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A Literature-Based Approach to Reading

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Abstract

This study examined the impact that a primarily literature-based reading program had on a third grade class in becoming proficient independent readers and writers. Using authentic literature, students were taught reading content, prioritized strategies, and necessary reading skills. Progress was assessed using theme tests, periodic reading surveys, skills surveys, observation checklists and forms, student portfolios, and standardized tests.

The results of this study indicated that a primarily literature-based approach inspired and motivated children to become successful readers and writers. The literature produced, emphasized, and enforced positive learning experiences. The assessments used demonstrated that the class became stronger and more enthusiastic reading students. In a concentrated study, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills showed significant vocabulary and comprehension progress in five students. Although several factors could have contributed to improved performance, it is hypothesized that the use of this program was the important contributor to success.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction and Statement of the Problem

Reading and writing are the fundamentals on which we base all education. The ability to read and write has implications for a person's well-being throughout life. Proficiency in independent reading and writing are critical to lifelong learning and enjoyment. Reading involves complex cognitive processing, visualizing, conceptualizing, abstracting, reasoning, and evaluating. Frequently, we run across students who have deficiencies in one or more of these cognitive processes, thereby making reading more difficult for them. It is imperative, however, that all students receive reading instruction that builds an excitement for learning to read. Using my class of 22 third grade students, I have found that a reading program that is primarily literature-based strengthens the processes necessary for successful and enjoyable reading.

CHAPTER TWO

Background

Throughout the history of Holland Christian, its elementary schools have used basal readers as the majority component of its reading program. The basal reader approach to reading is set up as a comprehensive base of operation. Several facets make up the teaching of reading, and a child learns to read as the sum of those parts. It's based on a scope and sequence prescription for learning to read. Scope is the range of skills to be learned, while sequence is a systematic teaching of those skills. A basal series determines which skills must be taught as a prerequisite to other reading skills. The basal begins with the teaching of phonics. Its programs place an emphasis on code interpretation skills and letter sound correspondences.

Basal reading series are commonly used and, therefore, draw support from a large group of teachers. It is a very orderly and organized system of reading teaching, and includes a complete set of instructions and a variety of teaching aids. Its power lies in skill sequencing and a controlled vocabulary. Basal

reading programs have been and are successful in teaching basic skills, particularly those that appear on standardized tests. However, standardized tests are often based on the philosophies and ideas of a basal system, and, therefore, they are testing exactly what they wish to measure. They evaluate a basal-taught reader rather than a literature-taught reader.

In contrast however, basal programs do have their critics. The strongest complaint comes out of the practice that the basal series becomes the entire program rather than a resource to teach reading. A basal reader is so organized that teachers neglect to recognize its weaknesses and don't attempt to supplement it with other activities or even exercises. The teacher becomes locked into the basal series.

A second criticism is that strict phonics teaching can lead children to seeing only sounds or parts of words rather than complete words as a part of a context conveying meaning. Children can become mechanical word readers rather than comprehension readers.

A third criticism is that basals generate ability grouping. Children are labelled and realize their

position within the classroom. Children often get into a group and never get out. Especially for children in the low groups, reading becomes a negative component of school and their low placement hinders their self-esteem.

A fourth criticism is the lack of literary quality in basal stories. Stories are often chosen on the basis of what skill can be taught with that particular story, or what questions can be answered. Basal series also use a highly controlled vocabulary, so any story must fit into a selected group of words. Basal stories are often judged on the basis of skills and vocabulary rather than story content. This also limits a broad range of interesting and worthwhile literature.

A final criticism is that basal series' often spend more time on skill lessons and workbook pages than on the literature. Children associate reading with work sheets rather than literature. Their interest, excitement, and enthusiasm for reading wanes. New worlds and distant places become closed doors and imaginations are limited to what's real and close. A young child not excited about reading yields an adult

who will not read.

In recent years, basal series' have recognized these deficiencies and have improved their story selection and workbook pages. The newer series' seem to have a stronger phonics program. The literature contained within the textbook is of a higher quality. More diverse stories are being included. Children are being made aware of various ethnic groups, their literature and culture, as well as peoples of other lands and nationalities. Because of this, children's vocabularies are being broadened as well as strengthened. Finally, newer series' are recognizing individual differences and allowing for more individualized learning.

CHAPTER THREE

Importance and Rationale of the Study

Reading is a basic life skill. It is the cornerstone for a child's success in school, as well as for an adult in today's society. Poor reading skills make all of school more difficult. It also closes doors to advanced education. As an adult, poor reading skills in the marketplace will lead to unfair competition and lost opportunities. Good reading skills also lead to personal enjoyment and self satisfaction. A vast amount of information comes to us through printed material. As an adult, we need that information to make responsible choices and enrich life. Reading is essential to children and adults.

In April of 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education presented a report on the quality of education in America. In A Nation at Risk, it cited the following statistics of America's reading problem:

1. Some 23 million American adults are functionally illiterate by the simplest tests of everyday reading, writing, and comprehension.

2. About 13 percent of all 17-year-olds in the United States can be considered functionally illiterate. Functional illiteracy among minority youth may run as high as 40 percent.

3. Average achievement of high school students on most standardized tests is now lower than 26 years ago when Sputnik was launched.

4. The College Board's Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) demonstrated a virtually unbroken decline from 1963 to 1980. Average verbal scores fell over 50 points.

In a more recent and focused report, the "Reading Report Card for the Nation and States," reported that "41 percent of Michigan's fourth graders could not read at a basic level." Students did not comprehend nor understand what they were reading, could not internalize the story, and could not return the main ideas of the story using their own words. In informational passages, children could not process the information, categorize it, or retrieve it to use in relevant situations. More condemning, less than one-fourth of Michigan's students "had achieved the federal

governments' goal of proficiency." To be proficient, a student must be "able to draw conclusions and make connections to their own lives." Just 3 percent of our state's fourth graders had advanced reading skills, "being able to critically and thoughtfully discuss what they had read." Michigan, as a state, rated only in the middle, nationwide in basic reading ability.

Why do we in America, the world's richest nation with the greatest resources, have this educational dilemma? There are a variety of reasons, both inside and outside the school. No one particular reason is responsible. However, most schools do use a basal reading series. I am not stating that this is the cause, but I do believe we must use our best materials and resources to confront this situation. It is my belief that a primarily literature-based reading program, supplemented with a basal series and whole language experiences, will produce better readers and instill in children a love for reading.

My present teaching assignment is third grade. This level is a very crucial stage for children's reading development. At this age students make a

transition from learning to read reading to learn. Many of the initial reading skills are replaced with comprehension, context, and literature.

The purpose of this paper is to present my reading program that is primarily based on children's literature and supplemented with necessary basal skills and whole language development. Also, the paper will present different assessments that show that children in this program make better reading progress and gain a greater appreciation and love for reading and literature.

CHAPTER FOUR

Goals and Objectives

Illiteracy is a handicap. No person can function in the marketplace or find satisfaction in his own world without the ability to read. My goals and objectives are to produce students who become proficient readers who also enjoy reading. A student should also develop skills related to reading and necessary for life.

Goals

1. To use a reading program in our school system which inspires and motivates children to become successful readers and writers which in turn will open the door to new realms of imagination for children and lifelong learning.

2. To use a reading program that promotes and teaches proficiency in independent reading and writing--skills which are critical to lifelong learning and enjoyment.

3. To use a reading program which correlates with a writing program.

4. To show fellow educators that reading can be taught with literature in an exciting, creative, and flexible way.

Objectives

1. The student will demonstrate an excitement for reading by picking up books to read during free times and by showing a desire to share books with other children as well as the teacher.

2. The student will show an increase in vocabulary scores on standardized tests as well as a stronger use of vocabulary in writing.

3. The student will show an increase in comprehension scores on standardized tests.

4. The student will demonstrate an ability to carry over reading skills to the content areas.

5. The student will demonstrate more creativity in writing allowing imagination to be expressed and to come alive.

6. The student will demonstrate an ability to improve in performance on carefully selected skill sheets.

7. The student will demonstrate an ability to produce a story related to the literature read in the classroom.

CHAPTER FIVE

A Discussion of Children and Their Literature

Today's children, like today's adults, read for many reasons: to dream, to learn, to laugh, to enjoy the familiar and explore the yet unknown. They read for sheer pleasure and they take in, through their reading, those aspects of books that reflect the developmental values that are appropriate to the individual readers at each of the stages of their growth.

Literature leads children into discovery and adventure. It's a teaching tool along with a source of much enjoyment. Literature may help children build a concept of the society in which they live and of their roles in that society; literature may help shape and sharpen their concepts about other people and relationships; and literature can contribute to an understanding of themselves.

Reading and Child Development

Four main areas of child development are influenced by children's literature: Language,

cognitive, personality, and social. This development happens in clearly seen stages. All children will develop in the same sequence of stages, yet not all children progress through these stages at the same pace. This paper will focus on the Early Elementary Stage when children are 6-8 years old.

1. Children's literature aids a child's language development.

At the beginning of the third grade year, language development is in a continuing process; many new words are being added to a child's basic vocabulary. Providing time daily for reading to children and allowing for oral interaction at this stage is important.

Another characteristic of this grade level is that most children use complex sentences, adjectival clauses, and conditional clauses beginning with "if." On the average, an oral sentence length is seven and one-half words. The implications here are that teachers read stories that give models for children's broadening language.

Moreover, children at this level begin to relate

specific concepts to general ideas. "Meanwhile" and "unless," along with others, are connectors that are used. Books need to be supplied as models, and children should be encouraged to use these terms during oral language activities.

2. Children's literature aids in a child's cognitive development.

During the stages of six to eight, children are learning to read and to enjoy reading easy books which display their new abilities. Therefore, it is important that a teacher provides easy-to-read books aimed at children's developing reading skills. Children are also learning to write and are fascinated with creating their own stories. They need to be given opportunities to write, illustrate, and share their own picture books. Here wordless books are an excellent tool for inspiring a plot.

Another characteristic of this age level is the fact that a child's attention span is now growing larger. Children enjoy longer stories than they had previously enjoyed.

Children under seven still base their rules on

immediate perception and learn through real-life situations. A teacher needs to provide experiences which allow these children to see, talk about, and verify information and relationships.

Finally, as children progress through this age group, they pass into a stage Piaget referred to as "concrete operational." What this means is that children have now developed a new set of rules called groupings. They no longer need to see all objects to group. Children can now understand relationships among categories.

3. Literature contributes to a child's emotional growth.

Literature is able to do this in four different ways:

(1) By showing children that many of their feelings are also common to other children and those feelings are normal and natural.

(2) By giving a broader view of the feeling and by giving a base for which to name that emotion.

(3) The actions of characters show different alternatives for dealing with an emotion.

