

AN ANALYSIS OF THE READING PROGRAM
AT BIG ROCK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Abstract of Applied Project

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Presented to
the Faculty of the School of Education
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of the Requirements for the Degree of
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ABSTRACT

Big Rock Elementary School is located in Southwest Virginia, in Buchanan County. Grades kindergarten through seven are taught at Big Rock Elementary School. At the beginning of school year 1987-1988, four hundred and five students were registered for classes. Reading is taught in all grades at Big Rock Elementary School. Teachers realize the importance of students acquiring proficient reading skills. In 1983, Science Research Associates (SRA) achievement reading test scores for students at Big Rock Elementary School ranked at the 35th percentile. This ranking drew concern from county and school officials. As a result of the concern, the Standards of Learning Program (SOL), increased Science Research Associates testing and a text series by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers (HBJ) were introduced.

The study compares reading achievement test scores of eighty students (chosen at random) for school year 1983 and reading achievement test scores of eighty students (chosen at random) for school year 1987.

The research questions formulated for this study include: 1) What impact on student reading achievement has occurred between 1983 and 1987? 2) Are proficient reading skills necessary for students to be successful in our society? 3) Have students' reading skills improved in

grades two through five, when comparing 1983 reading test scores to 1987 reading test scores? These questions will be addressed within the body of this study.

The purpose of the study was twofold: 1) to examine the effects (of the introduction of the Standards of Learning Program, Science Research Associates test expansion, and the text series by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers on Science Research Associates reading test scores and, 2) to make suggestions for the improvement of the program.

The procedures of the study included the compilation of test scores for students in 1983 and 1987. The procedures also involved a review of literature on the subject of reading. Interviews were also conducted with experts in the field of reading education,

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of introducing the Standards of Learning Program, Science Research Associates tests expansion, and the use of the text series by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers for the school years 1983 through 1987 in grades two through five at Big Rock Elementary School. Students' reading achievement scores have significantly improved in grades two through five in 1987 when compared to 1983. The improvement is a result of the Standards of Learning Program teamed with Science Research Associates tests expansion,

and the use of Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers text series. A causal effect has occurred and this causal effect is due primarily to the introduction of the major variables listed above.

The results and recommendations of the study shall include: 1) The Standards of Learning Program, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers text series, and expanded Science Research Associates testing has made a significant difference in reading achievement test scores since 1983. 2) A system and network has been established that allows and encourages a team approach among reading teachers, staff, and parents. 3) The Standards of Learning Program, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers text series, and expanded Science Research Associates testing program should continue. 4) Results of this study should be shared with other schools within the Buchanan County School System. 5) A continued effort should be made to examine other reading programs for inclusion into Big Rock's reading program. 6) A future study should be conducted for the purpose of identifying the side effects of improved reading skills in other course areas, including Math, English, and History.

Accepted by:

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LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. Achievement Test Scores by Year.....	37
2. Test Score Comparisons by Year.....	43

LIST OF GRAPHS

<u>Graph</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. Grade 2 - Reading Test Scores.....	38
2. Grade 3 - Reading Test Scores.....	39
3. Grade 4 - Reading Test Scores.....	40
4. Grade 5 - Reading Test Scores.....	41
5. Achievement Test Score Comparisons.....	44

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
LIST OF TABLES.....	vi
LIST OF GRAPHS.....	vii
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. RELATED LITERATURE.....	7
3. PROCEDURES.....	33
4. FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS.....	35
5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	47
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	50
APPENDIX	
A. Terms.....	53
B. Interview Sheet.....	54

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Big Rock Elementary School is located in the heart of the coal fields of Southwest Virginia in Buchanan County. Big Rock Elementary School was constructed in 1952. Grades kindergarten through seven are taught at Big Rock Elementary School. At the beginning of academic year 1987-1988, four hundred and five students were registered for classes. Twenty-five certified teachers provide instructional services for the student body. Six administrative personnel provide support services for the school. The administrative personnel include the elementary supervisor, principal, assistant principal, nurse, psychologist, and pupil personnel worker. Approximately ninety percent of the certified teachers have earned master's degrees and the remaining ten percent have bachelor's degrees. The economy in Southwest Virginia is comprised of approximately eighty percent mining, ten percent manufacturing, and ten percent service organizations.

In 1983, Science Research Associates (SRA) reading test scores at Big Rock Elementary School for grades two through five ranked at the 35th percentile. Reading scores and skills in 1983 were below the state average. Respon-

sible officials of the Buchanan County School System and Big Rock Elementary School Staff were forced to take action that would improve reading scores and skills. Officials of the Buchanan County School System began a review of the reading programs taught throughout Buchanan County. A committee was formed to offer recommendations that would promote accelerated reading skill and achievement. The committee, after examining the reading programs throughout Buchanan County, offered the following suggestions: 1) The Standards of Learning Program (SOL) mandated by the State of Virginia should be implemented at once. 2) SRA tests should be administered to students in all grades and reading scores closely examined by teachers. 3) Textbooks should be adopted that would allow teachers the opportunity to systematically develop student's skills in decoding, comprehension, language, study skills, and literature appreciation.

The suggestions of the committee resulted in the following actions: 1) The SOL program was implemented immediately. 2) SRA reading tests were administered to students in all grades. 3) An innovative reading text series, entitled, "Bookmark Reading Program" by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers (HBJ) was adopted. These actions were considered of paramount importance by the committee.

The purpose of this study is twofold: 1) to examine the effects of the introduction of the SOL program, SRA tests expansion, and the text series by HBJ on SRA reading test scores and 2) to make suggestions for the improvement of the program.

Reading skills appear to be directly related to learning in all subject areas. The constant improvement of student reading skills at Big Rock Elementary School is vital if students are to keep pace in a competitive and changing world.

When the question is asked, "What is reading?", many people offer answers such as these: 1) Reading is recognizing printed symbols. 2) Reading is interpreting a secondary form of oral language. 3) Reading is absorbing and understanding the symbols of oral language. All these definitions are probably correct. Reading is a meaningful recognition of the printed symbols of language and the interpretation of these symbols as they may have been related to the reader's own experiences (Bergman, 1969:3).

Being able to read well is a great practical use in our society and the world. Because of its central importance, reading should be the paramount example of what education is all about. Education has become the largest enterprise of our society, an enterprise that is both practical and logical (Bruno, 1982: 49-50).

Learning to read must give the child the feeling that through reading, new worlds will be opened to the mind and imagination of the child. If children are to grow up to be literate, reading must be exciting from the very beginning. Reading should help students understand themselves and their world.

Statement and Purpose

The purpose of this study is twofold: 1) to examine the effects of the introduction of the SOL program, SRA tests expansion, and the text series by HBJ on SRA reading tests achievement scores and, 2) to make suggestions for the further improvement of the reading program.

Significance of the Study

The results of the study will be used to determine the effects of the reading program on the achievement test scores of students. Results will be examined to determine if the reading program is effective, and if so, how effective.

Limitations

The limitations of this study include those listed below;

1. Students' achievement scores from Big Rock Elementary School only will be examined.

2. Achievement scores of students from grades two through five only will be examined.
3. Students' reading achievement scores only will be examined. Other areas of the curriculum will not be examined.
4. Students' achievement scores of five years only will be examined, 1983 through 1987.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated for this study:

1. What impact on student reading achievement has occurred since the implementation of the SOL program, SRA test expansion, and the use of the HBJ text series?
2. Are proficient reading skills necessary for students to be successful in our society?
3. Have Big Rock Elementary School students' reading skills improved in grades two through five, when comparing 1983 to 1987 reading test scores?

