain in comprehension in the unit taught with trade books.

CHAPTER I

Statement of the problem

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of using trade books in a multiage social studies class on students' ability to answer targeted higher level questions.

Need for the study

As an educator teaching during an era that seems purely test-driven it is difficult to incorporate materials into daily lessons that are not "pre-programmed" in preparing students for state tests. It seems as though everyday we, as teachers, are moving away from lessons that engage our students in higher level active learning and into lessons that fit them neatly and orderly into the norm. Instead of students reading and sharing ideas that have been analyzed and synthesized through their own experiences and schemata they are being told what to think and how to think it.

In order to better prepare students on how to read a graph, map, or answer specific history questions teachers are moving away from the use of trade books in their classrooms and relying more on the use of textbook activities. These activities allow the teacher to train the student on that skill while still imparting content knowledge to them. For whatever reason, they feel that the use of these textbook activities better prepares their students to do well on standardized test questions.

Trade books are a valuable resource in letting children take ownership of their education. It breaks the mold of traditional teaching methods and allows the students to experience knowledge through many different eyes. Kornfeld (1994) stated that:

Stories about the past are intriguing to children of all ages, and they can provide kaleidoscopic images of the world in all its intricacies. But it is up to the teacher to help interpret these stories and, in doing so, help provide a coherent, global picture for the students. (p.281).

Definition

Multiage class - grades three, four, and five all in the same classroom learning the same curriculum.

Null Hypothesis

There will be no statistically significant difference between the mean posttest scores of the tradebook treatment and the mean posttest scores of the textbook treatment.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

The Problem

In the world of education there is always some form of controversy over how to teach children. Whether it is whole language versus phonics or push-in versus pullout there is always one extreme against the other. With the current state testing so looked upon and valued by administrators and parents, today's dispute is whether a trade book approach is as valuable as a textbook approach in teaching content. Many teachers feel that there is an invaluable experience that children get from reading a trade book about someone's life during a particular time period. While others believe that a textbook covers what needs to be covered in that area and better prepares them for the state exam.

Why Use Trade books to Teach?

Allowing children to use trade books that incorporate stories of people's lives have been proven to teach children of all ages compassion and understanding for others. It allows them to see past their own lives and into someone else's and share their experiences both positive and negative. Sullivan (1996) stated that, "The right choice of trade books can offer an opportunity for teachers to spread knowledge and understanding of the world outside" (p. 399). It is not enough however, for children to simply read a trade book. They must also have the opportunity to discuss it with others and share ideas and experiences they have had with the literature. During this "share time" they learn to accept other opinions and develop a greater understanding for the people around them. Houser stated that, "In using critical literature, it is essential to help children focus on those aspects of a literary work that contain social significance, have relevance to their own lives, and suggest a course for

personal action" (p.212). This has never been more important than in today's global society. With the way the world is going, interaction among people of different backgrounds is becoming an everyday experience. By giving children the experience of these different cultures early in life through literature we are creating a more compassionate and empathetic child. Trade books also teach the learner that he/she plays a role in our global community. Becker (1982) believed that, "Through study, the learner develops a competence in perceiving his or her involvement in a global society" (p.69). Norton (1990) believed that reading children's books about different cultures helped students in many ways. He stated that:

Students gain understanding about different beliefs and value systems. They develop social sensitivity to the needs of others and realize that people have similarities as well as differences. Students gain aesthetic appreciation as they learn to understand and respect the artistic contributions of people from many cultural backgrounds (28-29).

Because using children's literature teaches not only academics but also how to relate to others it is important that the correct books get chosen and used.

Sullivan (1996) found that, " In using trade books to enhance global understanding, it is essential, first, to keep in mind the formal and informal context in which students learn about other cultures and, second, to have clear goals and use them as the guides to our choices" (p. 399). Sullivan (1996) proposed four criteria for the selection of trade books:

1. Does the book show our common humanity? Our students need to understand that real people, who live and work in other countries, share our interests and aspirations.
2. Does the book provide a sound knowledge base when it deals with the geographic, social, historical, political, economical, and/or religious aspects of life in other societies?
3. Does the book show that other peoples have different but valid approaches to our common human concerns and needs?
4. Does the book increase understanding and empathy for other and the potential to learn from other peoples and culture? (p.399).

Social Studies and Trade Books

Right now in many classrooms around the country children are sitting quietly at their desks reading a chapter out of their social studies textbook. This

will be the only reference material to which they will be exposed. They will memorize places, dates, and names and not learn the real history behind the history. Their interests will not be piqued. They will soon lose the information they have gained, and there will be no active learning taking place. Sesow and Sorensen (1987) found that "the text book continues to be the main source of curriculum content, and who feel that this situation will not change in the near future" (p.125).

