

A LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE
APPROACH TO REMEDIAL
READING IN THE PRIMARY
GRADES

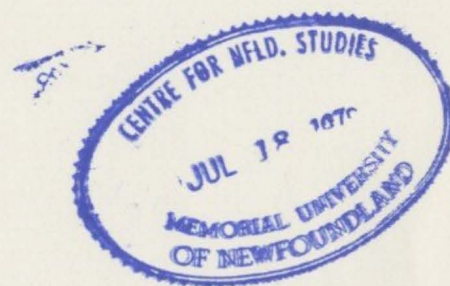
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A LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE APPROACH
TO REMEDIAL READING IN
THE PRIMARY GRADES

An Internship Report
Presented to
the Faculty of Education
Memorial University of Newfoundland

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Education

by
Charlene Follett Sheppard

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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this internship was the implementation of a language experience approach in the remedial situation in an attempt to improve the reading performance of eight primary children who were retarded in their reading performance and apathetic in their attempts at improvement. A related aim was to provide evaluative information concerning the efficacy of the language experience approach as an effective technique to apply in the remediation of reading difficulties.

The subjects of the study were five boys and three girls in grades one to three who attended school in an economically well-developed community on the outskirts of St. John's. They ranged in chronological age from six to almost nine and in mental age from five to nine. They received regular classroom instruction in reading, which was supplemented by remedial help given by the intern. Most of the students were retarded by one year or more in reading achievement and were reluctant to read.

The internship covered a period of approximately twelve weeks. During this time the intern worked with the subjects in carrying out the procedures designed to fulfill the purpose of the study. These procedures included learning about the pupils, selecting instructional materials, and devising teaching procedures. Implementation of the language experience approach in the remedial situation involved stimulating discussions, creating language experience materials, developing word skills, and practising reading.)

The effectiveness of the internship in achieving its purpose was

indicated by desirable changes in the subjects' reading achievement, productivity levels, and attitudes toward reading. The subjects showed gains in reading achievement of 0.7 years in vocabulary and in comprehension which, when compared with gains normally expected during the internship period, were statistically significant. The students increased their productivity levels in reading, spelling, writing, and art activities in both the regular and remedial classrooms. Attitudes toward reading became more positive through increased enjoyment of remedial class activities.

It was concluded that the internship was generally effective in achieving its purpose. The language experience approach was recommended as an effective approach to remedial reading in the primary grades.

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Chapter 1

THE PROBLEM

In Newfoundland schools today, approximately ten to fifteen percent of the students have been placed in remedial classes because they have experienced failure and frustration in learning to read. They have been taught to read through traditional approaches with which, for a variety of reasons, they have been unable to cope. Remediation attempts, however, often have been based on the very type of instruction in which the students have failed. Motivation, success, and changes of attitude, which are of primary importance to remedial readers, have been difficult to achieve in such situations. The repeated failure and frustration of some children have made educators aware of the need for a novel, stimulating approach which would not remind those children of their failure.

This internship deals with the problem of improving the reading performance of some students who were becoming increasingly unsuccessful at learning to read. It explores the application of a language experience approach to the remediation of reading difficulties and attempts to provide some evaluative information concerning the efficacy of this approach in the remedial situation.

NEED FOR THE INTERSHIP

During the past two years, the Department of Education has made provision for the hiring of remedial teachers within school systems.

These teachers have been allocated so that each has worked with a school population of approximately five hundred pupils. Their primary function has been to provide remedial instruction for pupils retarded in their reading performance.

The remedial teacher has been required to screen classes for pupils with reading problems, to diagnose each pupil's strengths and weaknesses in reading, and to devise and implement remedial programs for the students who she has felt could benefit from such programs.

Because of the immensity of such a task for one remedial teacher, the school in which the intern has been a remedial teacher decided that she should concentrate her efforts on children with reading problems in the primary grades. Students in the elementary grades who needed remedial instruction would be accommodated to the extent that workload and time scheduling permitted.

The intern is a remedial teacher in an elementary school in a modern town on the outskirts of St. John's. It has nineteen staff members and an enrolment of approximately five hundred pupils. It offers music, physical education, special education, and remedial programs. The school also has the part-time services of a reading consultant, a guidance counsellor, a speech therapist, and a nurse.

In each of the primary grades the children are grouped for reading. The purpose of this grouping is to place each child on a level at which he can adequately cope. Usually three reading programs are used in each classroom--The Ginn Integrated Language Program, The Nelson Language Development Reading Program, and The New Open Highways Program.

During the past two years, the classroom teachers have been responsible for the core reading program, while the intern has been

responsible for providing each student who was retarded in his reading performance with instruction designed to remediate his weaknesses. Each week the intern has taken small groups of children who required such instruction from the regular classroom for three periods of 25 to 45 minutes in length, depending upon the children's maturity and attention spans.

While conducting remediation in this manner, the intern found that reading problems generally stemmed from two main areas of weakness--inadequate development of sight vocabulary and word attack skills. In remediating these areas of weakness, she used workbooks, worksheets, high interest-low vocabulary books, and reading games.

The intern felt that, while some degree of success had been achieved by most students, the remedial program had not been as successful as it probably could have been. She attributed this to the lack of a variety of interesting materials on levels at which the children could cope, difficulty in motivating the children to want to read, and the use of the same type of instruction in which they had been unsuccessful in the past. If a different approach to remedial reading had been implemented, the intern felt that the benefits of the program would have been increased for the children. Because it satisfied all the previously mentioned needs, she felt that a language experience approach was an answer.

Advocates of the language experience approach claim that it promotes in children a positive attitude toward reading as it removes their fear of failure through requiring them to read their own compositions. This ensures that the children bring to their reading the necessary background of experiences that other approaches presuppose they have.

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Hall (1970:21) says that the language experience approach is effective with older disabled readers because of the motivating effect that reading materials which use the children's own language patterns have. Since remedial students are advanced in oral language beyond the language of textbooks on their instructional levels, the stilted, artificial and controlled language of the textbook materials have little appeal or motivation. The language experience approach offers them appealing reading materials in their own language patterns.

Under the language experience approach, reading becomes individualized. The nature of this approach requires that reading materials be developed on an individual basis, since each child's language and experiences are unique to him. As each child develops his personal reading materials, the teacher selects skills to be introduced or reinforced according to the need. Phonics, structural analysis, contextual analysis, and vocabulary skills are introduced as children need them in writing and in reading their own and other materials.

