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ABSTRACT

This paper describes and illustrates an approach to reading which combines the language experience approach (LEA) and imaginative play. The LEA and the components of the lesson are briefly reviewed. Imaginative play and its descriptive components are identified and explained. The procedure for combining the two elements is roughly as follows: The children interact in an imaginative play situation while the teacher observes them. After the episode, the students are encouraged to verbalize their roles, and as they relate what happened, the teacher transcribes the language used by the children. The teacher then reads the story to the children and then has the children read it. Major words are reviewed, and the story is retyped into more permanent form and reviewed and reread by the children. Then another story is begun. An example is given of an imaginative play episode and its subsequent incorporation into a LEA lesson. (RS)

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LANGUAGE AND IMAGINATIVE PLAY EXPERIENCE
APPROACH TO READING: FACT OR FANTASY?

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LANGUAGE AND IMAGINATIVE PLAY EXPERIENCE APPROACH TO READING:

FACT OR FANTASY?

Concern for developing a sound method to beginning reading which would use realistic language, actual vocabulary, and speech patterns of children has provided the impetus for the growth and use of the language experience approach (LEA). Extensive information on the rationale and procedures for using the LEA appear elsewhere (Allen, 1964; and Stauffer, 1970). However, a number of teachers could capitalize further on the values and benefits of the LEA if they better understood how to proceed in developing and providing meaningful experiences to serve as "grist" for reading instruction. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why some teachers are cautious about using the LEA and resign themselves solely to a reading approach prescribed by a basal series.

The potential of children's play as a setting for establishing meaningful experiences--the "grist" for LEA in reading instruction--is virtually ignored. Capitalizing on an individual child's or several student's imaginative play episode can provide teachers with experiential data for incorporating LEA into their reading instruction.

To better understand the use of LEA through imaginative play, LEA and the components of the lesson are briefly reviewed. Imaginative play (IP) and its descriptive components are identified and explained. The third part of this narrative describes the incorporation of IP into LEA and the components of a Language and Imaginative Play Experience Approach (LIPEA). An example of a LIPEA episode and a suggested lesson play follow.

Language Experience Approaches

The unrealistic language of the basal reader has been criticized for many years. The reason for this is evident. The basal reader approach is virtually a whole word approach to beginning reading (Spache & Spache, 1973) by relying upon repeated exposure for the learning of sight words. What is more, the number of sight words in a basal reader series is limited to permit numerous repetitions of each new word. Elaborate formulas have been developed to maintain the balance of new sight words introduced in each level reader (Gray, 1960).

As a result of dissatisfaction with basal material, several approaches to beginning reading have been developed which would incorporate the realistic language of readers (Smith & Johnson, 1976). There are at least two ways of doing this. One approach to writing basal readers uses the true speech of the reader instead of traditional stilted language. Another approach as outlined by Stauffer (1970) allows the children to write (or dictate) stories themselves using their own speech patterns and vocabulary. Both ways provide a whole word approach to reading and at the same time utilize the children's speech patterns and vocabulary (Lee & Allen, 1963).

A language-experience approach that would allow children to dictate their own actual experiences would be faced with a necessity for more individualization and be more related to a particular ethnic, geographic, cultural, and racial group than any other approach to reading. Spache and Spache (1973) state that the demands of such an approach would be great. More teacher time would have to be spent in a one-to-one relationship with each learner, and masterful teaching would have to depend jointly on the

spontaneous creativity of the student and teacher. The result, however, would certainly utilize many principles of learning which are not evident in other reading approaches (Allen, 1964). Instruction is individualized, related to individual self-concepts, and is significant to the real needs of each student (Stauffer, 1970). Material is written in the experiential context of each student, is highly meaningful, and in need of fewer repetitions since it is the child's language. Whole-learning is stressed rather than bit-by-bit fragments of vocabulary artificially strung together. The language experience approach could indeed reach students "where they are".

