STUDIES IN LEARNING STYLES
STUDIES IN THE TEACHING OF LITERATURE

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OVERVIEW

by

Yeap Lay Leng and Dudley de Souza

This issue of REACT features two themes, namely, (1) Studies in Learning Styles, and (2) Studies in the Teaching of Literature. There are altogether 15 abstracts. The first seven abstracts draw attention to some of the factors that make for effective learning, while the remaining eight abstracts highlight some studies in the teaching of literature.

STUDIES IN LEARNING-styles

The major focus of the seven abstracts is on issues related to learning styles, a term that refers to the environmental, emotional, sociological, physical, and psychological stimuli under which an individual is most likely to learn, remember, achieve, and process information. Dunn's abstract entitled "The Relevance of Learning Styles" introduces some useful background reading for an understanding of the concept of learning style. The question of recognizable patterns in which students of different achievement groups can best concentrate or process information is answered in Yeap Lay Leng's abstract based on a local study.

Knowing students' learning style profile will lead to an even more pertinent question of practical importance. Spire's, Cafferty's, and Wilkerson's abstracts explore in different ways the effects on students' achievement when there is a match between how teachers instruct and how students learn. Of particular interest will be Stahl's abstract on the study of the effects on pupils' mathematics achievement and reading fluency and comprehension when a child is taught using specific methods and materials to support his/her learning style.

The findings relevant to the issue of whether learning styles are stable or can be changed with direct training are highlighted in Reynold's abstract. While this issue should have important implications for classroom teaching, unfortunately not many articles on this topic can be found in the research literature.

The seven abstracts under the rubric of learning styles should be of direct relevance to teachers as these findings on the individual nature of students' learning will have important implications for the curriculum. The recognizable patterns of individual or group learning styles would warrant differentiated educational approaches in relation to the environmental, physical, emotional, sociological, and psychological factors.
STUDIES IN THE TEACHING OF LITERATURE

The eight abstracts presented here under the banner of "Studies in the Teaching of Literature" focus on a diversity of interrelated topics that would appear to be of direct relevance to the task of teaching literature in the Singapore school.

The major focus - as is to be expected - appears to be the reading of literature. Four of the abstracts deal directly with reading itself. One focusses on the taxonomy of skills in reading and interpreting fiction, an area that would appear crucial to the teaching of fiction in schools; another deals with pleasure reading and its effects; another with the act of reading in terms of the thought processes related to understanding written messages, while yet another surveys teenage reading patterns.

Other dimensions are also explored in the other abstracts collected here. Literary theory and its connection with the teaching of literature in local schools is the focus of one of the abstracts. The study that this abstract is based on deserves special attention since it is not easy to obtain data vis-a-vis literature teaching based on experiments with local pupils, even if they happen to be in another country. Related to the problem of interpreting the message is the question of whether writing itself is a valid gauge of the student's understanding of the literary text. This is dealt with in the abstract entitled "The Effects of Writing on Students' Understanding of Literary Texts". Another abstract spotlights poetry teaching at the lower secondary level; the study focuses on two different methods of teaching poetry to secondary one students: the Conventional and the Response methods. Finally, drama comes into focus in the abstract on "Using Drama to Enrich Students' Lives". The study on which the abstract is based provides additional insights into the way drama is able to enrich the lives of students.

This brief survey is a mere aperitif meant to whet the appetite for a further investigation of the varied offerings available to the literature teacher looking for research that would be relevant to the teaching of literature.

ENDNOTE

As you read each abstract, you may find that the richness of detail is somewhat lost in the effort to be concise. This is inevitable. You are therefore encouraged to read the original reports, articles or dissertations, most of which are deposited in the IE Library.
Every pupil has a learning style, which basically refers to the way individuals concentrate on, absorb, and retain or difficult information or skills. It comprises a combination of environmental, emotional, sociological, physical and psychological elements that permit individuals to receive, store, and use knowledge and abilities.

This article summarises the studies that verify (a) increased academic achievement, (b) improved attitudes towards school, and (c) reduced numbers of discipline problems that result when youngsters are taught through materials or strategies that match their styles.

Special reference was made to the styles of gifted and underachieving pupils.

WHAT WERE THE STUDIES?

The studies discussed were done by The Center for the Study of Learning and Teaching Styles at St. John's University, New York, which tested more than 200,000 pupils ranging from third grade (elementary school) through college (undergraduates). After identifying an individual's preferred style with the Learning Style Inventory (LSI, consisting of dichotomous items) and the Productivity Environmental Preference Survey (PEPS), the effects of matching or mismatching them with the learning environment on his learning (eg. reading comprehension, reading speed and accuracy),attitudes towards school and discipline (eg. truancy) were measured.

WHAT WERE THE RESULTS?

Among the twenty one elements studied most people had between six and fourteen elements affecting them. They could also tell their preferences and dislikes that were actually important to their learning. Some pupils had extreme preferences for some of the conditions. The elements are classified below.
[1] **ENVIRONMENTAL ELEMENTS**

Sound (Silence versus Sound), Light (Bright versus Low Light), Temperature, and Design (Formal versus Informal Design of Environment).

[2] **EMOTIONAL ELEMENTS**

Motivation (eg. need for positive feedback, supervision), Persistence (eg. the need for "breaks"), Responsibility (eg. permission for options) and Structure (eg. the need for specific directions for assignments).

[3] **SOCIOLOGICAL ELEMENTS**

Learning alone, with others or with media.

[4] **PHYSICAL ELEMENTS**

Perceptual Strengths (Auditory, Visual, Tactile/Kinesthetic), Intake (eating, chewing, smoking), Time of Day or Night ("early birds" or "night owls"), and Mobility versus Passivity (eg. sitting still).

[5] **PSYCHOLOGICAL ELEMENTS**

Global versus Analytic (step by step learning versus overall gestalt), Hemispheric Preference (left or right-brain preferred), Impulsivity versus Reflectivity (spontaneity in verbal participation).

