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Application of the Language Experience Approach for Secondary Level Students

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Application of the Language Experience Approach for Secondary Level Students

by

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Abstract

This study was conducted to determine the effectiveness of the language experience approach (LEA) for teaching reading and writing skills to functionally illiterate high school students who were identified as learning disabled. Twenty-one 9th-grade students ages fifteen to sixteen participated.

The students were divided into a control group and an experimental group. The control group was instructed through the use of a commercial reading kit, Reader's Workshop I (1974). The experimental group received instruction using the LEA which uses student written material to generate reading skill activities.

To verify effectiveness of the LEA, pre- and posttests of the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (1976), or SDRT, brown level, forms A and B and the Sentence Writing Strategy Pretest (1985), or SWSP, were administered to both the control and experimental groups.

The results on the subtests of the SDRT indicated no significant gains or losses of reading skill ability for either group. The SWSP though, indicated a significant gain in sentence writing ability of 29 percentage points for the experimental group while the control group lost 11 percentage points.

It is therefore evident that the language experience approach can be successful for teaching reading and writing skills to functionally illiterate high school students because it integrates reading and writing rather than providing detached skill instruction.
Problem Statement

Is the language experience approach effective as a means of teaching reading and writing skills to functionally illiterate high school students who have been identified as learning disabled?

Rationale

Illiteracy, both functional and marginal, is a critical problem in the United States today. Although estimates vary, it is judged that approximately 25 million adults cannot read and write and are therefore considered functionally illiterate. Another 40 million adults have only marginal reading and writing skills. This means that approximately 29 percent of the U. S. population is faced with a myriad of problems because they cannot read and write.

This situation has developed for many reasons. According to Rude and Oehlkers (1984), many of the problem readers in our schools need not exist and are victims of a system that in many cases has failed them. Of course, the educational system need not assume responsibility for all of today's reading problems; parents and society must share the blame. Although the responsibility lies with many, the assumption that "only the schools can make a difference" persists.

As a result, state and federal agencies fund a considerable number of special programs in an attempt to solve the illiteracy problem. Some of these include remedial
reading programs and special education classes of students identified as learning disabled. This paper will limit the discussion to illiterate high school students who have been identified as learning disabled.

By definition, students identified as learning disabled have a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language. This disorder can result in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, or spell. Although the criteria for identification of students as learning disabled varies from state to state, the procedure most commonly involves the determination of an average to above-average intelligence and a marked discrepancy between this potential level and current achievement. Inherent, then, is the capacity for learning.

Although an innate ability for learning exists, many students identified as learning disabled are emerging from our high schools everyday unable to read and write. Why is this occurring? According to Harste and Stephens (1986), specific skills and subskills are often the focus of literacy programs in special education. Additionally, they state that "... because these students have already "failed" and are expected to continue to do so, special education teachers are relatively freer than other teachers to experiment with various instructional approaches." (Harste & Stephens, 1986, p. 128). This type of experimentation and specific skills/subskills instruction gives the impression that the programs are ever-changing and inconsistent. The use of a variety of approaches also seems to give one the idea that there is a lack of understanding of reading theory and the reading
process. Without a sound knowledge of reading theory and the reading process, the use of a variety of approaches is haphazard.

Goodman and Burke (1980) describe reading as a problem-solving process. Both the reader and author bring to the printed page their own semantic, syntactic, and graphophonic cues to build meaning. The reader tries to discover what the author means while utilizing his/her experiential knowledge. This process can never be exact because of the obvious differences in the language, thoughts, and meanings of an author, and those of the reader. Although this reading process is not precise, without meaning, reading cannot occur.

If success is to be evident and failure reduced, special education must cease using what Lipson (1986) calls the mechanical approach. This approach teaches reading solely through numerous detached drills. Students who learn this way miss a great deal of reading for understanding ideas and concepts. By the time students reach high school, they have probably not experienced much success with the mechanical approach to reading. Since they have not been provided with the reading skills needed for adequate understanding of concepts and the writing skills necessary for the production of ideas, they continue to face failure and in many instances give up by dropping out of school.

