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ABSTRACT

All sixth grade pupils in the largest elementary school in New Orleans were involved in a study to assess the effects of social reinforcement on the use of library books. The number of library books used by both experimental and control groups was ascertained and compared. Standard arithmetic procedures were used to establish baseline, experimental, and postexperimental phases for the study. The treatment for the experimental classes consisted of social reinforcement in the form of praise by the librarian when the pupils returned their borrowed library books to the librarian personally instead of placing the books in the usual place. The members of the classes not having used library books were ignored. It was concluded that social reinforcement can (a) increase the utilization of library books by sixth grade pupils and (b) it can increase proper care and prompt returning of library books by sixth grade pupils.
 (Author/JM)

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SOCIAL REINFORCEMENT TO INCREASE THE UTILIZATION
OF LIBRARY BOOKS BY SIXTH GRADE PUPILS

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SOCIAL REINFORCEMENT TO INCREASE
THE UTILIZATION OF LIBRARY
BOOKS BY SIXTH GRADE PUPILS

ABSTRACT

All sixth grade pupils (1-170) in the largest elementary school in New Orleans, Louisiana were involved in a study to assess the effects of Social Reinforcement on the utilization of library books. The number of library books used by both experimental and control groups were ascertained and compared. Standard arithmetic procedures were used to establish a baseline, experimental, and post experimental phase for the study. The treatment for the experimental classes consisted of social reinforcement in the form of praise by the librarian when the pupils returned their borrowed library books to the librarian personally instead of placing the books in the usual place. The members of the classes not having used library books were ignored. Using social reinforcement was considered an effective way to increase the pupil utilization of library books. Increased usage of library books is known to have implication for increased educational achievement.

Subsequent to Title 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, Public Law 89-10, innovations in education have increased and an unprecedented portion of the Gross National product is being spent on education. Still many youngsters are poor and/or non readers. Brown (1971) comments upon disadvantaged youngsters being poor readers when he stated:

Inability to read or to read at all is a common cause of library non-usage in ghetto areas (p.519).

Brown (1971) further alluded to the poor reading habits of youngsters by stating that the disadvantaged often lack the desire to read and that motivation must be aroused first before real library usage can begin.

One of the more recent developments in the utilization of library facilities by elementary school pupils is for librarians and teachers alike to modify the behavior of pupils. Lipsman (1972) summarized the rationale for this recent development when he stated:

The responsibility of the library is extended from that of supplying information to that of actively seeking to modify individual behavior and attitudes (p.12).

This paper deals with a research study which was conducted at a large (1200 pupils) Title 1 Elementary School in New Orleans, Louisiana to determine if the librarian could socially reinforce sixth grade pupils (N=170) and resultantly increase the pupils utilization of library books.

BACKGROUND FOR THE PROBLEM

The hypothesis that increased utilization of library books will improve the educational achievement on the part of pupils has been tested by many researchers. Nearly two decades ago, Day (1956) found that book lovers usually became good readers and that desirable environments tended to motivate interest in reading more books. Similarly, Calhoun (1961) stated that skill in reading can be improved by doing more of it and suggested students be motivated to read more books.

The need to motivate pupils to read more books responds to some of the adverse criticisms of libraries. One major criticism of libraries was advanced by Brown (1971). He contended that many libraries had far too many rigid rules, too much "hush-hush" atmosphere which repelled many noisy and vocal youngsters.

Current practices in motivating youngsters to read more library books involves close personal contact between the librarian and the pupils. The United Teachers of New Orleans accepted this view when they negotiated a contract with the New Orleans Public School System which dictated closer personal contact between the librarian and the pupils using the library during regular school hours. Likewise, Long (1953) contends that in guiding reading, the children's librarian places particular stress on the importance of personal contact with the child.

PROCEDURES

When this study was envisioned, the researcher who was the principal of the school held a conference with the librarian and solicited her voluntary participation in the study. There after, the librarian set up two areas in the library for the sixth grade pupils to return library books when they had completed reading them. The two areas were: (1) the librarians's desk, and (2) a table adjacent to the librarian's desk with a sign on it which stated "place return-library books here." The librarian further instructed the pupils in both the control and the experimental group to place all returned

library books on the table adjacent to her desk for a two week period (baseline). The experimental phase of the study consisted of the pupils returning library books to the librarian personally for a two week period (experimental). The librarian reinforced the pupils during this two week period with smiles and complementary remarks for having read the library books. A two week follow-up period followed the two week experimental period. During the follow-up period, the librarian instructed the experimental group to place their books on the table adjacent to her desk and abstained from reinforcing the pupils with smiles and or complimentary remarks (ignored them).

