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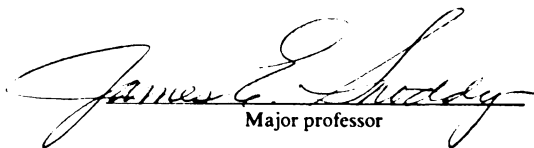
STUDENTS' RESPONSES TO SEATWORK ASSIGNMENTS
DURING FIRST GRADE READING INSTRUCTION:
AN OBSERVATIONAL CASE STUDY

presented by

Mary Patricia Winchester

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

Ph.D. degree in Teacher Education


Major professor

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STUDENTS' RESPONSES TO SEATWORK ASSIGNMENTS
DURING FIRST GRADE READING INSTRUCTION:
AN OBSERVATIONAL CASE STUDY

By

Mary Patricia Winchester

A Dissertation

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Teacher Education

1988

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ABSTRACT

STUDENTS' RESPONSES TO SEATWORK ASSIGNMENTS DURING FIRST GRADE READING INSTRUCTION: AN OBSERVATIONAL CASE STUDY

By

Mary Patricia Winchester

This was an observational study of one first grade classroom. The purpose of the study was to examine how first grade students respond to independent seatwork during reading instruction. An array of factors were addressed which have effects on the responses that students make toward seatwork. These factors are the teacher's purpose and expectations, time, student's ability, environment, type of assignment, and rules and responsibilities in the classroom. It was found that not one factor alone, but a complexity of interactions between students and their environment determined the students' responses to seatwork.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I really must acknowledge my mother before all others for her continual support and assistance through the many years in pursuit of my educational goals. My children also have helped carry the burden of time away from home and obligations that seemed to take priority over their momentary needs.

I am also very grateful to many people for their help with this dissertation. I wish to thank Dr. James Snoddy for his guidance as chairperson of my committee. I would like to express appreciation to Dr. Doug Campbell who went beyond his duties as a member of my committee to give extra time and assistance. I would also like to acknowledge the other members of my committee, Dr. Don Nickerson and Dr. Ben Bohnhorst who gave of their time to assist in the preparation of this study.

Thank you to Nancy Heath for her expert typing of this dissertation.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of Problem

A basal reading program is one of several methods of reading instruction, and it is by far the most common. Usually in a basal program, children are grouped according to reading achievement. In order to meet with each of the reading groups daily, teachers assign what is commonly referred to as "independent seatwork." One characteristic of independent seatwork is that students are to remain in their seats and work independently. In most classrooms, this means they are not to disturb other students or the teacher while the teacher is instructing a reading group.

A major concern of the present study is students' responses to independent seatwork during reading instruction. Their responses can be influenced by several factors: the student's ability, teacher's purpose and expectations, the assignments and manner of instruction, and the structure of the environment, most of which are under the control of the teacher. Educational research has examined each of these factors as they relate to the student. What is sometimes not

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considered is how more than one factor together affect a student's response. A classroom is a very complex environment with several independent minds responding in several varied ways. The focus of this study was to observe the responses that students make in relation to all the factors listed above.

To a teacher, the independent seatwork may be as important as the instruction that takes place in the small group; for if the students are not working independently, it becomes difficult for the teacher to instruct the small reading group.

Often the writer has observed classrooms in which the students are walking around disturbing others, or constantly interrupting the teacher to ask for assistance; or, the noise level increases to a point where the students in the small group find it difficult to listen. It can become a teacher's nightmare.

Teachers express many concerns in regard to seatwork assignments. One is the teacher's time devoted to planning the assignment. Teachers need to design or find the right assignment to trace a particular skill. They need time to write the assignment on the board or prepare a ditto or copy of the assignment. They also need time to correct the assignments once they are completed.

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Teachers also express concern that the assignments are not functional in keeping the students on task for a given amount of time. Some students have completed the work quickly. Others do not complete the assignment. The most common concern of teachers is that they are still confronted with disruptions during the group instruction time.

A final concern that is often expressed is that the assignments are not right for each child. They are too easy for some and too hard for others. There is too much for some students to complete, while not enough for others.

Given these dilemmas, most teachers will reexamine the assignments that they give for independent work. Sometimes they will attribute the problem to an individual student's ability and will assign individual work for a particular student. Hopefully, teachers make constant changes and evaluations from assignment to assignment. Teachers' concerns are justified when the students' responses do not reflect the educational goals.

A student is confronted with several choices. The student may choose to daydream, to play with certain items in his/her desk (pencils, eraser, small toys, etc.), to talk with a friend, to watch the other children at work, to go to sleep, to walk around the room, or

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hopefully to complete the assigned work. A child is very imaginative, and can choose many alternatives to finishing the assigned work. This writer believes students exhibit certain behaviors in response to corresponding sets of circumstances. By focusing on their responses, we can learn how to change the circumstances if we want to change the responses.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine how first grade students respond to independent seatwork during reading instruction.

It is probable that the reasons for the completion or noncompletion of this work can be attributed to several factors, some of which are under the direct control of the teacher. The research which has been undertaken here is an observational study of one classroom. Nevertheless, an array of factors will be addressed which may have effects on the responses that students make toward seatwork. It is expected that the outcomes will show that it is not one factor alone, but a complexity of interactions between students and their environment. There is no simple answer, but by looking judiciously at many factors simultaneously, a teacher may have a more significant impact on structuring the environment of the classroom. Traditionally studies have

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been written in the third person, however, this study will be written in the first person consistent with the informal and observational nature characteristic of this type of research (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983).

Background of the Problem and Related Research

A student's response in an instructional situation can be influenced by several factors. First is the student. The maturity, development, and ability of the student would surely affect the work that he/she completes during this independent work time. The extent to which the student's ability affects the independent work is unclear. Some researchers believe that students who have high ability, such as those who are placed in the high reading groups, respond better in attention to task and exhibit higher performances on that task than students who are low achievers or who are placed in low reading groups (Anderson et al., 1984; Good and Beckerman, 1978).

In an earlier research by this researcher (Winchester, 1986), this relationship was not found to exist. In each reading group observed, there were students who responded positively to the independent seatwork and students who did not. If in fact a task were too difficult for many individual students, then student ability would be likely to relate directly to the

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completion or noncompletion of the task, but when given a task at the student's reading level, it would appear that other factors influence the student's completion or attention given to the task.

That leads to another factor: the type of assignment that is made for independent work. In some districts, a teacher may give what is commonly referred to as "whole class" assignments. This is when the teacher makes one assignment for all the students to complete. Generally, this is an open-ended assignment in which each child can hopefully work according to his/her own level of experience. Creative writing assignments are a good example of a whole class assignment. Each child will write and develop a composition according to his/her individual abilities.

In contrast, individual reading group assignments have been made where each group was given an assignment to complete. An example would be workbook pages that corresponding to the reading book from which the student is reading. These assignments have the presumed benefit of being on the student's reading level, and usually develop or address a skill directly related to improving the student's reading.

There may be times when the student has little knowledge of the purpose of a particular assignment. Every assignment should have a purpose clearly stated for

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both the teacher and the student (Osborn, 1985; Kuply and Blair, 1986).

The nature of what is assigned for independent seatwork during reading can be extremely important. Most of a student's reading class time is spent on the seatwork. A student may spend 18-20 minutes in a small reading group, depending on the number of groups, and 60-72 minutes working on independent seatwork (Winchester, 1986; Rosenshine, 1981).

Sometimes students are assigned work which appears to do little to advance a student's reading ability. Students may be assigned work that is too easy or too hard. This occurs in many "whole class" assignments where the assignment is geared toward the average student and misses the two opposite ends in ability, the very high and the very low. When this occurs, there will be several students whose response to the seatwork will be other than what the teacher had intended (Anderson et al., 1984).

The teacher's purpose in assigning the independent seatwork is very related to the student's response. All teachers set goals. Some goals may be managerial in nature, while others are instructional. During reading instruction, seatwork plays an important part in keeping the students quiet and busy while a

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teacher instructs a small reading group. This would be considered a managerial goal (Anderson et al., 1984).

The particular assignment that a teacher selects for the seatwork usually fulfills an instructional goal, which is reinforcement of a skill that has already been taught. Other instructional goals may be to develop "independent work skills" like taking responsibility for getting one's own work done and checking it (Anderson et al., 1984).

A student's response to seatwork may not be in accordance with the teacher's goals if those goals are contradictory. A teacher's managerial goals are usually very explicit with direct rules to ensure that the goals are reached. For example, a common rule is that a student is not to disturb the teacher while a reading group is being instructed. Students are to remain in their seats and work quietly. The conflict usually occurs given certain instructional goals. If an instructional goal involves a skill that the child does not understand, the child will find it impossible to complete the assignment without assistance from someone, either by disturbing the teacher while instructing a reading group or asking another student. Either way, it conflicts with the managerial goals of working independently and quietly at one's seat.

If an instructional goal involves a skill that a child knows very well and can do without assistance from anyone, then the question becomes: Is this effective use of a student's time and what does the student do when this "busy" work has been finished? Many teachers struggle with this problem of setting good instructional goals that will not impede the necessary managerial goals that are needed during reading.

In addition to the ability and age of the child, the teacher's purpose in assigning seatwork, and the seatwork assignment itself, the structure of the environment can have a lot to do with a student's response to seatwork. The structure of an environment has several aspects. It can mean the physical arrangement of the room, that is, if students sit in rows facing front, or in clusters, or if they can move about at will and sit where they choose. Some teachers specifically arrange seating assignments so that when students complete their seatwork, they will not be sitting by anyone else in their reading group in order that their work will be the student's own. Other teachers do the direct opposite so that students in the same reading group can help each other. Hence, a student's response to the seatwork is likely to be influenced by the seating arrangement.

Time is also a factor in the structure of the environment. For some students, they may work on a seatwork assignment for one entire setting. This would usually occur if they were called for their reading group first or last. Even in both instances, one group may react differently from the other. For example, for one group of students, the directions are given and the students are allowed to begin their seatwork and work until they are finished. For another group, they must meet with their teacher in a reading group; and then, perhaps twenty minutes later when they return to their seat to do seatwork, they must remember the directions. Other students begin their seatwork assignments and then at some time must stop for their reading instruction and then return to their assignment later. Some students find it very difficult to settle down and start working independently again. The time pattern for seatwork may be the same each day or it may change each day depending on the teacher's plan for the rotation of reading groups. Either way it may be a factor that should be addressed.

Rules and responsibilities are another factor in the structure of the environment that can and does effect a student's response to seatwork. Every classroom has its own set of rules and responsibilities, and yet upon visiting several public school classrooms one may find many to appear to be the same with only slight

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variations. The reason is that most rules are only a means to reach certain goals and many educators promote the same goals. As observers, we learn the rules quickly and from there we can begin to see the goals that are in place in a particular classroom. Within these rules and responsibilities, one finds activities that the students encounter during seatwork. These activities sometimes facilitate the completion of seatwork and other times exert very little effect one way or another. An example of this could be the use of learning centers in the classroom, including a computer. The student's response to the particular learning center may affect his/her motivation to do the seatwork. This may involve actual work in the center that must be done or it may involve work in the center as a reward for completion of other work.

Background of the Study

During Winter Term, 1986, I spent ten weeks doing research on reading in a local school district. In this particular district, the basal reading program was required in all elementary schools. It was observed that an enormous amount of time was spent on independent seatwork during reading instruction. Typically, sixty minutes may have been devoted to independent seatwork, as compared to twenty minutes with direct instruction in a

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reading group. The focus of the research began changing more and more from the teacher during reading instruction to the students at their seats while engaged in independent seatwork. It was hard for me, as an observer, to make a connection between reading instruction in the small group and reading instruction as it was intended to be incorporated into the independent seatwork. The significant amount of time engaged in seatwork, as well as the enormous responsibility to incorporate assignments that provide instruction and growth in reading skills appeared definitely to warrant investigation.

During this study, different responses from two students in the same reading group were noticed. One student was very conscientious about her independent seatwork. She would always complete her work with very little, if any, distractions. In contrast, another student was given the same assignment, but would rarely, if ever, complete the work and would spend most of her time watching or talking with classmates. This led to the belief that more than a student's reading ability or a particular assignment affects a student's response to seatwork.

During observation of these two girls, I questioned whether independent seatwork does always provide instruction and growth in reading skills. Would

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this difference in their response to seatwork lead to a difference in achievement? Teachers would hope that the completion of seatwork assignments does lead to greater achievement, but an effective seatwork program would warrant an individual analysis of needs and an assignment that addresses those needs. Even then, a student may choose not to respond.

The idea that different students respond to different factors during reading brought me to this current study.

Research Questions

First grade students respond to independent seatwork in many varied ways. In order to understand what precipitates certain responses from individual students, I need to address certain questions. Each set of questions flows out of the context that was addressed by the set of questions that come before. The questions begin with the presence or purpose of seatwork in reading instruction. To what extent does seatwork play a part in reading instruction? What is the teacher's perception of the purpose for independent seatwork during reading, and how much reading time is spent on seatwork? Before we begin to look at the work assigned and how the students do or do not perform the tasks, we need to find out the

purpose for assigning these tasks and to what extent it is being incorporated into the program.

After knowing the teacher's purpose in assigning the seatwork, we can begin to observe the students at work and pose several more questions to consider. Is seatwork serving the purpose for which it was intended? Are there interruptions during the instruction of reading in small groups? Do the students complete their seatwork? Do they express an understanding of what they are doing or learning in their seatwork assignment?

Most teachers will view the purpose for seatwork as a necessity to keep students quiet during this time or specifically to learn and practice certain skills. Whatever the reason, we must then go one step further and see if indeed that purpose is being carried out in a particular classroom.

After knowing the purpose and the extent to which seatwork is incorporated into the reading program, more specific questions need to be addressed. What assignments are being made as independent seatwork? What skills are these assignments presumed to teach? Do the assignments reflect what the students are studying in reading? Each question will be answered differently depending on the particular classroom teacher. I have been in classrooms where the independent seatwork during reading instruction was from another subject area

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entirely, e.g., students were doing mathematical computational drill sheets. I have also been in classrooms where students are reading assignments and developing specific skills like sequencing or other comprehension skills.

As educators, we continue to question the manner in which assignments are explained to the students. Do students know the purpose for their reading assignments? Has the purpose or specific skill that it is hoped they will develop been explained to them? Many times this is included in the directions. Are the directions given orally or are they written out on the board or on a worksheet? Some students respond better to oral directions, especially if reading is difficult for them. There are other students who respond better to written directions since listening comprehension may be a weakness. Teachers will sometimes give directions orally, as well as in written form. It is important to observe the manner in which directions are given since it may indeed affect a student's response.

Seatwork may serve the purpose of learning or reinforcing skills? If the seatwork is used for an understanding of skills, then assistance from the teacher should be available and offered to the student. Many times this does not occur. Even though the students are expected to complete all assignments correctly, the

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teacher gives the directions and expects the students to remember them and work independently until finished. The teacher will not repeat directions, and the students are told not to interrupt the teacher with questions while she is instructing a reading group.

Many teachers believe the purpose of seatwork to be twofold. First is the reinforcement of skills, and second, to keep them busy and quiet. Perhaps part of the confusion lies in trying to do both.

The purpose of my study is to "look" at what occurs in a classroom during reading, while the students are engaged in independent seatwork. I was an observer in a first grade classroom during the instruction of a basal reading program. I hope to address many of the questions that I put forth in this study, to the extent that they are recognized in a particular classroom by the teacher and the students.

Limitations

For an ethnographic researcher, time always appears to be a limitation. The involvement that one develops with the subject of the study becomes such that one never wants to let go or bring it to an end. There also is a natural inquiry that comes from the data. The more one finds out about the subjects and their

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interactions, the more questions one has, and the more s/he wants to know.

The responses that the students gave in many situations during the study came from more than one year of schooling and many years of growth and development in the home. To understand the true nature of their responses, I believe my study would have to encompass those years.

Having begun my study in the middle of the school year, I had not shared in the initiation of the students into the rules and responsibilities for which they were accountable, or the circumstances that might have occurred to warrant new ones to be established. The responses of the students may indeed reflect reactions that extend back to the outset, or may show growth and change from the beginning of the school year to the end.

My study was also limited to one site. Initially I had planned to observe in more than one classroom. Given the nature of a basal reading program and the fact that the school district I chose had mandated the use of the basal in the early elementary years, I believed my findings would be useful for examining the seatwork activities in other elementary classrooms.

There were four elementary buildings that had similar socioeconomic backgrounds from which I could choose. Only one of those buildings would grant me

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permission to do a research study. Having gained access to the building, I had the possibility of seven classrooms. I met with the teachers and explained the research study, and what it would entail. Only one teacher gave her consent to participate, and that came reluctantly, but with the support and strong encouragement from the principal. Thus, my grateful acceptance of one site.

Even though at this time there is no comparable study, some generalizations may be made by observing the similarities in the classroom structure and organization of classrooms that employ the use of a basal reading program.

Some readers may identify students whom they know that exhibit similar responses to those observed in my study.

Before any generalizations are to be made by the reader, I would suggest that s/he remember that one teacher's strength may be another's weakness. When looking at students' responses, we must remember that the issue is very complex and involves many factors. This is just one account of many individuals and their responses to several factors in a given classroom.

