

THE EFFECTS OF A NON-BASAL HOLISTIC CURRICULUM OF  
READING IN A FOURTH GRADE CLASS

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A Field Report  
Presented to  
The School of Graduate Studies  
Drake University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Science in Education

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by  
Barbara K. Mahoney

June 1987

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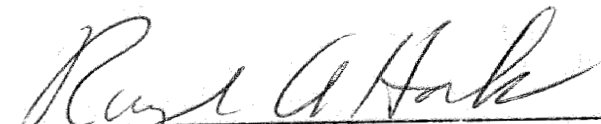
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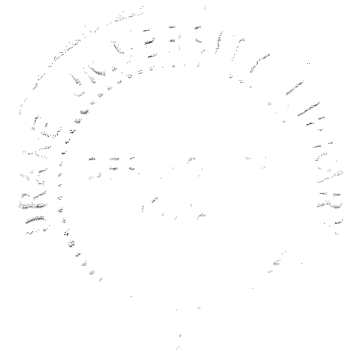
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An Abstract of a Field Report by  
Barbara K. Mahoney  
June 1987  
Drake University  
Advisors: Dr. Bruce Vennard  
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The problem. The purpose of this study is to determine whether or not attitudes and certain identified reading skills can be affected by using a non-basal holistic curriculum as proposed in the report Becoming a Nation of Readers prepared by Richard C. Anderson, Elfrieda H. Hiebert, Judith A. Scott, Ian A. G. Wilkinson, and other members of the Commission on Reading.

Procedure. The Estes Attitude Scale was given as a pre- and post-test to a population of forty-nine fourth graders in a Des Moines public school. The students' progress in mastering specific reading skills was documented by the administering of criterion tests developed by the Des Moines Public Schools. These tests will be referred to as SARI (Systematic Approach to Reading Improvement).

Findings. Desired attitude responses on the Estes Attitude Scale were determined prior to administering the instrument. The McNemar test was used on the results of the pre-evaluation and post-test data. The results of the pre- and post-SARI tests were computed into percentages using a criterion of 80 percent as mastery. The percentages indicated that the students did master the identified reading skills at the eightieth percentile or above.

Conclusions. Attitudes of fourth graders involved in the study were positively affected. The students also mastered identified reading skills at an eightieth percentile or above. If we embrace the concept that a student's attitude affects learning, then the results of the Estes Attitude Survey also indicated a positive effect on learning.

Recommendations. There is a need for further longitudinal studies to be done comparing a non-basal holistic reading curriculum to a traditional three-reading-group basal curriculum.

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CHAPTER 1  
Introduction

At the time of the writing of this report there were numerous studies that had been published indicating that reading curricula need not be based on the traditional basal, ability-grouped instruction. In fact, evidence suggests that traditional basal-type instruction may improve the achievement of the rapid learner but not necessarily the slow learner.<sup>1</sup> Frank Smith has gone so far as to state that we as educators are not inviting the non-readers into the "reading club."<sup>2</sup>

For many students basal instruction is clearly inappropriate, unnecessary, and perhaps even impedimentary in learning to read and in developing text fluency.<sup>3</sup> It has been the writer's observation that too often we lock-step children into reading groups, with no chance for movement and much limitation of learning.

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<sup>1</sup>Richard C. Anderson et al., Becoming a Nation of Readers (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 1985).

<sup>2</sup>Frank Smith, Essays into Literacy (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1983).

<sup>3</sup>Anderson et al., 12.

Studies have also shown that engaged reading time is significantly related to gains in reading achievement. However, the typical class spends less than 10 percent of reading class time actually reading. For the typical primary class this averages about seven to eight minutes of reading a day, while the typical middle-graded class averages one to fifteen minutes of reading a day.<sup>1</sup>

This study was designed to discover for the writer if, in fact, reading progress and attitudes toward reading can be affected by the use of a non-traditional reading curriculum.

#### Statement of Problem

Reading, comprehending and thinking with language and the printed word are a cultural phenomenon that is particularly important for the success of a child in school. This success, or lack of success, in turn affects a child's self-concept, opportunities for personal fulfillment, and economic independence.