Imaginative Play

The power of play and its potential for education and development is virtually an untapped reservoir (Caplan & Caplan, 1973; Neuman, 1974). Research on play is but an historical infant (Klinger, 1971; Singer, 1974). Play, Gould (1972, p. 2) writes, has been and is of some interest to educators and child development specialists who, "loosely linking 'fantasy and play', point to the creativity and learning opportunities evident in children's self-directed play experiences." The main reason why the power of play is largely untapped and unearthed lies within our Puritan tradition that has dictated that work comes first . . . then play. In our society work and play are on opposite ends of the value continuum. In context of our public schools, play has also been relegated to the preschool and kindergarten years and work to the primary and especially the secondary levels.

Over the past decade, however, researchers in steadily increasing numbers are beginning to re-examine play and specifically make-believe,

play in learning and development (Yawkey & Silvern, 1976). Researchers such as Freyburg (1973), Leiberman (1965), Nicolich (1975), Pederson and Wender (1968), Piaget (1962), Pulaski (1973), Wolfgang (1974), and others are suggesting that play is serious work. More importantly, the research results show that imaginative play is a learning vehicle. Play, a developmental process like thinking, evolves from birth and continues across the life span. Make-believe, or imaginative play, for many developmental researchers like Piaget begins around age two with the onset of language and continues to ages 11 or 12 when rule-governed play increases in importance. Imaginative play in its various forms spans the preschool through the elementary or middle school.

Research results point-out that imaginative play is a process of mental representation and as such is closely linked to language--both oral and written. Nicolich's (1975, p. 28) research shows, for example, that "the development of the symbolic function through imitation, symbolic play, and the mental image prepares the way for linking verbal elements to reality." In other words, a child who pretends to use a unit block "as if" it was a car, or a group of children who imagine they are "mommies" and "daddies" or role play characters in a reading story, must have mental images of the car, of the mother and father, or of the characters in the imaginative play episode. During the play episode, the child is "immersed in a sea of words which defines and relates his social behaviors and his physical activities" (Richmond, 1970, p. 31). The relationship of play to mental representation is the foundation for relating make-believe play and learning (Pulaski, 1971). Make-believe play permits the child to explore and gain mastery over the

environment of objects and ideas, and at the same time, allows the child to become the chief actor, observer, and participator. Make-believe play, whether it is individual "let's pretend" in dramatic play, or role play episodes characteristic of the later grades, is ". . . to teach the child full utilization of his scattered experiences, knowledge, and vocabulary in an imaginative combination, to develop in him the ability of positive social interaction, and to enrich his language and broaden his concepts through the interaction with co-players, peers, and adults" (Smilansky, 1973, p. 3).

Components of Imaginative Play

The elements or components of imaginative play, like the components of the language experience approach, can be identified and used in group learning situations. The following components have been modified from the research of Curry and Arnaud (1973) and Smilansky (1968).

The components are:

(1) Imitative Role Play. A child undertakes a "let's pretend" role when the individual or a group of children transform themselves through forms of play to be persons or objects other than themselves. The pupils demonstrate the perceptions of role through verbalizations and/or motor actions. Verbal statements or declarations serve the player by changing personal identity to take on make-believe roles. From Smilansky (1968, p. 8) examples are, "I am the daddy, you will be the mommy, and the doll is our baby."

(2) Make-Believe in Regard to Objects. In this element, movements and verbal statements are substituted for real objects. Thus, the nature and

basic identity of real objects are changed through movements and words. For instance a fourth grade child declares, "I am sawing a log!". Yet, neither saw nor log are present. Imagining that the hand is the saw is make-believe; the arm movements are imitative. The object, hand, and its movements are changed by statements and actions of the child.

(3) Make-Believe in Regard to Actions and Situations. With this component, verbal descriptions become substitutes for actions and situations. An example of speech substitutes for actions and situations appears in the episode. Here, the child says, "Let's pretend I already returned from work. I cooked the food, and now I am setting the table." (Smilansky, 1968, p. 8). In this episode, only the last activity was actually completed and although imitated, the previous two statements were substitutes for actions. Language is also used to describe situations. As examples, Smilansky (1968, p. 8) notes the following. "Let's pretend that the doctor is sick, so the nurse will do the operation", and "Let's pretend that this is a hospital and there are alot of sick children in it."