Summary

Student reading achievement test scores in 1983 for grades two through five at Big Rock Elementary School were below national and state averages. An effort to improve reading achievement levels resulted in action in three forms. An SOL program was implemented along with SRA tests expansion. A new text book series by HBJ was adopted that would allow teachers the opportunity to systematically de-

velop student skills. In an effort to better understand developments in the field of reading, this study includes a review of current reading research and literature.

CHAPTER 2

RELATED LITERATURE

When asked, "What is reading?" many people offer the following descriptions: 1) reading is recognizing all printed symbols, 2) reading is interpreting a secondary form of oral language, 3) reading is absorbing and understanding the symbols of oral language. All these definitions are correct but not complete.

There is difficulty in forming a simple definition of a complex process. Even after many years of study and research no one has been able to offer, with any amount of certainty, all the physical and psychological aspects that constitute the reading act. The entire child appears to be involved in the act of reading - - not simply the eyes or the voice. A child reads with muscles, senses, experiences, and cultural heritage (Dechant, 1951:23; Osborn, 1985:275). Before any complete definition of reading can be offered, the nature of the reader must be defined. This is not an easy task. Reading is the meaningful recognition of the printed symbols of language and the interpretation of the symbols as they may be related to the reader's own experiences (Smith, 1951:27).

There appear to be many processes that accompany the reading act. The reader must receive visual stimuli.

For this, vision must be functioning mechanically well with depth perception, binocular coordination, and the ability to center and to change fixation at will. Much evidence is available that failure of the eyes in any of these sensory skills results in reading difficulties.

Given the correct environment reading may be acquired at many stages of growth and development. Reading is a cohesive set of skills that must carefully be presented in an orderly sequence to be efficiently used. The most important ingredients contributing to students' achievement are the teacher and the teaching (Carrilo, 1976 :109; Hoffman, 1986:109).

In the past ten years, research on reading programs has shifted the focus from the effectiveness of lesson formats to the effectiveness of teacher and to the effectiveness of schools. This transition to larger and larger units of analysis for effectiveness by researchers has been echoed by the changing focus of public school districts attempting to improve the effects of reading programs for children.

Jefferson County, Kentucky, a large urban school district, was analyzed in its thrust over the past few years to improve teacher effectiveness in reading instruction. This analysis was accomplished by chronicling the changes of the district's program (Hoffman, 1986:109).

Skills of reading form a hierarchy of sophistication that parallels the total development of the individual. After a child has been taught the skills of word identification through the use of the many tools available (picture clues, sight words, context, phonics, word structure, and dictionary helps), the child is confronted with the still more complex areas of comprehension, study skills, speed and fluency (Bergman, 1969:19; Early, 1983: 8). Finally the student reaches the point where critical and interpretive reading begin to parallel growth stages. Although abilities in previously listed reading skills may approximate the ultimate in the individual's capacity to them though never completely, there is the area of reading called "personal values" that has to do with interest, taste and attitudes toward reading. Full achievement in this area is never really consummated.

Reading is a vital skill in today's complex society. Reading is an essential skill for facilitating a multitude of day-to-day tasks and promoting an easily accessible means for recreation in today's highly complex, print-orientated society (Olson, 1982:208). Reading is the most flexible, economical, and varied means of total communication at our disposal.

Education has become the largest enterprise of our society. Being able to read well is of practical use. The

child through reading must get the feeling of new worlds being opened to the mind and imagination (Bruno, 1982:50). Reading and learning should include creation and imagination.

Because of reading's central importance, reading should be the paramount example of what education in the deepest sense is all about. If the objective of our society is that children must grow up to be literate, reading must be exciting from the very beginning. Reading should help students understand themselves and the world.

Anyone who could conclusively answer the question of "How should reading be taught?" would be the most sought-after individual in this universe. There is no one best way to teach reading. Certainly over the years, many methods have been devised and much research has been done. It is known what skills are needed to be able to read and the various ways to teach those skills. A panacea for reading ills may not soon be found. The teaching of reading must be taught in different ways to the different individuals that come together for such training. At best, the reading teacher must be prophetic and eclectic. The teacher must be able to predict what a student needs by diagnosing and then going about choosing from the available methods, the best way to teach that particular individual. There are guidelines, however, that can help

any teacher of reading. The beginning of every reading program whether it be remedial, classroom corrective, or developmental begins with proper diagnosis. Diagnosis is simply a study of the child's instructional needs based on results of tests that usually require such basic information as chronological age, mental age, and grade placement or selection. With these factors known, the results of intelligence tests scores from standardized tests can be interpreted in terms of expectation and the reader's test score can be compared to the national and local norms (Bergman, 1969:6-12; Cushenberry, 1977:117).

The basal reader is by far the most used approach to teaching reading in American public schools. Reading instructions in almost all schools starts from a similar basis: basic readers from a graded series are used by ninety percent of first grade teachers and by ninety-two to eighty-four percent of second and third grade teachers, on all or most days in the year (Hester, 1964:29; Turner, 1988:62). This preponderance in favor of the basal reader is even more remarkable when one considers the attacks that have been made upon this approach to teaching beginning reading. In addition to the articles which have urged the rejection of the "word method" of teaching, specific attacks have been made upon basal reading programs by Arthur Trace. Trace followed this with a series of

basal readers of his own, using the alphabetic-phonetic method. This method has garnered some support among teachers. (Rudolf, 1955:10).

Basal reading programs, offered by a number of different companies, are widely used for several reasons. First, they offer a continuity of growth in reading that would difficult to achieve by using a variety of unrelated books. Vocabulary control, presentation of word attack skills, and content are consistent within a series of basal readers. Second, each series offers to the classroom teacher with each revision whatever is new in reading research as it applies to class instruction (Hester, 1964: 291; Early, 1983:11). A teacher who uses readers wisely finds many suggestions by the authors and publishers for flexible use of basic material to take care of varying needs of each child. But children appear to need, experiences that are commonly related as well. There is a definite advantage in sharing an experience. Wise use of a basic series enables a teacher to meet both of these needs of children. In addition to basal reading methods, other methods have proven successful. Language experience charts have become widely used.

Language experience charts were first discussed at about the time of World War I. It was not until the decade from 1925 to 1935 that language chart were used. Wide

use of language charts came later. Language experience charts are still used in various parts of Europe and the United States (Robinson, 1964:197; Kinney, 1985:854).

The philosophy behind the language experience approach, while radical for its time, seems simple and logical today. The child comes to the school with a background of language experiences in speaking and listening. The teacher should draw upon this experience in teaching the child to read, and let vocabulary and sentences proceed from it. A common method of introducing the relationship of words and things was to label objects. Later, the teacher might guide a discussion of the children's experiences, help them summarize ideas, and finally write these ideas in simple sentences made up of the children's words.

Language experience charts and stories are considered excellent for both prereading readiness and beginning reading. By watching the teacher write the sentences as the children are pronouncing the words, the children will grasp the relationship between the spoken and the written word (Smith, 1963:197). In addition to language experience methods, other methods have proven successful. Individualized reading methods have become widely used.

Individualized reading is another important element for success. Individualized reading is widely taught. The

first concerted efforts to individualize reading instruction came at about the same time as the introduction of the language experience approach. Several cities, including San Francisco, Los Angeles, Detroit, and Madison Wisconsin reported studies of individual instruction, while the state of Connecticut and Illinois experimented with individualizing instruction in rural schools (Miel, 1958:1; Cushenbery, 1977:58).

