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ABSTRACT

An instructional strategy adapted the Big Book reading experience to the adolescent student to increase enthusiasm for reading, vocabulary development, and sound word attack and comprehension strategies. Criteria for choosing books to read aloud with teenagers include: (1) select well written books; (2) select books that reflect students' interests and experiences; (3) select books that reflect warmth, humor, and emotions that teens can identify with; (4) select books from a variety of categories of literature; and (5) allow students to help select books for reading aloud. A college professor "borrowed" an eighth-grade class in a laboratory school to pilot the shared reading program. The professor read aloud to the students for 15 to 20 minutes each day after lunch, tracking her finger along transparencies on an overhead projector. Strategies for learning new vocabulary words in context and reading strategies were modelled, and class discussion followed. Student comments indicated that little learning was taking place. Extensions that would strengthen the oral reading include writing in double entry diaries written during instructional reading time. The professor concluded that teenage reluctant readers would receive the most benefit from using the shared book experience. With the very capable readers in the pilot study, perhaps a book selection with which the majority of the class would experience difficulty might have captured their interest. (A figure listing criteria for selecting shared books for teens and a figure presenting a 14-item bibliography of books for shared reading are included.) (RS)

Dr. Karen Hicks & Dr. Beth Wadlington

The Efficacy of Shared Reading with Teens

Main thrust: This instructional strategy adapts the Big Book reading experience to the adolescent student to increase enthusiasm for reading, vocabulary development, and sound word attack and comprehension strategies.

Background of SHARED BOOK EXPERIENCE

According to Goodman (1986), reading should be a process-centered approach in which meaning rather than mechanics are emphasized. Readers should be immersed in books of good quality leading to the natural developent of language skills. Cambourne (1988) has taken this concept further by developing seven natural conditions for effective language learning which include immersion in texts of all kinds as well as demonstrations of how these texts are constructed and used.

Although this approach is popular with young children, many people may question the practicality of it when teaching adolescents. However. being exposed to and interpreting fine literature assists students of all ages in many ways. It prepares students for overall academic success, improves their self concepts, provides constructive diversion, and helps students generally upgrade their reading and writing skills. Reading of fine literature also encourages critical thinking skills, provides a background for content subject matter, aids students in recognizing literary elements of good stories (i.e., plot, sequence, characters, tone), and allows teachers to individualize to meet students' needs. Furthermore, experiencing quality literature encourages students to relate to the timeless themes presented as well as takes them to other times

and worlds. Most importantly, good literature makes reading pleasurable which encourages students to read. In summary, literature can serve as the core of an integrated approach to learning.

Reasons such as these convinced these college professors that adaolescent students should be exposed to whole selections of good quality literature not available on their independent reading level. They chose the Shared Book Experience, originally developed by Butler (1984) to do this. This instructional strategy in its purest form uses Big Books with text two inches high read aloud in an intimate circle around the teacher much like a mother reading to her own children. The teacher (or friend) is reading in a safe, exciting, and secure environment. The book is held in such a way so that the listeners can follow along as the reader reads. Often, the reader tracks the print with a finger or hand. The advantages of the Shared Book Experience are that it is multisensory, interesting, and provides the catalyst for modeling reading strategies that good readers naturally use. Studies have shown that many children enjoy reading and often learn to read without formal, direct reading instruction through this strategy. It was piloted with teenage students at using fine literature enlarged by the overhead projector.

In addition to all of the benefits of exposure to find literature that have already been mentioned, the listeners experience other desired learning outcomes. As the reader reads the book aloud, the listeners become familiar with pagination, illustrations, directionality (i.e., left to right, top to bottom), and new vocabulary. As the reader points to the words being read, they may repeat the words they recognize. They learn to mimic the reader's oral expression, use of punctuation cues, and

comprehension strategies. In addition, many letter-sound associations are observed. Furthermore, listeners learn about good sentence structure and story grammar.

Often listeners enjoy rereading and savoring meaningful text in a Shared Book Experience. During and after reading, discussion about the book flows naturally between the listeners and the reader. The reader and listeners use rich, oral language (often quoted from the book) as they discuss its meaning. The reader becomes a reading role model as listeners note how he/she interacts with the text.