The intern felt that these advantages which the language experience approach appeared to offer would be of benefit to the children in her remedial situation. Implementation of the language experience approach, therefore, became the major aim of the internship.

PURPOSE OF THE INTERNSHIP

The major purpose of this internship was the implementation of a language experience approach in the remedial situation in an attempt to improve the reading performance of a selected number of students in the primary grades. A related aim was to provide some evaluative information concerning the efficacy of the language experience approach in the reme-

diation of reading difficulties.

ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

This chapter has included a discussion of the problem under consideration, the need for the study, and the purpose of the internship. Chapter 2 reviews the literature related to the language experience approach and to its application in the remedial situation. Chapter 3 contains the objectives of the internship and the methodology used to achieve them. Chapter 4 presents an evaluation of the internship. The final chapter summarizes the study, discusses conclusions drawn from it, and makes specific recommendations.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter reviews the literature related to the language experience approach and to its application in the remedial situation. Specifically, it reviews selected writings about the characteristics and rationale of the approach and studies employing the language experience approach.

CHARACTERISTICS AND RATIONALE OF THE LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE APPROACH

Johnson (1966:64-68) states five fundamental principles of learning which underlie working with remedial readers. She says that learning begins with the known, proceeds from concrete to abstract, demands active participation, should be goal directed, and is an individual matter.

The language experience approach, Hall (1970:20) maintains, begins with known material which is easily decoded and understood, provides concrete materials as the starting point, actively involves the learner, helps the learner to be goal directed, and approaches reading in an individual manner with concern for a personal involvement in the reading situation.

According to Durkin (1974:38), a language experience approach to reading instruction is based on three assumptions about children learning to read. First, they have had, and will continue to have, experiences,

Second, they are able to tell about them. Third, if one writes down what they tell, it can be used as instructional material to teach them to read.

The language experience is a plan for reading based upon the oral and written expression and identified needs of the children. Each child's need to communicate and express himself becomes the basis of his motivation to read and write. His motivation is based on the self-realization that his thoughts and experiences can be recorded in writing and thus read by him. This self-realization has been phrased by Allen (1964: 68-70) as, "What I can think about, I can talk about. What I can say, I can write (or someone can write for me). What I can write, I can read. I can read what others write for me to read."

It has been pointed out by Spache and Spache (1973:244) that the assumption behind Allen's rationale is that reading is a by-product of the child's thinking and expression. Progress in reading is therefore directly dependent upon the child's growth in experiences which are translated into oral language and his own written expression.

Hall (1972:328-31) offers what she terms a linguistic rationale for the language experience approach. She says that the beginning reader must be taught to view reading as a communication process, is a user of language, should understand the reading process as one of consciously relating print to oral language, should incorporate the learning of writing with the learning of reading, should learn to read with material written in his own language patterns, and should learn to read meaningful language and to read orally with smooth, fluent expression.

The language experience approach to reading, Hall (1970:4) points out, integrates the teaching of reading with the other language arts as

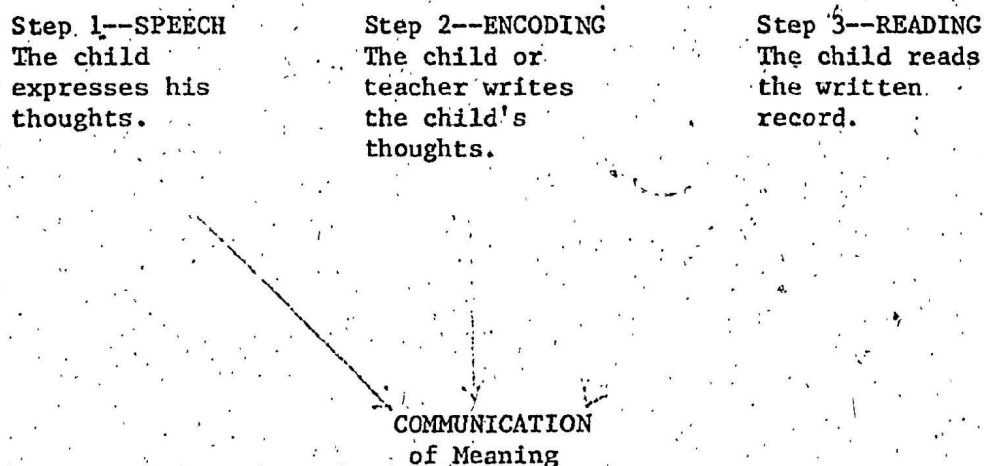
children listen, speak, write, and read about their personal experiences and ideas. A child's speech determines the language patterns of the reading materials, and his experiences determine the content. This approach is based on the concept that reading has the most meaning for a pupil when the materials being used are expressed in his language and rooted in his experiences. She continues to say that as children see their spoken thoughts put into written form they can understand the nature of communication in reading in addition to recognizing words. Communication is stressed as children speak, see the speech represented by printed symbols, and then read the written representation of their speech. The association of meaning with the print is built into the reading of the personally created materials of the language experience approach.

Hall (1970:5) gives the following diagram to represent the sequence of communication in the language experience approach:

Step 1--SPEECH
The child
expresses his
thoughts.

Step 2--ENCODING
The child or
teacher writes
the child's
thoughts.

Step 3--READING
The child reads
the written
record.



COMMUNICATION
of Meaning

She adds that in the language experience approach, the purpose of communication underlies the three stages of producing reading materials as depicted in the above diagram. It shows the child's

involvement as he moves from talking to encoding to the reading of his thoughts. As the child sees his speech encoded into printed symbols, the communication of the meaning of his speech in written form becomes evident to him. As he decodes the printed symbols and associates them with his previously spoken thoughts, he is communicating through reading.

The primary goal of reading instruction, according to Hall (1970: 24), is to develop children's ability to use reading as a medium of communication. She says that the language experience approach must, like any other approach to reading instruction, build children's reading vocabulary, establish effective means of word attack, develop comprehension ability, and promote a favorable attitude toward, and permanent interest in, reading.

The goals of the language arts have been identified by Applegate (1962:8) as using words responsibly, thinking clearly, listening imaginatively, speaking effectively, reading thoughtfully, writing creatively, using mechanics powerfully, regarding good English respectfully, and acquainting children with good literature.