(4) Literature makes it clear that a child experiences many emotions and sometimes these conflict.

It's important at this level to help children find acceptable ways to handle their tensions. Pick stories to read to children which show how other children handle their tension.

Moreover, give children the opportunity to demonstrate independence. Have them select books to share with the class. Have a supply of hooks on hand in which characters develop independence.

4. Children's literature aids a child's social development.

The first characteristic of a child's social development from ages six to eight is that children may disregard their parents when in a pressure situation. Furthermore, they have trouble getting along with younger siblings. By talking with children and reading stories to them, children can be encouraged to become more sensitive to family needs.

Secondly, children want to have friends but often insist on being first. Once again a teacher must encourage children to both lead and follow by using

books which deal with the same problems.

Thirdly, children desire praise from their teacher and in turn want to please their teacher. This being the case, a teacher should encourage them to share their work and thus receive praise. Moreover, praise their reading and sharing of books.

The next characteristic of children from ages 6-8 is the fact that they love listening to stories being read to them. Storytelling story-reading should be a part of every school day.

Fifthly, children at this age have a definite inflexible idea of right and wrong. They identify with the values, standards, and morals of their parents.

Finally, children in this age group are beginning to become curious about the differences between boys and girls. They begin questioning those differences and begin to wonder where babies originate. Books can help answer those types of questions.

Definitions of Children's Literature

Children's literature is anything written that addresses the needs and interests of children. This definition assumes that children are not miniature

adults but are special developing people of their own. Childhood, therefore, is a special part of the life cycle. This assumption has not always been accepted. To better understand this definition, we must briefly trace the progression of children's literature.

After a long oral tradition of storytelling, the first written books were hand copied. These books were very expensive and basically adult books. A few privileged children could use them but only indirectly. Teachers, mostly monks, would use them as a basis for teaching reading, grammar, and music.

The printing press reduced the cost and increased the availability of books, but they were still adult-oriented. Books were now more available to children but they did not match children's interests. They were more widely used in schools, but their goal was to improve children's manners and enlarge children's thinking powers.

By the mid 1600's, children's books became more available, but their style and content were dominated by Puritan thinking. A conservative religious group, the Puritans outlawed giants, fairies, and witches,

things that children enjoyed. The goal of children's reading was not enjoyment but moral instruction. Children's books were to teach a child to read and write but at the same time to build his moral character.

At the end of the 1600's, a break came in the wall of children's literature, which up until now was intended solely for educational and moral development. John Locke, an English philosopher, said that literature should be written for children. This literature should be easy to read, free of moral stimulation, and be pleasurable. Children should read for fun, and the right books would encourage children to read. Charles Perrault, in seventeenth century France, echoed this same idea. He recorded fairy tales, long a part of the oral language, into a literature book written especially for children.

John Newberry, in the mid 1700's, began writing and publishing children's books for children. Children were recognized as a separate and important part of the family. Newberry watched children, recorded their interests, and then wrote to these interests. Society

now accepted books written specifically for children, their interests, and entertainment.

From the time of John Newberry to now, his philosophy has continued and grown. Illustrators have been given the freedom to draw for children. During the Victorian Period, childhood was elevated to a higher position than adulthood in the upper and middle class, and many different trends, styles, and themes have entered children's literature, but each has kept the child at the center. Family structure and culture has changed, and books are written to help children deal with those changes. Children's literature has come of age to meet the needs and interests of today's children.

Definitions of Types of Children's Literature

There are eight major types of children's literature. These types are as follows:

1. Picture Books
2. Traditional Literature
3. Modern Fantasy
4. Poetry
5. Contemporary Realistic Fiction

6. Historical Fiction

7. Multiethnic Literature

8. Nonfiction: Biographies and Informational Books.

It must be noted that though these are different categories, often they are intertwined and overlap.

The term picture book covers a large variety of books. It starts with Mother Goose and toy books for young children to picture storybooks with plots that feed the appetite of more experienced older children. Not all illustrated children's books are picture books, however. In many books, the illustrations merely aid the text. Illustrations in picture books, on the other hand, have a very important role in bringing the story alive and therefore are either as important as the text or more important than the text. In fact, some picture books have no words at all.

Other types of books which come under the category of picture books include: Alphabet Books, Counting Books, Concept Books, Easy-to-Read Books, and Picture Storybooks. Picture books can provide a lot of enjoyment for children along with stimulating language and

assisting cognitive development. Picture books can also improve the skills of observation, enlarge descriptive vocabularies, and develop an appreciation for art, beauty, and language style. Whether or not a particular picture book is appropriate depends upon the age of the children involved and whether one child or a group of children are looking at the book.

Traditional literature is made up of many stories which for centuries were passed along by word of mouth. Charles Perrault's book of French folktales and the Brothers Grimm's collection of German traditional tales were the breakthrough for traditional literature. Traditional literature usually includes folktales, fables, myths, and legends. No adult can read without being conscious of the varied groups into which they fall: cumulative tales, humorous tales, beast tales, magic and wonder tales, pourquoi or "why" tales, and realistic tales.

Traditional literature can aid children in learning about problems of human beings and those solutions which are possible. Moreover, children are introduced to different cultures and to the fact that people in

other lands experience the same struggles and emotions as we do. Finally, traditional tales are just plain enjoyable, not only to read but also to hear.

Folktales are fiction and should not be taken seriously. The tales are set in any time and in any place which makes them seem almost timeless and placeless. The adventures of animal or human characters are the center of folktales. They are filled with the supernatural, with magic, and with the familiar theme of good versus evil.

Fables are brief narratives which take abstract ideas of good or evil, wise or foolish behavior, and try to make them concrete and striking enough to be understood and remembered. The chief actor in most fables is an animal which behaves like a human being and has one dominant trait. Fables are usually a satire on human conduct which teach a moral lesson at the same time.

While fables are simple, highly condensed lessons in morality, the myth goes much deeper. It attempts to explain in rather complex symbolism the vital outlines of existence. Myths are usually accepted on faith and

considered sacred. Myths contain answers to how the world and humans began, love and death, natural phenomenons, and so on. The characters in myths may be humans, animals, or deities, whose actions happen in another world or at a much earlier time.

Legends are much like myths, however they take place in a time frame less remote. Characters in legends are human. The setting is most often secular rather than sacred. The major difference between myths and legends is that legends are reflective of something in history.

Fantasy is the art form that many modern writers have chosen to explain to children the realities of life--not a physical or social sense, but in a psychological sense. Modern fantasy turns, what seems to be the impossible, to something that becomes convincingly possible. Children are brought into an imaginative world of wizards, aliens, and talking animals. Themes of modern fantasy deal with some important human values.

Poetry is not easy to define. Robert Frost said that, "A poem is a momentary stay against confusion.

Each poem clarifies something... A poem is an arrest of disorder."

Frost was saying that our experiences come from here and there and are rather mixed up, but a poem sorts them out and gives them order and meaning. Poetry surprises and delights; it sings like music; it often uses rhythmic words to make you think about something; it causes an emotional and physical reaction. Poetry enables a child to experience the world with greater understanding and to share feelings, experiences, and insights with the poet. The reading and sharing of poetry is a worthwhile experience for children. Poetry is very enjoyable and serves these educational purposes: (1) to lead children to a knowledge of the world around them; (2) to develop children's language appreciation; (3) to build the children's ability to recognize characters and situations; (4) to give children a look into themselves and others.

Realistic fiction suggests that everything in a realistic story, which includes the setting, characters, and the plot, is in agreement with the

lives of real people in our contemporary world. Just because the story is realistic doesn't mean the story is true; it just means that the story could have happened. Some frequently used themes in contemporary realistic fiction are dealing with fear and responsibility, coming to terms with being illegitimate, being divorced, having handicapped siblings, living with parental expectations versus children's ambitions, coping with the death of a loved one, and finally, managing problems created by parents who don't care and have deserted their children.

Realistic fiction is enjoyed by children and young people alike because the stories are about people their same age with similar interests and concerns. Realistic fiction can serve as a tool for helping children understand human problems and how others like them have coped with those problems. Realistic fiction can provide hours of enjoyment as children escape into mystery and adventure stories.

We require that modern fiction for children depict life honestly and accurately. This is also a major requirement for historical fiction. Children can check

the experiences described in modern fiction against their own lives and that of their friends, or they can confirm them through the mass media. But children bring to historical fiction little knowledge of particular periods of history and must rely on the author's accuracy in this field.

Usually, the writer of historical fiction aims to tell a story set in a past time, a time of which the majority of the book's readers have little or no knowledge. The past comes alive through the pages of historical fiction. Not only do children learn about the experiences of others, but they are also being entertained while learning about their heritage. Historical fiction teaches children that all people depend on each other no matter what time they live in, and that people have similar needs throughout history. By reading historical fiction, children can evaluate the actions and relationships of people of the past and realize that past events have implications for today and even the future.

The term multiethnic literature refers to literature dealing with a racial or ethnic minority

group that's socially and culturally different from the majority of white Anglo-Saxons in the United States. Literature in the U.S. predominately centers around the middle-class values and customs of this majority. Multiethnic literature usually centers around Black Americans, American Indians, Hispanic Americans, Puerto Ricans, Cuban Americans, and Asian Americans. Reading multiethnic literature builds children's respect for other cultures, helping them to realize that there are differences between themselves and other cultures, but there are a host of things we have in common. Finally, multiethnic books build self-esteem of people who are a part of these racial and ethnic minorities. These children will discover that they have roots in a cultural heritage of which they can be proud.

Biography may be defined as that part of literature that deals with the history of individual men's and women's lives. Therefore, there are three essential ingredients in a good biography: history, the person, and literary artistry. Facts should be authentic and verifiable; the subject should be considered as an individual rather than as a type or

pattern; and the writing should be a conscious work of art. Thus, biographies require much research on the part of the author so that the characters are believable and the script is authentic.

Children read informational books to satisfy a curiosity, whether their books have been chosen to answer questions of a particular subject or to fulfill a desire for broader knowledge. The best informational books are those which are accurate and not stereptyping, have accurate illustrations which clarify the text, are current, and contain simplified material with a limited scope of the subject for the intended audience. The organization in an informational book should be logically sequenced and helpful. Children can find informational books for practically any area in which they have an interest.

Biographies and informational books are a fun way for children to learn and discover new things. Their knowledge of the world is broadened, and children are encouraged to develop their ability to think critically. Finally, children are introduced to a

scientific method while increasing their appreciation of those people who use it.

CHAPTER SIX

Reading Instruction:

Types, Explanation, Position

Basal reading instruction traditionally uses a basal textbook and a skills workbook. The beginning point of this instruction is the teaching of phonics which leads to the decoding of words. Words are broken into pieces of specific sounds. Students then reassemble those sounds making whole words which produce meaning. The idea is that children learn best by moving from the part to the whole. This "bottom up" approach begins with sounds and ends with entire stories.

