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Robert Lynne Sproul

Date

July 14, 1970

THE PREVENTION OF READING DIFFICULTIES THROUGH
SPECIAL INSTRUCTION

by

Herbert Lynne Sprout

A professional paper submitted to the Graduate Faculty in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

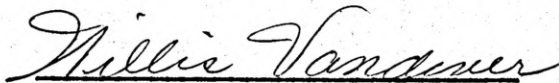
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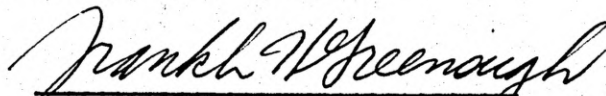
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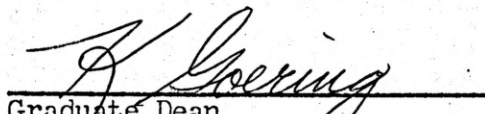
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Approved:


Head, Major Department


Chairman, Examining Committee


Graduate Dean

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
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ABSTRACT

The Townsend Elementary School study was conducted to reveal the effects of a special reading program on the progress of the reluctant reader. The area of study was the primary grades and was chosen in an attempt to strengthen the theory that prevention of reading difficulties has more value than remediation in the higher grades.

The children were divided into two groups. The experimental group consisted of those who had participated in the special program. The control group was made up of those children that followed the regular classroom curriculum.

Statistics were compiled from test scores earned on the Metropolitan Readiness Test administered in grade one and compared to achievement scores earned in grade three as measured by the Iowa Basic Skills Test.

The objective analysis of the investigation revealed that the higher students still rated higher than did the lower students. However, a comparison of I.Q. scores of the two groups indicated this should be expected. I.Q. scores as measured by the Otis Quick Scoring Ability Test assigned the control group scores of 107 to 130. The experimental group's measurements ranged from 95 to 116.

The more subjective analysis that included observations of administrators, teachers and parents indicated there was improvement in the student's attitudes, behavioral patterns and study habits that enhanced their chances of success in the middle grades.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

There was an awareness that all children do not achieve or progress at the same rate. Since it was the responsibility of the school to do all that was possible to prepare each student for a future, competitive life, curriculum and instructional provisions designed to help students overcome educational barriers were essential. Reading authorities had long been of the opinion that exposure to basic materials was not a completely satisfactory method of assuring success in reading.

Millard Black, of the Claremont Reading Conference, contended early and continuing failures in school induced low level expectancy and minimized willingness to take risk. This cautious attitude may be improved by developing a program that will teach and reteach until each separate concept is learned. Those who lack adequate achievement should be promptly identified and corrective procedures undertaken.³ The lack of success will tend to destroy the self-concept image and condition the student to failure. Because he has failed to meet the required ability to read, the retarded reader is especially susceptible to conditions in the school room.

Many schools have employed a traditional method of following a basal text. Problems arose when low achievers were considered for

promotion or retention. If instruction in the following grade is not geared to the needs of the children and does not provide for individual instruction, then perhaps children should be retained if they do not complete the required work of their grade. Many schools have accepted policies pertaining to promotion or retention. Whatever they are if they don't meet the individual needs, they are not erasing the problems of the student or meeting their responsibilities to education. If the student is retained and instruction is tied to a traditional program, then he must repeat in the same material with which he already associates failure. If he is promoted, then he is forced into material that is too difficult.

Pollock, in reviewing a study of the Gesell Institute of Child Development, states that:

Overplacement is perhaps the single greatest cause of children's hating school, failing, dropping out and eventually becoming delinquent. Approximately half of the pupils doing poorly in school have been placed at a grade level above where they should be.⁹

Today there are many varied ways in which teachers and administrators are trying to solve the needs of the individual student by means of a modern reading program.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The purpose of this investigation was to determine if the special reading program being conducted in the primary grades was

improving the reading skills of the low achiever; therefore, giving him a better opportunity to compete successfully in the fourth grade.