The need for individualizing the teaching of reading grew out of greater understanding of the process of human growth and development. In a typical application of the individualizing approach to reading, the teacher provides a wide selection of reading materials that cover many topics of interest to children in that age group (Veatch, 1959:8). These materials will be of different levels of difficulty to accommodate all of the pupils. The children will select their own books and read at their own rates and levels. The teacher checks on the progress of each pupil, gives assistance with skill development, and keeps records of materials read and skills mastered. Although the teacher may group the children occasionally for help in solving some common problems, the grouping is temporary and flexible, allowing the individual child considerable freedom to make his own decisions and seek answers to his own question (Cushenberry, 1977:66).

A phonics program is not a program for teaching reading, but, rather, a set of generalizations about the relationships among letters and sounds that are taught to children. Phonics is taught with a variety of materials and through a variety of teaching activities as a part of multiple programs. A "phonics" program is any reading program with an emphasis on teaching phonics. There are several published programs that are similar to basals because they are graded sets of materials that cover word identification, comprehension, and study skills (Botel, 1962:14; Robinson, 1964:27; Cooper, 1983:12).

As with the phonics program, linguistics is not actually an approach but rather an emphasis upon the relationship between language development and reading. The main emphasis of linguistic teaching is one of decoding. Although there are many differences among the various types of linguistic programs, most appear to have the following factors in common: 1) The names of the letters rather than the sounds are taught first. 2) Beginning vocabulary is almost entirely restricted to words that have consistent letter-sound relationships. 3) They present three-letter words of a consonant-vowel-consonant pattern in words that have a common spelling pattern. 4) They teach a few high-utility words as sight words so that meaningful sentences can be written. 5) They do not teach

phonic generalizations, but they expect children to note the similarities of words containing the same spelling pattern and then develop an understanding of the relationship between spelling and sound (Harris, 1979:214).

Programmed instruction presents instructional materials in small, sequential steps, each of which is referred to as a frame (Burns, 1976:16). The pupil is to respond in some way to each frame and is instantly informed of the correctness of the response. The pupil moves through the material at the individual's own pace. Although a "total" reading program containing programmed materials on word identification, comprehension, and study skills may be used as the only instructional approach, this is seldom done. In most cases, it appears that other materials and methods are used in conjunction with programmed approach (Skinner, 1986:108).

In computer assisted instruction, a computer is used to administer programmed instructional sequence. All children sit in front of a small computer console in a one-on-one setting and respond in a self-paced manner to each computer command. Feedback as to the correctness of the response is immediate. Although computers could be programmed to teach all the reading skills, the computer is usually used in conjunction with other teaching approaches and methodologies.

Eclectic is a term that refers to any approach to teaching that combines desirable aspects of a number of different major approaches (Wagner, 1966:35). For example, a teacher might organize a program that uses the skill exercises from a basal reader program along with the self-selection of books, individualized conferences, and book-sharing aspects of an individualized program.

The Standards of Learning Program is designed to identify what students are expected to accomplish, to provide a method of determining what has been learned, and encourage teachers to give additional instruction when needed. The SOL program is not intended to reduce the total school program to a single list of objectives or to replace the curriculum that a school division already may have developed for its students (Riehm, 1981:3).

The SOL Program is unique because the focus is student learning oriented rather than teacher oriented. SOL identifies and monitors the basic knowledge through grade twelve in Virginia Public Schools. SOL incorporates the best of two programs in Virginia Public Schools: The Basic Learning Skills Program in the elementary grades and the Graduation Competency Program in secondary schools.

Expanded educational and work opportunities have created a need for assuring a sound foundation in the "basics." The SOL program has accomplished this. The

major objectives of the SOL program are to improve learning and to provide ways to measure that improvement. By establishing learner objectives, the program assists in laying the foundation for each student's educational growth and development (Davis, 1981:1).

Those affected by the SOL Program can be divided into four major categories: 1) students, 2) parents, 3) teachers, and 4) administrators. The SOL Program assists students in promoting continuity in their instructional programs and provides them with a foundation in the basic learning skills. The SOL Program provides parents with information about the skills their children are to learn and enables parents to work with teachers as partners in the instructional program. The SOL Program assists teachers in following the progress of students in selecting instructional materials and in communicating effectively with students and parents.

The SOL Program also allows teachers to modify all instruction daily for students who require special assistance. Administrators are involved in the SOL Program. They help identify strengths and weaknesses in curriculum and instruction at state, school division, and individual school levels (Davis, 1981:3).

The Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Bookmark Reading Program is a basal reader. Its use has become widespread.

The Eagle Edition is a basal reading program, carefully structured in approach and sequential in its development, assessment, reinforcement, and extension of skills that are essential to the reading process. HBJ Bookmark, Eagle Edition, has retained all the proven strengths of the previous editions by continuing to provide a rich and complete reading curriculum that encompasses five skill strands: word service/decoding, comprehension, language, study skills, and literature appreciation. The HBJ Bookmark Reading Program, Eagle Edition, provides teachers with well-organized, well-defined, three-step lesson plans as well as practical diagnostic tools, extensive practice, and numerous provisions for individual differences (Early, 1983:23).

The Prereading/Readiness Program that prepares students for beginning reading is comprised of three basic components that present a continuum of prereading/readiness skills. The Language Activity Kit is designed for use at the kindergarten level, and utilizes methods and non-book materials that emphasize the development of oral language skills including speaking and listening. The kit includes cassettes of poetry and other oral readings, game boards, hand puppets, and other manipulatives. The teacher's edition contains thorough lesson plans, content-area resource centers, and copying masters for both enrichment

and reinforcement. Enrichment and reinforcement appear to be common elements in most successful reading programs and approaches. The commonality of these two elements appear to blend into the fabric of progressive reading programs (Early, 1983:6).

Look, Listen, and Learn contains oral language development while providing a transition to the printed page. Look, Listen, and Learn presents basic prereading skills and is appropriate for use in either late kindergarten or early first grade. In both the pupil's and teacher's editions, the focus is on auditory and visual discrimination, oral language development, concept development, thinking skills, and listening skills (Cooper, 1983:14).

Sounds, Symbols, and Sense for use in kindergarten, reviews many of the prereading skills previously introduced in the language activity kit and correspondence and vocabulary that will be retaught in level one, Sun Up. The teacher's editions for both Look, Listen, and Learn and Sounds, Symbols and Sense contain reduced pupil's edition pages (Early, 1983:7).

The major goal of the primary program is learning to read; that is, mastering the basic reading skills and gaining independence in reading. Essential decoding and comprehension skills must be developed. These skills are

developed through a strong, comprehensive instructional program that gives consistent, structured attention to word analysis and meaning. Selections in the pupil's editions, offer variety, purpose, and enjoyment in reading. These selections include informational articles, fictional selections, poetry, and plays (Cooper, 1983:25).

The intermediate/junior high levels of HBJ Bookmark Eagle Edition, not only review and reinforce skills from the primary program, but also concentrate on the skills necessary to use reading as a means of acquiring information and knowledge. The program provides students with the methods and materials to use reading as a learning tool and involves students in enriching experiences with quality literature that contribute to reading for pleasure. Each pupil's edition contains reading selections that help students transfer reading skills to other school subjects, as well as selections that provide for the careful teaching of literary concepts and understandings. Each pupil's edition is composed of both fiction and nonfiction reading selections from the highest quality children's literature (Early, 1983:8).

The HBJ Bookmark, Eagle Edition, teacher's editions provide objectives and well-organized teaching plans for each lesson. The three basic steps for each teaching plan are clearly identified. They include: 1) preparing to

read, 2) reading and discussing, and 3) maintenance skills. Each plan is self-paced and self-explanatory and provides instructors with evaluative techniques.

