CHILDREN'S PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR READING PROGRAM
IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The idea for this paper developed from the author's realization that there was a lack of information about children's feelings about their reading program. When an attempt was made to review other studies made in this area, it became obvious that little research had been done. Although innumerable studies of other aspects of reading had been made, it apparently had occurred to only a handful to ask the students themselves for their opinions.

The purpose of this paper was to make an attempt to fill this gap in reading research, and to ascertain if children understood the purposes of their reading program. The twenty-six students questioned in this survey were asked questions about the portions of the directed reading lesson included in their normal classwork. Then their answers were analyzed to determine if the students generally understood the objectives of their assignments.

In chapter two of this paper, the writer will review the available literature pertaining to children's perceptions of their reading program in elementary school. In chapter three a summary of procedures used in gathering data will be presented. Chapter four will consist of the results of the survey
and their analysis, along with relevant discussion and interpretation. In chapter five the conclusions and implications of the study will be found.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Very little research has been done in the area of children's perceptions of their reading program. There appears to be a great amount of interest in the students' attitudes toward reading itself, but not about the program they use in reading class.

John Downing felt that children's feelings about reading was an under-researched area because thinking is an invisible process. He felt that a breakdown in the thinking processes was the real problem in failure to learn to read. Downing mentioned that in 1962 Vygotsky did research in Russia, and that he concluded that the abstract quality of written language is the major stumbling block in learning to read, and that a child has little motivation to write because he sees no need for it.¹ This idea of children needing to realize why was also mentioned by Russell Stauffer in Instructor when he said that, in his experience, children learn more and profit more from their studies if they know why they are performing a task. He mentioned that a teacher should set purposes for reading so the child will feel a sense of inner direction.² This idea was again supported

by Huck and Kuhn when they stated that, "Learning is facilitated if the learner is clued into the structure of the content and the learning process itself." "Active participation in selecting and planning the learning activity increases interest."³

Several writers discussed children's feelings about reading. Rucker asked students what they felt their reading problems were, and received a variety of answers which included frustration, boredom, cultural deprivation, sight defects, alienation from other students, and lack of motivation. As one child expressed it, "Readin' ain't real. Real is outside that window."⁴

This feeling shows a definite lack of understanding of the purposes for learning to read, and a shortcoming in this child's reading program. Helen Bottel told of a special reading program at the Yuba County Reading-Learning Center, and the development of one special child. After Luis was helped to find relevance in his reading program and began to develop reading ability, he admitted, "You didn't really teach me to read. All you did was show me I could."⁵

This example again shows the need for a child to understand the purposes of his reading program. When Ruth Strand asked students, "Why do you want to read better?" she received a variety of rather shallow answers. She finally

³Charlotte Huck and Doris Kuhn, Children's Literature in the Elementary School, p. 27.


⁵Helen Bottel, "Do Drag Racers Need to Know How to Read?" American Education, 7:3-7, October, 1971.
concluded that, "Perhaps much ineffectiveness in reading stems from students' inadequate concept of reading and their lack of recognition of the value of reading to them."  

In Molly Ransbury's assessment of reading attitude, she realized that frequently the feelings of students, parents, and teachers are not the same. When she asked for behaviors that demonstrate reading attitude, children said that enjoyment and spare time reading were the best indicators. However, parents felt that frequency and the diversity of reading material was a better indication of attitude, and the teacher cited intelligence, perhaps forgetting that some bright students don't like to read. When children were asked what factors influence their feelings toward reading they mentioned ability and their parents' influence. Teaching methods and materials were not mentioned, which led Ms. Ransbury to wonder if teachers and parents felt that it was the child's responsibility to develop a positive attitude toward reading.  

The results of these studies which discussed student's attitudes toward reading reveal that, although several other factors were discussed, generally achievement and a positive self concept were found to be the most important factors in determining a student's attitude toward reading. This study goes a step beyond these findings, to explore children's understanding of the reading program they were exposed to in school,


and to see how many of the teacher's objectives they perceived.
CHAPTER THREE
EXPERIMENTAL PROCEDURES

Sample
The students involved in this survey were fourth graders from a middle class background. They were grouped in the classroom by reading ability, and the levels of performance were determined by the Holt Reading Program placement inventory and by their reading performance the previous year. The distribution of students in the class is indicated in Table 1. Level thirteen indicated that the students were reading at fourth grade level, in this case with enrichment, and level nine was composed of fourth grade students reading at first semester second grade level. There were no students reading at the "average" fourth grade level, and only one classroom was included in the survey.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Reading Level</th>
<th>Sex</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Female</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
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Instrument