A second important component of basal instruction is skills-learning. Reading skills are taught first so that a child can learn to read. Advanced skills are taught later so a child can become a better reader. Skill instruction in a basal series may or may not come out of the story. The skills often become more important than the story, its style, and its content. The power of the basal lies in skill sequencing and a controlled vocabulary.

Whole language reading instruction begins with a collective story from the entire class based on their experience. From this story, the children learn meaning, and using meaning they identify ideas and specific correlating words. They also learn patterns of words and the relationship between words. Using these words they then create their own individual stories. The learning of reading skills comes indirectly out of what the child has written. As children progress in their reading, they incorporate other literature from a variety of sources. Their writing and skill-learning then come from these sources. This "top to bottom" approach is based on the idea that the most successful way to develop language competency is by actually using the language. Literature-based reading instruction uses authentic literature in the form of trade books as its primary teaching medium. The vocabulary and story of these books is exactly what the author wrote and intended. This exposes children to rich language and to stories containing quality depth and emotion. Children now read an entire story, experiencing the story from its

setting to the solution of the problem. Children get to know the characters and their motivations more completely, they realize the tone of the story better, and they understand the plot, its development, and solution as a whole. Children also get a better appreciation of an author's style and character.

Literature-based instruction uses various combinations of student and teacher interaction. A student and teacher can discuss a story, and a student can be given the opportunity to respond to a story. This allows students to become thoughtful readers, and thinking readers lead to proficient readers. Literature-based reading encourages students to read for information; to find out what is in the real world around them. In that way they can understand and relate to real world situations. Finally, literature-based reading instills in children a love for reading. Reading becomes an enjoyable experience because we're reading real books opening up real worlds.

The most important task of educators in the area of reading is to give students the skills necessary to become proficient and avid readers. We not only need

to teach children how to read but also to instill in them the joy and excitement of reading. Only then will they become true readers. It's the position of this paper that a literature-based reading program presents the best context for reaching these goals.

Research clearly indicates the need for systematic, early instruction in phonics. The same research also indicates that phonics, in and of itself, does not lead to success and independence in reading. Context, phonics, recognition of word parts, comparing unknown words to known words, and the ability to recognize words are all important in word identification. In order to develop a strategy for identifying words and understanding their meanings, students need to learn to use a balanced combination of all these elements. Phonetic skills cannot be taught at the expense of comprehension, and meaning cannot be divorced from word recognition. In order for meaning to be constructed, a child must use his or her prior knowledge and the print that's been created by the author. It's the position of this paper that the most effective program for primary reading instruction is a

program which is primarily literature-based and meaning-based but also systematically teaches word-recognition strategies. Complimenting this program, reading and writing skills, speaking and listening, taught within the context of meaningful literature, will strengthen and increase a child's reading ability. In order to give children the most comprehensive reading instruction, a teacher must select components from all three approaches and combine them with good creative teaching practices.

Observation and testing of my third grade class lead me to this position. Children have a healthier and happier attitude toward reading. What a student/child likes to do, he/she does better. Test results also indicate that students are making stronger reading progress than some of their peers.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Methods and Procedures

Children's literature plays a big part in my classroom. The reading program in my classroom centers around children's trade books. I have in my room a large supply and a wide variety of trade books, some of which I own and others of which belong to the public library. Children choose books which they like to read. The only requirement having to do with their choice is that it cannot be a book that is below their reading ability; those books are acceptable for leisure time reading but may not be used during the "structured" reading period.

A first component of my reading program is individualized reading. Using Jennete Ueatch's guidelines, I teach my children four main skills in regards to this reading period: (1) how to choose books wisely, (2) how to get books and read them without disturbing others, (3) how to get the help they need without disturbing others, and (4) how to prepare a story for me.

First, children are encouraged to pick a book they

think they'll like. To check readability, they are to choose a middle page with a lot of words. Next, read the page silently. If the child comes to an unfamiliar word, he or she must put down his or her thumb. If, on the same page, the child finds another unfamiliar word, put down their first finger, and so on. If the child uses up all their fingers on one hand, the book is too hard, so put it back and try another. I also encourage children to pick different types of literature from time to time. I make available to them all the eight types mentioned in this paper.

Secondly, since children are beginning and ending books at different times, they must be able to select and read books without disturbing others. I require them to be quiet and respect the rights of those reading.

Next, when children need help with a word, I encourage them to seek help from several sources. They can go to a dictionary. They may ask a friend or me. They can figure it out from the word context or from an accompanying picture. Often a beginning will help them recognize the word. It's also just fine to guess,

especially when it's a good story.

Finally, the children need to prepare the books they read for a conference with me. I tell them to choose a book, and read it to themselves. They need to have a good handle on the story. As children finish their books, they sign up to have a conference with me. In five to ten minutes I'll find out the main idea and story plot, the child's interest in his or her book. In short, we talk together one-on-one about what the child read. To conclude the conference, the child reads a small selection of the book to me that he or she has prepared and practiced.

A second component of my reading program is working through a trade book as an entire class. Each child has a copy of the same book. At times I read with them. As I read, I explain vocabulary words, specific characters, and meaning. At the end of the passage, we have a general discussion usually centered around the problem of and if and how it was resolved. At other times, I assign a passage to be read individually, or aloud in small groups. I circulate among the groups for short discussions, and after the

passage is finished by all students, we again engage in an entire class discussion. At times, preceding the general discussion, I give question sheets on the passage to stimulate thinking and lead into the discussion. A listing of the books I have and use is in the appendix.

Another way besides trade books that I make literature come alive in my classroom is by having a poetry corner. Each month I feature a new theme using poetry books that give samplings of that theme by many different authors. Throughout the month, I read selected passages to the children from many different books hoping to introduce them to many types of poetry. These poems may include lyrics, ballads, narratives, limericks, concrete rhymes, free verse, and Haiku. Besides varying styles, I also want them to realize that poetry may be written on practically any topic.

Not only do I want children during the year to appreciate poetry, but also I want them to write and to share poetry. An excellent way to write poetry is to imitate the style and verse of others. Each day of one special poetry week becomes a certain type of poetry

day. Monday is limerick day. I first read to the Let's Marry Said the Cherry. After reading this collection, we discuss what a limerick is. Then we write. After we write, we edit our original copies. Then we share our poems with the class and they become the first section of our week long poetry display. We also collect our poems and make them into poetry books.

Tuesday is Haiku day. I begin by reading Haiku: The Mood of the Earth and Haiku-Vision: In Poetry and Photography. Then we continue in the same manner as on Monday. Wednesday is color poem day. I begin by sharing Hailstones and Halibut Bones and then continue on as done on previous days. Thursday is cinquain day and on Friday we do A-B-C poems. By week's end we have listened to, written, shared, and displayed five different kinds of poetry. From time to time I repeat poetry week varying the kinds of poetry but following the same pattern.

We also incorporate creative dramatics into our study of poetry. Children are given an opportunity to make stories come alive in the classroom. I read a book to the entire class. I then divide the class into

groups according to the number of characters needed. I give the groups time to practice, and then we present our stories for our classmates. Three of my favorite books for this activity are Hilary Knight's The Owl and the Pussy Cat, The Night Before Christmas, and Jonathan Bing.

A third activity I emphasize during poetry time is choral speaking and singing. I use soloists and single speakers, small groups, and the entire class as a choir and in group speaking. Two excellent resources are Pierre: A Cautionary Tale for Chorale Speaking and American Folk Songs for Children--In Home, School, and Nursery School.

My classroom, as part of their regular literary experience, goes to the library once a week on Friday. Together we have a quiet reading time for thirty minutes. I also arrange a half-an-hour storytime with the school librarian frequently. Four times a year, I take my class to Herrick Public Library. There I give them the opportunity to select up to three books, go through the check-out process, and then read those books. Some of those times I arrange with the

librarian to have a special presentation about the library, a short film, or storytime.

Children need time to read to become proficient readers. Each day I have a time of silent reading. The class is given from twenty minutes to a half hour to read. This includes the teacher. During this time, we share nothing and interrupt no one. Our focus is on our books, discovering what's in them and enjoying them.

I also use children's literature in my classroom to stir ideas for creative writing. One of my favorite books to use is Dr. Suess's And To Think That I Saw It On Mulberry Street. I first read this book to them. After reading this selection and sharing the silly illustrations, we talk about using our own imaginations. Then each child writes his own interpretation of what he might see on the street where he lives. Each child also illustrates his story. Finally, each child shares his story with the class.

Children enjoy reading, but they also enjoy being read to. This exposes them to a variety of literature, teaches them oral expression, and makes them better

listeners. Each school day, I read to my class, and they look forward to that time. I use several trade books, some of which are my choice and some of which are on a required reading list. Often after I have finished a book I will give a book talk on a corresponding book written by the same author. This gives the child an impetus to select that book for their own reading next time. A sample of the books I enjoy reading to my class are in the appendix.

Reading seems to fit best as part of the language arts program, but reading can also be incorporated into other subject areas. Children must read something in every subject area, however, trade books can be used in Social Studies and Math as well as the textbook. Two excellent books I've used to introduce geometric shapes are Circles, Triangles, and Squares, and Shapes, Shapes, Shapes, both by Tana Hoban. To try and get across the largeness of a million, I use the marvelously illustrated book by D.M. Swartz, How Much Is A Million? One of our units in Social Studies deals with the first communities in what is now the United States. During the course of this unit, I enjoy

reading Laura Ingalls Wilder's Little House on the Prairie followed by its sequel Little Town on the Prairie. Both of these books allow children to take a look into the past in a much more enjoyable way than just reading a textbook.

This process exposes children to a wide variety of literature, instills in them an enjoyment for reading, allows them to respond to literature, and inspires them to read more. However, there are certain skills discussed from the literature that need to be reinforced. I believe a good way to do this is by using basal skill sheets that match. From our basal series, I select certain sheets that strengthen children's skills necessary to master word attack and comprehension. Some of the skills most important to third graders are topic and main idea, summarizing, base words and prefixes and suffixes, sequencing, fact and opinion, and referencing skills. These skill sheets not only reinforce, but can also provide a beginning point for more creative writing. From a main idea can come a descriptive paragraph, and from an encyclopedia can come a report. This makes our skill

sheets an integral part of our reading and writing process.

Every reading program needs an evaluation, and every child in this type of program must be measured. This is done formally and informally, objectively and subjectively. The program's success I measure by the end result.

