

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE EFFECTS OF AFFECTIVE RESPONSE
TECHNIQUES ON SEVENTH GRADE STUDENTS OF LOW AND HIGH
ABILITIES WHEN APPLIED TO READING IN THE CONTENT AREAS.

THESIS

Submitted to the Graduate Committee of the
Department of Education and Human Development
State University of New York
College at Brockport
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Science in Education

by

James G. Bennett
State University of New York
College at Brockport
Brockport, New York
April, 1991

Abstract

The purpose of the study was to introduce concepts of the Affective Response Approach to Literature to students in two seventh grade classrooms in order to determine whether the use of affective responses changes students' attitudes about reading and about social studies. Also measured was student achievement in both areas.

The subjects for the study were the 88 seventh graders enrolled in the Blessed Sacrament Catholic Junior High School in the 1989-1990 school year. Prior to the study all students were evaluated using a modified Rhody attitude assessment tool in order to measure their attitude toward reading and social studies. A modified primary trait scoring system, modeled after Cooper's writing evaluation tool, was used to measure student aptitude in reading and social studies.

For a period of ten weeks, content area teachers implemented elements of Bleich's heuristic and affective response techniques in covering reading in their perspective areas. The language arts teacher reinforced concepts covered in content areas with expanded uses of both Bleich's heuristic and personal responses. Some seventh graders were absent on test days or failed to complete assignments. These students' scores were not included in the analysis.

At the end of the study, the students' abilities and attitudes were again evaluated using the above measurement tools. Results of the study showed a significant increase in both student attitude and aptitude in both reading and social studies as a result of using affective response approaches. These results were consistent when the class scores were compared as a whole and when they were compared in thirds when grouped by ability.

In all comparisons, student aptitude improved markedly as shown in pre to post test scores. Student attitude scores never reflected the same improvement. In comparison of pre and post test of the top third of the class, attitude assessment scores reflected almost no improvement in attitude due to use of affective response techniques. However, since the attitude of the class as a whole was shown to improve significantly at the end of the study, and since the aptitude of the students, as a whole and at each level, reflected an important improvement, it can be said that affective response techniques are a useful and effective new set of strategies for teaching reading in the content areas.

It is suggested that a problem with comprehension may have little to do with a person's decoding skills, but more to do with synthesis/interpretation skills. "It's not that the majority of students can't read. Most choose not to because they have never been shown how to explore and interpret effectively" (Vacca and Vacca, 1986, p. 6). The challenge, then, is to find ways to assist comprehension through means that encourage interpretation and exploration.

Affective Response

Many researchers have come to the conclusion that true comprehension involves the assimilation of new concepts with personal beliefs and conceptions. A primary researcher in this field is Louise Rosenblatt. A contemporary of Dewey, she was concerned with enhancing and understanding students' abilities to comprehend and interpret literature. Rosenblatt postulates in Literature as Exploration (1938), that the meaning of literature is found not in the text but is created in the interaction between the reader and the text. In order for a reader to come to a whole or even a valid understanding of literature he must "be given the opportunity and courage to approach literature personally, to let it mean something to him directly" (Rosenblatt, 1938, p. 81).

David Bleich (1975) has taken the basic tenets of Rosenblatt's ideas and applied them to the classroom. He teaches students to interpret literature based on their personal reactions to it. Students pick out the most

important word in or their most vivid association to the text, analyse their choice and determine which qualities of the text elicited their response. Their critique of a text is as much an analysis of their ratiocination as it is an evaluation of the work as a whole.

The use of a reader's emotional response to the written word is also useful as a technique to increase reading comprehension for beginning or "slow" readers. Some researchers have advised that instructors downplay the importance of diagnosis, prescription and testing in favor of increased dialogue with the student and the text (Gage, 1971). Educators have come to the conclusion that a student's interpretation of a text, indeed his ability to interpret the text, is largely shaped by his personal experience. Instructors have learned to help students use their experience to help them interpret context clues. For instance, if a reader encounters the words "Some squares do not have four sides" a confusion will result.

[This] sentence, like all reading situations, demands reader interaction. The [reader] might react in any number of ways. "This is a misprint-it should say, 'all squares have four sides.' No, maybe that's not the kind of square it means; Michael Philbutt is a square, and he doesn't have four sides. No, that's not what it means. Now a square is a plane figure, but it has a front and a back, or does it have a back side? That's either five or six sides" (Heilman, Blair & Rupley, 1981, p. 6).

