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REVISTA
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REVISTA DE HUMANIDADES
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CUADERNOS DE SOFÍA
EDITORIAL

PERCEPTION OF THE LANDSCAPE PAINTING BY PUPILS: "BARRIER-FREE" AND "BARIER" VISUALISATION TECHNIQUES

Ph. D. Svetlana I. Pozdeeva
Tomsk State Pedagogical University, Russian Federation
Tomsk Polytechnic University, Russian Federation
ORCID 0000-0002-2747-0120
svetapozd@mail.ru

Abstract

The article states a problem of traditional methods effectiveness for developing coherent written speech among children when describing paintings. The process of painting perception handling and text writing results in the insufficient attention to children's live speech; their activities are guided by the teacher, and individual perception of a painting is blocked by "barriers", such as rigid teacher instructions, sample descriptive texts, etc. The article presents an experimental technique, based on establishing open educational communication between the teacher and pupils at the lesson where primacy and value of the painting as a visual image is recognized. Content of three lessons taught in the third grade is presented. The lessons were based on describing two paintings "Spring. High water" and "March" by I. Levitan. The article represents the comparative analysis of children's texts – painting descriptions – based on different techniques of visualization; the analysis pays attention to children's speech format and content (vocabulary, part-of-speech diversity, figures of speech, size of text and sentences). The following results are presented: a) comparison of text drafts and final versions describing the painting "Spring. High water"; b) comparison of texts describing the paintings "Spring. High water" ("barrier-free" technique) and "March" (using the prepared text description as a "barrier"); c) analysis of pupils' worksheets for comparing two paintings; d) analysis of individual memos "How to write a painting description essay".

Keywords

Landscape painting – Visualization – Visualization barriers – Painting description

Para Citar este Artículo:

Pozdeeva, Svetlana I. Perception of the landscape painting by pupils: "barrier-free" and "barier" visualisation techniques. Revista Inclusiones Vol: 7 num Especial (2020): 467-478.

Introduction

Working with the painting as a visual image, has always been considered in regular schools as an important component of developing children's speech coherence. Textbooks on the Russian language, being a part of all academic and methodological complexes for modern primary school, contain reproductions of paintings: these are usually landscapes, less often – genre painting, even less often – still life paintings. The traditional method of developing children's speech[1] "forces" teachers to work on a painting description essay according to the following structure: an introductory conversation (for example, about an artist, history of a painting), looking at the painting, discussing it and drawing up a plan (the same for all pupils), choosing appropriate words (including elements of orthography), finally, writing the text. It is believed that such essays are "convenient in terms of organization and psychologically valuable since the phenomena of life depicted in the painting have already been interpreted by the artist ..." [2].

The main principle of a traditional method is based on that the process of painting perception, as well as creation of text has to be guided: an adult knows what painting should be taken, to what part the attention should be paid by children, what words (including figurative ones) should be used when describing it, and in what way the description text should be organized. Such process cannot be spontaneous because children will not pay enough attention to main parts of the painting; the description will be "uncultured" in terms of speech structure (orthography, punctuation, and stylistics).

It is also worth noting that there is not enough of live, extended speech produced by children during the lesson on speech development, and if there is, all of the statements are only addressed to the teacher; there is no communication among pupils, it is "redundant" as there is nothing to discuss: all of them see the same thing, they interpret what they see in the same way, and as a result, write very similar texts, forgetting that any essay is a creative act.

In our study another way to organize an essay (an alternative to the traditional one) is suggested: while working with a painting (in case of a landscape), children are allowed describing it freely, and share their thoughts and ideas with each other about what they have seen. In other words, the teacher aims at structuring the lesson so the painting becomes a source of discussion, reflection, mutual interest, a source of open educational communication between the teacher and children. After all, the painting was originally created for its viewing (admiring and gradual immersion), not for the purpose of description. Many artists would be surprised to read how their works are interpreted in numerous students' essays which were written under supervision of methodologically competent teachers.