The goal of my reading program is to get my children to read of and by themselves. I want them to enjoy books and see new worlds that these books can open to them. To measure the success of that goal, I ask myself the question, "Are my students responding in their spare time?" Happily I can answer, "Yes!" There is no better way to learn and grow than by reading. If they're willing to read in their spare time at school and at home, children are becoming successful readers. A way in which to monitor the amount a child is reading in his spare time is to keep a record of the number of books read, and the number of pages read, or the amount of time spent. At various times, I put up charts in my classroom to record this, and at times I have the children keep individual charts. I also participate in

the Pizza Hut Book-It Program which gives each child an individual reward for time read, and the class gets a group reward if everyone achieves a required goal.

The individual conference is an effective way to evaluate a child's understanding and comprehension of a particular book. As stated previously, a child is asked numerous questions about what he has read. If he can talk about the book logically and comprehensively, then mastery reading (learning) has taken place. If he is unable to discuss the book, then the opposite is true and he must review or even reread the book.

I also evaluate a student's knowledge of a particular trade book by giving him an activity to do with the book. One time I might have a child write a book report. Another time I might have him or her describe or act out a favorite scene from the story. Sometimes children share a book with the class or make a poster advertising the book. If a number of children have read the same book, that group can put together a puppet show and present it to the class.

More formal evaluations are made using theme tests that correspond to our basal units. I grade skill

sheets and use skill tests that cover the skills we have discussed and enforced. At times, I use a skill survey to measure progress on skills covered. I use an oral language checklist and an oral reading summary to evaluate progress in those areas. To arrive at a more exact measurement, I will from time to time give informal reading inventories and a standardized achievement test. I keep a collective portfolio on each student so they, their parents, and I can see reading and writing progress. These evaluations help me to know where my class is going and if I need to make adjustments to better meet the needs of my class.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Results Evaluation

Without a long and comprehensive research project, it is impossible to definitely say that my reading program yields better results than others. However, I believe my reading program does produce better readers and life-long readers as well. This chapter will produce evidence and reasons for this position.

At the beginning of each school year, I give my class a Reading Attitudes and Habits Inventory. It asks what each child likes to read, how often they read, what they do in their spare time, and where reading fits in a priority list. Near the end of the year, I gave them the same inventory. The results of this inventory have consistently shown encouraging results. Reading has taken a higher place on the priority scale. The amount of time children read at the end of the year is generally 50 to 100 percent greater than when they entered my class. They now can easily list several books that they have shared or wish to share with friends and classmates, where at first that list was very short, or they didn't have one. The

children are reading more and enjoying it more.

Our school participates in the Pizza Hut Book-It Program. When I taught strictly the basal series, my class never earned a pizza party. Since I began a literature-based approach, I have had a party every year. Generally, in the past, as the five months of the program progressed, each month our class read fewer minutes. Now, each month's total of minutes read increases. By the last month, February, my children are very "into" my reading program, and they read the greatest amount of time. They often ask to extend the "Book-it" program, or do something similar to record time spent outside of the classroom.

When a child finishes a trade book, I have a fifteen minute conference about that book with that child. I ask him/her questions about the story setting, its characters, the plot or problem of the story, and its solutions. I find the children well prepared to answer these questions and eager to share their story. We go on discussing the mood of the story, the feelings of characters, and how those feelings relate to us. Did they feel the same as the char-

acters, and when do they have those kinds of feelings in their lives? They also prepare a passage to read to me, and from that I do an oral language survey. Because this is a book they have chosen, and because the passage to be read is a favorite part, the students are very excited and prepared to share their book.

Our present basal system is divided into themes. Each theme teaches the children a different kind of literature. Each theme also teaches skills that can be found in the selections. I assign the stories and teach the skills. To evaluate their progress on this, I give the theme tests. I then go on to strengthen those skills, and we do a trade book that follows the theme's style of literature. I only give the tests after we have done the trade book. I have found this improves the scores on the theme test. I also give a Skill Test after we have reviewed the skills and found examples in our trade book.

Each day our class has a silent reading time. In the past I would be asked by some if they had to read. Others would pass the time looking at a book not really reading. Since I have begun a literature-based system,

children look forward to this time, often asking me when it will be, and request that it be longer. The room is always perfectly quiet, and I often give one child one minute to summarize what he/she has read at the end of the time. I usually have several volunteers.

I use several checklists to keep track of what my children are doing in reading. I use a General Observation Checklist to record any positive or negative progress in any area of reading. The weak area are focus points for one on one instruction. I use an Oral Reading Summary to evaluate their oral reading. It shows if they are reading the text correctly. A pattern of their substitutions will show if a student really understands what he/she is reading. An Oral Language Checklist evaluates how well a child can express his/her language. It also shows the strength of a child's listening skills and gives opportunity to correct or improve any weakness. I have found that my reading program has made children much more verbal, and they express themselves more articulately. To evaluate my class' skills progress, I

use a Student Progress Summary. Where weaknesses appear, I use individual help or small group instruction to strengthen those areas. When I use ideas out of their trade book to work on these skills, they are more willing and ready to cooperate and learn.

An Informal Reading Inventory is a powerful tool to gauge a child's reading ability. It is given in a one-on-one setting and will show a student's strengths and weaknesses. Because of its nature, it is very time consuming, and is generally unnecessary for most students. I use the I. R. I. only on very high or very low students. In this way I can plan a curriculum to meet their individual needs for remediation or enrichment.

In the past, every year at parent-teacher conferences, a certain number of parents would share their concern about their child's attitude toward reading and about their child's ability to read. With a literature-based approach, these concerns have greatly diminished. Parents are now sharing with me their child's excitement of reading. They also feel that some of their child's reading problems have

disappeared because their child now has a different attitude toward reading. They want to share at home the book they are reading, and they read at home without being asked or coerced. Parents have also become enthused about this program.

Once a week, my class has a thirty minute library period. This time is not necessarily a quiet time, but it is a very enthusiastic time. The children are very active and busy. They are using a card catalog looking for books by the same author that they have read, or we are reading as a class. They are offering suggestions to their classmates, recommending books they have discovered. They are summarizing books and discussing traits of certain authors they now recognize. Then when they have found the right book, they are eager to go to a quiet area and begin discovering what that book holds. The student themselves have become their own best library assistants.

Starting at the beginning of the school year, I keep a reading and writing portfolio on each student. Into that portfolio go reading and writing samples of the entire year. I do select and choose so the

portfolio does not get too cumbersome. I do not necessarily place into each child's portfolio the same papers. The purpose of this portfolio is to give a representative sample of a child's work, to show reading and writing progress throughout the year, and to evaluate a child's work. The portfolio is always open to the student. At times I review the portfolio with the child, and I also review pages put into the portfolio for a specific reason. A child also has the option of adding a paper to this collection. A student keeps a written log of the books he/she has read. This allows me to check how much a child is reading and the diversity of books being read.

Every autumn, our school gives to its students the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. This is a comprehensive battery of tests that measures the achievements of each student in a variety of subject areas. Included in these tests are a Reading Vocabulary and a Reading Comprehension test. My students were given this test in November of third grade, and again in October of fourth grade. That's a time span of eight school months and eleven chronological months. Most of that time was

spent in my third grade. The results of their tests represent progress mostly gained while a part of my third grade classroom.

An "average" student should show one year of progress from one year's test to the next. Therefore, if a child is given a test in the third month of third grade, and he scores at grade level, his score should be 3.3. That same, at grade level student, should show a score of 4.2 in the second month of fourth grade. These are grade equivalent scores. If a student is below grade level, his progress from one year to the next, might well be less than one year, and if a student is above grade level, we would expect more than one year of progress. The proportions and percentages of progress can be calculated.

In vocabulary, students B, D, and E made more progress than we would expect on average. Student A made one full year's progress in 11 months, but his beginning score was low. Therefore, we would have expected him to make less than one year's progress in this time frame. Student C made exactly one year's progress in eleven months. Normally, we would consider

this acceptable, and it very closely is. However, student C began one year ahead of grade equivalent in third grade, and at fourth grade testing had gained one year and one month. His progress should have been somewhat greater because he is an above average student.

In the area of reading comprehension, four students made substantial progress, more than we would expect. Students A, C, D, E showed a greater gain in their grade equivalent scores than we would normally have found if we plotted their average individual expected increases. Student B showed one year of progress in the eleven calendar months. Again, while we at first would consider this acceptable, he began at least two years ahead of class average, and we would expect his progress to be greater than one year. It is interesting to note that student C, who made only acceptable gains in vocabulary, showed very strong gains in reading comprehension. The results show generally, that stronger progress was made in reading comprehension than in vocabulary. While we do want children to know and understand words, we are more

concerned about their understanding of meaning.

Percentile scores give a clearer picture. A percentile score gives a rank order of where a child stands in relation to his peers on a continuum from one to a hundred. A percentile of one says that all students his grade level performed better on the test than he did. Likewise, a percentile score of 100 puts a student at the very top of his class.

Increases and decreases in percentile scores quickly show how much progress a student has made relative to the average. If a child stays in the same percentile position, he has made the average progress relative to his peers. If his percentile position decreases, he has made less than average progress according to his peers, and he has made less than a year's progress according to his own individual standard. Likewise, a gain in percentile scores says he is making more than his expected progress. Increases in percentile scores are what we hope for because it shows that a child is not only learning more, but he is also becoming a stronger learner.

In my study of five students, four gained in

placement on the percentile ranking in vocabulary. The greatest gain was eleven points. The student losing position lost three points. The average gain for these five students was just over five points each.

The comprehension part of the test showed bigger percentile gains. Again, four of five students showed progress. The greatest gain was eighteen position points, and the single decrease was two points. The average gain in comprehension was 6.4 percentile points.

This sample and its results does not prove to me that my reading program will yield better progress than another program. However, the strength of increased grade equivalent scores, and the progress in percentile rankings, do indicate to me that my reading program does allow my students to make greater strides in reading progress than one would usually expect.

CHAPTER NINE

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

Reading is an essential life skill. It is the responsibility of the schools to guarantee reading success. Teachers must use all the resources available to them to reach that goal, but they must evaluate and then select which methods promise greater reading success.

There are some important maxims to the teaching of reading. First, kids learn in a variety of ways. No teacher should continually rely on one teaching method or a single resource to meet the needs of each and every student. A teacher must be aware of and open to what is available. Secondly, kids learn better if they are excited about learning. Human nature says any person does better those things he enjoys doing. A child will read more if he does it better. Therefore, it is the teachers responsibility to motivate children to read, and this is accomplished as children see their own success. Thirdly, kids need to be broader readers. They must be exposed to a wide variety of types of

literature and subjects of literature. There are so many different kinds of stories, some with long histories and rich traditions. We live in a global society. Students need to know the cultures and people of other countries. Kids need these stories. Finally, kids are individuals. One same story cannot meet the needs and abilities of every student. Ability grouping labels children and hinders self-esteem. Individual children need individual books.

