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DOES THE TEACHER'S ATTITUDE TOWARD READING AFFECT THE ATTITUDE TOWARD READING HELD BY THE STUDENTS?

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When trying to determine who is an effective teacher of reading, three variables have been considered: 1) pre-sage—what the teacher brings to the classroom; 2) process—what the teacher does in the classroom; and 3) product—what the outcome of the teacher's instructional strategies is in terms of pupil growth.

It has been pointed out that the teacher of reading, while continuing to be regarded as a most significant influence on reading progress, continues to be a relatively neglected research variable (Schofield and Start, 1977).

Agin (1975), in an overview of research in reading, emphasized the importance of interest, attitudes, and motivation. She maintained that "the attitude of the teacher is the main ingredient...(in) getting children to read." There is very little research literature on the relationship between pupils' attitudes toward and their achievement in reading, and almost no research at all on the effect of teacher attitudes toward reading on pupil attitudes and achievement.

While not developing an instrument which could be used to objectively measure change in pupils' attitudes toward reading, the present study was an initial step in determining what influence a reading tutor's attitude toward reading had on the pupils he/she tutored. The tutors taking part were enrolled in a second undergraduate reading methods course. Three areas were the points of emphasis in this course.

- (1) Student tutors were to help elementary pupils develop more positive self images.
- (2) Student tutors were to use easy interesting materials in working with elementary pupils.
- (3) Student tutors were to read to elementary pupils each day and to come to recognize that this activity is an important and essential component of any successful reading program.

Procedure and Subjects

During the first seven weeks of the semester the class met on campus for two 2-hour sessions each week. During the last six weeks of the semester the tutors went to an elementary school where they provided individual reading instruction for pupils who were experiencing difficulty in reading. Elementary pupils were recommended for the tutoring program by their regular classroom teachers. These teachers were advised of the type of instruction to be provided for their pupils. A total of twelve elementary pupils participated; three from grade 2, one from grade 3, two each from grades 4, 5, and 6, one from grade 7, and one from grade 8.

The format of the tutoring sessions was structured as follows:

- (1) Tutor read to pupil for 15 minutes.
- (2) Language experience approach or adaptation of it (i.e., wordless picture books were used to help children develop a story).
- (3) Assistance provided for reading in content areas (intermediate and upper grades).
- (4) Remaining time to be planned for by tutor.

One stipulation was made during first meetings on campus—no worksheets were to be used by any students and no textbooks were to be used with primary students.

To determine, albeit in a very subjective manner, whether there were any changes in the child's attitude toward reading, he/she was asked the following question by the tutor at the first and last tutoring sessions: How would you teach a younger child to read?

It was hypothesized that the pupil's final response would be influenced by his experiences with the tutor in the tutoring program. While it is true that the tutors had varying attitudes toward reading which could not be strictly controlled, the instructor of the reading methods course was present each day to see that tutors were working to achieve the three goals set forth during the on-campus class sessions. Lesson plans were also checked to help ensure that tutors followed the prescribed format.

Findings

A brief chart listing the goals of the tutoring program and children's inclusion of these goals in their recommended practices is listed:

<u>Goals</u>	<u>Initial Response</u>	<u>Final Response</u>
Use of easy, interesting material	3 children	5 children
Read to child	1 child	3 "
Help child build self-image	0 children	2 children

For the practice of using easy, interesting material, the three pupils who recommended this before receiving instruction from the tutors were in the 8th, 7th, and 4th grades. They held to this recommendation in their final response also. In addition, the other 4th grade pupil and a 5th grade pupil included this in their final responses.

Only one 4th grade pupil recommended reading to children in his initial response. He was joined by two additional pupils, one in 3rd grade and the other in 5th grade, at the final session.

None of the students initially indicated that a positive self-image was important, but a 2nd and 4th grader did in their final response.

Three areas specifically not emphasized by tutors did receive emphasis by children. These areas were:

- (1) sounding out,
- (2) use of pictures, and
- (3) word-for-word accuracy

Pupils in 6th, 4th, 3rd, and 2nd grades emphasized this first area initially. The 6th grade pupil dropped the recommendation in his final response, while a 5th grader added this practice.