PROCEDURES

The writer reviewed literature in the library at Montana State University in order to become acquainted with various types of reading programs and gain some knowledge of longitudinal studies and the various techniques being used. This research supplied information pertaining to the use of readiness test scores as a base from which to measure achievement. Research indicates using this means to measure academic growth by comparing readiness test scores and later achievement scores is a valid measurement.⁶

Children from the third grade at the Cecelia Hazelton Elementary School, Townsend, Montana, were selected for this study. These children were enrolled in the third grade during the 1968-1969 school term. These children were divided into two groups. One group consisted of those children who had completed the third grade without taking part in the special reading program. The other groups was made up with those who had completed the third grade, but had spent various lengths of time participating in the special program.

During the time the second group was in grades one, two and three, individual problems were observed. Skills such as success with beginning, medial and ending sounds were checked. The teacher observed

their ability to discriminate with auditory and visual concepts. Along with the phonetic elements, phrasing and comprehension were given a great deal of attention. Diagnosis of specific weak areas was made and the student was then channeled into the special program for remediation. If and when the weakness in the specific skill was overcome, the student then returned to his regular reading group. The length of time spent in correcting the student's weaknesses varied from six weeks to two years.

In the special class, no basic reader was used. Since each student was reading at his own level and may have had a different reading problem, special materials were selected for him. Attempts were made to find materials for the reluctant reader with an interest level commensurate with his age. Provision was made for the child to move as rapidly as possible through these materials until the teacher felt he was able to progress with his peers. The basic goal was for the student to attain the highest level of reading competency of which the individual was capable. The reading program was concerned chiefly with the systematic and sequential development of the skills, abilities and understanding in every reading situation.

Permanent records of all the students were checked to determine (1) the readiness test scores earned at the time they entered the first grade as measured by the Metropolitan Readiness Test, and (2) reading achievement scores at the end of the third grade depicted from the Iowa

Every-Pupil Test of Basic Skills, published by Houghton-Mifflin Company.

LIMITATIONS

The study was limited to those third graders who attended the Cecelia Hazelton Elementary during the 1968-1969 school term and had continuous attendance since their entrance into the first grade. Only those students with intelligence quotients scores of 95 or above as measured by Otis Quick Scoring Test were included in the final analysis.

This investigation was also limited by materials available in the library at Montana State University. Since the study is basically experimental, most of the information and data had been obtained from test scores, teacher observation and results of the Townsend special instructional reading program.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Research literature at Montana State University was examined for trends in reading education that provides for individual differences. As public education has expanded, more emphasis has been put on the basal text with group type organization. Most experiments have been within the framework of the basal text using homogeneous and/or heterogeneous grouping in self-contained classrooms. Florence Sperry¹¹ emphasizes that we must not go around in the same pattern again and come up with the same unsatisfactory answers.

The problem of the low achiever is two-fold. Partially, it is the lack of reading readiness with children entering the first grade and partially with the curriculum the children encounter.⁶

PREVENTION vs REMEDIAL

Marvin E. Oliver⁷ discusses when and where should an attempt be made to correct reading difficulties. One philosophy that is prevalent in today's educational circles is that students be given a chance to develop at their own rate under the guidance and techniques of the homeroom teacher. If by the end of the third grade, some are not reading as well as they should, a remedial teacher can take the frustrated readers and with special instruction can meet their individual needs.

Meanwhile, back in the primary grades, the teacher continues with the same techniques which permitted the difficulties to develop. Without special provisions for prevention of reading difficulties, many remedial cases appear year after year in the fourth grade. Three years of frustration caused by unsuccessful attempts at learning to read, probably will deal a damaging blow to the student's self-image. For it is success in beginning reading that builds confidence and desire, the ingredients of life-long interest in reading.

Children in the primary grades are less critical of the slow learner. Students have had fewer unhappy experiences with reading instruction. The attitude of benevolency among primary children allows for a more comfortable feeling and acceptance of the slow learner. Differences in ability seem to be less significant than they are in the middle grades.

Oliver⁷ recommends the philosophy of prevention by identifying problems and emphasizing corrective procedures in the primary grades. He does not suggest this will eliminate the need for remediation later, but it will drastically reduce the number of remedial readers beyond grade three.