(4) Interaction and Verbal Communication. Both of these elements refer specifically to a group setting of at least two players as the framework of the play episode. Here verbal interaction related to the episode must transpire. The very nature of interaction and verbal communication between two or more individuals implies sociodramatic play.

Although all the elements of sociodramatic play interact and in reality are interdependent, the quality or richness of the play episode depends upon the presence of all the components. The richness of the play episode also is dependent upon the extent to which the elements are developed and used in the sociodramatic setting.

Language and Imaginative Play Experience Approach (LIPEA)

The Language Experience Approach (LEA) and the components of an imaginative play episode (IP) as identified by Smilansky (1968) typically describe the role of the educator in using LEA and the IP episode. They include basic provisions for experiential activity, basic elements of action to observe and explain the use of language generated by the children. Putting together both LEA and IP procedures has a number of clear advantages. The advantages of this combination are:

1. Provides a practical model that can be easily used in open and traditional classrooms as well as in home settings for parent and professional educators.
2. Strengthens the observation component of LEA by giving educators' guidelines for their own observation of the episode. These guidelines in turn highlight the significant statements that are used by the children. These statements of the children can be brought out in the follow-up discussion through appropriate adult guidance.
3. Uses a natural real-life experience that originated with the children rather than an experience contrived by the educator.
4. Employs the power of imaginative play especially interactions between children for use in the language experience story.
5. Harnesses the characteristics of sequence (i.e., one event following another in order) and coherence (i.e., the elements of the episode forming a logical whole with story beginnings, the body, and the ending) that are fundamental to imaginative play episodes (Curry & Arnaud, 1972; Piaget, 1962; and Smilansky, 1968).

6. Employs both individual and group settings for purposes of instruction, diagnosis, and prescription.

The practical model developed by combining the basic elements of LEA and IP has two fundamental components--observation and language development. Each component has several guidelines in using it with children. The major components and guidelines are illustrated in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 about here.

Observation Component

The observation component provides the raw data that is used in the language development component. Specifically, it sets the scene in terms of the children's imaginative play episode, provides the educator with guidelines for observing, and then interviewing the children in context of the experience. The guidelines of this component with examples are as follows.

A. Observing. During the experiential episode, the educator can observe for the main elements of the imaginative play scene. The elements are: (1) imitative role play, (2) make-believe in regard to objects, and (3) make-believe in regard to actions. Here, the educator notes either mentally or in written form the roles the children undertake in play. For the element of imaginative role play, the children will transform themselves into persons or objects other than themselves and demonstrate their change of personal identities. Indicators of the role changes are

the child's verbal statements, declarations, and motor movements. From Smilansky (1968), examples are: "I am the Daddy! You will be the Mommy! The doll is our baby!". Observing for the second element "make-believe in regard to objects" will indicate whether or not verbal statements and/or body movements are substituted for real objects. Here, the basic natural identity of real objects are changed through verbal declarations, actions, or movements. For example, a third grade teacher says, "I am sawing a log!". Through observation, the educator notes that neither saw nor log are present. Imagining that the hand was the saw is make-believe: the arm movements for the saw were imitated. The child's hand and its movements were changed into a saw and saw movements by statements and actions of the child. Observing for the third element, make-believe in regard to actions and situations will show the educator whether or not verbal descriptions become substitutes for actions and situations. In substituting actions, for example, a kindergarten or primary grade pupil may say, "Let's pretend I already returned from work. I cooked the food. Now, I am setting the table." (Smilansky, 1969, p. 8). The educator should note through observation that the first two statements made by the child were substitutes for actions and only the last action, "setting the table" was actually completed. In substituting situations, for instance, the young child declares, "Let's pretend that the doctor is sick, so that the nurse will do the operation!", or "Let's pretend that this is a hospital and there are alot of sick children in it." (Smilansky, 1968, p. 8). By carefully observing for roles, the students' play, and for objects, actions, and situations that are substituted by verbal declarations, the better able the educator will be in interviewing the children and trans-

cribing the language episode. More importantly, the educator will be able to use actually observed language statements that represent mental abstractions in facilitating language growth (Freyburg, 1973; Nicolich, 1973; and Smitlansky, 1968).