The language experience approach (LEA), on the other hand, is sufficiently flexible to provide for both mechanical detached learning of skills and the top-down reading process of gaining meaning from the printed text. The rationale for the use of this approach according to Cheek and Cheek (1984)
is that by using the student's own oral language as dictated, reading can be a successful experience. Moreover, Burmeister (1983) states that "The Language Experience Approach stresses the development and unity of all the communication skills--listening, speaking, reading, and writing...It makes reading personal and concept-driven" (p. 522).

It seems that the growing number of illiterate Americans are products of hit or miss instruction in special education classrooms. Rather than haphazard instruction, the LEA seems to possess a theoretical foundation which is comprehensive in nature. According to Burmeister (1983), it provides for a means of acquiring sight vocabulary, basic recoding skills, use of syntactic cues, and semantic cues as well as an understanding of an author's position and fallibility. A discussion of the LEA's procedures for implementation will be included in this paper as well as a study of its applicable use with functionally illiterate high school students.

Many textbooks dealing with methods of teaching reading to secondary school students discuss the use and value of the LEA but do not provide evidence of its success. The same holds true throughout a review of the literature. But one fact remains evident, if a student's language is being utilized and that language is viewed as acceptable, the results should be an improved student attitude, improved reading, and improved writing.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to determine the effectiveness of the language experience approach for teaching reading and
writing skills to functionally illiterate high school students who have been identified as learning disabled.
Definition of Terms

Functional illiteracy - inability to read and write well enough to qualify for employment.

Marginal illiteracy - limited ability to read and write but this ability is not sufficiently developed to qualify for employment.

Language experience approach - a method of reading instruction which facilitates the student's oral language to develop materials for acquiring reading skills.

Detached skill instruction - a method of instruction in which subskills within a particular skill area are taught in isolation of each other.
Chapter II: Review of the Literature

Why use language experience?

The Webster New World Dictionary (1974) defines language as any means of communicating, and experience as anything or everything observed or lived through. Therefore, when combined, the approach of language-experience is a method of utilizing listening, speaking, reading, and writing together with life experiences to create material to read. Hall and Allen (cited in Wangberg, 1986) state further that the language experience approach integrates the development of reading and writing skills and allows the learner to use experiences, interests, and thoughts to produce text which will become the basis for further instruction.

The language experience approach, or LEA, has several very pertinent advantages for use with secondary school students. Since the language and experiences of the student are key components, the students come to realize that what they say is important and acceptable. These factors can serve to improve not only the students' reading and writing but also their attitude toward themselves. Additionally, Cheek and Cheek (1984) note an advantage for the development of oral language skills which benefit those from educationally deficient environments. As with any method, a primary concern is maintaining student interest. Using language experience, students are not forced to confront textbook language and author's experiences for which they have no foundation to understand. Instead, the interest level of the student is maintained because the content of the material is their own. A final and possibly most noteworthy advantage
of the LEA for students identified as learning disabled is its coordination of the learning modalities; auditory in dictating the story, visual in seeing the words, and kinesthetic in copying or writing the story.

The LEA has had limited use as a tool for teaching students to read due to some common misconceptions. Krening (1983) focuses on six of the most prevalent misconceptions and exposes them to the facts of research and practical experience. Her results include the following: (1) The LEA does teach basic communication skills as well as the mechanics of communication; (2) it forces the teacher to organize and structure, to think about what he or she is doing and why he or she is doing it; (3) language experience stimulates a perpetual growth—it is for all ages; (4) the growth of language arts and reading skills are stimulated through purposeful use; (5) it helps create independent, autonomous readers because students learn how to master reading as a process; and (6) it is not a method of teaching limited to experienced teachers. Use of language experience then can be a highly rewarding experience for both teacher and student.

Theoretical Foundation of the LEA

According to Smith, Otto, and Hansen (1978), all the current theories of the reading process are nothing more than approximations of a mysterious act that we do not understand. Nevertheless, knowledge of the reading process is an important aspect of teaching. It helps to develop an understanding of what is going on in the mind of a person who is reading and helps to expand an awareness of philosophies that have governed the formation of reading
In reviewing the literature, it seems that the interactive process model of reading provides the theoretical foundation of the language experience approach. This model is best described as a problem-solving process. It consists of a combination of the bottom-up and top-down process models. The bottom-up process is a text-bound, text-driven model in which recoding is an important aspect while the top-down process is a concept-bound, concept-driven model in which comprehension is the key element.

