

1971

## The Effectiveness of a Sustained Silent Reading Program in the Elementary Learning Center

Phyllis M. Gowans

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## The Effectiveness of a Sustained Silent Reading Program in the Elementary Learning Center

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**THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A  
SUSTAINED SILENT READING PROGRAM  
IN THE  
ELEMENTARY LEARNING CENTER**

**A Research Paper Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the Re-  
quirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts**

**by**

**Phyllis M. Gowans**

**July, 1971**

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## CHAPTER I

### THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

#### INTRODUCTION

The importance of reading can not be denied, although with today's technology one can be better informed than ever before without it. Louis Untermeyer wrote

Why do Americans read? Basically, there are only two reasons why we read. The prevailing one is obvious: to escape, to avoid the routine of everyday living, "to get away from it all," to immerse ourselves in some fantastic other-world than ours--a world more romantic and glamorous and adventurous--to leave this realistic world for an unrealistic one. The other reason is the exact opposite, not to escape the world but to accept it, to use books as a means of sharing, of recognition, to enter the world with greater awareness.

Another viewpoint on the state of reading today is expressed by H. Vail Deale.

Reading is an art, but a very practical and necessary one for those who would survive in today's lively and complex world. Students always have read, and always will--but our schools are neglecting one of their basic functions if they fail to teach reading skills, and fail to encourage the individual student to appreciate all manifestations of the printed word.<sup>2</sup>

The schools' performance in teaching reading leaves much to be desired. Low-level reading performance by approximately one third of the nation's youth has now become a grave national concern.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Louis Untermeyer, New Directions in Reading (New York: Bantam Books, 1967, p 2.

<sup>2</sup>H. Vail Deale, "The Excitement of a Crowded Library", Wisconsin Library Bulletin, 65:1, January-February, 1969, p 29.

<sup>3</sup>Lyman C. Hunt, "The Lively Learning Center and the Alert Librarian", Wilson Library Bulletin, November 1970, p 1088.

Only five per cent of North Americans can be thought of as habitual readers, or, to put it more urgently, ninety-five per cent of those who attend school will probably never take to reading as a matter of habit.<sup>1</sup>

Studies also show that reading is rated low among choices of what children would choose to do or have chosen to do with their time outside of school.<sup>2</sup>

One phase of the school library program is encouraging and teaching children to read and to enjoy reading. The question arises as to the effectiveness of such a program. The content of a program, if it exists, is determined by individual librarians and is mainly dependent and concerned with the needs, interests and abilities of the school population. Thus, limited uniformity exists in this process of encouraging and teaching reading in school learning centers.

#### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study is designed to determine whether nine, ten, eleven and twelve year old students in a selected school Learning Center environment will improve their reading skills after a required sustained silent reading program.

#### HYPOTHESIS

There will be no significant difference in the reading

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<sup>1</sup>L. F. Ashley, "Children's Reading Interests and Individualized Reading", Elementary English, December, 1970, p 295.

<sup>2</sup>Norine Odland, "Discovering What Children Have Learned About Literature", Elementary English, December, 1970, p 276.

ability of nine, ten, eleven and twelve year old students participating in a sustained silent reading program and nine, ten, eleven and twelve year old students who have not participated in such a program, as measured by the Stanford Achievement Test, Subtests Word Meaning, Paragraph Meaning, Spelling and Language.

#### IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

This study will indicate the value of a formal sustained silent reading program in the elementary school Learning Center. In turn, this would suggest whether elementary school librarians should emphasize this sort of reading program or should devote greater attention to other types of library services.

#### DEFINITION OF TERMS

Learning Center. An area offering both print and non-print media for students to use in the area or to borrow for home or classroom use.

Nine, ten, eleven and twelve year old students. In a non-graded school, Grant Elementary School, Waterloo, Iowa, students of these chronological ages are placed on a team of approximately one hundred students, and randomly assigned to one of four homerooms. These students are referred to as Team III, rather than as belonging to grade three, four or five. For the purpose of this study, they will be considered as Team III.

Sustained silent reading. A required period of time in which students read silently books of their own choice.

Reading ability. Specifically, the ability to decode the printed symbols used in reading; generally, adeptness in using what one

reads in life situations, interest in reading regularly and ability to involve oneself in silent reading frequently.