A study conducted at the Riverside Unified School District in California to evaluate their corrective reading program, which is conducted in the primary grades, revealed results that the greatest improvement was between grades one and two, and two and three. By the

middle of the third grade, achievement patterns were pretty well stabilized.²

READINESS: A BASE FOR EVALUATION

To measure success of a program, a pre-test should be given to establish a base for evaluation, a follow-up study conducted and a post-test score from which to compile evidence regarding effectiveness of the program.

Although there is some controversy about the value of reading readiness tests, it is usually granted that they do serve a purpose for measuring skills valuable in beginning reading as well as planning for later instruction. The term reading readiness is used by many, not only to refer to its use in grade one, but is used to encompass all grades. This concept of reading readiness is consistent with the developmental reading philosophy, so teachers should ascertain readiness in other grades to determine if pupil's preparation is such as to give chance of success at specific grade levels.¹

The extent a student lacks readiness skills in grade one compared to the extent he lacks reading competency in a later grade can give an indication of progress. Research verifies the significance of reading readiness test scores and later success in reading achievement. It indicates that the means of measuring growth by comparison of readiness test scores and later achievement scores is a valid measurement.

INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION

There are various factors that contribute to a child's failure to achieve in reading. These factors are not necessarily the same for every individual. The best one can do is to identify the contributing factors, discover the specific deficiencies and plan a program for correcting them. The most obvious essential treatment is to give him effective instruction in those developmental reading skills which will strengthen his individual weaknesses. "The best way to judge whether a child has the ability to read better is to give him our best instruction and see whether he learns."⁹

Ruth Strang⁹ suggests a criteria for a successful reading program: (1) individualized approach so members have a greater opportunity to express themselves, both to the teacher and each other (2) greater opportunity for diagnosis and analysis of difficulties (3) give support by identifying with others. The student must accept his level of performance before he can change it. (4) small informal groups which provide social as well as instructional opportunities which makes for more interaction, self-exploration, reassurance, encouragement and support. The experience of success, then, replaces the unpleasant experiences the student has had previously in his own classroom.

Mary Elsa Hacker⁶, in her study at Anchorage, states that less mature children lost interest which presented a difficult task for both the student and teacher. In Alaska, it seemed more realistic to

give the immature children an integrated approach to reading. In this program, phonics, reading, writing and spelling were not taught separately, but integrated with audio-lingual approach stressing reading for meaning.

The children were identified early for individualized reading help in the second grade. The program was designed to review skills taught in the prior grade. This classroom review increased their maturation and improved their individual reading and brought most up to the grade level in a six weeks period.

The same individual approach was applied to children going from the second to the third grade and expanded some even in higher grades. Problem readers in upper grades, after individual help could often be returned to their grade and achieve in a normal manner. In the small group situation, the student received help in learning to function as an effective member of a group, he progressed toward becoming more of an independent reader, and received guidance on how to develop improved work habits before he was returned to the larger group.

Hacker⁷ states the value of the program was measured by the number of reading failures it prevented, test scores, its popularity with teachers, administrators and the community. She further emphasized, it was dealing with children as individuals.

Research data revealed that the reducing class size for reading instruction will have a cumulative effect and will enhance opportu-

nities of reading achievement in later grades. In 1962-1963 school year an experimental program was initiated at the Riverside Unified School District in California. The Metropolitan Readiness Test had been administered to all children when they were in the first grade. The Metropolitan Achievement Test was administered to all children in the second, third and fourth grades as they progressed through school.

This study reveals the experimental group scored significantly higher than those in the control group. In this study no variable except class size was considered. The increase in achievement apparently was the result of class size.²

Evidence revealed by research seems to indicate that evaluation of a special instructional reading program as it is being conducted in Townsend can be measured by a study such as the writer conducted. Examination of this investigation is presented in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER III

THE TOWNSEND STUDY

The purpose of the Townsend special reading program was to improve the reading skills of the low achiever to an extent he could compete more successfully by the time he entered the fourth grade.

The purpose of this research was to reveal the effects of the special reading program upon the progress of the pupils. The problem was approached with the intent of making a statistical analysis of evaluation.

METHODS

Forty-five children that completed the third grade at the end of the 1968-1969 school term were selected for this study. Children selected were those who had continuous attendance at the Townsend school for the time they entered the first grade.

