Predictable Books Guarantee Success

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When readers can guess what the author of a book is going to say and how he or she is going to say it, the book is considered predictable. Frequently, there is a repetitive, rhythmic syntactic pattern ("Little pig, little pig, let me come in." "Not by the hair of my chinny, chin, chin.") and a repetitive semantic pattern (By the time the wolf is at the second pig's door, we know what is going to happen.) Cumulative patterns such as The House That Jack Built or familiar sequences such as the days of the week, the months of the year, etc., supported by appropriate illustrations are also characteristic of predictable books (Rhodes,1981).

The structure of the materials that readers encounter and the abilities and experiences readers bring to the act of reading affect the ease with which they comprehend the text. Good readers who are not lawyers or accountants will be slowed down, if not completely perplexed, by their first law briefs or tax forms. Conversely, those students who are in

trouble with reading should benefit from texts whose structure and story line are obvious to them.

To test this last assumption, one group of students using their basal reader and another group of students using predictable books in a reading lab for grades one, two , and three were pre- and post-tested to discern if their reading scores were affected by their respective experiences.

Procedure

Nineteen first-grade students, 14 second-grade students and 15 third-grade students in the ECIA-I Reading/Language Arts Laboratory program of a small rural school in southern West Virginia participated in the study. To be eligible for participation in the program, the students were first referred by the classroom teacher at the end of the previous year. The kindergarten students who were entering first-grade and children retained in grade one were administered the Metropolitan Readiness Test. If the student scored at or below the 39th percentile on the test, he or she was eligible for participation in the ECIA-I program. The first-grade students and students retained in the second-grade were given the reading and language section of the Primary 1 level of the Metropolitan Achievement Test and the second-grade students and students retained in the third-grade were given the same sections of the Primary 2 level of the Metropolitan Achievement Test. If the students who took the MAT scored at or below the 40th percentile in either the reading or the language sections of the test, they were eligible to participate in the ECIA-I program. New students were tested at the beginning of the school term.

The groups for the study wee chosen randomly from each of the three grade levels. The experimental group consisted of three groups: ten students in grade one, seven students in grade two, and eight students in grade three. The control group consisted of three groups: nine students in grade one, seven students in grade two and seven students in grade three.

The instructional materials used by the control group were based on a developmental, sequential basal skills approach. The major portion of instruction came from the Ginn Reading Series. Supplemental materials were from

ditto masters which used a skills approach for reading instruction. The instructional reading materials for the experimental group were predictable books. All group projects and activities used in the program were the same for each student.

Beginning in September of the school year six groups of students were taken daily from the regular classroom and placed in a Reading/Language Arts Laboratory situation for a 45-minute period.

The students in the control group were given their materials in a sequential, step-by-step pattern according to the Ginn Basal Reader they used in the regular classroom. The students brought their basal readers to the Reading Lab for oral reading purposes. A specific list of skills was logged by the classroom teacher. These skills were used in the Reading Lab to supplement reading skills which were taught in the regular classroom at a particular time. The children were not permitted to skip, but had to adhere to the presentation of specific skills according to the teacher's manual for the students' particular reader.

At the beginning of the term the students in the experimental group were first shown the predictable books which were to be used. Then they were allowed to browse and read any book which they chose. The students were allowed to choose any books they wished to read on a particular day. The method of introducing the books to each child was based on a modified version of Stauffer's Directed Reading-Thinking Activities. These five steps were used both when the students were read to orally or when each child read individually.

1. Read the title and show the picture on the cover of the book and ask, "What do you think this book will be about?" Encourage children to use both word and picture clues as they make their predictions.

2. Begin reading the book as soon as the children have enough information, stop reading and ask one or more of the following questions to encourage children to predict what will happen:
"What do you think will happen next?" "What do you think (character) will say next?" "What do you think (character) will do next?"