### ASSUMPTIONS

It is assumed that all students had an interest in improving their abilities in reading. Also, it is assumed that a regular program of reading instruction will be maintained by the classroom teacher using some methods of basal textbook, individualized, or learning experience approaches. The sustained silent reading program occurring in the Learning Center will be in addition to the classroom teaching or reading. The classroom reading experiences will vary and will affect students' reading abilities to some degree. Individual students and their home and classroom reading habits will also vary and may be reflected in tests of reading skill.

Socioeconomic factors which might have a bearing on test results (the availability of print materials in the home) will tend to be negated since there is a random grouping of students in each homeroom of Team III.

### LIMITATIONS

This study will be limited to four homerooms of Team III students, heterogeneously grouped.

Testing will be limited to reading skill as measured by the Stanford Achievement Test, Subtests Word Meaning, Paragraph Meaning and Spelling and Language.

## PROCEDURES

This study required all Team III students of four homerooms to attend the Learning Center three times weekly for a nine week period of time. Students from the control groups studied, browsed, read randomly, or used audio visual materials independently. Students of the experimental groups chose books to read from several book carts stationed in the room. Many books at all levels of difficulty from easy to read picture books to very difficult were available. These students were required to sustain themselves in silent reading for twenty five minutes per period. There were no reports, written or oral. A quiet room was provided. Only silent reading was permitted during the sustained silent reading period. The librarian in charge read silently during this time.

This study tested four homerooms of Team III during the spring semester, 1971. The control group was two of these classes which had not been participating in the sustained silent reading program. The other two classes which had been required to participate in the sustained silent reading program comprised the experimental group. A control factor to be considered is the quantity and quality of silent reading exercise students had received in their classrooms.

The Pretest-Posttest Control Group Research Design was employed since only the experimental group had been exposed to a

school Learning Center imposed silent reading program. The Posttest as well as the Pretest consisted of the standardized test, the Stanford Achievement Test, Subtests Word Meaning, Paragraph Meaning, and Spelling and Language.

The mean, a measure of central tendencies, was computed for both the control and experimental groups. The mean scores of the two groups were compared to determine the effectiveness of the Learning Center sustained silent reading program.

CHAPTER II  
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

"The heart of any reading program is books and the heart of any library is books".<sup>1</sup> The traditional library held books and only books, and non-readers or reluctant readers chose simply not to use a library. The new concept of libraries as Learning Centers with non-print materials to interest non-readers may be guiding students to even less use of print materials. In Learning to Read. the Great Debate, Jeanne Chall<sup>2</sup> stated there was a need for more imaginative, self-teaching, immediately reinforcing materials. In saying this she is really pointing to children's books. Books are creative, imaginative, self-teaching and reinforcing. The child reads and his enjoyment, his gaining information, and his knowledge that he understands all act as contiguous reinforcement. Robert A. McCracken<sup>3</sup> believes that the best materials to teach reading are children's books and the best self-teaching program is a child reading a children's book. He also states that requiring a child to know all the rules of reading (skills such as finding root words, using prefixes, and syllabication) before actually reading a book will retard interest and ability in reading. Word calling to the exclusion of reading silently is more harmful than useful.

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<sup>1</sup>Robert A. McCracken, "Audiovisuals in Reading", School Library Journal, May, 1970, p 37.

<sup>2</sup>Jeanne Chall, Learning to Read. the Great Debate (New York: McGraw, 1967), p212.

<sup>3</sup>Robert A. McCracken, "Audiovisuals in Reading", School Library Journal, May, 1970, p 37.

Lyman C. Hunt<sup>1</sup> states that involvement with books must merit the highest authority in the teaching of reading. Creating the atmosphere for positive reading is the librarian's most pressing concern. Establishing of practice periods for uninterrupted sustained silent reading may be one of the best things a librarian can do, he feels. He further states that a librarian can and should provide free access and flow of books to students and should sponsor and promote a reading program.

Some authors believe the common classroom method of teaching reading using a basal reader written on a student's reading level of ability is a harmful practice, retarding both abilities and interests of the student.

Semi-literate readers do not need semi-literate books. The simplistic language of much of the life-leeched literature inflicted upon the average schoolchild is not justifiable from any standpoint. Bright, average, dull--however one classifies the child--he is immeasurably better off with books that are too difficult for him than books that are too simple.