The instrument used in this survey was developed in consultation with the thesis advisor, and initially consisted of twelve questions pertaining to the student's reading program. In a field test of the instrument, the questions were administered individually by the writer to ten fifth and sixth graders of different abilities and sexes. Then the results were analyzed to discover weaknesses in the instrument. The format was altered, some of the questions were reworded, and the final instrument developed (see p. 10). The questions were grouped into three categories. The warm-up questions were intended to give the students a chance to get used to the writer, who again administered the questions privately, and to let them get the feel of the survey. The class related questions did not pertain directly to aspects of the directed reading lesson, but offered more interesting insights into students' feelings about their reading program. The final group, the reading program questions, related directly to aspects of the directed reading lesson, and were intended to discover if the student realized the activity was taking place, if he understood the teacher's reasons for including the activity in the reading program, and how the activity affected him.

Data Collection Procedures

The instrument was administered privately to each of the twenty-six students described earlier, and their answers were written down as they were given. Probes and further explanations of the questions were given when necessary. The students were
reassured that the strictest privacy would be maintained, and that their answers would not be shared with their classroom teacher. However, since the writer was formerly a student teacher in the school, it is possible that some of the students were hesitant to give negative answers honestly.

Methods of Data Analysis

The results of the survey were analyzed question by question. Each question was examined for similarities in the answers, and grouped where possible. The groups were then checked for significant factors (e.g., all girls, all level thirteen students, etc.). Finally, the results were examined for significant trends and interrelationships among the results of the questions.
READING QUESTIONS

Warm-Up Questions

1. Why do you think you have reading class every day?

2. Do you help plan the way you spend your time in reading class? What do you plan?

3. Do you learn anything about yourself from reading any of the stories? What do you learn--give an example.

Class-Related Questions

4. Do you like reading class? Why?

5. What one thing that happens in reading class do you like best? Why? What does your teacher want you to learn from doing ________?

6. What one thing that happens in reading class do you like least? Why? What does your teacher want you to learn from doing ________?

7. Name one reading skill you've learned recently.

Reading Program Questions

8. Does your teacher talk to you about the new words in a story before you begin to read? Why do you think she does this? What effect does talking about the new words first have on you when you read the story?

9. Does your teacher talk to you about a story before you read it? Why do you think she does this? What effect does talking about the story first have on you when you read it?

10. Does your teacher discuss the story with you when you've finished reading it? Why do you think she does this? What does this discussion do for you?

11. Does your teacher ever have people read out loud? Why do you think she has you do this? What does reading out loud do for you?

12. Does your teacher ever have you practice on reading skills? Why do you think she has you do this? What effect does this practice have on your reading?

13. Do you ever have tests over what you do in reading class? Why do you think your teacher has you do that? What effect does the test have on your reading?
CHAPTER FOUR
RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Warm-Up Questions

1. Why do you think you have reading class every day?

Results
1. To learn to read - 76%
2. To work on skills and vocabulary - 16%, all of whom were level 13 students.
3. To cover the necessary material - 8%

Analysis
A significant proportion of the students saw reading class as a time to "learn to read"--not to improve reading or share perceptions about stories or books. It was interesting to note that, with the exception of five level 9 students, the children were above average readers, and experienced little difficulty in reading beyond their grade level. Therefore, it was possible to conclude that they perceived learning to read as a series of challenging tasks and concepts which formed an intrinsic part of the directed reading lesson, and not simply the decoding process. A small percentage of the students realized that they were expected to cover a certain amount of material during the school
year, and that in order to do so, it was necessary to allot time for reading daily.

2. Do you help plan the way you spend your time in reading class? What do you plan?

Results
1. Yes - 50%
2. Activities cited as planned by the students were:
   a. Enrichment activities such as taping oral reading or acting out plays - 46%
   b. The timing of the reading program, and letting the teacher know when they were ready to move on to something new - 15%
   c. To do what the teacher told them - 15%, all of whom were level 13 girls.
   d. Other activities, including practice on pronunciation and study time - 24%

Analysis
From the examples of activities cited as planned by the students, it was interesting to note that a basic part of the directed reading lesson was never mentioned. Instead, the children felt they had a role in planning enrichment activities and their personal study habits.

Discussion
It was possible to conclude from this information that the classroom analyzed was teacher directed, and that the students were involved in planning "extras". The fact that half of them felt they were involved in plan-
ning may indicate that the teacher was aware of their interests and preferences, and was molding her program structure to meet the student's approval.