3. After the children have made their predictions, ask them to explain why they made those predictions by asking one or more of the following: "Why do you think that idea is a good one?" "Why do you think (character) will say that next?" "Why do you think (character) will do that next?" The purpose of these questions is to help children realize that they are basing their predictions on the book's repetitive patterns.

4. Read through the next set of repetitive patterns to enable children to confirm or reject their predictions.

5. Continue reading and have the children repeat steps 2, 3, and 4. For children reading individually, encourage them to finish the book using the predictive cycle (Tompkins and Webler, 1983, pp. 500-501).

Each student kept a list of books read and the dates they were read. Whenever a student read 15 books, he or she received a reading certificate. The students also listened to tape recordings of the books and followed the text as they listened to the tape.

During the last week in March, all students took a post-test to see if there were any differences in scores. Students completing the first grade were given the reading and language sections of the Primary 1 level of the Metropolitan Achievement Test. Students completing grade three were given the reading and language sections of the Elementary level of the Metropolitan Achievement Test.

A two-way analysis of covariance (treatment by grade) was performed on the post-test reading scale scores with pre-test reading scale scores used as covariate.

Results

Table 1

Pre and Post Test Means of All Groups

Treatment	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3
Predictable	Post M=514.4	Post M=545.6	Post M=604.2
Books	Pre M=115.6	Pre M=460.3	Pre M=553.7
Basal	Post M=473.6	Post M=544.8	Post M=565
only	Pre M=113.3	Pre M=504.7	Pre M=557.6

M = Mean

TABLE 2

Results of Analysis of Covariance

	F-Ratio	Degrees of Freedom	Significance Level
Treatment	15.41	1	.0003*
Grade	4.43	2	.0181*
Interaction	.41	2	.6666

* Significance level less than .05

A least squares means analysis showed that there were significant differences in pre- and post-test scores for both treatment groups between grade levels (prob: .0001). Althought there were significant differences between the mean test scores due to the grade variable (see Table 2), the least squares means analysis did not reveal significance levels less than .05 for any pair-wise comparison of grades.

Discussion

To determine whether or not there was a difference in the pre- and post-test scaled scores of the Metropolitan Achievement Tests by the two treatment groups, an analysis of covariance was performed. The students using the predictable books as a supplement improved significantly over the students who used only the basal reader (.0003). Also there was a significant difference between the scores of each grade level (.0181). There was no significant interaction between the treatment and grade variable (.6666). The least mean square analysis showed that both groups of students improved significantly.

These differences support the theories of Goodman (1983), Smith (1975), and La Berge (1974) concerning the nature of the transactions which occur between the reader and text. The results also support the findings of Rhodes (1979) and Burke (1977) that a whole language approach to reading using predictable books is a sound process which provides whole units of meaning for the reader and makes the natural prediction of reading easier.

However, it should be noted that the children in the experimental group who read the predictable materials were exposed to the basal reader approach in their classrooms. Also, the control and experimental groups were not large groups, and were removed from the classroom daily. Since both groups were removed daily, a halo effect is somewhat controlled.

This study provides several implications for classroom use. Since predictable books reflect the child's knowledge of his world, they are good supplemental books to use in the classroom, even if teachers are required to use a basal reader. Through the use of predictable books, a teacher can find a new resource and method of expanding effective reading.

Teachers who learn to effectively use predictable books as resources for reading and writing activities will help readers acquire basic reading skills without consciously teaching a step-by-step reading method. Children who use predictable books will automatically acquire such reading skills as sight vocabulary and the use of context clues.

In addition to the advantage of using predictable books for reading skills, the books can be used as resources for writing. When children use books such as Bill Martin's Instant Readers, they can analyze the patterns in these books and use the patterns as models for their own writing. The pattern then serves as a framework upon which to hang their own ideas. Predictable books based on rhyme can help children learn word families with common sounds or syllables and improve spelling.

In today's society, where becoming literate is very important, teachers must constantly be on the lookout for materials and methods which work and demonstrate results. The use of predictable books is one such method, and their use expedites both the teaching of reading and the love of reading.

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