A balanced reading program provides instruction in the habits, skills, and abilities necessary for adequate control of reading as a means of learning. These skills vary, but essentially the skills include the following: decoding (emphasizing phonics, plus context and word structure clues), comprehension, and study skills. Word service decoding skills emphasize phonics, context, and word structure. The emphasis on teaching these skills are on thorough teaching for mastery, not rapid introduction for coverage (Cooper, 1983:28).

Comprehension skills, (literal, inferential, and critical), are developed by giving consistent attention to meaning and context in decoding and vocabulary lessons, always establishing a purpose for reading, and using a question and discussion strategy both during and after reading. Comprehension of printed material depends upon the characteristics of both the material and the reader. Reading comprehension is a term used to identify those skills needed to understand and apply information contained within written material. The process is difficult to define precisely because it is influenced by a great many factors. There are numerous theories about the process of

comprehension that take these various different factors into consideration. For example, a study by Geyer (1972) found that as many as seventy-seven models of reading have been proposed. Most of the currently cited models of reading may be placed in one of the two general categories that follows: 1) those in which the components are fused together and have no individual identity within the larger entity labeled as the "reading process", that is, reading is considered to be a total process, and 2) those in which the components are parts that function in association with other parts but can easily be detached from them, that is, the reading process is composed of a combination of separable subskills.

Describing reading ability is not an easy task. To completely analyze what is accomplished when reading occurs would almost be the acme of a psychologist's achievement, for it would be to describe very many of the most intricate workings of the human mind. Underlying all that is done in an effective instructional program is the realization that reading is comprehending (Huey, 1903:3; Durkin, 1983:3).

Strategies for improving reading comprehension can be organized into categories. The two categories are: 1) basic skill strategies, including locating factual information, finding main ideas, sequencing, and making many

inferences and 2) metacognitive or learning strategies, including comprehension, monitoring, self-questioning, and methods for studying context areas (Graves, 1987:12).

Effective questioning strategies may be used as a tool to enhance children's thinking. Since there is an obvious relationship between reading comprehension and thinking, it would be reasonable to incorporate questioning strategies into instruction in reading comprehension. Good questions can identify students in need of specific skill instruction, provide a means for teaching particular skills, and reinforce any skills already known (Piaget, 1967:36; Graves, 1987:12).

Educators have long recognized that reading to young children helps them assimilate sophisticated language structures, accumulate background information, and develop interest in learning to read (Morrow, 1985:870). Active participation in activities involving literature has been widely recommended to enhance comprehension, oral language ability, and a sense of story structure.

Identifying and labeling story structures improves the comprehension and reading strategies of youngsters who can already read. When children are aware of a story's structural elements, they use relationships between events and know what to expect in a story. A sense of story structure improves memory of text and the ability to use

and predict outcomes and facilitates understanding. The ability to predict outcomes appears to be of particular interest to children between five and seven years old (Bower, 1976:21; Gordon, 1982:76).

Retelling stories has been used frequently as a assessment tool in studying developmental trends in comprehending (Whaley, 1980:27). Retelling stories is also an active procedure that involves children in reconstructing literature. This appears to be a strategy that can improve comprehension, concept of story, and oral language.

From primary grades through secondary school and beyond, there is a standard procedure for making sure that students have understood what they have read - "Teachers ask comprehension questions." There appear to be two drawbacks to this procedure. The nature and timing of the questions cause this follow-up activity to function more as an oral exam than an occasion for developing understanding. Second, in an attempt to stimulate thinking at different levels, teachers often pose unnecessary question and answer exercises. Because of these drawbacks, the standard question-and-answer routine often detracts rather than enhances comprehension (Nessel, 1987:442).

A better approach to comprehension requires all students to make predictions. Rationalizing is required,

Students who do this kind of reading and discussing are actually engaged in problem solving. Students are no longer responding only to teachers but continue to build on one another's ideas. A question strategy that focuses on prediction is a powerful tool for developing and enhancing comprehension at all grade levels.

Few relationships have been so clearly established or of such continuous interests as that between word knowledge and reading performance. This interest has led to analysis and reanalysis of data that have spanned nearly half a century (Blachowicz, 1968:27). Related investigations, such as analysis of readability, have also demonstrated the preeminent role of word knowledge in reading comprehension.

Current attempts to build a theoretical base for vocabulary instruction provide frameworks for sorting out effective from ineffective instruction. There are two ways of looking at the connection between vocabulary knowledge and reading performance. One called the instrumentalists position suggests that reading comprehension depends in part upon rapid access to word meanings. Automaticity training is an important component of this model. Instruction reflecting these models often involve rote learning of words and their synonyms or definitions (Anderson and Freebody, 1981:77-117).

The second position, dubbed the "knowledge position," suggests that individuals who score well on vocabulary measures do so because of their conceptual knowledge. In its strictest form, this viewpoint contends that concept development and wide reading provide the necessary vocabulary knowledge that is a symptom of, rather than the cause of, improved comprehension (Bower, 1976: 25).

Looking at these clues from research, a few principles of vocabulary instruction emerge to guide the reading teacher. The principles are: 1) build a conceptual base for word learning, 2) stress learner involvement, 3) focus on usable vocabularies, 5) introduce your students to resources for word learning, 6) develop transferable skills (Beck, 1983:179).

Instruction is given in study skills that underlie a student's ability to use reading as a means of learning, study, and research. In the area of skills study there are five concerns: 1) selecting and evaluating, 2) organizing, 3) locating information, 4) following directions, and 5) using the specialized skills involved with a particular subject. Major authorities agree that study skills are of primary importance in helping children to read with greatest efficiency (Robinson, 1964:36; Early, 1983:12).

Independent reading is important to the total program because it supports the theme that children learn to read by reading, and that independent reading promotes the lifetime habit of reading. Educators are so involved teaching reading they frequently neglect to give children the opportunity to read. Reading skills are important, but should not preclude guiding learners to read for pleasure (Sanacore, 1988:46).

There is a growing consensus among reading research scientists that literacy depends upon specific information called "cultural literacy". To be culturally literate is to possess the basic information needed to thrive in the modern world (Hirsch, 1987:63). The breadth of that information is great, extending over the major domains of human activity from sports to science.

The educational theory relating to cultural literacy might be described as an anthropological theory of education because it is based on the observation that all human commodities are founded upon specific shared information. Americans are different from Germans, who in turn are different from Japanese, because each group possesses specifically different cultural knowledge. In an anthropological perspective, the basic goal of education in a human community is acculturation, the transmission to children of the specific information shared by the adults of the

group. Transmigration of knowledge from adults to all children is held as an absolute within this school of thought. Community acculturation held wide usage in Europe during the early 1980's.

In contrast to the theories of Plato and Rousseau, an anthropological theory of education accents the naturalness as well as the relativity of human cultures. The anthropological view stresses the universal fact that a human group must have effective communications to function effectively, that effective communications require shared culture, and that shared culture requires transmission of specific information to children. Literacy, an essential aim of education in the modern world, is no autonomous, empty skill but depends upon literate culture. Like any other aspect of acculturation, literacy requires the early and continued transmission of specific information. Only by accumulating shared symbols, and the shared information that the symbols represent, can one learn to communicate effectively with one another in our national community (Hirsch, 1987:25).

Planning and use of effective educational measurement and evaluation has become increasingly important in today's schools. Population diversity, a characteristic of many schools, has made teaching more complex and difficult than ever. It has contributed to growing concern

about students' mastery of the basic skills and their ability to function adequately in society (Carroll, 1987: 424). There is concern, too, about whether all students are learning and functioning as well as they are able to learn and function.

