Effects of a student book club on third graders' literacy attitudes and performance

Kirsten M. Bellamy
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EFFECTS OF A STUDENT BOOK CLUB ON THIRD GRADERS' LITERACY ATTITUDES AND PERFORMANCE

by
Kirsten M. Bellamy

A Thesis
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Science in Teaching Degree of The Graduate School at Rowan University (June 28, 2001)

Approved by Professor

Date approved June 28, 2001
ABSTRACT

Kirsten M. Bellamy
Effects of a Student Book Club on Third Graders' Literacy Attitudes and Performance
2001
Advisor: Dr. Randall Robinson
Master of Science in Teaching

The purpose of this study was to identify a method of improving the reading attitudes of elementary students. A book club program was chosen as the treatment because it incorporates sociocultural perspectives in learning and opportunities to put previously learned skills to use. An experimental and control group of third grade students, with 28 children in each group, were administered the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS), an instrument that tests attitudes toward recreational and academic reading. After determining beginning attitudes, the experimental group participated in a book club, which utilized small group reading sessions followed by whole class discussions of main ideas, characters, and perspectives. Students also completed weekly writing assignments. At the conclusion of the book, the experimental and control groups were retested for any change in attitude. Beginning and ending scores were totaled and means and standard deviations were calculated and compared. It was hypothesized that third grade students that participated in the book club would increase their reading attitude scores more than third grade students who did not. While the book club program proved effective, it is recommended that it augment rather than replace regular reading instruction. Basic reading skills and strategies are necessary for successful participation.
Mini-Abstract

Kirsten M. Bellamy
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This study focused on determining if a book club program would improve the reading attitudes of third grade students. Comparison of pre and post-test results of a reading attitude survey proved the book club program effective. However, it is recommended that this program augment rather than replace regular reading instruction.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to gratefully acknowledge the dedication of my advisor, Dr. Randall Robinson. Without his commitment to the successful completion of this thesis, my task would have been considerably more difficult.

I would also like to acknowledge my children, Pearis and Paul Bellamy IV, for their unwavering love and inspiration. They motivate me to continue investigating practices that will enhance student enjoyment of learning activities. Hopefully, my efforts may improve their academic experiences as they soon embark on their elementary school journeys.

Lastly, I'd like to acknowledge my parents, Joyce and Alvin Pearis, Sr. for their steadfast support throughout this graduate adventure. Their love and encouragement has been priceless.
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Chapter I
SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Introduction

Recent educational trends are shifting from over-reliance on special education pullout programs for children with reading difficulties, and leaning toward the expectation that regular elementary classroom teachers assume a more primary responsibility for the acceleration of reading growth for all of their students. These trends are rooted in research that has shown that many struggling readers either do not qualify for district sponsored support programs or that such programs are sometimes not available (Spear-Swerling, & Sternberg, 1996; Wang, Reynolds, & Walberg, 1988). Even when students receive help via special or compensatory education programs, most of their teacher-directed reading opportunities still occur in their regular classroom (Haynes & Jenkins, 1986).

A pivotal publication in the world of education, Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report of the Commission on Reading, concludes that the “best predictor” of reading comprehension, size of vocabulary, and gains in reading achievement between the second and fifth grade are the average minutes per day spent reading books during leisure time (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985). It stands to reason that understanding student attitudes toward reading and effectively motivating intrinsic desire to read may solve a myriad of issues pertaining to raising our nation’s student literacy achievements. A journal article published in Reading Research Quarterly expresses this sentiment well:
Understanding the role of attitudes in developing readers is important for two principal reasons. First, attitude may affect the level of ability ultimately attained by a given student through its influence on such factors as engagement and practice. Second, even for the fluent reader, poor attitude may occasion a choice not to read when other options exist, a condition now generally known as aliteracy (McKenna, Kear, & Elsworth, 1995, p. 934).

Attitudes toward reading, as with anything else, are generally acquired and reinforced through experience, usually produce observable behavior, and are persistent over time. Generally, the findings of research exploring the relationship of negative reading attitudes and low achievement levels have a positive correlation (Fitzgibbons, 1997, p. 3). Thus, improve the attitude and possibly increase the probability of increasing achievement.

Statement of the Problem

Dissatisfying reading experiences, whether academic or recreational, lead to successively worsened attitudes toward reading in general. Considering the positive correlation of negative reading attitudes and low achievement levels, it can be assumed that any decline in attitude will adversely affect performance across several academic content areas. Without increasing satisfying reading experiences and promoting mastery of skills needed to increase vocabulary size, comprehension, and reading speed, how will teachers potentially improve overall academic performance and student enjoyment of reading?