These goals given by Applegate apply to a broad interpretation of the language experience approach and emphasize the significance and interrelatedness of all the language arts in this approach to reading (Hall, 1970:24). A successful language experience reading program teaches both reading and language arts skills in situations which necessitate meaningful communication.

Hall (1970:6-7) says that although the characteristics of the language experience approach are implied in the definition, three major characteristics should be emphasized. The first is that pupil-composed materials constitute the major source of reading materials in the language

experience approach. Reading materials are developed as children talk about their ideas, and as their talk is recorded. The written record is then used for reading. As children advance in reading skill, other materials such as trade books, magazines, basal readers, and commercially published materials are also utilized, since children need to develop skill in reading and in obtaining meaning from many types of materials.

Second, the interrelationship of all the communication skills is stressed. Reading is not taught apart from, but is dependent upon, the other facets of the language arts. Reading is a language activity and the ability to communicate through language is essential for success in reading. In the language experience approach, as children increase their listening and speaking facility, they are increasing their ability to understand ideas encountered in their reading.

The third characteristic is that there are no vocabulary controls in the reading materials other than the extent of a child's speaking vocabulary. The initial reading material is not limited to a few simple words or to short, artificial sentence patterns with a planned amount of repetition of frequently used words. When a pupil reads content which he has first spoken, it is certain that the words employed in reading are in his speaking vocabulary and are written in the pattern of his own language.

Allen (1964:67-68) includes in the basic framework of a language experience approach twenty language experiences which contribute to the balanced development of language skills including reading skills. The three major categories with their emphases as classified by Allen are:

Group 1. Extending experiences to include words--through oral and written sharing of personal experiences, discussing selected topics,

listening to and telling stories, writing independently, and making and reading individual books.

Group 2. Studying the English language--through developing an understanding of speaking, writing, and reading relationships, through expanding vocabulary, improving personal expression, studying words, and gaining some awareness of the use of high frequency words and sentence patterns.

Group 3. Relating ideas of authors to personal experiences--through reading whole stories and books, learning to use a variety of printed resources, summarizing, outlining, reading for specific purposes, and determining the validity and reliability of statements found in print.

These language experiences become the major framework within which children learn to read. The experiences are sequenced according to the ability and maturity they demand of the learner.

The term "language experience" is one which has been used to describe an approach to reading which can take many forms in its implementation. Veatch (1966:4-5) says that the language experience approach is a method devised to meet individual differences in reading instruction that depends centrally upon the use of the child's own speech in various ways at all age levels, a variety of materials with literary merit, the incentive factor of pupil-selected materials, and individual teacher-pupil conferences. These are the basic components of the language experience approach. How the components are implemented in the classroom depends upon the individual teacher. Allen (1966:5) claims that the key to success in this approach is the teacher. The approach is for the teacher who is searching for a means of capturing the real LANGUAGE and

EXPERIENCES of children and utilizing them as the avenues to reading.

STUDIES EMPLOYING THE LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE APPROACH

An indication of the widespread interest in language experience is its inclusion in six of the large-scale "First Grade Reading Studies" (Stauffer, 1967). These studies were conducted in grade one classes in centers throughout the United States in the late 1960's. The major group of studies investigated the effectiveness of a variety of approaches to reading instruction including those employing basal readers, phonetic emphasis, linguistic materials, the initial teaching alphabet, and the language experience. The length of the instructional period for all the studies was one hundred and forty days. Pre-instructional and final tests were administered at uniform times throughout the studies. An attempt was made to have the daily instructional time held constant, but difficulties were encountered in certain programs because it was difficult to determine when reading instruction started and stopped.

The results of the six studies employing some form of a language experience approach as compared to some other approach(es) are presented below.

The purpose of the study done by Stauffer (1969) was to compare a traditional basal reader approach with a language experience approach which used a basal reader after a vocabulary of about one hundred and fifty words had been acquired. The language experience pupils excelled in nine of the ten areas in which significant differences were found, namely, word meaning, paragraph meaning, rate of oral reading, the Gates, Fry, and Karlsen word lists, writing mechanics, and spelling (for girls

only).

Without using the basal reader as an adjunct to the language experience approach, Vilscek et al. (1966) had results which were almost as positively in favor of the language experience approach as those of Stauffer's study. They report that the language experience approach had significantly higher mean scores at the .01 level of confidence on word meaning, paragraph meaning, vocabulary, word study, and attitudes; and at the .05 level of confidence on the Gates and Karlsen word lists.

Hahn (1966) compared three approaches to beginning reading instruction--initial teaching alphabet, basal readers, and language experience. He found that the language experience method resulted in significantly higher scores on the word meaning and vocabulary measures. Because the children in all three approaches responded enthusiastically to a reading attitude survey, no significant differences were reported in reading attitudes.

Kendrick and Bennett (1967) compared the language experience method with the basal reader approach. They separated the results for high and low socioeconomic groups, as well as for boys and girls. Significant differences ($F > .01$) favoring the language experience approach were found in interest in reading for lower class boys, and in writing--total number of words--for both higher and lower socioeconomic groups of boys and girls.

In McCanne's (1966) study, the economically disadvantaged pupils who were Spanish-speaking or bilingual did not respond favorably to the language experience approach. He found that the basal reader approach developed the highest achievement in reading skills. In the conclusion of his study, however, he points out that these results may have been

influenced by the relative lack of experience with the language experience method on the part of the teachers, and that nothing in the study should be construed as being unfavorable to the practice of using the language experience approach.

Harris and Serwer (1966) similarly found that black, inner-city pupils did not respond favorably to the language experience approach. They reported that the basal reader method employed held a slight lead over the other methods at the first-grade measuring point.

Follow-up second grade studies using the same students were conducted. Again, the results of the studies done by Stauffer (1967), Hahn (1967), Vilscek et al. (1966), and Kendrick and Bennett (1967) were in favor of the language experience approach. Most of the findings of the "First Grade Studies" persisted for the pupils in the second grade.

Several studies continued their methods comparisons into the third grade. Stauffer and Hammond (1969) found pupils using the language experience in the third grade to be superior on paragraph meaning (girls only), spelling, oral reading rate and accuracy, and the Gates and Fry word lists. They were also superior on writing skills such as writing mechanics, number of running words, and number of different words used in their compositions.

