

A STUDY OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF AN  
UNINTERRUPTED SUSTAINED SILENT  
READING PROGRAM AS CONDUCTED IN  
A NEWFOUNDLAND SCHOOL SETTING

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

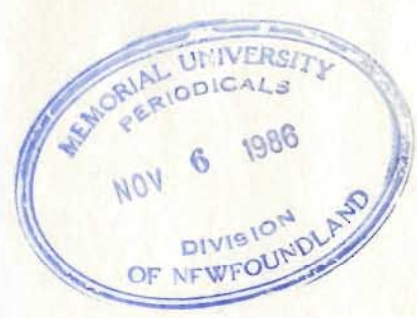
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A Study of the Effectiveness of an  
Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading Program  
as Conducted in a Newfoundland School Setting

by



James Charles Legge

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
MASTER OF EDUCATION

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# ABSTRACT

Many young people lack a quiet place to read or have no adult model to foster a desire to read. S.S.R. attempts to provide both.  
(Moore, 1980, p. 446)

The need identified by Moore supplied the impetus for this study. Young people are not always given an opportunity at home or at school to experience the pleasure and value of reading. When this problem was recognized at Hollands Memorial, a solution was sought. A program of Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading was introduced and it was decided to study the program in depth.

After a year of U.S.S.R. the students' attitudes towards reading were measured and changes noted. The findings confirmed that positive attitude change had occurred. How much of the change was a result of U.S.S.R. is difficult to estimate but it is felt that U.S.S.R. had a significant role to play in that change.

## CHAPTER I

### WHAT IS U.S.S.R.?

Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading (U.S.S.R.) or Sustained Silent Reading (S.S.R.) for those who object to the connotations of the first is a structured silent reading program. It refers to a specific time in the timetable when everyone in a school - students, teachers, administrators, etc. - read. Yes, that is all they do. What is the purpose of this reading? Enjoyment. Adults who read recreationally know the enjoyment that reading brings. For many children reading is only associated with study and homework, and most people know that some children do not even get time at home for this. U.S.S.R. attempts to give them an opportunity in school to find out that reading can be fun.

In order to accomplish this all reading during U.S.S.R. periods must be in self-selected books. Also, students must be made aware that their reading will not be tested. No textbook reading, no studying, no reviewing for exams, can take place during this time. Afterwards, children will not be quizzed on what they have read. If a child volunteers to share some reading experience with his teacher, well and good, but each child must feel that reading is a personal experience.

And what is the teacher going to be doing during this time? Reading too! Yes, the teacher can sit in the class doing some of the reading he always wished he had time for. In doing so he will be accomplishing the most important part of the program - providing an adult role model so that students will see adults doing and enjoying what they have asked students to do. It has long been known that students learn a great deal by imitation. The teacher reading will be providing an opportunity for them to imitate a worthwhile activity. Remember, many of them probably never see adults reading regularly at home. The only restriction on the teacher is that he may not read textbooks or correct papers and exams. After all, this is supposed to be perceived as enjoyment - not work.

The idea of self-selected reading material probably gives some teachers some trouble. The problem for children in earlier grades will be to select a book they can read. The teacher may want to suggest titles of books that are of appropriate reading level, but this will not always be necessary. Children will not stay with a book that they cannot make sense of. And research has shown that once a child can handle a book or reading level with ease, he will want to move into reading material that presents some challenge.

When the child no longer finds The Hardy Boys stimulating it will be quite natural for him to move into more stimulating reading.

But what of the older students? Their self-selection may result in reading material that is "smutty," "degrading" or "offensive." Certainly this concern is warranted, but it should be remembered that reading will be taking place in a class situation. Most children will be embarrassed to bring these books along. Those who do will probably do so for shock effect - shocking the teacher. After a few classes when no one notices, most of these students go back to reading material that is not objectionable. (Richard Karlin corroborates this conclusion in the latest edition of his textbook, Teaching Reading in High School, 1984, p. 321). And what of Harlequin Romances? Like The Hardy Boys, if students are into reading regularly they will outgrow them. There is only one restriction that is recommended at the high school level - no comics or magazines. Requiring students to read paperback or hardcover novels, short stories, etc., will - in most cases - require them to use their libraries.

Earlier it was mentioned that the program was structured. It may be asked, "Well, where is the structure?" "And how is this different from a 'free' reading period?"

Well, first of all there is a control on what can be read - no school textbooks. Secondly, the teacher has to read, not correct tests and assignments or make up tests. Finally, the reading period is a regular, permanent part of the timetable. It is not listed as a free period but as U.S.S.R. Students begin to feel it is considered in the same light as other subjects. It has importance. The only thing different is that it will not be evaluated.

#### The Problem

For some time previous to September 1982, it had become evident that many students at the high school in which the writer was employed as Department Head (English) - Hollands Memorial, Norris Point - were not reading except when required. Students were seldom observed doing independent reading and use of the school library was minimal.

The school staff - administrators and teachers - were concerned that students did not hold positive attitudes toward reading generally. It was felt that a positive attitude toward reading would benefit the students academically and lead to a healthy life-long habit.



### Purpose of the Study

Merely identifying a problem does not ensure that something will be done about it. Even introducing a program to deal with the perceived problem is no guarantee that the treatment program will have the desired effect. A definitive method of evaluating the treatment had first to be planned.

The first step in this evaluation was the identification of what would be a desirable effect of the treatment program. The desired effect was identified as the development of a more positive attitude toward reading among the students.

The next step was arriving at a method of evaluation of the program to ascertain if the desired effect was achieved and, if so, to what degree.

This study, then, was to be an evaluation of a treatment program designed to promote more positive reading attitudes among high school students.

### Need for the Study

A program of Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading as previously defined was decided upon as the treatment program. The choice of U.S.S.R. was based in part upon the promising reports that had been made about its effect and also because

of its ease of implementation - both in terms of timetabling and financial concerns. Evaluation of the program was felt to be necessary because even though there were many promising reports on its effectiveness, not all previous research reflected this view. Much earlier research had dealt with younger students and for varying periods of time. Also, no study of this nature had been carried out in this province. Therefore, there could be no assurance that U.S.S.R. would have the desired effect in this rural situation among junior and senior high students.

#### Limitations of the Study

At the outset of the evaluation process, certain limitations were obvious. First, the study could not be considered truly scientific without some control group with which to compare the group receiving U.S.S.R. It was not practical within the school to set up experimental and control groups because of the administrative difficulties involved and because of the small number of students in some grades. Some grades were divided upon the basis of past performance and others were divided on the basis of the courses the students were registered in.

Another limitation of the study was its restriction to one locale - the Norris Point school system. This would limit the possibility for generalizing about the effect the program might have in other areas of the country.

A final limitation that had to be recognized was the inconsistency of the role models that were participating. Role modelling is considered of great importance in the program's success. Although all teachers acting as role models were encouraged to take their part in the program seriously, it is questionable if all were able to provide the same quality role-modelling.

CHAPTER II  
REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH

The little research that has been done in silent reading programs has tried to establish whether there is any link between silent reading and attitude towards reading and/or reading comprehension. The bulk of the research is still inconclusive, but many researchers suggest that the biggest effect silent reading has is in creating a positive attitude toward reading.

Pfau (1966), studying first and second graders, suggested that S.S.R. had a positive effect on student attitude towards reading. This was also the conclusion of Hanson (1972) in a study of second, third and fourth grade students who also participated in an S.S.R. program.

Petre (1971) reports on a program of silent reading that involved fifty schools in Maryland where students were reading self-selected material for 35 minutes daily. He reports of 800 high school students reading approximately 1000 books - excluding periodicals - per week. "Such an atmosphere of tranquillity hovers over the whole school and outlasts the end of the break in student behaviours - quietness, friendliness, and courteousness." (Petre, 1971, p. 192). One middle-school

vice principal reports a 50 percent drop in discipline cases after the school began such a reading environment. (Petre, 1971, p. 192).