The process begins with the reader’s interaction with the thoughts and language of the author. The reader attempts to understand the author's meaning by using his or her own knowledge of language and experiences as a foundation.

The first strategy employed by the reader is the predicting strategy. During this stage, the reader uses graphophonic, syntactic, and semantic cues to make tentative decisions about what is to come next in the reading.

The second strategy, confirming, occurs as predictions are made. At this point, the reader tests the hypotheses to see if they are meaningful. Goodman and Burke (1980) state that readers ask themselves two questions to test their predictions: Does this sound like language to me? and does this make sense to me? If the reader answers yes, he/she continues to read. If the reader answers no, he/she can choose several options: (1) stop and rethink the problem; (2) reread and attempt to pick up more cues; (3) continue reading to build up additional context; or (4) stop reading because the material is too difficult.

Integrating is the last strategy which allows the reader
to connect the purpose for reading and the relationship of what is being read to his or her view of the world. As a result of the integrating strategy, the reader may choose to accept, deny, or change his or her view.

Rude and Oehlers (1984) state that the LEA is sufficiently flexible to provide for both top-down and bottom-up processing. To help students acquire a sight vocabulary, to teach them to take advantage of context in identifying and remembering words, and to help them develop fluency in reading simple material are three noted objectives of the LEA. All of these objectives require the use of the predicting, confirming, and integrating strategies of the interactive process model of reading.

In the LEA, according to Cohn (1984), language and subject familiarity assists the learner in sampling and drawing upon syntactic and semantic information to better understand what is being read and thereby to predict from the reading matter enough to confirm a guess as to what is coming next. Integrating occurs most naturally because of the reader's participation in development of the text.

In summary, the theoretical basis for the LEA suggests that reading is a constant interaction between the thoughts and language of the author and reader. The LEA is a method of reading instruction which simplifies the process by combining the role of writer and reader into one. As stated by Marino (cited in Vacca, 1980), the reader is freed from the necessity of finding a match between his or her experience and the experience of the author because his or her own language and knowledge of the world has been employed. The resulting materials used to enhance reading instruction
facilitate reading success.
Chapter III: Design of the Study

Purpose

The purpose of this paper was to determine the effectiveness of the language experience approach for teaching reading and writing skills to functionally illiterate high school students who had been identified as learning disabled.

Method

To carry out the purposes of this paper, two types of tests were administered; a norm-referenced test and a criterion-referenced test. A comparison of pre- and posttest scores were made to verify gains.

Subjects

Twenty-one 9th-grade high school students who had been identified as learning disabled by a school psychologist participated. There were seven girls and fourteen boys ages fifteen to sixteen. The study was conducted during a class entitled Learning Strategies, in which improvement of reading and study skills are primary objectives.

Materials

To determine entrance level reading ability of the students, the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (1976), brown level, form A was administered as a pretest. To determine the effects of language experience, the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (1976), brown level, form B was used as a posttest. Both internal consistency reliability and alternate-form reliability coefficients are provided in the manual. The reliability coefficients range from .90 to .97 and from .75 to .89 respectively, depending upon the subtest analyzed. The test is considered to have content validity.
because it is measuring common objectives of reading programs throughout the country.

Writing skills, the second proposed area positively affected by the use of the language experience approach, was pre- and posttested with a criterion-referenced measurement developed by Schumaker and Sheldon (1985). This evaluative tool, the Sentence Writing Strategy Pretest, was developed to provide teachers with an instrument for quantifying students' writing skills in terms of ability to produce simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences. The test was selected for use because three scores could be obtained: the percentage of simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences produced correctly; the percentage of compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences produced correctly; and the percentage of the three complicated types of sentences produced and punctuated correctly.

Procedure

Pretesting. The pretesting of the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test, or SDRT, was done over a three day period with the 21 students to determine which students would be part of the experimental group. The results of the subtests; auditory vocabulary, reading comprehension, and reading rate were analyzed in terms of stanines. Those students whose stanines fell below four were identified as illiterate in reading ability. Although the phonetic and structural analysis subtests were administered, they were not considered in determining whether a student was to be part of the experimental group. Out of ten students in the experimental group, seven had stanines below four. Of those selected
for the control group, four out of eleven students had stanines below four.