The study is based on the idea of U. Mitchell[3] that there is a struggle for dominance between images and linguistic signs in modern culture and education, where the textual and

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[1] Methods of teaching the Russian language and literary reading. T.I. Zinovieva (ed.). Textbook and practice (Moscow: Garant, 2016) y M. R. Lvov; V. G. Goretskii & O. V. Sosnovskaya, Methods of teaching the Russian language in primary grades: Educational manual for students of pedagogical institutions of higher education (Moscow: Publishing Center Academia, 2002).
[2] M. R. Lvov; V. G. Goretskii & O. V. Sosnovskaya, Methods of teaching the Russian…
[3] W.J.T. Mitchell, Iconology: image, text, ideology (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

visual forms are opposed to each other. Birth of visual culture in modern society aggravated the opposition between the culture of printed word and visual image where the latter is seen as a "second-rate illustration" of ideas[4]. The experimental method is based on the idea of simultaneous (a one-time and "single-moment") perception of the painting as a visual image, compared to a successive perception of fictional text with gradual reading and understanding, with the assumption that the result of text perception is interpretation, of visual perception is description[5].

Here it is important to point out that simultaneity of visual image perception assumes the viewer's trust in his first impressions (there cannot be right and wrong impression), which according to Mamardashvili[6] are responses to "events of emotional life", "reflections of mental work". Using the painting as a source of impressions means children get diverse, lively and real impressions when looking at the painting, the impressions retain (get dissolved), are deciphered (splashed out and interpreted) during communication with the others. In this sense, the situation of a painting viewing can be interpreted as a situation of emotional and communicative involvement in group work at the lesson which can be defined as a child's opportunity to participate in group work with the teacher and other children[7], and creation of text describing the painting is considered to be a result of open discussion of what the group participants saw (open cooperative activity). On the other hand, physiologists and neuroscientists remind us that "process of observing or viewing something helps us get a much clearer understanding of the situation in contrast to other senses, thinking process or behavior. Approximately half of our brain serves our eyesight"[8].

The traditional method for pupils' speech developing is still based on a successive approach and insists on differentiating two processes: perception of the painting as a work of art by children and preparation for communication about the painting. In the first case it is important to build a conversation competently, in the second one – to prepare children for painting description by drawing up a plan, selecting the lexical means appropriate to the painting specifics, structuring the spelling training to prevent children from mistakes. It is important to consider all features of the descriptive text because the traditional method uses a standard division of texts according to speech type (narration, description, and argumentation) without using other stimuli that cause the children to respond in writing[9]. The stages of lesson on essay writing, based the painting, are as follows: setting the educational task, silent examining of the painting, analyzing the painting content, discussing the essay structure, preparing of lexical and spelling means, and writing the text. Within this method the painting specifics as a visual image and its educational resources for open educational

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W. J. T. Mitchell, What Do Paintings Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005) y W.J.T. Mitchell, Painting Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Représentation (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1994).

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communication of the teacher with children is lost, as well as organization of the dialogue between participants in cooperative activity. "Understanding in the dialogue is carried out through representation of individual vision and its complementation with different viewpoints which, as a result, deepen and enrich this vision"[10].

One of methodological difficulties for a teacher working with a visual image, is defined as "confrontation" of the printed text (word) and painting (visual image)[11]: the teacher interprets the landscape painting through the prism of "reference" printed text that children should create to describe this painting. Examples of texts-descriptions of the painting in the methodological manuals and on the Internet, in our opinion, become a barrier in building open communication with children when working with a visual image.

Even supporters of the so-called creative writing (an alternative to the Russian concept of "speech development") in the UK, Canada and the USA, emphasize the practical activities importance when constructing speech content in the process of teaching writing, and also encourage teachers to listen to pupils more attentively and discuss their potential[12]. They associate success of pupils' written speech development of with the choice of topics which are close to the personal experience of children (every day and reader experience), and pay less attention to educational and communicative resources of visual images and their application at the lesson.

Materials and methods

The purpose of experimental study: to test the technique of descriptive essays writing on the basis of open educational communication between the teacher and pupils, recognizing the primacy and value of a painting as a visual image, compared to the secondary nature of the text describing it. It was important for us to understand how much we can trust the children in their individual vision of a painting, removing all "barriers" such as rigid teacher instructions, regulated conversation on the painting, prepared plans, observance of rules for text constructing, presentation of descriptive text samples, etc. Within the experiment we wanted to prove our assumption that "universalization of speech actions can result in loss of visual image uniqueness (there is no such painting and will never be) and deprives of opportunity to use the painting as a means for communicative and personal development of a child ..."[13].

