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EFFECTS OF ADDING FOLKLORE TO BASAL READING PROGRAMS

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For the past several years reading in the elementary schools has been an area of special emphasis and has been reinforced as one of the basics of a good education. In response to this situation, educators are always searching for ways to improve reading instruction.

One aspect of reading that recently has been of particular interest is the inclusion of folklore in reading instruction. As a part of every culture's literature for a long time, many of the stories originated centuries ago. A resurgence of interest in folklore in the last few years has made it a logical source for supplementing basal reading programs. Often the terms "folklore" and "fairy tale" are used interchangeably. Thompson (1951), however, attempts to make a distinction between the two. He concludes that the term "folklore" is broadened to include "fairy tales" and "household tales," as well as all forms of prose narrative, written or oral, which have been handed down through the years.

Koeller's review of twenty-five years of The Reading Teacher (1981) reveals that advocating the use of children's literature in the elementary reading curriculum has been a common practice. Despite this strong endorsement, she cites studies showing that 95-99% of American elementary teachers adopt basal reading programs which contain only a small amount of children's literature, as the major source of instruction.

There seems to be ample evidence from the research literature to suggest the hypothesis that topic interest does affect reading comprehension of both good and poor readers. The results from research studies such as Belloni and Jongsmma (1978), Estes and Vaughn (1973), Cook and White (1977) and Smith (1963) have clearly shown that folklore is one of the topics most interesting to students in the area of reading, though most basal reading programs contain a small amount of folklore.

With the challenge for educators to provide quality reading instruction, it is necessary to determine what materials/methods are most effective for use in the classroom. The focus of the present study is an investigation of the use of folklore in reading instruction.

It was hypothesized that the addition of folklore to basal reading instruction will significantly increase second graders' reading achievement.

METHOD

Subjects

The subjects for the study were 49 children randomly selected from a population of 90 second graders in an elementary school in a suburban/rural section of a large metropolitan city. Eleven of the 60 subjects originally selected had to be eliminated because they had moved during the course of the study. The subjects ranged in age from 6 years, 10 months, to 8 years, 2 months ($\bar{X} = 7.4$). Their grade equivalents on reading achievement ranged from 0.6 to 5.2. All subjects were randomly assigned to either the control (Group I) or the experimental (Group II) groups.

Procedure

Both groups were pretested on Form A of the California Achievement Test in early September before the treatment was started. Thirty-one percent of the subjects scored in the first, 33% in the second, 20% in the third, and 16% in the fourth quartile of the CAT pretest. The groups were then posttested on Form B of the CAT six months later after the treatment was completed.

A week following the pretest an interest survey was conducted to determine the interests of the subjects. The children were given the opportunity to choose their favorite topic for reading from among six categories of topics. The results were as follows:

Fairy tales	12 students (20.34%)
Animals	12 students (20.34%)
Space	12 students (20.34%)
Wild West/Cowboys	11 students (18.64%)
Adventure/Mystery	10 students (16.95%)
Family	2 students (3.39%)

Treatment for the two groups commenced immediately following the completion of the interest survey. Since the focus of the study was on content (basal versus folklore), an attempt was made to keep the mode of instruction for the two treatment groups as similar as possible.

Treatment for Group I. In addition to receiving their regular reading program, subjects in Group I were given thirty half-hour sessions of instruction in the basal reading program by this investigator. The particular basal reading series used in this study was Harper & Row Design for Reading at the Primary Levels, Levels 4-9 (1974). The instruction for the basal reading program was given according to the format provided by the Directed Reading Activity method, as discussed by Tierney, Readence, & Dishner (1980). This method included reading the stories, discussion, follow-up activities (such as vocabulary development), phonics lessons, and comprehension exercises. In an attempt to maintain the interest and involvement of the children and to avoid investigator bias, every effort was made to provide interesting and enriching activities in the basal reading program. These included reading related popular stories, poetry, some art work, and acting out short skits. In addition, remedial activities, as suggested

by the basal teaching guides, were also used.

