Analogies: Word Attack and Reading Comprehension Skills in a Thinking Context

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Few cues give a teacher a more valid or quicker insight into her students' thinking abilities than 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 non-readers 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
- Part—Whole
- Part—Part
- Action to Object
- Object to Action
- Synonym
- Antonym
- Place
- Degree
- Characteristic
- Sequence
- Grammatical

  - glove: ball
  - race: fatigue
  - snake: reptile
  - gill: fin
  - kick: football
  - Miami: Florida
  - Warm: Hot
  - Ignorance: Poverty
  - Spring: Summer
  - Restore: climb
Maney (1961) lists and classifies relationships in much more specific ways:

Association — function
Association — where worn
Association — specialized containers
Association — organ and instrument
Association — target and projectile
Association — degree
Apparel — wearer
Article — holding device
Associated Ideas
Associated Sense
Classification
Classification as to Constituents
Classification as to Common Locale
Characteristic — Sound
Characteristic — Sound
Color — associated meaning
Cutting Tool — specific use
Complete Reversals
Clothing — Function
Container: Content
Caution Sign For Specific User
Covering
Degree
Degree — Size
Description
Direction — Indicator
Effect — Cause
Equipment — Accessory
Function
Food

4:12: 9:27
devil: wrong
Shoe: sock
devil: wrong
fork: spoon
glove: wristwatch
pliers: tool box
eye: camera shutter
bowling pin: bowling balls
broom: vacuum cleaner
bow tie: father
shirt: hanger
laugh: funny
Color: saw: call: heard
ladder: elevator
balloon: boot (rubber)
helicopter: air
Snow: white
bell: peel
red: stop
razor: father
1-2-3: 3-2-1
pajamas: bed
cash register: money
lighthouse beam: ship
corn: husk
warm: hot
farm: garden
cloud: white
wind: vane
TV: antenna
purse: money
cat: milk
Homonyms
Home
Insect – construction
Intensity
Indexing
Levels of Abstraction
Liquid – consumer
Meaning
Multimeaning of Label
Movement
Numerical Ratio
Number – person
Object Turned
Object – Specialized
Motion
Object – Use
Opposite
Object to Insert
Outside Inside
Product
Product Related to
Utensils
Purpose
Place
Packaging
Preferred Food
Part – Whole
Person – Equipment
Position
Referent
Sequence – progression
Shelter
Sports Equipment
Synonym
Source – Product
Stages of Evaluation
Specific User
Subject – Verb Agreement

bow: bough
bird: nest
spider: web
may: must
shape: square
King: god
Pepsi: boy
under: where: never: when
(ice cream) cone: (pine) cone
wheel: turn
2:1: 3:2
they: I
screw: screwdriver
rabbit: hopping:
  frog: jumping
train: ride
coin: parking meter
camera shutter: film
hen: egg
sweater: knitting utensils
starch: stiff
grass: ground
hay: bale
rat: cheese
soldier: rifle
hat: head:: lid: container
Mrs.: she
February 29: Leap Year Day
garage: car
football: helmet
mink: fur coat
tadpole: frog
saddle: horse
I: have: she: has
This article will not deal with analogies as a thinking skill. Rather it 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, such as face: head; run: walk; hit: knock, etc. For example, 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:

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h . . se:    saddle
h . . se:    home
m . . th:    year
m . . th:    cavity
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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.).
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 letters in the four 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 out of sentence-context is limited in usefulness and should be supplemented by using those words to be learned in a sentence-context situation).

Concerning analogy as a reading comprehension skill, consider the following example:

up: down West: __ _

The pupil who is able to show a pattern of correct responses to analogies like the one above is engaging in one form of reading comprehension. Not all forms or even several forms, to be sure, but in one of them. For example, a student who figures out analogies easily and thereby shows high intellectual potential may not, nevertheless, be able to tell the main idea of a story he has just read or even to reveal some important details. But analogy is not less than one form of reading comprehension. For when a child shows his teacher that he understands analogies he is revealing that he comprehends the meanings of the words he is able to decode and that he comprehends the relationships between them. Some might interpret the phrase “understanding the meaning of words” as a synonym for “vocabulary,” and right they would be because vocabulary is a form of comprehension. Vocabulary is comprehension on the building block level. When the blocks are put together, comprehension is the structure that stands. Comprehension is the anatomy of reading; vocabulary is its physiology. Analogy is a form of reading comprehension because it considers the meanings of words (infrastructure) and the relationships between words (interstructure).

SOME WORKBOOKS THAT INCLUDE ANALOGY EXERCISES

REFERENCES