B. Interviewing. After the episode, encourage the students to verbalize their roles, and use the language statements that were substitutes for objects, actions, and situations. This procedure enhances language growth and at the same time reinforces mental representations--the framework for all of thought. Make sure that the sequencing and coherency, fundamental characteristics of imaginative play and vital skills in initial reading instruction, are noted (e.g., beginning, body, ending: then what happened, event after event).

C. Transcribing. As the children relate what happened in the imaginative play episode, the educator can transcribe the language. The transcription should be as close as possible exacting in detail and in the same form as it is being dictated by the children (Stauffer, 1970).

Language Development Component

The language development component uses the raw data provided by the observation component. Basically, mental representations are strengthened by recall and language growth facilitated by use of the language experience episode for oral reading. Review of the transcription by the children with ample teacher guidance reinforces their learning. The guidelines for this component are as follows.

A. Reading. The educator after transcription reads the story orally to the students. As with all language experience episodes, the educator should slide his/her finger or marker below each word as it is pronounced. The educator will find the "rule of thumb"--"pausing with the marker as you pause with your voice"--most helpful and conducive to oral reading. This strategy provides a constructive model for the children to imitate. After the educator reads the passages, then have the pupil read them while pacing him or her with your marker. If the child blocks on words, supply them with no other comment or nonverbal expression. If the teacher feels that repetition of the passage is necessary, repeat the process again until total oral reading is fairly fluent.

B. Reviewing. Even though the transcription is based upon a natural imaginative play episode, reviewing the major words in the composition is most helpful for learning, relearning, and diagnosing. Educators find that pointing directly to or framing the major words with their hands aids the students' review and facilitates both in-context and in-isolation word recognition. As the last step in the reviewing phase, commit most if not all of the major words (or phrases, if you prefer) in the composition to individual flash-cards for WORD-STUDY or SKILLS-PRACTICE.

C. Retyping. Before the next oral reading session, retype the total composition in more permanent form. Review the story and have the children re-read it. Then, start on another story.

The practical model developed by combining basic elements of LEA and IP is a fantastic tool for use at preprimary levels and primary grades. It can also be adapted for use in the intermediate grades with stories, plays,

and actual role playing episodes developed by older children. An actual example of the practical model for use in the classroom follows.

An Imaginative Play Episode: An Example

Setting: The classroom.

Players: Five children--Shanda, Leslie, Bessie, Angelo, and Sam.

Teacher: The teacher observes the imaginative play episode as it unfolds.

Episode:

Bessie and Sam suggest "playing farm" and their statements attract the attention of Angelo, Shanda, and Leslie. After moments of discussion, Bessie is to play the role of the farmer's wife, Shanda the farmer, Angelo and Leslie are the farmer's helpers, and Sam is the animal. The children decide on the materials, objects, and clothing needed and Angelo and Leslie put on blue workman's hats, Bessie a dress, hat, purse, and shoes, and Shanda puts a blanket over Sam.

Sanda says, "Look at our animal! Isn't he big!" Sam moves around on all fours, "mooing" and making movements with his head. Shanda suggests that, "Henry is hungry and wants something to eat!" Leslie tells Angelo, "Go and get some hay 'cause Henry is hungry and tired of standing all day!" Angelo runs around a minute or two and bends down to pick up wooden blocks, and then reaches for an eraser. Placing the eraser on top of the wooden blocks, Angelo proceeds with Leslie's help to feed the animal. "Here is some hay for you!", says Angelo and Leslie takes the hay and places it in front of Sam. Bessie notes to the group, "When Henry eats all that up he is going to get bigger!"

Sam meanwhile is "munching" on the hay and "thrashing" his head back and forth.