Statement of Hypothesis

Third grade students who participate in the book club program will increase their score in attitude toward reading more than third grade students who did not participate in the book club program.
Limitations of the Study

The implications of this study must be considered in light of some inherent limitations. The first limitation was that of sampling restrictions. The sample was made available through the assignment of student teaching, pre-determined and out of the researcher's control. The use of an assigned school and district significantly reduces the opportunity to study the effects of the treatment on a more heterogeneous population. Elementary schools are primarily zoned by neighborhoods, hence presenting similar economic backgrounds and possibly cultural likenesses among the students sampled. That presents difficulties in pronouncing overall validity of a book club program with students nationwide.

Another limitation of this study included time constraints. The student teaching assignment was restricted to one sixteen week period. The length of time available for the preparation and administration of this study was contingent on that time frame. Possibly a more accurate picture of success or failure of the book club program would be presented with a longer treatment phase using a variety of books.

A third limitation was teacher variability and transition. Throughout the sixteen-week student teaching assignment there was a gradual integration of the student teacher into a primary teaching role. Inherent to this process was a period of adjustment for the students in adjusting to a new face and teaching style. This may have affected the accuracy in answering questions on the pre-testing of reading attitudes and motivation throughout the program. Highly positive feelings toward the researcher may have prompted students to answer as they think they should as opposed to answering
truthfully. Conversely, longing for their regular teacher may have prompted rushing in order to finish the process quickly.

Lastly, existing reading skill levels of the students was considered. Students in the sample class possessed very few phonics and decoding skills. The district in which the school was located exercises a whole language approach to reading. This approach, which concentrates on memorization of commonly seen words and excludes the process of learning letter sounds for purposes of decoding, is what the children have learned since kindergarten. They had extreme difficulty with decoding, pronouncing, and deriving meaning for new words.

**Operational Definitions of Terms**

**Reading Attitude:** A system of feelings related to reading which causes the learner to approach or avoid a reading situation (Alexander & Filler, 1976, p. 1).

**Reading Comprehension:** Ability to construct meaning from text, using personal background knowledge in addition to text information.

**Vocabulary:** Knowledge base of words and their meanings.

**Literacy:** Connection and application of oral and written language.

**Literature-based instruction:** Teacher uses authentic children’s literature as basis for teaching students reading skills, concepts, and strategies.

**Book Club:** Student-led discussion program where students read and discuss a book together freely.
Chapter II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

It is commonly accepted that reading is an integral part of learning. Without this ability it is difficult to function successfully in our society. For these reasons researchers, educators, and parents are concerned about the lack of interest in reading exhibited by our nation’s youth. Educators in particular need a method of enhancing student attitudes toward reading due to the ever-increasing responsibilities of the classroom teacher. The limited availability of compensatory or support programs in some districts places the onus of assisting struggling readers on the shoulders of regular education teachers who often have to grapple with increasingly large classroom sizes as well (Spear-Swerling & Sternberg, 1996; Wang, Reynolds, & Walberg, 1988).

This thesis introduces a method of addressing all of the above needs. A student book club program allows classes of all sizes to take advantage of the reading aptitude of each student. Children working together provide opportunities for growth in communication skills through the exchange of differing perspectives. Students participating in the book club program will score higher in attitude toward reading than their counterparts who did not participate in the book club program.

Reading Attitudes

Reading attitudes are greatly due to a combination of three factors: (1) individual beliefs about the outcomes of reading (2) individual beliefs about the expectations of
others, and (3) specific reading experiences. Children's early reading experiences, beginning at home and extending to the classroom, work together to form the overall attitude they may carry throughout a lifetime. Classroom teachers are afforded the unique opportunity to alter this attitude and may do so simply by positively altering the above factors (McKenna, Stratton, Grindler, & Jenkins, 1995).

Positive alteration is not as easy as it may sound. As children age, reading must compete with more and more activities that compete for their attention during leisure time. Even assuming a positive reading attitude exists due to early, positive experiences in the child's life such as home, school, and peers, the temptation is great to abandon reading as a recreational activity when faced with the many other choices available today. For struggling readers, as a large percentage of American youngsters are, independent reading is most important yet most rare. On average, most classrooms devote less than 10% of total school time to reading and most children only devote approximately 1% of their free time to reading (Anderson et al, 1985). It is imperative that educators find a means to motivate students to read and instill a joy of reading early in the primary grades to hopefully inspire a lifelong love of literacy (Fitzgibbons, 1997).