After three years, Harris and Morrison (1969) continued to report no significant differences in any test scores for the approaches. As side effects, however, they noted that after their trial with language experience, teachers tended to continue with the language experience as an adjunct to their basal method.

In addition to these first grade through to third grade studies, there is a research report from Cramer (1970) who explored the effects

of the language experience approach upon spelling and writing. He found that the language experience pupils were significantly better spellers than the basal reader pupils on lists of regular and irregular words, both of which they learned to spell equally well. They were also significantly better in the number of running words and different words used in their written compositions.

In summarizing these one-to-three year studies, there appear to be certain advantages for the language experience approach. The results were not identical in all of the experiments, since implementation of the idea varied from study to study. In terms of various reading, phonic, and spelling skills, the evidence, however, in favor of language experience was strong in the first grade and continued into the second grade. Moreover, the approach did seem to make a contribution to spelling and to the length and breadth of vocabulary in children's compositions.

Spache and Spache (1973:258-9) say that from the studies done there seems to be enough support for the language experience approach to say that it must be recognized as an independent, effective method of teaching reading during the primary grades, that it is not just an adjunct or preliminary stage to other methods, although it may be so used, and that it is as effective in stimulating skill development among middle-class children as the basal approach. They also say that in measures of quantity, quality, and diversity of vocabulary in writing and spelling, the language experience approach appears to be superior.

LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE IN THE REMEDIAL SITUATION

Language experience is an approach which can be used to teach

reading to children individually, in small groups, or in whole classes. It appears to be ideal for use with small groups such as those found in remedial situations.

Literature on the language experience approach in the remedial situation is scanty; however, some authors claim that the approach is an effective one for use with remedial readers.

Miller (1972:55) says that this approach is very useful with disabled readers as a means of introducing or carrying on a program of remedial reading. Edwards (1965:548) has found in his experience that it works with outstanding effectiveness in both individual and group situations, not only with young children at the beginning stages of reading, but also with children who are potential dropouts.

The language experience approach, Kennedy (1974:83) believes, can be used at any achievement level. He recommends it as the most effective standard approach for teaching initial reading skills to disadvantaged students. According to Matteoni (1973:55), it is a sound method for developing learning ability in reading for all children, but especially for those who are not suited to the characteristics of many of the published programs. It has been pointed out by Spache and Spache (1973:252) that this approach has been very appealing to those who deal with children who have special problems, such as remedial readers and economically disadvantaged children. Hall (1970:20) adds that the language experience approach has merit for remedial readers who have experienced failure in learning to read through traditional approaches.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the objectives of the internship, and reports on the subjects, materials, and teaching procedures used in the implementation of the language experience approach in the remedial situation.

OBJECTIVES

In order to fulfill the purpose of the internship, the intern considered it necessary to achieve the following procedural objectives: (1) to diagnose each individual student's needs in reading in relation to those skills necessary to decode reading materials adequately; (2) to develop and implement a language experience approach to remedial reading; (3) to improve vocabulary and comprehension skills; and (4) to develop favorable attitudes toward, and an interest in, reading through the implementation of the approach.

PROCEDURES

Kennedy (1974:80) says that although formal syllabi are rarely used for language experience teaching, there are some steps which are characteristic of the preparation for, and implementation of, an effective program. These characteristics include learning about the pupils, selecting instructional materials, devising teaching procedures, begin-

ning reading instruction, and improving reading skills. The characteristics relevant to the internship are discussed in terms of the procedures employed by the intern to achieve the given objectives.

Learning about the Pupils

The pupils selected for the internship were eight students--five boys and three girls--ranging in age from six to almost nine. Four of these students were in grade three, three in grade two, and one in grade one.

According to the cumulative records, these pupils, with the exception of one child, had not been administered tests of intelligence. That particular child had been tested by the Weschler Intelligence Scale for Children which indicated an intelligence quotient in the average range. No intelligence quotients were available for the remaining students..

In order to acquire a uniform, current assessment of each student's capability, Form A of the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (Dunn, 1965) was administered in the preliminary stages of the internship. The results of this test are presented in Table 1.

These results indicate that in two cases the mental age was about one year above the chronological age, in four cases the mental age and chronological age were approximately the same, and in two cases the mental age was about one year below the chronological age.

Based on the results of past reading tests and their own observations, the teachers of these pupils estimated that they were reading at a level about one grade below their grade placement.

Early in the internship period, the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test

Table 1

Results of the Peabody Picture Vocabulary
Test, Form A

Student	Grade	Chronological Age	Mental Age	Percentile Score	Intelligence Quotient
A	1	6-9	5-2	8	81
B	2	6-11	7-10	70	108
C	2	6-10	6-10	49	98
D	2	7-0	5-11	28	89
E	3	8-5	9-2	80	111
F	3	8-8	8-3	34	93
G	3	8-0	8-1	53	100
H	3	8-5	8-3	34	93

(Gates and MacGinitie, 1965) was administered by the intern to all subjects except the grade one child, who was at the pre-reading stage, to obtain an initial assessment of each student's general reading level. Primary B and Primary C forms of this test were administered to the pupils in grades two and three respectively. Test results for the vocabulary and comprehension subtests are reported in Tables 2 and 3.

The results coincided with the teachers' observations and indicated that each child, with the exception of the grade one child, was retarded in his reading performance by at least one grade level.

School medical records revealed that the subjects were free from any apparent physical defects which would impede their progress in learning to read. Vision and hearing assessments were conducted by the school nurse at the request of the intern. These checks showed that no hearing or vision defects were present in any of the children. The grade one child had a speech problem and was being helped by a speech therapist.

Attitudes toward school in general appeared to be healthy. Most of the subjects participated in and enjoyed most school activities. Some of them were reluctant to read or to engage in reading activities, which can probably be accounted for by their lack of success in learning to read. The grade one child was hesitant to speak in large groups or in the presence of those unfamiliar to her. For the most part, however, the subjects all seemed to be physically and psychologically normal, well-adjusted children.

