

**THE EFFECTS OF INTEGRATING LANGUAGE
AND SPELLING LESSONS WITH
READING INSTRUCTION ON THIRD GRADE
STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENT IN VOCABULARY
AND READING COMPREHENSION**

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Language arts instruction has for many years been a great concern to educators throughout the nation. In May, 1978, Ernest Boyer, Commissioner of Education stated, "We must recognize the centrality of language. Language is the connecting tissue which binds us all together." In recent years, there has been a great deal of interest in the interrelationship among the various language abilities. (Artley, 1950; Hughes, 1953; Winter, 1957) There have been many attempts at coordinating and integrating the language arts in an effort to improve achievement in these areas. (Stauffer, 1966; Stauffer & Hammond, 1967; Callaway, Mason, & McDaniel, 1972; Callaway, Mason, Salmon, & McDaniel, 1974)

Boehnlein and Retty (1977) in a review of the integration of the communication arts curriculum pointed out that while it is difficult to find empirical evidence of the superiority of one curriculum over another, most authors of language arts methods textbooks suggest an integral approach with stress on the individual needs of the child. This research project was an attempt at integrating the reading, language, and spelling instruction of third grade students at Lithia Springs Elementary School in Douglas County, in an effort to improve their achievement in the language arts.

There was a great concern among the third-grade teachers and the principal of Lithia Springs Elementary School, that the language arts program was not correlated to allow students to progress at their instructional level. Many of the students coming to the school in the third grade were reading below grade level, a half year to a year or more.

The instructional level of reading was assessed and students were taught at this level. However, all students were expected to perform assigned tasks from the third-grade language and spelling books. This caused some students to be greatly frustrated and doomed to poor achievement.

The purpose of this study was to compare the achievement of students whose language arts instruction was centered around their basal reading program with that of students being taught in a traditional language arts program using the reader, language book, and speller in separate sequences.

METHOD

Subjects

the pupils chosen for this study were all third-grade students from Lithia Springs Elementary School. The students were assigned to reading groups according to the reading level they had achieved the previous year and on the basis of previous teacher recommendations. The students were then randomly assigned to reading classes on their level. Scores from classes only in the middle range of achievement were tabulated. Thirty-six students comprised the basal-centered language arts program; one class of students was reading in the second grade, second reader, and one class was reading in the third grade, first reader. The traditional language arts program, 44 students, was made up of one class which was in the second

grade, second reader and one class that was reading in the third grade, first reader.

Materials

Basic materials used in the language arts program were the system curriculum guide, county-adopted basal textbooks, and supplemental materials, both teacher-made and commercial. The curriculum guide and textbooks supplied the foundation for planning instruction.

The curriculum objectives for language arts had been referenced to the basal readers, language book, Georgia Criterion Referenced Tests, and the Wisconsin Design for Reading. Since it was referenced by page number, teachers were able to correlate instruction plans quite easily.

The Wisconsin Design provided excellent supplementary materials with its three components: word attack, comprehension, and study skills. The activities in this program helped teach and reinforce the language skills as well as the reading skills. It also provided a management system whereby skills attempted and mastered were recorded on individual record cards. Because of this, the teacher was kept aware of the students' progress as well as their needs.

Library materials were ample and readily accessible in the school. Films, filmstrips, newspapers, and magazines were available, as well as books for enjoyment and information. Overhead projectors, recorders and cassettes, and record players were also available for use by the teachers and students.

Teaching Procedures

Four third-grade classes, originally 101 students, from Lithia Springs Elementary School participated in the study. Two classes were assigned to the experimental group and used a basal reader-centered language arts program. Two classes were assigned to the control group and used the traditional language arts program with reader, language book, and spelling book as separated sequences.

The *Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills* (reading and language subtests) was administered to the third-grade classes on September 25, 1978, and at the end-of-year on May 14, 1979. The students in both groups were taught their language arts program for two hours each day for 140 days.

The control group followed the traditional method of instruction. Language arts was divided into three distinct academic subjects: spelling, language, and reading. Basal tests were provided for each subject area.