Book Club Program

Struggling readers need more than traditional short-term interventions. Effective reading instruction in their regular classrooms is needed as well. The Book Club Program is a comprehensive program that addresses all students regardless of reading level. It can be modified by the teacher to fit district curriculum requirements and classroom personalities. According to McMahon, Raphael, Goatley, and Pardo (1997),
four common components found in current versions of the Book Club Program (BCP) are: 1.) Community Share: This part of the program occurs in a whole class context and includes teacher review of reading or discussion strategies, summarization of texts read loud to class, preview of new texts, and opportunities for small groups to share their readings and discussions. 2.) Reading: Teacher and students read texts in several ways. Sometimes reading is done silently as individuals or together as groups. Sometimes text, or portions of text, is read out loud to other classmates by students or the teacher. 3.) Writing: Students write briefly or for extended periods of time in reading logs, journals, or in the construction of their own stories. This component prepares students for discussion of texts and expands their thinking. 4.) Book Club: In Book Club, diverse groups of students discuss a common text. The role of the teacher is less prominent, he or she acts more as a moderator than instructor. Within the Book Club, the discussions about the text are primarily student led and are done after substantial instruction and modeling of discussion techniques and behaviors (Duffy-Hester, 1999).

The student book club program is based on the adult version that takes advantage of the intellectual stimulation that occurs when like-minded individuals share enthusiasm, whether positive or negative, towards a common text (Shenitz, 1999). It borrows the authentic literature and freedom of expression components from whole language practice while combining the direct instructional practices usually utilized in traditional basal instruction. The teacher moderating the process spends a significant amount of time preparing students and arming them with the skills needed to successfully participate (Duffy-Hester, 1999).
Operating under the auspice of removing the strict parameters students often associate with reading, the book club program should theoretically be viewed as a welcome relief to most primary students. The children are allowed to get together and read, respond, listen to one another's perspectives, and hopefully enjoy the reading experience (Menon & Mirabito, 1999).

Basis for Book Club Program

Russian psychologist, Lev Vgotsky, initiated the sociocultural theory, which focuses on how culture and social interaction, particularly dialogues between children and more knowledgeable peers and adults is necessary in the learning process (van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991). Cognitive development and activities such as reading are regarded in his view as "socially mediated processes", or in other words, dependant on the support that adults and more mature peers provide as children attempt new tasks. According to Vgotsky, children don't move through the same sequence of stages. Instead, when they acquire language, their ability to communicate is enhanced by varying degrees from culture to culture and from one individual experience to another (Berk, 1997). This may help explain why children of the same age and grade level can vary so greatly in reading ability and attitude.

In their book, *The Book Club Connection: Literacy Learning and Classroom Talk* (1997), the authors describe three concepts related to Vygotsky's theory of children's learning and development that are integral to the Book Club Program: 1.) the role of language in the development of thought: this refers to the belief that higher mental functions are social in origin because are learned first through interaction with others. Also, language is a higher mental function that is mediated by the use of sign and
symbols people can use psychological tools to organize and modify their thoughts and actions (Vgotsky, 1978).

2.) the zone of proximal development, which refers to the range of tasks a child cannot yet handle alone but is capable with the assistance of an adult or more skilled peer (Berk, 1997): At home it is usually a parent who answers questions and assesses the child’s progress. In the classroom, the teacher and other students fulfill this role. Students are benefited by the comfort of the availability of knowledgeable others who understand their current capabilities, the end goal, and the means to help them attain it. 3.) internalization of newly learned tasks: students learn through the observation of as well as the direct instruction of their teacher and peers. This new knowledge isn’t simply copied, it is internalized within the child (McMahon, Raphael, Goatley & Pardo, 1997).

Using reciprocal teaching, authentic literature, strategic questioning and discussion empowers both children and teachers (Dermody & Speaker, 1999). Children gain confidence in their ability to effectively participate in literature discussion groups when they have developed the skills of prediction, question generation, clarification and summarization. This is particularly important in light of research regarding struggling readers and teacher efforts to assist. It seems that many struggling readers are passive and tend to give control of the reading process to the teacher. This is often the result of a series of unsuccessful reading experiences, which cause the student to “give up”. The well-intentioned teacher often falls prey to the tendency to do for the student in attempts to involve him in the process. Studies show this to be exemplified in observable, physical behavior while reading with the teacher. During one-on-one instruction, the teachers often do much of the physical and mental work of reading. Teachers dominate
reading and discussion, hand out materials, write notes, take pencils out of cases, open and hold books open, turn pages, erase mistakes and pose questions. The reader simply sits back, looks around and avoids the materials as well as discussion (Dayton-Sakari, 1997). This may be happening subconsciously while the teacher strives to complete lessons in a timely manner; however, this scenario is not helpful to the development of the struggling reader.

Reading programs need to be identified that can overcome these student and teacher tendencies and give more ownership and empowerment to the children. This is necessary to help them develop a positive attitude toward literacy and improve their achievement levels.

Motivation vs. Inability?

Efforts should be made to determine the nature of this passivity on the student’s behalf. It would be useful to explore two areas of possibility: lack of motivation and possible lack of ability.