Objectives of the experimental study:

1.   Develop and teach lessons in the 3rd grade of regular school where one can compare the "barrier-free" and "barrier" communication techniques; the latter presupposes a prepared text describing the picture as a barrier.

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2.   Substantiate and prove techniques of creating open educational communication at the lesson, during frontal, individual and group work.

3.   Analyze children's primary (immediately after the painting perception) and secondary (after a group discussion) texts in terms of their speech format and content.

4.   Find out how children themselves identify the succession of painting description and what role they attribute to visual actions.

Within the experiment the following methods were used: development and conduct of experimental lessons, observation over teacher and pupils' activity, audio record and lesson transcripts, analysis of the texts created by children in terms of their speech format and content (the vocabulary, part-of-speech diversity, figures of speech, size of text and sentences were considered).

For the experimental study two paintings were selected: "Spring. High water" and "March" by I. I. Levitan. Grounds for selection of these paintings are the following: they are a part of classic Russian painting; the pictures are comprehensible for a child's perception, close to their personal experience, and positive in color range. Choice of the third grade as a test basis can be explained by the fact that children have developed oral and written speech skills at this stage, have experience in writing essays of different kinds, experience in interpreting painting reproductions at the Russian language and literature lessons.

Three experimental lessons were developed and conducted by the teacher every two weeks in April-May 2017. The first lesson included work with the painting "Spring. High Water", where the texts were based on the original drafts and a group discussion what pupils have seen ("barrier-free" technique). At the second lesson, the painting "March" was interpreted with the use of "barrier" technique: children started with a prepared descriptive text and moved on to painting perception, and then wrote their own descriptions. During the third final lesson, the main task was to compare two paintings and create a memo "How to write an essay about the painting".

The first lesson had the following structure. Demonstration of the painting in front of the children was accompanied with a puzzle: a boat depicted in the lower left corner remained covered, and children tried to guess what was hidden there (an animal, a bridge, a boat, or a bush). After getting the answer, children tried to predict the painting title ("spring flood, an early spring, a conversation of trees, a wooden lake"), then they explained the author's title, particularly, why it consists of two words. It is worth noting that some children did not realize it was spring, they decided that fall was depicted on the painting. After that, on the worksheet which had two columns (Me vs. Others), children wrote what they saw, their impressions, in the first column (for this task the teacher suggested a set expression "In the painting I see ..."). Then, some volunteers read their drafts. The other children could write their groupmates' expressions and sentences which they liked in the second column. Finally, they wrote down a "full" descriptive text of the painting.

The second experimental lesson was structured in a different way. At the lesson beginning, the painting description was given; after reading it children had to predict the picture itself. To do this, the pupils while reading the text highlighted word-images and word-paints with pencils of different colors. As a result, children attributed the following words to words-images: a snow cap, will slide with rustling, hit, a horse, an unclosed door, stretching towards the sun, reinforces the birdhouse, is breathing, reflecting, was gaining strength. Color words: a sunny day, a bright blue sky, sunlit, spring warmth, light trunks, dark pines, warm reddish tones of the road, in blue shades of snow, a lemon-yellow wall, in golden

sunrays, a clear blue sky. After reading the text, children tried to describe orally how they saw the picture. After they have been shown the picture and after its careful examination, children shared their opinions about what coincided and what did not coincide with what they imagined. Only after that children wrote their own texts.

The third lesson was devoted to comparing two paintings. During an introductory conversation children recollected what they had been doing at the previous lessons: they guessed an object covered in the painting, they predicted what the painting would look like, compared what they thought of the painting with what they actually saw, and they described the pictures. After that the teacher suggested choosing one of the paintings to explain why it caught their attention. Children wrote mini-texts. Seven pupils chose the painting "Spring. High water", twelve – the painting "March". They gave the following arguments in favor of the first painting: the water looks like a mirror, beautiful (beautifully depicted) trees that seem to be bathing in the water; the boat is depicted on the shore and it can be seen that a fisherman has been there recently; summer is getting closer and everything is coming to life. The painting "March" attracted children's attention because it has many bright colors, a modest plot; it is clear that this is March, the scene depicted is brighter, lively, cheerful; some shadows are depicted, there are animals (a horse). It is interesting to note that one pupil remembered the fact that the artist had painted it quickly.