The reluctance on the part of the teacher to participate in the study was probably the greatest limitation. The teacher expressed a fear of any

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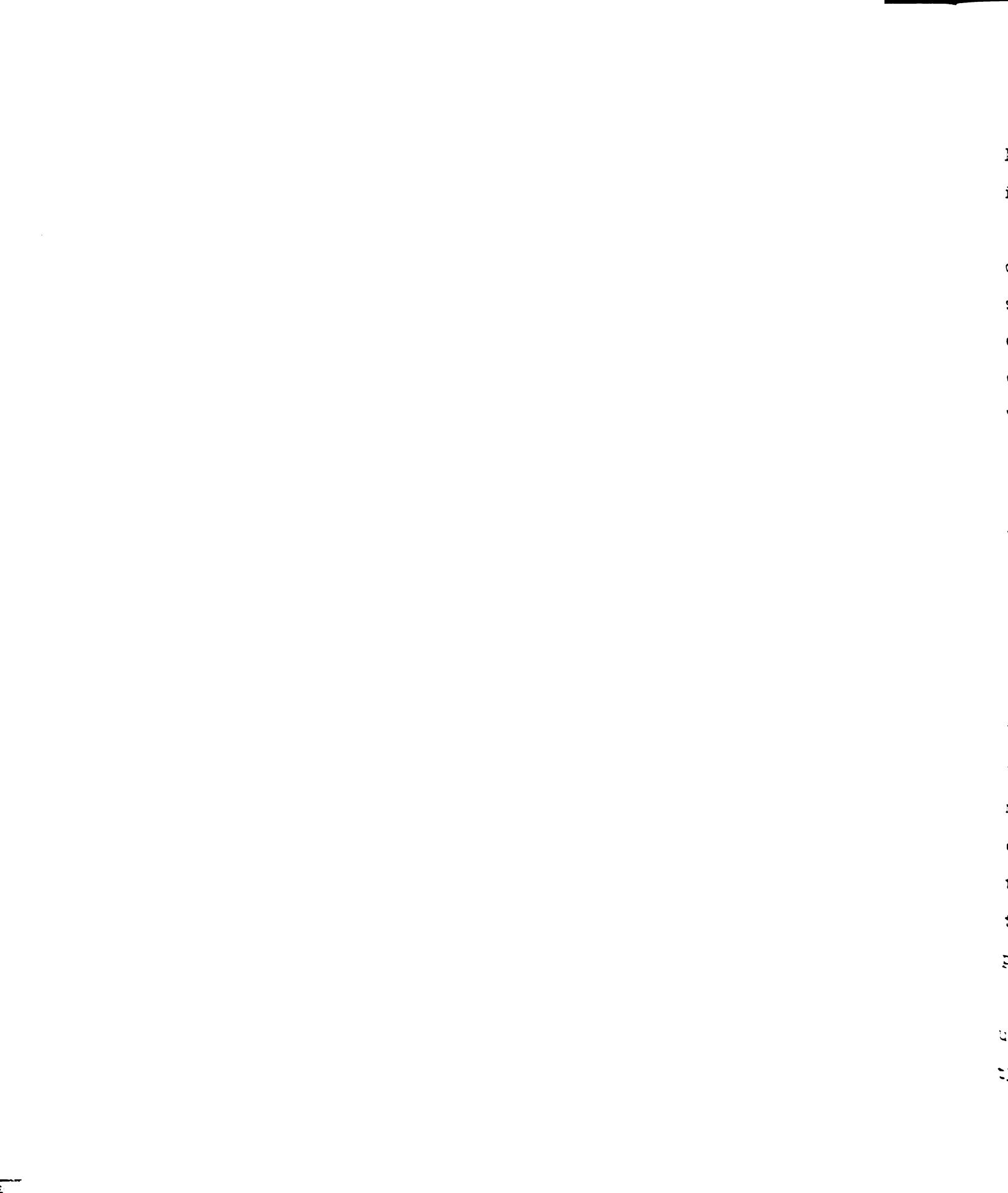
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unsatisfactory report being given to the principal or the district office. I responded with several assurances that I was not there to judge the teacher's performance, but I would be observing the students. It is difficult to separate teachers from their students. It is a natural tendency on the part of the teacher to take responsibility for the actions of the students.

The teacher, given her participation in the study, had much influence in the methodology that was used. There was to be no videotaping at any time. I was allowed to use a tape recorder with the permission of the parent, during student interviews, but I was not allowed to use a tape recorder during the interviews with the teacher. I also was not allowed to bring the tape recorder into the classroom.

It soon became obvious that many of the responses from the teacher were guarded and carefully monitored. The many months I spent in the classroom, and my devotion to making myself a natural fixture in the room, helped the teacher gradually forget about my presence. The protective manner of responding would recur occasionally given certain circumstances, such as formal interviews or on days when the students were particularly noisy or active, especially if she had a confrontation with an individual student. These unusual occurrences were of



little importance to the study, and thus did not invalidate the study.

The restrictions in methodology did create its own limitation for the study. Most of my data relied solely on observational notes. Observation in an early elementary classroom can be a very difficult task. Young children have a propensity to be continually in motion. To record the many responses to a variety of stimulation left this researcher exhausted and occasionally questioning the data. A videotape would have revealed more responses by the students, and possibly given light to what precipitated certain responses.

Overview of the Study

In the introduction to my study, I have stated that an individual student's response can be influenced by several factors including a student's ability, teacher's purpose and expectations, the assignments and manner of instruction, and the structure of the environment. Educational research has examined many of these same factors and how they relate to students. In the next chapter, Review of the Literature, I will present the findings from these studies.

Chapter III will explain the methodology that was used in this study. Classroom observation was chosen for this particular study because of the many factors,

that influence the varied responses that are seen exhibited by individual students. For one study to encompass the relationship and complexity of the problem required a method of research that observed the individual within his/her environment.

Chapter IV and V are concerned with the field research of this study. Chapter IV describes the site. It contains pertinent information about the school, the teacher, and the subjects of the study (the students). It also describes the environment in which the study was conducted. Chapter V presents the findings of the study. The findings are presented as they related to the aforementioned factors that influenced the responses that students gave.

Finally, Chapter VI will interpret the findings. Upon the conclusion of my study, I found that I had questions that still need to be addressed by educators. In light of my findings, this chapter offers a direction for further research.

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CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction: Research on Methodology

I had a predisposition as to the type of research study that I wanted to do, but after several written proposals, I began to have doubts about my choice of methodology. After listening to the criticisms made by my colleagues, I questioned the scientific nature of my proposed study. Scientific studies should produce documented hypothesis that are applicable to other settings and thereby can be replicated. These studies contribute to an understanding of teaching that moves our profession forward.

An observational study of one classroom, conducted by one researcher, did not appear to meet the requirements of a study that could be applicable to all classrooms. There were no controls for all the variables that could account for any findings. It would produce more questions than it would answer.

It was not until I read Arthur S. Bolster's article, "Toward a More Effective Model of Research on Teaching," (1983) that I realized I was not alone in my beliefs. Classrooms are very complex social

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environments, and no matter how hard researchers try to control all of the many variables, there will always be several unanswered questions. The fact remains that there is not a one-dimensional solution for classroom teaching (Duffy, 1982).

For a research study to make a contribution to the profession of teaching, it is important first to understand what teaching entails. In addition to Bolster's article, I read several articles that followed the same questioning concerning one-dimensional findings. Gerald Duffy (1982) in his article on "Looking in Classroom Research" agrees that for too long educators have traditionally ignored the complexities of classroom life.

Bolster and Duffy both concluded that most teachers' knowledge of teaching is formulated through situational decision making or what Duffy refers to as "fighting off the alligators."

Bolster said that knowledge of teaching includes situational decision making, but also includes the classroom culture, which is defined as the interaction between teacher and student and between the students.

The most important elements of any social situation are the shared meanings which participants take from the process of interaction and which ultimately shape their

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behavior. Significant knowledge of any social situation, therefore, consists of an awareness of the emerging meanings that participants are developing, and the specific ways that these meanings are functioning to shape their endeavors and thus the characteristics of the situation itself (Bolster, 1982, p. 303).

Both Bolster and Duffy agree that if research is going to make a contribution to the understanding of teaching in all its complexities, then we must indeed look in the classroom. Observational studies reveal teaching practices as they occur naturally in specific situations.

The difference between the two authors' proposals for effective research is what Bolster defines as the culture of the classroom or the shared meanings that were mentioned above. Each classroom is unique in this culture. When research studies compare several classrooms, as most do, they ignore the importance of culture, and how it relates to the teaching and learning that occurs in each particular classroom. As Bolster points out, social science research on teaching assumes that causation in classrooms operate unilaterally from teacher to students and that magically learning occurs from those teaching strategies, and yet at the same time, researchers recognize the situational decision making that occurs when teachers change their teaching strategies according to the particular group of students that they are teaching. If we also recognize the learning that takes place between

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students, it becomes apparent that each classroom will show particular characteristics and implications concerning teaching and learning. The in-depth study of a particular classroom, as I have proposed here, may have limitations in that it may or may not be applicable to other classrooms, but it will have considered the social structure of the classroom and its complexities in understanding the process of teaching.

The goal for my research is established and grounded in the literature. It is a research study that observes the complexities of a particular classroom. The focus is on the shared meanings that come from the interactions between the teacher and students unique to this classroom.

Purpose for Assigned Seatwork

In the literature, there is considerable research in the area of reading instruction, the bulk of which focuses on the instruction that is from teacher to child, usually in the small group setting. There are some that debate one methodology over another. I have found few that focus on the students during independent seatwork in reading.

One study done which did examine seatwork in reading was done under the auspices of the Institute for Research on Teaching at Michigan State University

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(Anderson et al., 1984). It looked at the responses of first-grade students to seatwork assignments. Their study addressed many of the same questions that I have researched. That is, what are the goals or purposes in assigning independent seatwork, and are the students attentive and successful in their work? In particular, they looked at a student's strategy in completing his/her work. It is interesting to find students using unique strategies in order to complete a task that may hold little comprehension for them.

A major concern of mine which has led me to do this particular research was also expressed in the Anderson et al. study. One of their conclusions was that,

the students who needed the most instruction in reading were the ones whose seatwork often had the exact opposite characteristics: the seatwork was difficult because the gaps between the students' knowledge and the knowledge required for the task were too great for them to bridge independently. Thus they spent a large amount of their allocated instructional time in seatwork that contributed proportionately little to their reading growth (1984).

For this reason, I made the decision to look at the type of assignments that were assigned by the teacher, and what instructional assistance, if any, was offered to the students during the completion of their seatwork.

Ruply and Blair (1986) did a study of the assignment and supervision of seatwork. They observed twelve first, second, and third grade teachers during

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reading. Specifically, they studied what was assigned to students for seatwork and the manner in which instructions were given. They also paid close attention to how the teachers supervised the students and what, if any, assistance was given.

The major differences between this study and the Anderson et al. research was that there was little attention paid to the strategies employed by the students or the implications that it may hold for the students over a period of time.

Both studies did agree that teachers need to provide students with a purpose, and to illustrate the task as well as circulate to insure success in order to be effective.

Osborn (1985), in her paper on "Evaluating Workbooks," gave several guidelines for evaluating a workbook that accompanies a basal reader. Her last directive in accordance with the other studies that I have mentioned is that "appropriate workbook tasks should be accompanied by brief explanations of purpose for both teacher and student."

There was agreement in all the studies I read that the teacher's purpose in any seatwork assignment is important for the students to be successful. When the teacher's purpose is not apparent or articulated, there is a tendency on the part of the students to view the

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Time as One Demand in Reading Instruction

There were several studies that look at the time element of reading instruction. Time is important as a variable; it is also important to distinguish between allotted time and engaged time, both of which are proven to have an effect on a student's progress in reading.

Martha Thurlow had one of the most extensive studies on time allotment during reading. She studied thirty-five second grade students from ten elementary buildings. Her study found that

out of 120 minutes of scheduled time during one school day, about 80 minutes actually were allocated to reading instruction. Of the 80 minutes, only about 20 minutes actually involved the student being engaged in active academic responses, with only about 10 minutes in reading responses (8 minutes in silent reading, 2 minutes in oral reading). On the other hand, over 40 minutes of the reading period was spent engaged in task management or waiting responses (1984).

Rosenshine (1981) also did a study on time spent in elementary classrooms. This study also included second grade students. The distinction between allocated time and engaged time was very important to both studies. Allocated time is the time that is provided for the student to complete a task whether that task is an assignment given as seatwork or whether it involves teacher-led instruction as in a reading group. Engaged

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time is the actual time that students are actively involved or show signs of being on task. In this particular study, the author showed that more allocated time did not lead to less engagement. In reading, there was a positive correlation between allocated time and engagement rate.

Rosenshine reported that second grade students were allocated 90 minutes for reading and language arts activities. The average students were engaged for 64 minutes daily in reading activities. In Thurlow's study she reports 80 minutes allocated for reading instruction with only 20 minutes actually engaged in active academic responses. There is a high discrepancy between the two studies. Both authors were specific about their distinction between allocated and engaged time. The definition of reading instruction is less clear. Reading instruction may refer to the time spent in group reading instruction or it may include seatwork assignments that have reading instruction as a goal. Even though the Thurlow study gives a thorough explanation of what was observed as far as the specific tasks involved (i.e., whether they were during group instruction, or seatwork involving workbooks, readers, worksheets, or other media), it was still unclear in the report of findings when the term "active academic response" was used. In Rosenshine's study, there was no explanation given for engaged time

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except that academic subjects were designated as reading which includes writing activities and math. This may account for some discrepancy in that there may be several writing exercises in second grade that Rosenshine may include under the title of reading, whereas Thurlow may not view them as part of reading instruction.

The discrepancy in findings may also be attributed to the selection of subjects. Even though both studies involved second grade students, Thurlow study reflects a full range of second grade reading groups including at least one student from each ability group. In contrast, Rosenshine's study included students within the average range of ability; the very bright and slower children were not included. If, as many authors claim (Goldenberg, 1969; Rist, 1970; Weinstein, 1976), teachers allocate time differently for the different ability groups or that different ability groups have different engaged time (Good and Beckerman, 1978; Anderson et al., 1984), this would account for a discrepancy in any findings that report allocated or engaged time for reading instruction.

Time, whether allocated or engaged, is an important factor to be considered when observing students during reading instruction. It appears that ability is another factor that should be considered. The majority of our public schools adhere to the practice of teaching

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reading in ability-oriented group. It is this practice that necessitates seatwork during reading instruction.

Ability Grouping

The research study showed that when students were in teacher-led groups, their engagement rate was about 84 percent, whereas during seatwork, it was about 70 percent (Rosenshine, 1979). Other studies (Good and Beckermann, 1978) have also shown that students are more on task when their instruction is led by a teacher than when they are working alone. Even so, students still spend only 30 percent of their time in teacher-led seatings and 70 percent of their time doing seatwork (Rosenshine, 1981). The ability levels in any one class are so diversified that teachers believe there is a need to break the class into smaller groups based on achievement. To instruct a class as a whole might find the lower ability students behind and the high students may become bored. Dividing a class into groups, based on achievement, accounts for the figures that Rosenshine has given for the amount of time that a student spends on seatwork to free the teacher to work with groups. This also accounts for the current literature that looks at ability as a factor in whether a student is on task. Since groups are established for instruction, it becomes a natural occurrence or factor to consider the students' work habits in reference to their

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memberships in a particular ability group. Most agree that high achievers are more involved in spending more time on task than low achievers (Good and Beckerman, 1978; Anderson et al., 1984).

When students are grouped by achievement as they are in reading and specifically when they are assigned seatwork as whole-class assignments, performance is evaluated comparatively, both by the students and by the teacher. This comparison of performance narrowly defines reading ability where students perceive and agree upon differences among themselves (Rosenholtz and Wilson, 1980).

The ranking of students among themselves can have an effect on a student's self-concept (Eder, 1983; Winn and Wilson, 1983). If it is true that lower ability groups tend to develop their own values and rewards and become increasingly antagonistic toward school (Hargraves, 1967; Esposito, 1973), this may explain the off-task performance reported in the research.

Ability grouping and the type of assignments given for seatwork in reading are important factors to address in any study that hopes to look at the effectiveness of seatwork assignments in reading. If the goal in seatwork assignments is to facilitate the learning of basic skills and to increase a student's ability in reading, to what extent can we ignore a student's self-concept or the fact

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that the low ability students, through less engaged time, may be making little or no progress?

Type of Assignment

There are few studies that directly looked at the type of assignments that were used for seatwork during reading. Instead, several research studies made reference to assignments for seatwork in their recommendations. Through the many studies conducted that involved time on task, there has been an acceptance of the principle that learning occurs through engagement. Children improve in reading in direct proportion to the amount of time they spend in engaged reading. Consequently, there have been several recommendations that reading be incorporated in seatwork assignments. The most engaging study on this topic was conducted by Leinhardt, Zigmond, and Cooley (1981).

They began their study with two premises. First is that learning occurs through engagement, and second, that learning to read requires high rates of engaged reading behavior. Over a 20-week period, the research team observed 105 students. Their findings showed that the most fully focused student was reading silently or orally 23 percent of the day. The least attentive pupil was reading 0 minutes per day. During reading periods, students were off task for 22.5 minutes per day and spent

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34.1 minutes in transition. In conclusion, they recommend increasing the amount of time in silent reading, and helping the class, as a whole, in reduction of transition time and off-task behavior.

In addition to its reference to time and environment, Leinhardt et al.'s study supports the concern of other authors that students need more time in silent reading. The proposal for such reading assignments as seatwork is not beyond our reach. It may also lend itself to the fulfillment of other recommendations for seatwork, that is, interest value and appropriate level of difficulty and variety.

Environment

Process-product studies in which measures of teacher and student behavior are correlated with measures of student achievement have revealed the necessity to look at the environment, as well as the direct instruction that takes place in our classrooms. Looking at classroom environment and the role it plays in learning can be as simple as looking at the physical arrangement of the room or as complicated as teaching students motivation and completion of school tasks for intrinsic rewards of satisfaction and the acquisition of valued skills.

The physical placement of reading groups is important to limit distractions for both the group and the

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students working on seatwork. Ideally the two groups would be sitting back-to-back as would occur if the reading group were placed in the back of the room facing away from the seatwork group. This eliminates either group's watching the performance of the other. It also is important for the teacher to be facing both groups. This, in turn, helps a teacher exhibit what Kounin refers to as "With-it-ness" (Kounin, 1970). With-it-ness is an awareness of what is happening at all times in order to detect inappropriate behavior early and take measures before it escalates into disruption.

The seating arrangement also helps students' focus of attention. Their desks should face the point in the room where they most often need to focus attention (Brophy, 1983). During seatwork assignments, many elementary teachers assign what is commonly referred to as boardwork. Work is placed on the board to be copied by the student. In order to focus attention on the assignment, students' desks should face the board.

Consideration of traffic patterns and equipment storage can provide smoother transitions. Routines and procedure also help in the transition time from one activity to another, as well as the ability of the teacher to focus attention on clear beginnings and endings for specific tasks. This attention to the time spent in transition has come about through the current research

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findings on time (Rosenshine and Berliner, 1978). When students are academically engaged, they focus attention and participate in instructional tasks, thus increasing student achievement compared to when they participate in nonacademic engagement, such as transition time, talking, and disruptive behavior.

In addition to focusing students' attention, effective teachers conveyed a sense of purpose for the students' work. Students were held accountable for completing their work on time. Teachers also monitored the students' work, checking for understanding, offering assistance, and monitoring their progress toward completion. This monitoring of students' work was also cited in research as important for student achievement (Anderson et al., 1980).

Rules and responsibilities are considered by many authors to be part of the overall environment of the classroom. I chose to separate the topic due to a distinction that can be made in some classrooms as to ownership. The physical arrangement for supplies and seating arrangements in most classrooms are clearly decided upon by the teacher. Most students do not believe they have any control or input for the decisions. There is usually no ownership or involvement by the student in relation to the physical environment as important as it has proven to be on their performance. The other

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effective management skills that have been mentioned here--focus of attention, monitoring students' work, with-it-ness--have all been related to the teacher. The next section, rules and responsibilities, is a part of the environment of the classroom. In most classrooms the rules are determined and enforced by the teacher. However, in order to be successful or effective, they must be internalized by the student, and the ownership must at least in part be experienced by the student. For this reason, I have separated it from the topic of environment.

The Rules and Responsibilities in the Classroom

Rules and responsibilities should be a part of the instructional program. Effective teachers place the stress on teaching, not on manipulating students through rewards and punishments (Brophy, 1983). Teachers can assist students in their behavior by making expectations clear and modeling correct procedures for them. They can identify and capitalize on student interests, help a student to identify the problem, and understand the logical consequences, and to develop coping strategies that assist the students in monitoring their own behavior. The emphasis is on encouragement and help, rather than threat of punishment.