Educational motivation is an area that has been studied countless times, most comprehensively in the area of motivation to complete homework. This is of importance to the study of reading attitudes in that, just as reading reinforces literacy skills, homework reinforces subject material learned in the classroom. Research has shown a correlation between student achievements, the development of critical skills, and homework (Checkley, 1997). Also, similarly to the competing forces recreational reading takes a backseat to, homework is also regarded as secondary to extra curricular activities and social obligations. According to Hinchley (1996), many students fail to see the purpose in completing their homework assignments. Without the belief that
reading or homework is useful, children will not place these activities as priorities in their lives. It stands to reason that teachers need to ‘sell’ homework and reading activities and make them relevant in students’ lives (Checkley, 1997).

While lack of motivation is mainly an intrinsic challenge, lack of ability has more extrinsic implications. It can be assumed that one of the components of reading attitude formation is specific reading experiences. Unfortunately, poor experiences of any sort are largely due to instances of embarrassment or insecurity. In experiences observed during student teaching, I’ve found that most students who are poor readers usually cringe when called upon to read aloud in class. Peer ridicule, whether real or imagined, is very powerful during most stages of child development. Cliques are still prevalent, and friendships are largely superficial. Public exposition of a difficulty such as reading can prove to be humiliating from the child’s perspective. Reactions to this may include two extremes: intense dedication to improvement or avoidance.

Curriculum As a Factor in Reading Attitude Development

What role does curriculum play in the preparation of students to read proficiently? In the last twenty years there has been significant controversy regarding the most effective method of reading instruction: traditional basal instruction or whole-language practice (McKenna, Stratton, Grindler, & Jenkins, 1995). Traditional basal instruction incorporates the use of phonics, which emphasizes letter sounds and aids in the decoding of words based on letter patterns. Whole-language practice concentrates primarily on immersion in authentic literature. In a study about the differential effects of whole language and traditional instruction on reading attitudes (McKenna, et al, 1995), a positive relationship was found between attitude and ability with traditional reading
instruction but not with whole language practice. The whole language group showed no signs of such a relationship. This can possibly be attributed to the abundance of choice regarding reading materials in a whole language environment. Students are allowed freedom in book selection, thus reducing chances of frustration due to deficiencies in reading ability and lack of interest. Benefits of whole language practice were identified as: (1) emphasis on comprehension (2) use of functional, purposeful language (3) use of real literature in the forms of: writing, cooperative group work, affective aspects of students’ learning experiences (4) lack of systematic, sequential skill instruction with emphasis on maximizing “teachable moments”. A major benefit of traditional, basal instruction is the strong emphasis on decoding strategies, a life skill which can be transferred across the curriculum (McKenna, Stratton, Grindler, & Jenkins, 1995).

Regardless of method chosen in reading instruction, perhaps the actual implementation is of more serious consequence in producing positive reading experiences for children. The National Commission on Reading (Anderson et al. 1985) describes “direct instruction” as explaining the steps in a thought process that give birth to comprehension. This may include teacher modeling of strategies and instruction on how and when to use such strategies. The Commission goes on to say “instruction of this type is the surest means of developing the strategic processing that was identified earlier as characteristic of skilled readers (p.72)”. There are seven components of direct instruction. These include:

1. Instruction on explicit step-by-step strategy.
2. Student mastery of each step in the process.
3. Strategy (or process) corrections for student errors.
4. **Gradual** fading from teacher-directed activities toward independent work.

5. Adequate, systematic practice for students- using a range of examples.

6. Cumulative review.

7. Teaching formats that anticipate ("pre-correct") potential errors.

Gersten & Carnine, 1986

Oftentimes teachers are unable to provide this type of instruction either due to time constraints, excessive class size, or unfamiliarity with the practice. Though highly structured, it appears most effective in preparing students of all reading levels to improve their reading abilities and conversely improve their reading experiences.
Chapter III

METHOD

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of implementing a book club program with third grade students. A program of this sort has the potential to meet the needs of the students, teacher, and district by providing an enjoyable, educational, in-classroom reading environment that capitalizes on sociocultural perspectives in learning. Russian psychologist, Lev Vygotsky’s theory is paramount in these perspectives. Specifically, he asserts that cognitive development is a “socially mediated” process, meaning that children learn by example and assistance from adults and other children (Berk, 1997).

Book club programs are based on the assumptions that “literacy acquisition and development are grounded in connections between oral and written language... reading is a social process... that learners should be actively engaged in constructing meaning as they read and discuss texts as well as exposed to opportunities for more knowledgeable others to advance their literacy abilities (McMahon, et al, 1997). This quasi-experimental study, using a book club program, gathered information regarding student attitudes toward literacy activities and any changes affected by participation in the project. The results of this study were useful in identifying a method of improving student literacy skills.
Description of Sample

The student sample participating in the book club program was comprised of third grade students in a southern New Jersey elementary school. The class included 28 students of low to lower middle class socio-economic backgrounds. The ethnic makeup of the sample included 23 Caucasians, 2 African-Americans, 2 Hispanics, and 1 Asian American. With respect to gender, the experimental group was comprised of 18 girls and 10 boys.