The Sentence Writing Strategy Pretest, or SWSP, was administered in one day. The students were provided with a variety of topics and asked to select one which interested them. They were directed to write a minimum of six sentences concerning their topic and to use a variety of sentences including simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex.

The results of the SWSP were used in conjunction with the SDRT to determine literacy. According to Schumaker and Sheldon (1985), students who score the following percentages are considered adequate sentence writers: (1) Complete sentences—simple, compound, complex, compound-complex: 100%; (2) Complicated sentences—compound, complex, compound-complex: 50%; and (3) complicated sentences punctuated correctly: 66%. Those students who scored below 70% in area one, were identified as possible candidates for the experimental group.

Statistics. Although a variety of statistics are generated from administration of the SDRT, stanines and percentile ranks were used for comparative purposes of this study. Stanines are derived scores which facilitate grouping of students in terms of above-average (stanines 7, 8, 9), average (stanines 4, 5, 6), and below-average (stanines 1, 2, 3). Percentile ranks give a student's relative position and provides for both intra- and interindividual comparisons. In other words, each subtest can be compared with other 9th-graders and the scores in each subtest can be compared with each other.
The Experimental and Control Group. The control group continued development of reading and writing skills through use of the Reader's Digest Educational Division—Reader's Workshop I (1974). A minimum of two skill cards in areas of dictionary usage, definitions, main idea, recall, sentence analysis, writer's purpose, sequence, and other reading skills were completed daily. The cards were graded according to percentage correct and feedback was provided concerning areas of weaknesses.

The experimental group received instruction using the language experience approach as described in the next section. A minimum of 40 minutes was devoted to this approach daily. The students were not required to work in the Reader's Digest Workshop I or on any other extraneous reading activities.

The Language Experience Approach. The language experience approach, or LEA, can be done either individually or in a group situation, but the objective of this paper was to demonstrate the procedure to be used in group instruction. More specifically, the procedure described here has been designed for use with a group of high school students identified as learning disabled.

Initially, it is beneficial for the teacher to conduct an interest inventory through group discussion to determine common interests among the group. Once this has been completed, the teacher initiates the procedure by providing stimulus for the students. The stimulus can be a list of topics, a picture, a series of pictures, or a magazine or newspaper article (read to the group by the teacher) relating to an area of interest. Students are then asked
to give their comments. As each student speaks, the teacher selects key words and writes these on the board. After opportunity has been given for each student to contribute to the discussion, the key words are reviewed. If any student suggests additional key words that are pertinent, they are added.

Next, the students are asked to think about a story they would like to write which would be related to the stimulus and key words. To facilitate the recording of ideas in a logical sequence, the students work on developing an outline. The outline may take on any form. The standard form uses Roman numerals, capital letters, and arabic numerals in which each are indented respectively. An organizational sheet may have a list of question words for which the details of the story will provide the answers. Or the teacher may decide to map out a series of boxes so that the students can sequentially order events which they envision will occur in their story. Learning to condense thoughts into a few words will help students identify phrases around which to build sentences.

When the students, individually, have completed their outline or organizational sheet, they read the product to themselves and then aloud to the teacher. At this point, the student and teacher discuss the information; any hazy areas are refined and any that need additional information are expanded. Spelling is also corrected.

The students are now prepared to write a first draft of their individual stories. When this draft is completed, the student first reads it silently, then aloud to the teacher and if the student wishes, he or she may read the story
to another student. At any time during these readings, the student may elect to make changes but the teacher should not stifle attempts at written language by controlling vocabulary, sentence length, dialectal or syntactical language. It is deemed necessary though, to correct spelling.

When the student is satisfied with the first draft, the final copy is rewritten. Again, the student checks the copy first by silent reading, then an oral reading to the teacher. The students' stories are now ready for "publication". The final drafts are reproduced for use as class reading activities.

Once this initial activity has been completed by at least two students, the structure of the class may appear chaotic but it is in fact at this point that the class becomes involved in shared learning. As published copies become available, each student selects a story written by one of their classmates or themselves. They read the story silently and then seek out the author. The author reads the story aloud to the student. The student offers comments to the author and changes are made if needed.

