

4-1-1979

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Recommended Citation

Axelrod, J. (1979). Word Analogies: An Overlooked Reading Aid. *Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts*, 19 (3). Retrieved from https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol19/iss3/10

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WORD ANALOGIES: AN OVERLOOKED READING AID

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Few cues give a teacher a more valid or quicker insight into her students' thinking abilities than word analogies. The pupils' mental manipulations or lack thereof reveal to the aware and perceptive teacher a usually accurate idea of the extent to which her pupils will be able to perform. Picture analogies for nonreaders and word analogies for literate pupils can be used informally by the classroom teachers to approximate just how much pupils, individually, are capable of learning in an academic situation.

Yet, as important as being able to understand relationships is, there appears a dearth of literature on the subject either in classic texts in reading, psychology and intellect or in recent journals indexed in *Education Index* and *Current Index To Journals in Education*. William James (1890), for example, admits to the importance of this subject but nonetheless dismisses it in a couple of lines: "A native talent for perceiving analogies . . . (is) the leading fact in genius of every order . . . people (who) are sensitive to resemblances, and far more ready to point out wherein they consist are . . . the writers, the poets, the inventors, the scientific men, the practical geniuses." Considering the apparent importance of analogies, it is hard to understand why so many scientific men and practical geniuses are mum on the subject.

Turner (1973) lists and exemplifies fifteen kinds of relationships:

Purpose

Cause - Effect

glove: ball

Part - Whole

race: fatigue

Part - Part

snake: reptile

Action to Object

gill: fin

Object to Action

kick: football

Synonym

Antonym

Place

Miami: Florida

Degree

Warm: Hot

Characteristic

Ignorance: Poverty

Sequence

Spring: Summer

Grammatical

Restore: climb

Numerical

4:12: 9:27

Association

devil: wrong

This article will concern itself with analogies as (1) word attack and (2) comprehension skills.

Analogies deal with words not in the context of a sentence and paragraph. Therefore, if it is assumed that learning words on sight should be made in sentence-context, then the use of analogies as a word analysis skill is limited. After all, pupils can hardly rely on context clues to aid them in figuring out a word if there is no sentence-context for that word. Nevertheless, there is another type of context for words in an analogy and this context can aid the pupil in recognizing that word. The context for a word in an analogy is its companion word. For example, “face” can be a companion word for “head”; “run” for “walk”; “hit” for “knock,” etc. Let’s take an example of how word analogies can be used as a decoding device.

Many pupils confuse minimal-pair words like “horse” and “house” and between “month” and “mouth.” They confuse these pairs of words for a number of reasons: they fail to use context clues; their teachers have not taught phonics elements such as “ou-ow” and “or”; pupils come across contexts suitable for both minimal pairs like “The house is white” or “The horse is white.” But whatever the reasons are for their confusion, the use of analogies can help to alleviate the problem. One suggestion would be for the teacher to teach medial vowel and consonant-controlled vowel sounds and then place on the chalkboard:

h__se: saddle

h__se: home

m__th: year

m__th: cavity

Have pupils first guess at the appropriate words and then at the appropriate missing letters. Ask the learners to justify their answers (e.g. “a horse goes with a saddle”; “there’s an ‘r’ sound in ‘horse,’” etc.). Then place on the board:

horse: home

house: saddle

mouth: year

month: cavity

Ask the pupils why these responses are not congruent (e.g. “A house and a saddle aren’t related” or “A month is in a year and a mouth has nothing to do with a year,” etc.) and have them correct the analogies by juggling around the medial letters in the four encased words causing phonic confusion. The purpose of this analogy activity is to have the pupils perceive two contexts for their responses – a correct and an incorrect one. In addition to spurring them to think logically, they will have engaged in a useful phonics and word attack lesson. (It should be added, however, that in teaching words out of sentence context, the teacher may not know whether the pupil will know these words *in* sentence-context. Thus, teaching words