Having listened to children, the teacher summarized that Levitan's spring was different in these paintings; then he gave a group assignment to analyze both paintings using a comparative table with the given criteria and reproductions. When formulating the comparison criteria, we considered the following steps: to start with the painting title, because it briefly conveys its content, then address the objects depicted (they specify the painting content), then turn to signs of spring (since both paintings are "vernal"). The next step is to pay attention to the colors used by the artist (since it is a piece of art), and further analyze the presence of a person in both paintings (explicit or hidden), and finally complete the analysis with defining the overall impression (mood) of the painting. When all groups presented, the lesson ended with an individual writing of the memo "How to write a painting description essay".

Results

Table 1 presents the analysis of drafts and final versions of the texts (25 descriptive texts) created by the children during the first experimental lesson.

Criteria	Draft	Final version	Improvement (difference)
1. Average size of the text (number of sentences)			
2. Variation of a number of sentences	F	F	
3. Average number of words in the text			
4. Variation of a number of words	F r o	F r o	

5. Number of figurative means (per one text)			
6. Correlation of speech parts (in relation to the total number of words in the text): nouns verbs (gerund) adjectives and participles pronouns adverbs			

Table 1
Comparative characteristics of the first text (draft) and the final variant

As can be seen from the table, the final texts are 2.5 times larger than the first drafts what is explained by increase of sentences number, and hence, of words. Variation of sentences number when writing the draft was 3.0, and the final texts – 3.4, that proves a greater diversity of final texts. This result is also proved by the variation of word number: 3.64 and 3.72, respectively. However, the average number of words in a sentence almost did not change (!): it was 5.5, and it became 5.48. The changes mainly related to the sentence structure. The drafts consisted mainly of simple and unextended sentences; when complex sentences appear in the final texts (in 88% of the texts). Children used up to 4 complex sentences in the text. For example (note: each sentence is taken from different texts), "I really like spring because it becomes warmer. The river is like a mirror where the whole forest is reflected. Here are a lot of colorful scenes, for example, a transition from violet to blue. In the distance you can see a house, apparently, a fisherman lives in it. I imagined that I was floating on a boat along this very big and beautiful river. In the picture I see trees that seem to be bathing in the water. It appears that white birches are bathing in the water and the birches are talking to each other. And the silence is such as if something is about to happen. In the picture I see spring trees that stand in cold water. Looking at this picture, I feel that I'm standing on the shore and breeze is blowing in my face from the water".

The final texts, as can be seen from the table, have become more imaginative due to use of more epithets, personifications and metaphors. As for variety of speech parts, number of nouns has not changed, number of verbs has even decreased, number of adjectives and participles has almost doubled (!), which indicates the accuracy, extendedness and imagery of description. In our opinion, this improvement was connected with discussion of initial drafts when personal vision of the picture was enriched by another person's vision. This is confirmed by analysis of the column "the Others" during discussion of the first draft; 77% of children filled this column. At the same time, 55% wrote only one sentence, 35% added 2 sentences and 15% – 4 sentences. In 75% of cases, children named objects (water, trees, sky, and houses) or put down short phrases like: *In the picture, I see trees on the water. Trees and houses have already been flooded. Half of the picture is occupied with the water.* Only in 35% of cases in the column "the Others" children wrote sentences with figurative means: *Trees seem to be talking to each other. The natural mirror is reflecting the trees*. However, only 15% of children included such sentences in the final version of text. It is noteworthy that only one child wrote the phrase *In the picture, the others saw* ... There is no specific difference between use of adverbs and pronouns, although the final texts also contained demonstrative pronouns, not only personal ones.

Table 2 shows the comparative analysis of texts which were based on the barrier-free and barrier techniques.