3. Do you learn anything about yourself from reading any of the stories? What do you learn? Give an example.

Results

1. Yes, they learned about themselves from the stories - 92%

2. Examples of the things they felt they learned fell into three general categories:
   a. Application of the morals of the stories to themselves - 50%, all of whom were level 13 students.
   b. Learn to read better - 29%, which included 80% of the level 9 students.
   c. Other, including increased personal taste in reading - 21%

Analysis

Generally the students felt that the stories they studied in reading class were relevant to their own lives. Half of the students felt that the morals from the stories were applicable to their experiences. Several of the answers included ideas such as "not to be a bad sport", "don't try to be something you're not", or "learn not to be selfish or jealous." One girl said that sometimes the stories made her wish to be different, and another said that she sometimes had feelings similar to the characters in the stories. All of the students who
percieved the moral of the story as a way of learning about themselves were level 13 students. This indicated that either the material was more relevant for them, or that they were more capable of transferring the knowledge. Over one-fourth of the students interpreted the question to mean what they, as individuals, learned from reading class. The most frequent answer given was that they "learned to read better." It was interesting to note that 80% of the level 9 students interpreted the question this way, while only 14% of the level 13 students did. The remainder of the students who answered "yes" indicated that they were learning increased taste in reading, or were unable to give an example of what they learned about themselves from the reading, although they felt there was something.

Discussion

The number of students who felt that the moral of the story was relevant for them made it possible to conclude that they were using a stimulating reading program, and that their teacher was helping them to see the relationship between the stories and their own experiences. The fact that only the brighter students were able to make this transfer was not surprising. The slower students seemed to have trouble seeing relationships between different topics and in applying knowledge from one area to another. It was interesting to note that three students who felt that they learned something about them-
selves from the stories were unable to give any examples.

Class Related Questions

4. Do you like reading class? Why?

Results

1. 84% of the students indicated that they liked reading class. The reasons that they gave were:
   a. Because they liked to read - 54%
   b. Because they liked the stories in the book - 15%
   c. Because they had a positive feeling about the things they learned - 15%
   d. Because they enjoyed the variety of activities included in the reading program - 8%
   e. Other reasons, including having an opportunity to share ideas and the fact that they liked the people in the class - 8%

2. 8% said that they enjoyed reading class with certain qualifications.
   a. One girl said that she liked reading, but disliked the activities that were included in the directed reading lesson.
   b. Another girl said, "Some things are exciting."
      Both girls were in level 13.

3. 8% of the students said they did not like reading class. Their reasons were:
   a. Because they moved too slowly
   b. Because they didn't like to read
Analysis

A large percentage of the students indicated that they liked reading class. Their reasons were varied, but most of them included some reactions about feeling that reading was a pleasurable activity. All of the level 9 students fell in this category, generally because they said they liked the stories, activities, and the people in their class.

Discussion

Generally children are oriented to regard school, and particularly reading, in a positive light, and it is possible that more indoctrination rather than honesty was coming through in the answers to this question. It seemed odd that 100% of the slow students had a positive reaction to the reading class, in spite of their obvious frustration and lack of achievement. The only other interpretation was that their teacher was particularly skillful in making a difficult experience palatable and even pleasurable.

5. What one thing that happens in reading class do you like best? Why? What does your teacher want you to learn from doing ________?

Results

1. The activities chosen as favorites were:
   a. Silent reading - 23%
   b. Workbook activities - 19%, 80% of whom were level 13 girls.
c. Enrichment activities, such as plays and choral reading - 15%
d. Discussion - 12%
e. Tests - 12%, all of whom were level 13 students.
f. Oral reading - 12%, all of whom were level 13 students.
g. Vocabulary or evaluation activities - 7%, all of whom were level 13 girls.

2. The students gave several reasons for choosing their favorite activity. These reasons included:
   a. Because they enjoyed it - 61%
   b. Because they felt they learned from it - 15%
   c. Because the activity made them feel successful - 12%
   d. Because the activities permitted them to move about, added variety to the reading program, or other - 12%

3. 70% of the students questioned recognized the teacher's objective in teaching the reading activity they selected as their favorite. When the level 13 students alone were analyzed, 85% were found to recognize the teacher's objectives.

Analysis
A wide range of activities were chosen as favorites, which led to the conclusion that different activities appealed to different individuals. Reading and discussion activities were chosen by all groups, but the written and evaluative activities generally tended to be chosen
by level 13 students. The students usually preferred easy, stimulating activities in which they felt successful. The level 13 students appeared to be more aware of the underlying reasons for the different reading activities they were expected to perform.