Perhaps the most important reading measurement is concerned with diagnosis, so that abilities, inadequacies, disabilities, and progress can be determined (Shilley, 1970:25). Diagnosis begins with a study of the child's instructional needs based on expectations of his chronological age, mental age, and grade placement. Thus, a starting point can be the standardizing of intelligence tests that are usually administered to large groups of students simultaneously. Then, if deemed important, a reading readiness test may be administered.

Reading survey tests as opposed to diagnostic tests are usually given to large groups of students. Through this phase, problem readers may be detected and given a diagnostic test to discover specific strengths and weaknesses. Informal oral reading is also a good way to discover how well a child reads and, in fact, becomes the only way to pick out specific reading problems: word attack, sounding and blending (Bond, 1957:58).

Three separate types of test accompany the HBJ Bookmark Reading Program. All three are related. Preread-

ing, primary, and intermediate/junior high placement tests help place students at all levels of the program. Periodic tests provide options for pre/post and retesting and prescriptive teaching. Cumulative tests help measure all students' progress at the end of each level. Microcomputer versions of the periodic tests are available for levels 1-14. By using any or all of these optional measurement instruments along with the evaluation provisions that are built into the core components of the program, teachers can satisfy virtually any assessment need or preference for their students (Cooper, 1983:14).

Extensive testing procedures have been developed by SOL to determine the progress of students toward achieving the objectives set for them. Procedures are flexible enough to serve different instructional programs, and the results are used to aid individual paper and pencil tests and observation. SOL charts are kept on individual students (Riehm, 1981:4).

The objectives of the SRA achievement series have been chosen by using the best judgement of curriculum specialists in the subject areas covered by the tests. SRA's intent is to ensure that the tests measure what is being taught in the schools. Critical thinking is very important in achievement (SRA, 1979:2).

Use of controversial material in certain social studies and reading items is essential if students' critical thinking may be measured with any degree of accuracy. The ability to think critically may be measured by presenting exercises that contain differing points of view, hidden appeals, and unpopular views. Exercises require students to recognize indirect messages and their many implications; they neither require nor attempt to totally influence students to reveal or change their personal convictions in order to give a correct answer (SRA, 1979: 4).

Even though there is no simple and adequate definition of reading, there appear to be many processes that accompany the reading act. The entire child is involved in the act of reading. Reading is an essential skill for facilitating a multitude of day-to-day tasks. Various methods are used when teaching reading. Basal, language experience, individualized, and phonetic methods are among those now used in today's classrooms.

CHAPTER 3

PROCEDURES

The procedures of this study consisted of the examination of various books, periodicals, and other related literature on reading. Libraries at Morehead State University, the University of Kentucky and Pikeville College were used as resource centers. A complete list of the literature review can be found in the Bibliography section of the study.

Interviews were conducted with twelve school officials of Buchanan, Tazewell and Dickenson Counties of Virginia. Included in the interviews were: 1) school principals, 2) reading supervisors, 3) text book selection committee members, 4) Buchanan County School Superintendent, 5) Virginia Department of Education Supervisor, 6) Elementary School Supervisors of Buchanan County, and 7) Harcourt Brace Jovanovich textbook representative. The interview sheet can be found in Appendix B.

An examination was made of the Science Research Associates' reading achievement tests scores for students in grades two through five at Big Rock Elementary School. During the course of the examination it was discovered that SRA reading achievement tests scores were below state and national averages. Specifically, Big Rock Elementary

School student scores ranked at the thirty-fifth percentile. Buchanan County School Officials and Big Rock School Staff implemented three measures in an effort to raise student reading achievement. These measures were: 1) Standards of Learning Program was implemented, 2) SRA tests were expanded to all grades, 3) reading texts from HBJ were adopted for grades kindergarten through seven.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

While conducting research for this study, a discovery was made that the acquiring of reading skills are of paramount importance for the total development of a child. Methods of acquiring reading skills vary with the individual. After an examination of Science Research Associate reading achievement test scores of students at Big Rock Elementary School over a five year period, an exact determination was made that reading skills have significantly improved. The findings and interpretations of the study can best be explained by examining the information available in Tables 1 and 2, and graphs 1 through 5.

Table 1 contains information that illustrates mean SRA reading achievement test scores for eighty students (selected at random) in grades two through five in school years 1983 through 1987. Reading achievement test scores are shown in the percentile. Information in Table 1, reveals that students in grade two from 1983 through 1987 increased their scores from the 35th percentile to the 53rd percentile. This was an increase of approximately fifty percent. Students in grade three, from 1983 through 1987, increased their scores from the 36th percentile to

the 43rd percentile. This was an increase of approximately thirty-seven percent. Students in grade five from 1983 through 1987 increased their scores from the 49th percentile to the 58th percentile. This was an increase of approximately sixteen percent. An interpretation of the performance scores indicate that reading tests scores and reading ability significantly improved and that a significant intervention had occurred having a causal effect on the scores.

Information found in Table 1 and Graphs 1 through 4 also indicate constant improvement in all grades of reading achievement test scores with the exception of grade 4 in 1984 and 1986. Table 1 contains information that illustrates mean SRA reading achievement test scores for eighty students selected at random in grades two through five in school years 1983 through 1987. Reading achievement test scores are shown in percentile.

Information found in Graph 1 illustrates the steady improvement of SRA reading test scores for second graders at Big Rock Elementary School from 1983 through 1987. Beginning in 1983, second graders scored at the 35th percentile and in 1987 second graders had improved and ranked at the 53rd percentile.

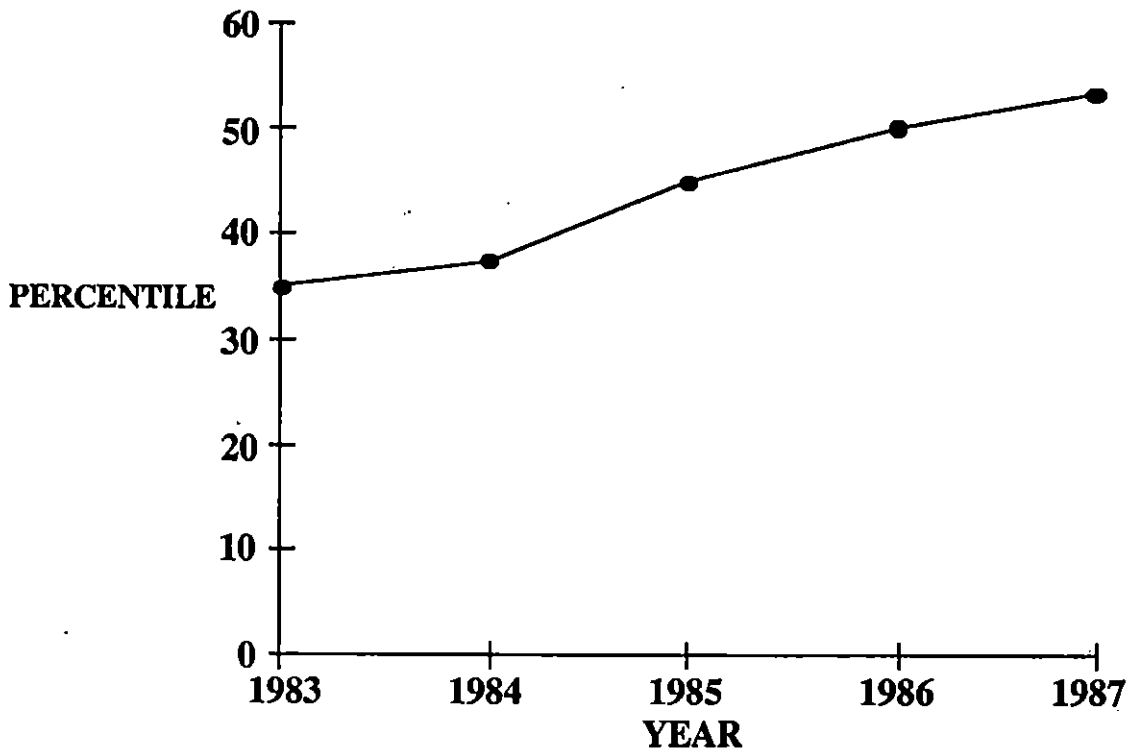
Information in Graph 2 illustrates the steady improvement of third graders. This improvement was steady.