Sadoski (1980) reports of the initiation of a silent reading program at the high school level which involved grades 10-12 for one period per week. The program ran for only seven weeks, but the sample involved 287 students - approximately one-half of the school. He reports,

An averaging of the total mean scores for the "product" questions (attitude trend) yields a 2.58. In the narrative terms of the survey, this ranks midway between "a little" value and "significant" value. Considering the fact that the pilot covered only seven 45 minute periods in seven weeks, this figure suggests a positive trend on attitude development.  
(p. 723)

In the same study, 51 percent of the faculty members wanted the program continued for the full year while another 20 percent wanted another seven-week trial period. Sadoski (1980) writes, "Students need sustained interaction with discourse if reading is to become a global, holistic activity to them." (p. 153).

Cline and Kretke (1980) report of a three-year program of silent reading that was carried out with students in grades 7 to 9. The students were reading approximately two years above their grade level at the outset of the program. In this

study a control group of students who had not received the S.S.R. program was used for comparison. These control group students were comparable in terms of socio-economic background and scholastic achievement. The findings reveal there was a significant difference at the P .05 level between the S.S.R. group and the control group on four items out of twelve on a General Attitude Survey used to assess attitude towards reading. These four items "concerned attitudes towards going to the library, reading a book of choice, reading an assigned book, and the importance of reading." (p. 17). Findings on the Estes Attitude Survey indicated that "Sustained Silent Reading had a very positive effect as a motivational tool. The mean score rose 2.67 points in less than 4 months time achieving significance at less than the .01 level, and of additional importance is the fact that in the control school the mean dropped by .87 of a point." (p. 21). At the same time a breakdown of students reveals that students who were at a reading level below their grade level experienced the greatest positive change in attitude, moving from a September mean of 62.7 to a January mean of 67.0.

According to Ball (1981), Oakwood Junior High School in Dayton, Ohio, had positive results after introducing U.S.S.R. After the program had been functioning for a year, 38 percent



of staff thought the program was excellent and wanted to expand it, while 55 percent of staff felt it was good and should be kept as it was. Among the students, 46 percent said it should be expanded and 46 percent said it should be kept as it was. Seventy-one percent of students reported that they were reading more, 59 percent said they had experienced an increase in reading pleasure, and 74 percent felt their reading comprehension and/or reading speed had improved.

Brunner (1973) reports of a silent reading program that was introduced in a junior high school whose students were multi-racial, from low income families, and were experiencing reading difficulties. The periods began with ten minutes and expanded to thirty minutes. They ran daily Monday to Friday in periods 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6. Although no statistical results were compiled, the school staff reported great interest in the program and in reading. The principal of the school stated,

I feel there is a very definite impact on the reading skills of the students. I feel that SSR is entitled to the credit and praise it has received thus far. (p. 85)

Coley (1981) reports of findings involving two groups of students involved with a S.S.R. program. One group of students numbered 1,100 at various juvenile justice facilities who were involved in the program from three months to one year. The second group

of students were from the Washington Public School System, 96 percent of whom were black. The students' group represented four junior high schools and numbered 1,397. Two of the schools were involved in the S.S.R. program and two were used as control groups. Results for the studies were obtained by using pre- and post-Gates MacGinitie Reading Survey, interviews and questionnaires, and a semantic differential scale measuring student and teacher attitude towards paperbacks and reading. Results for both the public school students and the alternate school students showed gains above what might be expected based on previous performance. The greater positive change was in comprehension. The study reports that "the results of the attitude survey indicate that there were significant positive shifts in both attitude toward reading and attitude toward paperback books." (p. 4).

Pardy (1978) reports of a study conducted with fifty-four college students, one-half of whom were given S.S.R. and one-half of whom acted as a control group. No significant difference was recorded when students were tested on the California Reading Test or the Nelson Denny Reading Test. However, she reports,

While analysis of the data indicated no treatment differences between NSSR and SSR groups, subjective expressions from student

evaluation indicated extremely positive affective change towards reading." (p. 9)

Reed (1978) reports on a study involving sixty-one English classes that attempted to discover if S.S.R. had any effect on comprehension skills or attitude toward reading. The classes were randomly assigned to S.S.R. and non-S.S.R. classes. The S.S.R. group had four days of regular English classes, while for one day the class would have S.S.R. instead of English. The non-S.S.R. group had English classes each day. Using a standardized reading achievement test and an attitude survey, no significant change was noted for either comprehension or attitude at the .05 level of significance between the two groups. Reed concludes that students who were allowed to read what they wanted did not suffer any loss in comprehension or attitude towards reading. She felt that because of its ease and economy of implementation and its ability to let students practise lifelong reading skills, S.S.R. should become a part of any school program.

Burley (1980) writes of eighty-five black students, male and female, in residence at a major university for six weeks. The students were randomly assigned to classes involving four different reading programs - <sup>1</sup>S.S.R., <sup>2</sup>Programmed Text-books, <sup>3</sup>Programmed Cassette Tapes, and <sup>4</sup>Programmed Skill

Development Kits. All groups received regular reading instruction followed by the treatment that each was assigned. The time changed from forty-five minutes of regular instruction followed by fifteen minutes practice in the treatment method, to twenty minutes of regular instruction followed by forty minutes of practice in the treatment method. Students were then evaluated on the Stanford Diagnostic Reading-Test, Form A. The conclusion of the study was that Sustained Silent Reading with self-selection of books was the "most successful method of reading practice used to improve literal and inferential reading comprehension, and fast reading for high school students considered to be educationally disadvantaged." (p. 161). Neither of the programs proved significantly better for vocabulary improvement.

Wilmot (1975) conducted a study involving 576 grade 2, 4, and 6 students. She used the Estes Attitude Scales to evaluate reading attitude. The results of the study found that fourth and sixth grade students involved in U.S.S.R. had a significantly better ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) attitude toward reading than students in the control group in those grades. Although the control group had significantly better ( $\alpha = 0.10$ ) scores on the comprehension tests, Wilmot concluded, "It is doubtful that a

standardized reading test is sensitive enough to measure any gains in reading comprehension or vocabulary over a period of nine weeks." (p. 62).

Summers (1979) conducted a study that lasted seven months that did not show significantly different levels of attitude change or comprehension improvement. But Summers estimated that his study may not be as accurate as it should be because teachers failed to let the students see them in the role model function that is so much a part of a successful S.S.R. program. It was subjectively estimated that only 65 to 70 percent of the total modelling that could have been done actually was done.

Langford (1979) reports of a study carried out on 250 fifth and sixth graders in eleven classrooms. Six of the eleven classes were involved in S.S.R. for six months. Results indicated that the S.S.R. group showed significant differences at 0.05 on the Slosson Oral Reading Test as well as significant differences at 0.05 on a scale of Reading Attitude Based on Behaviour.

On the other hand, not all research has shown S.S.R. to have had a positive influence on attitude or comprehension. Minton (1980) reports that when S.S.R. was used with ninth graders for a period of fifteen minutes daily, no positive

gains in attitude toward reading were recorded. In fact, 15 percent fewer students said they enjoyed reading than had previously indicated. But this S.S.R. program was not well established. It was implemented without staff approval and therefore met with some opposition. (For a successful S.S.R. program, staff cooperation is essential if the proper modelling is to occur). Also, there was no inservice for teachers on what to do during the period. A third problem was that students were forced to read wherever they happened to be when the period came around. This often meant students had to read in the gym and shop classes.

Einhorn (1979) also reported on an S.S.R. program among eighty-one fifth graders. The students were divided so that forty received fifteen minutes of S.S.R. daily and the remainder received an equal amount of time doing a commercial reading kit. The program lasted for ten weeks. The results of the study showed that there was no significant difference between the two groups in terms of Reading Attitude, number of books completed, or number of pages completed. The flaws in this study are obvious. The relatively short time daily was insufficient for students to get far enough into a book to get interested and ten weeks was probably insufficient to bring about any change in attitude. At the same time the



control group was involved in a new activity that could have provided them with motivation to read in the short term. Therefore, S.S.R. was not being compared with the ordinary program of the school.