A control group was used for comparison purposes. This sample was also comprised of third grade students in the same southern New Jersey elementary school. This class included 28 children, with 12 boys and 16 girls. Ethnically, the class included 25 Caucasians and 3 African-Americans.

Design of Study

The study was designed with a quasi-experimental basis. Beginning, or baseline, data compiled from a pretest was compared with ending data compiled from a post-test. Both groups, experimental and control, received identical pre and post-tests on the same days by the researcher. Because of the use of a control group, any change in reading attitude may be interpreted as being due to the treatment administered through the study.

Procedure

Reading attitudes were measured using a standard instrument, the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS), (see appendix A) which measures both recreational (pleasure) and academic (school) reading attitudes. The hypothesis that third grade students will experience a more positive shift in attitude toward reading due to
participation in the book club program was tested during the sixteen-week, spring 2001 semester period.

Students were administered a pretest to determine beginning reading attitudes as well as a post-test at the conclusion of the project. Scores on the attitude measurement instrument were standardized based on the norms compiled by the instrument’s developer.

Implementation of the Book Club Program was preceded by a series of lessons teaching the skills needed to participate. These skills are: reading comprehension and discussion strategies, question generating, and effective writing skills. The Book Club Program was then implemented utilizing four components: community sharing of ideas and strategies, reading, writing, and discussion.

The students were divided into groups of 4 (with one group containing 3 students). These groups were assigned by the researcher based on a mixture of low to high reading ability. Students were permitted to rearrange their desks for close proximity to their group members and allowed to read together for a period of 20 minutes per day.

The book selected for the experiment was *Freckle Juice* by Judy Blume. This award-winning novel was selected because of its relatively short length (47 pages) and engaging storyline involving students of the approximately same age. Each group received a worksheet (see appendix B) with spaces provided for the documentation of unfamiliar words and/or situations in the story they’d like to discuss with the class.

After each reading session, students moved their desks back to their normal positions. The class then engaged in a group discussion of the book, with each discussion session being moderated by the researcher. Once per week, the students were given the
opportunity to write mini reviews of their favorite or least favorite chapters and read them to the class on a voluntary basis.

Description of Instrument

The Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS) uses the familiar cartoon character, Garfield, which makes it age appropriate and comfortable for the student sample. The developer has computed norms for grades one through six, and it has been tested for reliability and validity in previous studies (McKenna & Kear, 1990).

The ERAS is a 20 item, 4 node, pictorial rating scale similar to the Likert scale. It depicts the cartoon character in four facial/body expressions ranging from very happy to very unhappy as a means of answering questions about how they feel about reading. According to McKenna & Kear, the use of four options and the avoidance of a neutral, middle choice was based on research that suggests that subjects often use the middle rating to avoid commitment to an answer despite clear options (1995). Total scores can range from a least positive attitude (10 points) to a most positive attitude (40 points).

Directions for administering, scoring, and interpreting the survey were provided by the designer (see appendix C) who also published extended permission to use ERAS in the classroom (see appendix D).
Chapter IV

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Introduction

For a sixteen-week period, third grade students were studied to note any changes in attitude toward reading. The experimental group participated in a student book club program, which utilized a popular children’s novel, group reading sessions, and class discussions. The control group did not participate in the book club and was included to further distinguish any change documented in the experimental group’s reading attitude.

Tabulation of Raw Scores

Prior to implementing the student book club program, a pretest was administered to determine existing attitudes toward reading. The test revealed attitudes toward reading for pleasure (recreational) and reading for learning (academic). The same test was later re-administered to reveal any changes in attitude after participating in the book club.

Table 1 displays the pretest results of the experimental groups. It is divided into the categories of recreational and academic reading. The total sum of scores on the recreational reading attitude portion was 780 points with a mean score of 27.86 and a standard deviation of 4.38. The academic reading attitude portion totaled 736 points with a mean score of 26.29 and a standard deviation of 7.46. All data was run through the statistical computer program, *Windows Statpak to Accompany Educational Research: Competencies for Analysis and Application, 6th Ed.*, by L.R. Gay and Peter Airasian.
# Table 1
**Experimental Group Pretest Reading Attitude Raw Scores**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>SUM OF SCORES</th>
<th>MEAN</th>
<th>STANDARD DEVIATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RECREATIONAL</td>
<td>780</td>
<td>27.86</td>
<td>4.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACADEMIC</td>
<td>736</td>
<td>26.29</td>
<td>7.46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 28

Table 2 shows the pretest results of the control group. The sum of scores for their recreational reading attitudes totaled 822 points with a mean score of 29.36 and a standard deviation of 3.85. Academic reading attitudes totaled 694 points with a mean score of 24.79 and a standard deviation of 5.01.