Treatment for Group 2. In addition to its regular reading program, this group was given thirty half-hour sessions of additional reading instruction using folklore. This treatment was given by the same investigator. The curriculum included fables, legends, myths, tall tales, fairy tales, and folktales. The instructor chose the selections of folklore used in this curriculum based on research by Rogers & Robinson (1963), Smith (1962) and Smith (1977).

Translations of Aesop's fables by Thomas and Townsend (1949) were used. Sometimes a movie of a fable, such as "The Hare and the Tortoise" was viewed.

Myths were difficult to adjust to second graders' level. However, Jason and the Golden Fleece (Gunther, 1963) was one the children studied. It seemed to fit their level and interests. Legends, especially ones about people in America's past, were used. "The Legend of Paul Bunyan" (Leach, 1958) and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (Irving, 1956) are examples of one studied.

The supply of fairy tales was abundant. With an effort to provide a variety of tales, instruction in this section included fairy tales collected by several noted authors. Among the tales studied were Irish tales about leprechauns by Green (1968), German tales from the Brothers Grimm (Gag, 1936), and other stories from collections of Andrew Lang (1948) and Alice Dalglish (1947).

The tall tales used in this study were ones from the American West, such as Tall Tales from the High Hills (Credle, 1957). Stories told in the Appalachian Mountains and Deep South provided the sources for tales found in The Jack Tales (Chase, 1943) and Grandfather Tales (Chase, 1948). These stories were usually told rather than read, as was the tradition of such tales. The students were given opportunities to learn some of these tales and to tell them to others. Some instruction in the art of storytelling was obtained by the instructor from Storyteller (Ross, 1980) and Sawyer's The Way of the Storyteller (1962). These sources provided the instructor with techniques of storytelling.

The treatment period lasted six months after which both groups were posttested on Form B of the CAT.

RESULTS

In order to compare the amount of gain in reading achievement between groups, it was first necessary to determine if the two groups differed significantly on reading achievement. A t test comparing the independent pretest means indicated no significant difference between the two groups, $t = 1.940$, $p < .05$ (See Table 1, on following page.)

Within group changes in reading achievement were determined by computing a t test between non-independent (correlated) means derived from pre and posttest scores for both groups. The results revealed that there was a significant increase in reaching achievement for Group 1, $t = 11.659$, $p < .01$ (12.81% gain), and there was a significant increase in reading achievement for Group 2,

Table 1
 Pretest Means, Standard Deviation,
 and \underline{t} -value for Groups 1 and 2

Groups	Pretest \bar{X}	SD	\underline{t}
Group 1 (Control)	78.08	16.6	1.940*
Group 2 (Experimental)	79.64	13.3	

$\underline{t} = 19.708$, $p < .01$ (18.33% gain). While both groups increased in reading achievement over the period of six months, the gain for Group 2 was 5.52% greater. (See Table 2)

Table 2
 Pre and Posttest Means, Standard Deviations,
 \underline{t} -values, and % Improvement for Groups 1 & 2

Groups	Pretest \bar{X}	SD	Posttest \bar{X}	SD	\underline{t}	Percent Im- provement
Group 1 (Control)	78.08	16.6	88.08	18.72	11.659*	12.81
Group 2 (Experimental)	79.64	13.70	94.24	13.74	19.708*	18.33

A comparison of the posttest means showed that there was a significant difference, $\underline{t} = 7.569$, $p < .01$, between the two groups, thus supporting the hypothesis that inclusion of folklore significantly improves reading achievement. (See Table 3)

Table 3
 Posttest Means, Standard Deviation
 and \underline{t} -value for Groups 1 & 2

Groups	Posttest \bar{X}	SD	\underline{t}
Group 1 (Control)	88.08	18.72	7.569*
Group 2 (Experimental)	94.24	13.74	

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Basal reading programs, in general, seem to focus predominantly on day-to-day family and neighbor situations (Smith, 1962).

