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Ann Warren
Boise State College

E. Coston Frederick
Boise State College

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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ATTITUDES OF FIRST GRADE CHILDREN IN TWO READING PROGRAMS— INDIVIDUALIZED AND BASAL

Ann Warren & E. Coston Frederick

BOISE STATE COLLEGE

Background of Problem

Many studies have been done comparing individualized and basal reading programs, but few have employed a valid attitude scale to evaluate attitudes toward reading at the primary level.

Adams (1962), while comparing individualized reading with basal oriented reading, failed to use an attitude scale in his test data, yet concluded that a more favorable attitude toward reading was found in the individualized reading program. Duker's study (1957) suggested that his individualized group evidenced larger vocabulary, read more books, and enjoyed reading more. Again, no scale was used to measure attitudes. Acinapuro's study (1959) of upper elementary children found that an individualized program created more positive attitudes, as measured on an attitude scale.

Since more favorable attitudes had been alluded to in some primary studies which used no attitude scale, and other studies used scales but were concerned with a higher grade level, perhaps studies need to be done on the first grade level also using an attitude scale.

Statement of Problem

Will children at the first grade level show a more favorable attitude toward reading in an individualized reading program, as measured by an attitude scale, compared to children in a basal oriented program?

Population

Ninety-eight first grade children from seven classrooms were involved in the research project. Fifty-three children were systematically sampled from three classrooms employing an individualized reading program and were assigned to the experimental group. Forty-five were

systematically sampled from children involved in a basal-oriented reading program and assigned to the control group.

Selection of Groups

The classrooms were selected by the reading technique used. Professors who had visited the classrooms reported teachers who employed techniques favoring individualized reading or basal oriented reading. The teachers selected for the individualized group had to be employing the principles of seeking, self-selection, and pacing. Individual conferences between the teacher and child, held one or more times a week, were also necessary for a classroom to be included in the individualized group. No provision was made to control the teacher variable except that they were considered outstanding by a professor or by the teacher's principal.

The basal oriented group, the control, was also selected by recommendation of the teacher's principal or a professor who had visited the class. These teachers were also reported to be outstanding. The basal group had to be using ability grouping for reading and also a basal series. When a reading group had completed one book in the series, the children would go on to the next book in the series.

Measurement Instrument

The most intriguing aspect of the study was finding a measurement instrument which would effectively reflect young children's attitudes. None of the usual manifest attitude tests were appropriate for first grade children.

The semantic differential was selected for this study for three reasons: validity has been supported (Osgood, *et. al.*, 1957), reliability has been established (Osgood, *et. al.*, 1957), and the test could be adapted to young children.

The semantic differential is an instrument normally involving twelve opposite adjectives on bipolar scales. The subject places an "X" on a seven-point scale representing how he feels about a particular concept, within the limitation of the opposite adjectives. For example:

sweet sour

The twelve opposite adjectives represent three factors of any concept, identified by Osgood (1957) as evaluative, potency and activity. The adjectives used in this study resulted from a large scale, trans culture, trans language study by Miron and Osgood (1966) to identify the twelve "purest" adjectives.

The evaluative factor is the descriptive attribute of a concept reflected by adjectives such as “nice/awful.”

The potency factor is the power attribute reflected by adjectives such as “old/young.”

The activity factor is the movement attribute reflected by adjectives such as “fast/slow.”

Because primary aged children were used in the study, a simplified form of the semantic differential was used. It was felt that first grade children might have had difficulty with semantic space represented by a continuum, so a presentation different from the usual was employed. First, the seven-point scale was reduced to three. The three-point scale was then represented by three clowns, each holding his hands at different widths.



The clown with the widest hands represented a positive reaction and the number three was assigned to it. The middle clown was number two, and the clown with the narrowest hands was considered negative and assigned the number one. Thus, a child could be asked, How well do you like spinach? The expected answer would be number one. Ice cream would be more likely to gain a “three” response.