Information pertinent to the study was taken from children's permanent records. The raw scores they earned on the Metropolitan Readiness Test at the beginning of the first grade in 1966, were tabulated and compared with reading achievement scores earned on the Iowa Basic Skills Test taken at the end of the third grade. Comparative results were used as a measurement of academic growth during that period.

The children were divided into two groups. The experimental group consisted of those who had participated in the special reading program for a period of six weeks to two years. The control group was made up of those children that had followed the regular classroom curriculum.

The writer's study was concerned with the comparison and analysis of the difference of achievement between the experimental group who had participated in the special reading program and the control group who had progressed through school in the regular classroom situation.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The hypothesis to be tested in the Townsend study was that reading scores earned in the Iowa Basic Skills Tests by children who had participated in the special reading program would show greater improvement than those who had not.

Statistics were compiled from test scores earned on the Metropolitan Readiness Tests administered in grade one and test scores earned in the vocabulary and comprehension portion of the Iowa Basic Skills Test administered in grade three. The results were arranged to show the student's class rank in grade one as compared to his rank in grade three to determine the change in class standing during that interim. Careful evaluation and analysis of those statistics was made to determine the progress each student made as the result of the

program. Since there were thirty students in the control group and fifteen students in the experimental group, the writer drew his conclusions from a comparison of the two groups.

Table 1 on pages 15 and 16 of this report compares the class rank standings of the control group. Readiness scores administered in grade one ranked three of those students below the top thirty in class. Achievement scores administered in grade three still rank three students below the top thirty, even though they are different students.

Table 2 on page 17 compares statistics of the experimental group. Grade one readiness test scores show three of the students in the top thirty. However, achievement scores show six students above the thirty mark. The seemingly contradiction in this report was caused by the numerous identical scores. Six out of the fifteen students of the experimental group improved their class standings. Of the remaining nine, the drop in class standings ranged from one to thirteen places.

Table 3 on page 19 of this report shows average statistics of the entire class, the control group, the experimental group and a percentage comparison of the two groups. A purely objective analysis reveals the experimental group suffered a slight loss in every category except the class rank and the percentage of class rank. The experimental group increased their class rank from 33.3 to 32.3. The percentage comparison between the two shows an increase of .7%.

There were unmeasurable variables that probably had a

Table 1

Control Group

Student	IQ	Readiness Score Grade 1	Class Rank Grade 1	Achieve Score Grade 3	Class Rank Grade 3
* A	121	58	5	56	1
B	127	57	12	55	2
* C	124	59	2	54	3
* D	121	56	15	54	3
E	111	54	22	54	3
F	124	59	2	53	6
* G	117	56	15	53	6
H	107	47	40	53	6
* I	108	58	5	52	9
* J	120	56	15	52	9
K	125	58	5	51	11
L	124	58	5	51	11
* M	113	57	12	51	11
N	114	50	31	50	15
O	113	60	1	49	16
* P	114	54	22	49	16
* Q	117	53	26	49	16
* R	107	57	12	48	20

Table 1 (continued)

Student	IQ	Readiness Score Grade 1	Class Rank Grade 1	Achieve Score Grade 3	Class Rank Grade 3
S	120	53	26	48	20
T	109	48	33	48	20
* U	130	58	5	48	20
V	127	58	5	47	24
W	111	56	15	47	24
X	112	48	33	47	24
* Y	124	55	20	45	28
* Z	119	53	26	45	28
AA	112	58	5	45	28
BB	112	59	2	44	34
*CC	110	51	30	44	34
*DD	117	54	22	41	39

*denotes students that were boys

Table 2
Experimental Group

Student	IQ	Readiness Score Grade 1	Class Rank Grade 1	Achieve Score Grade 3	Class Rank Grade 3
* a	107	54	22	51	11
b	105	48	33	49	16
c	95	50	31	46	27
* d	112	56	15	45	28
* e	107	53	26	45	28
f	101	48	33	45	28
g	105	48	33	44	34
* h	115	48	33	43	37
* i	116	50	31	42	38
* j	109	37	45	40	40
* k	96	48	33	38	41
l	100	47	40	37	42
m	101	47	40	37	42
* n	100	47	40	35	43
* o	98	46	44	34	45