The reader portrayed here is reacting to the text in a personal way. He is trying to comprehend what he has read

using the knowledge he has gathered from his environment. He uses his schema in order to come to an understanding of new print material. The meaning that he uncovers in the text comes as much from his own environment as it does from the print.

It has been theorized that the reader's background correlates closely with comprehension of the text (Adams and Bruce, 1980). Comprehension is not an automatic result of mastering decoding skills (Cooper, 1986.), but relies more heavily on the reader's prior knowledge of his world. (Harris and Hodges, 1981). Researchers have come to see comprehension as the "building of bridges between the new and the known" (Pearson and Johnson, 1978, p. 24). Comprehension is now seen as an interaction of the reader's schema with the text itself.

Affective Response in Action

A number of researchers have experimented with teaching styles which draw on student shemata in order to comprehend the text. Marie Dionisio has taught her remedial reading students to evaluate literature via letters to the teacher. She has abandoned isolated reading skills in favor of personal response and higher level thinking skills (Dionisio, 1989). Martha Dudley (1989) has used more structured tenets of Atwell and Romano to fit the diverse needs of culturally/ability mixed classes. Carol Giles (1989) has chosen to use study groups and interpersonnel dialogue in her

classes as a means to come to an interpretation of the text. Robert Probst (1988) sees reading as a dialogue with a text. The teaching of skills is secondary to the response to literature as literature.

Bill Corcoran has an interesting analogy to the interpretation of literature. He argues his "case for personal, operational and cultural dimensions of literary response." Like Bleich, he feels that students should start with their initial, visceral response to the work. He sees literature as "anatomies of discourse, as bodies of language to be pleurably dismembered and reconstituted, no matter how apparently inaccessible and serious the text in question" (Corcoran, 1988, p. 39).

Steven Athanases (1988) sees students as legislators of meaning. He imbues the students with a sense of ownership of the text as he builds on the works of Rosenblatt and Bleich. Carlson (1988) and Schaars (1988) have also successfully implemented the tenets of Rosenblatt and Bleich into their classrooms. Researchers have shown that increasing student ownership, accountability and involvement with the text increases their success with the text.

Reading/Writing Correlation

Other researchers of the reading process have strongly advocated the integration of reading and writing instruction. The work of Evanechko, Ollila, and Armstrong (1974) indicated that "reading and writing use certain skills in common and

that the presence of those skills should result in better performance in both areas" (Harris and Sipay, 1984, p 87). They determined fluency of language to be the single most important factor in reading success. This ties in with the theories of Kenneth Goodman and Roach Van Allen.

Evanechko suggests reinforcement of language fluency and competency in the use of varying and more complex syntactic structures as the first step in improving reading performance (Harris and Sipay, Ibid). Allen (1969) first described the language experience approach (LEA) in a paper presented at the Early Childhood Lecture Series, Ypsilanti, Mich., in 1969. Harris and Sipay offer this approach as one technique for achieving the goal of improved reading performance through language integration.

This approach integrates the teaching of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. As described by Allen [ED 034 571], LEA involves allowing students to talk about topics of interest, discuss those topics with others, listen to the language of many authors, dictate their own stories or poems to teachers or other adults, tell stories, explore writing as a recreational activity, write their own books, and relate reading to speaking and writing through hearing their own stories read aloud. (Harris and Sipay, 1984, p 87)

Using LEA ensures increased aptitude in all areas of language use. With enhanced language the students gain enhanced thought (Bruner, 1983). A central component of LEA is dialogue and communication between the students and their peers and their teacher. J. David Cooper, in his textbook, Improving Reading

Comprehension, has suggested some ideas about integrating reading and writing.

Readers and Writers as Composers of Meaning

	Reader	Writer
Planner	Have purpose for reading Generate background	Have purpose for writing Generate background
Composer	Read and compose meaning	Write and compose meaning
Editor	Reread, reflect, revise meaning	Revise
Monitor	Finalize meaning	Finalize copy

The processes of proficient reading and writing not only have many similarities in how they function, but they also tend to be processes that are used together. . . . Whenever possible, reading and writing activities should be tied together and not taught as separate subjects. The teaching of reading and writing together involves

1. teaching students the writing process,
2. pointing out the relationships that exist between reading and writing.
3. using writing activities as a part of the reading lesson and using reading materials as a stimulus for writing.

