

VISUAL IMAGERY AND ITS EFFECTS
ON STUDENT LEARNING AND COMPREHENSION

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of
Pacific Lutheran University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

By

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August, 2009

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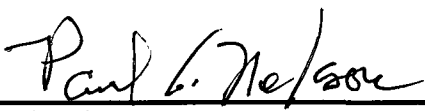
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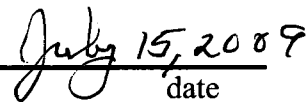
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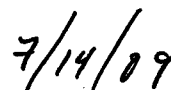
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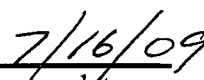
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This journey has been extensive in nature and often times daunting. During this process there have been numerous people that have not only influenced my thinking in regards to this project, but have simply been a sounding board or provided abundant support and encouragement. I would like to take this time to properly thank those that have been a part of this part of my thousand mile journey. First and foremost I would like to thank my family; my mom, dad and brother. Their support and encouragement has been immensely important during this entire program. There was so many times where I felt as if I would not make it but their love and care kept me going and for that I am internally grateful. Secondly, I would like to thank Dr. Paul Nelson. His support, flexibility and challenges helped me direct my focus and provide a clear scope and sequence to a thesis project that at times I thought would never materialize.

I would also like to recognize my two mentor teachers, LeeAnn Alfano and Karen Fugate. These two women took me under their wing, opened their classrooms and hearts and provided me with a student teaching experience that was authentic, challenging and amazing. I will never forget my experience with them and I will never forget the abundant amount of support and assistance these two women provided me with. Next, I would like to thank a person who has been very close to me, Sadie Ayers. Her continual encouragement and understanding during this entire process helped me stay grounded and confident when I was ready to give up on myself. She never gave up on me and there

are no words that can adequately describe my level of gratitude towards her. Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank a few specific members of the cohort I was so proudly a part of. First “the boys”; Sean Foote, Johnathan Fox, Peter Larson, Chris Benson, Glenn Lasko and Gary Hoopes. Our conversations and laughs were moments of relaxation that were much needed during this entire process and with it I don’t think I could have made it through.

Lastly, I need to thank a man who I have developed a great friendship with, Ryan “Sweet Tea” Novak. I cannot even begin to articulate the enjoyable moments we had both inside the classroom and out. Through this man I have developed a friendship that has the potential to last a life time and I am truly grateful to him for his support, kicks in the pants when I need them and jokes and stories that kept me laughing for the past 14 months. This man, along with everybody else has been instrumental in my success as a person and educator. From the bottom of my heart I thank each and every one of them for helping me get to this point.

VISUAL IMAGERY AND ITS EFFECTS
ON STUDENT LEARNING AND COMPREHENSION
AN ABSTRACT

By

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Pacific Lutheran University, August 2009

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This study investigates the effectiveness of using visual imagery with secondary students in order to improve their learning and comprehension of various texts. The study includes an examination of the effectiveness of visual imagery with English as a Second Language Students and Learning Disabled students as well as the practical application of visual imagery strategies in the general education classroom. Data collection from this study attempts to provide further information to this topic by conducting experiments using various visual imagery strategies in four secondary English classrooms. Strategies include the use of film adaptations of text as well as lessons which require students to generate their own visual imagery to better understand a piece of text. Participants of these studies had the chance to reflect on the lessons through surveys as well as reflection sheets which required them to break down the visual images in comparison to the text.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
AN ABSTRACT	v
CHAPTERS	
INTRODUCTION	1
Purpose and Rationale.....	1
Background	3
Problem.....	4
Importance of Study.....	5
Research Questions	6
REVIEW OF LITERATURE	7
ESL and Learning Disabled Students	7
Benefits in the general education classroom.....	11
Visual Imagery Application in the Classroom.....	17
METHODOLOGY	22
Participants	22
Setting	23
Data Collection	24
THE DATA.....	27
Movie notes for “The Scarlet Letter”	27

“The Crucible” test experiment	29
“The Crucible” movie notes.....	31
Visual Depiction Survey.....	33
“Beowulf” Visual Survey.....	37
WHAT I LEARNED.....	40
Final reflections from the review of the literature.....	40
Reflections on personal data collection	43
REFERENCES	48
APPENDIX A.....	51
“The Scarlet Letter” Movie Notes.....	51
APPENDIX B	52
“The Crucible” movie notes.....	52
APPENDIX C.....	53
“The Fall of the House of Usher” Visual Depiction Survey.....	53
APPENDIX D.....	54
“Beowulf” Visual Survey	54

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Purpose and Rationale

During my education in both junior high and high school I often spent time in various classes witnessing a teacher going to the television, plugging in a movie, then going back to their desk to grade papers, make phone calls, or catch up on emails or the day's headlines in the newspaper. Sometimes the type of technology would go lower than that as slide shows were used to show us their family vacation to Mexico, or the backpacking trip they took two years prior across Europe. While some of these visuals had relevance to the unit or lesson currently being worked on, many of these visuals had little to no connection to anything and was simply a basic version of classroom management; watch the film, look at the slides and keep quiet. Rarely were these forms of visual imagery connected to higher-level thinking or used to provide a deeper connection to the text that was being read in class. Often times the films were watched after the novel had already been read and the test was completed. It was a simple stop gap between two units or a way to "reward" us for our behavior or performance on the final exam. The slide shows were even worse, hardly ever being used in conjunction with a unit, but simply something to fill a shortened class period or a class period before a holiday break.