After initial and subsequent reading of favorite parts of the book, follow-up activities could be provided. These may include independent reading of the story, double entry diaries, dramatization, art, music, writing, or reading of other books by the same author. Many times excited teens recommend books to their friends and are happy to explain why.

Choosing a Shared Book for Teens

The criteria for choosing books to read aloud with teenagers include the following:

1. Select well-written books. Teenagers should be exposed to literature that has merit. Select books that contain rich, descriptive, figurative language with a natural rhythm. This young age group especially enjoys books with a strong, fast-paced plot and interesting, well-delineated characters with whom they can identify.

Books should be filled with colorful language that promotes visual images. Listening to the language of literature affects students' oral and written communication skills. They learn to write not only by becoming involved in the actual writing process but by reading the words of others.

2. Select books that reflect the interests and experiences of adolescent students. Talk to your students. Find out what makes them tick, what

they love, what they hate, and what they fear. Without prying, try to find out about the rich background of experiences in your class. Books become even more appealing when they relate to specific interests or when students can identify with situations and problems similar to their own.

3. Select books that reflect warmth, humor, and other positive and negative emotions with which teens can identify. Remember that by the teenage years, these students have experienced a broad range of complex emotions and feelings. Find books that express these.

4. Select books that will stimulate your adolescents' imaginations. One of the most rewarding outcomes of reading is that it encourages imagination. It lets the reader dare to dream, to journey to far-off places, to break away from worldly boundaries, and to take part in wonderful adventures.

5. Select books from a variety of categories of literature. Historical fiction, realistic fiction, fantasy, and folklore provide youth with characters and emotions with which they can identify and establish settings and themes that capture their imaginations and explore the human condition. Fiction helps them understand themselves and others.

Poetry should not be ignored. Poems express human feelings and motivations, and students can readily identify with the characters and themes in both contemporary and traditional poetry. In addition, poems provide a natural outlet through which students can express their own feelings.

Nonfiction books (informational books and biographies) provide students with facts and background they need to connect new concepts and knowledge. These should be closely correlated with their interests.

6. Select books from both traditional and modern literature. Modern literature reflects contemporary settings, language, and characters, but the themes may be contemporary or universal. Traditional literature provides links with the past and carries the reader to another place and time. Select traditional literature that contains timeless, universal themes that are as relevant today as they were at the time the story was written.

7. Select books that are appropriate to your students intellectual and emotional levels. No matter how outstanding and worthwhile a book may be, if its subject matter or vocabulary is too sophisticated, students will lose interest.

8. Select books that the oral reader (not only the students) enjoys. The reader's enthusiasm is catching. The reader must relish a book in order to make the text become alive, exciting, and real to the audience. Middle school students are very perceptive. Enthusiasm cannot be faked.

9. Allow students to help select books for reading aloud. You may want to display numerous books with attractive book jackets in the class. You will want to briefly describe each book to your students so they can make appropriate choices.
(See Figure 1).

Insert Figure 1 about here.

(See Figure 2 for a bibliography of recommended Shared Books for teens).

Insert Figure 2 about here.

Adapting the Shared Book Experience to Teens

A college professor borrowed an eighth grade class in the lab school to pilot the shared book reading technique with teens. The time period that fit both groups' schedules was the after lunch time that was normally used for the teacher to read a novel aloud while the students lounged on large pillows on the floor, slept, and generally relaxed. It was into the center of this environment that an overhead projector was wheeled.

After a brief summarization of what was read the day before, the professor read aloud fifteen to twenty minutes during from transparencies made from *The Client* (Grisham, 1993). The words were tracked with her finger so the class could keep up with the place. If

something was mispronounced, the leader would stop and ask, "Does that make sense?," rereading the passage to emphasize that reading is meant to be meaningful. The text was read with expression demonstrating how to appropriately stop at punctuation cues and how to make the text come alive for the reader.

Strategies for learning new vocabulary words in context were modeled as well. Vocabulary words that were probably not known were marked with a post-it note to return and predict meanings later. After the reading was completed, the teacher asked if there were any other words that the students did not recognize as the story was read.

The class discussion focused on the following questions: "What did you like about the story today?" "What descriptive words or phrases did Grisham use to make the writing interesting to read?" Certain phrases were pulled from the reading with the meaning discussed. "Have you had a similar experience as the one the author described?" What does this teach us about the legal system in our country? What questions can we bring to lawyer parents to answer? All answers and suggestions were praised, encouraged, and accepted.