The teacher should not assume that the teaching of writing automatically improves comprehension or vice versa. Students must be taught how to write just as they must be taught how to comprehend. However, if the two processes are systematically taught and related to each other, they will reinforce each other (Cooper, J. 1986, p. 312).

What is interesting about Cooper is that he too calls readers composers of meaning. With his advocacy of integration of reading and writing coupled with his belief that meaning is

created (composed) by the reader, he contributes to the beliefs and works of researchers along the Rosenblatt line.

Many teachers and researchers of the teaching of writing have espoused techniques and attitudes that enhance the learning process in all areas. Janet Emig has presented some fallacies about the teaching of writing that can be easily applied to the teaching of reading.

Tenets of Magical Thinking Paradigm--Current Credo

- 1) Writing is taught--not learned
- 2) Writing is taught atomistically, bottom up
- 3) There is essentially one process that serves all
- 4) Writing Process is linear
- 5) Writing Process is almost exclusively conscious
- 6) Because writing is conscious, it can be done swiftly and in order
- 7) No community or collaboration in writing, it is a silent, solitary entity

Developmental Research Findings

- 1) Writing is learned
- 2) Writing process is complex-wholes to parts and back again
- 3) There is no monolithic writing process
- 4) Non-linear writing is natural, real
- 5) Writing is often pre-conscious
- 6) Writing has varying rhythms
- 7) Process is enhanced by group work

(Emig, 1987, p.63-4)

The developmental research findings correlate with the beliefs of many researchers of the reading process. For this reason, and because reading and writing have been shown to be two facets of the same process, many research techniques that have been tried in writing experiments are readily adaptable to study of

the reading process. Furthermore, many of these techniques can also be profitably adapted to use in the content areas.

Reading Comprehension in the Content Area

Content area teachers are quite occupied with their caseload. Many look on the field of reading instruction as something complex, overwhelming and beyond their ken. They feel that it is not their job to teach reading. They have enough trouble teaching social studies or science.

According to Vacca and Vacca (1986, p. 7), "a content teacher's job is not to teach skills per se, but to show students how to use reading effectively to comprehend and learn from text materials".

Early (1964) said content area teachers should draw three implications about their role:

- 1) They have something important to contribute to the reading development of students, but they need not become reading specialists to contribute it.
- 2) They should not be held responsible for direct reading instruction, since a qualified reading teacher will be in a better position to deliver a program that meets the specialized needs and abilities of learners at every bend of the spiral.
- 3) A reading program works best when reading specialist and content teachers respect and understand each other's roles (Vacca and Vacca, 1986, p.12).

According to Vacca and Vacca, the teacher's role is often to facilitate the conversations in the classroom. As they see it, classroom learning consists of conversations between a teacher and students, students and other students, and readers and the text (Vacca and Vacca, 1986, p. 5).

If the teacher can follow the questioning guidelines of Dewey, the class will come to interpretations and

comprehensions of the text without the need or the crutch of typical reading comprehension quizzes. In fact, boring, end of chapter study questions can be supplemented, if not supplanted, by discussion sessions involving students as legislators of meaning. Levstik (1986, p. 12) has said that "topics in content areas can often be treated thoughtfully and effectively through narrative text."

What is needed, in fact, what is most helpful, is an infusion of whole language activities into content area strategies. For "in the new paradigm, knowledge is internal and subjective, learning is constructing meaning, and teaching is a dynamic combination of coaching and facilitating (Hiebert and Fisher, 1990, pp. 62-3). The questions need to be student rather than text originated, and the tasks should be authentic. While most teachers who use whole language in reading and writing periods have been unable to make the jump to using whole language in social studies, science, and mathematics (Hiebert and Fisher, 1990), the lessons of Probst, Bleich, and Rosenblatt can easily be adapted to content area reading. Steven Tchudi (1989), whose goal it is to enable all students to use critical thinking skills, calls for "interdisciplinary exploration of a wide range of topics" using a diversified array of media which stretch the boundaries between content areas, making them fairly ephemeral.