Perkins (1965) conducted a study for the purpose of identifying student behavior and its relationship to

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academic achievement. It involved fifth grade students, 36 of which were considered to be achievers and 36 which were selected as underachievers. The selections were based on I.Q.'s, grade point averages, and reading scores. Weekly observations were conducted by pairs of observers. One could observe pupil behavior, while the second observer would observe teacher behavior at the same time in given situations. The study supported the proposal that learning activities, students' attention to task, and teacher's roles and behavior that facilitate learning are associated with increased academic achievement. Quiet study, teacher-led recitation, and student individual work were associated with achievement. Teacher lectures or criticisms were associated with decrease in achievement. The teacher, as lecturer or criticizer, was associated with a decrease in achievement by both achievers and underachievers. Underachievers were more frequently observed engaged in nonacademic work and withdrawing. This may be attributed to the belief that students who are unable to be successful and gain approval in academic activities withdraw from the learning situation. An important point was made for the selection of assignments that insure success. Withdrawal may also be a safe response to criticism.

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This study lends support to Brophy's proposal to teach and model good behavior instead of threatening punishment and criticism. If it can be shown through future research of this kind that criticism has its affect on all students, achievers as well as underachievers, in their academic achievement and that it is related to withdrawal on the part of all students, then the instruction of rules and responsibilities and teacher responses to infraction of those rules is indeed an important factor for consideration in teaching.

Summary

The literature reflects a consensus that the classroom is a very complex social structure involving several independent factors that may have an effect on academic achievement. Future studies need to "look in the classrooms" to observe the natural happenings and interactions that occur. Through observation we may find insight into the shared meanings that exist between participants in the classroom culture and come to understand what precipitates certain behavior and how the behavior affects academic achievement.

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CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Classroom Observation as a Choice

During my teaching career, I read very few research reports. As a graduate student I have read several. The more that I became familiar with current research, the more I pondered the question of why I had not read more while I was a teacher. There were several answers. One was accessibility. The journals to which I subscribed were read in several teachers' lounges, and were not empirical in nature. They contained several articles about current problems and related several ideas to practical solutions. When I did read a documented research report, I found the language to be very different from my professional language. I became lost in the verbiage. Later, when I reflected on what I had read, I judged the research to be contrived and not at all like the natural occurrences that I found in my classroom. This research, according to my thinking, was conducted by and for the university community. I believed it was of little importance for me as a classroom teacher.

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Now as a graduate student in the university community, I was conducting my own research. It was important for me to maintain my perspective as a teacher and in so doing to conduct and write my research for the benefit of the classroom teacher.

Hammersley and Atkinson in Ethnography Principles in Practice (1983) say that methods must be selected according to purposes. It is their belief that the most important feature of social research is its reflexivity, the fact that it is part of the social world it studies. There is no escape from reliance on common-sense knowledge and on common-sense methods of investigation.

My common sense method took me back to the classroom. I chose to do an observational research study. I observed students during reading instruction in a first grade classroom. I began my observations in March and continued through the end of May. In this chapter, I will describe my methods of investigation.

Research Design

Observational research is not just a happening. To enter a site and just observe would provide a lot of information, but without a focus or purpose for the study it would have little direction or relevancy. Therefore, before entering a site, a research study has a design.

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The basis of this design is a specific problem selected for research. In my particular study, the problem developed within the structure of a basal reading program. Within my own teaching experience, I had several experiences in which I questioned the responses I got from students while completing seatwork assignments. There were individual students who never completed their work. There were some who completed it so quickly that I questioned whether it was an appropriately challenging assignment. There were those students who did the work, but still created a noisy environment that made it difficult for others to work or for me to instruct my reading groups. In the end, there was the most nagging question of all: Did the seatwork advance the reading skills of the students?

In the review of the literature, I found that there was an extensive volume of research in the field that related to students' completing work in a basal reading program. The problem was no longer a solitary pursuit on my part, but a problem that would warrant further investigation as an addition to the literature already in place.

Given the problem, my next step was to select a setting and the classes that I believed would provide me with an accurate insight into the occurrences that related to my problem. A basal reading program was a

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prerequisite. I also preferred a district that was located in the city. This was a personal choice, but one that was justified in light of my personal experience and university studies. I had been trained to be an inner-city teacher, and had taught for five years in large urban districts. My graduate work included a cognate in urban studies that continued to focus my studies on the problems of our city school districts, not the least of which include teaching reading effectively.

I was fortunate to find a school district that had implemented a new basal reading program four years before my study as a response to declining reading scores on the state mandated tests of competency.

The focus on reading and the new basal program led me to believe that I would find the structure and environment that I was looking for in my study.

The fact that the program had been in place for four years gave the assurances that the teachers and students had some familiarity with it and would have a routine established. This was also heightened by the fact that I would begin my observations in the middle of the year, and not at the beginning when the teacher and students were new to each other and did not know what to expect.

I chose the early elementary years for my study, particularly first grade, because it is here that the

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basal program appears to be most firmly in place. As students progress in their reading skills in the upper grades, teachers become more flexible and provide enriching diversions from the reading program. They are confident that the students have the skills to warrant variations from the general routine. In early elementary grades, class time is a precious commodity. There are so many skills to be mastered, and the complexity of making sense of the process involved in reading leaves little time for anything else. This will become apparent in the next chapter where reading during this study is said to be 180 minutes out of an instructional day totaling 285 minutes.

Finally, when the topic of the study is defined, and the selection of the setting and cases are chosen, the next step in the design is to decide what sampling within the case will be done; in other words, when to observe, and who and what to ask. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) stated it quite simply when they wrote that there are three major dimensions along which sampling within cases occurs: time, people, and context.

As common as the basal reader is in our classrooms so is the time during which reading instruction takes place. Reading dominates our early elementary curriculum to the extent that it is usually taught both in the morning and afternoon. It also takes

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priority in being the first lesson of the day. Most schools also place it the first lesson following lunch, but there are some who teach math at that time followed by reading. In any case, I was relatively certain that I would be in the classroom every day at the beginning of the school day, and would probably spend an hour or more at some time in the afternoon.

Sampling of the subjects could also be determined in the design of the study. Given a classroom of 20 to 30 students, I realized that it would not be feasible to observe them all. However, there were simple principles that I knew I wanted to adhere to. First, I wanted a subject from each reading group. My study did not have a focus of high achievers or low, but I wanted to look at the differences in the responses from all levels of readers. Therefore, I would need to observe at least one student who was comparatively low in the skill of reading, one who was average, and one who was high in ability.

I also did not want to show any discrepancy among the genders by only observing a boy on a given level or a girl. Therefore, I wanted to design my sampling so that it would include not only a sampling from each reading level, but a sampling of each gender on that particular level.

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For many of the same reasons, I chose to pay particular attention to the race of my subjects. Since most city schools have a minority representation in their populations, I chose to have at least one minority represented on each level of the reading spectrum.

Since the focus of my study was the responses of students to their seatwork assignments during reading instruction, I believed that it was important to observe those students who remained on task and usually completed their assignments as well as those students who went off task frequently and did not complete their work. Therefore, a sampling for my study would include students who exhibit one or the other above-mentioned characteristics.

The sampling of the subjects is for the specific purpose of setting limits for the number of interviews and the collection of specific data, such as field notes and samples of classroom work assignments. There will be some data reported that is gathered from the site which includes all of the students in the class.

Since students may respond differently given a different context, I needed to consider this issue in my research design. I wanted to observe the same sampling of students, within the same time of observation, but with a change of context. Substitute teachers were the answer.

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A substitute teacher is presented with lesson plans that are written by the regular classroom teacher. Usually, the schedule, routine, and assignments remain the same as if the regular teacher were present. Would there be a change in the students' responses to seatwork on a day when there was a substitute teacher in the room? I was fortunate that I observed on two days when a substitute teacher was there instead of the regular classroom teacher.

Research designs are only a beginning. Field researchers must report what they observe. If those observations do not follow the design that they have developed, they are left with two choices. They may leave the site and look for another which may prove more suitable for their design or make the necessary changes to report the findings in the given site. Change is a common phenomena and one in which field research embraces. Researchers continually report and change not only their premises, but also their methods of analysis. The research design is only the beginning.

Gaining Access to the Site

To gain access to a public school district, I first had to present a written proposal for my study. The district presented me with a guide as to what the proposal should contain. I was to state what my topic of

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research was, but more importantly, I was to show how my research could benefit the district given the areas that they were interested in further research being conducted. I was fortunate in that this particular district was very interested in any research that pertained to a basal reading program.

The district that I had chosen was denying access to several researchers because they were unhappy with the conduct of some researchers who had been in the district the year before. Fortunately, I had completed a project study in the district the previous year, and had received favorable response to my study from the subjects involved. For this reason, the district, again, approved my proposal for this study.

Once the topic of the proposal had been approved, the proposal was sent to all of the principals to determine who was interested in having the study conducted in their building.

There were several buildings in which I was particularly interested in conducting my research. I approached the principals of these buildings personally in the hope of gaining their acceptance of my proposed study for their building. Several times I was denied access, and given various reasons for that denial. The most common was that there were already too many university personnel already present in their buildings,

i.e., student teachers, professors conducting research projects, students participating in field work, etc.

The district, finally, notified me that there was one principal who had responded to my proposal and expressed an interest on the part of one of his teachers. I contacted the principal and arranged for a meeting.

During the meeting with the principal, he expressed his own interest in my proposed study. He went on to say that the teacher who had expressed an interest had since found that she was already committed to several projects, and felt that she could not commit to another at this time.

The principal was willing to schedule a meeting after school for several of his primary teachers in order to give me the opportunity to present my proposal, but it was to be clear that the teachers' participation in the study would be voluntary.

Four teachers attended the meeting. I presented the proposal for my study, and then related my past experience from the year before as to the responses from the teachers involved in that study. To dispel any fear of being watched or evaluated, I stressed the fact that the focus of my observation was to be the students, not the teacher. Since I had one teacher already who had expressed the fact that she was already committed to

several projects that demanded her time and energy, I also stressed the fact that I was only requesting to be an observer in the classroom, and possibly two interviews with the teacher if it were convenient. I then waited for their responses or questions.

I was told that they were very aware of the interest on the part of the principal in this study, but that they had several commitments in addition to their teaching assignments, and since this was strictly voluntary, they would have to decline. One teacher was hesitant, and asked to speak with me further about the project.

This particular teacher was interested in the study, and would consider participating. She also was aware that the principal was interested in having it done in his building. Her main concern was in the final report that would be made to her principal, as well as to the district office. We both knew that this was a requirement for any study that was done in the district. I assured her that I would let her read any report that I made prior to submitting it to the district or the principal. I also explained again that the focus of the report would be the students' responses to their work, not any evaluation on the teacher's actions. In fact, the report would not be an evaluation of any action, but simply an observational report of what I observed the

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students doing in the classroom during reading instruction.

I gave the teacher a couple of days to think about her participation in the study, and then met with her to talk further about confidentiality, and to ask her to sign a consent form. She signed the consent form, but added in writing her stipulation that there was to be no use of a tape recorder in the classroom or at any time that she consented to an interview.

My last step in gaining access to the site was to have consent forms signed by the parents of the students in the classroom. The teacher explained to the class that I was a student from the university, and that I would be observing in their classroom for several months. She further explained that I was there simply to observe, and that it was not to interfere with their work nor were they to come up to me to ask any questions. They were to continue their work as if I were not there. They were also to take home a note explaining why I was in their classroom, and have their parents sign it, and bring it back to school the next day.

When only a few consent forms had been returned, I sent home a second copy. After several weeks, I still had not received even half of the forms I sent. I then sent a third copy of the form to individual parents from who I had yet to receive a response. One student's

parent was asked to come to the school so that an interpreter would explain the form in their language in order to obtain a consent. I was very grateful for the assistance provided by the school personnel in obtaining consent for the study to be initiated.

Data Gathering

My research study was an observational case study in which the major data-gathering technique was nonparticipant observation. The focus of the study was students while they were doing independent seatwork during reading instruction.

I was an observer in a first grade classroom from March through May. Since reading was taught twice a day, first thing in the morning and immediately following lunch, I was in the classroom every weekday during the hours of reading instruction. Most of my observations took place during the morning sessions. During the afternoon sessions, there were several interruptions to the schedule, i.e., assemblies, announcements, discussions about lunchroom or recess behavior, etc. There were also more "time-outs" when the teacher asked the students to put their heads down on the desks or to stand up and stretch. Since my focus was the students working independently on seatwork, I found these interruptions to interfere with their responses to the

seatwork, and made the decision to spend more hours during the morning sessions where there were fewer interruptions.

Each day I went into the classroom and observed the students while they were at their seats working on seatwork. I sat in various spots on different occasions in order to obtain different vantage points around the room. One day I sat in the back on the left side of the room. The next day I sat in the back on the opposite side of the room. Some days I moved my seat half way up the outside aisle to locate nearer the middle of the room. I always kept my seat at least two to three feet away from the nearest student in order not to give any one student the idea that he/she was being watched and must be on good behavior. I also took time to copy the boardwork in my notes which gave several students the idea that I was interested in doing the work and not interested in what they were doing.

The main source of data was my field notes. In the field notes, I recorded any action or movement by the students and my insights or reactions to the various notes that were taken. I also recorded all verbal communication that related to the students who were working on seatwork. If it was possible to hear conversations that took place between the students at their seats, I recorded it in my field notes. If the

teacher directed comments to those students who were working on seatwork, I recorded it. If students at their seats asked a question of the teacher, I recorded it. I also recorded all the verbal communication that took place prior to the beginning of the reading groups, in order to record all directions that were given concerning the seatwork or expectations on the part of the teacher.

The focus of my observation in the classroom, as reflected in my field notes, was directed toward the following factors:

1. Ability: How are the students grouped for reading? Are there groups for seatwork? Which students are in which group? How many students complete their assignments in each group? Which students ask for assistance from the teacher or from other students?

2. Type of Assignment: How are the directions given: orally, written, both? What are the daily assignments? Is there one assignment for all or are there different assignments?

3. Teacher's Purpose: What is the teacher's response to the student's questions during seatwork? What is the teacher's response to individual student's actions during seatwork? What directions in regard to behavior does a teacher give either before or during seatwork?

4. Environment: What is the seating arrangement during seatwork? What movements and conversations take place during seatwork? Are seating patterns ever changed during reading?

5. Time: When do different groups begin or stop seatwork in order to receive group reading instruction? Is it the same every day, or does it change? If so, is there a pattern or regularity of schedule?

6. Rules and Responsibilities. What does the teacher say are the rules during seatwork time? What happens when a student breaks the rules? What do students do when they complete their seatwork?

In addition to my daily observations, I conducted two scheduled interviews with the teacher. The first formal interview was near the beginning of the study (March). The second formal interview was scheduled near the end of the study (May). Both interviews contained specific questions related to the study (see Appendix A).

During the first formal interview, the teacher took several minutes before she responded to a given question. She was very specific and direct in her response. She did not elaborate or provide any additional information. For example, when I asked her what were some of the rules during reading instruction, she was quiet for a few minutes, and then responded "to complete work to the best of their ability and to work

quietly." When I asked if reading was ever assigned as seatwork, there was a pause, and then she responded, "They are encouraged to read ahead in their basal."

I felt that her answers were very guarded. She had specifically reminded me that the interview was not to be taped, and I felt she was very nervous whenever I made notes of her responses.

For this reason, I decided to conduct several informal interviews. Immediately following the reading instructions, the students went outside for recess. The teacher usually went outside with the students. I found that if I accompanied her to the playground and asked several questions informally without paper and pencil, she was very responsive. Throughout the rest of the study, I conducted several of these informal interviews.

I met with the teacher for my closing interview in the morning before school was to begin. We had set the time two days prior to the interview. The teacher's first words to me were that she did not have much time to do several things that she had to take care of before the children arrived for school. As in the previous interview, the teacher sat at her desk and I sat in a student's chair a short distance away. I had my tape recorder with me because I would be conducting my student interviews later in the day. Upon asking my first question, the teacher inquired if my tape recorder were

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on. I assured her that I remembered our agreement, and that I was carrying it for the purpose of using it later for the interviews with the students. She accepted my explanation and went on to answer the first question. Her responses were quick and to the point. There were several interruptions. Someone came to the door and needed to talk with the teacher for a few minutes. A short time later, the intercom interrupted our interview saying that the teacher had a phone call in the office. The clock alerted both of us of the fact that soon the students would be arriving for school. I found myself asking questions very quickly in order that I might at least get some response or reaction before our time was over. I knew from past experience if I tried to reschedule the interview, I probably would never get the answers to my questions. In scheduling this interview, this was her only free time, and even then, she had come to work early in order to accommodate my needs.

The interviews with the students were much easier to schedule. The teacher was very happy to allow the students to leave the room during reading instruction to have interviews with me. Because I did not want to interfere with their work more than necessary, I interviewed the students all on the same day, and informed the teacher the day before. I felt that by giving the teacher the information beforehand, she would

know that the students work would be interrupted and would plan accordingly either by giving them more time to complete their work or giving an assignment that was not important whether they finished or not. As it turned out, all of the students interviewed completed their work on that day.

The student interviews were conducted in the hallway outside the classroom. They were taped and completed on an individual basis. One session of interviews was scheduled for March, and one session at the end of the year.

Writing questions that would be informative for my study as well as be appropriate for students' ages (6 and 7 years old) was a challenge for me. During the interviews, I was amazed by how much information they would give me when asked the right question, and how quickly I got the response: I don't know or no response when I asked a question that was a little too complicated. A good example of the latter was question eight during my first interview with the students (see Appendix B). When asked what advice they would give to a new student in regard to reading, four out of nine said, "I don't know," or gave no response. Even though this might cause a researcher to question whether the question should be discarded, there were a couple of responses that allowed me to catch a glimpse of some of the rules

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that might be adhered to in the classroom. For instance, Gina responded that she would tell a new student that you shouldn't get games out. You must get a book out and read. Jeffrey, when asked the same question, responded that you should bring your pencil to reading group. Theresa, who has had some problems with her oral reading, responded that she would tell a new student that you read like you talk.

Interviews can be a time to find out how good the research design was at the beginning of the study. The advantage in having done a field study was that upon reflection on the responses from my first interviews and given what I observed day to day in the classroom, I had the opportunity to revise and add questions for my final interviews.

The final interviews with the students were conducted in the same way, only during the final week of my observations in the classroom. One student, whom I had interviewed during March, moved before the end of the year. She was not interviewed a second time. Another student whom I had been observing daily, cooperated in a long interview, including some of the questions asked during the first interviews, as well as all of the questions for the second interview. Aside from these two changes, I used the same subjects for the second interviews as I had in the first.

In my original proposal for this study, I had planned to use daily report forms with both the students and the teacher. The teacher's report was to include the seatwork assignments, the source of where she obtained the assignment, its purpose, and a short evaluation of its strengths, weaknesses, and whether she will use it again (see Appendix C).