The concept chosen for the present experiment was: How does reading make me feel? Instead of presenting both of the opposite adjectives for each scale, the tester used only the positive adjective in the sentence, How.....does reading make me feel? Each child was asked: How *Big* does reading make me feel? How *Helpful* does reading make me feel? How *Old* does reading make me feel? and so on. The child then indicated his answer by pointing to the clown which represented the degree to which he related to the adjective. The total list of adjectives are as follows: big, helpful, old, strong, powerful, deep, nice, fast, sweet, alive, good, quiet.

The tester then made a check on a three-division scale to indicate which degree the child pointed to. At the completion of the test, the tester grouped the scales according to factors and tallied the results for each factor—evaluative, potency, and activity.

Design and Statistical Analysis

The post-test only control group design was used in the experiment. It was assumed that the children entered first grade with randomized attitudes concerning reading.

The children were tested individually by the tester in May of the school year. The clown's order was reversed twice during the test in order to prevent response sets.

Raw score means were obtained for each of the three factors—evaluative, potency, and activity—for the concept: How does reading make me feel? The difference between the means was determined, the standard error for each set of means was calculated, and the one-tailed *t* test was applied.

Alpha was set at .05.

Hypothesis and Analysis**Hypothesis Number 1:**

There will be no significant difference in the evaluative factor on a semantic differential at the first grade level between children in an individualized reading program and children in a basal oriented program on the concept: How does reading make me feel?

TABLE I

**A COMPARISON OF THE MEAN SCORES ON THE EVALUATIVE FACTOR
FOR THE BOYS AND GIRLS ON THE CONCEPT:
HOW DOES READING MAKE ME FEEL?**

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	<i>t</i>
Total Basal	53	2.255	.456	1.170
Total Individualized	45	2.372	.524	

No significant difference appeared between the basal group and the individualized group on the evaluative factor. The null hypothesis was accepted.

Hypothesis Number 2:

There will be no significant difference in the potency factor on a semantic differential at the first grade level between children in an individualized reading program and children in a basal oriented program on the concept: How does reading make me feel?

TABLE II

**A COMPARISON OF THE MEAN SCORES ON THE POTENCY FACTOR
FOR THE BOYS AND GIRLS ON THE CONCEPT:
HOW DOES READING MAKE ME FEEL?**

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	<i>t</i>
Total Basal	53	2.250	.370	
Total Individualized	45	2.416	.395	1.196*

* = significant at the .05 level.

A significant difference appeared between the basal group and the individualized group on the potency factor in favor of the experimental group. The null hypothesis was rejected.

Hypothesis Number 3:

There will be no significant difference in the activity factor on a semantic differential at the first grade level between children in an individualized reading program and children in a basal oriented program on the concept: How does reading make me feel?

TABLE III

**A COMPARISON OF THE MEAN SCORES ON THE ACTIVITY FACTOR
FOR THE BOYS AND GIRLS ON THE CONCEPT:
HOW DOES READING MAKE ME FEEL?**

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	<i>t</i>
Total Basal	53	2.161	.380	
Total Individualized	45	2.339	.531	1.832*

* = significant at the .05 level.

A significant difference appeared between the basal group and the individualized group on the activity factor. The null hypothesis was rejected.

Comparison of Mean Scores for Girls

After closer investigation of the data, the tester felt it valuable to compare the girls involved in basal reading with the girls involved in individualized reading on the three factors: evaluative, potency, and activity.

TABLE IV

A COMPARISON OF THE MEAN SCORES ON THE EVALUATIVE FACTOR
FOR THE GIRLS ON THE CONCEPT:
HOW DOES READING MAKE ME FEEL?

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	<i>t</i>
Girls Basal	24	2.354	.396	.040
Girls Individualized	23	2.348	.573	

No significant difference appeared between the girls in the basal group and the girls in the individualized group on the evaluative factor.

TABLE V

A COMPARISON OF THE MEAN SCORES ON THE POTENCY FACTOR
FOR THE GIRLS ON THE CONCEPT:
HOW DOES READING MAKE ME FEEL?

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	<i>t</i>
Girls Basal	24	2.208	.381	1.229
Girls Individualized	23	2.337	.338	

No significant difference appeared between the girls in the basal group and the girls in the individualized group on the potency factor.