Vacca (1976) in a study involving thirty-six junior high students for three weeks could discern no difference in terms of reading achievement. Again, the study was certainly too short; further, the small number of students was a drawback of this study.

Collins (1980) reported on a study involving grades two, three and four students for fifteen weeks. The grades were involved in S.S.R. for ten, fifteen, and thirty minutes daily, respectively. No statistically significant change in attitude was observed. Nor was there improvement in word recognition or comprehension as measured by Gates MacGinitie Reading Achievement. But the experimental group did progress significantly further in their basal readers than did a control group that had spent the same time with the basal readers. Also worth noting is that although the experimental group were involved in S.S.R. during a time normally spent at English and spelling, their performance in these subjects did not fall behind the control group. Again, the short duration of the study certainly had an effect upon the results.

Evans and Towner (1975) report of a study involving a group of forty-eight fourth grade students who received one hour of reading instruction daily supplemented with S.S.R. for one-half the group and commercial reading kits for the other group, which lasted for twenty minutes. The total program lasted ten weeks. The students were pre-tested with Form 7 of the Durost and post-tested with Form G of the Durost. Evans and Towner report no significant difference in achievement for the students who received the S.S.R. treatment. As with other studies it is doubtful if ten weeks treatment would be long enough to bring about a significant difference in achievement. The researchers themselves recognized this limitation and added,

It may be that there are other advantages of SSR. It seems logical, for instance, to accept SSR as a more rational form of practice since it involves the total act of reading. (p. 156)

#### Summary of Literature Review

The review of current literature, then, indicates that there is no clear consensus of opinion concerning the effects of U.S.S.R. Many of the studies have based their conclusions on subjective views rather than objective results. Some reports are based on studies of special groups of students -

those in juvenile centres, high achievers, low achievers, or blacks. These studies, too, often try to assess the effect of U.S.S.R. on two dependent variables - reading attitude and reading comprehension. In sum, reports on the effect of U.S.S.R. are varied and conflicting.

The present study focuses only on the dependent variable "change in reading attitude" and attempts to assess the effect of two types of independent variables. The first type of variable is that which is unique to the area of study. This includes whether or not a student has repeated a grade and the community in which a student had received his/her elementary schooling. Not all areas have the same policy concerning promotion; and factors such as evaluation policies, variety of courses offered, and teacher expectations are just a few factors that determine whether or not a student repeats a grade vary from one area to another. (The students involved in this study would have received their elementary education in either Rocky Harbour or Norris Point).

The second type of independent variables which were studied in terms of their effect on reading attitude were of a more general nature. These included student age, sex, and grade as well as reading comprehension levels and vocabulary levels.

By assessing the influence of such a variety of factors on the effectiveness of a program of U.S.S.R. upon change in reading attitude, it was hoped that future programs of U.S.S.R. could be initiated in areas where they would be of greatest benefit - or not initiated at all, depending upon the outcome of this and further studies. For the program at Norris Point, the study would dictate if U.S.S.R. would continue in whole or in part or whether some other program would be utilized to solve the problem as identified.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE U.S.S.R. PROGRAM AT HOLLANDS MEMORIAL

In September 1982, a U.S.S.R. program was initiated at Hollands Memorial High School, Norris Point, in the electoral district of St. Barbe South. The program had been set up in response to a need to improve student reading habits that had been identified by the English department.

At a meeting of the English department the problem of lack of reading by school students was discussed. A possible solution to the problem proposed was the initiation of a silent reading program that was to be popularly known in the school as U.S.S.R. But before the program could be placed on the timetable the program had to be first introduced to the staff and students.

Staff were introduced to U.S.S.R. at the next staff meeting. The reason for wanting the program begun was explained and most teachers and administrators agreed that there was a problem with the amount of reading being done among the students. But staff and administration were not asked to make a decision for or against U.S.S.R. at this time. Rather, they were asked to consider the program and the part that each of them would have to play in it. At the next staff meeting they would be asked to decide. In the meantime, the English teachers made

sure that the topic was brought up during free time in the staff room over the next week or so. Procedures were explained and further questions were answered. When in doubt, the English teachers turned to articles by McCracken and Hunt, who had clearly outlined how the program was to be set up.

By the time of the next staff meeting everyone was aware of U.S.S.R. Further discussion led to a vote and it was unanimously decided to introduce U.S.S.R. for one period (40 minutes) into the school's six-day timetable. The period chosen was to be period 7 on day 4.

But before the period was actually begun it was felt that students should be made familiar with it. Therefore, over the next week teachers, especially English teachers, explained what would be happening during that period. Students were informed that they were responsible for having books to read, and that they had to choose the books themselves.

Also discussed at the staff meeting in which it was decided to conduct a study was the need to see what, if any, effect such a reading program would have on student attitudes towards reading. The fact that a program of U.S.S.R. had been set up in response to the perceived problem - poor attitude toward reading - indicates that it was felt U.S.S.R. would lead to more positive attitudes toward reading. That the



introduction of U.S.S.R. would lead to more positive attitudes toward reading would be the assumption to be proved or disproved by this study. To do this the dependent variable "reading attitude change" would need to be calculated. "Reading attitude change" was defined as the difference between scores students achieved on pre- and post-tests of the Estes Attitude Scales.

Shortly before the introduction of U.S.S.R. the Estes Attitude Scales were administered to all students in the school. The Estes Attitude Scales consist of fifteen statements in each of five subject areas. These are English, Mathematics, Reading, Science, and Social Studies. To each statement the student may respond "strongly agree," "agree," "cannot decide," "disagree," and "strongly disagree." Each possible reply is scored from 5 to 1 respectively. Therefore, a total of 75 for positive replies is possible. Scoring of the attitude scales consist of using an answer key that indicates positive attitudes with a score of 5 and negative attitudes with a score of 1.

In administering the Estes Attitudes Scales, students were not told that their answers had anything to do with any program they were presently doing in school. This was true, since U.S.S.R. had not then begun. Also, students were told

to answer as honestly as possible and that they were not to put their names on the answer sheet. Unknown to students, answer sheets were coded when collected so that individual scores could be tabulated later. To ensure uniformity of administration of the attitude scales, only the writer and one other teacher were involved in the administration.

Near the end of May, after the U.S.S.R. had been a regular part of the school program for approximately ten months, the Estes Attitude Scales were administered again. The same procedure was used in administration and correction as had been used in the initial testing situation.

As mentioned earlier, the independent variables for the study were: (1) reading comprehension levels of the students, (2) their "vocabulary" levels, (3) the communities in which they had completed their elementary education, (4) whether or not they had repeated a grade, (5) their present grade, (6) their age, and (7) their sex. The last five of these variables were obtained by collecting the information from the school registers. An up-to-date assessment of reading and comprehension scores was needed. It required having students complete a standardized test designed to supply definite scores.

Administered about the time the U.S.S.R. program was begun were the Canadian Achievement Tests. Form 17 was used with

grade 7, Form 18 with grade 8, and Form 19 with grades 9, 10, and 11. Only two sections of this general achievement test were administered. These were the vocabulary and reading comprehension sections of the test. Again, only two teachers were involved in administration to ensure uniformity of administration procedure. Correction was carried out by the present writer, using the answer key provided with the tests.

Now that it has been explained how and why U.S.S.R. was introduced to Hollands Memorial High and how the program was to be evaluated, it is necessary to describe the school and its student body.

Hollands Memorial High is a central high school that is located in Norris Point, a community of approximately 1,000 people. The school's population of approximately 280 students come from Norris Point-Rocky Harbour predominately, with approximately a dozen students coming from Sally's Cove. Students entering the high school have attended either the elementary school in Norris Point or the elementary school in Rocky Harbour.

Students at the school were in grades 7 to 11.

#### Grade 7

There were seventy-two students in grade 7, 45 percent of whom were male. Approximately 47 percent of the students came

from the Rocky Harbour elementary school, while the remainder came from the Norris Point elementary school. Sixty-one percent of grade 7 students had repeated a grade at least once during their years in school. Table 1 gives the scores for the grade on vocabulary and comprehension as attained on C.A.T. as well as the pre- and post-test results for the class on the Estes Attitude Survey.