The approach of instructors like Tchudi increases a student's awareness of the interrelationship of educational concepts and worldly applications. This is a major benefit of "whole language" approaches to education. When the student is the central component of the learning process, and all the world's experience is the text, the student's learning potential is limited only by his or her ability to learn.

COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

Theories and Models

A number of researchers have studied the correlation between cognitive development and language development. Conclusions have been drawn showing a relationship between cognitive growth through language usage and educational success. Barnes (1976) and Goodman (1987) have devoted much time to deliniating an environment which is most conducive to growth through language development and usage. From their findings a model of a classroom environment can be envisioned which greatly facilitates the learning process.

Given the view of the reader as the central element of the learning process and the reader's experience/schema as the key to unlocking learning potential, it is easy to view the world and all new experiences as a 'text.' Students experience many new worlds through the vicarious activities

in reading. Strategies that help them interpret literature would also help them understand their personal experiences. The converse is also true.

According to Goodman, Smith, Meredith, and Goodman (1987), if you consider reading to be a process rather than a product you may consider learning to also be a process. The goal of educators is to facilitate this process as much as possible. The process is provided by the curriculum; its depth of use is determined by the approach of the teacher and by the ability of the student. A student can be shown ways to evaluate his environment by helping him develop his language. "Language development follows and is facilitated by cognitive development and in turn facilitates such development. Both language and thought expand through this interaction, and it is this expansion that becomes the key objective of the school curriculum" (Goodman, Smith, Meredith & Goodman, 1987, p.3). The more you expose the students to varied language use the more you increase the tendency of that student to expand his schema and so increase his cognitive development (Rumelhart, 1988). The idea is to increase the student's awareness.

The school provides many rich experiences to students. The goal of the educator is to facilitate the student's incorporation of these experiences in his or her own learning process. The school serves as a setting for personal development through language development.

School for every child is a confrontation of between what he "knows" already and what the school offers, this is true of both social learning and of the kinds of learning which constitute the manifest curriculum. Whenever school learning has gone beyond meaningless rote , we can take it that a child has made some kind of relationship between what he knows already and what the school has represented (Barnes, 1976, p.22).

Due to this 'fact' each student's perception of the school and profit from the lesson varies as his/her schema correlates with the content/language of the lesson.

In Barnes' opinion, it is usually profitable to begin lessons with concrete and familiar ideas. Teachers must contain within a lesson material which the students already understand. Intermingled with the familiar ingredients are new and challenging ideas. Learning is not additive but perceptive/interpretive. Teachers should mix experience with past knowledge, allowing the students to assimilate, conjecture, store and use this knowledge (Barnes, 1976). Remembering that language and learning assist each others' development, it is most profitable to have the students engage in informal, but guided, discussion about their new knowledge.

As students discuss their thoughts and feelings they are forced to put this inchoate information into words (Weaver, 1979, and Chomsky, 1975). In so doing, they clarify their impressions both to themselves and to the group.

As teachers lead such discussions it is important that they ensure that all relevant information is considered.

Every student should be encouraged to contribute to discussion any thoughts and impressions that they have concerning the learning experience. Once the general impressions have been gathered and assimilated by the group, it is necessary to guide the members of the group to be explicit about facts, to postulate theories that are based on and extended from these facts and the students' primary impressions. Finally the group can consider effects and conclusions of the learning process (Barnes, 1976). This discussion process puts the responsibility to learn on the shoulders of the group as a whole. This model empowers the students to use their personal schemata to come to a comprehension of the new material. Furthermore, this model does not entail reteaching the instructors in new techniques nor does it entail the purchase of new materials. With this philosophy in mind, it is easy to see how these open discussions can be used in all areas of instruction with an increase of comprehension on the part of the students.

If there are, as Barnes states, two kinds of teaching,¹ then the above technique would surely be of the hypothetical mode. The students are actively involved in the learning. They are the substance of discussion as they contribute to the discussion. In this mode the students feel an ownership

¹ Expository Mode: teacher controlled, may or may not involve student wholly, Hypothetical Mode: Cooperative, more wholly involves student with lesson (Barnes, p114, 1976).

not only of the learning process, but of the content matter as well. This is essential in establishing the setting which Rosenblatt described as central to the workings of transactionalism (Barnes, 1976).