"Reading" is a peculiarly personal interaction between a reader and a book, an interaction differing in each case as widely as readers may differ from each other in breadth of experience and quality of mind. But in no case does this interaction demand an understanding of every word by the reader. In fact, the threshold of understanding --of meaningful interaction--is surprisingly low, and even in many complex books can be pleasurablely crossed by many simple readers.<sup>2</sup>

For this study, a wide variety of reading materials were provided. These materials ranged from picture books to quite difficult fiction and non-fiction. Also, children's and adult's

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<sup>1</sup>Lyman C. Hunt, "The Lively Learning Center and the Alert Librarian", Wilson Library Bulletin, November, 1970, p 294.

<sup>2</sup>Daniel N. Fader, Hooked on Books (New York: Berkley Medallion, 1968), p 66.

magazines were included in the array of materials. Quantities of materials were provided to the amount of at least eight selections per student, and materials were added weekly for variety. The purpose of this quantity and variety was to provide interesting and exciting materials from which every student could select.

In self-selection each child chooses a book or story he wants to read, one that appeals to him and his inner purposes. Unless the choice proves to be unwise, he agrees to complete the story before making another selection. When he finishes, he selects another story.

Self-selection, when the child has the responsibility for choosing what to read, is one way to solve the problem of the right book for the right individual. Children get books which are ideal for them--books they can read with interest and satisfaction. The quick child finds material to challenge him; the slow child feels a sense of accomplishment in reading material suited to his needs.

James Herndon, in his teaching experiences in a junior high school, developed another theory on reading and its development, which emphasized that although much teaching of reading takes place in the schools, students have no time to really read.

We just knew it was absurd that a normal O.K. American kid of any class or kind of twelve years old shouldn't be able to read. Why was it? Because reading is not difficult. Anyone can do it. It is an activity which no one seems to be able to explain but which everyone can do if given a chance. It is simple for people to do. If you know enough to tie your shoe and come in out of the rain, you can do it.

If you can't do it, you must have been prevented from doing it. Most likely what prevented you was teaching.

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<sup>1</sup>Helen Fisher Darrow and Virgil M. Howes, Approaches to Individualized Reading (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1960) p 44.

For one thing, if you have to get taught the same "skills" for seven years over and over again, you probably get the notion that it is very difficult indeed. But more important, the "skill" involved in reading is at once very simple and quite mysterious. Once you can look at C-A-T and get the notion that it is a clue to a certain sound, and moreover that very sound which you already know means that particular animal, then you can read, and that is certainly quite simple, even if the ability of humans to do this is opaque. What you probably need to do then is to read a lot and thereby get better at it, and very likely that's what you will do, again, if no one stops you. What stops you is people teaching you skills and calling those skills "reading," which they are not, and giving you no time to actually read in the school without interruption.

That, basically, seemed what was wrong with everything we had investigated. With the tests, with the "methods," with the class structures, with the teacher's determination to teach --that no one had ever had much time in school to just read the damn books. They were always practicing up to read, and the practice itself was so unnecessary, or so difficult, or so boring you were likely to figure that the task you were practicing for must combine those qualities and so reject it or be afraid of it.<sup>1</sup>

Another aspect of the practice of teaching reading is offered in the following excerpt.

Independent reading is a time for children to try out new skills, to set their own goals--in short, to manage and organize reading for themselves. During this time children encounter many situations which they have to handle by themselves.

During independent reading children frequently make important personal discoveries for helping themselves and for developing a skill to a far greater degree that direct instruction would indicate. Children enjoy the opportunity to figure out new words, to use their own resources for discovering word meanings. Not only is it time for them to put their skills to work, but many times they develop additional insights for tackling reading problems.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>James Herndon, How to Survive in Your Native Land (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), p 152.

<sup>2</sup>Helen Fisher Darrow and Virgil M. Howes, Approaches to Individualized Reading (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1960) p 48.

Kathleen Harty has this to say about children's reading.

The elementary school reading program has long recognized the wide range of reading abilities and interests among students. It has been estimated that in a typical classroom, approximately one third of the students are reading above grade level, one third at grade level and one third below grade level.

Interest inventories and teacher observations have indicated that although students at a particular academic level have certain interests in common, there is still a wide diversity of interests among children. In addition, children's interests are frequently changing. As a part of the reading program it is necessary for the librarian to acknowledge the variety of student interests and abilities both in the materials provided for children to read and in the guidance given to individual children.