TABLE VI

A COMPARISON OF THE MEAN SCORES ON THE ACTIVITY FACTOR
FOR THE GIRLS ON THE CONCEPT:
HOW DOES READING MAKE ME FEEL?

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	<i>t</i>
Girls Basal	24	2.146	.375	1.788*
Girls Individualized	23	2.391	.527	

* = significant at the .05 level.

A significant difference appeared between the girls in the basal group and the girls in the individualized group on the activity factor in favor of the individualized group.

Comparison of Mean Scores for Boys

It was also felt to be of value to compare the boys involved in basal reading with the boys involved in individualized reading on the three factors: evaluative, potency, and activity.

TABLE VII

**A COMPARISON OF THE MEAN SCORES ON THE EVALUATIVE FACTOR
FOR THE BOYS ON THE CONCEPT:
HOW DOES READING MAKE ME FEEL?**

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	<i>t</i>
Boys Basal	29	2.172	.491	1.638
Boys Individualized	22	2.398	.480	

No significant difference appeared between the boys in the basal group and the boys in the individualized group on the evaluative factor.

TABLE VIII

**A COMPARISON OF THE MEAN SCORES ON THE POTENCY FACTOR
FOR THE BOYS ON THE CONCEPT:
HOW DOES READING MAKE ME FEEL?**

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	<i>t</i>
Boys Basal	29	2.284	.364	1.830*
Boys Individualized	22	2.500	.443	

* = significant at the .05 level.

A significant difference appeared between the boys in the basal group and the boys in the individualized group on the potency factor in favor of the individualized group.

TABLE IX

**A COMPARISON OF THE MEAN SCORES ON THE ACTIVITY FACTOR
FOR THE BOYS ON THE CONCEPT:
HOW DOES READING MAKE ME FEEL?**

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	<i>t</i>
Boys Basal	29	2.181	.389	.746
Boys Individualized	22	2.284	.542	

No significant difference appeared between the boys in the basal group and the boys in the individualized group on the activity factor.

Conclusions and Discussion

The evaluative factor in the semantic differential reflects somewhat of a cognitive response. As such, the children may have been responding to what they had been taught about reading—that reading is *nice*, *sweet*, and *good*. Very few children in either the experimental or control group responded negatively.

Unlike the evaluative factor, however, children are not told that reading will make them feel *big*, *old*, *strong*, or *powerful*—the adjectives used for the potency factor. If children respond to these scales favorably, they are reflecting how they *feel* about the concept rather than what they have been told. The significant difference in favor of the experimental group apparently indicates that when children select their own books and read without being compared to other children that they feel more positively about reading. It would appear that the individualized reading program provided more support through self-selection and success so that the children in that program felt bigger, older, stronger, and more powerful than the children in the basal program.

The activity scales (helpful, fast, alive, and quiet), like the potency factor, are not learned. Basal reading programs are often characterized by immobility of the children. That is, the physical orientation of the reading group precludes much movement away from the reading circle. The books are often on the table when the children arrive for reading groups. When they return to their desks, they become occupied with various worksheets. Little opportunity is available for children to share their books or carry out book activities. Thus, children in an individualized reading program possibly feel more active about reading than those in a basal program.

There is a further possibility that children in an individualized reading program simply read much more than basal children, and therefore reflect a greater change in attitude.

It is interesting to note that boys in the individualized reading program seemed to reflect more positive potency attitudes toward reading than boys in the basal programs. There has been much discussion concerning the possible female orientation of early school reading programs. Perhaps further research will throw more light on individualized reading as one method to re-orient the personal responses to reading.

Further research is needed on the adaptation of the semantic differential to first grade children. It is an intriguing concept of measurement, and seems to represent the personalized goals of reading more realistically than the usual standardized instruments.

SUMMARY

First grade children in an individualized reading program reflected more positive attitudes on the potency and activity factors of a semantic differential than children in a basal reading program on the concept: How does reading make me feel?

No differences occurred on the evaluative factors.

First grade boys in an individualized reading program reflected a more positive potency attitude than boys in a basal program.

First grade girls in an individualized reading program reflected a more positive feeling of activity than girls in a basal program.

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