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# IMPLICATIONS OF PIAGETIAN THEORY FOR CORRELATING ART AND READING

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Piaget tells us that we know something to the extent that we act on it. Because art facilitates the right kinds of action for knowing, or learning, correlating art and reading may well be the vehicle to growth in and enjoyment of communication skills. Therefore, art not only contributes to reading development but also contributes to both the cognitive and the affective development needed for success in all academic areas.

In addition to the tangible aspects of art there is also an aesthetic dimension. Fortunately, people are imbued with the potential to create art and to appreciate the artistry of their surroundings. We will show how this potential may be nurtured and in so doing illustrate how the following principles can be realized in practice:

1. Art provides children of a broad range of abilities opportunities to participate meaningfully and happily in communication experiences
2. Art provides an excellent vehicle for the exercise and development of interrelated adaptive processes--assimilation (play or using existing abilities) and accommodation (work or developing new abilities). In this way balanced development results.
3. Art provides children with interrelated physical, mental, and social environment necessary for the development of a variety of important concepts needed for reading and other academic areas.
4. Art activities provide a context in which

a child may be aided in decentering psychologically and perceptually. In decentering psychologically, the child learns to take other people into consideration. In decentering perceptually s/he looks at several aspects of a configuration such as a letter or a printed word in order to differentiate it from similar-appearing letters or words.

### From Principles to Practice

In our work of correlating art and reading in the schools, we have developed a number of activities based on the above principles. When trying these activities with children, one experiences the satisfaction of knowing that what is being done is rooted in good theory. Also, one enjoys these activities and begins to see children developing in many ways.

#### Learning and Using Letters.

Learning to recognize and reproduce letters of the alphabet is an important part of most beginning reading programs. Regardless of the methods or combinations of approaches used, there always seem to be letters that are difficult to master. Teachers often scratch their heads, pondering the effort to find "the" activity that clicks.

#### Eating Through the Alphabet

Make cookies in the form of letters and allow the child to internalize each letter s/he has mastered. A child may also wish to take letters home to be eaten and enjoyed by those who may also have been helping in letter mastery. You will need the following:

- 1 recipe of chilled refrigerator cookie dough or sugar cookie dough (homemade or purchased--refrigerator dough is stiffer)
- 1 3x5 unlined index card for each difficult letter to be studied (each letter previously printed clear and large with a magic marker)
- waxed paper (10 sheets in 18" lengths)
- cooking oil
- oven
- spatula
- cookie tin

Prepare activity table: Tape index card (on which target letter has been previously printed) on table. Cover index card with a sheet of waxed paper. (Target letter on index card will show through waxed paper). Place small amount of cookie dough in upper corner of waxed paper.

Procedure: Place small amount of cooking oil on each child's hands and instruct child to rub together (palms only). Roll cookie dough into snakes. Form letters on waxed paper using the see-through letter guide. Remove formed letters with spatula, place on cookie tin and bake. While baking first batch, repeat the

activity. However, remove the taped index card from beneath waxed paper and place at top of waxed paper. Ask children to make second cookie without the use of the pattern under the waxed paper.

Variations: If cookies are not to be eaten, paint and glaze as desired. The same activity can be done using Kitchen Klay. Make scatter pins, necklaces, or manipulative play letters with Kitchen Klay or cookie dough.

"I Can Read and Spell My Name!" Children are so proud when they can utter these words. And parents are quite happy to hear them because they mean the child has achieved some key developmental tasks. That is fine; but our concern should always be to find the best methods to attain these goals.

For example, teachers overwork the use of name puzzles for teaching written and oral spelling of children's names. And, of course, laborious copying methods are not very meaningful. There are easier ways for learning name mastery. Why not use a correlated art and reading approach?

Making Name Bracelets. For this activity one needs these materials for each ten children:

"Kitchen Klay", see recipe below  
 Milk straws, cut into 1" lengths (60-100)  
 Waxed paper (10 sheets cut into 18" lengths)  
 Ball of string or yarn  
 A sentence strip or index card with each  
     child's first or last name printed  
     in large plain letters  
 A sharpened primary pencil

Recipe for "Kitchen Klay"           1 cup plain flour  
   1 cup salt  
   1 cup water

Put one cup of flour and one cup of salt into a bowl. Mix with a large spoon. Add one cup of water to mixture and stir. Place mixture in the top of a double boiler and cook until firm. Remove from pan to a cutting board or waxed paper and knead gently. Keep "Kitchen Klay" in a covered container until ready to use. (A coffee can with a plastic top makes an excellent container.) If mixture becomes too hard, add a little water and knead. If mixture becomes too soft, sprinkle a little cornstarch over the mixture and knead. This material hardens and turns white as it dries. To hasten drying, place finished products in a warm oven for two or three hours.