Considering the chart below, with which Barnes contrasts two teaching styles, it is easy to see how closely the methods of the Interpretation Teacher match the ideals of Louise Rosenblatt.

Transformation Teacher

- Believes knowledge exists in form of public disciplines which include content and criteria of performance.
- Values learner's performance insofar as it conforms to criteria/discipline.
- Perceives teacher's task to be evaluation/correction of students' performance, according to criteria of which he is the guardian.
- Perceives learner as uninformed vessel to be filled with knowledge.

Interpretation Teacher

- Believes knowledge exists in knower's ability to organize thought and action.
 - Values learners commitment--shared contribution to learning.
 - Perceives teacher's task to be the setting up of a dialogue in which the learner can reshape his knowledge through interaction with others.
 - Perceives learner as possessing knowledge that only needs to be reshaped and stretched.
- (Barnes, 1976 pp. 144-145)

Establishing the Atmosphere for Learning

The Interpretation teacher establishes an atmosphere of tentativeness in her classroom. The students are engaged in the learning process rather than sitting on the sidelines. Truth is discovered and created with and by the students rather than for them. An interpretive teacher encourages discussion, thinking aloud, hypothetical explanations. For if teachers demand too much structure and conformity the result might be too little thought (Barnes, 1976).

In a class such as this it is important for the teacher and the students alike to distinguish between speech as reflection and speech as communication (Barnes, 1976). It helps, when grappling with new or difficult material, to talk one's self through the problem. This forces an organization upon previously jumbled thought and emotion. Such dialogue is applicable to classrooms whenever speech as reflection is seen in the "open" interaction of students working/discussing in small groups. This encourages openness, self-evaluation, and more complete answers (Barnes, 1976).

The teacher must serve as a mentor as he models the most beneficial approach to discussion of varied ideas. Barnes (Barnes, 1976) points out that as there are two types of teaching, there are two approaches to discussion.

UNDERSTANDING.....VERSUS..... JUDGING

Accepts Idea	Positive Evaluation (Good)
Clarifies Understanding	Negative Evaluation (Wrong)
Reflects or Paraphrases Ideas	Counter Proposals, Suggestions
Expands on Someone Else's Idea	Implies Judgments (Should-Should never, you always, everybody ought) --(Barnes, 1976, p. 112)

Some students tend toward the "Judging" approach. They feel that it is their duty to point out errors in other's logic. They point out the good and the bad points of ideas without consideration that these ideas might be good beginnings that need development. Garth Boomer (1987) states that it is of prime importance to stress the understanding mode of sharing ideas. With Rosenblatt and Barnes he puts emphasis on establishing the proper setting for enhancing learning.

The teachers's role is to make sure that the learners have the opportunity to clarify the problem, to make observations in potentially profitable areas, to form and test hypotheses, and to reflect on the results. To omit any of these opportunities would be to jeopardize the learning (Boomer, 1987, p. 12).

If a setting such as this can be established and sustained, the learners will feel that they own, they create, they benefit from the learning process. They are using their language to asses and to communicate their experiences with the world.

Now that the students no longer feel that meaning and value of learning is not found elsewhere: neither encoded within the text nor enshrouded within the intellect of the teacher, but is within and from their own thoughts and experiences, it is necessary for the school to "provide intellectually supported experiences for the growth of students' thought and language" (Goodman, Brooks, Meredith & Goodman, 1987, p. 3).

The curriculum must present a challenge to teachers as well as students. The worthiness of the subject matter must be evaluated satisfactorily by both student and teacher. Each must be satisfied with the what and the why of learning (Boomer, 1987). If the literature can be based on the familiar with forays into the challenging, the students will be better equipped to meet the challenges. "Language and thinking develop together as children confront new problematic situations" (Goodman, Smith, Meredith & Goodman, 1987). Ideally, the curriculum and the classroom atmosphere should combine to create opportunity for expansion of student experience, thought, and language.

Established Atmospheres for Learning

Nancy Atwell (1987), Patricia Reed (1987), and Sylvia Ashton-Warner (1987) have each created such atmospheres in their own classrooms. Each of these teachers use dialogue as the main ingredient of the teaching process. Kohl (1984), Rosenblatt (1938), Bleich (1975), and Ashton-Warner (1963)

have in common a sense of student as center. The student is the one interacting with the text, the school and the world. The teacher must create a curriculum, a style of questioning, and environment that stimulates and facilitates the students' growth.