Table 1
SRA Reading Achievement Test Scores
Big Rock Elementary School
1983 through 1987

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>GRADE 2</u>	<u>GRADE 3</u>	<u>GRADE 4</u>	<u>GRADE 5</u>
1983	35	36	46	49
1984	39	37	44	50
1985	45	40	51	53
1986	50	41	42	55
1987	53	43	63	58

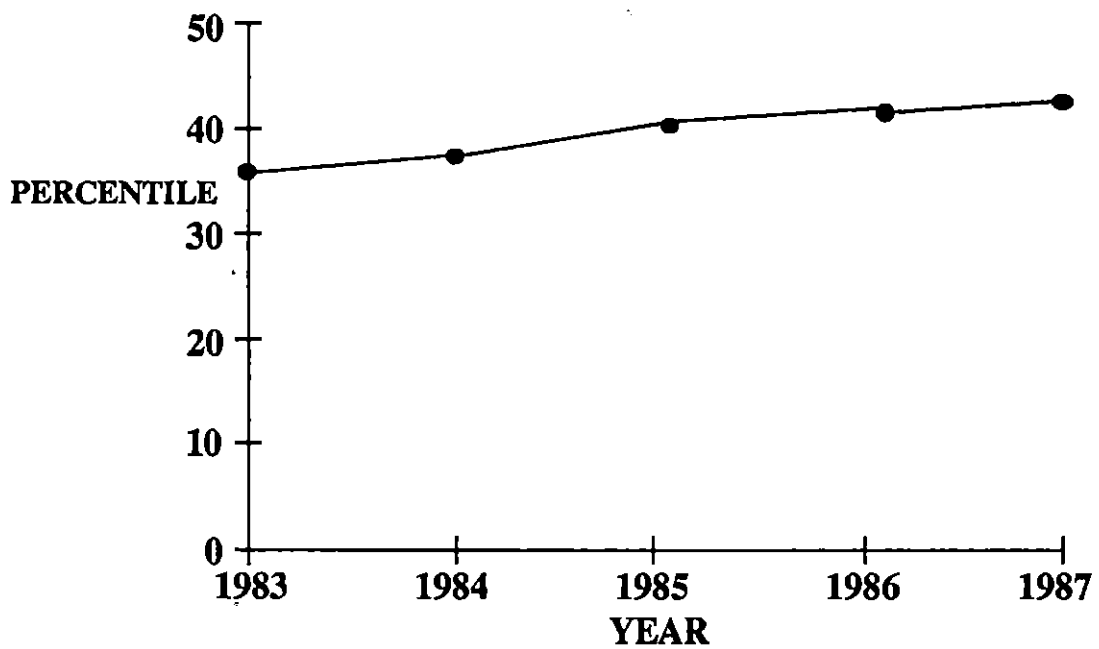
Table one contains information that illustrates means SRA reading achievement test scores for twenty students selected at random in grades two through five in school years 1983 through 1987. Reading achievement test scores are shown in percentile.

Graph 1
SRA Reading Test Score - Grade 2
Big Rock Elementary School
1983 through 1987



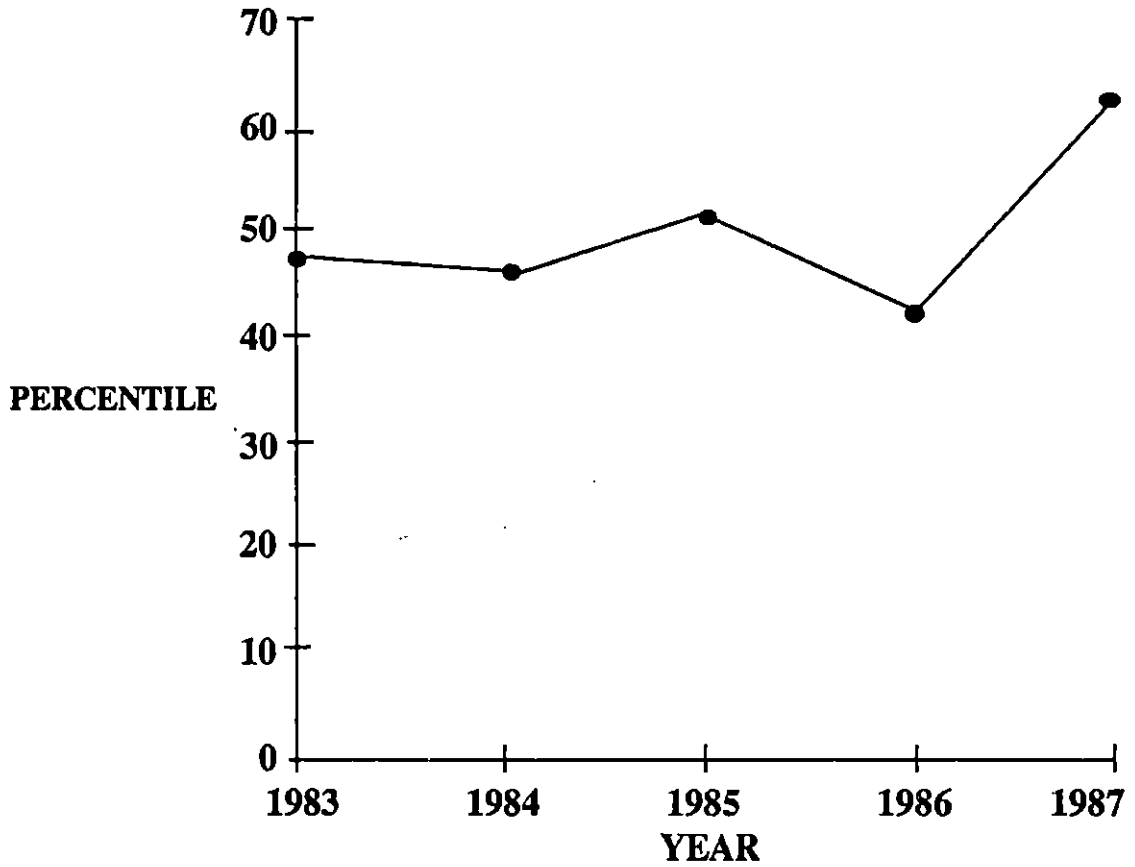
Information in Graph 1 illustrates the steady improvement of SRA reading test scores for second graders at Big Rock Elementary School from 1983 through 1987. Beginning in 1983, second graders scored at the 35th percentile, and in 1987 second graders had improved and ranked at the 53rd percentile.