The intern had been conducting remedial reading classes with the pupils for a period of six months prior to the internship. During this period she had been able to observe each child's attitude and behavior pattern, to get an impression of the language development of each, and

Table 2

Student Reading Achievement on Two Subtests
of the Gates-MacGintie Reading Test,
Primary B, Form 1

Student	Vocabulary			Comprehension		
	Standard Score	Percentile Score	Grade Score	Standard Score	Percentile Score	Grade Score
B	34	5	1.2	44	27	1.5
C	37	10	1.3	39	14	1.4
D	35	7	1.3	39	14	1.4

Table 3

Student Reading Achievement on Two Subtests
of the Gates-MacGintie Reading Test,
Primary C, Form 1

Student	Vocabulary			Comprehension		
	Standard Score	Percentile Score	Grade Score	Standard Score	Percentile Score	Grade Score
E	40	16	2.0	42	21	2.0
F	43	24	2.2	39	14	1.8
G	37	10	1.6	41	18	1.9
H	35	7	1.6	45	31	2.4

to discover each one's chief interests. In addition, she had been able to assess each child's ability in oral language, reading, and writing.

In order to implement a strong and well-rounded reading program while following a language experience plan of instruction, the intern followed a systematic program in word attack skills. Hall's Word Attack Check List (1970:90-94) was followed to ensure that each child learned the skills necessary for independence in attacking unknown words. A record was kept for each child to indicate the skills which he had mastered and those which he needed to learn.

Further in-depth diagnostic testing was not necessary for the implementation of the language experience approach. The approach was not dependent upon previously learned vocabulary and skills, as it began with the children where they were--at the beginning stages of reading or at any reading level.

Selecting Instructional Materials

The language experience approach required very few materials which were not readily available in the school. The materials selected by the intern to be used in the implementation of the internship included art materials, such as crayons, markers, paint, and brushes; writing materials, such as notebooks, scrapbooks, and handmade booklets; filmstrips, films, and pictures which were secured through the school system and from the University when they were required; and reading materials. Books were borrowed periodically from the school library and from the Curriculum Materials Centre at the University, so that a varied supply was available to the children at all times.

Devising Teaching Procedures

Kennedy (1974:78-79) says that while no standard procedures for using a language experience approach are specifically laid down, the following learning abilities and experiences are generally emphasized:

Oral language. Activities that necessitate talking and discussing are emphasized at all times, since oral language development is viewed as an essential factor for progress in this approach.

Individual work. Each child has a distinct role in a language experience program. His stories, reactions, and comments are received and treated with respect. Assignments are made to individuals who are expected to assume responsibility for completing them. Individuals are given help and guidance as needed.

Group work. Though individuality is stressed, it is important for pupils to work together if they are to get all the kinds of language experiences needed. Group activities which include conversing, discussing, oral reporting, planning, and similar tasks are essential.

Basic reading skills. Basic reading skills, such as word recognition, word analysis, and comprehension are introduced and taught to small groups and individuals when they are needed. A pupil is introduced to formal reading of books only when his word vocabulary and reading interests reach a level which assures success.

General language skills. As instruction progresses, varied types of instructional materials at increasingly difficult levels are utilized to give pupils a greater variety and range of language exper-

iences. Extensive use of listening, oral language, reading, and composition lead to the development of more advanced communication skills--the ultimate aim of the language experience approach.

Lee and Allen (1963:70-73) present a developmental pattern with which children who learn to read through the language experience approach should have contact during the primary grades. The language experiences which comprise this developmental pattern include, in the following order, listening to stories, sharing, discussing, telling stories, dictating, developing speaking, writing, and reading relationships, making group and individual books, developing awareness of common vocabulary, expanding vocabulary, writing independently, reading whole books, improving style and form, studying words, and improving comprehension.

Following this pattern and the previously mentioned learning abilities and experiences, the intern developed a series of sequential steps for the day-by-day implementation of the approach.

Implementing the Approach

The following are the basic steps the intern used to implement the language experience approach:

Step 1. Stimulating Discussions

The first task was to encourage the children to talk about what they knew. These discussions arose from activities they had engaged in, from events which they had seen or heard about, from plans they were making, and from ideas and activities they were interested in--from whatever sources had meaning for them. In response to a comment or question, the children were stimulated to discuss such matters as what stories they

enjoyed, what made them happy, or what pets they had. The important issue was not what they talked about but that they were motivated to want to talk and that they had something to say. The intern's knowledge of the students enabled her to spark discussions on topics which were of interest to them. At this stage, her role was to a large extent that of a stimulator who encouraged the free expression of ideas.

Step 2. Creating Language-Experience Materials

After the children had had an opportunity to talk about the topic of immediate concern, they and the intern created a composition about it. When doing this, the intern led the children to state the topic. They then decided what they wanted to say about it, with the intern helping them to discriminate between relevant and irrelevant details. She acted as a secretary and recorded the spoken reactions in written form. She read the composition immediately after the recording and then asked the group to read it in unison. Individual volunteers were next encouraged to read the composition, with the intern supplying the words which they did not remember. Written copies of all compositions were kept and became basic reading books for the children.

At the beginning of the internship period, compositions were created on a group basis. The intern prepared a booklet of these for each child, who illustrated his own copy.

As soon as the children became accustomed to this procedure, dictation of ideas for a composition was conducted on an individual basis with each child either dictating for the intern to print or writing it himself with the help of the intern. The intern read the composition, the intern and child together read it, and the child read it alone with

help when needed. He was then asked to identify or to find certain words in the composition. If he could, the words were printed by the intern on cards about 2" x 3" in size. The child's attention was directed to high-frequency words which he could not recognize, and word cards were made to facilitate his learning them. Word cards were also made for the words he selected to learn. All word cards for each child were collected and kept together in a box to become his "word bank."

Word banks, together with the compositions, constituted the major materials in this language experience approach. An individual word bank was a personal vocabulary file kept by each child and used in a variety of ways for promoting vocabulary development and language awareness. In the initial stages of instruction, the word banks were used primarily to reinforce the learning of a sight vocabulary. As the children progressed in reading ability, they were used for word analysis exercises, reference in writing and spelling activities, and oral language discussions about words.

Samples of the children's compositions are contained in Appendix A. The building of a word bank is further described in Appendix B.

Step 3. Developing Word Skills

After the creating and illustrating of a composition, follow-up activities were supplied for extra practice and direct teaching of skills. Opportunities for rereading and for repeated exposure to words were provided, especially in the initial stages of instruction.