Pictures were not mentioned in the first response by anyone. Pupils in 7th, 4th, and 2nd grades recommended this finally. That makes a total of four recommendations for this practice (two at 2nd grade level).

Word-for-word accuracy received initial stress by the 8th grade pupil and one of the 4th grade pupils. Only a 5th grade pupil included this as being important in his final response.

Discussion

Examination of individual pupil's responses in some detail provides a better understanding of that pupil's attitude toward reading.

A fifth grade boy stated initially that he would have his pupil study his workbook, do papers, read readers and get lots of 100's on papers. His final response to the question was that he would read to his pupil and have his pupil read orally. He was concerned that the pupil give an accurate reading with no mistakes. If mistakes were made, the pupil would be asked to read the passage over.

The final response of this child perhaps reflects the influence of the tutor to the extent that the boy would now spend some time reading to the younger child. He

still placed very heavy emphasis on word-for-word accuracy in oral reading. This was not true in the tutoring sessions as the main concern of the tutors was for the pupil to obtain meaning from what he read. Meaningful substitutions were accepted.

A fourth grade girl initially stated that she would give her pupil a very easy book and tell her to read. If she couldn't read, the tutor would read it for her so that she would get used to hearing the words and would be able to read them later. She would also write words the pupil did not know on flashcards and have her sound them out.

In her last reply she stated she would still ask the pupil to sound out words, but she would also try to help the child picture the story in her head. She believed an interesting story which might tell a life lesson like Charlotte's Web should be used. The child should keep trying until she learned and should believe in herself.

This girl placed emphasis on sounding out words in both her initial and final responses to the question. There was indication that she recognized the importance of using interesting materials in her final response. The last comment she made about just believing in oneself is an excellent one which all teachers would do well to remember, as well as being one of the major goals set for the tutors to achieve in their sessions.

A fourth grade boy would help the child to spell and pronounce words. He would also read him little stories and have him read books on his own. In his final response he indicated that he would teach SQ3R, ask questions about stories read, use books the pupil is interested in, point out the use of pictures in reading, and give candy if pupil is good.

An element of behaviorism is present in the final response pertaining to providing candy as reinforcement for good reading. This definitely was not a part of the tutoring sessions. This boy was the first to mention in his initial response to the question that he would read to the child. This could be a result of his experiences in his home or in his regular classroom. His comment that books of interest to the pupils should be used might be accounted for by the tutoring sessions.

The third grade child indicated in her first response that she would have her pupil sound out words by blending the first two letters together. She included sounding out words in her response to the second question, but she also would have him read a book every single day. This last recommendation could be a result of the influence of the tutor. Perhaps part of the reason she held to her recommendation of sounding words out is because this is

frequently a practice in regular reading classroom instruction.

A second grade boy would show the pupil words and tell him what they were. He would use an easy book. If the pupil made mistakes in reading, he would tell the pupil what the words were. In his final response he indicated he would talk with the child first and help him learn new words he wanted to know. He also stressed the importance of looking at pictures first, before reading a selection.

His emphasis changed from telling the child the right word to helping him learn new words he wanted to know. This centers on the child's interests which are important. He also pointed out the value of looking at pictures. His emphasis on using an easy book was made at the first session, so that response could not have been influenced by the tutor.

Conclusions

Because such a short time was spent in tutoring sessions (12 one-hour sessions over a six week period) it is impossible to say with firm conviction that these tutors helped their pupils develop a more positive attitude toward reading. It is encouraging to note, however, that five of the twelve pupils recognized the importance of using easy, interesting material at the end of the sessions as contrasted with three at the beginning. The importance of reading to the pupil was recognized by only one child at the beginning of the sessions, but this number had reached three by the final session. And, the importance of a positive self-image which was not recognized as a concept by any children before the sessions did receive recognition by two students in their final responses.

Recommendations for Future Research

It would seem worthwhile to continue investigation in this area. A more objective way of determining the teacher's attitude toward reading should be developed. The relationship between the teacher's attitude toward reading and the change in attitude of his pupil should be examined closely. This might make it possible for us to move a bit closer to an understanding of the importance of a teacher's attitude toward reading and his effectiveness as a teacher of reading.

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