If indeed we are to answer the challenge to become a nation of readers then we must be willing to respond to what we have learned about human cognition, linguistics, and child development. We must be willing to risk our traditions and change our curriculum.

The problem this study attempts to address is to

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<sup>1</sup>Anderson et al., 76.

determine whether or not a non-basal curriculum can affect the attitudes and progress of fourth graders in reading.

#### Questions to be Answered

1. What attitudes did the fourth graders possess prior to the change in curriculum?
2. What reading skills had the fourth graders mastered prior to the change in curriculum?
3. What attitudes did the fourth graders possess after a semester of a non-basal holistic reading curriculum?
4. Did the non-basal curriculum affect the mastery of specific reading skills?
5. Did the non-basal curriculum affect attitudes toward reading, observed by parents at home, as documented by a questionnaire?

#### Definitions of Terms

The following are terms that will be used throughout the study:

1. Non-basal Curriculum - The curriculum is based on trade books used as tests.
2. Trade Books - Paperback books.
3. Holistic Curriculum - Curriculum involved in the whole act of reading, including: extended silent reading, opportunities for speaking, listening and writing.
4. Peer Collaborative Learning - Using peers as tutors, or allowing students to tutor each other; sometimes referred to as partner learning.



5. Whole Class Management - The use of heterogeneous grouping as opposed to ability grouping.

6. Thematic Webbing - Choosing reading material that has the same theme.

7. SARI Tests - Criterion-referenced tests developed by Des Moines Public Schools.

#### Limitations of the Study

A random sample of a population was unavailable to the writer for this study. Therefore the selection of students for the research was limited to the population of forty-nine fourth graders at Jackson Elementary School in Des Moines, Iowa. The writer's own enthusiasm for a non-basal curriculum was a factor that was difficult to assess or measure in relation to its effect on the participants of the study.

## CHAPTER 2

### Review of Related Literature and Rationale for the Non-Basal Curriculum

At the present time at Jackson School in Des Moines, Iowa, the fourth grade reading curriculum is basal driven. While this current curriculum does a good job of teaching the students the subskills that are needed for reading, it is the premise of the writer of this report that the present curriculum relies on this basal too long, and that reading progress is negatively affected by controlled vocabulary and short selections. Further, research has indicated that once decoding phonic skills become automatic to the learner, the reading emphasis should not be on the "parts," but rather the "whole" of reading <sup>1</sup>

With this holistic emphasis, the writer of this report designed and implemented a reading curriculum with an emphasis on motivation, whole class management with direct instruction of reading strategies, peer-collaborative learning, written language, and common interest grouping. The writer used trade books and thematic webbing as the tools to implement the curriculum.

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<sup>1</sup>Anderson et al., 16.

The writer will now analyze each section of the non-basal curriculum with reference to research that legitimizes its inclusion in the curriculum.

The Commission stated, "There is no substitute for a teacher who reads children good stories. It whets the appetite of children for reading and provides a model of skillful oral reading."<sup>1</sup> The writer believes that the teacher is a model first, and a teacher second. So each reading period started with the teacher reading to the class, modeling reading with expression and demonstrating comprehension skills, such as: predicting, identifying character traits, analyzing cause and effect, identifying metaphors and similes, and drawing conclusions.

The Commission believes that educators should explore other options for reading instruction. One option is more use of whole class instruction. This seems feasible for aspects of phonics, spelling, study skills and comprehension.<sup>2</sup>

It is the premise of the writer that whole class management of direct instruction is the most effective and efficient method of teaching. It also helps to establish an atmosphere where every reader is treated as an equal. In the opinion of the writer, the pecking order of the

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<sup>1</sup>Anderson et al., 51.

<sup>2</sup>Anderson et al., 91.

"Bluebirds" and "Buzzards" is successfully eliminated by whole class management.

Individual help was provided by conferencing small groups or individuals.

Recent research has taught us that reading is not the unconscious use of a set of skills. Instead, good readers are strategic. They use knowledge from a variety of sources to predict meaning embedded in the text, adjusting these predictions as they go along.

However, two conditions make it difficult to develop strategic readers. First, the concept of strategic reading is relatively new. It stands in stark contrast to the skills model which most of us were taught to use.