At the first meeting when I presented the study to solicit participation, this particular teacher said that she would participate, but she did not have the time to fill out the report forms. I remembered from the days when I was a teacher how much paperwork there was and how there never seemed to be enough time to do all the planning and preparation that you desired before the next day. I also believed that even though the information I would have gathered by this method would have contributed to my research study, I felt I could collect the same information by other methods. I knew the assignments by my presence in the classroom when directions were given to the students. I observed the strengths and weaknesses in certain assignments by recording the number of students who had completed the assignments, if they had to make corrections in their work, and how they used their time while working. I asked the teacher informally whenever I wanted to know the source of a particular

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assignment or her purpose in assigning it, and whether she would use it again.

The students' report forms were designed to be easily read and to minimize the time a student would need to complete the report. The questions were kept very simple. They were to circle "yes" or "no" to three statements.

1. I liked it.
2. It was easy.
3. I finished.

If they had the time and the ability, I left a blank section for them to express what they thought they learned from the assignment (see Appendix D).

The students were responsible for filling the report out whenever they finished their seatwork or at the end of the reading period.

I used the reports for two days. The first day, I found that the only students who attempted to fill out the reports were those students who finished their work early. The rest of the students worked on their seatwork assignments until it was time for recess. They were anxious to go outside to play and no one stayed behind to fill out a report.

I also found the report to be too confusing because I had five days listed on the report form. The students circled "yes" or "no" at times instead of

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responding in the section for a specific day of the week. No one responded in the section designated.

The next day I cut the form so that each day was separate, and I only set out one day of the week. Again, I received few responses. Those students who finished early had taken the time to answer the three questions, but did not respond to what they had learned.

I continued to set out the forms for the rest of the week, but after the second day, no one remembered that they were there. The choice was mine. I could take time to explain the procedure again to the class, but I would also risk the teacher's displeasure in taking time from the reading program. I could remind individual students while they were at recess, but it involved most of the class, and even then they could forget when they returned to the classroom. Finally, I could revise my methods and obtain the information in another way. I chose the latter.

I already had recorded in my field notes the names of those students who had finished their seatwork with the specific time. This was more accurate than the student record form. I also chose randomly to ask students while they were at recess if they had liked the assignment and if they thought it was easy. It was to my advantage to conduct those informal interviews orally to find out what they had learned from the assignment since

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the students had not attempted to answer that part of the student report.

The last method that I used in gathering information was to ask for selected copies of the students' work. The teacher corrected the students' seatwork assignments during the reading class time. The students then placed their corrected papers in their own mailbox to take home at the end of the day. I did not want to keep any student's paper from going home to be shown to his/her parents. Instead, while the students were getting ready for recess, I would approach individual students and ask if I could make a copy of his/her paper. A student never denied my request. While they were at recess, I would take their papers to the office, make copies, and then return them to their respective mailboxes.

The students' work not only provided me with information concerning their understanding of the work, but also showed their attempt that was made to complete the assignment. I observed many students who did not complete their assignment, but in my observation, I could not be sure how much of their assignments they had completed. Some students had completed some of the work correctly, while others may have only copied the work and made no attempt to do what they were assigned to do or some may have only written their names on the papers.

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Given these differences in their written work, I then went back to my field notes to see what the students were doing during the class time. I also talked informally with the students about their papers.

All the methods I used for this study were discussed and approved by the subjects in the study. When they set limits for my methods, such as not videotaping or tape recordings, I made adjustments by employing other methods that met with their approval. I was not directed by choice of methods, but in the information that I wanted to gather for my study. It was important to me that my subjects responded as naturally as possible, and that I remain as unobtrusive as possible. In this setting it required that I be a silent observer and so I arrived with the students at the morning bell, took a seat in the classroom, listened to the directions for written assignments and wrote my field notes.

Data Analysis

In ethnographic research, analysis is an ongoing process. As I took my field notes, I made several marginal notes that made reference to other pertinent data, or comments concerning current data. As I read and reread my field notes, I constantly looked for patterns and contradictions, comparing, contrasting, ordering,

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etc. As patterns emerged, analytic notes were made as part of the ongoing process of analysis.

After a short time, I was designating categories and developing linkages. From my field notes, I knew the sequences of behavior or routines, the time and place of certain situations, and how certain subjects related to others. I was now able to "make sense" or assign meaning to my data through an understanding of the rules and responsibilities of the subjects.

I found myself making several charts. Charts that noted the order in which individual students completed their seatwork assignments. Charts for the purpose of noting which students were off task during reading instruction and for what purpose: daydreaming, talking, distractions, etc. I asked myself if there is a relationship between being off task and completing their work on a given day. There were charts of time spent in reading groups and when they went into groups for reading instruction and if there is a linkage between the amount of time spent in group or when they went to group and whether or not they finished the seatwork assignment. There were notations about individual students having their seats moved to another row or away from the other students. Is there a change in their response or completion of seatwork assignments when they sat in a

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different seat? I constantly went through my field notes looking for relationships. Schatzman and Strauss in their book, Field Research (1973) said that when a researcher discovers a key linkage--that is, an overriding pattern, he then has the means to find significance within his classes of data.

It was at this point that I began to establish methods for checking my inferences. One way to cross check for validity was triangulation. Triangulation is a means of checking inferences drawn from one data source by collecting data from other sources. When diverse kinds of data lead to the same conclusion, there is a more confidence given to the inference (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983).

Respondent validation is one form of triangulation. This form of data check involves showing a participant one account of a certain occurrence or phenomenon and recording his/her comments. For example, during the second interviews with the teacher and students, I read them my field notes referring to a specific happening on a certain day, and then recorded their responses in regard to how they viewed the incident or my recording of the incident. The additional data of their insight into the event gave added depth to the description of the incident, as well as giving a validity check of the event (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983).

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Cross-checking, using several data sources, is a good method to think about, but was very difficult to plan with any degree of certainty before actually interpreting the data. I used a tentative plan for cross-checking my main categories of student responses in relation to the different sources of data (see Appendix E). This method of triangulation, or using several sources for data, does not guarantee the accuracy in our findings, but only an attempt to counteract the threat to the validity of our analysis (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983).

My final step in data analysis was the recording of my findings. This was accomplished by formulating statements and using various sources of data to illustrate the statement. These statements are called assertions. These assertions (found in Chapter V) interpret my findings as they relate to the factors that influence students' responses to seatwork, that is, ability of the student, the type of assignment, teacher's purpose, the environment, time, and the rules and responsibilities in the classroom.

Summary

Classroom observation was a challenging method for conducting research. It was also a rewarding one. I was in the classroom for a limited time, and there never

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was a feeling of finality or end to my research. The desire to return to the field and continue this type of research is still present today.

In gathering my data, I learned to revise my methods and to look for new ways to obtain information. This type of questioning and searching also continued after the study was completed.

The analysis revealed data that were rich in human experience. The continual search to interpret meaning to natural occurrences was not only a challenge, but a learning experience. I learned not only about the experiences of students in the classroom, but about myself as a researcher and the methods I used in my study. Through this analysis, a story was told and the facts that were revealed gave meaning to the experience.

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CHAPTER IV

DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH

SITE AND POPULATION

The Research Site

The city in which my research took place was an urban area of approximately 130,000 people. The school was located in the center of the city where per capita income was low and the crime rate was high. The population was very transient in character. The families moved often, but usually within the city boundaries. Many families were single-parent families on welfare.

The school was built in 1961, but looked relatively new compared to the other buildings in the neighborhood where it was located. However, it did show its age in many subtle ways. One particular rainy day I entered the school and found buckets strategically placed up and down the halls to collect the water from the leaks in the ceilings. The floor tiles throughout the school looked new; however, the furniture appeared old and used. The walls in the hallways had been newly painted with character drawings that were bright in color, as well as appealing to its young audience.

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Of the students in the school, 40 percent were from minority backgrounds, predominantly Afro-American and Mexican American. Approximately half of the minority students were bilingual. One member of the staff was bilingual to help with communication problems. It was this staff member who gave me assistance in obtaining consent forms from the parents who did not speak English.

The classroom in which I conducted my study was located about halfway down the main corridor of the school. It was a large, square room with a unique layout designed by the teacher (see Figure 1).

The classroom received a lot of sunlight since one whole wall contained windows. As one might expect, one wall was covered with a chalkboard. There were bulletin boards to the right and left of the chalkboard.

As in most classrooms, the bulletin boards depicted the activities that students had completed. One was a display of a recent art project. Another was a writing exercise, a collection of original short stories written by the students. The third board had a chart of basic skills with a list of all the students in the room. When students mastered a particular skill, they would receive a check mark next to their name under the appropriate skill. Only one bulletin board, the art display, was changed during the three months that I was in the classroom. As a general rule, most of the work

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Figure 1.--Floor Plan of the Classroom.

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completed by the students went home at the end of the day.

Out in the corridor leading to their classroom, the children were provided with hooks and shelves to store their coats and lunches, thus allowing more space in their classroom. There also was a small table with chairs in the corridor for students to work or study with an aide. This corridor setting was where I conducted my individual student interviews.

In the actual classroom, it was obvious that the front of the classroom was the main focus for activity. There were rows of tables all facing the front. It was on the front chalkboard that the boardwork for the day was written.

Just as obvious were the isolated desks and study carrel placed around the room a small distance away from the group of tables. These desks were used periodically for students who needed to be separated from the rest of the students for various reasons.

The teacher's desk was located on one side in the back of the room opposite the door. Also in the back of the room was an oval rug. There were chairs forming a half circle on the outer perimeter of the rug with one chair for the teacher in the middle facing the rest of the chairs. In front of the group of chairs was another chalkboard. It was here, on the rug, that the teacher

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instructed her small reading groups. A bookcase was placed on either side of the rug in order to seclude the group from distractions, such as individuals entering or leaving the classroom.

The bathroom was located toward the front of the classroom as was a sink with a drinking fountain attached. The students were allowed to get up and use the bathroom when they needed as long as it was not occupied. They were restricted on drinks, however, to designated times, such as immediately following recess.

The Research Population

The room in which I did my research study was a first grade, self-contained classroom. There were twenty-five students in the room. Thirteen were boys and twelve were girls. The majority of the students were Caucasian, seventeen in all. There were four Blacks, three boys and one girl. Coincidentally, there were also four of Hispanic descent, three girls and one boy.

The teacher was a young, Caucasian woman in her late twenties. She had taught elementary school for four years. This was her second year teaching in this district, and she was looking forward to receiving tenure following this school year. Most of her teaching experience had been in the early elementary years, grades 1-3.

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For reading instruction, the teacher had divided her class into three groups. She referred to each group by the name of the particular reader that they used in the basal reading series (Houghton Mifflin, 1983).

The Balloon group was the low reading group. They were the students with the lowest reading ability. There were ten students in this group. Six were boys and four were girls. One Black and one Hispanic student were in this group.

The next reading group contained nine students. They were called the Sunshine group. Sunshine was the next reader to be completed in the reading series following the reader titled Balloons. There were five girls and four boys in this group. Three of the students were Black and two were Hispanic.

The high reading group that was made up of the stronger readers were called the Moonbeams group. The group contained four students, three girls and one boy. One of the girls was Hispanic.

There were two students, both Caucasian, who were considered to be above grade level in reading, in fact, one was labeled gifted. They were both boys. They completed all of the assigned seatwork, but they went into a second grade classroom for their reading instruction. A second grade student came to the classroom door and asked for the two boys by name when it

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was time for reading. They would leave their classroom for approximately twenty to thirty minutes each morning for their reading instruction.

The students' assigned seats in the classroom were not decided upon for any reason pertaining to their reading groups (see Figure 2). Instead, they were seated in relation to whether they completed their seatwork or not, and if they stayed on task or were a constant disturbance to others. (This will be explained further in Chapter V with supporting data from an interview with the teacher and field notes that contain comments made by the teacher to individual students concerning where they were seated in the classroom.)

The seating arrangement did change once during the time that I observed in the classroom (see Figure 3). Again, there was no relation to the reading groups for their designated seats. Those students who did not complete their work or who disturbed others were seated in the back row nearest to the teacher.

The Established Routine

Every morning 105 minutes were set aside for reading instruction. Another seventy-five minutes were set aside in the afternoon immediately following lunch. My observations were primarily during the morning session (see Graph 1).

S	M	M	O	B	S
O	S	B	B	B	B
S	B	S	S	B	S
M	S	B	B	M	S
B					

B = Balloon Group
 S = Sunshine Group
 M = Moonbeam Group
 O = Two students who
 are not in group

Figure 2.--Seating Arrangements Pertaining to
Reading Groups in March.

B	S	B	M	O	M
S	M	O	S	--	S
S	B	S	B	B	B
M	B	S	S	S	B
					B

B = Balloon Group

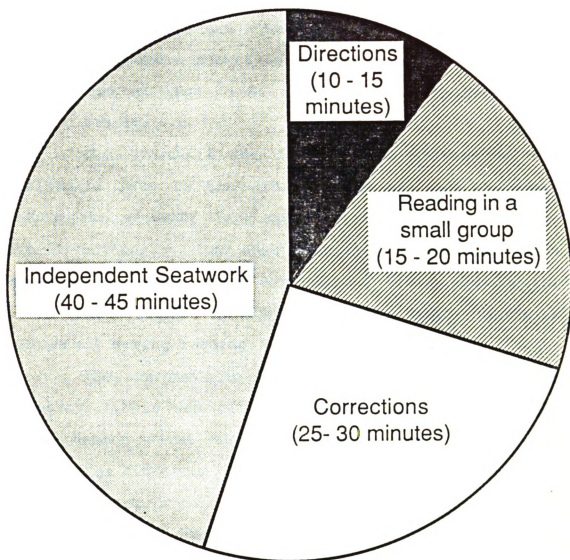
S = Sunshine Group

M = Moonbeam Group

O = Two Students who
are not in groups

-- = Empty seat for
student who moved
during the study

Figure 3.--Seating Arrangement Pertaining to Reading Groups in April.



Graph 1.--Instructional Time During Reading for each child.

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During the morning reading time, students listened to directions, completed their seatwork, and met in their reading group. Seatwork assignments consisted of boardwork and a packet of papers. Both the boardwork and the packet were to be completed during the morning reading session.

The boardwork for the day was written on the chalkboard late in the afternoon on the previous day. Before the students left school, the teacher explained the directions. The next morning the students were expected to enter the classroom and begin copying the boardwork. This was just part of their seatwork assignment during reading.

The teacher also stapled several sheets of paper together. This was called a packet and was placed on their tables first thing in the morning before they entered the classroom. This was to be the second part of their seatwork.

When the students entered the classroom in the morning, they went to their assigned seats and started the boardwork. The bell rang at 8:50 a.m. After the bell, the teacher called each student's name and he/she answered "here." She then asked those students, who would be getting a school lunch, to raise their hands. Next the teacher asked the students to stand and recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

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When the students were seated following the Pledge, they reviewed the directions for the boardwork. The directions for the packet were explained next, page by page in great detail. The students were then instructed to get busy and complete their work quietly.

The teacher went to the reading instruction area on the rug and called the first reading group. The Moonbeams group was usually called first. There were some days when the teacher chose not to meet with Moonbeams. On those days, the Sunshine group was called first. The Balloon group was always the last group to be called for reading. During the first interview with the teacher, she stated that she called the reading groups in a given order from the highest to the lowest.

During my study, Moonbeams had a range of fourteen to twenty-seven minutes in daily time spent in the reading group for the morning session. Their average time was twenty minutes. Sunshine group averaged twenty-five minutes in reading instruction time. Their ranges were from eleven minutes to thirty-nine minutes for group instruction. Balloons had an average of twenty-one minutes; their reading instruction times ranged from ten minutes to thirty minutes (see Graph 2).

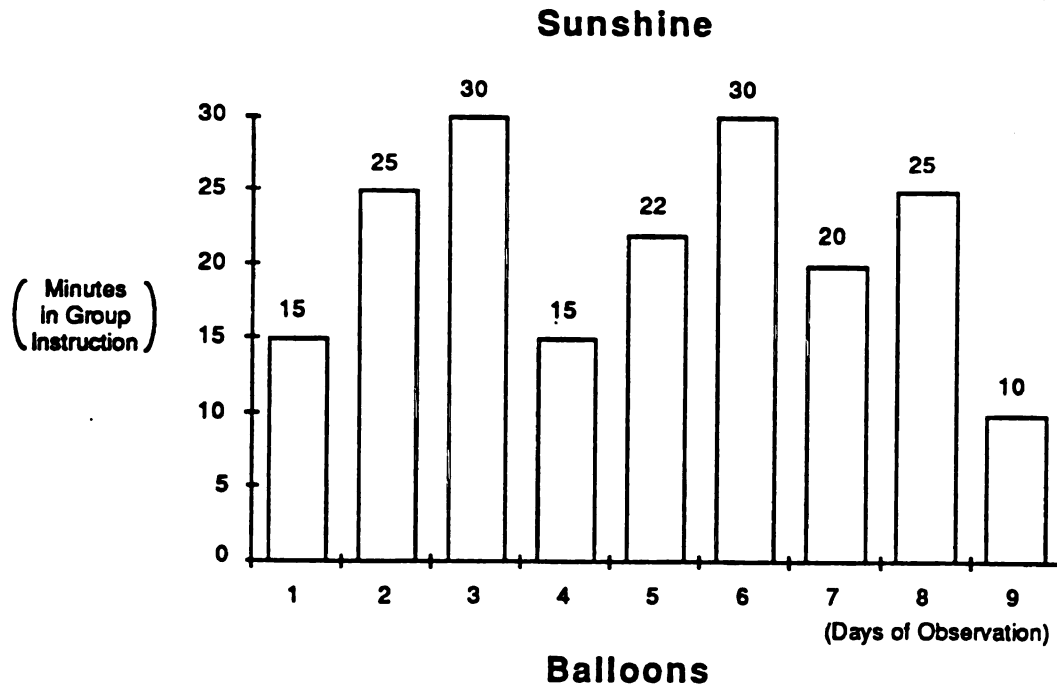
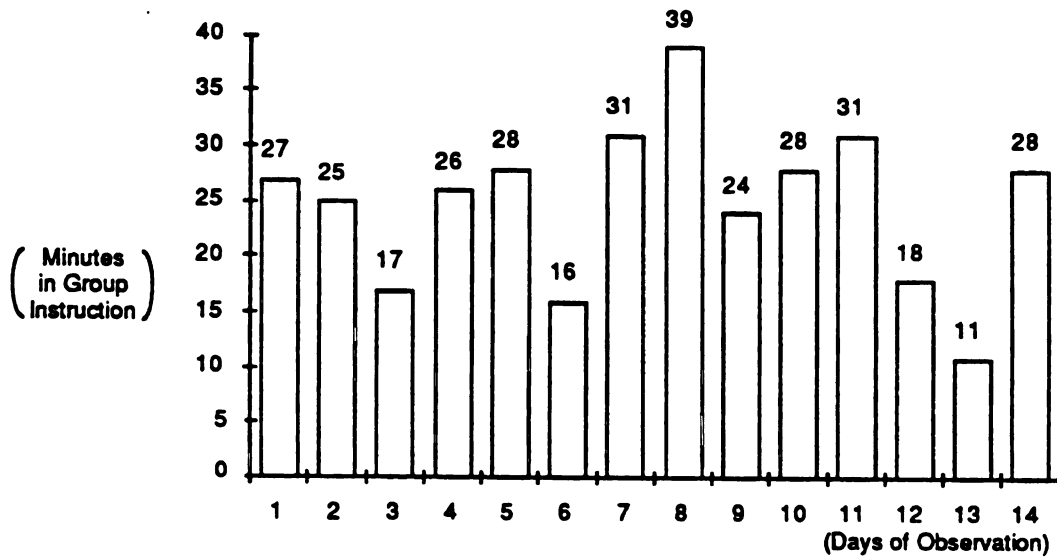
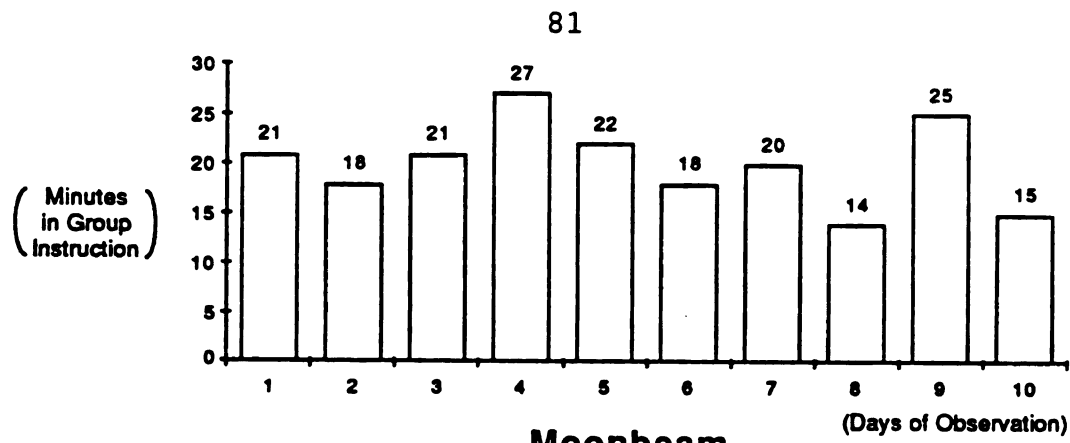
The teacher did not always call one group immediately following another group. There were several days when she would circulate among the students at their

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Graph 2.--Time in Reading Group Instruction.