Graph 2
SRA Reading Achievement Test Scores Grade 3
Big Rock Elementary School
1983 through 1987



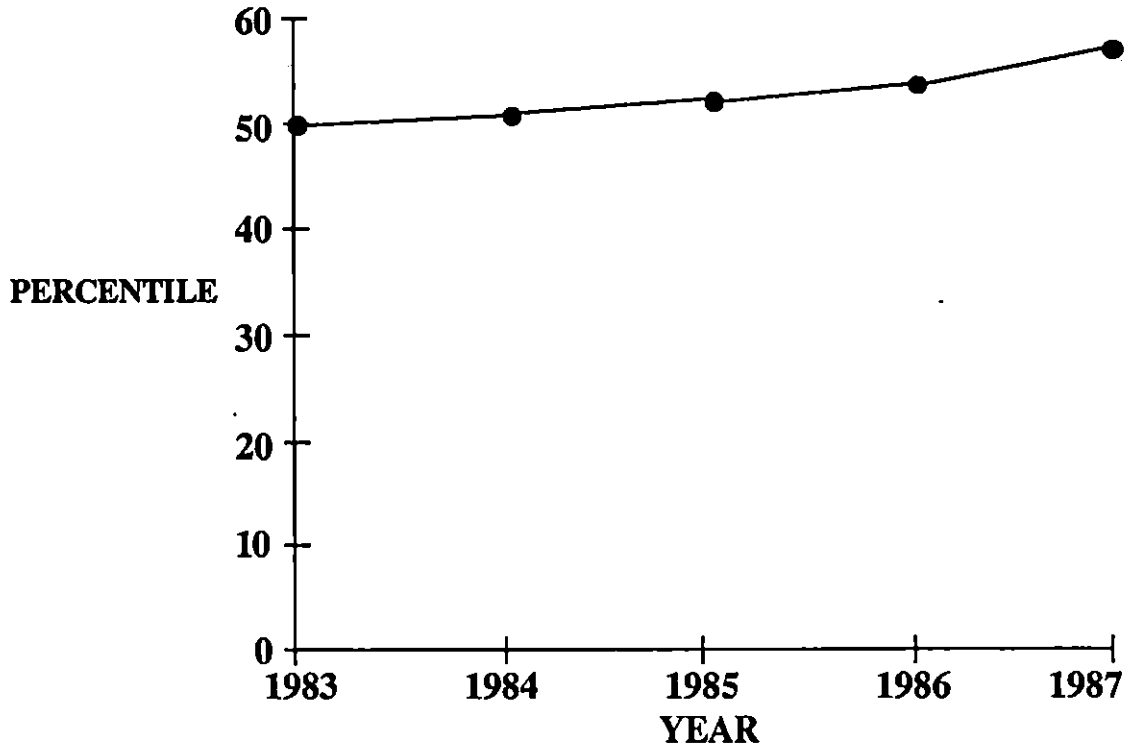
Information in Graph 2 illustrates the steady improvement of SRA reading test scores for third graders at Big Rock Elementary School from 1983 through 1987. Beginning in 1983, third graders scored at the 36th percentile, and in 1987 third graders had improved and ranked at the 43rd percentile.

Graph 3
SRA Reading Test Score Grade 4
Big Rock Elementary School
1983 through 1987



Information in Graph 3 illustrates the steady improvement of SRA reading test scores for fourth graders at Big Rock Elementary School from 1983 through 1987. Beginning in 1983, fourth graders scored at the 46th percentile, and in 1987 fourth graders had improved and ranked at the 63rd percentile.

Graph 4
SRA Reading Test Score Grade 5
Big Rock Elementary School
1983 through 1987



Information in Graph 4 illustrates the steady improvement of SRA reading test scores for fifth graders at Big Rock Elementary School from 1983 through 1987. Beginning in 1983, fifth graders scored at the 49th percentile, and in 1987 second graders had improved and ranked at the 58rd percentile.

Beginning in 1983 third graders scored at the 36th percentile and in 1987 third graders had improved and ranked at the 43rd percentile. This was a marked improvement.

Information in Graph 3 illustrates the steady improvement of SRA reading achievement tests scores for fourth graders at Big Rock Elementary School from 1983 through 1987 with the exception of years 1984 and 1986. Beginning in 1983 fourth graders scored at the 46th percentile and 1987 fourth graders had improved and ranked at the 63rd percentile.

Information found in Graph 4 illustrates the steady improvement of SRA reading achievement tests scores for fifth graders at Big Rock Elementary School from 1983 through 1987. Beginning in 1983, fifth graders ranked at the 49th percentile and in 1987 fifth graders ranked at the 58th percentile.

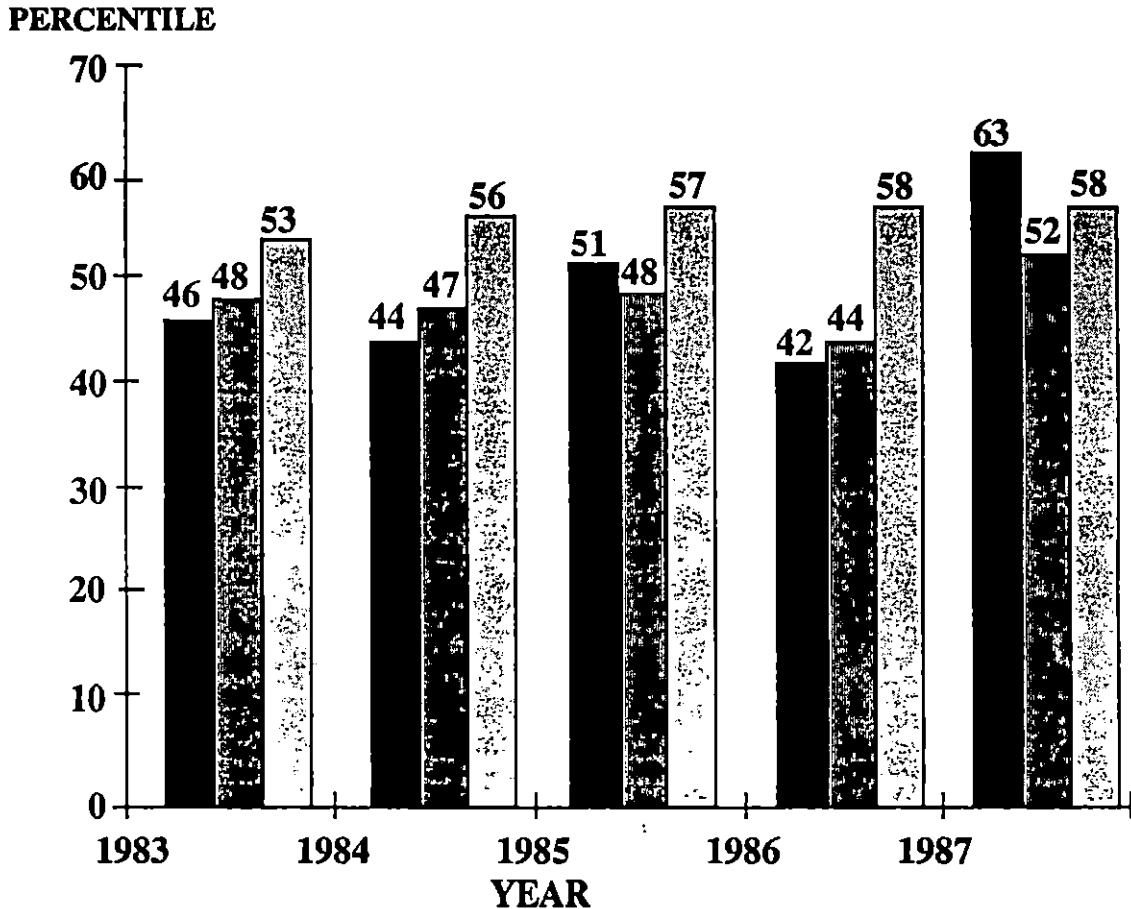
Table 2 and Graph 5 contains information that illustrates mean SRA reading achievement test scores for fourth graders from 1983 through 1987. Table 2 contains information that illustrates mean SRA reading achievement tests scores for fourth graders from 1983 through 1987. Big Rock Elementary School test scores are those of eighty students selected at random. Buchanan County and Virginia State test scores are mean scores of the total population of fourth graders. Scores are shown in percentiles.

