

ORAL VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT IN OPEN
VERSUS SELF-CONTAINED STRUCTURE
IN FIRST GRADE

A THESIS

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PEGGY PARKER HAMMER

DENTON, TEXAS

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The Graduate School
Texas Woman's University

Denton, Texas

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We hereby recommend that the Thesis prepared under
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Committee:

Dissertation/Theses signature page is here.

To protect individuals we have covered their signatures.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of Problem

There is an ever increasing need for urban educators to employ a practicable organization of curriculum, especially in the area of oral vocabulary development. It has been suggested that the organization of the traditional elementary classroom is antithetical to the development of creative abilities and that alternative or open approaches actively promote creativity (Gaitte, 1975). In addition, research indicates that the child's ability to control language could determine his success in school and his ability to function later as a productive member of his changing society. Hence, the ability to communicate is essential for everyone (T.E.A., 1970). Further, the philosophy of the open classrooms, to provide a variety of rich experiences for the growth of personal, idiosyncratic knowledge, can now be supported by research (Sanders, 1975).

The Houghton Mifflin Readers present a developmental reading program. It works constantly toward two major goals: the development of an ever-increasing control

of those specific skills that will enable the child to read well independently, and the development of an enthusiastic and ever-broadening interest in reading. These goals are not thought of as long-range goals that children do not reach until they have completed the work of the elementary school. They are goals that children reach at increasingly mature levels as they progress through the program. To read, a pupil must be able to convert printed language into the oral language for which it stands.

The purpose of this study was to assess the oral vocabulary gains made by first grade children in an open area classroom involved in the Houghton Mifflin Beginning Reading Program and to compare them to the oral vocabulary gains made by first grade children in a self-contained classroom involved in the Houghton Mifflin Beginning Reading Program.

Null Hypothesis

In formulating a construct of this study the basic hypotheses are as follows:

1. There will be no significant difference in oral vocabulary development between first grade students in an open area classroom and those in a self-contained

classroom using the Houghton-Mifflin Reading Program with respect to achievement level as measured by the Metropolitan Readiness Test at the .05 level.

2. There will be no significant difference in oral vocabulary development between first grade students in an open area classroom and those in a self-contained, first grade classroom using the Houghton Mifflin Reading Program with respect to verbal intelligence as measured by the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test at the .05 level.

Limitations

1. The duration of the study was limited to the school year 1974-75.
2. The study was limited to six and seven-year olds.
3. Children with speech impairment and hearing deficiencies were not included.

Background and Significance of the Study

Some studies and authorities have pointed out that they are not completely satisfied with the self-contained classroom organization. According to Rogers (1975) there is a hidden environmental curriculum in every school. That is the school itself. The halls, classrooms, cafeteria, playground, and office speak louder than the educator's exhortations. He further states that the school should move away from its traditional, institutional form into

something far more flexible and responsive to both the needs of children and the needs of society as a whole.

Since the importance of organizational methods that are responsive to the needs of children have been recognized, increased efforts need to be directed toward identification of means for improving the oral vocabulary of students.

Reading specialists are responsive to the needs of children as they continue to recognize the relevance of the development of the child's language skills for reading success. The child cannot really learn to read, in the sense that reading is thinking with words, unless his own oral language skills are well developed. In other words, unless he can first use his oral vocabulary in a meaningful way, he cannot really read with understanding (Spache, 1972).

Research substantiates the fact that a child must be able to communicate orally if he is to learn to read, and must have a good self-concept if he is to succeed. Many first grade children come from environments that do not provide adequate prereading experiences or satisfactory oral vocabularies (Fallon, 1973).

Dittmann feels that in order to build self-concept in the student, the teacher must act on the assumption that the most effective learning is that which proceeds

on the basis of the child's own motivation (Dittmann, 1975). That is, if a child hears another teacher explaining something of interest to another group he usually listens while doing his assigned work. As he reaches his attention span, his thoughts drift. By having other instructional voices in the same area and active class participation, the student will have an opportunity to be self-motivated. It is an area of interest to him, and he will listen as well as comprehend the instructional stimuli.

This study becomes particularly significant in view of Dittmann's regard for the importance of self-motivation which is the most effective determinant in any learning situation (Dittmann, 1975).