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seats to check the progress of their seatwork before she would call her next reading group.

When the students were not meeting with their reading group, they were expected to do the seatwork assignments independently and quietly. It was expected to be completed during the morning reading session. The seatwork assignments entailed some reading on the part of the student, but the areas of study for the most part were phonic drills, word recognition, English skills, math, and coloring pages.

When their seatwork was completed, the students were expected to go back through their packets and color all pictures and illustrations. When that was done, they were to turn their work upside down and place it on the corners of their table or desk. If they had work that was incomplete from the previous day, they had to finish it. If not, they were to take out their basal reader and read quietly until they were instructed to bring their papers to the back of the room for correction.

When the teacher had completed the work with the individual reading groups, she would then ask that all students who had completed their seatwork assignment to come back to the reading area to correct their work. Individually, she asked the students for their work and corrected each page. When she had finished, the students

took their papers to their mailbox to take home at the end of the day. The students would then return to the reading area where they waited quietly until the teacher checked all of the students' papers. It was then time for recess and the end of reading for the morning.

During reading instruction, students moved from one task to another (see Figure 4). The routine was the same each day. Whether or not the students went out for recess on any given day was determined by the use of their time and only if they had completed their seatwork. It was my task to observe the students at work and report my findings with the hope of having a better understanding of how the students used their time during reading instruction.

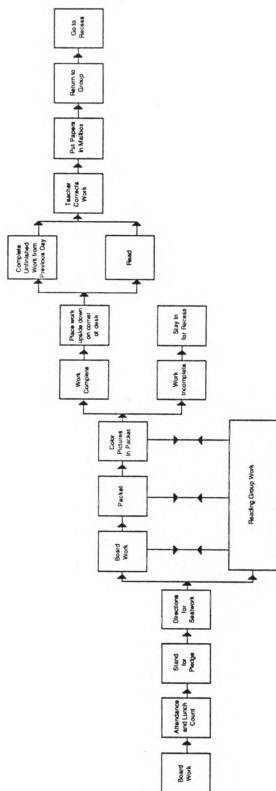


Figure 4.--The Activity of Seatwork.

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CHAPTER V

FINDINGS

What is the Purpose of Seatwork?

Introduction

My first set of research questions was addressed to the issue of the extent to which seatwork plays a part in reading instruction. What is the teacher's perception of the purpose for independent seatwork during reading and how much time is spent on seatwork?

In answering these questions, I will relate my findings as they pertain to the issues of the teacher's purpose and expectations for seatwork, and the issue of time in regard to when a group is called for reading instruction and how much time is allowed for the completion of seatwork.

During a basal reading program, a teacher's purpose in assigning seatwork is twofold. First is the acquisition of basic reading skills, and second is to keep the students busy and quiet during the instruction of small reading groups. In this section, I will show the importance that the teacher placed on the completion of seatwork and that seatwork was to be completed correctly in order to learn the necessary skills. I will

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also show that the teacher disliked disruptions while she was instructing a reading group.

The time that students had to work on seatwork was important for the completion of their seatwork. The specific data in regard to the number of minutes spent in reading groups and the number of minutes spent on seatwork was recorded in the previous chapter. In this chapter, I intend to relate the significance of time, as it pertains to the order of groups called for reading, to the teacher's purpose in assigning seatwork. The teacher called her reading groups in the same order every day. She would delay calling her last group (lowest in ability) if they had not completed their seatwork.

Teacher's Purpose and Expectations

First grade students respond to independent seatwork in many varied ways. In order to understand what precipitates certain responses from individual students, we first need to address the part that seatwork plays in reading instruction, and the teacher's perception of the purpose for independent seatwork during reading.

During my first interview with the teacher, I asked her what the purpose was for assigning seatwork. She responded, "for review and transfer of learned skills." She said that seatwork should not contain

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anything new. It should be a review of skills that have previously been learned.

The teacher expected the seatwork assignments to be completed satisfactorily. Since she believed the assignments were a review of skills previously learned, she did not accept papers with any errors. If a student brought a paper back to the group to be corrected, and it contained an error, she sent the student back to his/her seat to correct it. I recorded seven such incidents in my field notes. The following is one example (Field Notes, April 20, 1987).

The seatwork assignment for the day was boardwork: copy three sentences, put in capital letters and punctuation, and match the fraction with the correct illustration. The packet for the day contained three worksheets: one on telling time, one on counting, and one on alphabet order.

Dennis had completed all of his work, and had given it to the teacher to be corrected.

Teacher: No, Dennis, you need to do the work over. No, Dennis, what letters come first, F, L, or D? You need to look at your alphabet.

Teacher: Two, three, four of you have ABC order to correct. Fernando, David, Dennis, Sam!

9:43 Dennis returned to his seat. He looked at his boardwork that needed correction. Then he looked at his seatwork (ABC order) that needed correcting. He picked up the book, The Three Bears and began to read.

10:04 Dennis is still reading The Three Bears.

10:09 The Sunshine group is playing the game Simon Says. Dennis is still reading The Three Bears. He is on the last page. When he finishes, he sits in his chair, and watches the students play Simon Says.

10:11 Teacher: Balloon group come to the back and bring your work if I have not corrected it.

Dennis immediately gets up with his seatwork in his hand, and goes to ask the teacher about corrections.

Teacher: You put it in ABC order. What letter comes first: A, L, or E? Write the whole word."

Dennis went back to his seat, and began to put the words in ABC order. One student was calling Dennis's name to come to the reading group.

Teacher: Stop! Dennis has corrections to make.

Dennis finished his seatwork and took it to the teacher. He left his boardwork at his desk. That work also had to be corrected. In the reading group, the teacher corrected his ABC order, and he put it in his mailbox to take home at the end of the day. His name was not called to stay in for recess.

Dennis's behavior shows that he knows the rules in the classroom. One rule is that students do not interrupt the teacher when she is instructing a reading group. Dennis did not make corrections the first time when he returned to his seat. Later, when his reading group was called, and he had the opportunity to ask questions, he immediately sought help in understanding his work in order to make the necessary corrections.

There is also a rule that when you are not working on your seatwork assignments, you should be reading. Dennis, when he did not understand how to make

his corrections, took out the book, The Three Bears, and read until he could seek the necessary help with his work.

For twenty-eight minutes, Dennis was not able to work on his seatwork because he did not understand how to do it, but he did obey the classroom rules. He did not disturb the instruction of the other reading groups by asking the teacher questions about his work. He also practiced his reading skills by reading during the time when he couldn't complete his work.

This is also a good example of the necessity for good rules during reading instructional time. The teacher has already set in place a restriction on interruptions to the time needed for group instruction. She has also provided an alternative for the students to use their time productively on strengthening reading skills when they are not doing seatwork.

During an informal interview with the teacher, I asked her how she encouraged reading silently when they were not working on their seatwork. I had observed many students taking out their basals and reading when their work was completed. She explained that at the very beginning of the school year, she told the students that this is reading time, and we all read! Whenever they had the time, they should take out their basal readers or another book and practice their reading.

The rules in this classroom reflected the teacher's purpose. When your work was completed, you were to read. Reading involves many skills. When reading, the students strengthened those skills. Students knew that seatwork time was a time to work. It was not a time to talk, fool around, or do whatever you wanted to do. The rules were a guide for using your time wisely.

On the same day that Dennis was having difficulty with his seatwork, Harry was having problems with the rules during reading time.

Harry was thought to be gifted according to the teacher. He was one of the two students who went into the second grade for his reading group instruction. As on many days, Harry had finished his seatwork early. When the teacher called back the students who had completed their work and needed it to be checked, Harry had walked to the back with Dennis. Unlike Dennis, Harry did not have any corrections to make. His work was completed correctly. He put it in his mailbox, and returned to his seat. As he was sitting down at his desk, the teacher made the announcement that everyone had something to do, and if you were done, then you wrote, What I Did for Easter.

Harry started to read a book. He soon put his book away, and started to read the lunch menu.

After a minute, he put the menu away, and took out some paper to draw.

Teacher: Harry, where is your paper? What did you do?

Harry: We don't celebrate Easter!

Teacher: But what did you do? You should write . . .

Teacher: These students will stay in (from recess) and write! Harry, ____, ____, ____, ____, and ____.

During recess, I asked the teacher about Harry's having to stay inside today to complete his work. She said it was not because he had disturbed anyone. It was because he had not used his time wisely. She felt he used the excuse of not celebrating Easter to sit and do nothing.

Whether the teacher was right or wrong in her understanding of Harry's actions is not important. What is important is that the teacher makes a clear distinction that what is important is to use your time to strengthen your skills, not the issue of keeping busy solely to have a quiet room.

Alejandro did not complete his seatwork for several months in the beginning of the year. He found it very hard to stay on task. For the past few weeks, he has completed more and more of his daily work. This day was one when he made a conscious effort to complete all of the work.

Alejandro was in his reading group waiting for the teacher to correct his work.

Teacher: You're going to have to correct all of these! Pay attention to signs! A sentence begins with a capital letter. Today is not Wednesday. This month is not Thursday and tomorrow is not April. You have to write, My favorite weekday is _____. I like it because _____. You have to correct this, and this, and color this. (The teacher was flipping through the pages of his packet while she was speaking.) Take your papers to your seat. You'll have to work on them during lunch recess and come back here to sit."

Alejandro took his papers to his seat, and then returned to the reading group for instruction.

This was one way that the teacher expressed to Alejandro her desire for seatwork to be completed correctly. It is not enough to fill in all of the blanks. You must fill in the blanks with the correct words.

When Alejandro did his work again during lunch recess, he read each sentence, and carefully selected his responses to fill in the blanks. This time his work was correct.

In the teacher's demand for correct seatwork, she clearly states her purpose in learning the skills. Seatwork is not to be interpreted solely as busy work to keep the students quiet so that she can instruct the reading groups, but is a task to reinforce skills that are necessary for reading. This was also exemplified in the rules that were to be followed during this time. Seatwork was to be completed in order to review the

necessary skills for reading. It was to be completed correctly to gain mastery of those skills.

The teacher placed a high priority on the completion of all seatwork. If a student did not complete the work, it was difficult for the teacher to evaluate the progress that was made in learning the basic skills. This particular teacher used various rewards during the year as an encouragement to complete the seatwork (see Table 1).

The teacher used praise often in regard to the students' seatwork. She praised not only the quality of their work, but also when they completed their work and were working quietly. The following are some examples of praise by the teacher.

Teacher: Gary got a check plus, plus! See how neat it is. (The teacher held up Gary's paper for all of the class to see.) Gary looks at his paper and then smiles as several classmates look at him (Fieldnotes 3-24-87)

Teacher: Raise your hand if you got a perfect today. (Six students raised their hands.) You people tip toe to your seats. We will be going out (outside for recess) (Fieldnotes 3-24-87).

Teacher: How many in Balloon group have finished their work? (Several hands go up.) Bring it back. Now class, they have worked hard. Better than the other groups! (Fieldnotes 4-12-87)

Praise was given individually to a particular reading group or to the class as a whole. It was given privately or publicly to the entire class. Most of the

Table 1.--Rewards for Completion of Work.

	Incidents Cited in Field Notes
Individual Praise:	12
Recess:	7
Stars (by rows or individually):	4
Stickers:	3
Treats (cereal, bread, candy):	3
Notes sent home:	3
Special assemblies (storyteller, R.I.F.):	2

time, it was followed by smiles of satisfaction by the students involved.

In addition to praise and going outside for recess, there were several days when the teacher handed out stars, stickers, or treats as a reward. One particular day, the treat was jelly beans. Jelly beans were given to individual students if they came to the reading group with their work completed. Jelly beans were also given during reading instruction if they read with expression. Jelly beans were given again if they completed their workbook pages correctly.

On the day before Easter break, the teacher had bread that was baked in the shape of a bunny. When the students came to reading group, she broke off small pieces of bread and gave a piece to each student who had finished his/her seatwork.

Notes that were sent home could contain several messages concerning a student's work. It might be a note of praise about good work or it could as easily be a note of reprimand for work that was not done or was completed carelessly.

Dennis was a student who found it hard to stay on task. Consequently, he rarely finished his seatwork. On one particular day, he worked very hard. He got several of his pages completed. One of his math pages had four wrong, but he had worked every problem. On the page that

had money problems he had struggled long and hard, and had not gotten any of the ones that he attempted correct. The teacher tore the page out of the packet of seatwork, and set it aside. She then wrote a note on his packet of papers about how well he had worked that day. The teacher read the note to Dennis, and asked him to take it home to his mother.

In contrast, on another day, Maria had been talking during a lot of the reading time when she should have been doing seatwork. The teacher asked if her work were done. Maria shook her head no. The teacher asked her to come to the back of the room and sit until her work was completed. If it was not done by the end of reading time, the teacher told Maria that she would send her papers home so that her mother could see what she had not completed. It was already late, and Maria did not have sufficient time to complete her work. The teacher wrote a note on the top of her packet, and Maria was to take it home at the end of the day.

The structure of the basal reading program and the purpose and goals of the teacher during reading combined to divide the class into distinct groups: those students working independently and those participating in reading instruction. One was not to infringe on the other.

Even though this was not explicitly stated as a purpose for seatwork assignments, it was understood by the

students. While they were working on their seatwork, they were not to interrupt the reading instruction. They could not ask questions during this time, and there was not to be any talking or noise. There were several different punishments that were made at the direction of the teacher for interruptions during the reading instruction (see Table 2).

Generally when students were talking at their seats when they should be working independently on seatwork, the teacher quietly wrote their name on the chalkboard and continued her reading group instruction. If the students continued to talk, it would involve a verbal reprimand, and possibly a checkmark after their name.

If students were found to be talking again after their names had already been placed on the board, the teacher would continue a line of checkmarks following the name, one checkmark for each incident when he/she was caught interrupting the reading group by the noise of talking. There was always the risk that those students would not be allowed to go out for recess nor to an assembly, or they might have to stay after school. You were never really sure what the punishment would be, or even for sure if there would be one, but several students had been punished before in that manner.

Table 2.--Punishments for Interruptions and the Number of Incidents Recorded in My Field Notes.

	Incidents Cited in Fieldnotes
Names written on board with checkmarks:	11
Verbal reprimands:	11
Stand by desk:	5
Stay in for recess:	4
Stay after school:	2
Stay in at lunch:	2

Students could also have a checkmark or their names removed from the board by being noticed by the teacher while they were working independently and quietly.

Teacher: Dennis, I will erase the "s" on your name because you have some work done (Fieldnotes 5-21-87).

Fernando, I'm really happy to see you working quietly (Fieldnotes 4-13-87). (Teacher erased Fernando's name from the board.)

Another common punishment was a verbal reprimand by the teacher. Verbal reprimands were short comments by the teacher directly to individual students or to the group as a whole. They were usually stated as a reminder, such as, there should be no talking, or as a command like, Stop the talking and do your work.

There were several times when the teacher stopped her work in the reading group and asked individual students to stand and face the clock. She would tell them they could sit down and continue their work after so many minutes of watching the clock.

For example, one day four students were at their seats talking. The teacher called all of them by name and asked them to stand and face the clock. The red hand on the clock had to go completely around the clock five times before they could sit down again and do their work.

There were some times when the teacher just asked students to stand by their desks. They were to remain standing until she told them they could sit down again.

Sometimes a student would continue to do his/her seatwork from a standing position.

It becomes very obvious in this classroom that seatwork is important. Punishment may take the form of more time given for seatwork as in doing your work during recess or after school, or it may be in time being taken away by standing at your seat, but either way, your seatwork must be completed, and completed satisfactorily.

Time

The teacher called the reading groups in the same order every day. She started with the highest ability group. The last group to be called was the lowest in ability.

During our first interview, I asked her about her seatwork assignments and whether she made the same assignment for all or a different one for each group. She said that even though the boardwork and the packets were the same for all, she called her groups in a given order so that she might give additional assignments to the higher ability groups, therefore, they are called first.

She also said during this interview that she believes the lower group needs more time to complete their work and tends to forget the directions if she does not allow them to begin right away.

During my observations, I noticed several times the teacher's waiting until the low ability group had finished their seatwork before she called them back for reading instruction. This is one example from my fieldnotes:

9:45 Teacher: How many in the Balloon group have everything finished? (no hands). Well, I'm giving you a little more time before I call you back.

9:55 Teacher: Balloon group bring back your work. I want to see what you finished. I want everything back here.