Assessment of Shared Book Experience with Teens

Reading strategies modeled for them during the oral reading such as using syntactical and semantical clues to figure out the meaning of a new word were applied in their personal reading. Skipping an unknown word and finishing the sentence or paragraph to determine if the word if needed for understanding was applied. If the meaning of the sentence was unclear, comprehension clues were sought from the rest of the sentence or paragraph.

The eighth graders were asked to comment on their reactions to the Shared Book Experience with the following results being typical:

"When someone reads to you, you should be able to relax, and you shouldn't have to read it yourself."

"The overhead projector annoyed me and kept me from listening attentively."

"I could not relax and make a mental picture of the story."

"Your eyes hurt, and you start to fall asleep. It bores people."

"Using the overhead (projector) only seemed to complicate things. I didn't enjoy the book as much when I was following the pen. I was distracted."

A few students wrote positive comments:

"I could see how difficult words were spelled."

"It makes you feel as if you are reading the book, and that's a great feeling!"

"I could see the words and understand them."

Most of the students said that they only looked at the screen when the reading was stopped to reread and emphasize a certain concept or vocabulary word. Obviously, at this time of day, with this particular book, the students felt that very little learning was taking place.

Extensions that would strengthen the oral reading include writing in double entry diaries written during instructional reading time. Each student would write the book's story plot on the left side of their paper with their personal reaction to it on the right side. Similar experiences that had happened to them could be explained. Spelling and punctuation

would not checked, but a written comment by the teacher regarding meaning could be written to each individual student.

Conclusion

The conclusion was reached that teenage reluctant readers would receive the most benefit from using the Shared Book Experience. With the very capable readers in the eighth grade pilot study, perhaps a book selection with which the majority of the class would experience difficulty such as Chaucer or Shakespeare might have captured their interest. Also, using the regular, instructional reading time when the class is seated in desks, awake, and expected to respond in oral and written formats, would increase the group's interaction. Choosing a book that is harder than the majority of the class can read easily by themselves also would pique interest.

With these parameters in mind, the Shared Book Experience for teens can be a valid learning experience.

References

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Cambourne, B. (1988). *The whole story: Natural learning and the acquisition of literacy in the classroom.* Richmond Hill, Ontario: Scholastic.

Goodman, K. (1986). *What's whole in whole language.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Figure 1. Criteria for selecting shared books for teens

1. Select well-written books.

2. Select books that reflect the interests and experiences of teens.

3. Select books that reflect warmth, humor, and other emotions with which youth can identify.

4. Select books that will stimulate adolescent's imaginations.

5. Select books from a variety of genre.

6. Select books from both traditional and modern literature.

7. Select books that are appropriate to your students intellectual and emotional levels.

8. Select books that the oral reader and the students enjoy.

9. Allow students to help select books for the shared book experience.

Figure 2. Bibliography for shared readings with teens

The "Read-Aloud, Shared Book" selection is a highly personal choice, individualized to your students. The following books meet the criteria in Figure 1.

Burns, O. A. (1984). *Cold sassy tree.* New York: Ticknor Fields.

Christie, A. (1977). *And then there were none.* New York: Pocket Books.

Cromier, R. (1977). *I am the cheese.* New York: Pantheon Books.

Dickens, C. (1965). *Great expectations.* New York: Walter J. Black.

Fulghum, R. (1986). *All I really needed to know I learned in kindergarten: Uncommon thoughts on common things.* New York: Ivy Books.

Grisham, J. (1993). *The client.* New York: Doubleday.

Kinsella, A.P. (1982). *Shoeless Joe.* New York: Ballantine Books.

Lee, H. (1960). *To kill a mockingbird.* New York: Warner.

MacGregor, R. (1989). *Indiana Jones.* New York: Bantam Books.

Porter, W. (1988). *Stories by O'Henry.* New York: Tom Doherty.

Potok, C. (1967). *The chosen.* New York: Simon & Schuster.

Rawls, W. (1974). *Where the red fern grows.* New York: Bantam Books.

Spinelli, J. (1990). *Maniac Magee.* New York: Little, Brown.

Vance, J.M. (1980). *Grandma and the buck deer, and odther tales of youthful diaster.* Jefferson City, MO: Cedar Glade.