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BETTER ATTITUDES VIA BRANCHED STORIES

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Jack reads adequately for a nine-year-old, but reading is not his thing. When he gets to the end of a basal-reader page, he'd rather quit than continue. So far, his reading materials just haven't turned him on.

You want to help Jack. You figure that there has to be a way to improve his attitude toward reading. But how?

Maybe by involving Jack more actively in his reading material. Maybe by giving him choices among high-interest topics. Maybe by providing cliffhangers at the bottom of each page. Maybe by creating a new format for Jack's reading material. All those "maybe's" were addressed in the design of some new classroom reading materials called branched stories.

Since there are some "Jacks" (and "Jills") in every elementary classroom, it seems continually advisable to investigate new types of materials that might have a positive effect on their attitude toward reading.

This study, therefore, investigated the effect of branched stories on elementary pupils' attitudes toward reading. Specifically, it determined whether significant differences would be found in the attitudes of third, fourth, and fifth graders toward basal and branched stories.

Materials

The basals used in this study were the Scott-Foresman Reading Unlimited Series, 1976 edition. The experimental materials were the branched stories of the Attention Span Series (Mountain, 1978).

The unique branching feature is built into the format of each page of the Attention Span Series. The following excerpt from Time Trip (Mountain, 1978, p.9) demonstrates how branching involves the reader actively in the story: it provides both a choice in plot direction and three cliff-hangers at the bottom of each page.

Clouds of cold gray fog rose around Joe. For a few moments he felt as light as a leaf, floating through the fog. Then suddenly he knew there was something solid beneath his feet again. A second later everything came into focus, and he saw a...

FLYING	STREAK OF	PYRAMID
LIZARD	LIGHTNING	continued
continued	continued	on page 15
on page 11	on page 13	

TAKE YOUR CHOICE

Branching has been investigated before in relation to attitude. Senter, Nesberg, Alama, and Morgan (1965) did not find significant differences in their subjects' attitudes toward three programmed formats, one of which involved branching. However, the programmed materials used in their study were nonfictional.

This study was designed to investigate whether branching would have a positive effect on pupils' attitudes toward reading fictional material. Many studies have investigated reading attitudes of children (Koch, 1975; Vaughn, 1974; La Haderne, 1968); no previous study, however, has compared elementary pupils' attitudes toward basal and branched stories.

Procedures

The population sample consisted of one class each of third, fourth, and fifth graders from a suburban school district in the Southwest. These pupils had been classified as average readers on the basis of basal reader achievement tests but reluctant readers on the basis of teacher judgment. Their general attitude toward reading was one of disinterest.

The investigation took place during a two-week period. During the first week pupils read stories from their basal reader for twenty-minute silent reading periods. At the end of this time pupils completed an attitude scale, based upon the Estes Reading Attitude Scale (Estes, 1973), regarding the basal stories. This scale required Likert type responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The twenty items on the scale expressed positive or negative attitudes toward the material read.

During the second week of silent reading periods the pupils were assigned to read branched stories.

Again, the investigators gave the adjusted Estes Reading Attitude Scale, with item order rearranged regarding the branched stories.

Both the first week and the second, pupils answering comprehension questions related to their reading, helping the researchers learn whether or not the pupils were indeed reading the materials about which they were expressing attitudes. Also, their degree of on-task behavior was observed and tabulated. Both the comprehension scores and the on-task scores gave positive evidence that reading was truly taking place.

Mean attitude scores from the first week were compared with mean attitude scores of the second week. Correlated t-tests for within-group data were used to analyze the data.

Findings

Significant differences in attitude were found between the mean scores of pupils reading the basal and the branched stories in all grades (grade 3, $p < .01$; grade 4, $p < .001$; grade 5, $p < .05$) and when the results of all grades were combined ($p < .001$). In all cases, this population showed more positive attitudes toward branched stories than toward basals.

Table 1
Correlated t-tests Attitude Scores

Grade	N	Treatment	Mean	Mean(Difference)	t-value
3	15	Basal	38.066	-7.133	-3.00($p < .01$)
		Branched	45.200		
4	16	Basal	38.562	-8.375	-3.96($p < .001$)
		Branched	46.937		
5	14	Basal	37.714	-7.428	-2.88($p < .05$)
		Branched	45.142		
3+4+5	45	Basal	38.133	-7.666	-5.78($p < .0001$).

These data indicate that the branched stories had a more positive effect on third, fourth, and fifth grade pupils' attitudes toward reading than did the basal stories.

Implications

Reading teachers often need to use a wide variety of material to improve the attitudes of pupils who are less than enthusiastic about reading. This study indicates that one type of material they might try is branched stories.

The typical nine-year-old Jack, who reads adequately but is not turned on by basal stories, can be found in many classrooms. The search for instructional

materials that will appeal to Jack is never-ending. THE material that will appeal to ALL readers simply doesn't exist, so teachers continue to collect many kinds of materials with many different types of appeal, in hopes of reaching Jack. On the basis of the data from this study, branched stories seem to be promising candidates for the collection. They just might turn Jack on.

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