When social studies is taught using trade books the experiences become more enriched and more valuable to the students. Coombs, Jones, and McKinney (1994) stated that:

Researchers and writers generally seem to think that children's books exhibit a better literary quality than textbooks. This enhanced quality causes the readers to become more readily engaged and be apt to sustain such engagement. The potential results are better comprehension, greater interest, and an improved attitude toward the books and the content area in general. (p.86).

In their 1990 study Coombs, Jones, and McKinney wanted to test the true efficiency of trade books over textbooks in an elementary social studies class. In the study they took 45 sixth-graders in two classrooms and used one as the textbook control group and one as the TLU group, children's literature group. The study took place over a period of twelve days and was measured using achievement and attitudinal tests. Coombs, Jones, and McKinney (1994) found that, " The results of the analysis revealed that mean posttest scores were significantly higher for the group given instruction via the TLU than for the textbook group" (p.90). As for the attitudinal scores Coombs, Jones, and McKinney (1990) reported that:

The attitude preference indicated that the group which had used the children's books (TLU) showed an increased desire to do so as measured from pretest to posttest. This attitudinal change, when considered with this group's increase in content knowledge, would suggest that not only did the TLU group learn more than the textbook group, but they also seemed to enjoy using the books that enabled them to do so (p.94).

During their research Coombs, Jones, and McKinney did find evidence of growth with the textbook group

though not as significant as the children's book group. It is this type of empirical data that helps to show the value of incorporating trade books into the social studies curriculum.

In another study of an elementary social studies class conducted by Smith, Monson, and Dobson similar results were revealed. In this study five fifth-grade classes used trade books to supplement the textbook approach. A variety of teaching approaches were incorporated into the lessons, whole class instruction, small group instruction, and individualized instruction. These five classes were compared to three other classes, which served as the control groups. In the control groups the teacher taught using strictly a textbook approach. At the conclusion of the study Smith, Monson, and Dobson (1992) found that, " The data suggests (sic) that students in the project classrooms were able to recall approximately 60 percent more information about U.S. history than students in the control classroom" (p.371). At the end of the year the project students

were presented with a survey that consisted of three questions:

1. What did you like most about using novels?
2. What would you suggest to make the project even better?
3. What did you learn from the novels?

When Smith, Monson, and Dobson (1992) reviewed the results of the survey they found many positive remarks about the use of trade book. "It was all one story, not a book of little non-interesting stories." "It was educational and you could look forward to it every day." "It's like a movie and every time you stop is like a commercial and you actually want to know what happens next" (p.373-374).

It has been suggested that trade books are presented both visually and structurally better than textbooks. Richgels, Tomlinson, and Tunnell (1993) conducted a comparison between trade books and textbooks based on their presentation. They found that, "Trade books are better structured and more coherent, have a higher readability level, contain

more complex sentence structure, and use greater elaboration" (p.122).

Trouble With Textbooks

"Textbooks are a defining characteristic for curriculum in most schools; 75% of the time students spend in the classroom is spent with the textbook." (Apple, 1986, p.85). What if the time spent with these textbooks gave the students a false view on a different ethnic group? Or the book's readability level was too difficult for the challenged reader? What kind of a role does the textbook then play in a classroom environment?

Currently a textbook's picture count at the primary levels has been shown to depict minorities at a far less rate than European Americans. In a study of three K-3 social studies textbooks, Denton and Muir (1994) found that "68 percent contained European Americans, 25 percent African Americans, and 23

percent Other Minorities" (p.156). As grade levels increase the amount of picture representation in textbooks of minorities becomes equal or close to that of European Americans. However, in the primary grades the pictorial representation of African Americans varied greatly. Denton and Muir (1994) concluded that "almost twice as many African Americans were portrayed in textbooks used in grades K-1 than in materials used in grade 3" (p.156). It is important to all children that they are able to view their own ethnic backgrounds in social studies texts. It instills a sense of belonging and pride in their culture, especially at the primary level where an illustration can carry more worth than any written word can.

How do Educators Select Quality Textbooks?

Is it fair for educators to simply accept a textbook because it is supplied by their school or district, or should they be equipped with an evaluation guide to help them find a suitable textbook

for their classroom? Chambliss (1994) had this idea in mind when she looked at methods of evaluation used by adopters, selectors, and publishers to improve the quality of textbooks for all learners in the classroom. This guide takes into consideration not only the general education student but the diverse learner as well. Many districts right now use readability formulas in order to pick the best textbook for their classes. The one drawback to this approach is that there is no one single formula. There are many formulas and depending on the one being used the readability of the textbook could vary greatly, as much as 6.2 grade levels. Another approach being used by districts is the checklist method. With this method evaluators can create a list of important features to highlight in a textbook. This particular method is a little better than the readability formula but it does have its own difficulties. By using this approach Chambliss (1994) found that "they tend to be long, superficial, and emphasize content to the exclusion of important writing features (p.349). In

her article Chambliss also spoke of using rubrics to when comparing textbooks. Chambliss (1994) stated that "comprehension studies have identified three general text characteristics that can affect comprehension: familiarity, interest, and structure" (p.349).