The skills needed for independence in attacking words were taught in direct and indirect instruction. Skills which the subjects had not mastered, as indicated by the Word Attack Checklist (Hall, 1970), were

taught on an individual or group basis, depending on the number who needed instruction in the particular skill. The intern used any procedures known to her in the teaching of these skills. In the language experience approach, however, the distinctive characteristic was that the words used in the exercises, games, and activities were selected from the children's compositions and word banks.

Step 4. Practising Reading

The subjects were given frequent opportunities to read their own writings to the group and to individuals within the group. As soon as they had developed adequate sight vocabularies, there was gradually increasing emphasis placed on reading what other people had written. They were encouraged by the intern to read each other's stories, as well as library books and basal readers on levels at which they could cope.

The older children in the internship were able to read easy books at the beginning of the implementation of the language experience approach. They were encouraged to select books in which they were interested and which they felt they could read. About once a week each child was asked by the intern to read aloud and discuss a portion of his chosen book. This served to check the progress being made by each in the areas of word attack, vocabulary, comprehension, and oral reading mechanics. Records of these individual conferences were kept by the intern.

Because the intern was seeing each group of subjects for only three half-hour periods each week, the implementation of Steps 1 through 4 usually took more than a week to complete. Following the completion of these four steps, the cycle was repeated again and again throughout the internship period.

Chapter 4

EVALUATION OF THE INTERNSHIP

This chapter contains an evaluation of the internship based on empirical data, teachers' opinions, and the intern's observations. Changes in the subjects' reading achievement, attitudes, and productivity levels are presented as evidence of the effectiveness of the internship in achieving its purpose.

READING ACHIEVEMENT

Alternate forms of the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test, Level 1, were administered as pretest and posttest to assess gains in reading comprehension made by the subjects during the internship period. The Comprehension section of Form W of this test was given to all subjects, except the grade one child, prior to the commencement of instruction. After instruction had terminated, the Comprehension section of Form X was administered.

Grade level scores received by the subjects on comprehension for both forms of this test are presented in Table 4. These results indicate that all of the subjects who were tested made some gains in reading comprehension during the internship period. The mean grade level was increased from 1.8 to 2.5, a difference of 0.7 years. Individual gains in comprehension ranged from 0.3 to 1.0 years.

Grade score increases in vocabulary were measured by the Slosson

Table 4
 Student Grade Scores in Comprehension on Forms
 W and X of the Stanford Diagnostic
Reading Test, Level 1

Student	Form W	Form X
B	below 1.4 ^a	1.9
C	below 1.4	2.1
D	below 1.4	2.3
E	2.1	3.0
F	2.3	2.6
G	2.4	2.8
H	2.4	2.7
Mean Score	1.8	2.5

^aThe lowest grade level norm given for this test was BELOW 1.4. Students B, C, and D were assigned a grade level score of 1.3 for data analysis.

Oral Reading Test. This test was administered prior to instruction and re-administered after the internship instruction had terminated. Grade level scores received by the subjects for both administrations of this test are presented in Table 5. These results indicate that all of the subjects made gains in vocabulary during the period of the internship. The mean grade level was increased from 1.8 to 2.5, a difference of 0.7 years. Individual gains in vocabulary ranged from 0.2 to 1.2 years.

In order to determine whether these gains in reading achievement were significantly greater than those which would normally have been anticipated during the instructional period of the internship, the t-test for dependent samples (Glass and Stanley, 1970:299) was applied. An application of the t-test revealed that the differences were significant for comprehension ($t = 5.5$) at the .01 level of confidence and for vocabulary ($t = 7.2$) at the .001 level of confidence.

STUDENT ATTITUDES

Prior to the beginning of the instruction period, the subjects were administered the Primary Pupils' Attitude Survey. After the termination of the internship, the survey was re-administered. According to the manual accompanying the survey, a score of nine or more indicates a positive attitude toward reading. Table 6 presents the scores for the pretest and posttest administrations of the attitude survey.

These scores indicate that all subjects, with the exception of one, improved in their attitudes toward reading. By the end of the internship period, almost one-half of the subjects were exhibiting positive attitudes toward reading. An application of the t-test for dependent samples revealed that these scores differed significantly at the

Table 5

Student Grade Scores in Vocabulary
on Two Administrations of the
Slosson Oral Reading Test

Student	Pretest	Posttest
A	0.2	0.9
B	1.0	1.2
C	1.0	1.5
D	1.9	2.7
E	2.4	3.6
F	2.4	3.2
G	2.6	3.3
H	3.0	3.9
Mean Score	1.8	2.5

Table 6

Student Scores on Two Administrations of
the Primary Pupils' Attitude Survey

Student	Pretest	Posttest
A	5	9
B	7	9
C	9	10
D	7	8
E	2	2
F	6	8
G	3	5
H	3	5
Mean Score	5.2	7.0

.01 level of confidence ($t = 8.4$).

The classroom teachers and the intern observed that the subjects appeared to be more interested in reading activities and rarely displayed reluctance when required to read. There were fewer negative comments regarding reading activities as the internship progressed. The subjects borrowed many more books from the remedial classroom and school libraries. They took these books home to read, or to have read to them, and were eager to read them aloud or tell about them when they returned to school.

As the subjects became accustomed to the language experience approach, they became increasingly engrossed in their reading activities. They attended the remedial classes willingly and eagerly, and often returned after school to complete stories or to exchange books. They became accustomed to the new approach quite readily and frequently came to the remedial classes with their own topics and ideas for compositions. Reading became an enjoyable activity for them when they started to experience success in it.

STUDENT PRODUCTIVITY

The classroom teachers and the intern felt that there was a definite improvement in the work produced by the students in the regular and remedial classes. Improvements were noted particularly in creative writing activities. The subjects used better sentence structure and more complex sentences when writing stories than they had done before the internship instruction. During the latter part of the internship period, the grade three subjects began to write their own stories rather than have the intern write them as they dictated. This independent writing required them to apply their phonic skills in spelling unfamiliar words,

and with practice their spelling attempts became more and more accurate. They also became more aware of capitalization and punctuation. As a result of illustrating their stories, their art work in their regular classrooms became more polished and creative.