# Table 2
**Control Group Pretest Reading Attitude Raw Scores**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>SUM OF SCORES</th>
<th>MEAN</th>
<th>STANDARD DEVIATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RECREATIONAL</td>
<td>822</td>
<td>29.36</td>
<td>3.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACADEMIC</td>
<td>694</td>
<td>24.79</td>
<td>5.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 28
Table 3 exhibits the post-test results for the experimental group. This time the total group recreational reading attitude score was 830 points with a mean score of 29.64 and a standard deviation of 5.55. Their academic reading attitude score totaled 777 points with a mean score of 27.75 and a standard deviation of 7.65.

**Table 3**

**Experimental Group Post-test Reading Attitude Raw Scores**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>SUM OF SCORES</th>
<th>MEAN</th>
<th>STANDARD DEVIATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RECREATIONAL</td>
<td>830</td>
<td>29.64</td>
<td>5.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACADEMIC</td>
<td>777</td>
<td>27.75</td>
<td>7.65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 28

Table 4 displays the post-test results for the control group. This time the group total for recreational reading was 832 points with a mean score of 29.71 and a standard deviation of 4.07. Academic reading attitude scores totaled 706 points with a mean score of 25.21 and a standard deviation of 5.79.

**Table 4**

**Control Group Post-test Reading Attitude Raw Scores**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>SUM OF SCORES</th>
<th>MEAN</th>
<th>STANDARD DEVIATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RECREATIONAL</td>
<td>832</td>
<td>29.71</td>
<td>4.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACADEMIC</td>
<td>706</td>
<td>25.21</td>
<td>5.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 28
Analysis of Data

Scoring of the initial pretest showed that the experimental group began with a lower attitude toward recreational reading than the control group, however scored higher in attitude toward academic reading. This may possibly be attributed to any variance in the reading teaching styles of the regular classroom teachers during the first half of the school year. Students in a classroom where reading for pleasure is encouraged may feel more positively in this area. Conversely, students in a classroom environment where academic reading receives most encouragement may be more likely to score higher in that category.

Post-test scoring revealed that the highest amount of change in attitude occurred with the experimental group. Table 1 shows a beginning recreational reading attitude score of 780 and a beginning academic reading attitude of 736. Table 3 shows an ending recreational reading attitude score of 830, an increase of 60 points. Table 3 also shows an ending academic reading attitude score of 777, an increase of 41 points.

The control group’s reading attitudes remained relatively constant. Table 2 displays this group’s initial recreational reading attitude score as 822 and its initial academic reading attitude score as 694. Table 4 shows a final recreational reading score of 832, an increase of only 10 points and a final academic reading score of 706, an increase of 12 points.

The experimental group’s reading attitudes and the changes that occurred during the sixteen-week experimental period are illustrated in figure 1. This chart displays beginning and ending attitude scores in both categories of recreational and academic reading. With pre and post-test results positioned next to each other, it is clear that the
hypothesis is accepted. Third grade students that participated in the book club program increased their reading attitude scores more than third grade students who did not participate in the book club program.

**figure 1**

*Experimental group pretest vs. post-test raw scores*
A comparison of beginning and ending reading attitudes within the control group are illustrated in figure 2.

**figure 2**

*Control group pretest vs. post-test raw scores*
Chapter V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

In an effort to find an educational method of enhancing literacy attitudes at the elementary level, third grade students were studied as they participated in a student book club program. The experimental treatment was employed in addition to the students’ regular reading curriculum. A control group was also utilized for comparison purposes.

Summary of the Problem

Knowing that reading is an integral part of life in America, it is imperative that we help our children master this ability. While basic reading skills allow for functionality, mastery will enhance the opportunities for growth and prosperity. As the old adage states, “practice makes perfect”, but without frequent reading perfection is elusive. The key to increasing reading both in and out of the classroom is to improve attitudes toward reading. However, the problem lies in how improving children’s reading attitudes can be accomplished.

Summary of the Hypothesis

Third grade students participated in a student book club program that took advantage of peer relationships and freedom of expression. It was hypothesized that students who participated in this program would increase their scores on a reading attitude test more than students who did not participate in the book club program.
Summary of Procedure

Using an experimental and control group of third grade students in the same southern New Jersey elementary school, each 28 member class was given a pretest to determine existing attitudes toward reading. These attitudes were tested using the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS), a standard instrument designed to measure both recreational and academic reading dispositions. The experimental group continued with the same Reading curriculum as the control group, but following the pretest, they participated in the student book club program.