Text Familiarity: It is believed that if a student has a great deal of prior knowledge of a subject that he/she will comprehend the text better than the student who has a lesser knowledge base.

Text Interest: Books that contain interesting facts or topics are going to pique a child's interests and allow him/her to recall more facts and greater comprehension. However, it can hurt the child with poor reading skills. He/she may get hung up a fact that he/she considers interesting and dismiss the rest of the text as boring.

Text Structure: Good writers will take their ideas and create an order to their writing that will help to form good text structure. Chambliss states "Good readers know the patterns and use them to comprehend the text by constructing a mental

representation that matches the passages structure” (p.350). If children have the background and can identify the structure of the text it will improve their overall comprehension.

By keeping in mind the ways to spot quality textbook writing and the skills that kids need in order to comprehend the text adopters, selectors, and publishers should have the necessary tools to purchase quality textbooks for their students.

CHAPTER III

Design of the study

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of trade books in a multiage social studies classroom on students' ability to answer targeted higher level questions.

Research Question

Will a trade book approach as opposed to a textbook approach in a social studies multiage class improve their subsequent ability to answer targeted higher level questions?

Null Hypothesis

There will be no statistically significant difference between the mean posttest scores of the tradebook treatment and the mean posttest scores of the textbook treatment.

Subjects

The subjects of this experiment were 23 students in a third through fifth grade multiage class from a suburban upstate New York school district. Four of the students were in third grade, nine were in fourth grade, and ten were in fifth grade. The class, besides the new third graders, had been with the teacher from the previous year and will remain with him until they leave the school. The curriculum varies depending upon the year. Third grade curriculum is taught one year, then the fourth grade curriculum, and then the fifth grade curriculum. When a cycle is completed it reverts back to the third and continues in the same cycle so that the students will have had all three curriculums before they go to middle school. For the purpose of this study the class will be learning information from the fourth grade curriculum. The ages in the class ranged from eight to eleven years old. The school is made up of four hundred seventy-five children with twenty-one regular education classes and one special education

class. Three of the students in the study are labeled with A.D.D. and are currently on medication. It is an open building and has 4 foot and 8 foot dividers as walls.

Materials

For the first portion of the research the teacher used the fourth grade MACMILLAN/McGRAW-HILL New York textbook along with the supplement materials which include practice worksheets, anthologies, and activity-text. The materials for the second portion of the study consisted of trade books, short stories, poetry, and other non-textbook materials that coincided with the curriculum. Materials for this portion were based on reading and interest levels.

An assessment was created by the teacher to use at the end of each unit. It consisted of three short answer "essential" questions that the district felt were general enough and could be used in all the areas of content.

Procedure

The teacher taught a three-week unit on American Indians using textbook materials as the only source for information. During this time lessons were read together and discussed as a whole class. Comprehension questions were given at the end of each lesson and answered in the student's composition notebook. Practice worksheets were given both as homework and class work. The students were allowed to work individually, in partners, or in-groups of three to answer the questions. Sometimes the work that was completed was shared and discussed as a class. Other times it was collected for a grade. This continued on for a three-week period three days a week until the unit was completed in the textbook. When the students had completed their study they answered three short answer questions geared towards American Indians.

The next unit of study was the American Revolution. This unit was studied using trade books, poems, and short stories. Neither the teacher nor the

students consulted the textbook during this unit for any information.

Students were put into literature groups to discuss different books they had read. They shared ideas they had and information they gathered from their resources. This information was added to depending upon what other students had learned from their resources. This went on for a three-week period during which students were given different pieces of literature to read and share. At the end of this unit the students answered the same three short answer question except this time they were geared towards the American Revolution.

CHAPTER IV

Analysis of Data

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of using trade books in a multiage social studies class on students' ability to answer targeted higher level questions.

Null Hypothesis

There will be no statistically significant difference between the mean posttest scores of the trade book treatment and the mean posttest scores of the textbook treatment.

Analysis of Data

A two-tailed correlated paired samples t test for the difference between the two means was used to compare the mean score of the Native American textbook posttest and the American Revolution trade book posttest.

Table 1

t test Results of Differences Between the Two Mean
Scores

Unit	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Critical t value	Deg. Free.	P (2 tailed)
Native Americans	23	1.57	.8958	3.872	(22)	.001
American Revolution	23	2.30	.9261			

t Crit.= 2.07

Findings and Interpretations

Table 1 shows the results of the differences between the two posttests for each treatment used in the research. The mean score for the Native American textbook treatment was 1.57 with a standard deviation of .8958. The mean score for the American Revolution trade book treatment was 2.30 with a standard deviation of .9261. A correlated paired samples t-test was used with a .001 level of significance. With 22 degrees of freedom the obtained t value was 3.872

which shows a statistically significant difference between the two methods and rejects the null hypothesis.

