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M. Cecil Smith
Northern Illinois University

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READING ATTITUDES OF PRE-SERVICE EDUCATION MAJORS

M. CECIL SMITH

Department of Special Education

Northern Illinois University

DeKalb, Illinois

Studies of teachers' reading habits and attitudes over the past fifteen years suggest that teachers generally do not highly value reading (Mangieri & Corboy, 1981; Mour, 1977; Mueller, 1973). If we cautiously generalize from these studies, it can be said that a number of practicing teachers are no avid readers, although a few studies have found that many teachers do enjoy reading for work and leisure (Searles, 1985). An implicit goal of reading instruction is to develop readers who enjoy reading and will read throughout their lives (Alexander, 1983). Children learn a great deal by imitating the behavior of models. So, it is important that teachers model good reading behaviors and positive attitudes about reading (Briggs, 1987; Gray & Troy, 1986).

One way of ensuring that the next generation of teachers embrace reading is to help them develop positive attitudes toward reading. Attitudes guide behavior and can have a large impact on individuals' reading activities. A few studies have reported success at enhancing the reading attitudes of preservice teachers via activities in reading methods courses (Brittain, 1981). Dillingofski and Dulin (1980) simply had their students (48 undergraduate teaching majors) discuss the books they read during the semester. These students increased the number of books which they read and there was some improvement in reading attitude as well.

The purpose of the current study was to assess the reading attitudes of undergraduates in training. We

wondered if there were any relationship between such students' reading attitudes and the number of reading methods and other reading- and language-related courses they had taken.

Subjects

Forty-seven students enrolled in educational psychology courses at a major midwestern university completed a 40-item reading attitude survey. Eleven percent (11%) of these students had taken six or more courses in reading methods or the psychology of reading and language, language arts, or communication studies; 21% of the students had taken more than 4 but less than 6 courses, 49% had taken 1-3 such courses, and 19% had taken no language-related courses.

There were 7 freshmen, 19 sophomores, 14 juniors, 6 seniors, and 1 graduate student in the sample. The mean age was 21.06 years. There were 42 females and 5 males.

Instrument

Students completed the 40-item Adult Survey of Reading Attitudes (Smith, 1988). Students responded to statements concerned with their feelings about reading and their reading behaviors along a 5-point scale (5="strongly agree" to 1="strongly disagree"). The survey assesses dimensions of reading such as enjoyment, social reinforcement for reading, and reading difficulty. A typical item reads "Reading is one of my favorite activities." A high score (about 150 and above) indicates a positive attitude toward reading, while 100 or below shows a negative attitude. Students provided demographic data (age, sex, GPA, year in school, courses taken) on the cover sheet of the ASRA.

Results

The results showed that the mean score for the ASRA equalled 140.55, reflecting a moderately positive attitude toward reading among this sample of students. This outcome is similar to earlier administrations of the ASRA with comparable groups of university students (Smith 1988). There was no relationship between attitude and the number of reading- and language-related courses taken ($r = .00$). There was, however, a significant correlation between reading attitude and students' self-rating

of their reading ability ($\underline{r} = .54$, $\underline{p} = .001$), and between attitude and overall GPA ($\underline{r} = .33$, $\underline{p} < .05$).

A t-test revealed no differences on reading attitude between those students who had taken 6 or more reading- and language-related courses and those who had not taken any such courses ($\underline{t} = -0.48$, $\underline{p} > .05$).

Discussion

This study revealed that there is no relationship between undergraduates' attitudes toward reading and the number of reading- and language-related courses taken. Obviously, other factors work to influence students' attitudes toward reading (e.g., attitude development in elementary and high school, influence of role models). It is not surprising to find that for those students who believed themselves to be good readers, attitude toward reading was positive. The majority of the students believed themselves to be good readers.

It should be remembered that no information was collected concerning the content and activities of the reading methods, language arts and communication courses taken by the students. Thus, we do not assert that students' reading attitudes were affected (positively or negatively) simply by having taken such courses. It is unlikely that the content of several of these courses dealt with the affective dimensions of reading. Further, it is quite probable that students who already have positive attitudes toward reading are likely to enroll in these courses. More carefully controlled studies, such as Brittain's (1981) are needed to determine the impact that instruction has on promoting positive reading attitudes.

Despite our failure to find an attitude-training relationship, this descriptive study demonstrates that typical undergraduate pre-service teachers possess only moderately positive attitudes about reading. Will these individuals come to view reading in a more positive light once they become practicing teachers? Perhaps by making professional reading materials more accessible (i.e., the content having a practical orientation) to teachers, and by promoting the benefits of reading for professional development as well as for leisure, we can

ensure that young children are exposed to teachers who are positive reading models.

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