Second, basal reading textbooks continue to prescribe skills in the old way.<sup>1</sup>

In order for a student to attain metacognition in reading, strategies must be consciously taught; with the teacher describing, modeling, and practicing the strategies in the context of meaningful text. The teacher must model the thinking done when encountering a blockage in figuring out unknown text. If the context is meaningful to the student then the strategies used will become part of the student's long-term or short-term memory.

Programs for teaching reading must provide for these three essentials:

a. There must be a lot of reading of whole, meaningful, relevant texts. Essentially, we learn to read

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<sup>1</sup>Gerald Duffy and Laura R. Roehler, "Teaching Reading Skills as Strategies," The Reading Teacher, Jan. 1987: 414.

by reading.

b. There must be an atmosphere in which risk taking is encouraged. In reading, risk taking involves trying to make sense out of texts even when you're not sure.

c. Both the reader and the teacher must focus on meaning, on the reader making sense of written language.<sup>1</sup>

In order to establish the atmosphere needed to promote risk taking, the writer and students established "ownership" of the curriculum by using trade books recommended by the students for whole class instruction. The students' opinions and observations were used as the criteria for book purchasing. This provided the class with whole, meaningful texts, while establishing an atmosphere of trust and respect. The class was then able to focus on making sense of the text they had chosen as meaningful.

Once a book was purchased for the class the student reviewers became the promoters of the book. Often the characters in a particular book became as real as the students in the class. The class discussed their problems and character traits as soon as they arrived in the morning. So, in essence, they extended the meaning of the text beyond the written word.

Another possible supplement to the conventional

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<sup>1</sup>Kenneth Goodman, "Basal Readers: A Call for Action," Language Arts, 63, No. 4 (April 1986): 361.

arrangement of teacher-led instruction of children grouped according to ability is an arrangement in which children tutor each other, alternating in the role of teacher. "Peer tutoring" has proven successful in arithmetic and it deserves exploration and study in reading as well.<sup>1</sup>

The writer of this study decided that peer tutoring would be used by allowing the students to work with partners. Guidelines were established about acceptable behaviors, and students were allowed to choose their own partners. This peer collaborative learning model was extremely successful in helping the children become responsible for their own learning.

Research has shown that a number of reading programs try to teach too many letter-sound relationships, and phonics instruction drags out over too many years.<sup>2</sup>

It is the opinion of the writer of this study that fourth grade reading curriculum should be focused on comprehension skills and not decoding or phonics skills. So the curriculum the writer implemented emphasized the meaning of unfamiliar words rather than the decoding of the words. This was accomplished by direct instruction of the Cloze

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<sup>1</sup>Anderson et al., 91.

<sup>2</sup>Anderson et al., 39.

method of word identification.<sup>1</sup>

Students spend up to 70 percent of the time allocated for reading instruction in workbooks or worksheets. Analyses of these materials reveal that they require only a perfunctory level of reading. Children rarely need to draw conclusions or use higher level thinking skills.<sup>2</sup>

The writer of this study used no workbooks and few worksheets. Seatwork consisted of reading, writing or extending activities such as drama, research, brainstorming and problem solving. Opportunities to write were established daily with the use of a journal. The children's writing was discussed, using the Des Moines Writing Model (see Appendix A) so that students were shown how to approach reading with the "eye of a writer."<sup>3</sup>

With the published report of the U.S. Commission on Reading,<sup>4</sup> there is a real challenge for schools to change the way reading is being taught. Other studies also challenge the methods used for grouping and teaching of skills.

To answer this challenge, a comprehensive study was

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<sup>1</sup>James D. Riley, "Progressive Cloze as a Remedial Technique," The Reading Teacher, Feb. 1986: 60-65.

<sup>2</sup>Riley, 75.

<sup>3</sup>Anderson et al., 79.