Underachievers had tactile and kinesthetic rather than auditory and visual preference while the gifted/talented pupils (of high IQ, musically and artistically gifted) were independent, self (internal) motivated, persistent, had strong perceptual strengths and needed options.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHERS AND PARENTS**

- Different individuals have different learning styles; some exceptional pupils may have extreme preferences for certain elements, be they environmental, emotional, sociological, physical or psychological.

- Allowing pupils to learn in an environment matching to their learning style would help or allow him to learn better.

- While it may be difficult, in the normal school situation, to cater to the great variety of learning styles among pupils (especially those styles for the exceptional children, such as the gifted and underachievers), teachers and parents could at least recognize their existence, identify them for the children and take them into consideration in their effort to individualise instruction.

This is an abstract of Rita Dunn’s article, "Learning Style and its Relation to Exceptionality at Both Ends of the Spectrum", *Exceptional Children*, 1983, pp. 496-506.
HEMISPHERICITY AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

by

Yeap Lay Leng

Abstract by
Lee Tiong Peng

One of the chief concerns of our teachers has been the individual differences of students within the class. Recent interests in this area have focussed on learning styles, that is, how individuals learn, remember, perceive, interact, conceptualise and process information and their relations to hemisphericity (brain dominance).

There is a need for teachers to find out an individual's (or group's) learning style in order to help stretch the academic abilities of the students.

HOW WAS THE STUDY DONE?

The purpose was to identify the hemispheric patterns of the 284 secondary students from four public schools. The specific domain investigated was the tendency of a student to use one side of the brain (left or right) to perceive and function more than the other.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE FINDINGS?

[1] Learning preferences can positively and negatively affect the students' academic achievement.

[2] Learning style characteristics in terms of brain dominance (left or right) distinguished the low, average and high achievers.

Generally, the Normal and Express groups (in secondary schools) were right-brain dominant and the Special group left-brain dominant. Right-preferenced students were better in visuo-spatial tasks and would process information holistically. Left-preferenced students were better in verbal tasks with sequential information processing. The lower the achievement levels of the students, the more marked was their performance between right and left brain dominant tasks.

WHAT ARE SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR THE TEACHER?

[1] Students learn or process information in different ways. Students in the Special stream would do well academically regardless of approaches. Since they are more balance in the functioning of both sides of the brain.
[2] Students in the Normal stream need a learning environment where the teaching styles match their learning styles, viz, developing matching methodologies that will support, complement the students' learning style preferences.

Learning style in terms of hemisphericity is beginning to throw light where there is a need to understand why some students are not making progress in their work and where there is great concern to stretch or develop any special talents in the individual. Overall, the teachers are being alerted to what motivates or inhibits students' learning.

CEREBRAL DOMINANCE

This is an abstract of Yeap Lay Leng's article, "Hemisphericity and Student Achievement", International Journal of Neuroscience, 1989, 48(3-4), 225-232.
Teachers and educators have always been interested in finding out how pupils learn. In the past, much work was done to improve teaching methods as well as to create conducive environments for learning and to achieve better results (achievement scores). However, in recent years, the focus has been directed at the pupils themselves. To be more specific, teachers and educators are now interested to know more about the learning styles of their students and how this knowledge can be used in teaching. If the teacher's teaching style is matched with the pupils' learning styles, would there be an increase in their achievement scores? The learning style approach is concerned with the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects of learning.

This study looked at the effect of a teacher in-service programme about learning style concepts and techniques on their teaching. The in-service participants were mathematics and reading teachers in elementary schools.

HOW WAS THE STUDY DONE?

Elementary school teachers were selected to serve as experimental and control group teachers. The former group participated in a series of in-service activities on learning styles before and during the school year. The latter group did not participate in these in-service activities and were asked to teach reading and mathematics in the usual way.

There were 233 and 221 pupils in their respective experimental and control groups. Each group consisted of pupils from Kindergarten to 6th grade, with sub-groups formed according to levels. The current achievement level of pupils were assessed using the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS). The Otis-Lennon School Ability Test was used to determine the pupils' changes in achievement before and after the study.
The results indicated that

- The pupils taught by the in-service teachers scored significantly higher on tests requiring conceptual skills in 4 out of 7 grades ($K, 1, 2$ and $3$)
- achieved significantly higher on 3 subtests: word attack, reading and mathematics.

- The pupils taught by non-participants in the in-service programme
  - did better on tests that required rote learning in 5 out of 7 grades ($K, 2, 3, 5, 6$)

- Overall, in-service teachers at each grade level used more individualised approaches in their teaching styles than the non-participating teachers.

- Teachers teaching in the upper elementary levels were more traditional in their teaching approaches than other teachers.

In summary, where pupils' learning styles were taken into account in teaching, these pupils performed better on reading and mathematics achievement tests than in pupils whose learning styles were not considered.

**Implications for Teachers and Teacher Educators**

1. In teaching our pupils at the primary level, we should consider the pupils' learning styles. Where possible, we need to match our teaching styles with that of our pupils' learning styles to bring about maximum learning.

2. Teacher educators should plan and conduct in-service courses that would result in significant changes in teacher behaviour for the benefit of our pupils.

This abstract was based on Roger D. Spires' "The effect of teacher in-service about learning styles on students' Mathematics and Reading achievement", Ph.D dissertation, Bowling Green State University, 1983.
MATCHING COGNITIVE STYLES OF TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

by

Elsie I. Cafferty

Abstract by Tan Fong Khow

This study was carried out to determine whether the degree of match in the students' and their teacher's cognitive styles resulted in any difference in the students' achievement.

According to Cafferty, cognitive style is the way an individual takes in information and processes it according to his or her personal experiences. Cognitive style may be influenced by the individual's family, friends, teachers and his or her own individuality.