Thus, the purpose of this study was to assess the oral vocabulary gains made by first grade children in an open area classroom involved in the Houghton Mifflin Beginning Reading Program and to compare them to the oral vocabulary gains made by first grade children in a self-contained classroom involved in the Houghton Mifflin Beginning Reading Program.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Tyler (1971) states that organization is seen as an important problem in curriculum development because it influences the efficiency of instruction and the degree to which educational changes are brought about in the learners. Educational achievement, according to the Texas Education Agency, Bulletin 696 (1970), is contingent upon a child's awareness and successful communication within his expanding and changing environment. The child who has been deprived of oral language and cultural contacts is at a distinct disadvantage.

A child's role in society depends on the knowledge, understanding, and skill which he has acquired through his personal use of oral language (Keith, 1968). John Locke's theory was that understanding is derived from one's own experience with the external and social world. That is, through listening and speaking the child learns to understand. Today, according to leaders in Project Follow Through, a child learns through the efforts of many people in the home, the classroom, and the community (Hess, 1972).

Education, like any systematic endeavor, needs an overall strategy, a collection of systematically related concepts which accounts for its endeavors. According to Keith, after several years of experimentation with differing varieties of team teaching, the nongraded school, and teaching machines in the elementary schools are testimonies to the fact that many educators are not completely satisfied with the self-contained classroom organization (Keith, 1968).

Utilizing many strategies, educators are placing great emphasis on the teaching of oral language skills and skills of listening. Thus, on language, more than almost anything else, depends not only acquisition of knowledge and skills, but also one's role in society (Keith 1968).

The oral vocabulary development of the young child is very crucial to later development of the young child. However, experts do not agree on the method of school organization which is best for developing the language of the young child (Katz, 1973). Dunn (1974) comments that few people learn in exactly the same way, just as few people think exactly alike. Experts suggest that it is wise to diagnose how each student tends to learn and then to assign him to a teacher whose teaching style complements his learning style. That is, before a student

is assigned to an instructional program, his learning style profile should be matched with the program's characteristics, and an effort should be made to match the student to the appropriate type of learning environment.

A home or school environment which is conducive to verbalizing and socializing aids in the development of a positive self-image with regard to learning and promotes intellectual growth. When the parent's or teacher's expectations are high, the child will grow in his responsive learning environment (Bergman, 1968; Rosenthal, 1968).

A good learning environment contributes to vocabulary development in many ways. Dorothy Adkins (1972) reported positive results when students actively moved toward goals, enjoyed school, saw themselves as learners, and set their own goals. To provide a learning environment which permits varied types of experiences is to advance the functional use of language and the thinking process through the child's own activities and play (Biber, 1971).

Educators and parents who work with children are becoming more aware of the many uses of oral vocabulary as outlets for emotional tension, as avenues for creative expression, and as instruments for social adjustment.

That is, the way in which the child uses his vocabulary is an index of personal experience (Boyd, 1970). Robert Owen, a Welsh socialist, was of the opinion that character is determined by one's environment (Hess, 1972). If a child lives in an environment where he has good experiences, he can become less fearful and more open. Confidence can be built by the quality of his experiences with others in his environment (Mills, 1972).

Dillon and Franks (1975) state that in an open environment freedom-within-limits is designed to provide for students many and varied experiences relating to personal ability and interests and, thus, enables students to internalize a sense of mastery, confidence, and competence. They state further that even though learning may be task and skill oriented, as long as it is self-determined, students can be aware of themselves accomplishing their own goals and mastering their own activities.

Kohl (1972) states that there is no single model open classroom, but that there are as many variations as there are combinations of students and teachers. One of the major objections to open class, according to Keith (1968) was the noise factor. However, Weber (1971) states that teachers and children did seem to be able to concentrate and to pitch their talk so as to hear each other.

Perley and Martin (1975) have ask what should happen in school and how the school environment can be planned so that the desired behaviors will be encouraged? Since it is hard to measure the effect of the physical instructional environment, we tend to discount it.

Sobel (1975) stated that 70 per cent of all school districts in North Dakota are involved in open classroom programs and about one fourth of all teachers may be considered "open". He stated that if open education is a fad, then the U.S. Office of Education, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the Ford and Carnegie Foundations, colleges, school systems, administrators, teachers, and parents have all been badly duped and this does not seem likely. Sobel believes open education is not a fad and is here to stay.

Sanders and Wren (1975) are convinced that open space schools are effective. They referred to six studies that had been conducted by graduate students and faculty members at the University of Houston which directly attacked the question of cognitive achievement by comparing academic achievement of students in open classrooms with that of students in conventional classrooms. The evidence of these studies indicated that the claimed advantages of open schools over traditional self-contained classrooms can be supported by empirical evidence and that the

recommendations of educators and architects favoring the open-school trend were justified. In other words, we must have an open mind about open classrooms and their contributions to learning and motivational attributes.