#### Grade 8

There were sixty-four students in grade 8 with 47 percent of them male. Approximately 45 percent of the students had attended elementary school in Rocky Harbour and 55 percent had attended the Norris Point elementary school. Forty-seven percent of grade 8 students had repeated at least one grade during their time in school. Table 2 gives the scores the grade attained for vocabulary and comprehension on the C.A.T. as well as pre- and post-scores on the Estes Attitude Scales.

#### Grades 9 to 11

There were 144 students in grades 9 to 11, with 49 percent of them being male. Approximately 44 percent of these students had attended elementary school in Rocky Harbour, while 56 percent had attended the Norris Point elementary school. Sixty-eight percent of students had repeated at least one

grade during their years in school. Table 3 gives the scores the grade attained for vocabulary and comprehension on C.A.T. as well as pre- and post-scores on the Estes Attitude Scales.

#### Grades 7 to 11

For the entire school student population, 47 percent were male. Forty-five percent had attended elementary school in Rocky Harbour, while 55 percent had attended the elementary school in Norris Point. Sixty-one percent of students had repeated at least one grade during their years in school. Table 4 gives the scores for the school population as a whole for vocabulary and comprehension on the C.A.T. as well as pre- and post-scores on the Estes Attitude Scales.

#### The Feeder School Communities

The two communities from which elementary school students feed into the high school are approximately the same size in terms of population. They are also alike in that fishing is one of the principal means of employment for the residents. But in many ways the communities are different.

Rocky Harbour appears to be the more modern of the two communities. Its elementary school is only a few years old, and adjacent to the school is a new public library that is open on a regular basis. Rocky Harbour is also the administrative

Table 1  
Descriptive Statistics  
Grade 7

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Kurtosis	Skewness	Minimum	Maximum
Age	12.80	1.11	-0.26	1.13	12	15
Sex	1.44	0.50	-2.00	0.23	1	2
Repeating	1.61	0.49	-1.84	-0.47	1	2
Community	1.47	0.50	-2.05	0.11	1	2
Vocabulary	16.82	4.51	-0.31	0.48	9	28
Reading	23.70	6.45	-0.66	0.19	11	39
Attitude 1	52.44	10.77	-0.03	-0.29	24	75
Attitude 2	56.86	10.03	3.88	-1.50	18	72
Attitude Change	3.92	10.56	1.06	0.04	-29	31

Table 2  
Descriptive Statistics  
Grade 8

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Kurtosis	Skewness	Minimum	Maximum
Age	13.94	1.08	0.00	0.98	13	17
Sex	1.47	0.50	-2.05	0.13	1	2
Repeating	1.47	0.50	-2.05	0.13	1	2
Community	1.45	0.50	-2.03	0.19	1	2
Vocabulary	15.40	3.93	0.90	0.69	8	28
Reading	24.27	5.00	0.76	-0.35	13	33
Attitude 1	55.81	9.17	0.61	-0.62	28	73
Attitude 2	57.67	8.82	0.84	-0.65	30	73
Attitude Change	2.16	10.61	0.86	-0.17	-31	29

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics  
Grades 9-11

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Kurtosis	Skewness	Minimum	Maximum
Age	15.42	1.04	-0.49	0.30	14	18
Sex	1.49	0.50	-2.03	0.03	1	2
Repeating	1.65	0.47	-1.41	-0.78	1	2
Community	1.44	0.50	-1.98	0.23	1	2
Vocabulary	15.98	4.78	-0.31	0.44	6	29
Reading	25.12	6.91	-0.72	-0.11	7	38
Attitude 1	57.10	8.80	0.70	-0.64	26	73
Attitude 2	57.87	9.52	-0.05	-0.62	33	75
Attitude Change	0.42	6.96	1.15	-0.46	-26	19
Grade	3.90	0.81	-1.43	0.18	9	11



Table 4  
Descriptive Statistics  
Grades 9-11

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Kurtosis	Skewness	Minimum	Maximum
Age	14.40	1.55	-0.86	0.01	12	18
Sex	1.48	0.50	-2.01	0.10	1	2
Repeating	1.61	0.49	-1.79	-0.47	1	2
Community	1.45	0.50	-1.48	0.19	1	2
Attitude 1	55.76	9.54	0.40	-0.58	24	75
Attitude 2	57.56	9.48	1.42	-0.90	18	75
Attitude Change	1.73	9.01	1.49	0.02	-31	31
Grade	2.72	1.39	-1.21	0.25	7	11

centre for the Gros Morne National Park. As such, the administrative offices are located there and many of the park staff live in the community. Many of these are people who have moved into the community from outside the province.

Business-wise, Rocky Harbour seems to be quite progressive. It has two boat-building businesses, three service stations, a liquor store, a building supplies dealer, a motel, and numerous grocery stores, some fairly large. The school board office is also located there and most board personnel live in the community.

With the coming of the national park, many families moved into the community from the smaller communities nearby. This influx of residents has declined but still continues.

Norris Point would appear to be less progressive. Unlike Rocky Harbour it is not on the main highway route up the Northern Peninsula but is located about five miles off the Viking Trail. Its elementary school is older than the Rocky Harbour school.

Fewer businesses are located in Norris Point. No regular service station exists and most stores are relatively small. The most important feature of the community is its small cottage hospital which employs some local residents.

Like Rocky Harbour, its population has been boosted by relocation caused by the national park in the area, but it has not received as many new residents as Rocky Harbour.

#### The High School and Its Structure

The high school in which this study was carried out is approximately twenty years old. Since it was built to accommodate only grades 9 to 11, an additional wing had to be built on, consisting of six classrooms to accommodate grades 7 and 8 when these grades moved into the school.

The staff consisted of sixteen teachers, including the principal and vice-principal. Four separate departments were present in the school - English, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies, with each department having a department head who coordinated activities within his department. The school also had a fairly large library with a relatively large number of books - mainly fiction - that were not being used a great deal. The librarian often commented on this lack of use by students. This, too, was another of the factors that influenced the staff to try to do something about the lack of reading in this school.

CHAPTER IV  
STUDY FINDINGS

Analysis Using Pearson Correlation Coefficients

Grade 7

Pearson Correlation Coefficients were first obtained between attitude toward reading as measured in September before the U.S.S.R. program was initiated and each of the variables age, sex, repeating, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. It was decided that correlation levels of  $p = .05$  or greater would be judged to be significant. See Table 5.

Table 5

Grade 7 (Pre-Study)

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable: Reading Attitude	
	Pearson Correlation Coefficients	P-Level
Age	-0.16	.09
Sex	0.22	.03
Repeating	0.14	.13
Vocabulary	0.17	.08
Reading Comprehension	0.23	.03

The variable age was not found to be significantly related to reading attitude but younger students were more likely to have positive attitudes toward reading.

Sex was significantly related to reading attitude. Females were found to have a more positive attitude toward reading at  $p = .03$  level.

Whether or not a student repeated a grade did not prove to be statistically significant among grade 7 students. Neither did the vocabulary level of the students. But reading comprehension was found to be significantly related ( $p = .03$ ). Attitudes toward reading were more positive among students who scored higher on reading comprehension.

Next Pearson Correlation Coefficients were obtained between attitude change and the same variables - age, sex, repeating, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. See Table 6.

Table 6  
Grade 7 (Post-Study)

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable: Attitude Change	
	Pearson Correlation Coefficients	P-Level
Age	0.17	.08
Sex	-0.10	.21
Repeating	-0.20	.05
Vocabulary	-0.02	.43
Reading Comprehension	-.13	.15

This time the only variable that appeared to be significantly related to attitude change was repeating. Students who had repeated a grade were likely to have had a greater positive attitude change than non-repeaters. This change was significant at  $p = .05$  level.

Although age was not significantly related at  $p = .05$  level it was at  $p = .08$  and older students tended to have the greater positive attitude change.