Her instrument is based on Dr. Joseph Hill's Cognitive Style Mapping test. This instrument has a 215-item self-assessment inventory. The instrument is divided into four categories (i) Symbolic Orientations, (ii) Cultural Determinants, (iii) Modalities of Inference, and (iv) Memory.

HOW WAS THE STUDY DONE?

The subjects were teachers and students at the tenth and eleventh grade doing English in Kearney High School. All of them sat for the Self-assessment Inventory Test. The first element in the inventory goes like this, "I can remember a telephone number once I hear it". If the teacher and a student marked 'Usually' in the inventory, it means that there is one matched element for that student. The students were then placed in four groups based on the percentage of match. Group I represented 75 per cent or more matched elements. Group II had 50 to 75 per cent, Group III had 25 to 50 percent and Group IV had less than 25 per cent.

WHAT WERE THE RESULTS?

The findings show that the greater the degree of match was obtained between the teachers' cognitive style and the students' cognitive styles, the higher the grade point average for that group of students. The students in Group I had the highest overall grade point average. As the degree of match became less in Groups II, III and IV, grade point average also declined.
HOW USEFUL WERE THE RESULTS FOR TEACHERS?

The whole concept of cognitive style is emerging as an important variable that is beginning to provide some answers as to why some students achieve better with some teachers than with others.

Teachers apparently teach in a particular style, select instructional strategies or use certain materials which are complementary to their own cognitive style, and therefore students whose cognitive styles are closely matched with those of their teachers' tend to achieve or learn more easily. Close matching of cognitive style also means greater communication and understanding and results in better learning.

This study also supports the idea that there is no one set of characteristics of a 'good' teacher, no best teaching strategy or pattern of organization for all students. Those characteristics, strategies or patterns of organization that may be termed best are those from which the student learns best.

Does this best or least describe you?

This is an abstract of Cafferty Elsie Irene's "An analysis of student performance based upon the degree of match between the educational cognitive style of the teacher and the educational cognitive style of the students", Ph.D. dissertation, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, (1980). A copy of her dissertation is found in the IE Library. Microfiche #AAK-5843.
EFFECTS OF THE 4MAT SYSTEM OF INSTRUCTION ON STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENT, RETENTION AND ATTITUDES

by

Rhonda M. Wilkerson and Kinnard P. White

INTRODUCTION

Research on brain hemisphericity [left brain dominance versus right brain dominance] shows that the two hemispheres differ in their modes of processing information. Students with right brain dominance prefer to learn in a non-verbal manner and to receive information as a whole while students with left brain dominance prefer to learn verbally and in a step-by-step manner. Besides hemisphericity preference, there are other types of learning styles. For example, McCarthy (1980) classified learners into four different categories:

- An innovative learner needs to be personally involved and learns by listening and sharing his/her own experiences.
- An analytic learner wants to know what experts think and learn by reasoning out ideas.
- A commonsense learner wants to find out how things work and learns by doing things.
- A dynamic learner prefers a variety of activities and learns through self-discovery.

THE STUDY

The author investigated the effectiveness of two different approaches to organising and delivering instruction for science lessons on Machines. In the textbook approach, the students read the textbook, answered questions in the textbook and worksheets, and carried out experiments following the directions provided by the textbook. The design of the 4MAT lessons is described below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Innovative Learner</th>
<th>Left Mode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lesson (1)</td>
<td>Students had to visualize machines and to draw pictures of their mental images.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analytic Learner</th>
<th>Left Mode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lesson (3)</td>
<td>Students watched a filmstrip on machines, drew pictures and matched the drawings with real objects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson (4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Common Sense Learner
Lesson (6) Students examined models of machines and discussed with their peers questions posed by the teacher.

Dynamic Learner
Lesson (8) Each student explained how his/her machine worked.

Lesson (5) Teacher read aloud a book on machines and students completed worksheets on six simple machines.

Lesson (7) Students were given answer cards and answered by holding one of the cards. Each student composed a picture of a compound machine.

RESULTS

Students in the 4MAT group scored better in an objective test [mean=32 points] than the textbook group [mean=27 points].

In a test administered 35 days later, the 4MAT group students again scored better than the textbook group.

The teacher having taught both groups found that the 4MAT group students were more motivated and spent more time learning than students from the textbook group.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CLASSROOM TEACHERS

1 Although this study shows that the 4MAT approach has positive effects on the students, one should be aware of extraneous factors that could confound the results. For example, there was more effort put into designing the lessons for the 4MAT group than for the textbook group and there were more instructional activities for the 4MAT group.

2 Despite this, the 4MAT approach is useful. The approach can be used for any subject area, so it is possible for teachers to apply this approach in designing materials for their English lessons, mathematics lessons and others.

3 To cater for different styles of learning and to make lessons interesting, teachers can combine textbook materials with instructional activities. Activities which require students to (a) model a procedure or a concept, (b) draw visuals or learn from visuals, (c) form mental images, (d) explore how things work, and (e) self-discover principles, rules and procedures, could be incorporated.

This is an abstract of Rhonda M. Wilkerson and Kinnard J. White's article, "Effects of the 4MAT system of instruction on students' achievement, retention, and attitudes", The Elementary School Journal, 1988, Vol. 88, pp. 357-368.
THE EVIDENCE SUPPORTING READING STYLES: A RESPONSE TO STAHL

by
Marie Carbo

Abstract by
Gayle Whitson

WHAT ARE READING STYLES?

Children have different styles by which they learn to read; these styles refer to an individual's learning style when engaged in the act of reading. While the different reading styles are not defined in this article it can be inferred that the author believes children have a preferred learning modality [eg. visual, auditory or a combination visual-auditory]. By teaching a child to read through his or her modality strength and by using specific methods and materials which support this strength the child will show maximum gains in reading fluency and comprehension.