*denotes students that were boys

significant influence on the results. A comparison of the IQ scores of the two groups would indicate that one should expect a loss by the experimental group. The IQ scores of the experimental group were considerably lower than those of the control group. This indicated that if the experimental group held its own with the control group, the program had great value. IQ is rate of learning. IQ scores as measured by Otis Quick Scoring Ability Tests administered in grade one assigned the control group measurements ranging from 107 to 130. The experimental group's IQ measurements ranged from 95 to 116. When the writer analyzed the IQ scores as compared to class standing, some interesting facts were revealed. Of the nine students that suffered loss of rank in class standing, all except two had measured IQ's less than the average IQ of the complete class. Those two were boys who had a questionable environment that was not conducive to home study.

The program apparently had more success for girls than it did for boys. Of the six that improved their class rank, two were boys and four were girls. Of the nine that went down in class rank, six were boys and three were girls. Since the experimental group included nine boys and six girls, the change seemed to favor the girls.

The objective analysis of the investigation results reveal that the higher students still rated significantly higher than did the lower students. There was some significance to the fact that this particular class scored .52 grade equivalent points higher than did the

Table 3

Class Averages

Class	IQ	Average Readiness Grade 1	Average Class Rank Grade 1	Average Achieve Grade 3	Average Class Rank Grade 3
Complete Class	112.9	54	21.3	4.69	21.9
Control Group	117	55.3	15.5	4.94	16.2
Exper. Group	104.5	48.7	33.3	4.18	32.3
Percent Exper. Scores to Control Scores	89.2%	88.1%	48.0%	84.7%	48.7%

Note: Class rank scores are reversed to make the comparison more obvious.

corresponding class before the special reading program was initiated in 1965. The objective results show a null hypothesis of this particular investigation.

At the risk of being overly subjective, the writer expresses some personal observations in the conclusion of this study.

CONCLUSIONS

Test scores cannot reveal a complete evaluation of a special reading program. Observations and opinions of others must be considered. Administrators', teachers', parents' and students' subjective evaluation support the theory that the Townsend program had value.

Parents reacted enthusiastically. The revelation that the school personnel were truly concerned served to awaken an educational consciousness in the community to the importance of reading. As a result, parents began to accept some responsibility of helping the student. They took the opportunity the program provided to discuss their child's reading problems with teachers. These communications did much to build confidence in the school.

Pupils' attitudes improved. As a result of being able to participate in classroom activities, they developed good impressions of their classes, and looked forward to them with anticipation. Excitement and satisfaction replaced boredom and apathy. Low self-esteem and low educational aspirations that were sometimes reflected in defensive,

hostile and negative behavior seemed to improve. They no longer accepted the concept of failure. They felt they had an opportunity to improve.

There was a greater interaction between the pupil and materials. The student became more independent. He chose to read more books with greater interest and understanding. The materials used in the program revealed a purpose for study. The teacher did not attempt to cover all areas of reading technique, but in class, the students used materials that would strengthen specific weak areas in which the student was in need. The student's choice of books for outside reading became more commensurate with his ability.

The very small class size gave opportunity for personal relationship between teacher and pupil. The teacher became more cognizant of individual reading difficulties and procedures for correcting them could be augmented quickly.

The final appraisal and analysis of the statistics of this investigation indicated the need for further study. Other bases for evaluation and interpretation could be considered. Different standardized tests would make valuable contributions to the interpretation of scores. Computerized F scores showing the relationship between IQ and achievement could reveal a true measurement of growth. In any continuation of this study, a more complete measurement program probably could be devised.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Townsend program seemed to be effective and met the expectations of those involved. While the writer recommended it to other interested school systems, certain stipulations should be considered. Class size was a very integral part of the program. The class size in Townsend varied from one to five. One should adhere strictly to this limitation. The choice of the teacher was an important part of the program. She must be well qualified. She must be familiar with those concepts that are prerequisite to success in reading. Above all, she must be enthusiastic. The teacher lays the groundwork for a lifetime of enjoyment and learning through reading.

The Townsend special reading program was not difficult to organize and execute, but it did require much work and planning. The experience in Townsend convinced the participants that it meant a better education for all of those children involved.

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