Although standardized reading tests, informal reading inventories and the classroom teacher's observations during the reading class are revealing of a child's reading ability and interest, it is in the actual selection and reading of a book that his inclinations and capabilities are best demonstrated. The observations of the librarian, then, may be pooled with the data collected by the classroom teacher so that both classroom instruction and library utilization may be enhanced for the child.

If librarians are to be maximally helpful to students, growth in and through reading will develop if they are aware that each child has four different reading levels. These levels may best be defined in terms of a child's performances with reading materials which are written at various difficulty levels.

The independent reading level is the level at which a child can read adequately "on his own". He reads with expression and fluency and has excellent comprehension.<sup>1</sup>

L. F. Ashley<sup>2</sup> in a study of children's reading interests states that the best chance of encouraging good reading habits lies in or before grade four but that there is very little hope after grade five since by this time reading habits have become set. He found that interest in almost every field of literature falls

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<sup>1</sup>Kathleen Harty, "The Real Book Lady," Wisconsin Library Bulletin, 65:1, January-February, 1969, p 46.

<sup>2</sup>L. F. Ashley, "Children's Reading Interests and Individualized Reading," Elementary English, December, 1970, p 1096.

away very sharply in the latter half of grade six.

Many writers have examined reading and its related problems. The school library or Learning Center must become involved with these problems and attempt to deal with them. Consequently, this study grew from the question: Will time to read freely from a wide variety and range of materials help to produce better readers? An elementary school library can have a positive effect on student growth in reading and therefore by inference can influence for quality education.

CHAPTER III  
THE STANFORD ACHIEVEMENT TEST, GROUPS STUDIED  
AND PROCEDURES

The Stanford Achievement Test was developed to provide dependable data concerning pupil achievement in important skills and content areas. In this study, only the subtests Word Meaning, Paragraph Meaning, Spelling and Language were utilized. These subtests comprise the Language Arts section of the test.

Reliability of the Stanford Achievement Test is computed as accurate at the .01 level and validity was established through a content examination of the subtests in relation to the objectives of instruction of a nationwide sampling.

The usefulness of the test depends largely upon the nature of the group from which the norming population was established. The Stanford Achievement Test used random sampling of students nationwide to establish norms.

The Stanford Achievement Test, Subtests Word Meaning, Paragraph Meaning and Spelling and Language was administered to ninety eight Team III students in the Grant Elementary School during February of 1971. The Team III students included fifty nine boys and thirty nine girls. These students had chronological ages ranging from nine years to twelve years six months. Mental ages ranged from seveny three to one hundred twenty two on the California Test of Mental Maturity.

Team III is assigned to Grant School as an age group, and in an ungraded situation. Students whose chronological age

falls in the nine to twelve year bracket are randomly assigned to Team III and to one of four homerooms within Team III. For the purpose of this study two homerooms were designated A and B and comprised the experimental group and two were designated C and D and made up the control group. Experimental groups A and B took part in the sustained silent reading program three times weekly for eight weeks, while control groups C and D were allowed to pursue independent activities, including reading, during their weekly meetings in the Learning Center. All four groups spent twenty five minutes three times weekly in the Learning Center.

Table I contains a comparison of experimental groups A and B Pretest and Posttest mean scores on the Word Meaning subtest with the control groups C and D mean scores of the same test. The range is from 17.80 to 22.00 and the mean of the two experimental groups is 20.01 on the pretest and 21.55 on the posttest. The mean for the control group is 18.81 pretest and 19.68 for the posttest.

Table II compares the experimental groups and the control groups on subtest Paragraph Meaning. The range is 23.96 to 29.00 with the experimental group mean 27.28 on pretest and 27.68 on posttest and control group mean 25.09 on pretest and 27.16 on posttest.

Table III compares the experimental groups and the control groups on subtest Spelling and Language. The range is 27.96 to 35.17 with the experimental group mean 31.23 on pretest and 31.17

on posttest and control group mean 31.56 on pretest and 28.96 on posttest.

Table IV compares the experimental groups and the control groups on the total Language Arts battery. The range is 70.12 to 82.22. The experimental group mean is 78.76 on pretest and 80.63 on posttest. The control group mean is 75.64 on the pretest and 76.69 on the posttest.