#### Grade 8

As with grade 7, Pearson Correlation Coefficients were first obtained between attitude toward reading before the U.S.S.R. program was begun and the variables age, sex, repeating, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. The same correlation level ( $p = .05$ ) was judged to be statistically significant. See Table 7.

Attitude toward reading was found to be significantly related to age. In fact, the level of significance was  $p = .00$ . The relationship between age and attitude was one where the younger students had more positive attitudes toward reading than did the older students.

Attitude and sex were also found to be very highly correlated. The level of significance was found to be at least  $p = .00$ . Females had more positive attitudes toward reading.

Table 7  
Grade 8 (Pre-Study)

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable: Reading Attitude	
	Pearson Correlation Coefficients	P-Level
Age	-0.39	0.00
Sex	0.43	0.00
Repeating	0.31	0.01
Vocabulary	0.11	0.20
Reading Comprehension	0.30	0.01

Whether or not students had repeated was also found to be significantly related to reading attitude. The level of significance was  $p = .01$ . Students who had never repeated a grade were likely to have more positive attitudes toward reading.

Students' vocabulary scores were not found to be significantly related to reading attitude but reading comprehension was  $p = .01$ . Students who had high reading comprehension scores were likely to have more positive attitudes toward reading.

Next, Pearson Correlation Coefficients were obtained between attitude change and the same five variables. (See Table 8). Attitude change did not prove to be significantly related to sex, repeating, or vocabulary, but it was significantly related

to age ( $p = .03$ ) and reading comprehension ( $p = .05$ ). Older students were found to have a greater positive change in attitude toward reading and students whose reading comprehension scores were low tended to have greater positive changes in reading attitude.

Table 8  
Grade 8 (Post-Study)

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable: Attitude Change	
	Pearson Correlation Coefficients	P=Level
Age	0.25	.03
Sex	-0.08	.28
Repeating	-0.05	.35
Vocabulary	0.02	.45
Reading Comprehension	-0.22	.05

Grades 9, 10, and 11

Students in grades 9 to 11 were tested as a single group because each had taken the same level of the Canadian Achievement Test. Pearson Correlation scores were obtained first between attitude toward reading before the introduction of U.S.S.R. and six variables - grade, age, sex, repeating, vocabulary, and



reading comprehension. Again,  $p = .05$  was used as a significant level of correlation. See Table 9.

Table 9  
Grades 9, 10, and 11 (Pre-Study)

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable: Reading Attitude	
	Pearson Correlation Coefficients	P-Level
Grade	0.06	.23
Age	-0.12	.09
Sex	0.36	.00
Repeating	0.22	.01
Vocabulary	0.37	.00
Reading Comprehension	0.26	.00

The first variable, grade, was not found to be significantly related to attitude on reading. Neither was age, although the correlation was high ( $p = .09$ ) with younger students tending to have more positive attitudes toward reading.

Sex and attitude toward reading were very significantly related ( $p = .00$ ) with females likely to have more positive attitudes toward reading.

Repeating and attitude toward reading were significantly correlated at  $p = .01$ . Non-repeaters were more likely to have positive attitudes toward reading.

The correlation between vocabulary and attitude toward reading was very significant at  $p = .00$ . Students with high vocabulary scores also had more positive attitudes toward reading.

Finally, the correlation between reading attitude and reading comprehension was also very significant at  $p = .00$ . Students with high scores on reading comprehension were likely to have more positive attitudes toward reading.

Next, Pearson Correlation Coefficients were obtained between change in reading attitude and the same six variables previously used. See Table 10. This time the only variable that was found to be closely related to attitude change was grade level. The level of correlation ( $p = .06$ ) was not judged to be significant, but nevertheless, it was relatively high.

Table 10  
Grades 9, 10, and 11 (Post-Study)

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable: Attitude Change	
	Pearson Correlation Coefficients	P-Level
Grade	-0.13	.06
Age	-0.05	.28
Sex	-0.03	.35
Repeating	0.08	.18
Vocabulary	0.00	.50
Reading Comprehension	0.08	.19

Students in the lower grades were usually those who experienced the greatest positive change in attitude toward reading.

Grades 7 to 11

Pearson Correlation Coefficients were next found for attitude toward reading and the variables grade, age, sex, and repeating for students in grades 7 to 11. See Table 11. Three of the variables were found to be significantly related to attitude toward reading. These were grade ( $p = .00$ ), sex ( $p = .00$ ), and repeating ( $p = .00$ ). Students who have more positive attitudes toward reading were likely to be in higher grades, female, and non-repeaters.

Table 11

Grades 7-11 (Pre-Study)

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable: Reading Attitude	
	Pearson Correlation Coefficients	P-Level
Grade	0.17	.00
Age	0.00	.50
Sex	0.33	.00
Repeating	0.22	.00

Pearson Correlation Coefficients were next found between change in attitude toward reading and the same variables. See Table 12.

Table 12  
Grades 7-11 (Post-Study)

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable: Attitude Change	
	Pearson Correlation Coefficients	P-Level
Grade	-0.18	.00
Age	-0.05	.22
Sex	-0.07	.13
Repeating	-0.06	.16

This time only grade was found to be significantly related to attitude change. It was significant at  $p = .00$ . Students in the lower grade were likely to have greater positive changes in attitude toward reading. Although repeating was not significantly related to change in attitude toward reading, the correlation was high ( $p = .16$ ). Students who had repeated were likely to have more positive attitude changes.

### Analysis Using Multiple Regression With Beta Scores

#### Grade 7: Multiple Regression

Table 13 gives the effect of six independent variables - age, sex, repeating, community, vocabulary, and reading comprehension - on attitude change for grade 7. Attitude change was measured by finding the difference in pre- and post-scores on the Estes Attitude Scales. The six variables together account for 24.5 percent of the attitude change among grade 7 students. Of the six factors, only community was found to be significantly related to the attitude change. Community was a significant factor at  $p = .01$  level. Students who had attended elementary school in Norris Point tended to experience more positive attitude changes.

Using the standard beta scores it can be observed that although repeating was not statistically significant at .01 levels the direction of the effect is interesting. At grade 7 repeaters were more likely to experience positive gains in attitude. When the variable repeating is studied for other grades, the importance of this becomes more interesting.

It is also worth noting that while students with higher reading comprehension scores were likely to experience more positive attitude changes, it was the student whose vocabulary

scores were lower who experienced more positive attitude changes in grade 7.

#### Grade 8: Multiple Regression

In Table 14 the same six variables are shown as they relate to attitude change toward reading for grade 8 students.. With grade 8 students the six variables account for 16 percent of the attitude change. The only factor that was significantly related to attitude changes was age at  $p = .01$ . For grade 8 students the direction of the effect indicates that the older students were more likely to experience the greater gains in attitude.

The level of significance for community for grade 8 students is very low but what is interesting is the direction of the effect of community. Grade 8 students who had attended elementary school at Rocky Harbour were the students who experienced the greater positive change in reading attitude. Overall, students from Rocky Harbour were shown to have the more positive reading attitudes. Thus, it would seem that even students with positive attitudes were able to make improvements in this reading attitude.

Also for grade 8 students the direction of the effect of vocabulary and reading comprehension variables has reversed

from the direction for grade 7 students. The effect of these variables is not significant at  $p = .01$  but it is interesting to note that for grade 8 students higher vocabulary scores and lower reading comprehension scores tended to be associated with more positive attitude changes.

#### Grades 9, 10, and 11: Multiple Regression

Students in grades 9, 10, and 11 are able to be observed together because they all took the same vocabulary and reading comprehension tests, Form 19. In Table 3 the effect of the variables grade, age, sex, repeating, community, vocabulary, and reading comprehension is shown as it relates to attitude change toward reading. These seven variables account for only 9.2 percent of the attitude change toward reading. See Table 15.

Of the seven variables, three were found to have a significant effect at  $p = .01$ . For the variable grade, the lower the grade the more likely it appears that students would have a positive attitude change. For the variable age, on the other hand, older students were likely to experience the greater gains in attitude change. For the variable repeating, students who had repeated were less likely to experience greater positive gains in attitude. Since older students in

lower grades are usually the repeaters, this finding appears contradictory. It is certainly an area that would warrant further study.