Discussion

Since such a wide variety of activities were preferred by different individuals, it was logical to conclude that variety within the reading program should be encouraged. In this way almost everyone could participate in a reading-related activity which he enjoyed. Structuring the program so that the reading activities would be presented in stimulating ways, and individualizing so that success could be built in would make the reading program more palatable.

6. What one thing that happens in reading class do you like least? Why? What does your teacher want you to learn from doing __________?

Results

1. The least-liked activities were:
   a. Evaluation activities - 24%, all of whom were level 13 students.
   b. Workbook - 16%
   c. Tests - 16%, all of whom were level 13 students.
   d. Oral reading - 16%, all of whom were level 13 students.
   e. Skills practice - 8%
f. Performing incompetently in any activity - 8%, all of whom were level 13 girls.
g. Vocabulary work - 4%.
h. Silent reading - 4%.
i. Discussion - 4%.

2. Reasons given for disliking an activity were:
a. Because it was difficult, discouraging, or embarrassing - 80%.
b. Because it gave them no reinforcement - 4%.
c. Because it was boring - 4%
d. Unable to answer - 12%

3. 60% of the students realized the teacher's objectives in teaching the reading activity they liked least. When the level 13 students were analyzed separately, 70% realized the teacher's objectives.

Analysis

The students disliked a wide range of activities. The level 13 students were the only ones to mention evaluation activities, testing, and oral reading. Since only level 13 was required to do evaluations, and since they had testing much more frequently, this was understandable. Both groups participated in oral reading, but the level 13 students performed in larger groups and seemed to feel more pressured to perform well. The level 13 students usually appeared uncomfortable in situation where their performance was evaluated before their peers. Generally students disliked activities
tivity was realized 10% more overall and 15% more among the level 13 students. This lead to the conclusion that children are more perceptive about activities they enjoy, and think as little as possible about the activities they dislike.

7. Name one reading skill you've learned recently.

Results

1. 35% of the students were able to correctly identify a reading skill.

2. The types of skills identified were:
   a. Word recognition - 33%
   b. Decoding - 67%

Analysis

The students frequently mentioned grammatical skills, such as categorizing words into classes and recognizing the noun phrase and verb phrase, rather than reading skills, in their responses to this question. Those who correctly identified reading skills mentioned decoding skills such as syllabication more frequently than word recognition skills.

Reading Program Questions

8. Does your teacher talk to you about the new words in a story before you begin to read? Why do you think she does this? What effect does talking about the new words first have on you when you read the story?

Results

96% of the students realized that new words were intro-
duced before they read the story.

2. 100% of those who realized the activity was being taught realized the teacher's objectives in introducing the new words.

3. The students gave the following reasons for introducing the new words:
   a. So they would know them when they read them to themselves - 75%
   b. So they would pronounce the words correctly - 21%, all of whom were level 13 students
   c. So they would become familiar with them, and would transfer this knowledge to other reading - 4%

4. The student's feelings about the usefulness of introducing new words fell into the following categories:
   a. To help them understand the words more easily when they encountered them in silent reading - 38%
   b. To help them understand the story - 26%
   c. To aid their pronunciation of the words - 22%
   d. Nothing - 7%, all of whom were level 13 girls
   e. Other, including the avoidance of frustration when reading the story - 7%

Analysis

The student's answers indicated that they were aware of the teacher's objectives in teaching new words. Generally they felt that the introduction of new words had a positive effect upon their reading.
Discussion

The high percentage of students who realized the teacher's objectives in introducing new words, and the overlapping of the student's understanding of these objectives and their feelings about the value of this activity to them, led to the conclusion that this is a worthwhile part of the reading program, and should continue to be included. An activity which heightens the students understanding of the material which he is reading, and which transfers from one reading source to another, leads to a feeling of competence and helps make reading a pleasurable activity. The development of positive attitudes toward reading and increased comprehension are important goals of the reading program, and an activity which develops these traits should be encouraged.

9. Does your teacher talk to you about a story before you read it? Why do you think she does this? What effect does talking about the story first have on you when you read it?

Results

1. 96% of the students questioned realized that they discussed the story before reading it silently.

2. 100% of the students realized the teacher's objectives in discussing the story before they read it.