Criteria	M a r	S p r	I m p
1. Average size of the text (number of sentences)			
2. Variation of a number of sentences	F r a	F r a	
3. Average number of words in the text			
4. Average length of sentence			
5. Variation of a number of words	F r a	F r a	
6. Number of figurative means (per one text)			
7. Correlation of speech parts (in relation to the total number of words in the text): nouns verbs (gerund) adjectives and participles pronouns adverbs	43.9% 18.7% 16.95% 4.4% 9.02%	42% 19.97% 12.18% 1 0	

Table 2

Comparative characteristics of the texts describing two paintings by I.I. Levitan

As can be seen from the table, texts of different essays turned out to be approximately of the same size in number of sentences, but average sentence length was less by 0.73 units in the second text. Variation of sentences and number of words in the texts on the painting "March" is less; in other words, the texts in this case are "more even". This "evenness" is manifested in the content: all children list the main objects in the picture, their mutual arrangement, denoting the main characteristics of these objects (color and size).

As for the speech parts, there is no significant difference between these two texts. Nouns and verbs are still leading. Among verbs, the word "stands/is standing" is the most frequent one; in some texts it is repeated up to 3-4 times. The same situation is with the word "was". According to average number of adjectives, the text "March" is slightly ahead of the text "Spring. High water". This is due to the fact that, firstly, the color range of the picture is more intense and bright, and secondly, apart from the words denoting colors, children used words which name dimensions (small, large), and also participles "not melted, harnessed, gone". In the text there were fewer pronouns because children did not use personal pronouns (I, me), as a result, the texts could be described as less personal. A small increase in adverbs number is due to use of adverbs of place (to the right, next to, in the middle of, up).

The difference was essential in terms of figurative means: texts on the painting "March" contained 7 times less tropes (!)). Only 4 pupils used one trope "the sky is not so

cruel: it's clear and bright", "it looks as if the snow is going to slide", "the house stands like on a cloud in the sky", "the forest is alone without a human soul". One can say that, despite the brightness of colors and positive mood of the painting, it "did not catch" the children emotionally: only two pupils wrote "I feel", three pupils – "I see", one – "I imagine". It can be assumed that the prepared descriptive text somewhat "cooled" the children's emotions and their personal attitude to the painting, i.e. it became a kind of barrier in the painting perception. It is noteworthy that when the teacher asked children at the lesson: "Did the prepared descriptive text help you with the description?", children unanimously replied "Yes, it did, much, it explained what should be described in the picture". This shows that children tend to exaggerate the meaning of prepared text, someone else's description, as they actually created their own texts. Nevertheless, they did not use the sample text as a source for their essays, but created their own versions.

Table 3 shows Analysis of worksheets for five groups. The worksheets were filled at the third lesson where two paintings were compared.

Comparison Criteria	SPRING. High water	MARCH
Suggested titles for painting	1.Summer is coming 2.Late spring 3. Flood 4. Late spring 5. Late spring	1. Beginning of spring 2. Early spring 3. Live spring forest 4. Early spring 5. Early spring
Objects named in the painting	1. Flooded village 2. Boat, birch, fir, house, water 3. Trees, land, water 4. Trees, boat, shadows of trees 5. Boat, village, trees, river	1. Private house, birdhouse 2. Horse, sleigh, birch, birds. 3. Trees 4. House, horse, snow, birdhouse 5. Horse with sleigh, birdhouse
Signs of spring	1. The buds blossom 2. Snow has melted, there is a lot of water 3. Flood 4. Water has melted, there is no snow 5. High water, tree buds	Leaves are shooting Mud and melting snow Melting snow The snow is melting, and a clear sky Melting snow
Presence of a person	1. A boat, a village. 2. There is a boat near the lake, and one can see a house at the distance 3. The boat 4. There is a boat on the shore and a village 5. Remote	1. A horse with a sleigh, a house. 2. Near the house 3. Horse, house 4. The horse is standing, the door of the house is open 5. Nearby
Colors	Vague 2. Orange, blue, light 3. Dim 4. Yellow, red, brown, green 5. Dark blue, sandy	1. Light 2. Brown, green, orange 3. Bright 4. Yellow, white, green, brown. 5. Brown, white, green
Mood conveyed by the painting	1. Gloomy 2. Cheerful and sad at the same time 3. Sadness and fun 4. Sad because of the gloomy sky 5. A bit sad	1. Cheerful. 2. Merrier 3. Hilarious 4. Cheerful, joyful 5. Reviving