I asked the students during their first interviews whether they liked to be called for reading in the first group, or the middle, or the last. It was interesting to note that in the middle group, all said that they would prefer to be called up first so that their work would not be interrupted. In the low group, one student said he would like to be called in the middle because the Sunshine group is better. Two of the other members in the low group said they would like to be called up first. Clarissa said it best when she answered: "I would like to be called first, but we are not called first. It is so we can have our work done. So we can finish it."

Even the students are aware of the teacher's purpose in calling the groups in a certain order. It is not alphabetical. It is not rotational. It is not from the best readers to the bottom readers, although that can

be implied. It is for the purpose of allowing the last group to be called to have the time to get their work done. This implication was so clear during the student interviews, especially when one student who was in the high ability group said that he wished he could be called last so that he could do most of his work.

The teacher believed it was important to allow the low reading group to work on their seatwork without the interruptions of meeting in a reading group. She would often delay calling the last group until the majority had completed their seatwork.

Summary

As I have found through interviews with the teacher and from observations in the classroom, seatwork is an important part of the reading instructional program. The purpose, as defined by the teacher, was for the review and transfer of learned skills.

From student interviews and observations, I have also learned that they knew that it was important to complete your seatwork, do your best work, and remain quiet during reading instruction time.

In this particular classroom, seatwork was an important part of the curriculum. It had a twofold purpose which was to review the skills previously learned by the students and provide a quiet environment for the

instruction of reading. In the next section, I will provide the data that I collected to see if in fact the purpose is indeed being carried out in the classroom.

Is Seatwork Serving Its Purpose?

Introduction

Since one purpose of seatwork, according to the teacher, was for the purpose of review and transfer of learned skills, it was important to the teacher that the students complete their seatwork in order to evaluate their progress. In this section, I shall show whether the students are completing their seatwork during this time, and particularly, which students are completing their work. Is it true that the students who are lower in ability do not complete their work, while the highest student not only complete their work, but complete it correctly? Since the students are already grouped according to reading ability in a basal reading program, I will show the relationship between the completion of independent seatwork and the reading group to which each student belongs.

I will also show in this section the students who are off task. Off task describes students who are distracted from their assigned work, and are spending time doing something other than what they are assigned to do. I will provide the necessary data to answer the

following questions. Which students from which particular reading group are off task? What are some of the reasons for being off task? Does a relationship exist between being off task and the completion of the seatwork?

The teacher also made it quite clear that there were to be no interruptions during the reading instruction. In this section I will look at the number of interruptions that occurred during reading instruction. What are the types of interruptions, and what is the source of interruptions? Are the students causing interruptions by their noise or talking? Are the students interrupting the teacher by asking questions about their seatwork? Does the teacher interrupt her own instruction of reading groups by directing comments to the students working at their seats on seatwork?

The environment of the classroom, particularly the seating arrangement, may contribute to the number or type of interruptions that occur in the classroom. It may also have significance in whether or not a student completes his/her seatwork. In this section I shall also look at this factor.

Student's Ability

A student's response to seatwork can be influenced by several factors. First and foremost would

be the students, themselves. Their maturity, development and ability surely affect the manner in which they complete their seatwork, but can we say that academic ability goes hand in hand with maturity and other developmental skills? Do students who have high ability, such as those in the high reading groups, respond better in attention to task and exhibit higher performance of that task than students who are low achievers or placed in low reading groups?

In order to find answers to these questions, I recorded in my field notes what individual students were doing at various times during the reading period. I recorded at what time they completed their seatwork, and what they chose to do when their work was done. I also recorded what they were doing when they were not working on their seatwork as they should be.

For each student in the class, I kept a record in my field notes on days when he/she handed in all of the seatwork to be corrected by the teacher. I also had a record in my notes of students who were verbally reprimanded by the teacher for not completing their seatwork or who remained inside for recess in order to work on their seatwork.

The teacher planned for time to correct the seatwork assignment before the period was over in order to evaluate the student's work and to know who did not

complete their work and make arrangements for them to complete it at another time, usually during recess. As happens in most classrooms, there were several days when her plans were not carried out. If the reading groups took longer than expected, she would correct some of the students' completed work, but she would not have the time to allow students to correct their errors or to make note of which students did not hand in completed work. There was always tomorrow and another seatwork assignment.

In my observations I, too, did not have a consistent record of every student for every day. Until a student handed in his work completed to the teacher, it was impossible for me to note if he/she had, indeed, completed every page in the packet of work. Boardwork was always to be completed first, and could be an indication that a student had not completed the work if he/she was still doing boardwork at the end of the period, as was the case with several students.

When looking at the overall incidents noted in my field notes as to when a student was acknowledged for completing the seatwork or for specially not completing the work, there was a significant difference between the students (see Table 3). To simplify the overall picture of students' work habits, I used qualifying terms, such as usually, sometimes, and rarely. The terms should not be considered absolute, for as I said, neither the

Table 3.--Number of Incidents in which a Student was
Recognized as Having Completed or not Completed
His/Her Seatwork.

Student	Number of Incidents Recognized for Completion of Work	Number of Incidents Recognized for Not Completing Work
Usually Completed Work		
1	15	0
2	12	1
3	12	1
4	12	4
5	11	1
6	11	2
7	10	2
8	9	0
Sometimes Completed Work		
9	8	7
10	8	7
11	6	2
12	6	2
13	6	4
14	6	7
Rarely Completed Work		
15	5	10
16	4	8
17	4	8
18	4	6
19	3	9
20	3	6
21	2	12
22	0	10
Discrepant Cases		
23	3	1
24	1	3
25	0	2

teacher nor I kept a consistent daily record, but there is a significant difference in the number of incidents noted during class. Students who usually or rarely were recognized for completion or noncompletion of work showed high incidents in one area and low incidents for the other, while students who sometimes completed work were more evenly balanced in recognition of both.

When considering ability as a factor in the completion of seatwork, it is interesting to find out who those students were. I have arranged the students in their respective reading groups and checked whether they were students who usually completed their seatwork, sometimes completed their work, or rarely completed the work.

As you can see in Table 4, the students are mixed throughout the reading groups, except for the two students who go into the second grade for reading. They usually completed their seatwork every day.

I did have three discrepant cases when looking over my data on the completion of seatwork. The first was student number 23 under discrepant cases on Table 1. This student was a special education student who has been mainstreamed into the regular classroom. She is a member of the low reading group. During reading period, she is pulled out of the classroom to report to her special education instructor. There were some days when she

Table 4.--Completion of Seatwork According to Reading Group

Student	Usually Completed Seatwork	Sometimes Completed Seatwork	Rarely Completed Seatwork
Low Reading Group			
1	x		
8	x		
11		x	
13		x	
16			x
18			x
19			x
20			x
Average Reading Group			
2	x		
6	x		
7	x		
9		x	
10		x	
14		x	
15			x
21			x
High Reading Group			
4	x		
12		x	
17			x
22			x
Very High Reading Group			
3	x		
5	x		

completed her seatwork before going to special education class. (There were three such incidents recorded in my field notes.) Usually, she was asked by the classroom teacher to take her seatwork assignment with her to her special education class. Her seatwork was checked at a later time by the classroom teacher. There was only one incident when she had to remain in for recess to complete her work. Therefore, I did not have enough information to place her in a specific group.

Student Number 24, under discrepant cases on Table 1, was the individual student who moved during the time that I was in the classroom doing research. She also was a member of the low reading group. During my first few weeks of observation, she spent several days with her head down on her desk or looking out the window, instead of doing her seatwork. One particular day she was sent to the hall for most of the reading period because she was crying. I asked the teacher during recess about the student, and was told that she cried often because she missed her mother. She completed her seatwork on only one occasion, but she was only a part of the study for a few short weeks.

The third discrepant case, student number 25 on Table 1, was also a girl. She was a member of the average reading group. She was a very quiet girl who rarely participated unless she was called upon. She

usually worked very slowly and quietly on her seatwork. I never saw her take her work up to the group at the end of the period for corrections. She usually remained in her seat quietly working, and yet there were only two occasions when she actually stayed in for recess to complete her work. I assume she either finished her work at the last minute on most days or she was overlooked by the teacher because of her good work habits. She never had an incident of being off task during the reading period.

It appears, at least in this particular first grade classroom, that there are students in every reading group that complete their seatwork daily and individual students from every reading group that rarely complete their seatwork.

During my observations, I also made notations of the number of days and incidents that students were off task or not working on their seatwork assignments during the reading period (see Table 5).

I noted what they were doing, and for how long. If they were on task, I noted which page they were on and which order of pages they did first.

It should be noted that since I did not have permission to use a video camera or any other machine, I had to rely solely on my own capabilities as an observer. It would be impossible for me to have recorded every

Table 5.--Observations of Students Off Task

Student	Number of Days Off Task	Number of Incidents Recognized as Off Task
Low Reading Group		
8	3	3
11	4	6
13	6	7
16	12	28
18	7	23
19	9	21
Average Reading Group		
2	3	4
6	3	3
7	5	9
9	5	8
10	12	41
14	10	27
15	11	23
21	8	14
High Reading Group		
4	4	8
12	2	4
17	8	13
22	10	28
Very High Reading Group		
5	3	6
Discrepant Cases		
1	11	20
3	10	18
20	4	8

instance that a student was off task. I was one observer with twenty-five students. Because of these limitations, an incident of being off task for a student would be, according to my notes of observation, a minimum of two to three minutes. In other words, a student would have to be off task for at least two minutes for me to have counted it as an incident. A student who stops working to whisper a few words to a neighbor or gaze out a window and then return to the work one or two minutes later would probably have not been noticed. It also probably would not have been a contributing factor as to whether they completed their work or not.

It also appears that there are high incidents of students being off task in every reading group. In fact, the students who usually complete their seatwork have the lowest incidents of being off task with two exceptions: student number 1 and student number 3. (Student number 20 is also a discrepant case, but for different reasons that will be explained later.)

Sometimes a student can be off task a significant amount of time and still complete his/her work. One could assume the student has high ability, and the work is too easy. (Student 3 may be one such case.) Maybe the student has good organizational skills, or good writing skills, and can complete the work faster. Maybe

a student is thinking when he/she appears to be daydreaming, or is writing while talking with a friend. Some students have several incidents of being off task, but are capable of returning to task quickly. (Student 1 may be one such case.)

When I first began my observations in the classroom, student 1 was seated at the same table as student 16. He was constantly being taken off task by the conversations and activities of student 16. The difference between the two boys was that immediately following an incident of being off task, student 1 would go back to his seatwork assignments, whereas student 16 would just sit and observe the rest of the students at work. A few weeks later, student 1 had his seat moved up a row where he now sat in front of student 16, and was less distracted by the activities of that particular student. He still was able to be drawn off task easily, only this time it was student 10 who also had high incidents of being off task. Since they did not sit at the same table, student 1 was not a participant as he was with student 16, but simply an observer. He would watch student 10 while he played with his crayons or throw things at various students. When he appeared to tire of his observations, he would return to his work. Because he was continually thrown back to his work, unlike some of the other students with high incidents of being off

task, I believe this may have accounted for his success in completing his seatwork, especially because he was a member of the low reading group and found the work to be sometimes difficult (see Alejandro on p. 91).

Student 3, Harry, was the student who I had mentioned earlier in Chapter IV. The teacher had considered him to be gifted. He usually completed his work early in the reading period. He rarely engaged in reading following his seatwork as was the rule in the classroom. I never observed his reading a basal reader. Since he left the classroom for reading instruction, I was not even aware of what basal reader he used. During the student interviews, Harry mentioned that he felt the seatwork assignments were too easy. He liked to do his workbook best as a seatwork assignment. Since the workbook pages are part of the basal reading program, they would be close to a student's reading level, and in Harry's case, they probably presented more of a challenge for him than the group assignments given as boardwork and in the seatwork packets. When Harry completed his work in a relatively short time, he usually just drew pictures or doodles at his seat. He was easily distracted by any other disturbances in the room since he was rarely engaged in a work assignment.

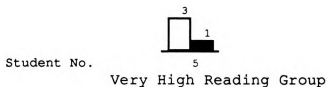
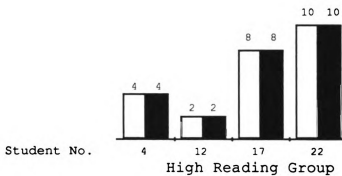
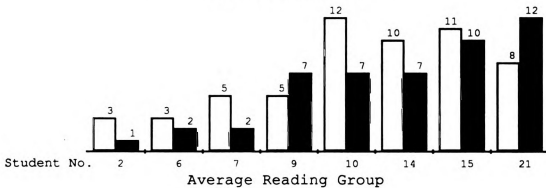
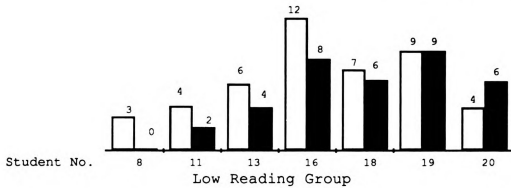
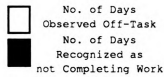
There does appear to be a relationship between being observed off task and being recognized as not

completing one's seatwork (see Graph 3). The only cases where students did not complete their work more times than they were observed being off task were the three students, numbers 9, 20, and 21. They were all girls. They were, for the most part, quiet workers. They usually worked slowly and took great care and concern to make their work neat and colorful. They all sat together in the last row, nearest to the reading group. (The row, incidentally, was designated by the teacher in the seating arrangement for students who don't complete their seatwork. This will be explained in the next section on environment.)

It is important to remember that some students do not finish their work, and yet, are not off task. For these students, there are several reasons why they may not finish their work. The first reason to come to mind would be academic ability. The work may be too difficult for the student. This is usually the reason some researchers give, particularly if those students happen to be in the lower reading groups. One explanation that I found through my observations and through informal interviews with the students was that their writing skills slowed them down.

In first grade, the formation of each letter in words is difficult for even some of the average or high-ability students. Copying boardwork may be a slow and

Legend



Graph 3.--Relationship Between Being Observed Off Task
and Recognized as Not Completing Seatwork.

tedious task for many students of varying academic abilities.

Another consideration is coloring. In the packets that this particular teacher assigned, there were several pages that required coloring or illustrations that the teacher encouraged the students to color in order to make their work attractive. For some students, this is an enjoyable task, one in which these particular students take great care and time in completing. I watched one girl spend several minutes selecting a variety of colors and then took great care in coloring each small section of the illustration. The coloring took a lot longer than what she had spent in writing the correct answers on the page.

Student 20, Theresa, was a discrepant case. She did not show a high incidence of being off task, and yet, she rarely completed her seatwork. Theresa explained it best during her student interview.

Interviewer: Are you a good reader?

Theresa: No.

Interviewer: Do you usually complete your seatwork assignments?

Theresa: No, I usually stay after school.

Interviewer: Why not?

Theresa: I write slow to get it neat.

Interviewer: Are the assignments too easy or too hard?

Theresa: Some of it is hard.

Interviewer: What seatwork assignments do you like the best?

Theresa: I like all of them the best.

Interviewer: What do you do if you do not understand your seatwork assignment?

Theresa: I copy off someone else.

Interviewer: Why do you think the teacher assigns seatwork during reading?

Theresa: To learn.

Theresa was in the low reading group. She did not consider herself to be a good reader. She rarely completed her seatwork, and found it to be difficult at times. She did her work slowly in order to get it neat. Theresa was very positive about her seatwork assignments. She believed they were necessary in order to learn, and stayed after school to complete them.

On one particular day when Theresa had completed her seatwork, I asked if she would fill out one of the student's report forms concerning whether she liked the seatwork, and what she learned. She said that even though she had today's work done, she couldn't do that for me because she had some old work to complete. Theresa usually stayed on task, but did not complete her work because she was slow in writing and the tasks were difficult for her.

There may be several reasons why some students are off task or why some students do not complete their work, but what is significant is the number of students who are continually off task and rarely complete their work. That is where we need to search for some answers. Maybe it is possible to structure the environment to help students stay on task and complete their work.

Environment

There are several reasons for a student to be off task. In some cases, a student may be drawn off task by another student who will ask them something or by some action in the room, such as the teacher's teaching the reading group or a group of students fooling around. Sometimes a student is bored, or tired. There are times when they do not have the needed supplies to do the work, or do not understand what it is that they are supposed to do.

Teachers often structure the environment to reduce the number of incidents that may draw a student off task. For instance, the seating arrangement in many classrooms is thought out and planned very carefully by a teacher. Students who are close friends and have a tendency to talk frequently are sometimes separated from each other. Students who find it hard to stay on task are seated by a student who has good work habits or

sometimes are seated away from the general class so that they will not be distracted by other students.

Many teachers also take great care to explain directions so that questions will not arise later during the reading instruction period. They also go over all supplies that are needed to complete the assignments and hand out any paper or other supplies needed before the students are to begin the work.

During my observations, I recorded the incidents of students being off task when they were working on seatwork assignments. I also recorded what they were doing when they were off task (see Table 6).

In certain situations, the teacher was very specific in what she did to control the environment to prevent any more disturbances that may take a student off task.

Talking was the most cited reason for being off task. In most cases, the teacher gave a verbal reprimand to the student or students involved. In some cases, she would make them stand and face the clock for a given amount of time. Sometimes she would make a list of names on the board with checkmarks for each time they talked. However, there were several occasions when she moved their seats.

Teacher: Fernando, your name is down (for talking). Move back to the desk where you are supposed to be (Field Notes 1-16-87).

Table 6.--Actions of Students While Off Task.

	Incidents Cited in Field Notes
Talking with another student	91
Playing with supplies, novelties, or toys	47
Disturbances such as throwing things or shoving desks	38
Borrowing or looking for supplies	28
Asking other students for answers	22
Watching the teacher in reading group instruction	21
Head down on desk	20
Watching other students	19
Sitting with seatwork completed	18
Staring out the window or in space	13
Asking teacher for assistance	3

- Teacher: Harry! (Harry is sitting and talking to a student next to him.) Take a book and go read in a cubicle (Field Notes 5-11-87).
- Teacher: Fernando, turn your desk all the way around and face the bookcase (Field notes, 5-12-87).
- Teacher: Christine, I want you to take your work out in the hall. Joan, I want you to do your work up at this desk (Field notes 5-20-87).
- Teacher: Gary, you have a checkmark for talking. I want you to work in a cubicle. Take all your things and your crayons. I don't want to see you back until all your work is done (Field Notes, 5-20-87).
- Teacher: Alejandro and Fernando, I am not moving you again. You are after school five minutes. Every time I have to talk to you from now in, it will be more time after school (Field Notes 3-19-87).

Alejandro and Fernando both had high incidents of being off task (Alejandro had 20; Fernando had 28). Fernando was assigned to sit in an individual desk that was located in the back of the classroom in close proximity to the reading instruction area. Alejandro sat in the back row of tables also near the instructional reading area.

Gary (27 incidents off task) and Jamie (28 incidents off task) also sat in the back row of tables with John (21 incidents of being off task) sitting at an individual desk in the back next to the teacher's desk.

David, who had the highest incidents of being off task (41 incidents), also sat in an individual school desk located off to the side in the middle of the room.