Leslie grabs a plastic container and shoves it under Sam's head. "Here is some water for you--and don't spill it on the floor!" Henry, delighted with additional food, "moos", then drinks from the container. "He is a good animal.", notes Bessie. "With the sun going down, its time to put Henry in the barn!", observes Angelo. With that statement, the children get behind Sam and push him into the barn. "Now Henry can go to sleep and rest!" "I am going home to eat right now 'cause I have worked all day!", declares Shanda and Bessie says, "Me too!" Leslie comments that, "Tomorrow will come before you know it!", and says, "Good-bye!". Angelo looks at Henry and concludes the episode by stating, "See you tomorrow, Henry!".

Observation Component of LIPEA

A. Observing. The teacher observes the children in "playing farm" and for the elements of imaginative play. Mental or written notes are taken of each child's role in the play--Bessie: farmer's wife; Shanda: farmer; Angelo and Leslie: farmer's helpers; and Sam: the cow, Henry.

B. Interviewing: After observing the episode, the teacher meets with the children and encourages them to describe, in their own words, the roles they played. Questions such as "What game were you playing? What parts did each of you play? Why did you play that? How did your play start out? What happened? How did it end?", provide the children with a framework for thought. The organization of the questions also help to enhance the natural

sequencing and coherency of the story.

C. Transcribing. As the children relate what happened in the imaginative play episode, the teacher transcribes their language onto the blackboard or a sheet of paper. The following transcription is matched as closely as possible, exacting in detail and form, to the dictation of the children:

| <u>Dictation</u> | <u>Elements of Play Observed</u> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <p>We're playing farm just like we saw on the farm.</p> <p>Shanda played the farmer.</p> <p>Angelo and Leslie were the farmer's helpers.</p> <p>Sam was the cow, Henry.</p> <p>Henry was hungry and wanted something to eat.</p> <p>He mooed alot and moved all around.</p> | <p>Imitative Role Play</p> |
| <p>Angelo went to get some hay because Henry was hungry and tired of standing around all day.</p> <p>Angelo looked in the barn and found some hay.</p> <p>Leslie took the hay and gave it to Henry.</p> | <p>Make-believe: Objects</p> |
| <p>The farmer's wife said that Henry would get bigger and bigger.</p> <p>Henry munched on the hay and thrashed his head all around.</p> <p>Then Leslie gave Henry some water from a pail.</p> | <p>Make-believe: Actions</p> |

She told Henry not to spill any.

Imitative
Role Play

Henry just mooed and drank.

Make-believe:
Action

The sun was going down so it was time to put Henry
in the barn.

Imitative
Role Play

We all got behind Henry and pushed him into the barn
so he could sleep.

Make-believe:
Actions

The farmer said he was going to go home to eat.

The farmer's wife was going to go too, so we all
said good-bye.

Imitative
Role Play

Leslie said to Henry, "See you tomorrow."

Language Development Component of LIPEA

A. Reading. After transcribing the dictated story, the teacher reads the story orally to the children, sliding his/her finger or a marker underneath each word as it is pronounced. After the teacher reads the selection, Angelo is asked to read it (as the teacher paces him with a marker). Angelo blocks on a word (e.g., "thrashed") the teacher furnishes the correct pronunciation without any comment. The children are asked to read the passage aloud several more times to improve oral reading fluency.

B. Reviewing. The students and teacher then review the major words in the composition. As the teacher frames each word with his or her hand as it appears in the story, the children pronounce them. As a final step,

each of the words pronounced are transcribed onto an index (flash) card for weekly review. Each week the children and the teacher (or aid) meet for practice (Word Study) with the flash cards containing the week's new words.

G. Retyping. Before the next oral reading session, the total story is retyped into a more permanent form. The story is reviewed and Shanda, Leslie, Bessie, Angelo, and Sam re-read it. Then the children and teacher start another story.

In sum, descriptions of LEA and IP exhibit close relationship with language development. The practical model developed by combining LEA and IP is an excellent guide for observing children's daily play activities and utilizing the play content for reading instruction. The example of the IP episode and its subsequent incorporation into a LEA lesson provides a step-by-step format for classroom use.

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Figure 1

Components and Guidelines of the LIPEA Model