For example, the basal program used in the present study, The Harper & Row Design for Reading at the Primary Levels (1974) contains less than one percent children's literature and over 86% family themes. The rationale provided by the publishers is that family and neighbor stories give the student "...an opportunity to empathize — to put themselves in the story characters' place and do what the characters do, feel what they feel" (Harper & Row Design, Level 7, p. T6).

The interest survey conducted with both groups immediately following the pretest revealed that fairy tales were among the top choices of the subjects for reading material. This finding seems to be in accordance with the information provided by Smith (1962) and Rogers and Robinson (1963). Smith found humor-fantasy and fairy tales to rank first and fifth, respectively. Children chose fairy tales more than any other topic when selecting their library books. Rogers and Robinson found similar results with first graders who preferred stories of make believe over seven other categories. The authors suggest even though students show an interest in a particular topic, interest alone might not be strong enough to encourage them to search for materials on that topic. Since students' reading habits may sometimes be limited by the availability of certain topics in books, further study is needed to determine the relationship between actual reading habits of the students and their interests. It would be interesting to observe what reading materials are chosen by subjects when they have an opportunity to choose freely their pleasure reading materials.

The present investigation strongly supports previous research (Cook & White, 1977; Estes & Vaughn, 1973) that the inclusion of folklore in reading instruction does significantly increase reading achievement. In light of such strong research evidence it is surprising that basal readers contain such a limited amount of children's literature especially if one assumes that a primary goal of early education is to develop reading interest and ability. It seems vital, therefore, that either the publishing companies incorporate more folklore into their basal reading series or encourage teachers to supplement their basal reading programs with folklore. With folklore readily available, this could be a plausible solution.

Further examination of the data revealed that in the group which received instruction using folklore, low-ability students made more gain in reading achievement than high-ability students. An average of 25.3% was gained in raw scores on the CAT by those students who scored below 2.0 at the beginning of the study. This is compared to an average gain of 14.28% experienced by those students who tested at grade level or above at the beginning of the study. These findings generally support Steven's study (1980) where it was found that higher-ability students made significant gains in reading achievement. However, these findings contradict that part of Steven's study where it was found that lower and middle ability readers' achievement was not affected to any degree by interest. Data from the present findings, rather, are more consistent with the study by Belloni and Jongma (1978) who found

that low-achieving students had better comprehension of materials they considered highly interesting than of materials they considered to be on low interest.

This study included a variety of folklore, such as fables, myths, legends, tall tales, and oral tales, enabling the instructor to cover different themes in literature. Some of the themes discussed were death, good versus evil, jealousy, sibling rivalry, poverty, love, hate, and other aspects of human nature. The folklore also allowed the students to study different cultures, settings, and customs. Some of the oral tales were told using the dialect native to a particular area. This enabled the students to experience the sounds and structure of language not usually found in their everyday reading lessons. These activities further support Bettelheim's study (1977) in which he contends that folklore allows children, as well as adults, to experience richness of language, imagery, settings, and situations which help them to deal with reality.

This study focused on the use of folklore in the basal reading program during reading instruction. It would have been interesting to see the effect of the use of folklore in other areas of the curriculum, such as social studies, art and music. Further investigation aimed at measuring the effects of the use of folklore in other areas of instruction would provide useful information to see if folklore results in any gains in these areas. Based upon the evidence found in this and previous studies, it seems logical that folklore should be an integral part of second grade reading instruction. Publishers could give serious consideration to revising the content of basal reading texts and include materials more appealing to their consumers. Teachers also can periodically survey the interests of their students and have materials available in the classroom which reflect those interests.

The present study gives evidence that folklore does make a significant difference in reading achievement. However, only weekly half-hour sessions of instruction were arranged for the children for the six-month period of this study. To further confirm the results obtained in this study, additional research needs to be done with a larger cross-sectional population where subjects can become acquainted with a greater variety of folklore over a longer instructional period.

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