It was very apparent in this particular classroom that the students who were not completing seatwork and were consistently off task usually were assigned an individual desk apart from the rest of the class or sat in the back row of tables nearest to the teacher when she was instructing reading groups.

The structure of the environment relates to more than the physical layout of the classroom and where individual students sit. It also pertains to the routines and rules and responsibilities that all the students know and follow.

In this classroom, it was very apparent that the students were not to interrupt the teacher while she was instructing a reading group. In my field notes, I have only noted three incidents when a student, who was at his/her seat doing seatwork, approached the teacher or asked any questions during the time when the teacher was instructing a reading group. Even on those occasions, the teacher responded to the inquiry by directing him/her to another student at his/her seat for the needed assistance.

Karl leaves his seat and walks up to the teacher while she is instructing a reading group. He has his packet in his hand. He says something to her, but I am not able to hear what he has said. He shows her a page in his packet.

Teacher: Who can tell Karl how to do this page? The teacher holds up the packet.

Several students raise their hands.

Teacher: Go ask Eddie.

Karl went over to Eddie, and Eddie explained the directions once again to Karl.

On another day, several weeks later, Gary got out of his seat, and approached the teacher with his packet. He asked how to do a particular page.

Teacher: That is ridiculous! I am not going over it again. If you do not do it correctly, you can stay in for lunch!

Gary: Gary returned to his seat.

The third occasion of an incident where a student approached the teacher while she was instructing a reading group occurred on a day when a substitute was in the classroom. Roberta was having trouble staying on task. The substitute had already reprimanded her for talking and had moved her seat in the hope of isolating her from any further distractions. Roberta still was not working. She was sitting at her seat with her hand up. The teacher did not respond. Finally, Roberta got up out of her seat and approached the teacher in the reading group. She whispered something to the teacher. The teacher nodded her head, giving assent. Roberta walked away, and went into the bathroom.

This was an unusual occurrence. During my observations, the students went to the bathroom, sharpened their pencils, threw things away, and obtained

supplies whenever they needed without asking permission. In fact, that was one of the noticeable traits in the structure of this classroom's environment that reduced the number of interruptions for the teacher while she was instructing a reading group.

Three interruptions over a period of several months were significant in alerting me to the rules and responsibilities that were clearly understood by the students concerning the time when the teacher was instructing a reading group.

This was not to say that this was the perfect classroom with all students working quietly at their seats and the teacher instructing a small reading group with no interruptions. There were interruptions on a daily basis. The significance comes in the distinction of the types of interruptions that occur. As I have said, in this particular classroom, the students did not interrupt the teacher's instruction time with questions; however, the teacher did interrupt her instruction time in order to reprimand the students at their seats. These interruptions were usually for talking when it should be quiet, for not completing their work, or general noise like moving desks, kicking one's feet, reading out loud, and so forth.

These interruptions by the teacher were directed to the entire group at their seats or to an individual

student (see Table 7). They not only caused the students' work in the reading group to stop, but they

Table 7.--Interruptions by the Teacher

	Incidents Cited in Field Notes
<u>Types of Interruptions</u>	
Talking	29
Not working	55
Classroom noise	13
<u>Responses by the Teacher</u>	
Directed to an individual student	51
Directed to the group	46

usually caused the students at their seats to stop work momentarily to listen to the teacher.

There were a variety of punishments that could be invoked at the discretion of the teacher, few of which were explained before the class began. Most were determined on the spot at the time of the interruption. Depending on the number of students involved, some punishments even directed to the whole class while others were for individual students. For example:

- Substitute Teacher: First graders, that's five minutes off outside playtime. We will spend the time with our heads down instead of outside playing. (Pause.) Six minutes! (Pause.) Seven minutes! (Field Notes 5-12-87).
- Teacher: Alejandro and Fernando, I am not moving you again. You are after school five minutes. Every time I have to talk with you from now on, it will be more time after school (Field Notes 3-19-87).
- Teacher: (12:35 p.m.) Now I am keeping names. When I go outside, you will stay in (Field Notes 3-24-87).
- Teacher: (Again on the same day) (12:56 p.m.) These people are on warning for going outside ____; ____; ____; (Field Notes 3-24-87).
- Teacher: It had better quiet down or there will be a lot of students missing gym class (Field Notes, 4-7-87).

The types of interruptions and the manner in which the teacher responds to the interruptions were very significant. First, it was very apparent that the students were not intentionally interrupting the teacher (only three incidents cited in field notes), but were indirectly interrupting through their actions (97 incidents cited in field notes for talking, noise, or not completing work). It was the teacher's response to these interruptions that took time away from reading instruction.

When different punishments are explained daily, particularly when the punishments are explained at the time of the interruption, it takes additional minutes away from the time that is allotted for reading

instruction. It also became apparent that most of the punishments were directed in the manner of a threat and in a negative fashion. If you don't stop talking, you will stay in for recess with your heads down.

The students know the rules and responsibilities. I have already shown through my observations and student interviews that the students know the rules concerning any interruptions of the reading groups, and they are very aware of their responsibility to complete their work. It is also apparent that there is a direct relationship between being off task and not completing one's work. Given the structure of the environment, the students incur a punishment as a natural occurrence of their actions. If they are talking or off task and interrupting the instruction of the reading group, it is very likely they will not complete their seatwork and have to stay in for recess or at another time to finish their work.

A teacher also has the choice of reminding the student of the punishment that they will receive if they continue with the interruptions (negative response) or to remind them of the rules not to talk or interrupt the reading groups and their responsibility to finish their work (positive response).

Summary

In this first grade classroom, the students were aware of the importance in completing their daily seatwork. There were as many students who usually completed their work as there were those who rarely completed their work. However, it was significant to note that the students' abilities or their particular placement in ability-oriented reading groups was not related to whether or not they completed their seatwork.

There also was a significant number of students off task during the reading period. Again, this was not directly related to any particular ability or reading group. There were students who showed high incidents of being off task in every reading group. There was, however, a direct relationship between a student's being off task and whether or not he/she completed the seatwork. A student who had high incidents of being off task also had a significant high number of incidents recognized for not completing their work.

There were several interruptions during the instructions of reading groups by the students working on seatwork. Most interruptions occurred at the students' seat. They were talking, making noise, or not doing their work. On several of these occasions, the teacher would change the environment by moving a particular

student's seat. There were only three occasions when students interrupted directly by asking a question. In most cases, it was the teacher who interrupted the work by reprimanding a student or the class.

What is Assigned as Seatwork?

Introduction

In years past to give the teacher more preparation time for reading instruction in the small groups, most seatwork took the form of "ditto" sheets. Dittos were prepared by publishing companies in all curriculum areas--English, math, creative writing--to name a few. Many criticisms concerning this practice surfaced. Many writers were of the opinion that students did not learn writing or composition skills by simply filling in answers on a ditto sheet. Extra teacher time in preparation of boardwork was worth having students learn how to write better by copying assignments from the blackboard or in some form of writing exercise. "Dittos" are still being used, but in my view hopefully with less frequency and with a specific purpose in mind other than just to keep the students busy.

Seatwork, whether it is written on the board to be copied by the student, or is handed out in the form of dittos, can be designated as a whole class assignments or a reading group assignment. Whole class assignments are

those in which one assignment is made for all the students to complete. In contrast, specific reading group assignments are those in which a particular assignment is made for each specific reading group.

In this section I will specifically look at the type of assignments that were made (as independent seatwork) in this classroom. I will also look at what skills these assignments were directed to teach.

I considered the manner in which the directions were given. I recorded in my fieldnotes whether the directions were given orally or written for the student to read as well as whether or not the purpose or goal of the assignment was explained. All of this information was important for a student successfully to complete seatwork.

The rules and responsibilities that were established during seatwork related to many aspects of the seatwork assignment. As was stated in previous sections, some rules were related to the teacher's purpose or the structure of the environment. There were others that related to the manner in which a student should progress through the seatwork from the time that directions are first given, until the reading period is over, which was designated on most days by the announcement to line up for recess. These rules served

to assist students in using their time wisely while at their seats during reading.

With seatwork accounting for the majority of a student's time during reading instruction, it is important to examine the types of assignments that are used as seatwork.

Type of Assignment

This particular classroom teacher gave a combined assignment of both boardwork and dittos. The ditto sheets were stapled together and called a "packet." Boardwork was written on the chalkboard daily. The students were instructed to copy the boardwork first and then complete their packets each day as their seatwork assignment during reading. These assignments were considered whole class assignments because every student was expected to finish all of the same work regardless of their reading ability or group. In addition the teacher would give reading group assignments that were workbook pages from their basal reading workbook. These assignments were individual reading group assignments that were to be completed when all their other work was finished.

During the afternoon reading sessions, there was no boardwork, but a packet of assignments was given as in the morning session. In addition to the packet, they

were to finish all workbook pages that may have been assigned during the morning session and additional pages in the workbook and practice book associated with their basal reader were assigned.

Since most of my observations were during the morning reading session, I was concerned with the type of assignment that was given during the forty to forty-five minutes used for seatwork daily during these morning sessions.

There were several skills being taught in the assigned seatwork (see Table 8). Some skills overlapped, and could be listed under more than one heading, for instance, word attack and word recognition skills. Many times when the teacher gave an assignment to teach these basic reading skills, she would incorporate spelling words in the lesson. The same was true for some English skills, such as plurals and proper nouns where the lessons also made use of the weekly spelling words. Because of this overlapping of skills in different subject areas, some administrators believe they should be taught together simultaneously as one subject--language arts. The language arts incorporate all reading, listening, speaking, and writing skills. This particular administration instructed their teachers to use the language arts skills as a basis for their seatwork assignments.

Table 8.--Skills Taught as Assigned Seatwork

Reading:	Word Attack (Phonics, Rhyming) Word Recognition (Fill in the blanks, Matching) Comprehension (Riddles, Coded Messages, Scrambled Sentences)
Spelling:	Alphabetical Order Days and Months of the Year
English:	Recognition of Nouns and Adjectives Plurals Proper Nouns Use of Capitalization and Punctuation
Creating Writing	
Math:	Addition Subtraction Sequence Order (dot to dot, first through sixth) Fractions ($1/2$, $1/3$, $1/4$) Graphs (bar) Telling Time Counting Money
Art:	Recognition of Colors Coloring Skills
Health:	Nutrition

Handwriting was not listed as a skill because it was not taught at this time. There was no instruction during my observations of the formation of letters for good handwriting skills. However, it was practiced daily when the students were instructed to copy the boardwork in their own handwriting. Neatness was stressed, when I observed on several occasions that students were asked to do their work over again if the teacher believed they could write it better than they had the first time.

Teacher: David, you were one of my best writers. That is not neat! If it is not neat, I will not look at it.

David crumbled his paper, and threw it away. He went and got another sheet of paper and began the assignment a second time.

Even though handwriting was not taught during this time, it was practiced and encouraged in all of the student's work.

In looking at the number of seatwork assignments in the various skill areas during my twenty days of morning observations, it was apparent that even though there were several assignments in the language arts area, there was an equal number of assignments in Math (see Table 9). When I asked the teacher her purpose in assigning seatwork, she responded that it was to review previously learned skills. She specifically did not say to review language arts skills. Even though this was the reading instruction time, the teacher assigned seatwork

Table 9.--Number of Seatwork Assignments during Twenty Days of Observations

Language Arts	45 Assignments
Reading	(13)
Spelling	(10)
English	(17)
Creative Writing	(5)
Math	45 Assignments
Art	4 Assignments
Health	2 Assignments

for the purpose of reviewing all previously learned skills including math. In fact, it became very apparent in the repetition of certain skills, particularly the counting of coins or money that the teacher believed in her purpose of review for the transference of certain skills. The students were given ten assignments on money, five of which were given four days in a row. Many of the students always appeared to be struggling on the assignments that had money problems. They took longer to complete those pages, and I would observe their asking others for assistance on more occasions.

Even though the teacher assigned work that encompassed more than the basic reading and language arts skills, she stressed the importance of reading during the instructional time with her firm rule of taking out your

basal reader to practice reading when all of your work is completed. On my last day of observation, I could hear her voice as I left the room, "Remember if you finish what you are to do, get out a reading book not from the library, the reading books we use, and read!"

It is important to remember that in this particular classroom, there were few interruptions during my months of observation where a student specifically asked for the directions to be repeated or clarified. Directions for boardwork were given twice on two separate occasions. They were explained the night before the assignment was to be completed in order that they might begin work the first thing after their arrival to school the next morning. They were repeated again after attendance was taken each morning. At this time, the packets were also explained. The directions were always given orally. There were no directions written on the board. The packets, however, contained written directions on each page.

Each morning, following attendance, the teacher would take the students through all of their assigned work, page by page, and go over the directions thoroughly. She would also ask the students if they understood the directions or if they had any questions about the work. The teacher would also call on

individual students to repeat the directions in their own words to be sure they understood.

The manner in which directions were given and the specific directions followed certain patterns and routines daily. Most directions involved ordering or underlining the right answer, matching, and fill in the blanks. When the directions were given, the students in this classroom knew that it was just not a listening exercise where the teacher would give the directions for each page, but that they would be involved and asked to participate in giving the directions.

The following is an example of the type of dialog that went on during the explanation of directions for assigned work. The seatwork assignment on this particular day involved the skill of recognizing complete and incomplete sentences and using the correct punctuation. Written on the board was:

Name	May	1987
Telling Parts	O O O O O O	
The dog runs fast.	Put an A on the first O.	
The sky is gray.	Put an F on the second O.	
The chair is broken.	Color the third O orange.	
	Color the fourth O yellow.	

Teacher: I like the way row one is sitting quietly. I need row four to be quiet. Do not begin writing until we go over some things. What is today's date? Let us make a sentence. Today is Tuesday, May 19.

Class: Today is Tuesday, May 19. (Everyone repeats together.)

Teacher: Let's read this part. (The teacher points to the first sentence on the board.) Raise your hand. What is the telling part of this sentence? (Pause while hands are raised.) Karl.

Karl: Dog.

Teacher: Dog. Right. Do we circle or underline dog?

Class: Underline. (Class repeats together. The class knows the answer because the directions for the boardwork had been given yesterday before they left for home.)

Teacher: Underline! Right. Who can repeat the directions? (Pause while hands are raised.) Fernando.

Fernando: Underline the telling parts.

Teacher: Right. On this part (teacher points to second part of the boardwork which teaches the recognition of certain words which show order) who can tell me what you are supposed to do? Dorothy.

Dorothy: Everyone but the Balloon group is to color.

Teacher: Balloon group you are to outline, not color! Balloon group, are you to color?

Balloon Group: No!

Teacher: You are to do, what?

Balloon Group: Outline!

Teacher: Outline only!

There were three pages in the packet on this particular day. The first page had a list of several complete and incomplete sentences. There were stop signs at the bottom to be cut out and placed at the end of certain sentences. The next two pages contained math skills. The first was a coloring picture that was broken into sections with simple addition problems. The sections that had an answer of two were to be colored red. The sections that had an answer of four were to be colored yellow, and so on. The last page involved circling the forms that showed the fraction, one-third.

Teacher: Now, in your packets. On this page. (Teacher holds up first page in the stapled packet.) If it is a complete sentence, I do not want you to put a stop sign. I want you to put a period in. (Pause.) Rhonda is. Is that a complete sentence?

Class: No!

Teacher: Rhonda is a girl. Is that a complete sentence?

Class: Yes.

Teacher: Rhonda is good. Rhonda is happy. A complete sentence should paint a picture for you. What do you put if it is a complete sentence?

Class: Period!

Teacher: What do you put if it is not a complete sentence? Question mark?

Class: No!

Teacher: What do you put if it is not a complete sentence? Dennis? Dennis stand up.

Dennis did not have his hand raised. He was sitting quietly in his desk, but he had not been giving any of the oral responses with the rest of the class.

Teacher: What do you put if it is not a complete sentence?

Dennis: You put an X.

Teacher: You put an X. Dennis, what?

Dennis: X

Christine walked into the classroom late.

Teacher: Christine, why are you tardy? You were tardy yesterday.

Christine: I slept in.

The teacher repeated the directions for the boardwork and then asked Dennis to repeat the directions for the first page in the packet.

The directions were not simply read or explained, but there was a dialog between the teacher and the class that necessitated active involvement on the part of every student. This involvement helped create, if not an understanding, then a knowledge of the directions for the assigned seatwork each day. Dennis may not understand which answer--a period or X--belonged at the end of each group of words, but he did know to place one or the other as he was directed.

The purpose or goal of each assignment was not explained, but many times the lesson to be learned was explained indirectly. In the above example, the teacher began her explanation of directions by asking what the

date was, but before anyone could answer, she instructed them to answer in a complete sentence. Daily the students responded to the same question with the date, but today was different. Today, the teacher wanted the answer stated in a complete sentence. Later the students were asked to recognize complete sentences from incomplete sentences. Thus the goal or purpose of today's seatwork may become clear to some students.

On another day, the following work was on the board to be completed during reading.

Name _____ March 17, 1987

I have one car.	I sleep in a bed.
Jan has two ____.	In my room, there are two ____.
Give me that map.	I live on a road.
We need both ____.	The city has many ____.
I like this book.	Bob has one red boat.
Tim likes these ____.	He has two blue ____.
Maps books cars	beds boats roads

Teacher: What are you working with in this week's spelling?

Class: S

Teacher: What does the "S" mean? Does it mean one or more than one?

Class: More than one.

Teacher: Fill in the blanks with the correct words.

Again, the purpose or goal was not explicitly stated as such, but some students knew that they were learning about words that mean more than one and that these words contain an "S" on the end, as shown by their responses given in class.

During the student interviews, I asked the students to explain the day's seatwork assignment. They were not in the classroom at the time, nor did they have their packets with them. It was all related by memory. I was surprised by the accuracy in their explanations. Some students related the assignments by the skills involved.

Clarissa: My boardwork was counting by tens and ones, writing spelling words that are written on board. In my packet was counting by tens and ones, adding and subtracting, coloring, and a page to color than cut and paste.

Some students would include the directions in their explanations.

Jeffery: The boardwork was tens and ones. You have numbers like thirty-four. You write three tens, four ones. On the back, write your spelling words if you missed them. How many you missed two times. If you don't miss any, write all of them once. In the packet, math same as boardwork. I don't know all the rest.

Theresa: For boardwork, write missed words two times. Write answer to the tens and ones. In the packet, count the dynamite and circle right answer. Coloring page and I don't remember the other.

I was very surprised as first graders how accurate they were in remembering the skills and directions for their assigned work. Out of eight interviews, only one student could not explain all of the boardwork, and at least three of the pages in the packet. That student was Margaret. Margaret was in the average reading group. She usually finished her seatwork and was rarely off task.

Interviewer: Are you a good reader?

Margaret: Yes.

Interviewer: In school, what do you like best about reading time?

Margaret: I like going to the reading groups when we first come to school because we have to do a lot of work.

Interviewer: Explain today's seatwork assignment.

Margaret: Coloring and stuff like that.

Interviewer: Do you usually complete your seatwork assignments?

Margaret: Yes.