A literature-based program accompanied by the basic reading skills taught from the literature will best accomplish the goal of successful readers. This program offers a variety of literature, realizes individual differences, recognizes necessary skills, and motivates and excites children to read. Real children will be reading real books and growing into a real world.

Recommendations

My first recommendation to any new or experienced teacher would be to totally adopt a literature-based program integrating basic skills. However, not all teachers may feel comfortable with this program, and

feeling comfortable is necessary. Therefore, teachers may want to take steps, using parts of this program along side of a basal series, or progressing into it over time.

A beginning step would be to incorporate a trade book into the curriculum every six to nine weeks. This book may be related to some part of your curriculum, or it could be totally separate. Each child should have a copy of the book. Work through the book as a class, drawing skills and activities from the book. Discuss its vocabulary, its characters, its plot, and its meaning. Several resources are available on particular trade books at teacher supply stores. These are very helpful, reduce the teacher's work load, and lend guidelines to good teaching.

A second step would be to assign a trade book for each class member to read independently. Children are going to need varying amounts of help because of various reading levels. However, the book does become their assignment. When finished, the student will feel a real sense of accomplishment by completing an entire book. From this book various activities can proceed.

Again, resources are available from several sources.

A third step would be to individualize this process with many books. Allow each child to select his/her own book. A teacher can control the library from which these books are selected. A teacher can also guide the selection as to the interest and difficulty. Set a time frame to complete the book. Using this situation, individual conferences can follow the reading. Children now can discuss and tell orally what they discovered. Reports, activities, question sheets, and skill lessons can also come out of individual books. The basal can still be as much a part of the reading curriculum as the teacher chooses.

A final step would be to use trade books extensively or completely. The basal can compliment these trade books as a resource for most literature. However, the basal still would be considered a textbook, and few students, if any, would complete the entire book.

The classroom now becomes much more individualized, and different students will be doing different things. However, students will spend a lot

of time reading, and by year's end they will have read many books. There is always time to do skill lessons as a class, or as a smaller group. There is also time to do a story or an entire books as an entire class.

Many worlds are waiting to meet our children. As a teacher, inspire your students to meet these new worlds. Supply them with the books they need to discover beyond their experience. Guide them, help them, motivate them, and challenge them to reach just beyond the closest horizon.

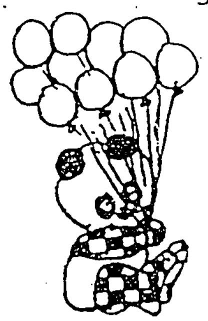
4E Month :

Reading Deposit Ticket

Day	Minutes
SUNDAY	
MONDAY	
TUESDAY	
WEDNESDAY	
THURSDAY	
FRIDAY	
SATURDAY	

TOTAL MINUTES ________

Parent's Signature ____________

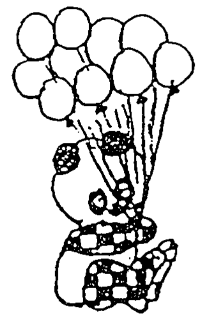


Reading Deposit Ticket

Day	Minutes
SUNDAY	
MONDAY	
TUESDAY	
WEDNESDAY	
THURSDAY	
FRIDAY	
SATURDAY	

TOTAL MINUTES ________

Parent's Signature ____________

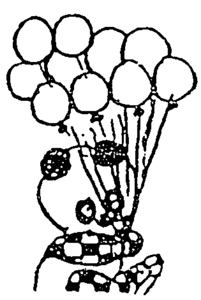


Reading Deposit Ticket

Day	Minutes
SUNDAY	
MONDAY	
TUESDAY	
WEDNESDAY	
THURSDAY	
FRIDAY	
SATURDAY	

TOTAL MINUTES ________

Parent's Signature ____________

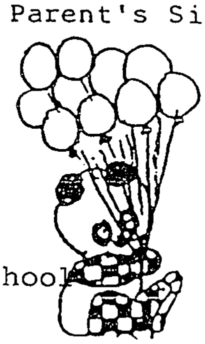


Reading Deposit Ticket

Day	Minutes
SUNDAY	
MONDAY	
TUESDAY	
WEDNESDAY	
THURSDAY	
FRIDAY	
SATURDAY	

TOTAL MINUTES ________

Parent's Signature ____________



From: Maplewood Chr. School

Maplewood
BOOK IT!
Christian School

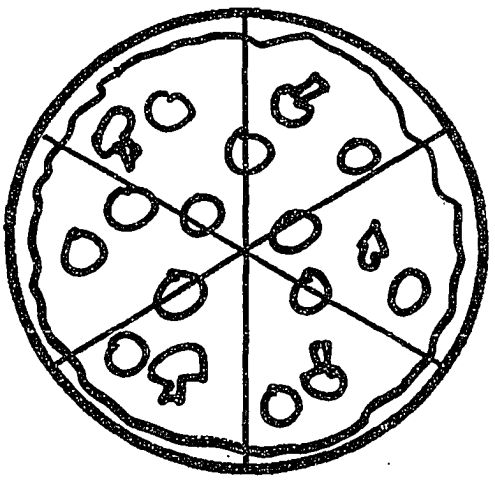
Name: _____

Parent's Signature: _____

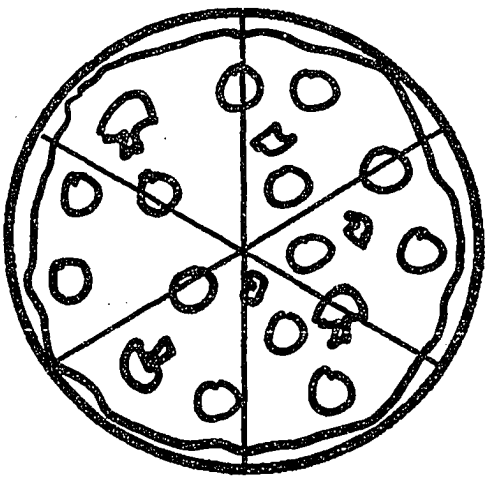
Month: _____

Color a slice of pizza for every fifteen minute "slice" of time that you read.

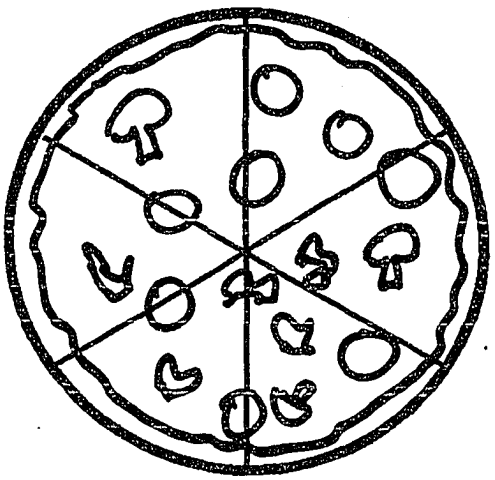
Week 1



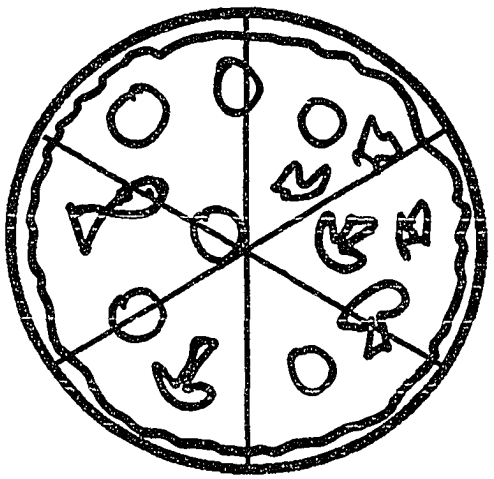
Week 2



Week 3



Week 4



From: Maplewood Christian School

Conference Question Sheet Name _____
Charlotte's Web

1. What do you think of Fern's reaction when her father decided to "do away" with her runt?

2. Wilbur was so lonely that he decided to meet Templeton whom nobody liked. Is it good or bad to have a friend whom nobody likes?

3. Why do you think the animals trusted Fern?

4. How has Charlotte affected your attitude toward spiders?

5. Why did Dr. Dorian say the web was a miracle?

Grades 3 and above

STORY MAP FOR

_____

SETTING

75

_____

IMPORTANT CHARACTERS

1. _____ 5. _____

2. _____ 6. _____

3. _____ 7. _____

4. _____ 8. _____

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM TO BE SOLVED?/WHAT IS THE GOAL?

_____

_____

_____

EVENTS

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

HOW WAS THE PROBLEM SOLVED?/HOW WAS THE GOAL REACHED?

_____

_____

_____

_____

From: Kim and Claudia Katz, Royal Oak, MI

Name _____ Date _____

Book Report

76

Title _____

Author _____

Introduction *(Begin with an interesting opening statement.)* _____

Body *(Tell what the book is about.)* _____

My opinion *(Tell why you liked or didn't like the book.)* _____

Student _____ Date _____

Parent Conference Checklist

77

Show samples of student's work:

Item	Comment

Discuss:

Areas of strength:

Areas needing improvement:

What is being done in class to facilitate growth and improvement:

What can be done at home to facilitate growth and improvement:

Results of tests, surveys, or inventories:

Instrument	Score or range	Comment

Overall progress and goals:

Other:

After-conference notes:

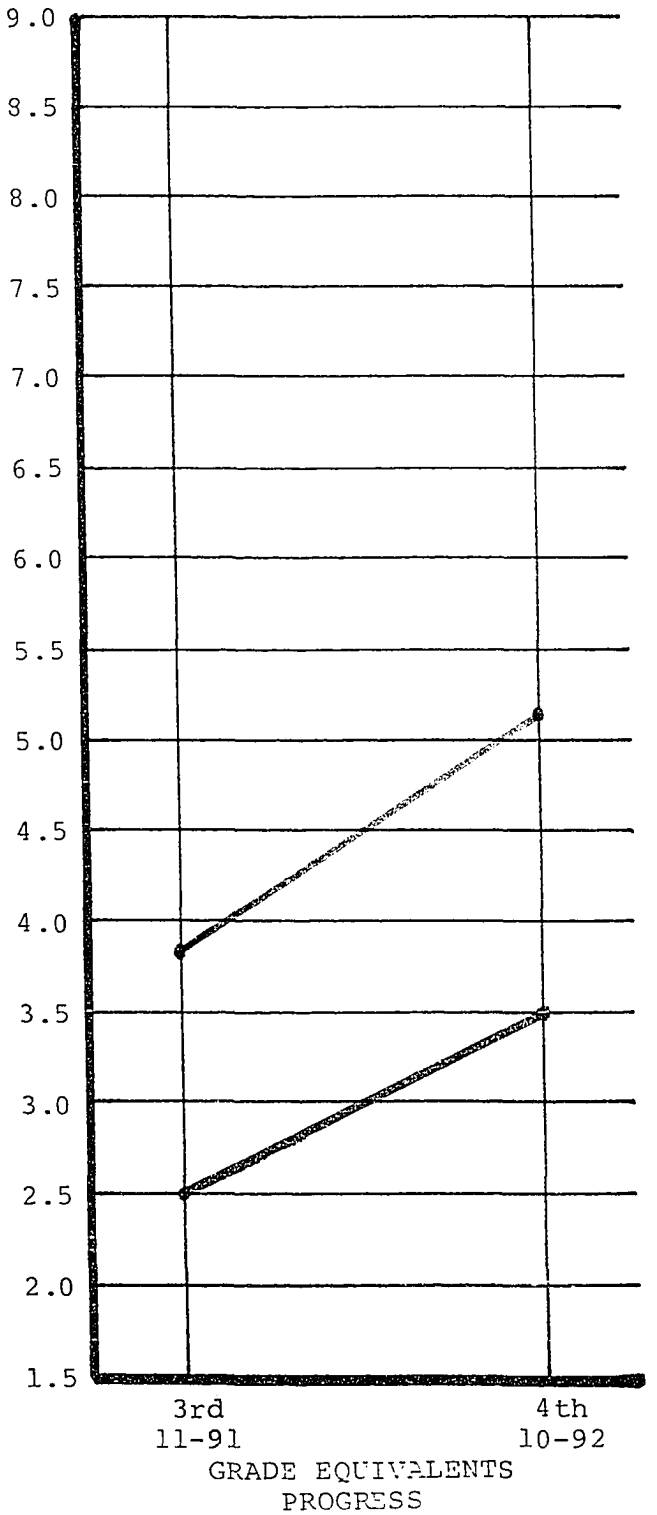
STUDENT A

IOWA TEST OF BASIC SKILLS

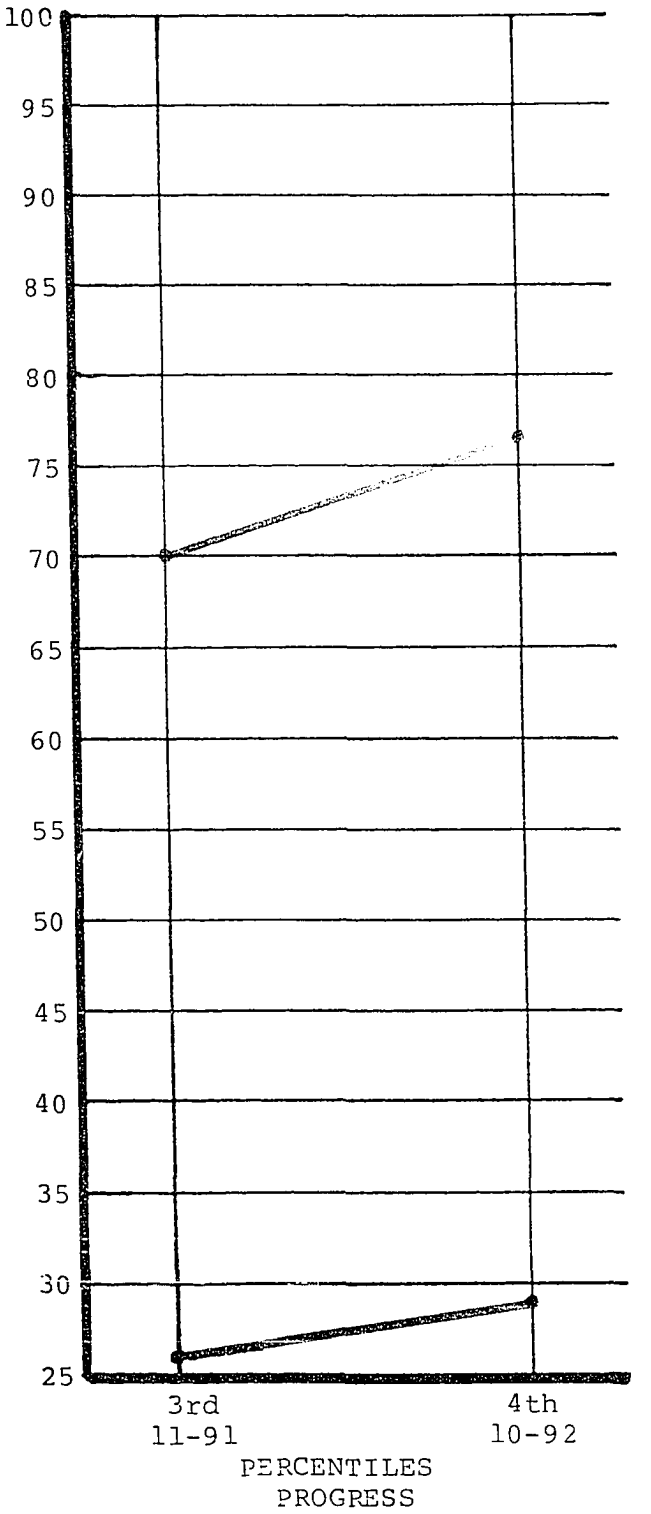
READING PROGRESS

READING VOCABULARY

READING COMPREHENSION



GRADE EQUIVALENTS
PROGRESS



PERCENTILES
PROGRESS

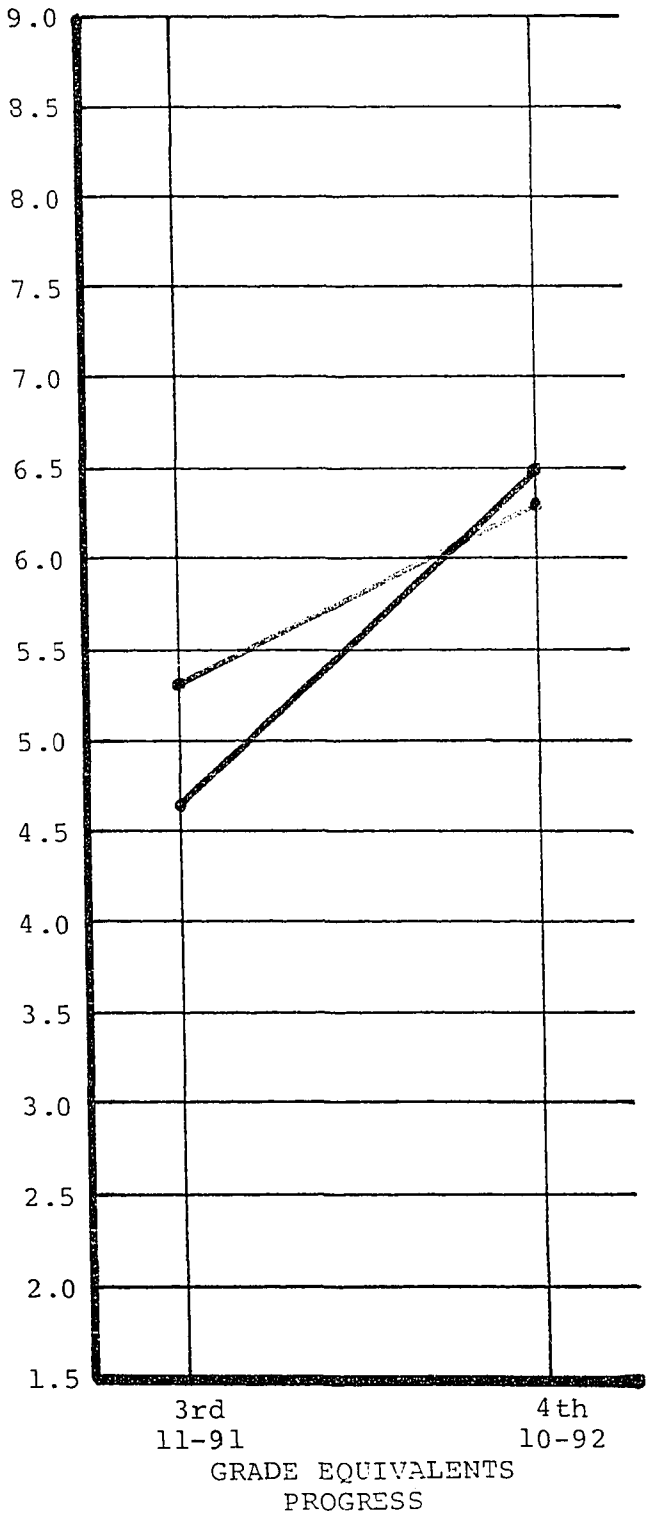
STUDENT B

IOWA TEST OF BASIC SKILLS

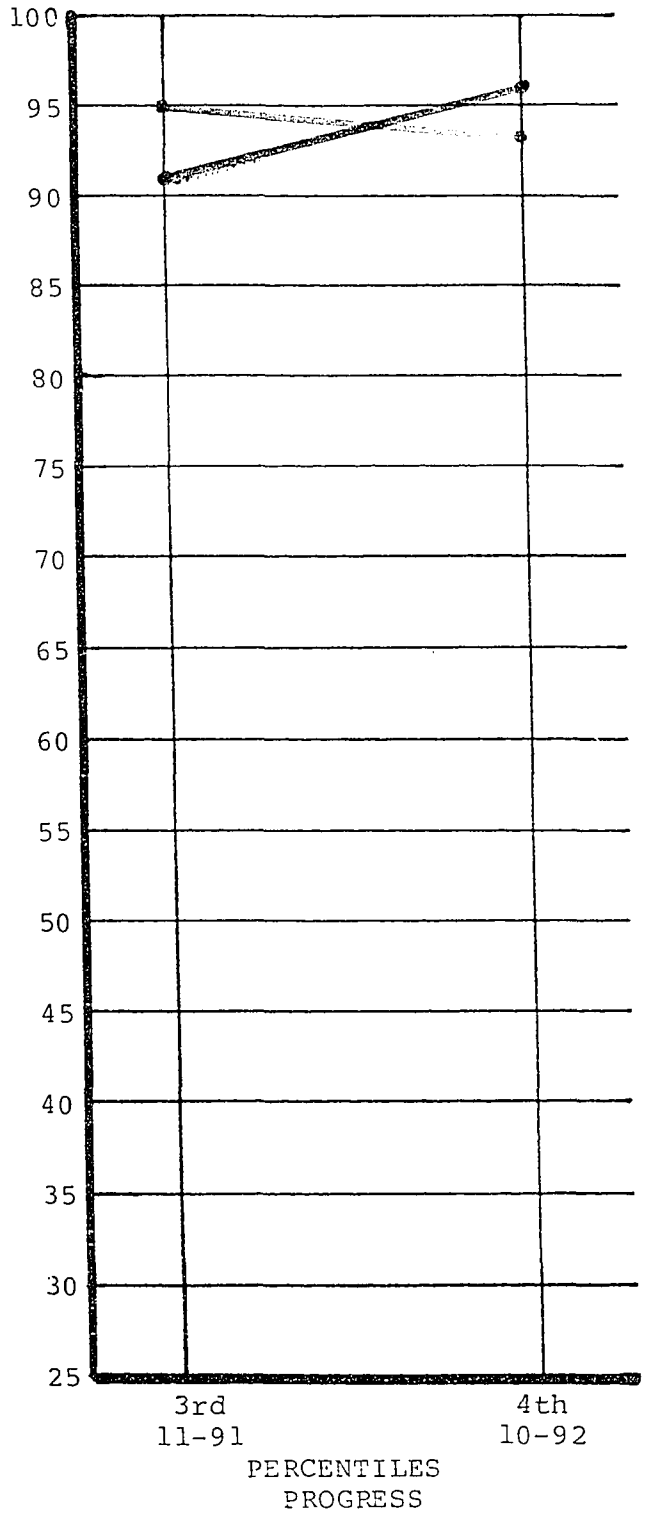
READING PROGRESS

READING VOCABULARY

READING COMPREHENSION



GRADE EQUIVALENTS
PROGRESS



PERCENTILES
PROGRESS

STUDENT C

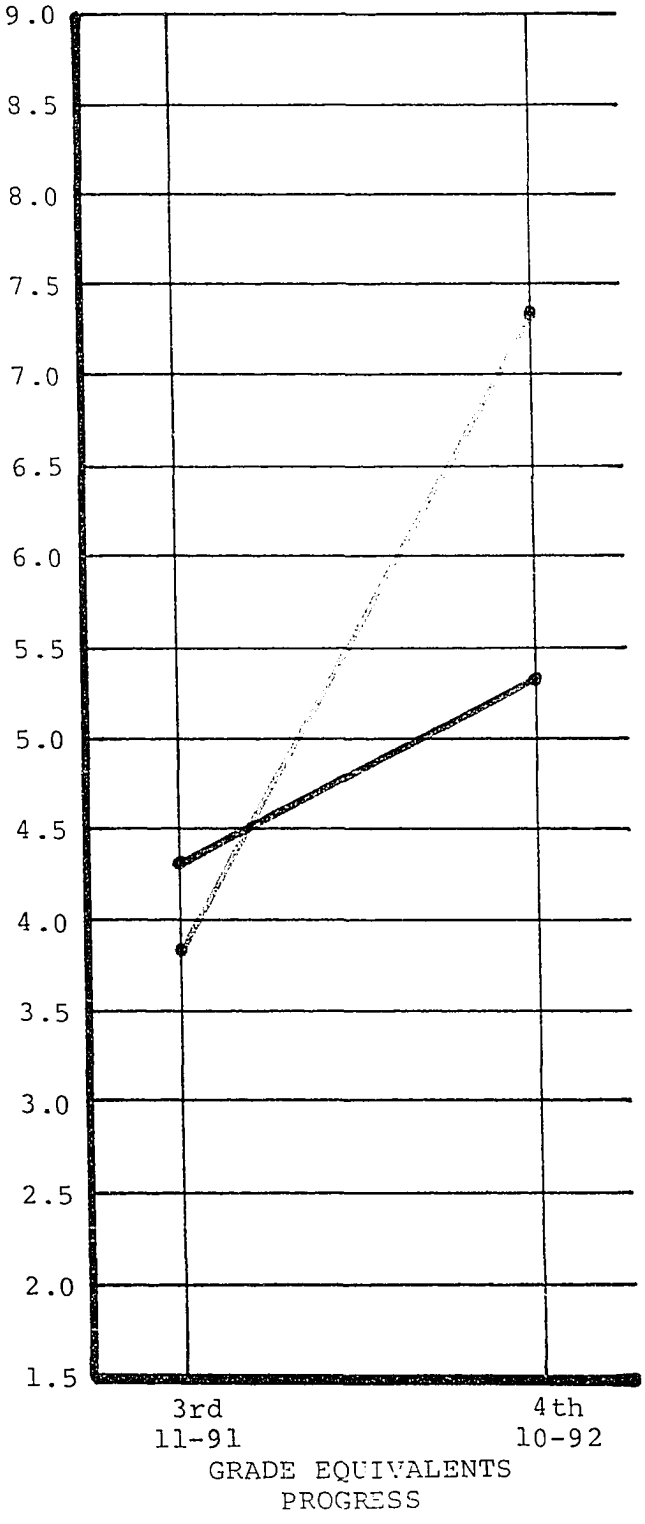