This is not a fully carried out comprehensive survey of all the literature available which is pertinent to this particular study. It is, however, representative of the thinking by persons well-versed in the field of open education and oral vocabulary development.

In summary, research suggests that it is profitable to utilize a variety of teaching methods and child-oriented materials in an effort to improve his oral vocabulary. Research also points to the need for a relevant curriculum which would be effective in the oral vocabulary development involving the home, the classroom, and the community.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Subjects

The subjects in the control and experimental heterogeneous groups of this study were two intact groups from the Garland Independent School District. Thus, no assumption of equivalency was made prior to the experiment. It was necessary to test for significance of difference between the group means on the pretest.

The subjects taking part in the experimental group and control group were from a ninety per cent Caucasian and ten per cent Mexican-American population. A small percentage were from the low socio-economic class, a large percentage from the middle class, and a small percentage from the upper socio-economic class.

The experimental group was conducted in an open area classroom involving thirty-one first grade students, ranging in ages 6.0 through 7.0, at the Club Hill Elementary School.

The self-contained control group, consisting of twenty-five first grade students, ranging in ages 6.0 through 7.0, were chosen from a neighboring reference

population at the Centerville Elementary School. Both elementary schools have grade levels kindergarten through sixth grade.

This study was begun in September of 1974 and continued through March, 1975. Both groups were given pretests in September and posttests in March. During the interim both groups utilized the Houghton Mifflin Beginning Reading Program. This program includes: Getting Ready To Read; Tigers; Lions; Dinosaurs; Rainbows, and Signposts. Each book, after Getting Ready To Read, is reinforced with work books and duplicated work sheets if this is needed by the student.

The Getting Ready To Read book includes pre-reading exercises that fall under the following headings:

1. Using Spoken Context
2. Distinguishing Letter Forms
3. Listening for Beginning Sounds in Words
4. Making Letter-Sound Associations
5. Using Spoken Context and Letter-Sound Associations
6. Using Spoken Context and the First Letter of a printed Word
7. Matching End Sounds and Letter Forms
8. High-Frequency Words

The children were grouped for instruction for the following purposes:

1. To fit instruction to the various levels of development reached by pupils
2. To fit instruction to variations in speed of learning among pupils
3. To meet special needs and problems of different pupils
4. To supervise more closely the marking of pages in their books
5. To help pupils correct their own mistakes

Several other materials have been prepared to go along with presenting Getting Ready to Read that are useful adjuncts to meet special needs. They are:

Story Boards - a unique set of generalized, abstract, impressionistic pictures that act as powerful stimuli for even the most reticent children to express themselves orally.

Letter Form Board - is a self-standing unit of plastic panels that contain recessed letter shapes into each of which pupils can place either one or two plastic letters made to fit that space.

Letto Game - consists of ten different bingo-type cards available to help pupils in Level 2 develop, in a fun situation, accurate recognition of all the letters by name.

Word Cover - is another bingo-type game of value in

developing instant and accurate recognition of the fifteen high-frequency words.

Letter Cards - a set of 60 letter cards is available for use in numerous pre-reading activities.

Plastic Objects and Boxes - three different sets of model objects and folding boxes with objects pictured on them are available to give pupils a chance to handle things whose names begin with one or another of the sounds that the different consonants represent.

Picture and Key Cards - a set of picture and key cards is available that contains four-color pictures and special key cards in which a letter is superimposed on the pertinent picture.

Animated Key Cards - these present the key pictures in a form in which the pictured object can be made to move in and out of view through a ribbed plastic window, while the superimposed letter remains constantly in view.

Learning Letter Sounds Filmstrips - this is a set of twenty-two filmstrips that can help you give special assistance to pupils who continue to have trouble with one or more of the lettersound associations for the consonants.

GetSet Games - available also is a set of eight different games which may be bought individually or as a set. These games are designed to provide enjoyable, independent practice of pre-reading and decoding skills.

Learning Letter Sounds Workbook - this is a consumable practice book that will provide additional exercises on the consonant-sound associations for those pupils who need it.

Listening-Lab Lessons - Listening and Learning, Listen and Do - Consonants, and Listen and Do - Vowels are three listening-station programs that provide additional instruction and practice.