A child's reading style can be identified by administering the RSI [Reading Style Inventory]. The questions and statements contained in the RSI represent different approaches used in teaching reading. Respondents are also asked to answer questions about their attitudes toward reading and about the strategies they use during the reading process. The children's responses are then matched to reading style profiles.

WHAT RESEARCH IS CITED IN SUPPORT OF READING STYLES THEORY?

There are five major pieces of research cited in favour of the reading styles theory. Details however describing the reading instruction used are limited. Two of these studies are highlighted in this paper:

[1] LaShell's Findings: 90 reading disabled students in Grades 2-6. Groups received 45 minutes of instruction in a resource room setting with a pupil-to-teacher ratio of 12:1. The Experimental group was instructed according to their matched reading styles using a holistic reading approach which included some phonics instruction. The Control Group received a structured phonics programme. Results after 10 months of treatment: Experimental group gained 15 months in their reading achievement while the Control group gained only 4 months.

[2] Meighan and Michael's Findings: 90 students from Grades 3-5 who were achieving at or below reading level. After treatment, based on matched reading styles, the Experimental
group achieved higher scores on the Gates MacGinitie Reading Test. These same students also retained storylines better than the Control group.

MAIN POINTS MADE BY CARBO:

- A holistic approach which includes literature; story writing; reading games; recorded books and choice of reading materials is better able to match the reading styles of young children and poor readers.

- While the area of modality and reading achievement remains controversial, Carbo has documented evidence that shows students' comprehension improves when instructed according to their modality strength.

- If children are given reading instruction to match their reading styles the act of reading will be made easier and the children will be more successful readers.
IS THERE EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT MATCHING READING STYLES AND INITIAL READING METHOD? A REPLY TO CARBO

by

Steven A. Stahl

Main Points Made by Stahl:

- Steven Stahl (1988) finds only two studies in support of matched modality strength and instructional practice.

- Stahl criticizes Carbo’s assumption, phonics instruction is inappropriate for beginning readers because they are more "global" in their learning style, for the following reasons: (1) certain distractors on the RSI are more attractive to the respondents, (2) children in order to respond to the questions need to be able to reflect upon what they "do" in the reading process.

- Stahl differentiates between the terms "beginning reader" and "initial instructional stage". Stahl claims that phonics is an important component of initial reading instruction. His claim is based on the research of Jeanne Chall in The Great Debate (1983).

- The research conditions [eg. pupil to teacher ratio] upon which Carbo has based her findings, are not representative of real classroom situations.
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SINGAPORE TEACHER: THE CARBO/STAHL DEBATE

1. The more information a classroom teacher has about teaching reading [eg. various approaches, methods and materials] the more effective the instruction.

2. In a second language context, such as Singapore, findings from language studies carried out in native English speaking countries should be approached with caution.

3. Phonics instruction should be combined with a "holistic" approach in reading instruction.

This is an abstract of the articles entitled "The Evidence Supporting Reading Styles: A Response To Stahl" by Marie Carbo and "Is There Evidence to Support Matching Reading Styles and Initial Reading Methods?: A Response to Carbo" by Steven A. Stahl. Both articles can be found in Phi Delta Kappan, Dec. 1988.
CHANGES IN STYLES OF LEARNING
AND THINKING THROUGH TRAINING

by

Cecil R. Reynolds and E. Paul Torrance

Abstract by
Hazel Mah Yuet Har

An individual tends to rely more on one than the other cerebral hemispheres for information processing. This tendency is known as hemisphericity. Studies have shown that the specialised functions of the hemispheres are established early in life (preschool and primary years) and if no intervention takes place they remain unchanged throughout life. The purpose of the study is to determine if short intense training programmes as intervention will modify preferred styles of learning and thinking.

THE STUDY

Two groups participated in the study. Group 1 was made up of 200 gifted and talented high school students. They were selected based on outstanding achievement in different disciplines. Indirect training through a variety of styles and experiences were used with this sample. These students spent two hours each day for six weeks working in their own discipline (e.g. music, French, mathematics, etc.). The remainder of the day was spent in interdisciplinary activities. Special attempts were made to help students see clear relationships between information in their own discipline and their future careers. Group 2 consisted of 68 graduate students of various disciplines, who were enrolled in a course in creative thinking. This group formed the sample for direct training in right hemisphere functioning. In addition to lectures on creative thinking, this group received extensive and intensive training in creative problem solving. The students met four hours each week for 11 weeks.

Based on the scores of the instrument administered, students were classified as:

(a) Right (using styles closely related to right cerebral hemisphere functioning),
(b) Left (using styles related to left cerebral hemisphere functioning),
(c) Mixed (using both left and right complementarily for information processing),
(d) Integrated (using right for some tasks and left for others).
THE RESULTS

The Group 1 students improved in the integrated category after being exposed to the wide variety of learning and thinking experiences. There was also a slight increase in the number of students in the Mixed category. There was of course a decrease in number in both the Right and Left categories.

The Group 2 students who received direct training showed a substantial increase in the number classified as having Right hemisphericity. Decreases were found in all three of the other categories for this group.

USEFULNESS OF RESULTS FOR TEACHERS AND PARENTS

The findings suggest that it is possible to change an individual's style of learning and thinking over a relatively short period. This change can also be directed and controlled. This means, therefore, that it is possible for teachers and parents to train individuals to change their information processing strategies to benefit themselves and to best fit the demands of their lives.

This is an abstract of the article entitled "Perceived Changes Styles of Learning and Thinking (Hemisphericity) Through Direct a Indirect Training", Journal of Creative Behaviour, 1978, 12(4) 247-251.
A TAXONOMY OF SKILLS IN READING
AND INTERPRETING FICTION

by
George Hillocks, Jr. & Larry H. Ludlow

Abstract by
Goh Soo Tian

WHAT WAS THE STUDY ABOUT?

The authors believed that skills required in reading and interpreting fiction can be identified and arranged in a hierarchy, from the easiest to the hardest thus forming a taxonomy.