Nancy Atwell (1987) is perpetually involved in classroom research. Students in her classrooms, are given choice and responsibility in book choice. They record their responses (initially their emotional and affective responses; i.e. Bleich and Rosenblatt) and opinions in informal letters to the teacher. A dialogue in written form is established. This dialogue is easily expanded in the form of classroom discussions. But the students, and their opinions, form the impetus of discussion. She has created an atmosphere of openness and tentativeness. Students are free to ask questions without undue censure or worry of accusations of digression. Like Sylvia Ashton-Warner, she has established a setting where the children know, with out conscious cognizence, that they own the tools of education. The subject matter, the vocabulary, the spelling list- all are from and of the students. The writing process is quite similar to the process proposed by J. David Cooper (1986): its central tenet is dialogue.

Atwell is studying much more than the products of the student's writing. She has even gone beyond study of the overt writing process. She is studying the background, the

schema, the ratiocination of her students. She communicates closely with her students to determine the sociolinguistic roots of their writing patterns and prejudices. She acknowledges the role that a person's environment has upon a person's writing ability. This is the mirror image of Rosenblatt's emphasis on environmental effects on reading ability.

Patricia Reed (1987) developed specific goals to use in dialogue with students. She stressed the importance of examining students' attitudes toward their past writing, of determining how the students view their writing activities of previous years in order to determine attitudinal patterns and prejudices. She had students "look at their writing of past years and from that identify some attitudes that were very much hurting their writing, and [she] tried to work on changing them" (Reed, 1987, p. 129).

After review of this research it became evident that a student's environment and schema have great influence upon their approach to both reading and writing. Students develop attitudes about reading and writing that effect their ability to comprehend and express language. In order to optimize the students' ability to comprehend and utilize language the subject matter must be appropriate to the student. The transaction between the reader/writer and the text must be stressed, and an atmosphere of openness, tentativeness and

acceptance must be established in the classroom. The following recommendations by Goodman et al. (1987) make a good checklist for establishing the proper setting for classroom research in helping students learn to read.

- 1] Encourage creativity in Language Arts
 - 2] Encourage children to experiment with style
 - 3] Encourage writing (and reading) while self evaluating
 - 4] Avoid demanding absolute conformity
--give ownership to children
 - 5] Expose children to wide variety of language
 - 6] Expand ("real"-owned) vocabulary
 - 7] Encourage risk-taking.
- (Goodman, Smith, Meredith, and Goodman, 1987, p.)

Once the researcher has sufficient philosophical background, it is important to find some models of research. Some aspects of research can be culled from the works of Atwell, Ashton-Warner, and Reed. These are excellent models of determining student background/attitude and for monitoring change: monitoring the process of language.

David Bleich has supplied an interesting topic for research. He has set an example of classroom research on subjective criticism with his work with college students. In this research the students are asked to read literature from poetry to novels. They then write essays which detail their responses to the literature. Specifically they record and analyse their associations to the work, their affective/emotional responses, and their opinions concerning the most important word in the passage or in the work as a whole. It is fairly obvious that this is a direct contrast to the tenets of the New Critics. Here, literature is

evaluated in terms of how it effects the reader. The depth of this evaluation is also a measure of the reader's comprehension of the work.

Summary

The research reviewed in this chapter form the philosophical base for establishing a classroom atmosphere which best facilitates student learning. The literature has shown correlations between cognitive growth and affective interaction, cognitive growth and language use, and reading ability and writing ability.

The research of Probst, Rosenblatt, Barnes, Atwell, and others suggests that dialogue with the student and with the text is central to the learning process. These authors have suggested guidelines and approaches which encourage student participation and ownership. Further research has shown ways to integrate cognitive and affective growth and approaches.

David Bleich's heuristic serves as a working model of one technique applicable to content areas in seventh grade. Cooper and Rhody have supplied measurements of student aptitude and ability.

The research reviewed above combines insights into overall classroom philosophy and approach, specific techniques and applications of the tenets of researchers, and accurate methods of evaluating student progress.