SUMMARY

The effectiveness of this internship in achieving its purpose has been indicated by desirable changes in the subjects' behavior. They improved their reading levels in comprehension and vocabulary, exhibited more positive attitudes toward reading and reading activities, and increased their productivity levels in both the regular and remedial classes.

Chapter 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter contains a summary of the internship, major conclusions drawn from the study, and recommendations concerning the application of the language experience approach to the remediation of reading difficulties.

SUMMARY OF THE INTERNSHIP

This internship dealt with the problem of improving the reading performance of eight children who were becoming increasingly unsuccessful at learning to read. Its major purpose was to implement a language experience approach to remedial reading in an attempt to improve the reading performance of these children. A related aim of the internship was to evaluate the language experience approach as an effective method of approaching remedial reading in the primary grades.

The subjects of the internship were five boys and three girls in grades one to three who attended an elementary school in a modern town on the outskirts of St. John's. They ranged in chronological age from six to almost nine and in mental age from five to nine.

All except the grade one child, who was a non-reader, were at least one year below grade level in reading achievement and were reluctant to read. Consequently, their regular classroom instruction in reading was supplemented by remedial help given by the intern.

The internship covered a period of approximately twelve weeks. During this time the intern worked with the subjects in carrying out the procedures designed to achieve the objectives of the internship. Instruction took place three times weekly in the remedial classroom during regularly scheduled half-hour periods.

The internship procedures included learning about the pupils, selecting instructional materials, and devising teaching procedures. Day-by-day implementation of the language experience approach in the remedial situation involved the four steps of stimulating discussion, creating language experience materials, developing word skills, and practising reading.

The effectiveness of the internship in achieving its purpose has been indicated by desirable changes in the subjects' reading achievement, attitudes, and productivity levels. The subjects made gains of 0.7 years both in vocabulary and in comprehension. When compared with gains normally expected during the internship period, these gains were statistically significant. Student attitudes toward reading and reading activities showed improvement. The students were more inclined to work, attended the remedial sessions eagerly, read more books, and expressed fewer negative comments about what was required of them. Corresponding increases in student productivity were noticed in the remedial and regular classrooms. Improvements were noted in creative writing, spelling, and art work.

CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions are drawn from the results of the internship:

1. The outcomes indicate that the internship was successful in achieving its purpose. Consequently, the intern concludes that the language experience approach is an effective approach to remedial reading in the primary grades.

2. Although it is difficult to determine the amount of change in the students' reading achievement levels which can be directly attributed to the effects of the internship, the intern feels that the language experience approach was the major contributing factor to the change.

3. The intern feels that the time of year in which the study was conducted could possibly have affected the results, particularly those of the post-testing which was done in late May and early June. The outcomes would possibly have been even more significant had the study been of longer duration and conducted earlier in the school year.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The intern recommends the language experience approach as an effective approach to remedial reading in the primary grades. The following conditions, however, are necessary for effective implementation of the program.

1. Remedial teachers wishing to implement the language experience approach should be familiar with its characteristics and the underlying rationale and principles.

2. Remedial teachers should have a thorough knowledge and understanding of their students' preferences, needs, and abilities before implementing the program.

3. Teachers need to motivate the students by introducing topics

of real interest to them so that they adapt easily and quickly to the procedures employed in the approach.

4. For maximum effectiveness of the language experience approach, the remedial periods should be of sufficient length to allow each child in the group to participate individually in the scheduled activities.

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APPENDIX A

Samples of Students' Compositions

Samples of Student A's Compositions

Student A was a grade one child who had a speech problem. Her words were usually unintelligible and infrequent. At the beginning of the internship she never spoke voluntarily. In answer to the simplest of questions, she would either shake her head or mutter a garbled form of "I don't know." It was an extremely difficult task to get her to speak even a few words in a whole remedial session.

Initially during the implementation of the language experience approach, the intern had to do practically all of the talking. The child would listen very attentively but would not comment. After she became accustomed to the procedures of the approach, she began to respond a little after much prompting, and improved gradually to the point where she would speak frequently and voluntarily.

The following compositions illustrate the progress made by Student A in language development and in learning to read. Unfortunately, the illustrations which she drew and coloured could not be included here. The underlined words are the words which were printed on cards to become part of her word bank. At the end of the internship period, Student A could identify these and other words in context or in isolation.

February 2

After looking at pictures of pets, hearing the intern talk about them, and listening to a story about a pet, Student A was encouraged to make a comment. There was no voluntary response. In answer to the question, "What would you like for a pet?" she answered, "a dog." The intern printed the following sentence for the child to see. She spoke the words aloud as she printed them and read aloud the completed sentence.

The child was then asked to follow the words and read them aloud with the intern, which she did. The intern repeated the sentence and the child repeated it entirely by herself.

I would like a dog for a pet.

March 2

The following composition was developed in response to a television guide from a newspaper which the intern had brought to the remedial class. While she mentioned, with the aid of prompting and questioning, her favorite TV programs, the intern printed her sentences in the booklet for her to see. Her immature sentence patterns appeared to improve with practice and encouragement.

TV

Me watches Steve. Me watches Mr. Dress-up and Casey and Finnigan. I watches the Hillbillies. I watches Sesame Street. I see Cookie Monster, Big Bird, Ernie, and Bert. I watches Jamie.

April 6

The following composition resulted from a comment voluntarily mentioned by the child when she came to the remedial class. She had received a bicycle for her birthday and was eager to tell about it. The intern gave the child her booklet and asked her to draw a picture of the bicycle. When she had finished her picture, she told the intern what to print below it. These sentences resulted:

My Bike

I can ride my bike. I got it yesterday. It is green. I can let Donna ride it.

April 27

This composition was developed after the Easter holidays. It was stimulated by questions such as, "What did you do during the Easter holidays?" "What did the Easter bunny bring you?" By this period of the internship, Student A was no longer fearful of talking and was responding normally.

Easter Holidays

I played checkers with Donna. I went out to Nanny's. I played out doors. I ride on my bike. The Easter bunny brought me candies and a chocolate bunny.

Samples of Student G's Compositions

Student G was a grade three pupil. In reading, he was about one grade below his grade placement. He was a quiet, friendly child who rarely had much to contribute to conversations.

Student G had very little concept of a sentence. He could not distinguish between a sentence and a non-sentence. When asked to answer a question with a sentence, he answered with either a phrase or several sentences run together. His creative writing efforts consisted of a series of run-on sentences connected with "and" and no punctuation marks.