Students were divided into small groups based on varying reading abilities and permitted to read the popular children’s novel, *Freckle Juice* by Judy Blume together. Each group received a worksheet with spaces provided for the documentation of unfamiliar words and/or examples from the story they’d like to discuss with the class. Following each 20 minute reading session, groups were disassembled and a class discussion moderated by the researcher was engaged. In addition, once per week students were given the opportunity to write short reviews of their favorite or least favorite portions of the book and voluntarily choose to read them for the class.

At the conclusion of the book and final discussions, students in both the experimental and control groups were re-administered the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey.

Summary of Findings

Comparison of pre and post-testing results revealed that the student book club program was effective. Although the control group began with a higher recreational reading attitude score and the experimental group began with a higher academic reading
attitude score, the amount of increase experienced by both groups in both areas at the study’s conclusion showed a clearly positive alteration in the reading attitudes of the experimental group. With no other significant differences between the two groups, it can be assumed that this improvement can be attributed to the book club program.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the book club program is an effective method of enhancing student literacy attitudes. Throughout the student teaching assignment, the researcher was careful in not altering the academic routines previously established in the classroom by the regular teacher. This was done to help minimize confusion as to what any change in reading attitude could be attributed to at the conclusion of the study. The researcher was also careful to select a control group as similar to the experimental group as possible. Not only were the students demographically similar, but the lesson planning and pacing of the regular classroom teachers were very comparable as well. At the inception of the study, both classrooms had covered the same skills and concepts and were using the same texts and testing measures.

The most significant difference between the two third grade classes was the utilization of a student book club program with the experimental group. The control group did nothing of this sort, making it easier to assume that without the book club treatment, the experimental group’s reading attitudes would have undergone little change.

Visual observation and interaction with the experimental group during the book club program revealed that the students really appeared to enjoy working together and actively discussing the book. Following the initial class discussion, where students were apprehensive about discussing their thoughts and interpretations, students were assured
that their opinions were their own and positive or negative feelings were okay. Participation then rose dramatically within each group and entire class discussions. Students began taking notes as they read, comparing ideas with one another and debating differing points of view. Even those students who did not particularly like the book enjoyed the process of analyzing it and attempting to persuade others to see things their way. Many students expressed interest in other books they'd like to read using the same format. Although this was a school activity, the process was pleasurable and thus explains the enhanced recreational reading attitude.

Though the increase was not as large (41 points vs. 60 points), it is interesting to note the improvement in the academic reading attitude of the experimental group. Although the book club worked solely with a popular novel, chosen primarily to capture student interest, the techniques used for comprehension and "reading for purpose" may have made "reading for learning" seem easier and/or more appealing.

Implications and Recommendations

Due to the confirmation of the hypothesis that third grade students who participated in the book club program would increase their scores in reading attitude more than third grade students who did not participate, it is recommended that a program of this type be incorporated into elementary classrooms.

Although the program itself is effective, it does not work in a vacuum. Prior to implementing the program, students need to be taught various reading skills and techniques. These basics can then be sharpened and enhanced through direct use, making them more meaningful to the students. The book club program allows students the freedom to read together and develop their own interpretations. However, the knowledge
base of reading strategies and comprehension techniques acquired through traditional reading instruction provides structure to each session. Discussion strategies also need to be modeled in order to provide productive group dialogue. For these reasons, it is suggested that a book club program augment, not replace regular reading instruction. It should be incorporated into the curriculum so that a variety of books can be read and students will have repeated opportunities to tax their critical thinking skills.

In addition to hopefully improving student grades, another benefit is that allowing students to work together allows the teacher more opportunities to evaluate student performance and progress socially as well as academically. Students benefit as well by learning how to effectively work together, speak their minds, and respect others’ points of view, which are skills that will benefit them throughout their lifetimes.
REFERENCES


Fitzgibbons, S.A. (1997). Attitudes of youth toward reading before and after a motivational project. *Information rich but knowledge poor? Emerging issues for schools and libraries worldwide*. Research and professional papers presented at the annual conference of the international association of school librarianship held in conjunction with the association for teacher-librarianship in Canada (26th, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, July 6-11, 1997).


ELEMENTARY READING ATTITUDE SURVEY

School_________ Grade____ Name__________________________

1. How do you feel when you read a book on a rainy Saturday?
   ![Garfield Emotions](Image)

2. How do you feel when you read a book in school during free time?
   ![Garfield Emotions](Image)

3. How do you feel about reading for fun at home?
   ![Garfield Emotions](Image)

4. How do you feel about getting a book for a present?
   ![Garfield Emotions](Image)
5. How do you feel about spending free time reading?