The student is now prepared to create a word bank. The student rereads the story and notes any words which have caused difficulty. On one side of a 3" x 5" index card, the student writes the word and author of the story. On the other side, the student copies the sentence in which the word is used. This is required so that the student will have context clues available for future reference. All word cards are alphabetized and maintained for use in later stories.
The student now places the story in his or her folder and obtains a cloze activity from the teacher. When completed, the cloze activity is self-corrected, students add any words that were particularly difficult to their word bank, and seek any needed assistance.

The teacher now listens to the student read the story aloud and asks several comprehension questions. If the teacher determines that the student has made sufficient progress, the student may select another story and repeat the process. If the student needs additional help with the story, the teacher applies one or several of the following options: (1) ask the author to read the story on tape so that the student may reread and listen to the story; (2) supply a sentence by sentence copy of the story in which key words are omitted that the student must find in the story and complete; (3) supply written comprehension questions so the student may use context clues for understanding; or (4) provide strategies and activities for decoding hard-to-read words.

When students' interests begin to wane with this first story, the teacher may decide to cease activities with this story and start new "publications". A new stimulus is provided and the process continues. A word bank is now available to select words for new stories.

Throughout the discussions, completion of outlines, and story writings, students can and should be encouraged to assist each other. This often provides a supportive atmosphere for the group.

The results of a stimulus discussion does not always need to be a story. The teacher may elect to guide the
students in one of many directions to expand the writing experiences. Mallett (cited in Vacca, 1980) mentions these activities for intermediate and junior high school students: (1) writing and producing a play; (2) creating a radio program; (3) make a class newspaper; (4) writing a letter to the editor; (5) writing captions for pictures; (6) evaluating advertisements; (7) making up advertisements; (8) writing a horoscope; (9) writing an "Ann Landers" column; (10) making up a petition; (11) writing a diary; or (12) creating a map "of your life".

The group oriented procedure of the LEA allows the students to learn, read, and write about areas of mutual interest without confinement to specific books or worksheets. Acknowledgement for ideas in the procedure presented go to Russell G. Stauffer (1970), Regina L. Cohn (1981), and John T. Becker (1972).
Chapter IV: Results

Purpose

The purpose of this paper was to determine the effectiveness of the language experience approach for teaching reading and writing skills to functionally illiterate high school students who were identified as learning disabled.

Subjects

Twenty-one 9th-grade high school students who had been identified as learning disabled by a school psychologist participated. Seven girls and fourteen boys ages fifteen to sixteen were involved in the study that was conducted from March 1987 to June 1987 during a class entitled Learning Strategies, in which improvement of reading and writing skills are primary objectives.

Materials

The Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (1976), or SDRT, brown level, form A was administered as a pretest to determine entrance level reading ability. To posttest and to judge the effectiveness of language experience, the SDRT, brown level, form B was administered. The SDRT provided scores in five reading skill areas.

Concurrently, the criterion-referenced measurement, the Sentence Writing Strategy Pretest (1985), or SWSP, was used as a pre- and posttest to quantify students' writing skills. The writing skills were measured in terms of ability to produce simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences.

Results

A comparison of the pre- and posttest scores of the
SDRT was done by averaging the stanines of the control and experimental groups respectively. The resulting stanines, which are derived scores that facilitate grouping in terms of above-average (stanines 7, 8, 9), average (stanines 4, 5, 6), and below-average (stanines 1, 2, 3), are provided in Table 1.

Data resulting from the administration of the SWSP is shown in Table 2. The SWSP generated three percentage scores for each student. The average of these percentages for the control and experimental groups respectively are given.

Table 1
Mean Stanines of SDRT Subtests for Brown Level, Form A and B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Control Group</th>
<th></th>
<th>Experimental Group</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Form A</td>
<td>Form B</td>
<td>Form A</td>
<td>Form B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3/87</td>
<td>6/87</td>
<td>3/87</td>
<td>6/87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonetic Analysis</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural Analysis</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auditory Vocabulary</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Comprehension</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Rate</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2
Average Percentages of the SWSP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Control Group</th>
<th>Experimental Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td>Posttest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3/87</td>
<td>6/87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3/87</td>
<td>6/87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Simple, compound,</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>complex, &amp; compound-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>complex sentences</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Compound, complex,</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&amp; compound-complex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sentences</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Compound, complex,</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&amp; compound-complex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sentences punctuated</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>correctly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

An analysis of the mean stanines of the SDRT indicate no significant improvement or loss for either group during the three month period that the study was conducted. The subtests show that the groups each maintained an average or below-average status respectively.