Throughout the six week period of the study, the three classes in the control group placed their returned library books on the table adjacent to the librarian's desk and did not receive reinforcement. The librarian kept a precise record of the number of books each pupil read.

Subjects

The subjects were 170 sixth grade pupils from six intact classes in an inner city elementary school. The subjects ranged in reading abilities from average and slightly above average to below average and came from economic backgrounds ranging from moderate to low. Each of the six classes was homogenously grouped on the basis of reading achievement test scores.

The six classes were equally divided into two groups; an experimental and a control group. Individual classes were selectively assigned to one of the two groups in an effort to make the groups comparable. That is, each of the two groups had three classes of pupils with comparable reading abilities ranging from slightly above average to below average.

Instrumentation

Standard arithmetic procedures were used to compute the number of library books utilized by the experimental and control group. A baseline, experimental, and follow-up phase was established for the experimental group and comparisons were made to assess the extent to which the treatment effect influenced the utilization of library books. The control group had one six week period of observation without reinforcement.

FINDINGS

A computation of the data results showed the following:

1. More library books were utilized in the experimental phase of the study than in the baseline or follow-up period for each of the three classes in the experimental group.
2. The better readers (class A) consistently read more books than the readers with less reading abilities (classes - B and C).
3. The experimental group utilized more library books than did the control group.
4. When the matched classes were paired (better readers vs. better readers), the better readers in the experimental group utilized more books than the better readers in the control group. However, the number of books read by the better readers in the experimental and control groups were approximate when comparing the paired group during the baseline and follow-up phases of the study.
5. The classes in the experimental group had fewer losses of books and returned books more promptly than did the classes in the control group.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study support the following conclusions:

1. Social reinforcement can increase the utilization of library books by sixth grade pupils.
2. Social reinforcement can increase responsibility of sixth grade pupils as it relates to proper care and prompt returning library books.
3. Social reinforcement has great potential for improving the educational achievement on the part of sixth grade pupils.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A follow-up study be made to compare the reading achievement, as measured by a standardized reading test, between the learners in the experimental and control groups.
2. This study be replicated in grades other than grade six.
3. Social reinforcement be used to improve educational achievement.

TABLE 1

Library Books Read Per Sixth Grade Class
(Experimental Group)