100

IOWA TEST OF BASIC SKILLS

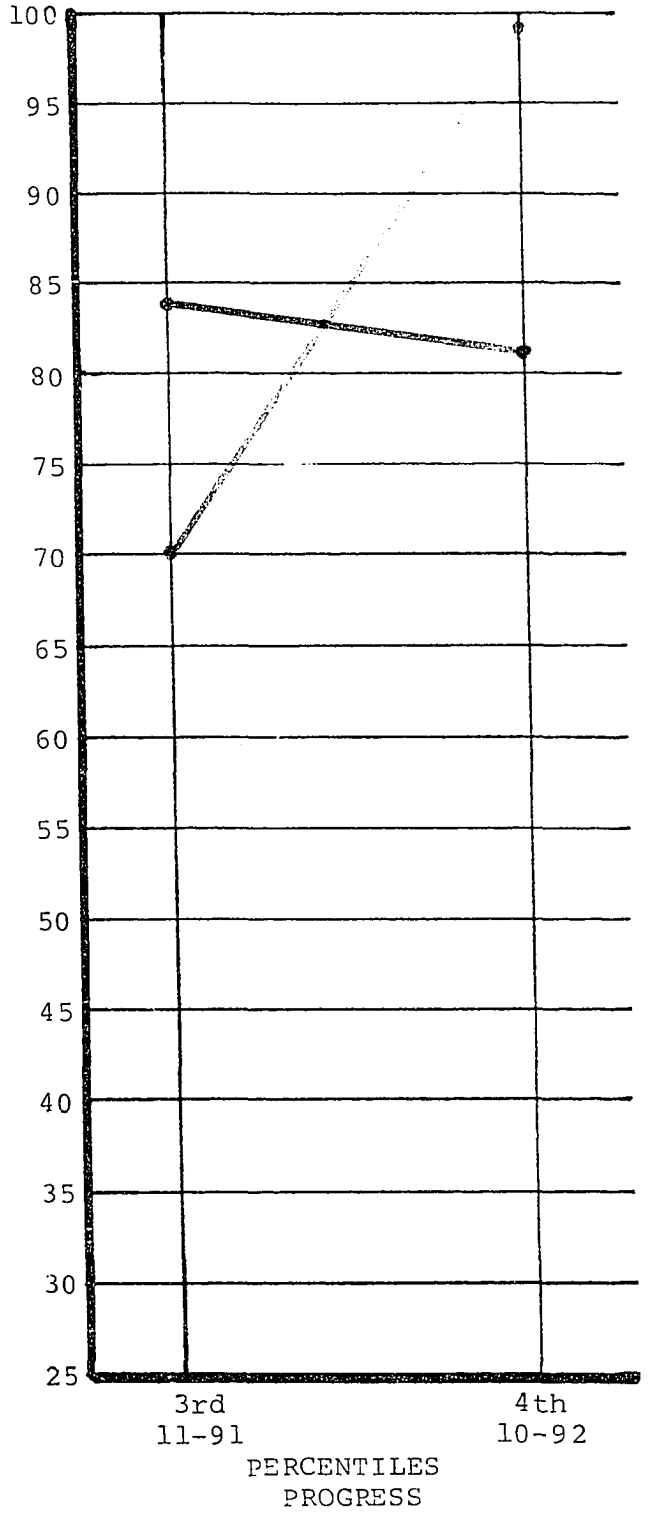
READING PROGRESS

READING VOCABULARY

READING COMPREHENSION



GRADE EQUIVALENTS
PROGRESS



PERCENTILES
PROGRESS

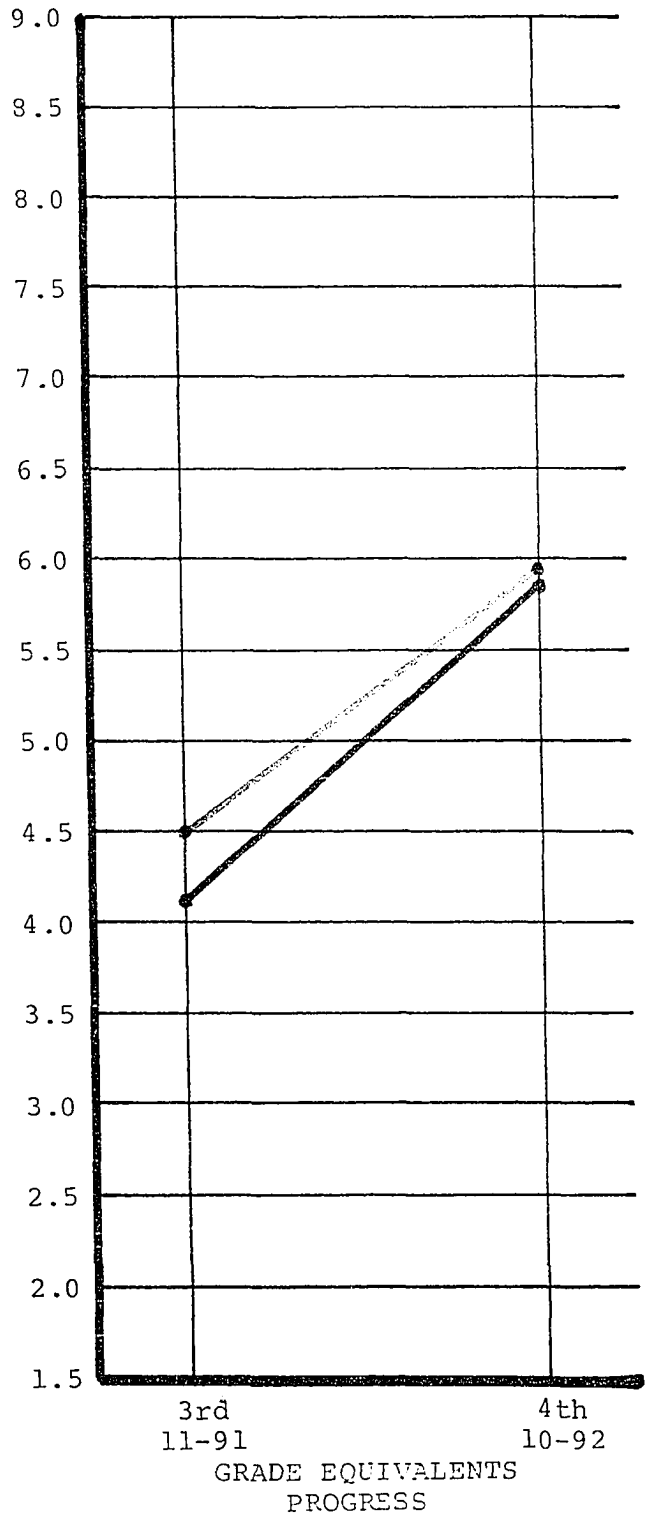
STUDENT D

IOWA TEST OF BASIC SKILLS

READING PROGRESS

READING VOCABULARY

READING COMPREHENSION



GRADE EQUIVALENTS
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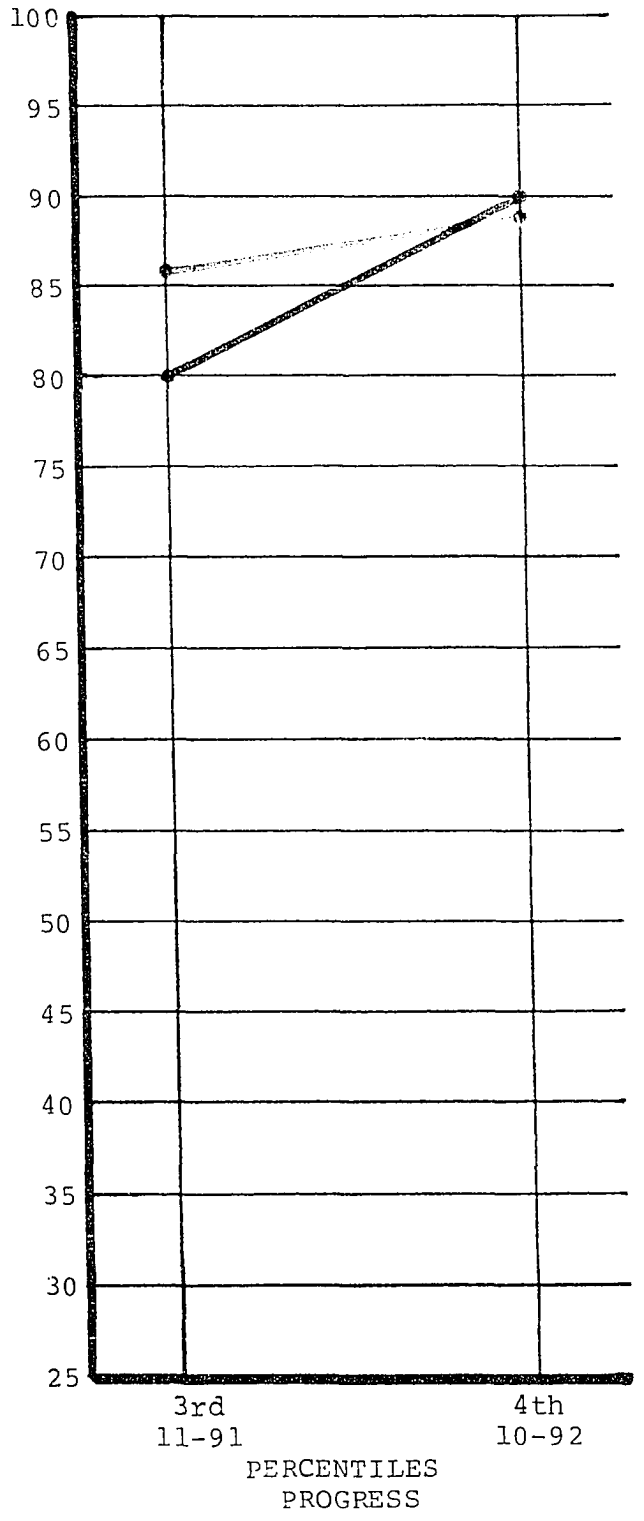

PERCENTILES
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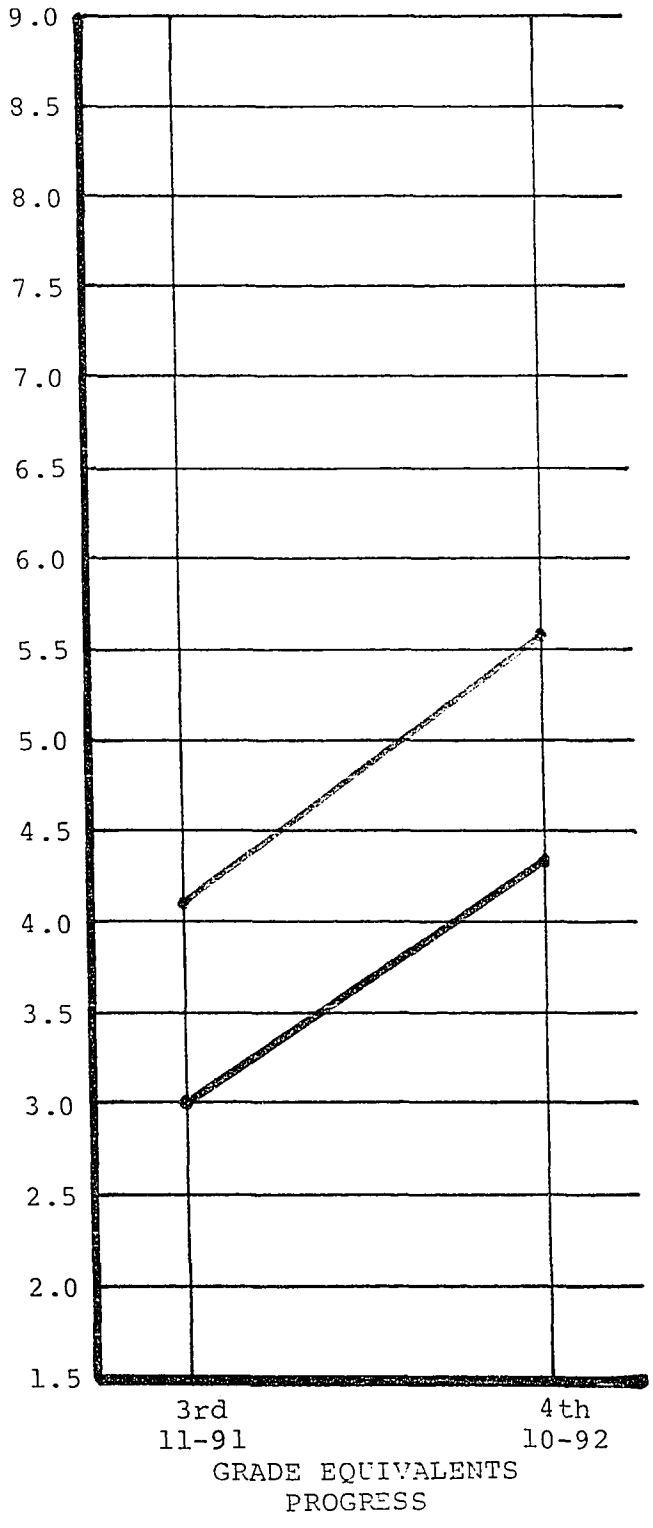