CHAPTER V

Conclusions and Implications

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of using trade books in a multiage social studies class on students' ability to answer targeted higher level questions.

Conclusions

The information gathered from each posttest at the end of the study showed a significant growth in achievement with the trade book method. Students were actively engaged and had a higher knowledge base. This coincides with the research I completed in Chapter II. Many of my findings replicate what I found in conducting research for this study.

Discussion

I saw very distinct behaviors from the students in each treatment. The students in the trade book unit were much more engaged and focused with the reading. In the textbook unit there was a lack of motivation and energy. The students didn't show an interest in the reading.

While teaching Native Americans with the textbook I attempted to conduct classroom discussions on each chapter but the students' knowledge or grasp of the material was limited due to the coldness of the text. With the trade book approach students were very willing to give their opinions and any information they gleaned from their book. At times I actually had to ask the kids to stop discussing because so many students wanted to add in detail that they learned from their book.

Majority of the kids in the textbook had difficult time with the vocabulary and because of the limited amount of detail they were not able to use context clues to figure out the meanings. In contrast

the trade book students rarely had trouble with vocabulary because they used clues from the book to figure out the meaning of the word or skipped the word altogether and still understood the main idea.

As a teacher teaching the Native American unit in this fashion I felt somewhat robotic. Every class period we would do a preview of the chapter, discussing the pictures/graphs, making predictions, and talking about vocabulary. I felt it not only stifled the students' ability to express ideas by making connections to their own schemata but it stifled me as a teacher. I was forced to remain on the same regimen each day so that the students would be able to comprehend what it was they were reading in the textbook. If I faltered from this "schedule" many of my students would be lost in the language of the text. During the American Revolution unit I allowed the students to read at their own pace and set deadlines for the chapters and the completion of the book. This seemed to make the students much more comfortable and gave them a sense of independence over

their own education. As a teacher, it allowed me to spend more time with those students who needed that little extra support in their book.

I also noticed during this time that there was very little excitement and interaction over what was being read. Students would simply read get the basic idea of the chapter and that would be all. I saw no interest in going to the following chapter to see what comes next and I didn't once witness students discussing what they read on their own. In contrast during the trade book unit many of the students were done with the book before the assigned deadline and I witnessed, on a number of occasions, students discussing their favorite portions of the books outside of our literature circles. On several occasions I had students finish one trade book and come to me to ask if they could read what a fellow classmate was reading because it sounded really interesting.

Implications for the Classroom

It is evident through this study and many like it that children benefit greatly from the use of trade books when teaching content. They become more engrossed in the text and generate a curiosity and interest towards the content. It is this kind of learning that every teacher should be striving for with his or her students. Our goal as teachers should be to shape a student who is a self-motivated, independent learner. Trade books offer us a tool by which to meet this goal. They allow us to reach not only that student who is "above the bar" but the ones who are at or below it as well. It gives us the freedom to permit students to work at their ability level instead of forcing every student to read and perform at the same level of academics.

Trade books offer another aspect of learning to kids, interest. By giving a child a choice of literature books to choose from you are allowing them to in a sense make a choice based on their own background knowledge. By doing this you are building

and strengthening what a student already knows. Even if the child doesn't have any background knowledge on the subject you can impart some basic information on them so that they can have the opportunity to make an educated decision on the book they chose. It is this freedom of choice that promotes a high interest/engagement level. As we have all seen there is no one "end all be all" solution to teaching, but at the very least allowing yourself the flexibility to try different approaches with your students you are giving them different doors to pass through in the world of education.

Implications for Research

Future research into the benefits of using trade books as opposed to textbooks is suggested. Further study in the following areas for this topic is encouraged:

1. Does the use of trade books in content improve the writing skills of students?

2. Will a trade book approach compared to a textbook approach improve students' scores on state tests?
3. Does trade book reading in the content area improve overall reading ability?
4. Will trade book reading in the content area promote independent historical reading?
5. Can the use of trade books provide a better understanding of different cultures or backgrounds?

For further study the following changes in the experimental design are recommended:

1. A pre-test of their knowledge on the subject before the experiment takes place.
2. A greater amount of factual writing samples during each treatment.
3. Having two different classes study the same subject using the two different treatments.

In a time when districts and communities are so consumed with state testing results we as teachers, need to be aware of the best practices for our

students. We can not be obsessed with rubric scores and testing preparation. We need to provide the students with an approach that allows them too freely explore and investigate not only the content but also their own various learning styles. We should create a classroom that has multiple reference choice when it comes to the content areas. If we do not do this how will they ever grow as individuals and find their own personal strengths and areas they need to work on.

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