3. The students felt that the teacher's reasons for having discussion before reading the story were:
   a. To help them understand the ideas of the story - 78%
   b. To visualize the setting - 7%, all of whom were
level 13 students
c. To know what type of story (eg., fiction, fantasy) to expect.
d. To understand the background of the novel, and the events which led up to the chapter in the reader - 4%
e. To understand the characters - 4%

4. The students felt that discussing the story before they read it had the following effects upon them:
a. To help them understand the story - 72%
b. Nothing - 12%, all of whom were level 13 students
c. To help them know what type of story to expect, and to allow them to read without asking questions - 8%
d. Unable to answer - 8%

Analysis

The students listed several objectives which they felt the teacher was trying to achieve with the discussion. The most frequently mentioned reasons were to help them understand the story during silent reading and to help them know whether to expect nonfiction, realistic fiction, fantasy, or another type of story. All of these ideas paralleled the teacher's objectives in incorporating a pre-reading discussion into her reading program, and the students were very much aware of what was going on. It may be concluded that with a few exceptions the students saw the value of discussion and realized why it was
included in their reading program.

Discussion

The students answers indicated that they saw the purposes of having discussion before they read the story, and that, in most cases, the teacher's objectives in including this activity were being met. Some of the brighter students felt that this introductory discussion was unnecessary for them, but generally the students indicated that it increased their understanding of the story when they read it on their own. An activity such as pre-reading discussion which gives the students confidence in an independent activity is to be encouraged, for hopefully this feeling of ability and confidence will be transferred to other reading material.

10. Does your teacher discuss the story with you when you've finished reading it? Why do you think she does this? What does this discussion do for you?

Results

1. 100% of the students questioned realized that they discussed a story when they finished reading it.

2. 77% of the students indicated that they understood the teacher's objectives in having discussion when they finished reading a story. When the level 13 students were analyzed separately, 85% indicated that they understood the teacher's objectives.

3. A great number of reasons were given by the students as the teacher's objectives in having discussion when
they finished reading. These answers included:

a. To increase what they learned from the story - 33%

b. To give the teacher a chance to check the student's understanding of the story - 14%, all of whom were level 13 students

c. To help them remember the story - 14%

d. To improve their vocabulary - 7%

e. To give them a chance to ask questions - 7%, all of whom were level 13 girls

f. To help them understand the main idea of the story - 7%, all of whom were level 13 students

g. To help them interpret the story - 4%, all of whom were level 13 girls

h. To understand the style of the story - 4%

i. Other, including preparation for the test and in order to have a chance to reread important parts of the story - 10%

4. The students said that discussion of the story had the following effects upon them:

a. Helped them understand the moral or main idea of the story - 73%

b. Nothing - 15%, most of whom were level 13 girls

c. Other, including skills practice - 12%

Analysis

A little over three-fourths of the students understood the teacher's objectives in having discussion when they finished reading a story. When the level 13 students
were analyzed separately, 85% indicated that they understood the teacher's objectives. Therefore, it may be concluded that the level 13 students were more aware of the purposes for having discussion. The students had a large variety of interpretations of the teacher's reasons for having discussion. Some of the answers were rather straightforward and obvious, but a few of the level 13 students gave more perceptive answers, including interpretation of the story and analysis of its style. Over three-fourths of their observations paralleled the usual objectives of a teacher in having discussion after silent reading. Generally, the student's perceptions of the teacher's objectives overlapped what they said they felt the discussion did for them. From this analysis it was possible to conclude that the students who understood the teacher's purposes for having discussion also saw the value of this activity to them. About three-fourths of the students gave answers which indicated that discussion was a worthwhile activity to them.

Discussion

Among the positive benefits derived from having discussion after reading, increased understanding of the story was frequently mentioned. An activity which makes the student feel more capable and perceptive probably increases his enjoyment of the reading act. The parallel between the student's perceptions of their teacher's objectives
in having discussion and their awareness of the value of the discussion for them leads to the conclusion that the students would probably benefit from having the teacher's purposes pointed out to them. This awareness could possibly lead them to a heightened perception of the value of this activity to them. It is interesting to note that the students were more perceptive about the teacher's objectives for having discussion before reading rather than after, and gave answers which indicated that they saw the value of this pre-reading discussion more clearly than discussion after reading. A possible explanation is that the pre-reading discussion is generally more concerned with concrete facts about the story's characters and setting to make the reading easier to understand. On the other hand, the discussion after silent reading has occurred generally covers the vague realm of analysis and interpretation, and thus the purposes are harder to grasp.

11. Does your teacher ever have people read out loud? Why do you think she has people do this? What does reading out loud do for you?

Results

1. 100% of the students questioned realized they had oral reading as a part of their reading program.