The trend that was observed at the grade 8 level - greater positive effect on reading attitude for students whose vocabulary scores were high and reading comprehension scores were low - no longer exists. Rather, grades 9, 10, and 11 tend to be like grade 7 students in this regard.

#### Grades 7 to 11: Multiple Regression

Finally, Table 16 shows the effect of five variables - grade, age, sex, repeating, and community - on attitude change toward reading. The five variables account for only 7.7 percent of the attitude change, but three of these variables are related significantly at  $p = .01$  level of significance. For the grades 7 to 11, students are more likely to have a positive attitude change if they are in the lower grades. For the variable age, it appears that older students are likely to experience the more positive attitude changes. For the variable repeating, students who had repeated are less likely to experience positive attitude changes in reading.



Table 13

Grade 7

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable: Attitude Change					
	(B) Raw Beta	Standard Beta	Standard Error	dF	f-ratio	p-level
Age	-0.42	-0.04	2.25	5/59	0.04	ns
Sex	-0.82	-0.04	2.53	5/59	0.11	ns
Repeating	-5.10	-0.24	5.16	5/59	0.98	ns
Community	8.01	0.38	2.49	5/59	10.35	.01
Vocabulary	-0.30	-0.13	0.39	5/58	0.55	ns
Reading	0.41	0.25	0.28	5/58	2.12	ns
R <sup>2</sup>	0.25					
Constant	2.16					

Table 14

Grade 8

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable: Attitude Change					
	(B) Raw Beta	Standard Beta	Standard Error	dF	f-ratio	p-level
Age	4.25	0.43	2.29	5/52	3.46	.01
Sex	-0.64	-0.03	2.95	5/52	0.05	ns
Repeating	6.73	0.32	5.16	5/52	1.70	ns
Community	-1.99	-0.09	3.02	5/52	0.43	ns
Vocabulary	0.31	0.12	0.45	5/50	0.48	ns
Reading	-0.47	-0.22	0.36	5/50	1.70	ns
R <sup>2</sup>	0.16					
Constant	-56.48					

Table 15  
Grades 9, 10, and 11

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable: Attitude Change					
	(B) Raw Beta	Standard Beta	Standard Error	df	f-ratio	p-level
Grade	-4.04	-0.47	1.41	7/121	8.21	.01
Age	2.96	0.44	1.27	7/121	5.43	.01
Sex	-0.36	-0.03	1.27	7/121	0.08	ns
Repeating	6.40	0.43	2.61	7/121	6.01	.01
Community	-0.74	-0.06	1.27	7/121	0.39	ns
Vocabulary	-0.17	-0.12	0.20	7/121	0.75	ns
Reading	0.15	0.15	0.13	7/121	1.47	ns
R <sup>2</sup>	0.09					
Constant	-39.59					

Table 16  
Grades 7-11

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable: Attitude Change					
	(B) Raw Beta	Standard Beta	Standard Error	dF	f-ratio	p-level
Grade	-4.20	-0.65	1.04	4/245	16.22	.01
Age	3.25	0.56	1.01	4/245	10.40	.01
Sex	-0.99	-0.06	1.13	4/245	0.77	ns
Repeating	5.29	0.29	2.12	4/245	6.27	.01
Community	1.11	0.06	1.13	4/245	0.97	ns
R <sup>2</sup>	0.08					
Constant	-42.36					

Summary of Findings Using Pearson Correlation  
Coefficients: Attitude Toward Reading and Attitude Change

The following is a summary of the relationship between attitude toward reading and each of the variables studied. This reflects the situation that existed before the U.S.S.R. program was begun at the school.

1. Younger students at all grade levels from 7 to 11 had more positive attitudes toward reading than did older students.
2. Females at all grade levels from 7 to 11 had more positive attitudes toward reading than the males had.
3. Students at all grade levels whose reading comprehension level was relatively higher had more positive attitudes toward reading.
4. Grade 7 students from Rocky Harbour had more positive reading attitudes than their counterparts from Norris Point.
5. From grade 8 to 11, repeating was a significant variable. Non-repeaters had more positive attitudes toward reading.
6. For the school population as a whole, students from Rocky Harbour had better attitudes toward reading.
7. For students in grades 9, 10, and 11, vocabulary was a significant variable. Students with relatively high vocabulary scores had better attitudes toward reading.

The following is a summary of the relationship between attitude change toward reading and each of the variables studied.

1. Older students were more likely to have a more positive attitude change at the grade 7 and 8 level.

2. Repeaters at the grade 7 level were likely to have a more positive attitude change than non-repeaters. This was related to age which was significant for both grades 7 and 8.

3. Grade 7 students from Norris Point were more likely to have a more positive attitude change.

4. Grade 8 students from Rocky Harbour had a more positive attitude change.

5. Grade 8 students with relatively low reading comprehension scores were likely to have a more positive attitude change.

6. For the school as a whole, students in lower grades experienced more positive attitude changes.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Attitude towards reading varies greatly among high school students. The variables studied in this project could account for only a small part of the variance. But what is important is that Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading appears to be a very influential and efficient method of promoting positive attitudes toward reading.

The students and staff who experienced U.S.S.R. at Hollands Memorial enjoyed the program. (The following year, students requested that the program be continued). The vice-principal at Hollands Memorial probably best summarized the views of most teachers and parents when he said, "If we are trying to make students into life-long readers, the least we can do is ensure that U.S.S.R. remains a part of our program. Let's wait until our grade 7 students have had U.S.S.R. for five years and then the true value of the program will be obvious." He added, "As the father of a teenage daughter, I know how much reading has become a part of her daily routine, and it pleases me to no end."

Reading is not just a skill that is learned in school. It is a part of a person's way of life - increasingly more so in an information society. To graduate students from an educational

system without giving them a chance to learn that reading can be a pleasurable experience is to send them out into life ill-prepared to learn and extend themselves.

The initial project begun at Hollands Memorial was designed to make time available for students to read. This could be accomplished simply by timetabling. The overall philosophy behind setting aside the time was more far-reaching. Intrinsically, it was hoped that students would develop reading habits and attitudes that persisted outside the classroom. The philosophy behind and the structure of U.S.S.R. were the reasons it was chosen as the vehicle by which students could have the opportunity to develop positive attitudes toward reading.

Young people need role models that are positive. ("Children tend to copy the behaviour of other people - especially people in positions of authority whom they like and respect." (Bandura, 1969)). The structure behind U.S.S.R. gave the positive models in the form of teachers who read in the classroom and who were perceived by the students to be involved in an activity that was enjoyable and worthwhile. Not all students might have needed to see teachers reading to understand the pleasure and value reading brings. Their home environments and past experiences had shown them this. But many of the



students did. For many students this was the first time that they saw adults engaged in reading whose purpose was not simply searching for facts.

#### General Discussion of Findings

The results of the study indicated that some measure of success was achieved. Statistically, the students' attitude towards reading was more positive after a year of U.S.S.R. than before U.S.S.R. was begun.

The greatest positive attitude change was experienced by older students and students who had repeated a grade in school. This may be attributed to the fact that initially younger students already had more positive attitudes than did the older students. Therefore, the older students had further to progress to be on the same level as the younger students. But the fact that older students did progress further in terms of positive attitude change is encouraging. These students, especially the repeaters, are generally considered to be non-readers. If, in some small way, U.S.S.R. narrows the gap between readers and non-readers, it is worthwhile.

Another finding in the study that may have wider implications is that students in lower grades had more positive

attitude changes than students in higher grades. When it is considered that these are the same students who are also younger and, therefore, the same students who began with fairly positive attitudes, it must be concluded that something significant happened during the same year that U.S.S.R. was introduced to affect the attitudes of these young students toward reading. This study involved only grades 7 to 11, but the indication is that it would be effective in the lower grades as well - perhaps even more so.