Prepare activity table: Tape each child's name to the table. Below each name, place a sheet of waxed paper. Place a small amount of "Kitchen Klay" on each piece of waxed paper. Seat the children.

Procedure: Ask each child to first count the number of letters in his or her name. Then ask each child to make that number of small clay balls. (Demonstrate) Next, instruct each child to place a clay ball between the thumb and forefinger, squeezing gently. (Demonstrate) Lay each clay ball on one of its flat sides until all balls are finished. With help, place a piece of straw lengthwise through each clay ball. (Demonstrate)

Aided or unaided, allowing for ability, have each child (using a primary pencil) engrave the letters of his name, one letter per ball, on a flat side of each ball. Let dry. Thread balls to make name bracelet. Allow children to take their name bracelets home upon name mastery. Paint if desired.

#### Learning and Using Words

Stamp collaging. Did you know that those gorgeous stamps that some people are tempted to discard can be utilized by creative little hands? Those big beautiful stamps that are coming out, especially in the nature series, can actually be used by children of all ages in activities ranging from stamp collaging to stamp collecting.

What can stamp collaging do for the pre-school child? We'll show you what Drew (age 5) has been doing and you will be able to see how stamp collaging helped further develop his perceptual and language skills.

An innovative teacher, having received nature stamps in the mail, decided to share with Drew the beautiful animal pictures on the stamps. She had recalled from a previous conversation with him that he knew something about animals indigenous to Florida. For example, upon seeing the numerous pictures, he readily identified the alligator picture and deduced that the word under it must be "alligator." She told him it was. He asked if he could take the stamps home. Hours later he brought back a treasure for her to see. It was an unusually interesting collage. He had carefully selected those animals that he had in his "bank"--ones that he now knew! Drew himself had licked the stamps and placed them to form a special design.

Through observing and manipulating the medium, he had dealt with shapes, sizes, and colors. A bonus was that he had discovered the idea of symbol-sound relationship. A further advantage was that he was engaging in the kind of near point visual activity used in reading.

Stamp collaging also afforded Drew the opportunity to talk to his parents, the teacher, and a friend about what he was doing. And, as he developed language

expression, he further expanded his social horizons.

#### Learning to Comprehend and Create

Storytelling with Puppets. An extremely important facet of the language arts that supports reading comprehension is listening comprehension. However, many children come to the learning environment with little or no ability to listen attentively and carefully over a period of time. How do we get their attention?

As most of us know, the more action and dramatic effect utilized in storytelling the more interested the audience. Action and dramatic effect in stories can be heightened through the use of puppets--especially the glove puppet which allows for the interchange of characters.

For example, in telling the story of "The Three Little Pigs," one uses a hand glove puppet to visually captivate the listeners. Each of the characters is represented by an attachable cotton pom pom head. Each head is attached to a finger on the glove with velcro. But there is more to this activity than listening. Note how other facets of the language arts are developed as this activity is expanded. No sooner is one finished telling the story than the children want the magic glove themselves! It's not long before they are retelling the story. Do they get bored? No, because after a while they begin embellishing the story. As children retell stories and as new stories are introduced, concepts and associated vocabulary are further developed and syntax is expanded.

How can reading be developed from these kinds of activities? As children are ready, one can ask questions such as, "What can you tell me about the wolf?" Most children will give specifics--long ears, big teeth, mean eyes, hairy. A few children will make inferences about the wolf's character. These phrases are written down and then read. Before long these words and phrases are combined into sentences, and sentences into paragraphs. It is obvious that through these art-based activities many important reading readiness and reading skills are being developed.

#### Wheeling for Comprehension

An excellent hands-on activity which further incorporates art and reading, and extends the work we do with storytelling and puppets, is the comprehension wheel or pie. For example, in dealing further with the story of "The Three Little Pigs," we can use a comprehension pie which contains inner and outer wheels. The pieces of the inner wheel might be the big bad wolf, the three little pigs, and the houses made of straw, sticks, and brick. By pointing to the appropriate pictures on this inner wheel, children

can answer questions about details, main idea, sequence and other aspects of comprehension. By manipulating the outer wheel, which contains words representing the pictures, the children can match words with corresponding pictures.

Since art activities are so meaningful and pleasurable, isn't it fortunate that they can be a vehicle for the kinds of cognitive, language, and affective development needed to make children better readers? In this article we have noted principles rooted in Piagetian theory, for correlating art and reading instruction and explained a number of useful activities in art that explicate these principles, as an example of theory into practice.