2. 69% of the students gave answers which indicated that they understood the teacher's objectives in having oral reading. When the level 13 students were analyzed sel-
arately, 71% indicated that they understood the teacher's objectives.

3. The student's interpretations of the teacher's objectives for including oral reading in their reading program were:
   a. So the teacher could check their progress - 32%
   b. To help their pronunciation - 20%
   c. So the teacher could give them a grade - 9%, all of whom were level 13 girls
   d. To help them understand the story - 9%, all of whom were level 13 girls
   e. To help them gain poise and communication abilities before a group - 9%, all of whom were level 13 girls
   f. To help the students expression and interpretation - 5%, all of whom were level 13 students
   g. To improve their silent reading - 5%, all of whom were level 13 boys
   h. Other, including giving others a chance to learn the words and skills practice - 11%

4. The student's analysis of the effects of oral reading on them included:
   a. Improving their pronunciation - 24%
   b. Improving their silent reading - 19%
   c. Improving their vocabulary - 19%
   d. Helping their interpretation - 11%, all of whom were level 13 students
   e. Nothing - 11%, all of whom were level 13 students
f. Helping them understand the teacher's interpretation of the story - 8%
g. Helping them in discussion and speaking out in class - 8%, all of whom were level 13 girls

Analysis

A little over two-thirds of the students realized the teacher's purposes for having oral reading. This statistic improved only slightly when the level 13 students were analyzed separately. Therefore, it may be concluded that the objectives or oral reading are obscure for a large number of students, and that the intelligence and performance level of the students makes little difference in their ability to perceive these objectives. The students gave a large number of suggestions for the teacher's purposes in including oral reading in their reading program. The answers indicated that over two-fifths of the students saw oral reading a grade-related, and that although level 13 students gave a wider variety of answers, many of them were no more perceptive than those given by the level 9 students. Over four-fifths of the students gave some positive response about the effects of oral reading on them. This indicated that they realized that oral reading had some beneficial effects, but they frequently saw the teacher's objectives and their gains as unrelated. Apparently oral reading had been emphasized as an opportunity for the teacher to check up on the students, and they didn't realize
where the teacher's objectives and the student's gains met. Pronunciation of words was the only skill mentioned with any frequency as both a beneficial result of oral reading for the students and an objective of the teacher, although expression, interpretation, and improved silent reading were mentioned in both categories. Although some of the students felt that the teacher intended oral reading to help them understand the story, no one ever mentioned increased understanding as one of the things oral reading did for them.

Discussion

Although the students gave several positive results of oral reading for them, their general confusion about the teacher's objectives and the number of negative statements led to the conclusion that oral reading was not a particularly successful part of the reading program. It tended to put students into potentially embarrassing situations before their peers, was not a good check of the student's ability since stress tended to distort their performance, and almost all of the other benefits of oral reading listed by the students could have been learned from pre-reading discussion or examination of new words. Although occasionally interpretation of a character's mood or feeling could be heightened by reading aloud some of his conversation, this should be done infrequently and on a voluntary basis. It may generally be concluded that oral reading is frequently used to
achieve objectives which could be met in other, less threatening, ways.

12. Does your teacher ever have you practice on reading skills? Why do you think she has you do this? What effect does this practice have on your reading?

Results

1. 96% of the students questioned realized that they practiced on reading skills.

2. 60% of the students gave answers which indicated that they understood the teacher's objectives in teaching skills. When the level 13 students were analyzed separately, 55% indicated that they understood the teacher's objectives.

3. The student's evaluation of the teacher's reasons for having them practice skills were:
   a. To learn and understand the skills better - 46%
   b. To prepare for the tests - 29%, all of whom were level 13 students.
   c. So they would remember them - 11%
   d. So the teacher could give them a grade - 7%, all of whom were level 13 girls
   e. No answer - 7%

4. The students said that practicing skills had the following effects upon them:
   a. To help them learn and understand the skills - 35%, all of whom were level 13 students
   b. To help their vocabulary - 19%
c. Nothing - 19%

d. To prepare them for the work they would be expected to do in the fifth grade - 11%