<sup>4</sup>Anderson et al.

done in Utah by Lloyd J. Eldredge and Dennis Butterfield, examining alternatives to traditional reading instruction.<sup>1</sup> In summary, five experimental programs were set up with twenty significant differences. Fourteen of these differences were in favor of a literature-based program, supplemented with direct instruction. One finding of these programs was that the use of heterogeneous grouping affected achievement positively.<sup>2</sup>

Students in the study made significantly higher achievement gains than children using basals, and their attitudes toward reading also improved significantly. Children's attitudes using traditional, basal-driven curriculum decreased during this time.<sup>3</sup>

Based on the comprehensive research available concerning methods of reading instruction, the question regarding this study might be: Why focus on an already-researched subject?

Manning stated that this question can be answered with one word--accountability. Teachers have been led to believe that accountability is to be found in numbers, percentile ranks, and grade equivalent scores; when in fact, teachers

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<sup>1</sup>Lloyd J. Eldredge and Dennis Butterfield, "Alternatives to Traditional Reading Instruction," The Reading Teacher, Oct. 1986: 32.

<sup>2</sup>Eldredge and Butterfield, 35.

<sup>3</sup>Eldredge and Butterfield, 36.



are truly accountable for much more. Teachers are accountable for the final implementation of any curriculum and for the professional decisions made on the most important level. Teachers are ultimately accountable to all those children who come to school to learn. There are no teacher-proof instructional materials, so it is not enough that teachers are knowledgeable about teacher's manuals and curriculum guides. Teachers must also be researchers if they are to discuss and validate what methods and curriculum best fits their students' needs and their own personal teaching styles.<sup>1</sup>

Motivation and enthusiasm can only come about if the teacher makes an emotional commitment to his or her teaching. This emotional commitment will be made if there is some "ownership" in building the curriculum. The teacher's role must be that of a scholar and a romanticist.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>John C. Manning, "What's Needed Now in Reading Instruction: The Teacher as Scholar and Romanticist," The Reading Teacher, Nov. 1985: 132.

<sup>2</sup>Manning, 132.

## CHAPTER 3

### Methodology

The writer of this study applied for and received a grant to conduct this study (refer to Appendix B). The writer then researched children's literature and purchased single copies of trade books recommended by research. From those lists of books, thematic webs were developed for the class. Student reviewers were then asked to read the single copies, and help decide if the books should be purchased for the class. The criteria the students used to choose the book can be found in Appendix C. At this time the thematic webs were adjusted using the reviewers' suggestions.

Whole class and read-aloud books were then purchased. Lesson plans were developed that included: prereading activities, during-reading activities, and culminating activities. These activities were developed to extend learning beyond the printed word and centered around drama, writing, oral language, left brain/right brain experiences, and higher order thinking skills.

To substitute for the traditional workbook, each child started a journal. In order to establish "ownership" of this journal all children were allowed to design their own journal cover. The journals then became the means of

documenting progress made in the application of language skills.

Peer collaborative learning guidelines were developed (see Appendix D). The children were then instructed on the responsibilities of their own learning and choices.

The non-basal, holistic curriculum was then implemented from January 10, 1987, until April 10, 1987, to a population of forty-nine fourth graders at Jackson School in Des Moines, Iowa.

To document the effects of the non-basal curriculum on attitude toward reading the Estes Attitude Scale was given in January and then again in April. In addition, the McNemar test, using the chi-square a distribution, was run on the results of the attitude scale to determine if the results were significant. The McNemar test was chosen because it is particularly useful in application where the groups of subjects were tabulated before and after some specific experimental treatment. Items eighteen and twenty were not analyzed on the test due to the lack of clarity (writer's opinion).

For the purposes of this study, the writer classified a "don't know" response on the scale as a negative response, even though it may not have been a negative response. Table 1 is a copy of the Estes Attitude Scale showing the desired responses.

Table 1  
Reading Attitude Scale

	A	?	D
	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree
15. Reading is fun for me.	X		
16. Books are boring.			X
17. Reading is a good way to spend spare time.	X		
18. Reading turns me on.	X		
19. Books do not make good presents.			X
20. Reading is rewarding to me.	X		
21. Reading becomes boring after about a half hour.			X
22. Free reading teaches me something.	X		
23. There should be time for free reading during the school day.	X		
24. There are many books I hope to read.	X		
25. Reading is something I can do without.			X
26. A certain amount of time during summer should be set aside for reading.	X		
27. Books usually are good enough to finish.	X		
28. Reading is not exciting.			X

The null hypotheses for the McNemar test was that there is no significant changes in student's attitudes using a non-basal curriculum.