The model of this taxonomy takes the form of an informal reading inventory. It is divided into two major levels: literal questions and inferential questions. There are altogether seven skill types, three under the literal level and four under the inferential level, designated in the following way:

Literal Level of comprehension
1. Basic Stated Information (BSI)
2. Key Detail (KD)
3. Stated Relationship (SR)

Inferential Level of comprehension
4. Simple Implied Relationship (SIR)
5. Complex Implied Relationship (CIR)
6. Author's Generalisation (AG)
7. Structural Generalization (SG)

The present study was undertaken to test the hierarchical nature of the question types in the two levels of comprehension.

HOW WAS THE STUDY DONE?

Four texts were selected: the first chapter of Steinbeck's novel The Pearl, and three short stories entitled "Butterfly", "Blood" and "Baby".

Based on the model, four sets of questions according to the seven skill types were set, one for each text.

The question sets were administered to groups of students from the ninth to the twelfth grades, numbering 112, 77, 127 and 79 for the four texts respectively. The students were given 50 minutes to read the text and answer the questions. The answers were scored.
by two independent raters using a key for 'right', 'partly right' and 'wrong' answers.

The scores were analyzed to determine the hierarchical relationships of the item types in the individual tests. The measurement model used was called the Rating Scale.

**WHAT WERE SOME OF THE FINDINGS?**

The results of the Rating Scale analysis showed that, on the whole, the hierarchical nature of the two broad levels, literal and inferential, was confirmed.

On the whole, the taxonomic characteristics of the seven skill types were confirmed.

Of the four question sets, three showed a good fit between predicted item difficulty and performance of each person taking the test.

**WHAT DO THE FINDINGS MEAN TO TEACHERS?**

Literature teachers can use the skills hierarchy as a guide in framing study questions on the texts.

Teachers can use the skill hierarchy to find out at what skills level students can work comfortably before moving on to the next higher level.

Teachers should make sure students are able to master the literal level before proceeding to the inferential level.

Class discussion and study questions organized according to the hierarchy will result in higher levels of comprehension and enjoyment than in the case of discussion and study questions which are haphazardly assembled.

This abstract is based on an article, "A Taxonomy of Skills in Reading and Interpreting Fiction" by George Hillocks, Jr and H. Ludlow in American Educational Research Journal, 1984, 21, p 7-24. The journal is available in the IE Library.
WHAT HAPPENS IN PLEASURE READING?

by

Victor Nell

Abstract by

Maureen Khoo

WHY WAS THE STUDY DONE?

The ability to enjoy pleasure reading is one of the important goals in the teaching of reading. The powerful satisfaction that pleasure reading gives (particularly reading of light fiction), drives sustained reading behaviour and is the reason for a thriving publishing industry. Yet, little is understood of how reading creates such satisfaction. A series of studies has thrown light on this, showing how the gratification processes include ease in reading, enjoyment of control over selection and reading pace, and physiological arousal as well as mental change effects during reading.

HOW WAS THE PROJECT CARRIED OUT?

The five studies involved 295 subjects in informal testing over six years. These studies considered two main areas: the pre-conditions and processes of pleasure reading, and the consequences of such reading.

The first study investigated the way reading ability relates to aspects of pleasure reading. A Reading Comprehension Speed Test and a Reading Habits Questionnaire were used on 129 students and 33 older readers to examine reading ability, reading habits and motive strength.

The next study using 33 readers in two laboratory reading sessions investigated variations in pace of natural pleasure reading within a text, i.e. whether such readers read both quickly and slowly or whether they read at an invariant pace.

A third study set out to determine whether readers are affected by society's value system on popular culture, i.e. if readers would arrange works of fiction in a literary merit system inverse to their own reading preferences, and if merit and difficulty ranking are related. A mixed sample of 129 students, 44 librarians and 14 University English lecturers were assigned the tasks of (1) preference ranking (2) merit ranking and (3) difficulty ranking of extracts from thirty carefully selected books. Readability scores were computed.

The fourth and most complex of the investigations was the laboratory study of physiological reactions during pleasure reading. In laboratory sessions, physical arousal as seen in respiration, heart-rate and skin potential in 33 readers were recorded using skin electrodes while readers went through a series
of nine tasks e.g. relaxing with eyes shut, listening to white noise, reading for 30 minutes, doing a work-reading task etc. It was anticipated that arousal during hard reading and mental arithmetic would be higher than during pleasure reading.

The fifth study, using the same 33 subjects, aimed to demonstrate that skilled readers are able to exercise absolute control over the reading content and quality of their own consciousness. They can use reading either to block self-awareness or enhance it. It was also to show that such readers prize pleasure reading for its effortlessness and the control and safety they are able to feel. This was done through group discussion.

WHAT OVERALL LEARNING WAS ACHIEVED?

Gratification from reading begins with effortless skilled reading.
Females spend more time reading than males.
Flexible control of reading pace adds to the gratification.
A reader's selection for pleasure reading is determined by the interacting forces of elite disapproval of light fiction, text difficulty and reader preferences.
During reading, there is fluctuating bodily arousal and changes in the consciousness and attentional states.
The skilled reader's enjoyment of reading comes from a combination of factors like economy of effort, being in control over his own reading, precision of outcome, savouring transformation of feelings.

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHERS?

Students should be given adequate quantities of easy reading materials to develop pleasure reading skills which are a mark of fluent reading. Pleasure reading should be regarded as a meritable activity, not reading of 'trash'.
Concerted effort is needed to help male students begin and maintain reading habits.
Reading instruction should include exposing children to reading at different speeds for different purposes both within a text and across texts, and ample opportunities created within class time to develop their sense of control in independent silent reading.
Teachers and children may wish to 'model' fluent reading strategies by talking in class about the way they skim or reread during pleasure reading.