e. To prepare them for the tests - 8%, all of whom were level 13 girls

f. Other, including learning to read - 8%

Analysis

Three-fifths of the students gave answers which indicated that they understood the teacher's objectives in having them practice skills. Surprisingly, this figure dropped slightly when the level 13 students were analyzed separately, but not enough to consider it a significant difference. Many of the students appeared to be confused about their teacher's reasons for having them practice skills. The student's understanding of the teacher's objectives in having them practice reading skills were generally vague or short range. Over one-third of them felt the purpose of skills practice was grade related or in preparation for the tests. The rest said that they needed to learn and understand the skills (why they needed to learn and understand them was never mentioned) and that practicing helped them remember them (again, why they needed to remember them was not mentioned). The level 13 students were generally more concerned with grading and testing than the level 9 students, and tended to relate skills practice with improving their performance in a testing situation. Over half
of the students said that practicing skills helped them learn and understand the skills and improved their vocabulary. One-fifth of the students felt that skills practice was useless and did nothing for them. Some students suggested that they would need to know the skills later, and if they didn't learn them now they would be behind in the fifth grade. A few of the level 13 students said that skills practice helped them perform better on the tests. Although some of these answers reflect the objectives of the teacher in having skills practice, none of them really relates skills and reading.

Discussion

The students did not appear to relate skills practice with the ability to read. One implication of this weakness is that the teacher has not helped them to see the relationship between the two, and reading and skills are seen as two separate and distinct entities. Although skills are an essential part of any balanced reading program, the effectiveness of teaching these skills is questionable when the students are not relating the skills to reading. A further responsibility of the teacher is to emphasize this relationship wherever possible, and help her students see the interrelationship between skills and the ability to read.

13. Do you ever have tests over what you do in reading class? Why do you think your teacher has you do that? What effect does the test have on your reading?
Results

1. 100% of the students realized that they had tests.
2. 88% of the students analyzed understood the teacher's objectives in giving tests. When the level 13 students were analyzed separately, 95% understood the teacher's objectives.
3. The students felt that the teacher's reasons for giving tests were:
   a. To check their progress and to see what they remembered from their reading - 48%
   b. So they would learn and understand more about the things they had done - 26%
   c. So that they would have more practice on skills - 18%, all of whom were level 13 students
   d. Other, including vocabulary improvement and grading - 8%
4. The students said that testing had the following effects upon their reading:
   a. Learn more about the stories and skills from the tests - 21%
   b. Nothing - 21%, all of whom were level 13 students
   c. An opportunity to review what they had learned - 14%
   d. Further practice on skills - 14%, all of whom were level 13 students
   e. Practice on vocabulary words, and help remember them - 10%
f. Other, including a progress check, grades, and for fun - 20%

Analysis

The students generally understood the purposes of having tests in their reading class. Nearly half of the students realized that one of the teacher's reasons for giving tests was to check their progress and see what they remembered from their reading. Another fourth of the students realized that tests were also intended as a learning activity, and some of the level 13 students felt that the teacher gave them tests in order for them to get more practice on skills. It is interesting to note the way some of the more intelligent students appear to have skills and testing linked together as an entity separate from reading. Most of the student's perceptions about the teacher's objectives in giving tests overlapped what they said the tests did for them. However, almost one-fourth of the students felt tests were unnecessary and said that they had no effect upon their ability to read. From this evidence it may be concluded that, although many of the students perceive the benefits of testing upon their reading, a large number do not.

Discussion

Although most of the students appeared to understand the purposes of having tests, a large number of them felt tests were unnecessary. The number of level 13
which were difficult, discouraging, or embarrassing.
A small percentage said they disliked boring activities,
or activities from which they received no reinforcement.

Discussion

It was interesting to compare the answers from question
#5 (favorite activities) with #6 (disliked activities).
Several interesting facts emerged.

1. There was a wide range of liked and disliked activities, and frequently the two categories overlapped.
   For example, 19% chose workbook as a favorite activity,
   16% chose it as a disliked activity. Tests, oral
   reading, vocabulary, silent reading, discussion,
   and evaluative activities were also mentioned in
   both categories. Therefore, it was obvious that
   individual difference was the key factor in determin-nings which category an activity would fit into.

2. Generally students liked easy, stimulating activities
   in which they felt successful, and disliked difficult,
   discouraging, or embarrassing activities. Hypotheti-
   cally it would be possible to turn a disliked
   activity into a more pleasant one by putting students
   into potentially embarrassing situations as infre-
   quently as possible, making the activities challen-
   ging but below the frustrational level to av-oid as
   much discouragement as possible, and to build in
   as much individual success as possible.