Students who were low in terms of reading comprehension also gained more positive attitudes toward reading. If it can be assumed that a positive attitude toward reading is necessary, or at least a help, in increasing reading comprehension, the implications of this finding may well be very significant. At which grade or grades do you find students whose reading comprehension is low? The answer is obvious. All grades contain students whose reading levels vary widely. U.S.S.R., then, has a place in any grade.

#### Recommendations for Further Implementation of U.S.S.R.

The recommendations to be offered here are based on two factors - the philosophy and the research associated with Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading.

First, on the local scene -- Rocky Harbour and Norris Point - it is recommended that U.S.S.R. be begun in the two elementary schools and continued in the high school. In introducing U.S.S.R. at the elementary schools, it would be advisable to follow a structured approach so that the philosophy of U.S.S.R. becomes known and accepted by the teachers and administrators. The success of the program will only be as strong as the commitment of the teachers to it. Appendix A provides a teacher's handbook for introducing U.S.S.R. into any school system.

In high schools where timetabling is a problem because of the structure of the new reorganized high school program, some flexibility has to be supplied. On a six-day, seven periods per day, cycle, offering fourteen credits of three periods each leaves no time slot for any other programs. Therefore, a compromise must be made if a program such as U.S.S.R. is to become a part of the school program. The compromise used at Hollands Memorial (and which it is recommended should be followed) was that one period was taken from courses that were two credits (six periods). School personnel can best decide which of the courses can be reduced to five periods to accommodate the new program.

One period per six-day cycle appeared to work well for high school students. Most students had no difficulty in concentrating on a book for forty minutes. The time usually proved to be long enough for students beginning a book to read the first chapter. Usually, by that time they could decide if the book was worth taking the time to complete. For the vast majority of students, completion of the book occurred outside the classroom or during spare time at school. The next U.S.S.R. period saw the beginning of a new book.

At both the primary school level and the elementary school level, forty minutes of sustained silent reading will probably be too long. What would be more advisable would be to have periods of ten to fifteen minutes in the primary and twenty to thirty minutes in the elementary levels. These time periods can only be estimates, for each teacher can best decide the amount of time his/her students will be able to be involved in sustained silent reading. It would be best to start with a short period of time and gradually increase it as students become more mature readers.

To compensate for the shorter periods of time involved in U.S.S.R., more periods per week should be provided. At the primary and elementary levels a period per day would not be unreasonable. Besides developing a positive attitude toward

reading, students at these levels are also developing and reinforcing reading skills. As Smith (1978) suggests, people learn to read by reading. It is time students were given the opportunity to read. Oliver (1970) suggested that reading efficiency could probably best be achieved by 20 percent instruction and 80 percent practice. U.S.S.R. can provide some of that practice.

#### Recommendations for Further Study

Throughout the Province, schools in which reading attitude is a problem are urged to begin U.S.S.R. programs. At the beginning of the program, many schools from widely different backgrounds should set up studies that can lead to greater understanding of the effect of U.S.S.R. on reading attitude. These studies should be conducted for longer periods of time than the present study so that a more adequate assessment of the importance of such a program can be ascertained.

At the same time, reading attitude differences within the Province can be documented and investigated. For example, in the present study it was found that community had an effect on reading attitude and attitude change. At the beginning of the program, students who had attended elementary school in Rocky Harbour had a more positive attitude toward reading than did

the students who attended elementary school in Norris Point. Why was this the case? Which factors existed among Rocky Harbour students that led to a more positive reading attitude? If these factors were identified, perhaps they could be introduced in Norris Point. More importantly, perhaps they could be transferred to school students generally. More extensive, long-term study in this area is warranted.

As was made evident in Chapter II, few statistical studies have been conducted in U.S.S.R. Most studies have been personal studies that consisted of observations of students' attitudes toward reading. Hicks (1983), studying a grade 6 class, concluded that after a year of U.S.S.R., students came to find reading an enjoyable pasttime and began to look forward to reading time. In the absence of long-term statistical studies, we will have to depend upon direct observations and teacher interpretation of how students are affected by U.S.S.R. Ultimately, these observations may prove as helpful as experimentally designed studies. So far, at least, the conclusions of both types of studies appear to be the same.

#### Afterword

Setting up U.S.S.R. programs for schools has much to offer. Its structured, yet simple method of introduction and operation

are complemented by its economy. Schools with books in their libraries have little to purchase. Many of the books that will be chosen by students will be their own, those borrowed from friends and teachers, or those borrowed from the public libraries. With greater demand by students for books, the supply of books locally will expand, creating an atmosphere in which books and reading become more visible. In such an environment, reading attitude will almost assuredly be more positive than it is at present.

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APPENDIX A

A READING PROGRAM FOR EVERYONE

AN INSTRUCTIONAL BOOKLET FOR EDUCATORS

by

Jim Legge

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## INTRODUCTION

As an educator you are aware of the need for people to be able to read. You are also familiar with people who know how to read but for whatever reasons, choose not to read. Most educators, like yourself, would like to see students develop a reading habit that will remain with them for a lifetime. Despite the heavy workload that is already placed upon the school system and upon you as a teacher, the school setting is probably the only place that can foster this reading habit. It is, therefore, on you that the onus falls to make every opportunity possible so that young people become lifetime readers.

You ask, "How can I do this when I already have so much to do?" Your question is a legitimate one. Fortunately, what you can do will take very little of your time, and once it has begun will require no effort on your behalf. In fact, you will probably find it to be a moment of calm in your busy schedule.

Have you ever heard of a U.S.S.R. program? No, it is not some Soviet plot to overthrow our educational system. Actually, it stands for "Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading." The purpose of this booklet will be to make you familiar with the implementation of a U.S.S.R. program. To do so it will be

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necessary to point out what is unique about the program, how to set it up, and what has happened to student attitudes towards reading in schools where it has been set up. To find out more about a program that will change kids' minds about reading, turn the page.



### WHAT IS U.S.S.R.?

Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading (U.S.S.R.), or Sustained Silent Reading (S.S.R.) for those who object to the connotations of the first, is a structured silent reading program. It refers to a specific time in the timetable when everyone in your school - students, teachers, administrators, etc. - read. Yes, that is all they do. What is the purpose of this reading? Enjoyment. Adults who read recreationally know the enjoyment that reading brings. For many children reading is only associated with study and homework, and we all know that some children don't even get time at home for this. U.S.S.R. attempts to give them an opportunity in school to find out that reading can be fun.

In order to accomplish this, all reading during U.S.S.R. periods must be in self-selected books. Also, students must be made aware that their reading will not be tested. No textbook reading, no studying, no reviewing for exams can take place during this time. Afterwards, children will not be quizzed on what they have read. If a child volunteers to share some reading experience with you, well and good, but each child must feel that reading is a personal experience.

And what is the teacher going to be doing during this time? Reading too! Yes, the teacher can sit in the class

doing some of the reading he always wished he had time for. In doing so he will be accomplishing the most important part of the program - providing an adult role model so that students will see adults doing and enjoying what they have asked students to do. We have long known that students learn a great deal by imitation. Here you will be providing an opportunity for them to imitate a worthwhile activity. Remember, many of them probably never see adults reading regularly at home. Your only restriction is that you not read textbooks or correct papers and exams. After all, this is supposed to be perceived as enjoyment - not work.

By now that idea of self-selected reading material is probably beginning to give you some trouble. The problem for children in earlier grades will be to select a book they can read. The teacher may want to suggest titles of books that are of appropriate reading level, but this will not always be necessary. Children will not stay with a book that they can't make sense of. And research has shown that once a child can handle a book or reading level with ease, he will want to move into reading material that presents some challenge. When the child no longer finds The Hardy Boys stimulating it will be very natural to move into more stimulating reading.

But what of the older kids? Their self-selection may result in reading material that is "smutty," "degrading" or

"offensive." Certainly your concern is warranted, but remember that reading will be taking place in a class situation. Most children will be embarrassed to bring these books along. Those who do will probably do so for shock effect - shocking the teacher. After a few classes when no one notices, most of these students go back to reading material that is not objectionable. And what of Harlequin Romances? Like The Hardy Boys, if students are into reading regularly they will outgrow them. There is only one restriction that I recommend at the high school level - no comics or magazines. This is a personal choice, but requiring students to read paperback or hardcover novels, short stories, etc., will - in most cases - require them to use their libraries.