6. How do you feel about starting a new book?

7. How do you feel about reading during summer vacation?

8. How do you feel about reading instead of playing?
9. How do you feel about going to a bookstore?

10. How do you feel about reading different kinds of books?

11. How do you feel when the teacher asks you questions about what you read?

12. How do you feel about doing reading workbook pages and worksheets?
13. How do you feel about reading in school?

14. How do you feel about reading your school books?

15. How do you feel about learning from a book?

16. How do you feel when it's time for reading class?
17. How do you feel about the stories you read in reading class?

18. How do you feel when you read out loud in class?

19. How do you feel about using a dictionary?

20. How do you feel about taking a reading test?
APPENDIX B

STUDENT BOOK CLUB WORKSHEET
FRECKLE JUICE

Here are some things I’d like to discuss with the class about the chapters we’ve read:

1. 

2. 

3. 

4. 

5. 

Here are some words I’m not sure of:

1. 

2. 

3. 

4. 

5. 

6. 
APPENDIX C

ELEMENTARY READING ATTITUDE SURVEY

DIRECTIONS FOR USE
The Elementary Reading Attitude Survey provides a quick indication of student attitudes toward reading. It consists of 20 items and can be administered to an entire classroom in about 10 minutes. Each item presents a brief, simply-worded statement about reading, followed by four pictures of Garfield. Each pose is designed to depict a different emotional state, ranging from very positive to very negative.

Administration
Begin by telling students that you wish to find out how they feel about reading. Emphasize that this is not a test and that there are no "right" answers. Encourage sincerity.

Distribute the survey forms and, if you wish to monitor the attitudes of specific students, ask them to write their names in the space at the top. Hold up a copy of the survey so that the students can see the first page. Point to the picture of Garfield at the far left of the first item. Ask the students to look at this same picture on their own survey form. Discuss with them the mood Garfield seems to be in (very happy). Then move to the next picture and again discuss Garfield's mood (this time, a little happy). In the same way, move to the third and fourth pictures and talk about Garfield's moods—a little upset and very upset. It is helpful to point out the position of Garfield's mouth, especially in the middle two figures.

Explain that together you will read some statements about reading and that the students should think about how they feel about each statement. They should then circle the picture of Garfield that is closest to their own feelings. (Emphasize that the students should respond according to their own feelings, not as Garfield might respond.) Read each item aloud slowly and distinctly; then read it a second time while students are thinking. Be sure to read the item number and to remind students of page numbers when new pages are reached.

Scoring
To score the survey, count four points for each leftmost (happiest) Garfield circled, three for each slightly smiling Garfield, two for each mildly upset Garfield, and one point for each very upset (rightmost) Garfield. Three scores for each student can be obtained: the total for the first 10 items, the total for the second 10, and a composite total. The first half of the survey relates to attitude toward recreational reading; the second half relates to attitude toward academic aspects of reading.

Interpretation
You can interpret scores in two ways. One is to note informally where the score falls in regard to the four nodes of the scale. A total score of 50, for example, would fall about mid-way on the scale, between the slightly happy and slightly upset figures, therefore indicating a relatively indifferent overall attitude toward reading. The other approach is more formal. It involves converting the raw scores into percentile ranks by means of Table 1. Be sure to use the norms for the right grade level and to note the column headings (Rec = recreational reading, Aca = academic reading, Tot = total score). If you wish to determine the average percentile rank for your class, average the raw scores first; then use the table to locate the percentile rank corresponding to the raw score mean. Percentile ranks cannot be averaged directly.
APPENDIX D

ELEMENTARY READING ATTITUDE SURVEY

PERMISSION TO USE
Garfield revisited: Unlimited extension of permission to copy the ERAS

Michael C. McKenna
Georgia Southern University, Savannah, USA
Dennis J. Kear
Wichita State University, Kansas, USA

The appearance of the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS) in the May 1990 issue of RT was based originally on an agreement with United Media, which allowed the survey to be reproduced through December 31, 1995. The Garfield character has since been acquired from United Media by the creator Jim Davis and his company, Paws, Inc., and the agreement was extended to December 31, 1999. Davis contributed to the development of the instrument by producing the four poses of Garfield used in the pictorial scale. He has now kindly consented to extend permission to reproduce the ERAS until further notice.

Educators wishing to use the scale for classroom use should copy and paste the following credit line on each page of the scale:

©Paws, Inc. The Garfield character is incorporated in this test with the permission of Paws, Inc., and may be reproduced only in connection with the reproduction of the test in its entirety for classroom use until further notice by Paws, Inc., and any other reproduction or use without the express prior written consent of Paws is prohibited.

Since its appearance, the ERAS has grounded a number of research studies of reading attitudes, which have contributed to an understanding of the instrument. The following sources may be useful to educators who have used the ERAS.

Research references


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