THE ACT OF READING

by
Margaret Early and Bonnie O. Ericson

Abstract by
Victor Neo

WHAT THE RESEARCH IS ABOUT

Early and Ericson report on research in reading that can prove useful to teachers of literature. This research, which has its roots in cognitive psychology and studies of language acquisition, seeks to trace the thought processes related to understanding written messages and to the answers to comprehension questions supplied by readers. This understanding of how readers comprehend written texts "has freshened teachers' understanding of how their students read literature" and "has affirmed inferences and intuitions" about the reading process stemming from the teachers' own experience of reading and from their knowledge of literary theory.

WHAT THE FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS ARE

Summarized below are some of the findings and their implications for teaching and learning:

1. Good readers use their knowledge of the world, stored in interconnected structures called schemata, to comprehend what they are reading, to make predictions during reading and to remember what they have read.

Implication

Teachers should activate students' schemata during pre-reading discussions to help students marshal their resources and to test out gaps in prior knowledge so that these can be filled before reading rather than after confusion sets in.

2. Good readers anticipate words and phrases because they are familiar with how twentieth century language works, as well as with many of the ideas conveyed in that language.

Implication

The teaching of Literature in English should be linked to English Language teaching since proficiency in English is linked to the competent reading of literary texts.
3. **Good** readers use schemata for literary forms in the act of reading literary texts.

**Implication**

Teachers should expose readers to a range of literary forms so that the readers' repertoire of schemata for literary forms can be expanded.

4. **Good** readers can use higher order reading skills and are the ones who read widely, choosing books of fiction and non-fiction beyond those required in school.

**Implications**

in addition to reading set texts, teachers should encourage students to read widely.

The school should also encourage students to read widely by organizing extensive reading programmes and by making available to students a wide range of reading material.

A portion of curriculum time can be set aside for silent "in-class" reading supervised by a teacher who knows his students' reading abilities, attitudes and interests.

5. **Good** readers understand how they make meanings, are aware of breakdowns in the process of reading and can employ corrective strategies when this happens.

**Implications**

Teachers should teach students how to derive meaning from texts, for example, how to make inferences from textual cues.

Teachers should also teach students repair strategies when breakdowns occur, for example, correcting prior predictions in the light of new data gathered from subsequent sections of the text.

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The abstract is based on 'The Act of Reading' by Margaret Early and Bonnie O. Ericson in Ben F. Nelms (Ed), Literature in the Classroom: Readers. Texts and Contexts, National Council of Teachers of English, Illinois, 1988.
UNDERSTANDING TEENAGERS' READING

by

Jack Thomson

Abstract by

Robert Yeo

WHY WAS THE STUDY DONE?

The study was undertaken because the author feels that there is a great gap between what teachers of literature believe in and what their students are actually experiencing and learning in secondary schools. He tries to bridge the gap by examining what a group of students read and how they read, and scrutinizes literary theories, current research and teaching practice for clues that could help to provide answers to some of the problems of reading and studying literature at secondary levels. He offers some answers to persistent questions like: Why read literature? How do good readers read? How do school students at different levels of literary development read? What satisfactions do they seek and attain from reading, and from which books? What bores them, and what does boredom mean? What activities in class do they find productive/unproductive/destructive to their reading development?

HOW WAS THE STUDY DONE?

° The research data were drawn from written questionnaires completed by all the students in year 8 (13 to 14 year-olds) and Year 10 (15 to 16 year-olds) attending two State high schools in Bathurst, NSW, Australia in both 1978 and 1984, transcripts of individual interviews with five per cent of these students and written questionnaires completed by their English teachers.

° Using the data obtained, Thomson goes on to look at current literary theories and finds that there is much to be learned from a theory that could generally be described as reader-centred, or to be more specific, reader-response-centred.

° From the standpoint of a reader-centred teacher, he examines examples of teachers at work and the variety of strategies employed to make the study of literature interesting and relevant.

WHAT ARE THE RESULTS?

From the data, he is able to come up with a developmental model of reading that stresses the importance of (i) the reader as being at
the centre of reading, and (ii) the reading process. The developmental model of reading has six stages:

Stage 1. unreflective interest in action

2. Emphathising

3. Analogising

4. Reflecting on the significance of events and behaviour

5. Reviewing the whole work as a construct

6. Consciously considered relationship with the author, recognition of textual ideology, and understanding of self (identity theme) and of one's own reading processes.

WHAT ARE IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHERS?

If the model is accepted, certain implications may be drawn:

° Reading is a process and teachers should not rush their students towards quick answers known to and required of the teacher.

° Response to literature is not always a case of the student understanding cognitively the meaning of a word, phrase, sentence, poem or the whole book, but is something more complicated than that.

° Student-centred... is likely to encourage the kind of response required.

° Teaching strategies should therefore take into account the different stages described, especially the need for the student as reader to empathise, reflect on events and behaviour and identify self in the process of reading.

This is an abstract of the book Understandins Teenaaers Reading by Jack Thomson (Mitchell College of Advanced Education, 1988).
WHAT WAS THE STUDY ABOUT?

Ideally, literature teaching should develop from students' personal responses to literary texts. But many an experienced teacher will agree that "the moment of fine careless rapture is hard to come by". How can literary theory be put to use in helping pupils respond to and analyse literature? Hena reported on her experience in teaching metaphor using these three theoretical approaches:

- **Emotive Theory** - a psychological approach which sees metaphors as objects drawn together to arouse certain emotions and attitudes in the reader as he draws on his own knowledge and associations about these objects.

- **Interaction Theory** - a metaphor is a complex cognitive model of verbal expression. Meaning is the result of the interaction of thoughts of different things stimulated by a single word or phrase.

- **Controversion Theory** - a metaphor says more than it states by cancelling out the primary meaning to make room for secondary meaning. Metaphors state things that are obviously absurd and false and force the reader to look for meaning beyond the literal level.

HOW WAS THE STUDY DONE?