The major behavioral objectives for Tigers, Lions, Dinosaurs, Rainbows and Signposts are as follows:

1. In order to demonstrate his ability, when reading silently, to convert printed language into the oral language it represents, the pupil reads aloud material of an appropriate difficulty level with acceptable pronunciations and expression and with a reasonable fluency.
2. The pupil correctly answers questions on material he has read at an appropriate difficulty level - questions that test not only his literal comprehension but also his ability to go beyond what has actually been stated in the text.
3. The pupil demonstrates good study procedures by making efficient use of reference aids such as indexes, dictionaries, encyclopedias, card catalogs, maps, tables, and graphs in locating needed information; appraising the

relevance and reliability of such information; and organizing such information in outline form.

The last objective is more for the higher levels than for the lower levels.

The Houghton Mifflin Reading Program is extremely beneficial to this study because it encourages oral language development. Especially is this true of the section entitled "Enriching Language Experiences." This section helps to build the child's general facility with language in both its oral and written forms. The activities suggested are confined to those in which pupils use oral language.

Procedures For Collecting and Treating Data

The Metropolitan Readiness Test to measure oral vocabulary comprehension was chosen because it purports to predict whether a pupil is likely to benefit from a certain kind of training or teaching. It was a good instrument for measuring the passive or recognition vocabulary which is dependent on the student's comprehension of oral vocabulary. The Metropolitan Readiness Test was used in both pretesting and posttesting.

The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test was chosen because it measures hearing vocabulary and taps the subject's comprehension of the spoken word. Peabody's Picture Vocabulary Test attempts to provide a very useful prediction of school success, especially in the areas

which call more heavily on verbal intelligence. The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test was used in both pretesting and posttesting.

Fisher's t-test was used to determine the significance of the differences found between the means of the control and experimental groups.

Teacher Qualifications

The teachers of the experimental and control groups were certified by the State of Texas. Each had four years of teaching experience in the Garland Independent School District. The teacher of the experimental group also had a Kindergarten Endorsement. The teacher of the control group had a Master of Education degree in Elementary Education.

Teaching Methods

Both teachers utilized the adopted curriculum for first grade students in the Garland Independent School District. The adopted curriculum included Getting Ready to Read, Tigers, Lions, Dinosaurs, Rainbows, and Signposts, all published by Houghton Mifflin. Other adopted curriculum, which was not dealt with in this study, includes: social studies, People At Home (Laidlow); handwriting, Better Hand Writing For You (Noble and Noble); math, Elementary

School Mathematics, Book One (Addison-Wesley) and Exploring Elementary Mathematics, Book One (Holt, Rinehart and Winston); and, science, Today's Basic Science I (Harper and Row) and The Scientist Observes (Harper and Row).

The teacher of the control group was working in a self-contained room, whereas the teacher of the experimental group was working with her own students in an open area. This open area space was shared by one other first grade class and one second grade class. There were no walls to divide the classes, but waist high book shelves blocked off each designated class space. Both teachers used a positive approach during the study, and tried to convey the belief that each child could achieve.

The teachers, first grade self-contained and first grade open area, worked to improve each child's oral, listening, and speaking vocabulary. They also spent approximately the same amount of time with their respective classes presenting the materials and curriculum of the Garland Independent School District.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to assess the oral vocabulary gains made by the students in an open area class and to compare them with the vocabulary gains made by students in a self-contained classroom.

Metropolitan Readiness Test

Children in both the open area and self-contained classrooms were pre-tested and posttested with the Metropolitan Readiness Test to determine their oral vocabulary achievement. The results are tabulated in Table I.

An analysis of scores in Table I indicates that there was a significant difference between the mean pre-test score of 79.12 for the control group and the mean posttest score of 83.96 for this group. There was also a significant difference between the mean pretest score of 77.19 and the mean posttest score of 92.65 for the experimental group. Thus, both groups made significant gains during the year.

TABLE I
METROPOLITAN READINESS TEST

Group	Pretest		Posttest		t-value for Related Measures
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
Control n=25	79.12	8.91	83.96	5.67	6.79*
Experimental n=31	77.19	9.61	92.65	7.41	6.72*
t-value for unrelated	1.34*		8.36		

*Significant at .01 level

The Metropolitan Readiness Test purports to predict whether a pupil is likely to benefit from a certain kind of training or teaching and included a portion on comprehension and oral language and a section on verbal concepts. It was a good instrument for measuring the passive or recognitory vocabulary which is dependent on the student's comprehension of oral vocabulary. Both classes made gains from pretest to posttest on this general test of achievement. Thus, it can be assumed that both classes had a good overall learning situation.