READING PROGRESS

READING VOCABULARY

READING COMPREHENSION



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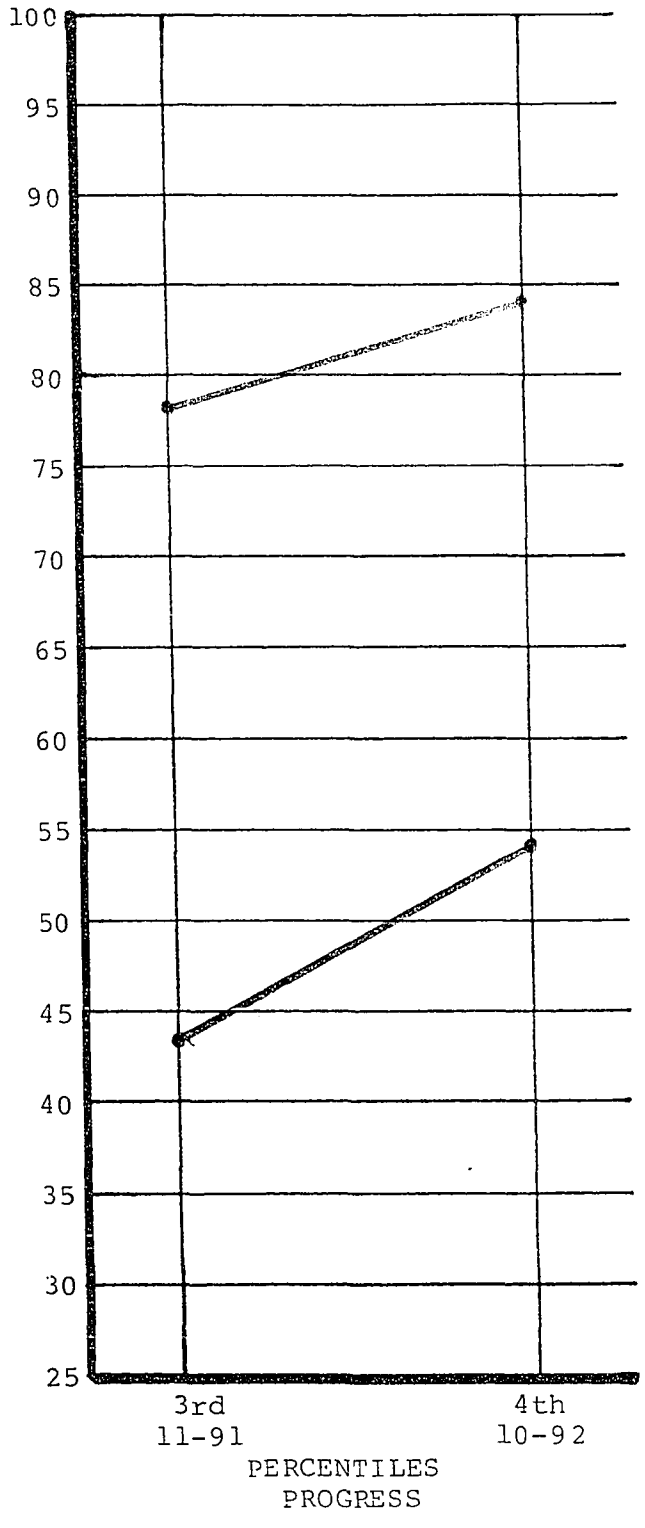

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PROGRESS

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1. Poetry
2. Traditional Literature
3. Modern Fantasy
4. Picture Books
5. Realistic Fiction
6. Historical Fiction
7. Riddles and Jokes
8. Nonfiction
9. Biography
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