The writer based her findings on poetry lessons she taught to Form V students in a Kuala Lumpur secondary school for about two-and-a-half months. She first presented the Emotive Theory approach and gave guidelines and examples on how to respond to poetry using this approach. Students then gave oral responses to poetry they had already read to ensure that these guidelines were understood. This procedure was repeated with the Interaction Theory and Controversion Theory. Different poems were used to teach each approach but students applied all three approaches to Blake's poem "London".

WHAT WERE THE FINDINGS?

The Emotive Approach: Readers were sensitive to the tone but missed the central theme. They could not support their ideas by referring
to the poem. Almost all found it difficult to identify metaphors and expressed discomfort about not attaining another level of meaning.

The Interactive Approach: Several students changed their minds about the poem's theme and showed a dramatic increase in attention to the meanings of words, phrases and the poem as a whole. They were aware of the multiple meanings and more willing to explore the different facets.

The Controversion Approach: Almost all pupils found this theory the most helpful of the three approaches where metaphors were concerned. However, pupils tended to look for clues the poet had set up and discussed each figure in an isolated fashion without referring to the rest of the poem.

In addition, students found that the third approach helped them to focus on the odd word, original phrases or structures for clues to unlock meanings in the poem. But they also said that they enjoyed the first approach as it was the least laborious. The writer also found, when teaching the second approach, that once pupils had decided on an overall theme, they tended to force subsequent metaphorical meanings to suit this theme. When she reversed the sequence in the third approach (metaphors first then theme) the lesson was found to be more fruitful.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHERS**

The Emotive Approach is useful

* at the early stages of a literature programme;
* when a new genre is being introduced
* when coverage of a large number of works is the objective rather than in-depth study;
* with words which do not require complex interpretations.

The Interactive Approach is more useful

* for sensitivity to word meanings in complex poems;
* for considering different implications and values.

The Controversion Approach is more useful (together with the Interactive approach)

* for developing skills in structural analysis and detailed explication.

This abstract is based on "Literary Theory: Implications for the Teaching of Literature in Malaysian Schools", Southeast Asian Review of English, 1989 (4 & 5) : 7 - 23.
THE EFFECTS OF WRITING ON STUDENTS' UNDERSTANDING OF LITERARY TEXTS

by
James Marshall

Abstract by
Gayle L. Whitson

WHY WAS THE STUDY DONE?

Teachers in the area of literature have long associated the act of writing as a means of evaluating a student's understanding of a literary text. But, could the act of writing be used as a means of enriching or even enhancing a student's response to a literary text? If so, what types of writing activities would serve this purpose?

The researcher provides answers to the following questions:

1. How does the teaching approach being used influence the students' responses to a literary text?

2. How do different types of writing activities affect the quality of the students' later responses to a text?

3. How would engaging the students in different types of writing activities affect the students' written responses to the text? Would these writing activities influence their understanding of the writing process?

HOW WAS THE STUDY CARRIED OUT?

This study was conducted in a middle-class high school located in the United States. The study involved an experienced teacher and three of her eleventh grade college-preparatory English classes, a total sample of eighty students.

This study was carried out in two stages:

Stage One documents the "instructional" methodology and the classroom context in which these students were being taught literature. The researcher used the research techniques of observational note-taking and case study interviews to give descriptive analyses of the classroom context.

Stage Two describes the "experimental" application stage of the study. Four stories from J. D. Salinger's Nine Stories were selected as the literary texts used in this research design. Four writing activities: no writing; restricted writing; extended writing (personal response) and extended writing (formal analysis) were designed to gather data necessary for answering the above research questions. To describe the effects that the different
types of writing had on the students' understanding of the literary texts, the researcher compared the written products of the different writing activities, observed six case study students during the writing process, using a "think aloud" technique, and finally compared post-test achievement results.

WHAT WERE THE RESULTS?

Stage One:
- The instructional method used for teaching literature was described as teacher-centred. The teacher controlled the interpretation of the text through the use of guide questions.
- The writing activities which students were engaged in were classified as restrictive activities which encouraged mere regurgitation of the teacher's interpretation of the text.
- Students were found to have developed "formulas" for answering specific types of questions.

Stage Two:
- In the restricted writing short answer questions, the students wrote fewer words and shorter sentences compared to the extended writing questions.
- Students engaged in extended writing activities spent less time focussing on the content and more time developing their ideas.
- Finally, in analyzing the post-test achievement results it was found that extended writing activities were superior in getting students to explore and understand the text in detail. Restricted writing was found to actually retard the students' responses and understanding of a text.

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR SINGAPORE TEACHERS?
- Writing answers to short answer questions has little effect on improving students' understanding of a literary text, unlike extended writing activities.
- Extended writing (personal response) requires the student to assume responsibility in interpreting a literary text and hence to discover independent reading strategies.
- Extended writing (personal response) strengthens and reinforces the reading and writing connection.

This abstract is based on James Marshall's "The Effects of Writing on Students' Understanding of Literary Texts". The study is reported in Research in the Teaching of English, 1987, (1): 30-63.
TWO METHODS OF TEACHING POETRY TO SECONDARY ONE STUDENTS

by
Bella Ho

Abstract by
D. P. de Souza

WHAT WAS THE STUDY ABOUT?

The study focussed on two different methods of teaching English Literature: the Conventional Method and the Response Method. The aim was to find out which would lead to more effective instruction, i.e. better achievement and greater interest in the learning of literature.

HOW WAS THE STUDY DONE?

The data were derived from four classes of secondary one pupils in two Singapore secondary schools -- two classes per school. In each of the selected schools, one class was the control group while the other was the treatment group. The main study was the experiment carried out in School A, while in School B the same experiment was repeated. The researcher performed the role of teaching for both sets of classes while there were observers who reported on the performances. The Conventional Method was characterized by teaching via the comprehension lesson approach while the Response Method emphasised interaction between the students and the poem, thus focussing on student response to the text.

WHAT WERE THE FINDINGS?