The following compositions illustrate the progress made by Student G in the area of sentence structure. The underlined words are those which he chose to be printed on word cards for his word bank. He usually chose "hard" words or words which had personal meaning for him.

February 18

This composition was developed after Valentine's Day activities. The composition consists mainly of sentences and phrases strung together

with "and." It is typical of the paragraphs structured by Student G at the beginning of the internship. He dictated the sentences and the intern printed them in his booklet.

Valentine's Day

On Valentine's Day I went with my friends and went to all the houses on our avenue. And after we gave out our valentines we went and helped the others and after we helped the others we tried to catch the other people putting valentines in our door.

March 10

This composition was developed after a group discussion about the pets they had and those they would like to have. It shows a slight improvement in that all the sentences are not run together, even though many of them begin with "and."

My Pets

We had ten goldfish last month and today there's only four goldfish left. Every night one floats to the top and stays there. And I have a budgie bird and its name is Petey. And we had him for over nine years. And I am getting a hamster and his name is going to be Hammy. He will be brown.

April 1

April Fool's Day was an excellent topic for discussion. Student G told about his activities for the day. His sentences are complete thoughts and well organized. None of the sentences begin with "and." Compared to some of his previous paragraphs, this composition is excellently composed.

April Fool

This morning, I didn't know it was April Fool's Day. My sister said there was a spider on my bedroom wall. I jumped out of bed and looked at the wall. She said, "April Fool!" She went downstairs and I said, "There's a rat on the ironing board." When she looked I said, "April Fool."

May 6

This composition resulted from a field trip taken by Student G's regular class. It was written by Student G himself with assistance in spelling words. The paragraph was indented, began with a capital letter, and contained the given punctuation marks.

The Museum

I saw some skeleton bones, a stage coach, a bobcat and a film, and a kayak, and a cannon.

Samples of Students' Compositions about a Common Topic

The topic of all of the following compositions is "All About Me." These compositions were created by the subjects at the intern's suggestion that they tell about themselves as if they were talking to someone they didn't know. Some of the subjects needed prompting and questioning to help them confine their thoughts to the topic of discussion. These samples were composed early in the internship period and were the children's first individual compositions.

Their compositions illustrate the variety of ideas, the extent of vocabulary, and the range of complexity of sentence structure which exist among children in the primary grades.

STUDENT A
GRADE 1

All About Me

I go to school. I work. I am almost seven years old. I am in grade one. My teacher works. My friends are Tommy, Holly, and Kelly. I play with Keith. I play with Donna. I play with Mommy.

STUDENT B
GRADE 2

I drives on my ski-doo every day after school. Then when it gets dark I puts my ski-doo away at seven o'clock. Then I watches some stories. And I watch Bionic Woman. I am seven years old. I get ready for bed every night at eight-thirty. Then I get up at seven o'clock in the morning. Then I go to school the next day. The end.

STUDENT C
GRADE 2

My name is _____, and my brother is named _____.¹ He helps me with the homework. I help him with his things. I help my mother to do the dishes and the work. And I help my family, too. And I brings out the garbage. And I does my homework when my mother tells me to. I come to school and I do my work. I am seven years old and I am in grade two. I read books for my mother.

STUDENT D
GRADE 2

My name is _____. I go to _____ School.

¹The intern wishes that the children and the school remain anonymous.

I'm in grade two. And I got two friends named Donnie and Kent. I got a brother named _____ and a sister named _____. And I go down to Mrs. Sheppard's for reading. I made a plane, and I have a little doll named Baby Wiggles.

STUDENT E
GRADE 3

I am eight years old. I'll be nine on April 21. I'm in grade three and it is hard work. I like to go riding my bike after school.

STUDENT F
GRADE 3

I like to do down around the bay. In Charlottetown there's a big wharf, and I like to go fishing there. After we go fishing we go to Terra Nova Park. I have one brother and five sisters.

STUDENT G
GRADE 3

I have a mother and a father, and a hamster called Nancy, and a dog called Tiny, and a brother called _____. I used to have a goldfish. I had two goldfish. I am eight years old. I go to _____ School in grade three B. I have a ski-doo. It used to go 50 miles an hour. It carried a skiboose where my brother rides. I can sit in it, too. I can drive the ski-doo.

STUDENT H
GRADE 3

I am in grade three, and I am eight years old. I got Daddy, and Mommy, and _____, my brother, and _____. I do the dishes and wash them and clean them. I like to play house with Lisa, Roxanne, and Kim. And I clean the mess up. I am a Brownie.

APPENDIX B

Building a Word Bank

Building a Word Bank

The simplest way of starting individual word banks with a group is in connection with either a group experience composition or a personal experience composition. This procedure will be illustrated with a selected individual composition.

STUDENT B
GRADE 2

All About Me

I drives on my ski-doo every day after school. Then when it gets dark I puts my ski-doo away at seven o'clock. Then I watches some stories. And I watch Bionic Woman. I am seven years old. I get ready for bed every night at eight-thirty. Then I get up at seven o'clock in the morning. Then I go to school the next day.

After re-reading the composition, the child was asked to underline with his pencil all the words he knew. The underlined words are the ones he chose. The intern then selected some of these words and printed them on the chalkboard to see if he could identify them in isolation. The words he knew were printed on 2" x 3" cards made of construction paper. Student B was then asked to underline any words which he would like to learn. He chose the words which are circled in the composition. These words were printed on word cards.

All of the word cards for Student B were of the same colour and were kept together in a small box. As the number of word cards increased, the child was encouraged to keep them in alphabetical order, usually alphabetized using only the first letter.

The word cards were used for word recognition activities. The

child was given frequent opportunities to participate in such activities to facilitate his learning and retaining of these words. Some sample activities included:

- (1) Selecting words and asking him to identify them.
- (2) Asking him to locate and identify certain words in his word bank.
- (3) Selecting random words and asking him to re-arrange them to make a sentence.
- (4) Allowing him to find words in old magazines and newspapers so that he could cut them out and match them with words in his word bank.
- (5) Having him select words from his word bank and re-arrange them to compose his own sentences.

These activities were usually conducted by the intern on an individual basis with the child. Sometimes, for variety, the child was paired with another child in the group so that they could work at an activity together.