3. The teacher's objective for teaching a favorite ac-
students who appeared to think of tests only as further skills practice might have profitted from an essay examination in which more literary and comprehension skills were stressed. Overall, it may be concluded that testing or some form of periodic evaluation is a positive experience for both the students and the teacher, and that it can be a valuable tool in determining areas of weakness and competence and in judging when a student is ready to move on to new material. However, care should be taken to avoid making a testing situation tense or embarrassing for the students.
CHAPTER FIVE
CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

From the review of the literature several weaknesses in children's perceptions of their reading programs became obvious. Researchers discovered that the greatest problem was that few students understood why they needed to learn to read, and did not realize the purposes of their reading class activities. These researchers found that the student's performance improved when the teacher set specific purposes for reading, allowed the students to share in the structure of the program, permitted them to participate in selecting and planning activities, and saw a reason for knowing how to read.

These ideas from the literature were reflected in the analysis of this survey. According to the criteria mentioned previously, two weaknesses in the children's program, which became apparent in their answers to the warm-up questions, were that the students had only a small part in planning their reading program, and that only half of the students felt that they learned about themselves from reading the stories.

The questions which related specifically to reading class yielded some interesting conclusions. The students were asked to name their favorite activity, and the one they liked least. Their answers frequently overlapped, and often an activity which
one person loved, another hated. The students liked activities which were easy, stimulating, and gave them a feeling of success, and disliked difficult, discouraging, or embarrassing tasks. In order to make every activity pleasurable, the teacher should allow everyone to work at a pace which is challenging, yet not frustrating. This, in turn, requires adequate preparation and motivation for each task. Students should never be "put on the spot" and embarrassed before their peers. Constructive criticism should be administered privately, and with the emphasis upon improvement, not past mistakes. Another interesting fact which emerged from the analysis of these questions was that students were usually more aware of the purposes for teaching activities they liked. As the review of the literature indicated, students tend to do better when they have a definite purpose and are aware of the value of an activity. Stressing the reasons for doing various tasks could serve to heighten the student's awareness and make the task more pleasant.

The questions pertaining to the reading program followed the format of the directed reading lesson. Beginning with the introduction of new words, the questions covered discussion, oral reading, the teaching of skills, and evaluation. Each component was analyzed separately for its strengths and weaknesses.

The introduction of new words and the pre-reading discussion were found to be strong areas of the reading program. The students were aware of the teacher's objectives, and felt that these activities helped their silent reading. Among the benefits
mentioned were improved pronunciation, a feeling of competence and self-confidence in a silent reading situation, and the avoidance of frustration. Activities such as these which lead to personal satisfaction are also creating a healthy climate for reading.

The students were generally not as aware of the purposes for having discussion after reading. Of the many possible reasons which they gave for including this activity, it's use as a check by the teacher to see if they completed their reading assignment was frequently mentioned. Further emphasis should be placed upon the sharing aspects of this activity, where character's actions and feelings might be discussed with less teacher direction. For the student's to develop the ability to critically appraise a literary work, they need time to explore their own emotional responses to the story, without the feeling that the teacher is busily marking down grades. The role of the teacher in this activity should be directed toward asking probing questions and allowing the students to share their opinions with each other.

Oral reading was a greatly misunderstood portion of the reading program. Only two-thirds of the students indicated that they understood the teacher's objectives for including it, and the benefits of oral reading to them were unrelated to these objectives. The positive aspects of oral reading for character interpretation and expression were far outweighed by it's tendency to put students into potentially embarrassing situations before their peers. Oral reading before a group was also a poor check
of a student's progress, since stress tended to distort his performance. When using oral reading in the classroom the teacher should be careful to make her objectives clear and let the oral reading be done on a voluntary basis in small groups. If the teacher wishes to hear a particular student read, it should be done on an individual basis to avoid any chance of embarrassing the student.

Possibly because the tests stressed application of the skills, skills and tests appeared to be linked by the students, but as tasks separate from reading. Their understanding of the teacher's objectives in having skills practice was generally poor, and stressed preparation for the tests. The student's understanding of the reasons for giving tests was somewhat better, but both areas showed a lack of application to actual reading. In order for the teaching of skills to be truly effective, the teacher must repeatedly emphasize that reading depends on the ability to "crack the code" of written language, and that skills provide the key. In order to make the tests more relevant, they should touch on areas other than skills. Interpretation and usage of the tests is the main factor in determining the worth of the evaluation. In order to make testing a worthwhile activity, the results must be used to find student's weaknesses and misconceptions, and to determine when one area is mastered and they are ready to move on to something new. If the students do not see this application, they will cease to be concerned with the tests results.

If a teacher is truly concerned with the student's progress,
most of these suggestions for individualizing the reading program will be unnecessary. The major emphasis should be placed upon helping the students find relevance in the reading program, and on making the objectives for each activity obvious to them. If these two suggestions are followed, the rest will come naturally.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