The SARI tests were also administered in January and April and the results were used to determine if the student mastered reading subskills at an 80 percent level. Those results were computed into percentages for each reading level.

## CHAPTER 4

### Findings

Table 2 shows the results of the McNemar test.

Table 2  
Attitude Toward Reading  
N=49

Test Item	Frequency of Desired Results on Pre-Test	Frequency of Desired Results of Post-Tests	( $\chi^2$ ) Chi-Square	Level of Significance
15	26	47	20.04	*
16	32	45	11.07	*
17	28	49	19.04	*
19	28	43	9.3	*
21	23	43	15.3	*
22	34	43	1.06	
23	35	45	4.08	*
24	37	45	6.13	*
25	23	41	16.0	*
26	22	33	.94	
27	35	43	.075	
28	28	43	8.47	*

$\chi^2$  .05 of = 1 is 3.84. \*Significance,  $s < .046$

Results show that there were significant attitudinal changes in nine of the twelve items tested, thus causing the researcher to reject the null hypotheses and possibly committing a type I error. A type I error is committed by rejecting a true null hypothesis.

Table 3 reports the results of the SARI tests.

Table 3  
Results of SARI Tests

SARI Level	Grade Level of Skills	Pre-test	Post-test
7	3rd	57%	94%
8	4th	51%	82%
9	5th	50%	86%

The results show that skills were mastered at the 80 percent or above level. The data also indicates that the below-grade-level reader (SARI Level 7) made the greatest gains.

A parent survey was conducted and the findings are indicated in Table 4.

Table 4  
Responses of Parent Survey

Number of Parent Forms Sent Home	Number Returned	Positive Responses	Negative Responses
26	15	63	2

This survey was limited to the 4-1 homeroom consisting of twenty-six of the students involved in the study. The writer received only fourteen surveys. For the purposes of this study, the writer is assuming that the unreturned surveys indicated neither a positive nor a negative attitude toward the curriculum.



## CHAPTER 5

### Summary

Forty-nine fourth graders were taught reading using a non-basal, holistic curriculum. An attitude scale given showed there was a significant growth in desired responses in nine out of the twelve test items. This indicated a 75 percent increase in desired attitudes toward reading.

The reading subskills established by the Des Moines district (SARI) as necessary for reading advancement were tested using a pre- and post-test format. The children pre-tested into three reading levels: third grade (SARI Level 7), fourth grade (SARI Level 8), and fifth grade (SARI Level 9). The district guidelines also established the criteria of 80 percent or above to indicate mastery of the skills. Each post-tested level met or exceeded the district's criterion for advancement. Further analysis of the results indicated that the slower learner (SARI Level 7) showed 70 percent more growth than the average (SARI Level 8) or above average learner (SARI Level 9).

The limitations of this study were: the population was limited, there were no control groups available, and the writer's own attitude may have affected the outcome of the study.

In conclusion, the writer's research has shown that a non-basal, holistic curriculum can affect students' attitudes about reading while still providing the students with the skills to meet the district's criterion for reading level advancement.

It is the writer's recommendation that further studies be made comparing the traditional, ability-grouped basal curriculum to non-basal, holistic curriculum in reading. These further studies need to include: a control group, a greater number of participants, and longitudinal data to be collected over a period of several years. It is also the recommendation of the writer that teachers as curriculum implementors need to listen to the student when establishing their own curriculum models. Many of the writer's students journaled their thoughts about reading the writer will quote some of their comments:

"I like this idea of reading, it is more fun and we learn the same skills we need. It's more creative and there is not as much pressure as there was."

"It is better than finding gold. It's like if you have a 59-point lead in a basketball game and it stayed the same."

"I like this better than the other because I didn't like doing workbook pages and worksheets. It was monotony because I got behind a lot."

"When we had reading groups it was almost as boring as waiting for a movie to start in a theatre."

Educators must also listen to the public, or in this case the parents, in order to satisfy the need to promote their schools. These are a sample of quotes collected from the parent survey:

"She has read more this year than she ever has."