Thirty minutes daily were allotted for spelling. The students were instructed using the series, *Basic Goals in Spelling*, (McGraw-Hill, 1968) which presented word groups which represented the most common spelling of English sounds and gave limited attention to uncommon spellings. Spelling words were presented in units; each unit was divided into 5 sets of activities, the fifth activity being the weekly spelling test.

The control group used *Our Language Today*, (American Book Company, 1974) as the language text. This book offered a balanced program in grammar, composition, literature, and linguistics with emphasis on practice. Language instruction was planned for a 45-minute period. The teachers taught the book chapter by chapter and used resource materials if the students needed additional practice.

Reading in the control group was taught using the second and third grade basal readers, *Shining Bridges, Better Than Gold*, and *More Than Words* (Macmillan, 1974). Teachers planned for a 45-minute period using the publisher's recommended lesson plans. The first segment included the building of background, vocabulary, preparatory exercises, and silent reading. The second segment was the guided oral

word

reading and teacher-directed activities (phonics, comprehension, study skills). Provision for individual differences and enrichment activities were the last segment of the lesson plan. Two or three days were required to accomplish the activities, depending on the students' achievement.

The experimental group spent the two-hour language arts block in an integrated program. Reading, spelling, and language were meshed into a single subject which students and teachers referred to as language arts. The same basal reading texts were used for the experimental and control groups. The difference was that the primary focus of instruction for the experimental group was the basal reader. Spelling books were not used, and language books were used when more practice on a specific language skill was needed.

The new vocabulary words for the stories in the readers became the students' spelling words. Teachers presented these words in the context of material to be read; then the words were used in oral activities, personal writing, or composition and skill-building activities as given in the teacher-directed activities and the curriculum guide. Spelling grades came from a weekly test of the vocabulary words.

Teachers planned language instruction using the specific skills presented in the teacher-directed activities. The skills were taught to the students and reinforced through practice in the language book. Vocabulary words used in spelling were also correlated with the language instruction. Careful attention was given to the program planned for the experimental group to insure that all the language arts objectives in the county curriculum guide were taught. Supplemental or resource materials supplied any missing practice.

Students in the experimental group read the stories silently after the background was built and preparatory exercises completed. Then, guided oral reading was done and language skills were presented using the teacher-directed activities. Independent and enrichment activities broadened the students' experiences. Two or three days were required to complete a story in the basal.

The test scores from the *Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills*, Reading Subtest Level 1 Form 5, (McGraw-Hill, 1974) for the experimental and control groups were compared at the end of the school year to determine if there was a significant difference in achievement between groups. Groups were compared for similarity using the t-test. Since the groups were not similar, analysis of covariance was used to analyze the final data.

RESULTS

Scores were analyzed using analysis of covariance with the pretest score as the covariate, the instructional method (group) as the independent variable, and posttest achievement as the dependent variable. Table 1 summarizes the adjusted and unadjusted mean scores for the groups.

The analysis of covariance for reading achievement revealed no significant differences between the main effects by groups in vocabulary, $F(1, 79) = .848, p < .05$; in comprehension, $F(1, 79) = 1.99, p < .05$; and total reading score, $F(1, 79) = 2.60, p < .05$.

CONCLUSIONS

The suggestion from the literature that a program which carefully coordinates experiences in language arts instruction should benefit students, was not confirmed by this study. Even though the experimental method might have capitalized

TABLE 1
Mean Scores From Reading Posttests

Measure	Group	N	Unadjusted Mean Scores	Adjusted Mean Scores
Vocabulary	C	44	4.21	4.27
	E	36	4.19	4.11
Comprehension	C	44	4.37	4.60
	E	36	4.44	4.16
Total Reading	C	44	4.19	4.32
	E	36	4.17	4.00

on the strengths of both interrelated and traditional basal programs, the combined effect was no greater than the impact of the structure in a basal reader or the application practiced in interrelated experiences.

However, the question is due further investigation as more demands are imposed on instructional time, as textbooks become more expensive, and as proof of practice for life roles is demanded. The effects of basal-centered communications instruction on achievement in other subject areas should be considered, as well as the attitudes of students and parents toward instruction.

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