While these activities were fun I often thought about the fact that the film we were watching could have been useful before the test was given. Teachers could have

also used the slide shows as a differentiated approach to a certain learning target by creating slide shows that generated thinking and effectively integrated into the particular lesson. These technological resources can be extremely useful in the classroom, but I often observed teachers using them as a carrot for good behavior and doing well on a test rather than developing a multi-modal unit that allows the best possible chance at learning from a variety of resources. During my student teaching experience I have witnessed many teachers use the same approach. Teachers would often brag before a holiday break that their day was going to be “easy” because they were showing X or Y movie. Being a future professional in this field I do not want parents to hear their student tell them about the movie they watched in class today and what it had to do with what we were studying. Parents and students alike deserve to know the way and students should have a clear understanding as to why the visual is being used and be able to adequately articulate that to their parents.

My purpose for investigating this topic is two fold. First, I want to be able to investigate the literature surrounding the subject of visual imagery in the classroom. I would like to add to the discussion of how visual imagery is used and what its effects are on learners of all ability levels. Secondly, I would like to shed light on how teachers can implement these differentiated approaches into their classroom to best fit learners of all needs. My hope is that my project will be able to provide not only a justification for the use of visual imagery in the classroom, but also to indicate to fellow educators how these valuable tools can be used properly during various units and lessons.

Background

During my student teaching experience I have had the chance to not only observe students in the classroom, but try and listen in and observe their discussions and conversations in the halls before school, after school and during passing time. While observing students talking with their fellow classmates I have often heard students boast of a teacher showing them a movie in the coming period because of how well the class did on the test, or how well they behaved before an upcoming break. Observing various teachers directly only confirmed this idea for me as I have witnessed numerous teachers at my school make these types of “deals” with their classes.

Upon being introduced to my two mentor teachers early on in this experience I quickly learned that both of them had a passion and desire to integrate visual imagery into their curriculum in a variety of ways. There were numerous moments during lesson planning with the two of them where we worked towards implementing various forms of visual imagery into a lesson in order to serve as many learning styles as possible and hopefully help students better understand the content of the lesson. While many people think that visual imagery is strictly limited to movie clips or films, my mentor teachers and I have found ways to broaden that label and include other elements of visual imagery into the classroom that provides a sharp focus on student-centered learning and encourages creativity from all students involved. One specific example utilized during my student teaching was a lesson where I was showing various scenes from the film version of the novel 1984 as we were reading those particular pages within the novel. I was not showing it all before, so students could potentially become confused or disinterested by already knowing the ending. I was also not showing it after, when most

student do not even care because the reading and homework is over. Instead, I would deliberately have the students read 15-20 pages of text and then show students that particular section of the movie and finally, facilitate discussions around what they saw and if and how it helped them comprehend the reading.

Going beyond the realm of movies I also created a lesson for my students where they generated their thinking about literature from the “Age of Reason” by viewing a short slide show that was played in front of them for a total of three minutes. The slide show they viewed had various images that were related to the time period; images of prominent figures such as Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Banneker as well as images of slaves, the American flag and the Declaration of Independence. During the viewing of this slide show students were asked to write down observations as well as any and all questions they had in regards to what they were viewing. They were given no prompt and no direct answers during the viewing of the slide show. This was simply an anticipatory set that generated student engagement and thinking and allowed them to get a visual preview of the coming unit and activities. Now that I have had the opportunity to put these types of lessons into place it has made me even more curious about whether or not these extensions can be implemented even more in order to benefit the learning of all students.

Problem

Try to reflect on the following questions: Was there ever a time in your schooling where you were watching a film adaptation of a novel and you thought to yourself that you would have done much better on the test for that novel if you would have seen the movie before taking the test? Was there ever a time during your schooling where you

wondered why you were watching *Star Wars* in history class? Were you ever reading a difficult piece of text and think to yourself; “I really could use a picture right now to understand what is going on.” If you have ever pondered these questions or ones similar you are certainly not alone, as I have heard students make these same comments while in class or walking the halls of school. The problem with this statement is the fact that it demonstrates how little teachers make connections between what they show students visually and what they are learning via text. Education is currently existing in a society filled with numerous forms of visual stimulation and technology. With the increasing amount of students that have access to this technology and require additional support and resources from teachers it concerns me that so many teachers are still reluctant to use visual imagery, or have little knowledge as to go about implementing those visual stimuli into their curriculum. The problem that needs to be addressed is two-tiered; is visual imagery an effective mode of education that benefits a large range of students and if so, how can educators best utilize these resource to fit the needs of their students. This thesis will center on that problem.

Importance of Study

No two students are alike. Not only do their personalities, interests, and ideas differ, but their learning styles are also vastly different than their nearest desk-mate. In order for teachers to truly be considerate of all students, we need to make sure that we are including activities in our lessons that spark the interest of all of those various learning styles and interests. That idea is the importance of this study. Undoubtedly when you ask a class what types of things help the students learn the best, you will always have at least one or two students (likely a lot more) that say that they learn best with visual stimulus. If