Earlier it was mentioned that the program was structured. "Well, where is the structure?" you ask. "And how is this different from a 'free' reading period?"

Well, first of all there is a control on what can be read - no school textbooks. Secondly, the teacher has to read, not correct tests and assignments or make up tests. Finally, the reading period is a regular, permanent part of the timetable. It is not listed as a free period but as U.S.S.R. Students begin to feel it is considered in the same light as other subjects. It has importance. The only thing different is that it won't be evaluated.

#### RELEVANT RESEARCH

"If we think that reading is fun we need to read for pleasure where our kids can see us and give them an opportunity in school to read for pleasure also." (Yackel, 1979).

Yackel probably summarizes what a great number of educators believe about reading. Smith (1978) states the very basic philosophy that children learn to read by reading.

But what has research actually shown about U.S.S.R.? Well, most research has attempted to show some relationship between a U.S.S.R. program and student attitude towards reading and student achievement level. Obviously we would hope for an increase in both. Let's take a look at a number of studies and their results:

Cline and Krethe (1980) report on a three-year S.S.R. program in grades 7-9, mostly high achievers. The results indicate a positive attitude change at .01 level of significance. Surprisingly, the greatest amount of positive change was among the low achievers in class. Imagine being able to motivate those reluctant readers in your class!

Ball (1981) reports on a U.S.S.R. program that had 93 percent of staff saying the program was excellent, should expand, or kept as is. Only 7 percent felt that the program was not beneficial.

Among students 92 percent wanted the program to either continue or expand and 7 percent felt that the program had resulted in an increase in their enjoyment of reading.

Burley (1980) tells about a program that compared the effect of 4 different types of reading programs. These were:

1. U.S.S.R.
2. Programmed Textbooks
3. Programmed Cassette Tapes, and
4. Program Skill Development Kits

The results show that the most successful method of reading practice used to improve literal and inferential reading comprehension for high school students was U.S.S.R. Again, the program was most effective among disadvantaged readers.

Still need more convincing? Langford (1978) reports on a U.S.S.R. program used with 250 fifth and sixth graders. They show a positive increase in reading attitude at 0.5 level of significance and a positive increase on Slosson Oral Test at 0.05 level of significance.

Wilmot (1975) reports that with a group of 576 grade 2, 4, and 6 students during a period from November 1972 - June 1973 grades 4 and 6 showed a positive change in attitude at .05 level of significance.

"Are there any negative results to report?" you ask. Yes, there are.

Minton (1980) reports of a fifteen-minute daily U.S.S.R. program that lasted one semester. The results indicate no increase in attitude change or reading achievement level. So, what went wrong?

I guess you can already guess the main problem. What really can you expect in such a short period of time - fifteen minutes and a couple of months? But more than this the report indicates there was no provision made for staff consultation or inservice. And students were forced to read wherever they were - gym, lab, workshop, etc. Could you really expect students to have a positive attitude towards reading in such a situation? Not likely.

Towner and Evans (1975) also report of a U.S.S.R. program that seemed to achieve no positive results. They involved only 48 students - 24 with the program and 24 without - for a period of only ten weeks. Again, the two most important variables for any such study - number of subjects and length of treatment program - were inadequate. Yet the researchers concluded, "It seems logical, for instance, to accept S.S.R. as a more natural form of practice since it involves the total act of reading." (p. 156). It seems that the researchers recognized the limitations of this study as well as the importance of U.S.S.R.

# IMPLEMENTING U.S.S.R.

Well, so far you know what U.S.S.R. is and you know what researchers are saying about it. Now you have a choice. If you feel this program will be of benefit to your students, the next part is for you. It tells you how to set up U.S.S.R. properly in your school. But before I do that let me tell you what Jim Anderson, Reading Consultant, Bonavista-Trinity-Placentia School Board, had to say about this proposed package and about U.S.S.R. Jim said:

I feel this package is very much needed in Newfoundland today. The S.S.R. philosophy is not widely known and, to my knowledge, not many schools have such a program. If any of the researchers in the last several decades are to be believed, such a program is not only necessary - it should be mandatory.  
(July, 1983)

Jim prefers to refer to the program as S.S.R. but that is neither here nor there. We are still referring to what may be the best thing to happen in your school in a long time.

Well now, let's get on to how to set it up.

Let me begin by telling you how U.S.S.R. came to be a part of the high school where I teach. At an English department meeting - there were only five of us in the department - one teacher mentioned the age old problem, our students did not seem to be reading very much, except assigned work and

little enough of that! What to do was the next question. I recalled having read about some sort of reading program that sounded very Russian but was supposed to be very effective. It was decided to find out more about it.

By the next meeting, after a little more reading I was ready to report on U.S.S.R. The teachers in the department felt it might be worthwhile and suggested we bring it up at the next staff meeting. So, eventually that's what happened.

Well you know what that could be like. To say that there was some difference of opinion about the program would not be a lie. But we proposed that instead of deciding on adopting or rejecting the program the entire staff should think about it and we would make a decision at the next meeting. Before the next meeting the topic came up occasionally in the staff room and gradually most questions were answered. By the next staff meeting it was decided to make U.S.S.R. a part of the program. Maybe that was not a wise decision in mid-year because it meant putting it in the schedule and taking something out. Nevertheless, it became popular enough that the next year it had its own place in the schedule - Day 5, Period 7.

Probably it would be best to outline what kind of selling job went on to get staff support first. This you will have to do if you want a successful program.



Step 1: Outline what you mean by U.S.S.R. and how it is different from "free" reading periods. Can't remember? Well read, "What is U.S.S.R.?" again.

Step 2: Speak to administrators and get some support for it. You may want to mention it to the English department head, principal, or vice principal. We found a great deal of support from our vice principal who just happens to teach English.

Step 3: Get the topic put on a staff meeting agenda. There you and any other teachers you have been able to win over will have to introduce staff to the program. Some of the favourable research I mentioned earlier would be an asset here.

Step 4: Give your staff members time to think about it. Ask them to postpone their decision until next staff meeting. In the meantime, don't let the idea die. The staff room will be a fine place to bring up the topic again.

Step 5: Let's suppose your staff agrees to go along with the program. CONGRATULATIONS!! Make sure the teachers and the rest of the staff know what they will be doing during the program - reading for enjoyment.

Step 6: Inform the kids about the program. Have the period announced in advance for a few weeks until everyone -

teachers included - gets in the habit of bringing along a book. Usually one day's notice is sufficient and immediately before the period begins announce that all work will stop and reading will begin. This lets all the kids know that everyone - not only their class - is now involved in reading.

Step 7: After Step 4, if your staff didn't go along with the program, start again. It will be worth the effort.

#### Some Management Questions

1. How long will each period be? This will depend upon the grade level. In the primary, maybe fifteen-twenty minutes would be sufficient, but I would try to have it at least twice per week or six-day cycle.

At the elementary level, a thirty-minute period would not be too long. I'd try for at least twice a week, but once a week would be a good start.

At the high school level we go with one forty-minute period per cycle. This seems to be the best arrangement, considering timetabling.

2. How can you place this program in a reorganized high school program? Let's face it, it means cutting a few subjects from the normal six periods per cycle to five periods. Try not to make it clash with a one-credit course. You will find

it best to put U.S.S.R. on the timetable first and add the other subjects afterwards.

3. What happens if a student forgets a book? This won't happen much after the first few weeks but when it does, this is nothing to cause concern. Insist that the student not do homework. Another student might have a spare book.

4. What is not acceptable reading material? We just insist that it not be magazines or comics. It should be a pocketbook, novels, short stories, poetry, or anything else the student is interested in.

It is best to begin U.S.S.R. at the beginning of the school year, but if you can get it inserted into the timetable during the year, you won't be disappointed.

Come on, take a try at it. The books you read may be your own.

Good Luck!