Tables V and VI compare the experimental groups A and B pretest and posttest total mean scores with the control groups C and D pretest and posttest total mean scores separated into scores for boys only and girls only.

TABLE I

COMPARISON OF EXPERIMENTAL GROUPS A AND B PRETEST AND  
 POSTTEST WORD MEANING MEAN SCORES WITH CONTROL GROUPS C AND D  
 PRETEST AND POSTTEST WORD MEANING MEAN SCORES

Homeroom	Pretest Mean Score	Posttest Mean Score
Experimental A	19.86	21.10
Experimental B	20.17	22.00
Control C	19.83	21.43
Control D	17.80	17.92
Range:	17.80 to 20.17	17.92 to 22.00
Mean:	20.01 18.81	21.55 19.68

TABLE II

COMPARISON OF EXPERIMENTAL GROUPS A AND B PRETEST AND  
 POSTTEST PARAGRAPH MEANING MEAN SCORES WITH CONTROL GROUPS C  
 AND D PRETEST AND POSTTEST PARAGRAPH MEANING MEAN SCORES

Homerom	Pretest Mean Score	Posttest Mean Score
Experimental A	25.90	28.19
Experimental B	28.67	27 17
Control C	26.22	29.00
Control D	23.96	25/32
Range:	23.96 to 28.67	25.32 to 29.00
Mean:	27.28 25.09	27.68 27.16

TABLE III

COMPARISON OF EXPERIMENTAL GROUPS A AND B PRETEST AND POSTTEST SPELLING AND LANGUAGE MEAN SCORES WITH CONTROL GROUPS C AND D PRETEST AND POSTTEST SPELLING AND LANGUAGE MEAN SCORES

Homeroom	Pretest Mean Score	Posttest Mean Score
Experimental A	31.05	31.76
Experimental B	31.42	30.58
Control C	35.17	29.60
Control D	27.96	28.32
Range:	27.96 to 35.17	28.32 to 31.76
Mean:	31.23 31.56	31.17 28.96

TABLE IV

COMPARISON OF EXPERIMENTAL GROUPS AND B PRETEST AND POSTTEST  
 LANGUAGE ARTS TOTAL MEAN SCORES WITH CONTROL GROUPS C AND D  
 LANGUAGE ARTS TOTAL MEAN SCORES PRETEST AND POSTTEST

Homeroom	Pretest Mean Score	Posttest Mean Score
Experimental A	77.28	81.52
Experimental B	80.25	79.75
Control C	81.17	82.22
Control D	70.12	71.16
Range:	70.12 to 81.17	71.16 to 82.22
Mean:	78.76 75.64	80.63 76.69

TABLE V

COMPARISON OF EXPERIMENTAL GROUPS A AND B BOYS PRETEST AND  
 POSTTEST TOTAL MEAN SCORES WITH CONTROL GROUPS C AND D BOYS PRETEST  
 AND POSTTEST TOTAL MEAN SCORES

Homeroom	Pretest Mean Score	Posttest Mean Score
Experimental A	84.58	88.17
Experimental B	71.00	79.14
Control C	79.69	86.23
Control D	65.00	67.17
Range:	65.00 to 84.58	67.17 to 88.17
Mean:	77.79 72.34	83.75 76.70

TABLE VI

COMPARISON OF EXPERIMENTAL GROUPS A AND B GIRLS PRETEST AND  
 POSTTEST TOTAL MEAN SCORES WITH CONTROL GROUPS C AND D  
 GIRLS PRETEST AND POSTTEST TOTAL MEAN SCORES

Homeroom	Pretest Mean Score	Posttest Mean Score
Experimental A	67.56	74.89
Experimental B	79.50	70.60
Control C	83.10	77.00
Control D	81.00	73.12
Range:	67.56 to 83.10	70.60 to 77.00
Mean:	73.53 82.05	72.74 75.06

## CHAPTER IV

### INTERPRETATION OF THE TEST SCORES

Table I shows the experimental group to have improved their mean test score on the subtest Word Meaning by 1.54 points, while the control group increased by only .87 points.

Table II shows the experimental group to have increased their mean scores on subtest Paragraph Meaning by .48 points and the control group to have increased by 2.07 points.

Table III, in comparing the experimental group loss of .6 point on subtest Spelling and Language also shows a loss on the part of the control group of 3.60 points.

In Table IV, comparing total gain or loss on the Language Arts total battery, from pretest to posttest, the experimental group gained 1.87 points and control group 1.05.