"My child's attitude about reading has always been good, but her experience this year has been the best ever."

"I hope this program can continue next year."

"Charley's attitude about reading pleases me beyond words."

"I don't know what method you used but it has made my son want to read."

"My daughter's reading habits have really grown to outstanding proportions."

"My child has been more interested and is even asking to go to the library."

Finally, the need for an emotional connection to learning was not analyzed in this study. However, this emotional connection was (in the writer's opinion) definitely established by the feedback collected from the parents and students.

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APPENDIXES

## APPENDIX A

## Des Moines Writing Model

Prewriting

- \* Explore the experience, question or topic.
- \* Determine the purpose, form and audience.
- \* Put ideas on paper.
- \* Discuss what is known.

Revising

- \* Read for meaning.
- \* Add, delete, rearrange words, sentences or paragraphs.
- \* Organize for the audience.

Editing

- \* Meet audience expectations by correcting capitalization, punctuation and spelling.
- \* Prepare final copy.



## APPENDIX B

Des Moines Public Schools  
 Application for Teacher Minigrant for Excellence  
 1986-87 School Year  
 (Second Semester)

Type four copies. Please answer within the space provided.

1. Title of project: Reading Beyond the Basal
2. Project chairperson or teacher: Barbara Mahoney  
 School: Jackson Grade/Subject: 4th self/contained
3. Number of student participants: 52
4. Total cost of project: \$802.45
5. Names of other staff members involved if group project:  
Marchie Gillman  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
6. Administrator best informed on project: \_\_\_\_\_  
Maxine Robinson
7. Why is the project needed?

At present, we have a basal-dominated reading program. Basal instruction, while doing a good job of teaching skills leaves too little time for students to actually read. I would like to investigate whether or not reading progress is affected by the use of supplementary materials and holistic reading strategies as outlined in Becoming a Nation of Readers. In my opinion, our district should investigate alternative curriculum options in reading before our next textbook adoption.

**8. What will project accomplish? State as a measurable objective:**

Eighty percent of the students will demonstrate a mastery of 80 percent of the reading objectives on the SARI post-tests for their instructional reading levels. This mastery will be accomplished by the use of reading materials other than the basal.

On a pre- and post-test basis students' attitudes will change toward reading as documented by completed forms. There will be an increase in the number of books read by the class as documented by a listing of the number of books read.

**9. How will project be done?**

I will use trade books and thematic webbing to implement a holistic model of reading. I will use strategies to minimize homogeneous grouping in favor of whole class management options, peer collaborative learning, and common interest grouping. Written language will be integrated by the use of a journal. Writing activities will be directed by the teacher.

**10. How will project's effectiveness be measured? (A written summary will be requested at the end of the project):**

The student's progress in mastering the SARI reading skills will be documented by individual charts showing post-test results. I will also keep an anecdotal record for each child.

The students will keep a record of the books they have read.

**11. Itemize project budget:**

See attached sheets.

**Project chairperson or teacher should keep one copy, give one to the principal and submit two copies by Wednesday, December 10, 1986, to Dr. James Wise, director, the Department of Communications, 1800 Grand Avenue, Des Moines, Iowa.**

## APPENDIX C

## Student Book Review Form

Student's name \_\_\_\_\_

Title of book \_\_\_\_\_

How long did it take to read? \_\_\_\_\_

Did you like it? \_\_\_\_\_

Would you recommend it to others? \_\_\_\_\_

Choose a page, read and put up a finger for each word you didn't know. How many fingers are up at the end of the page? \_\_\_\_\_

Comments about book: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX D

## Peer Group Guidelines

1. Quiet talk encouraged but only about reading.
2. Partners may choose how to read their book. Some options are:
  - a. Take turns orally reading with expression.
  - b. Each one silent reading and meeting to discuss the story at selected pages.
3. Partners will work cooperatively. Choose a partner with the same interest in a book because it is not recess but reading.
4. Partners need to equally share the work.
5. Partners need to keep one another on task.
6. You may choose a new partner for each new book.
7. Partner learning is a privilege, that can be lost.