Table I also shows a difference between the mean pretest scores for the two groups. The control group mean score was higher than the experimental group mean score at the beginning of the treatment period. A significant difference between the posttest mean score of the two groups was found at the end of the treatment period, indicating that the experimental group increased their abilities more than did the control group.

Therefore, the hypothesis, which states that there will be no significant difference between open area and self-contained classes using the Garland Independent School District's adopted Basal Readers curriculum with respect to achievement level as measured by the Metropolitan Readiness Test, was rejected.

It is possible that the audible instructions and class participation from the other classes in the open area may have contributed to the significant differences found between the experimental and control groups.

Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test

Children in both the open area and self-contained group were pretested and posttested with the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test. The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test was chosen because it measures hearing vocabulary

and taps the subject's comprehension of the spoken word. The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test attempts to provide a very useful prediction of school success, especially in the areas which call more heavily on verbal intelligence. The results are tabulated in Table II.

Table II reveals a significant difference between the mean pretest score of 69.77 and the mean posttest score of 72.58 for the control group. The difference between the mean pretest score of 66.13 and the mean posttest score of 70.81 for the experimental is also significant. As measured by these scores, both groups made gains during the year. However, gains made by the open area class were slightly greater than those made by the self-contained class. The self-contained class group made a gain of three points on their mean raw score while the open area group made a gain of four points on their mean raw score.

An examination of Table II indicates a difference between the mean pretest scores of the two groups. The mean group score of 69.77 for the control group was higher than the mean group score of 66.13 for the experimental group. After the treatment, the mean posttest scores were 72.58 for the control group and 70.81 for the experimental group. This difference was not significant,

however, the experimental open area group did make slightly greater gains during the year than did the control group.

TABLE II
PEABODY PICTURE VOCABULARY TEST

Group	Pretest		Posttest		t-values for Related Measures
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
Control n=25	69.77	6.52	72.58	6.29	13.38*
Experimental n=31	66.13	8.85	70.81	7.13	10.15*
t-value for Unrelated Measures	3.64*		2.10		

*Significant at the .05 level

Since the gain of the experimental group was slightly greater than the gain made by the control group, the hypothesis that there will be no significant difference between open area and self-contained groups, using the Garland Independent School District's adopted Basal Readers curriculum with respect to verbal intelligence as measured by the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, was retained.

Based on the results of this study, with the limitations inherent, the open area classroom situation appears at least as appropriate as self-contained areas for oral vocabulary development. Further study is indicated.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

In summary, the purpose of this study was to assess the oral vocabulary gains made by first grade children in an open area classroom and to compare them with the oral vocabulary gains made by first grade children in a self-contained classroom using the Houghton Mifflin program in both classes. During the year of the study, gains made by the experimental group were greater than those made by the control group on both measures. This indicates that the open area situation was more beneficial for developing oral vocabulary in first grade students in this particular study.

In this study the findings show that the experimental group, using open area organization, is likely to result in students being self motivated. Other evidence of the superiority of the experimental group was observed by the researcher. The experimental group appeared to be more autonomous than those of the control group.

The findings of this study also substantiate Rogers' (1975) views that there is a hidden environmental curriculum in every school.

The author agrees with Dittman (1975) in that the child learns most effectively if the child is interested in what is going on. That is, the most productive learning proceeds on the basis of the child's own motivational needs.

The findings of this study also substantiate the article written by Sanders and Wren (1975) entitled, "Open Space Schools Are Effective." Hence, it does look as if open education is not a fad and is here to stay.

Also, the author agrees with Spache (1972) in that the child cannot really learn to read in the sense that reading is thinking with words, unless his own oral language skills are well developed. That is, unless a child can first use his oral vocabulary in a meaningful way he cannot really read with understanding.

Recommendations

Based upon the findings, observations, and subsequent conclusions of this study, the researcher would like to submit the following recommendations:

1. It is recommended that Garland utilize more open area classes and compare the vocabulary gains of these classes with the gains made by self-contained classes using other beginning reading programs.

2. This study should be replicated as nearly as possible in its present design in order to strengthen

the theory which is presented by the research hypothesis.

3. This study should be repeated using representative samples from the second or third grades in order to determine if the open area classroom is equally effective at other grade levels.

4. A similar study should be conducted using representative samples from other socio-economic groups in order to determine if the open area classroom organization is equally effective with these other groups.

5. This study should be extended to see if significant differences occur in science, social studies, and math skills due to the open area teaching method.

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