Table 3
Content of worksheets

As can be seen from the table, according to the first criterion, children drew attention to the time of spring is depicted (late – early); the second criterion included what objects they mentioned; much emphasis was placed on the boat in the first case and on the horse

in the second. The boat turned out to be a very "attractive" object for children because at the first lesson this subject was covered in the painting and children tried to guess what was hidden (the followings lessons children repeatedly recalled this episode as one of the most interesting lesson parts); moreover, the boat is located in the lower left corner and immediately catches one's eye. The horse attracted children's attention as it is the only living object in the picture (one group also wrote about the birds which could possibly be in the birdhouse). The criterion "Signs of Spring" was not sufficiently manifested, children paid attention to snow, water and mud, even made a factual mistake about the blossoming leaves; the main difference in this criterion was presence or absence of snow. Presence of a person in the first case can be predicted seeing a boat on the shore and a house at the distance, in the second case – there is a horse, a house and an open door. One group made a very interesting remark about presence of a person; presence is remote (he is somewhere far away) in the first case and the nearby presence (he is close because he has entered the house) in the second painting. As for the color range, children mentioned the painting "Spring ..." is full of vague and dim colors: blue and yellow; in the second painting one can see bright colors: green, orange and brown. Apparently, it determined the painting mood – sad or mixed (probably, there was slight sadness), in the second – cheerful and reviving.

Discussion

Comparison of the texts written, using the "barrier-free" and "barrier" technique, points to obvious advantages of the first technique, as children's texts turned out to be more imaginative (and therefore, personal), more detailed, extended and interesting in their content. Movement from the painting perception to written expression of the first impressions, then exchange of these impressions and finally writing of the final text turned out to be possible and effective, as in their final texts children used more figurative means, adjectives (although the average length of sentence did not increase). The Barrier technique as movement from the prepared text to the painting, results in less detailed statements with a smaller number of figurative expressions, and what is most important – to similarity of texts, i.e., "leveling" of perception and vision of the painting.

The Barrier-free technique is built on recognizing the picture value as a visual image, trust in children's first impressions at what they have seen in the painting and building up educational and personal communication among children, within which there is an exchange of different impressions and thus their gradual enrichment. This very process becomes the method basis for writing texts by children, which can become diverse and interesting in terms of speech format and content. Implementation of the barrier-free technique contributes to development of the following communicative skills among pupils: ability to fully immerse in the picture (its color range and mood), express their impression of what they have seen (both in oral and written form); ability to see the same things as the others in the picture (pupils and the teacher); ability to choose adequate figurative means for expressing one's own vision; ability to compare different landscape pictures and understand the uniqueness of each.

Conclusion

Teaching experimental lessons and analysis of children's written texts allows us to draw the following conclusions. Firstly, the barrier technique where a child is guided to present his own text on the basis of prepared descriptive text for the landscape painting, results in poor monologic statements regarding their speech diversity and content; it simplifies the children's vision of the painting which is proved by similarity of the texts created

by different pupils. Secondly, the barrier-free technique, based on recognizing the painting value as a visual image, trust in children's first impressions of the painting and building educational and personal communication among children, is more effective because the texts of children are more diverse, full of figurative means and convey the author's position. Thirdly, emotional and communicative involvement of children in cooperative activity on the painting viewing ensures establishment of open adult-children and children-children communication where the teacher offers children "not to remember but look; not to listen but peer into; not to enumerate but enjoy the image ..."[14]. The conducted experiment shows that the method for primary schoolchildren speech development opens up an opportunity to create a real alternative to current educational situation where "a visual mediator – image assists (is subordinate) to a verbal mediator (word)"[15]. The subject of further study can be a search and approbation of mechanisms for educational communication building based on other types of visual images in primary school.

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