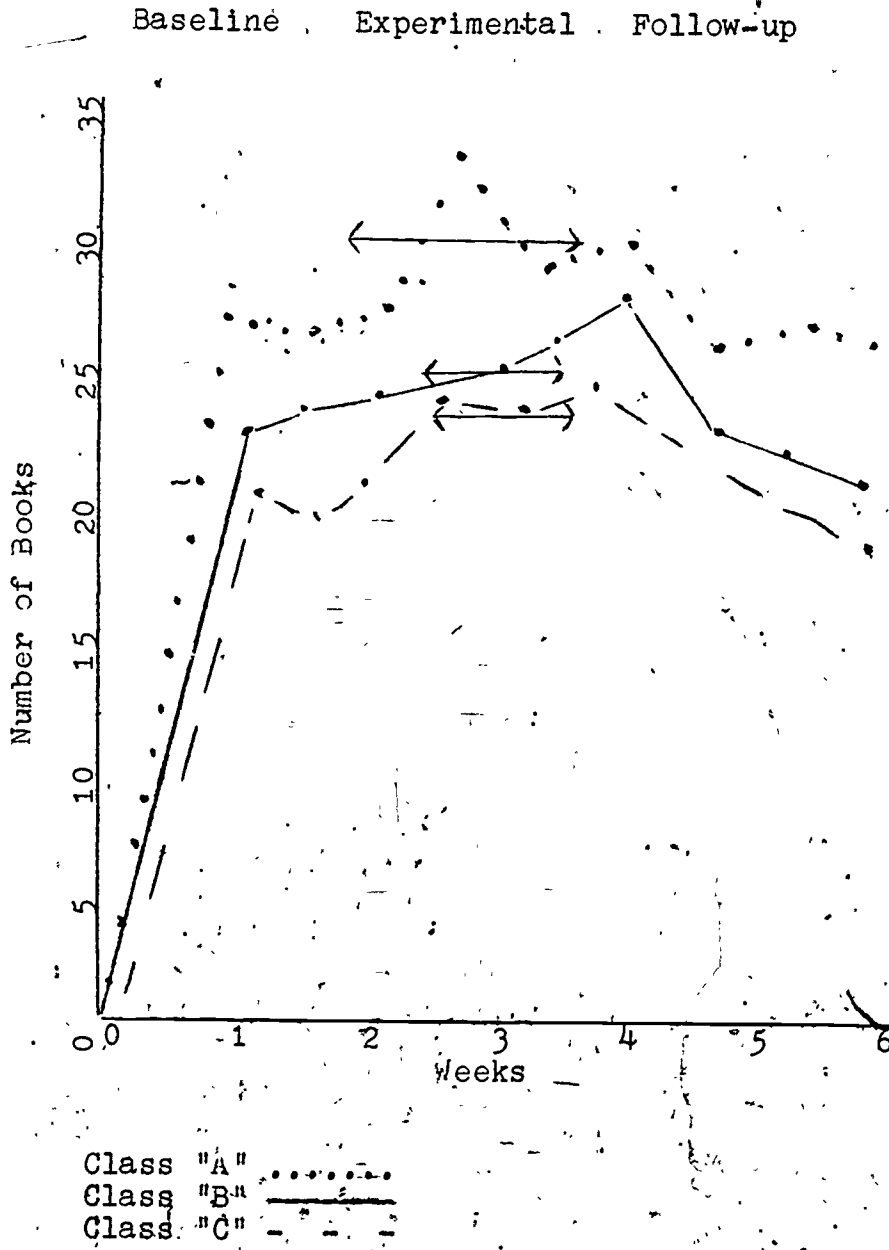
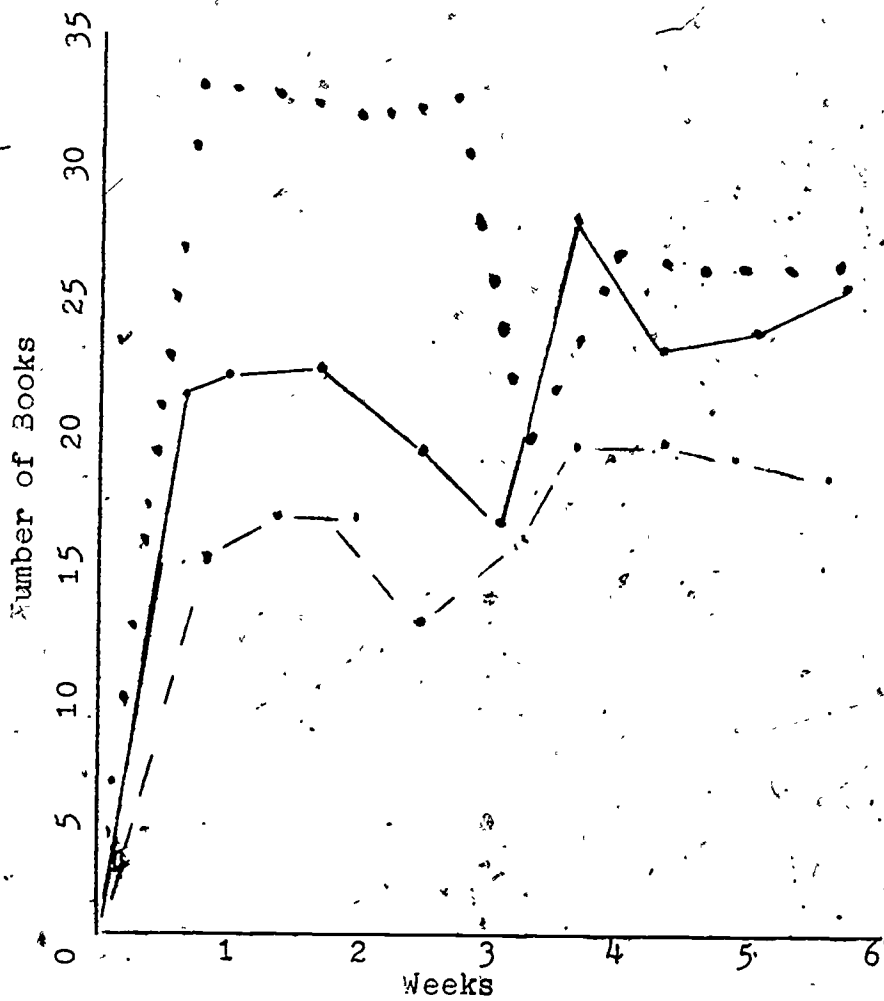


TABLE 2

6.

Library Books Read Per Sixth Grade Class
(Control Group)



Class "A"
Class "B" _____
Class "C" - - - - -

The study described in this paper was made at Valena C. Jones Elementary School in New Orleans, Louisiana, to assess the merit of the librarian's social reinforcement upon sixth grade pupils to increase their utilization of library books. A summary of the date results showed that social reinforcement increased the utilization of library books by sixth grade pupils. The librarian also reported that the social reinforcement also improved responsibility on the part of the sixth grade pupils. She reported that the experimental group returned the library books more promptly and had fewer damaged books.

Tables 1 and 2 clearly shows that a greater number of library books were utilized by the sixth grade pupils when they received social reinforcement.

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