Interviewer: Are the assignments too easy or too hard?

Margaret: Too hard.

Interviewer: What seatwork assignment do you like the best?

Margaret: Packet.

Interviewer: What seatwork assignments do you like the least?

Margaret: Spelling.

Interviewer: Why do you think the teacher assigns seatwork during reading?

Margaret: To keep us busy so we wouldn't talk.

Margaret does not see a purpose in her seatwork other than to keep her busy so she won't talk. She believes there is a lot of work, and that it is hard. Her least favorite assignment is spelling which was part of the boardwork on this particular day. Her favorite work is in the packet. On many days, as was on this day, there is a coloring page included in the packet. Coloring seems to be an easy assignment at this age, and one in which most of the students enjoy. Coloring was the only assignment that Margaret remembered or cared to relate when asked about the day's assignment. In contrast, the other students when interviewed related in detail the boardwork and at least part of the packet when first asked. One can only speculate that if Margaret perceived the seatwork assignments as having a different purpose than "keeping her busy so she won't talk," then maybe this purpose would, indeed, be carried through in her explanation of the seatwork.

During my research, I found evidence that the directions were explained thoroughly with an indication of the skill or goal to be learned. There were no interruptions during the reading period for directions to be repeated or explained. When students were asked, they

gave every indication of understanding what they were to do and for what purpose.

Rules and Responsibilities

In classrooms the rules can be understood by listening to the teacher. Teachers give constant reminders as to what the students should and should not be doing. The following is a list of rules as direct quotes from the teacher during my observations in the classroom:

Teacher: I cannot start until I see everyone working.

Everyone has something to do.

I shouldn't hear any talking.

____, stay in that seat.

I want everyone to make sure their name is on every page of their work.

You cannot go on to any other work until your boardwork is complete.

Sloppy! Sloppy! I will not accept this. You straighten each one up. Also, I told you to color everything.

Put your papers together in a stack at the corner of your desk. . . .

How many have gotten a book to read? You are not to get a game. You are to get out a reading book, not a library book.

If you have finished your work, your name on every page, and you have colored everything, you may bring up your paper.

If there's a black mark on them (your papers), then you know you need to correct them.

As I said earlier, most rules are only a means to reach certain goals. In this particular classroom, it would appear that the most important goal for this teacher is that the students complete their work, quietly and correctly. Their work should be neat and attractive (everything should be colored). When their work is completed, they should be reading.

Since in this study I strived not only to look at the teacher's purpose and expectations, but also to see if the students understood the purpose and expectations for their seatwork, it would be interesting to see what the students said were the rules and responsibilities in the classroom during seatwork.

Interviewer: What are the rules during reading when you are working at your seats?

Gina: No talking. (Pause.) Shouldn't get games. Must get a book out and read. Don't read out loud.

Alejandro: Do your work. Don't make noise. Don't talk to another person.

John: Do work. Don't talk to anyone.

Throughout my interviews, the students all said variations of the same two rules. Don't talk and do your work. The students were very aware of the fact that the teacher wanted the room to be quiet, presumably so that she could instruct the reading groups and so that they could complete their work. Several of the girls also mentioned during the interviews that they did their work

slowly in order to make it neat. None of the boys mentioned neatness, although they did mention the fact that they were happy to get stars when they completed their work correctly. I found this interesting because in my field notes whenever the teacher mentioned the fact that neatness was important, she was always speaking to one of the boys. Even though the boys were constantly being reminded that neatness was important to the teacher, they did not think to mention it at any time during my interviews concerning their seatwork. Maybe neatness was a goal for the teacher and the girls in the room, but not recognized by the boys as a goal for their work.

It was also interesting to note when looking at the differences in responses between the girls and boys, that the boys mentioned rules pertaining to physical behavior, whereas the girls made no response in that nature.

Interviewer: Do you ever break the rules?

Alejandro: I sometimes follow them.

Interviewer: Which ones do you break?

Alejandro: Don't push. Don't hit.

Alejandro was a quiet student who usually got his work done, but was frequently taken off task, usually by the more physically active boys in the classroom.

Interviewer: Do you ever break the rules?

John: I break the rules.

Interviewer: Which ones?

John: Don't throw crayons. Don't make noise.

John rarely completed seatwork, and I observed his being off task on several days.

The few girls who did say they sometimes broke the rules always said the rule that they broke was no talking. Most of the students interviewed, girls and boys, said that they usually didn't break the rules.

Rules in this classroom were not solely to keep order nor were they all negative in nature. Don't do this, and don't do that. There were several that were positive and had specific goals in mind. For example, the rule that I remember best from my observations and was probably most frequently mentioned by the teacher and students was to complete all of your work and then take out your reading book and read. After all, this was reading time.

Summary

The teacher was very consistent in the type of assignments she made as seatwork. They were whole class assignments that consisted of a writing exercise, (boardwork) and a packet of dittos. They addressed skills from all the subjects in the curriculum, but

mainly math and language arts. There were several skills that were presented almost daily for reinforcement of learning. Handwriting and neatness were stressed in all skill areas.

Directions for the seatwork assignments were given orally. They involved a dialog between the teacher and the class that strengthened listening skills as well as retention, for there were few interruptions during the reading period concerning the directions to be followed. The purpose or goal of each assignment was not directly stated by the teacher, but most students knew what they were learning through the manner in which the directions were explained.

The rules and responsibilities during the reading period were clear. Seatwork assignments were to be completed correctly and neatly. There was to be no noise nor talking during this time. When their work was complete, the students were to take out their reading books and read.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Interpretations

In a basal reading program, teachers use seatwork to reinforce skills and to keep students busy and quiet while they provide direct instruction to reading groups. The purpose of this study was to observe student responses to their seatwork assignments during reading in a first grade classroom. In order to look at students' responses, I found the observational case study to be an informative method of research for this study.

Student responses were influenced by several factors, including the teacher's purpose for the assignment, the time that a student spent working on his assignment, the student's ability, the environment in relation to where a student was seated in the classroom, the type of assignment that was given, and the rules and responsibilities that were established in this classroom.

Through interviews with the teacher and student and from observations in the classroom, I found seatwork to be a significant part of the reading instructional program. The purpose, as defined by the teacher, was for

the review and transfer of learned skills and to provide a quiet environment for the instruction of reading.

The students were aware of the importance in completing their seatwork and being quiet while they worked. They were constantly reminded of the punishments: stay in for recess, lunch or after school, or the denial of rewards, treats, stars, or stickers, if they did not complete their work. Their purpose, during this time, was to complete the work. There was little, if any, discussion on what they had learned from the assignment.

In this particular first grade classroom, there were as many students who usually completed their work as there were those who rarely completed their seatwork. However, it was significant to note that the student's abilities or their particular placement in ability-oriented reading groups were not related to whether or not they completed their seatwork.

There also was a significant number of students off task during the reading period. Again, this did not appear to be directly related to any particular ability or reading group. There were students who showed high incidence of being off task in every reading group. There was, however, a direct relationship between a student's being off task and whether or not he/she completed the seatwork. A student who had high incidence

of being off task also had a significantly high number of incidents in which he/she was recognized for not completing seatwork.

This does not support other research (Good & Beckerman, 1978; Anderson et al., 1984) that show students who have high ability, such as those who are placed in the high reading groups, respond better in attention to task and exhibit higher performances of that task than students who are low achievers or placed in low reading groups.

There are several explanations for this discrepancy in findings. First, there is the possibility that organizational skills and good work habits are skills that are learned apart from reading skills, and that mastery of one does not insure the others. Some students in first grade may have had an early introduction into reading, and yet, still be struggling with the expectations and responsibilities of good work habits in a classroom structure. They may not know how to structure their time or resist the temptation of talking or playing with their classmates.

There is also the possibility that the types of assignments may be a factor in the discrepancy in findings. The assignments in this particular classroom consisted of a writing exercise and a packet of dittos. They contained skills from all the subjects of the

curriculum, but mainly math and language arts. A student who has high ability in reading may not have a high ability in math. This could account for average or high reading students who do not complete their seatwork or stay on task. Also, the fact that part of the assignment involved writing and coloring skills was explained earlier in my paper as a factor that affect some students in completion of their work.

The assignments were whole-class assignments which suggests that the assignments were not on the ability level of all students. This affects the high-ability student as much as it does the low-ability student. A high student may not have the motivation to complete his/her work, and may choose to be off task rather than complete work that he/she feels is too easy, and has as its only purpose to keep him/her busy.

In this analysis of the possible reasons for the discrepancy in findings, it also becomes apparent that there is a need to consider several factors when seatwork assignments are being investigated. Student responses are very complex. I believe in the search for answers to our educational problems, but one must continue to question our methods of research. To isolate or only look at one factor, such as ability, may indeed lead to a conclusion that does not take into account the other factors, such as environment, rules and responsibilities,

etc. that also have an affect on the students' responses and can be controlled or directed by the teacher.

From student interviews and observations during my study, I learned that the students knew the importance that the teacher placed on completion of seatwork and remaining quiet during the reading instruction period; however, there were several interruptions during the instruction of reading groups by the students working on seatwork. They were talking, making noise, or not doing their work. The teacher would remind the students of the rules or reprimand them for their behavior. She also changed their environment by moving their seats either by isolating them in a study carrel or out in the hall or move them away from certain distractions to a seat in another part of the room. The manner in which a teacher handles these disturbances has been debated in research. Again, it is important to remember that this is only one factor that influences the responses that students make to seatwork.

I have tried to represent a comprehensive study of the responses that students make to seatwork in a first grade basal reading program. I have addressed the issue of the importance of looking at all the factors that influence their responses, that is teacher's purpose, time allotment, students' ability, environment, type of assignment, and the rules and responsibilities.

All play an important part in the success of our students in completion of the task of seatwork.

Implications

Upon completion of this research study, I realize the importance of looking at the teacher's purpose for assigning seatwork assignments. Teachers appear to evaluate students' performances and create the environment and rules according to their purpose. At the beginning of any program, teacher evaluation or study there should be an inquiry concerning the teacher's purpose in light of educational goals. When the purposes have been determined the purpose, then we have a basis of evaluation on whether those purposes are being carried out in the classroom. Administrators and researchers enter a classroom and make judgments or evaluations based on their own goals, expectations, or purpose for instruction.

There is a need for more research that addresses the question of the purpose for seatwork. If the ultimate goal in seatwork assignments is to be completion, to what extent should students' questions be ignored? How many times do teachers evaluate seatwork on the basis of how quietly the students worked, whether they stayed on task, and whether they finished the assignments? The students are reprimanded or punished if

they interrupt the teacher's work or that of another student by asking questions. They are expected to know the skills, and complete all the work.

In my research studies, I have found that teachers gave a twofold purpose for seatwork; that is, to reinforce skills and to keep the students busy and quiet in order that they may instruct individual reading groups. If the seatwork is used for an understanding of skills, then assistance from the teacher should be available and offered to the student. In most classrooms that I have observed, the students were offered little or no assistance in the completion of their seatwork. They were expected to finish all assignments and make corrections so that they have no errors. The teachers expected the students to listen to the directions, remember them, and work independently until finished. The teachers would not repeat the directions and the students were told not to interrupt the teacher with questions while she was instructing a reading group. A confusion may exist in having a twofold purpose with contradictory implementation.

Teachers plan the type of assignments they will use to review specific skills. The seatwork in many classrooms incorporates skills beyond reading alone. We need to consider seriously our curriculum goals and make decisions to guide the teachers to make the best use of

our limited time, especially in the area of seatwork which comprises the majority of our instructional time.

With the wide range of reading abilities, do we assign work on all reading levels or somehow try to hit a middle ground? Obviously, when we do the latter, we have some students who find the assignments very easy and have little challenge. We also have some students for which the assignment is too difficult. On the other hand, when we select the former method and put all the time and effort into putting up three to four separate assignments on the board we publicly display the complexity of each assignment which may cause some students to ridicule others concerning the simplicity of their task in comparison to their own.

One last question, but an important one, concerning the type of assignment for seatwork. Is there the possibility of engaging students in reading, or is there a reason for making seatwork a writing task? We always say that students need to be reading more and yet little is done at home or at school. What good are the skills if the students never apply them? What better time to read than during the period of reading when students are given the instruction of reading?

Teachers, administrators, and researchers need to address the many questions that still persist after many years in the practice of assigning seatwork as part of a

basal reading program. The significant amount of student time designated in the curriculum for this practice warrants further research in its effectiveness. The purpose of seatwork and the type of assignments should be the basis for further studies.

I would like to see further research take the direction of having teachers and researchers look together at the practice of assigning seatwork. Dialog either through journals or conferences between researcher and teacher is highly important in understanding what we are about and where we want to go.

A record of time spent in planning for seatwork, the source for the assignment, and a reflection of how it might have been improved upon or in effect what happened and why, could be the source for the dialog as well as what effect the seatwork had on the number of interruptions to the reading group.

A dialog among researchers, teachers, and students in regard to their personal understanding of the seatwork may also prove insightful. The students' perceptions of the purpose of seatwork as well as how well they understand it, whether it was interesting, or challenging, all would be a valuable contribution to any future study on seatwork.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEWS WITH TEACHER

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONS FOR FIRST INTERVIEW WITH TEACHER

1. Thinking about your reading instruction, what do you consider to be your successes? Your failures?
2. What is the purpose in assigning seatwork?
3. What do you assign as seatwork and why?
4. Do you get seatwork ideas from the basal? If not, where do your ideas come from?
5. How much planning time do you spend on the seatwork assignments?
6. Do you ever use one assignment for all students? Why or why not?
7. Can you give me an example of a seatwork assignment which you considered particularly successful? A complete failure?
8. Do you have a particular order for calling reading groups?
9. In addition to the basal, is there any other reading instruction?
10. How is reading encouraged in your classroom?
11. Is reading ever assigned as seatwork?

12. Do the students do any other reading beside the basal?
13. Are the students ever read to?
14. What are some of the rules during reading instruction?
15. Do you believe seatwork assignments are a necessary component of reading instruction?

Related Topics Followed by the Number of the Question
that pertains to each Topic:

ability

type of assignment 3, 4, 6, 9, 11

teacher's purpose 2, 15

environment

time 8

rules and responsibility 14

QUESTIONS FOR SECOND INTERVIEW WITH TEACHER

1. Do you believe the seatwork assignments are appropriate for all students? Are there particular students who you feel the seatwork assignments are too easy or too difficult?
2. I would like to get your response to a quote that I had recorded one day. Harry was sitting at his seat. His work was done. You said, "Harry, take something out to read NOW!" Why do you believe you responded in that way? Was there a particular rule that was broken?
3. Given your purpose of assigning seatwork, "to review a learned skill," do you believe seatwork in your classroom is fulfilling that purpose?
4. If you were free to make any changes you wanted to make, what would you change about reading time?
5. Do you think the children exceed your expectations, usually meet your expectations, or don't quite make it?

6. Yesterday, John and Gary were placing crayon on top of crayon to see how high they could make it. Your response was, "All right Gary and John! Gary, who controls the situation?" What did you mean? Was Gary responsible?
7. Why do the children prefer seatwork to boardwork?
8. How do you encourage reading when work is done?
9. Directions are given the day before for the boardwork. Do you give the directions again in the morning?
10. Arthur and Frank used to sit together in the back row. Arthur now sits up a row and is away from Frank. Why did you move Arthur's seat?

Related Topics Followed by the Number of the Question
that Pertains to Each Topic

ability	1, 5
type of assignment	7, 9
teacher's purpose	3, 5, 8
environment	4, 10
time	
rules and responsibility	2, 6

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEWS WITH STUDENTS

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONS FOR FIRST INTERVIEWS WITH STUDENTS

1. Do you like to read?
2. Are you a good reader?
3. Do you read at home? What? How much?
4. What is your favorite book?
5. In school, what do you like best/least about reading time?
6. How can you improve your reading?
7. Explain today's seatwork assignment.
8. What advice would you give a new student to your classroom in regard to reading time?
9. Do you usually complete your seatwork assignment?
Why or why not?
10. Are the assignments too easy or too hard?
11. What seatwork assignments do you like the best?
12. Which seatwork assignments do you like the least?
13. What do you do if you do not understand your seatwork assignment? Does this happen often?
14. Will the teacher answer your questions during seatwork time?

15. Why do you think the teacher assigns seatwork during reading?
16. Do you like to be called up for reading instruction first or last or doesn't it matter?

Related Topics Followed by the Number of the Question
That Pertains to Each Topic:

ability	1, 2, 3, 10
type of assignment	7, 10, 11, 12
teacher's purpose	15
environment	5
time	9, 16
rules and responsibilities	8, 13, 14

QUESTIONS FOR SECOND INTERVIEWS WITH STUDENTS

1. What are the rules during reading when you are working at your seats?
2. Do you ever break the rules? If so, which ones? Why do you think you break those particular rules.
3. Sometimes I notice that you are not working. What are some of the things that cause you to stop working?
4. Explain today's seatwork assignment.
5. During our first interview in regard to when your group is called up for reading, you said: (Read quote from first interview). How is your seatwork affected if you are not called up at that time? Why do you like that time best?
6. When do you do your best work during reading and why?

7. What would you like to do during seatwork time?

Related Topics Followed by the Number of the Questions
that Pertain to Each Topic:

ability	3
type of assignment	3, 4, 6, 7
teacher' purpose	
environment	3, 6
time	5
rules and responsibility	1, 2

APPENDIX C

TEACHER'S REPORT FORM

Week # _____

SEATWORK

	BEFORE			AFTER		
	Assignment	Source	Purpose	Strength	Weakness	Will Use Again
MONDAY						
TUESDAY						
WEDNESDAY						
THURSDAY						
FRIDAY						

APPENDIX D

STUDENT'S REPORT FORM

WEEK # _____ Name _____

Seatwork

	I Liked it	It was easy	I finished	I learned
MONDAY	<div>Yes No</div>	<div>Yes No</div>	<div>Yes No</div>	<div></div> <div></div> <div></div>
TUESDAY	<div>Yes No</div>	<div>Yes No</div>	<div>Yes No</div>	<div></div> <div></div> <div></div>
WEDNESDAY	<div>Yes No</div>	<div>Yes No</div>	<div>Yes No</div>	<div></div> <div></div> <div></div>
THURSDAY	<div>Yes No</div>	<div>Yes No</div>	<div>Yes No</div>	<div></div> <div></div> <div></div>
FRIDAY	<div>Yes No</div>	<div>Yes No</div>	<div>Yes No</div>	<div></div>

APPENDIX E

TENTATIVE CROSS-CHECK OF DATA

Table E.1 .--Tentative Cross-Check of Data

	Ability	Type of Assignment	Teacher's Purpose	Environment	Time	Rules and Responsibilities
First Interview with Teacher		X	X		X	X
Second Interview with Teacher	X		X	X		X
First Interview with Student	X	X	X	X	X	X
Second Interview with Student	X	X		X	X	X
Teacher's Daily Report		X	X			
Student's Daily Report	X					
Field Notes		X		X	X	X
Samples of student's work	X	X				

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