Conversely, average percentages of the SWSP show significant gains in the sentence writing ability of the experimental group. In area one, this group gained 29 percentage points as opposed to a gain of 11 percentage points for the control group. In area two, the gain was 6 opposed to 3 and in area three the average stayed the same for the experimental group while it dropped 8
percentage points for the control group.

In summary, the implementation of the language experience approach produced no significant gains or losses in reading ability but did result in substantial improvement of writing ability for the experimental group. The control group, on the other hand, who were provided instruction through the use of a commercial reading kit, maintained average reading ability but demonstrated a significant loss in writing skills.
Chapter V: Conclusions and Recommendations

It is evident that the use of the language experience approach, or LEA, can be successful for teaching reading and writing skills to functionally illiterate high school students who have been identified as learning disabled. Rather than detached skill instruction such as that provided by the Reader's Workshop I, the LEA integrates skills such as the use of syntactic cues, basic recoding, acquisition of sight vocabulary, capitalization, punctuation, and the importance of semantics when writing. Beyond this integration of skills, the LEA is most effective in contributing to a positive self-esteem and cooperative environment in which students rely on and enjoy working with each other.

Several factors can be attributed to the fact that the mean stanine averages on the SDRT posttest showed no significant gains or losses for the experimental group. First, instruction was interrupted twice during the three month period of implementation; one week for spring vacation and one week for county-wide standardized testing. These factors disturbed the flow and structure of instruction which had to be revived each time. If the instruction period had been six months to a year, these interruptions would probably not have effected the momentum. Second, the students were not exposed to a variety of specific reading skill activities due to the time element. Most often, comprehension skills were covered through the use of the cloze procedure and questioning activities but time did not allow for other skill areas to be sufficiently developed. The third and final factor can be associated
with a characteristic of the SDRT; the fill-in-the-bubble
type answer sheet. It has been observed that, typically,
learning disabled students dislike this format because
it requires additional concentration that distracts from
the test items.

Although the control group demonstrated some minor
improvements in several subtests of the SDRT, none were
significant. Moreover, the SWSP showed a marked reduction
in sentence writing ability for this group. Consequently,
the use of the Reader's Workshop I proved to be an
ineffective tool for teaching reading and writing skills.

The LEA, on the other hand, proved to be successful
in improving the sentence writing ability of the
experimental group. The average percentage of complete
simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences
increased from 42% to 71% while it decreased from 64% to
53% for the control group.

Moreover, the students involved with language
experience developed a cooperative atmosphere. They
monitored each other's writing before presenting it to
the teacher. This joint effort resulted in not only better
written material, but a mutual understanding of individual
differences and a sensitivity toward peers. The students
rarely insulted another's work and more often than not
provided constructive criticism that was readily accepted.

For future use of the LEA with high school students
identified as learning disabled, the following
recommendations should be considered: (1) time, (2) the
generation of a variety of reading skill activities, (3) an
audience for the students' written materials, and (4) the
use of computer software designed to generate the written
text and reading skill activities so that the teacher has
more time for individual instruction.

It is suggested that at least one year be devoted to
instruction using the LEA in order for its benefits to be
fully realized. This minimum is proposed so that the
students have ample time to increase their reading skills
and thereby become confident enough to expand their
writing by creating texts for audiences other than
classroom peers. For example, the students might
contribute to the school newspaper, or write stories or
plays that could be presented to elementary school
children. The possibilities are infinite.

The final recommendation involves the purchase of
computer software which has a word processor and is capable
of generating word lists and reading skill activities for
individual students. Such software is available through
The Graduate School, University of New Orleans, AD 205,
New Orleans, Louisiana, 70148. It is titled, LEAP I.
Used efficiently, computer software can free the teacher
to use valuable student time more effectively.
References