When achievement was measured in terms of scores attained in the post-test, it was found that between the Control Group and the Experimental Group there were no statistically significant differences in the two schools although there was a slight difference in School A taken alone.
When it came to a comparison of the attitudes of students towards poetry learning, it was established that students taught via the Response Method had a positive attitude towards learning the subject. These students claimed that they enjoyed their poetry lessons and wished to learn more about the subject.

As long as three months after the experiment, the regular teachers reported that there was an observable difference between the group that had been taught the Response way and the group taught via the Conventional way.

The strength of the Response Method lay in the fact that 77.5% (as compared to 76.25% for the Conventional Method) of the students taught in that way claimed they were "enjoying literature". In addition, 76.25% (as compared to 73.75%) indicated they were "finding poetry interesting", while 81.25% (as compared to 61.25%) were "eager to learn more poems".

The Response Method thus appeared to have had a more favourable impact in terms of nurturing student interest in the subject.

WHAT DOES THIS STUDY TELL TEACHERS?

This study indicates that

1. It would be narrow to look only at scores as a means of assessing the usefulness or effectiveness of a particular method. If more positive attitudes towards a subject can be nurtured through the Response Method then we should not discount the method even though there might be no significant gains in terms of test scores.

2. On the other hand, the hasty dismissal of the Conventional Method in an attempt to appear innovative might need a second glance. Teachers are comfortable with the method and could very well achieve good results in this mode. At least, what appears to be evident is that there is no major gap between this method and the Response Method in terms of test scores.

3. Perhaps, the best course of action for literature teachers teaching poetry would be to opt for an eclectic approach which would marry the virtues of both methods in a carefully thought out blend.

This abstract is based on Bella Ho's "An Investigation of Two Methods of Teaching Poetry to Secondary One Students", M.Ed. dissertation, National University of Singapore, 1988. It is available in the IE Library.
USING DRAMA TO ENRICH STUDENTS' LIVES

by

Norah Morgan and Juliana Saxton

Abstract by

Clive Scharenquivel

WHAT WAS THE STUDY ABOUT?

This action research study focuses on the uses of drama. Drama is able to synthesize language, feeling and thought and can enrich the lives of students and develop their competence and confidence, according to the authors. Besides the value of drama as an educational tool and for staging plays the authors see drama as yet a different order of experience, i.e. for understanding in which emotions (thinking/feeling) play an important role.

How can drama be used to help students to understand themselves and express their feelings?

HOW WAS THE STUDY DONE?

In drama, as in life, rituals and reflection are two of the most powerful ways of crystallizing meaning, and one of the most effective techniques to achieve this is for the teacher to role play.

Using Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, the authors developed a Taxonomy of Personal Engagement. This incorporates both the affective and educational objectives of drama. This is how the authors have outlined their taxonomy:

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WHAT WERE SOME OF THE FINDINGS?

Using ritual as a strategy, the teacher was able to exercise control while students had the freedom to respond and express themselves in their own way. Techniques used include voice-over, narration, silence, symbolizing, minimalizing, creating an atmosphere, repetition, questioning and teacher-in-role.
Using reflection as a strategy, students were given opportunities to reflect on and synthesize the experience. Through the dramatic experience, they were able to use communicative speech skills, eg. intonation, language, timing, questioning, variety in pace, volume etc.

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHERS?

If the teacher applies the structure and understands the importance of strategies and techniques and is guided by the taxonomy, the result and learning experience of the drama activities will be worthwhile, satisfying, educational and highly rewarding.

As rituals and reflections in drama are two of the "most powerful" ways of crystallizing meaning, the teacher could use the technique of role-play to advantage to develop and heighten emotions.

The teacher could also use the taxonomy of personal engagement to assist students to build up their confidence in expressing themselves fluently in English.

The abstract is based on the article "Working With Drama: A Different Order of Experience" by Norah Morgan and Juliana Saxton in Theory into Practice, 1985, 24(3), pp.211-218.
Dear Fellow Professional

React to REACT

Now that you have read REACT, we hope you will share with us some of your views so as to help us improve REACT. Please therefore complete the reactionnaire and return it to us through your principal at your earliest convenience.

Also, please answer the following questions:-

1. Are you a JC/Secondary/Primary teacher? ______________

2. How long have you been in the service? ____________ years

3. What main subject(s) do you teach? ______________

Thank you.

THE EDITORIAL BOARD

__________________________________________________________

REACTIONNAIRE

1. How do you find the language on the whole?

- Reasonably readable ( )
- Some difficulty ( )
- Too technical ( )

2. What themes/topics would you like to see in future issues of REACT?

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3. In what ways can REACT be improved so as to meet the needs of classroom teachers more satisfactorily?

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Please indicate the extent to which you have found each of the abstracts INTERESTING and USEFUL.

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION
Marked stylistic changes over the decades can be used to date the prose in novels. This factor can form the basis for a readability formula which can be of use to the literate teacher.


The ability to conceive of the behaviour of characters in terms of themes is dependent on the grade level of the student.


Comprehension tests that assume one right answer give an incomplete picture of the reader's comprehension. They also imply that we are studying the text only. What we have to be concerned with is the interaction between the reader and the text.


On the whole, a country like Singapore, where English is learnt as a second language, embraces reading young adults' fiction about their fellow nationals can enjoy the reading process even though the culture and communal values are different.


It has been shown that adults are more likely to remember important text elements than less important text elements, but this is not necessarily the case with children. A recent research study by C. M. A. Journal of Reading 33(3), 1-7.

On the whole, a country like Singapore, where English is learnt as a second language, embraces reading young adults' fiction about their fellow nationals can enjoy the reading process even though the culture and communal values are different.


In teaching literature it should be remembered that the text never achieves a completely authoritative grasp on life. Life is always ahead, in terms of both chronology and ultimate unanswerability. We should therefore not be too hasty in affirming the authority of our interpretation of the text.