Thus, even with improvement on mean scores of Word Meaning and Paragraph Meaning for both control and experimental groups, losses of achievement on Spelling and Language for both groups negated any significant differences.

Therefore the null hypotheses was accepted; there is no significant difference between Team III students' reading abilities whether or not they have participated in a sustained silent reading program.

Tables V and VI point out the relationships between boys

and girls and their mean scores for the total Language Arts battery.

Interestingly, boys of both the experimental and control groups raised their mean scores by 5.96 and 4.36 points respectively while the mean scores of the girls dropped. The experimental group of girls lost .79 point and the girls of the control group dropped their mean scores 6.99 points.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

#### SUMMARY

This investigation was concerned with the improvement of reading abilities following a sustained silent reading program, which was conducted in the Learning Center. The Stanford Achievement Test, Language Arts subtests Word Meaning, Paragraph Meaning, and Spelling and Language was the testing instrument.

A total of ninety eight subjects were in the sample; fifty nine boys and thirty nine girls whose ages ranged from nine years to twelve years six months.

The experiment took place during February and March of 1971 at Grant Elementary School, Waterloo, Iowa.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions regarding mean test scores both preceding and following the experimental treatment were marked by several inconsistencies.

1. Although gains were made by both experimental and control groups in the areas of Word and Paragraph Meaning, the gains were so small as to be inconclusive.

2. Decided loss was shown on mean scores of both groups on Spelling and Language usage.

3. Gain on mean score of the experimental group in the total Language Arts battery was found to be .82 points which is not a significant gain.

4. Boys showed decided improvement between pretest and posttest mean scores, while girls had a slight loss between the pretest and the posttest.

The testing instrument also may have been a poor choice. Accordint to Helen W. Cyr<sup>1</sup>

The Sobrante Park evaluation plan represented an attempt to study the program in terms of services and objectives of the media center and the librarian. What are these objectives? To teach word meaning? Word skills? Paragraph structure and the assimilation of discourse? Indeed not. However, the latter are the kinds of skills actually measured by standardized reading tests.

Instead, aren't we concerned with the motivation of students, inspiration of reading for enjoyment and personal self-fulfillment, helping teachers stimulate student learning? Aren't we more involved with the intellectual curiosity and the general knowledge of students, rather than their individual word skills?... Librarians should be cautioned, in the meantime, to study achievement tests carefully before using, if use them they must.

#### LIMITATIONS OF THE PRESENT STUDY

An obvious limitation of the present investigation is the small number in the sampling. The total of ninety eight students with forty nine in both the experimental and control groups is not a large enough sample to encourage generalizations.

The sampling was not controlled except by age and placement in homerooms. For this study, socioeconomic background, emotional stability and academic classroom achievement were disregarded.

#### THE NEED FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Sustained practice in silent reading was not found to be

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<sup>1</sup>Helen W. Cyr, "The Sobrante Park Evaluation Project", School Libraries, 20:1, Fall, 1970, p 24.

a factor in reading ability as tested by the Stanford Achievement Test. However, a long range study using a larger sample might prove to have different results.

A different testing instrument, perhaps based on attitudes and interests, rather than skills of reading, might have produced another aspect of the library's role in the teaching of reading.

James Herndon<sup>1</sup> believes

The "problem" of reading was simultaneously caused and invented by schools and their insistence on teaching "classes" and "groups"--and by the resulting quest of teachers finding ways to "teach," i.e., ways to standardize and to measure. That there simply is no way to measure what is crucial about reading a book--namely whether or not the kid liked the book, whether he imagined himself involved in the adventures of Jim Hawkins, whether or not he was changed by it. "This should change your life," says Rilke. Who can measure that? And yet it is all that counts.

So we were caught curiously in the middle. We were in a school which hoped to measure and standardize everything, and in which the kids themselves knew that everything important got grades, could be measured and was standardized. No one was getting A's for being moved to tears when Long John Silver took off for the last time in the longboat. What we had to do was recreate the way of teaching reading which existed before schools were invented, and use it in the school itself. Reading not as a skill (to be measured) but as an art (that which changes).

There would be little to lose and much to be gained from a long range study based upon children's silent reading as a form of art.

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<sup>1</sup>James Herndon, How to Survive in Your Native Land (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), p 155.

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