Table 2
SRA Reading Achievement Test Score Means
Big Rock, Buchanan County, State
1983 through 1987
Grade 4

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>BIG ROCK</u>	<u>BUCHANAN COUNTY</u>	<u>VIRGINIA</u>
1983	46	48	53
1984	44	47	56
1985	51	48	57
1986	42	44	58
1987	63	52	58

Table two contains information that illustrates mean SRA reading achievement test scores for fourth graders from 1983 through 1987. Big Rock Elementary School test scores are those of eighty students selected at random. Buchanan County and Virginia State test scores are mean scores of the total population of fourth graders. Reading achievement test scores are shown in percentile.

Graph 5
SRA Reading Achievement Test Score Comparisons
Big Rock vs. Buchanan County vs. State
1983 through 1987
Grade 4



Information in Graph 5 compares fourth grade students from Big Rock Elementary School to fourth grade students from Buchanan County and fourth grade students from Virginia at large. Comparisons are made from 1983 through 1987. It is interesting to note that in 1985 fourth grade students from Big Rock Elementary surpassed fourth graders in Buchanan County and in 1987 fourth graders from Big Rock Elementary School surpassed even fourth grade students at large from the state of Virginia. Big Rock Elementary students are represented by the solid black column, Buchanan County students are directly beside Big Rock students, and students of the state of Virginia at large are represented by the far right column in each year.

Information in Table 2 reveals that in 1983, fourth grade students scored at the 46th percentile. This score was lower than scores recorded by fourth grade students throughout Buchanan County (40th percentile) and much lower than fourth grade students throughout the state of Virginia (53rd percentile).

In 1984, fourth graders at Big Rock Elementary School appeared to repeat their performance of 1983. They still ranked lower than fourth graders in Buchanan County and fourth graders tested throughout the State of Virginia at large. It is interesting to note that in 1984 the gap between Big Rock fourth graders and fourth graders throughout the State of Virginia actually widened. In 1985, test scores of Big Rock fourth graders (51st percentile) exceeded scores of Buchanan County fourth graders (48th percentile) and narrowed the gap between themselves and fourth graders throughout the State of Virginia (57th percentile). In 1986, Big Rock fourth grade students once again fell behind county scores and state scores. Big Rock students scored at the 42nd percentile, Buchanan County students scored at the 58th percentile. In 1987, fourth graders at Big Rock School scored higher than Buchanan students and Virginia State students. Big Rock students scored at the 52nd percentile, Buchanan students scored at the 52nd percentile and Virginia State students scored at

the 58th percentile. An interpretation of the score comparisons found in Table 2 would indicate that from 1983 through 1987, reading test scores of fourth graders improved by approximately 37 percent, while scores of fourth grade students throughout Buchanan County improved by only nine percent and scores of fourth grade students throughout the State of Virginia improved by approximately ten percent. This information is also illustrated in Graph 5. Based upon the information found in Tables 1 and 2, and Graphs 1 through 5, it becomes apparent that a significant improvement in reading achievement test scores has occurred. This improvement exceeds improvements made by Buchanan County students and students throughout the State of Virginia. This significant improvement suggest that test scores did not occur by chance - - scores improved because something was introduced into the program. A causal effect has taken place by variables that should be identified and built upon. These variables and their effect will be more fully discussed in chapter five.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In summary, it appears that the ability to read and comprehend is considered of paramount importance by teachers, administrators, and parents. The ability to read appears to be directly related to vocational and social success.

Reading is taught in many different ways. Language charts, basal readers, individualized reading, experience charts, phonics, linguistics, programmed instruction, eclectic and computer assisted instruction are only a partial list of the methods used to teach reading. Elements of an effective reading program appear to be just as varied as methods available. Questioning strategies, comprehension, specific skill instruction, and story structuring make up the elements of many successful programs.

Officials of the Virginia Department of Education along with Buchanan County School Officials and Big Rock Elementary Staff have incorporated various elements into the reading programs. The elements discussed in the above paragraph, are part of the Standards of Learning Program and are an integral part of the Harcourt Brace Jovanovich text series used by teachers at Big Rock Elementary School.

Various conclusions can be reached as a result of the study. The conclusions include: 1) Reading test scores for students at Big Rock Elementary School are significantly higher in 1987 when compared to 1983 scores. 2) Reading skills have improved for students of Big Rock Elementary School since 1983. The introduction of the SOL program along with increased Science Research Associates testing and HBJ teaching material have been very instrumental in improving student achievement reading test scores. 3) Student reading skills are receiving emphasis by members of the Buchanan County School System and Big Rock Elementary Staff. 4) Teachers and administrators have become team oriented and have worked toward the accomplishment of an agreed-upon goal to improve student reading skills.

Implications as a result of the study are many. Implications include: 1) Improvement of student skills in reading requires an organized, honest and united effort from teachers and administrators. 2) Success in improving student reading skills in a given area are best accomplished when a disciplined, orderly, systematic approach is used. 3) Students at Big Rock Elementary School have the ability to improve reading skills equal to and exceeding those of other students throughout Buchanan County and students in Virginia at large. 4) Teachers have the abil-

ity to provide instruction that will significantly improve reading skills. 5) The reading program being taught at Big Rock Elementary School should be reviewed by other schools in Buchanan County. 6) The HBJ text series contains information, that when presented correctly, can contribute to the improvement of reading skills and achievement scores.

Recommendations as a result of this study include:

- 1) Big Rock Elementary School should continue using the SOL and HBJ series of instruction.
- 2) The expansion of SRA testing in grades one through seven should be continued.
- 3) The results of this study should be shared with Big Rock Staff, especially teachers.
- 4) The results of this study should be shared with officials of the Buchanan County School System.
- 5) Other programs should be examined and evaluated for inclusion into Big Rock's reading program.
- 6) A future study should be conducted to identify the side effects of improved reading skills in courses including Math, English and History.

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APPENDIX A

TERMS

Achievement Test. A test that measures how much of a specified body of knowledge and skills a student has acquired.

Cultural Literacy. Possessing the basic information needed to thrive in the modern world.

Diagnosis. A study of the child's instructional needs based upon results of tests that usually require chronological age, mental age, and grade placement.

Eclectic. Any approach to teaching that combines desirable aspects of a number of different approaches.

Mean. The arithmetic average of a set of scores.

Skill. Demonstrated proficiency in performing a specific task, for example, skill in computation or in using punctuation or locating information in a library.

Validity. The appropriateness of inferences from tests scores and the purposes for which the tests can be used.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW SHEET

NAME OF PERSON INTERVIEWED:

DATE OF INTERVIEW:

POSITION:

1. How important are reading skills to the total development of a student?
2. How do students at Big Rock rank in terms of reading abilities with students in Buchanan County and the State of Virginia?
3. Do you feel the reading curriculum now being used in your county school system is sufficient to develop effective reading skills?
4. Has the Standards of Learning Program along with other variables positively affected student reading achievement in your school system?
5. What recommendations would you make to improve the present reading curriculum?