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Some Relationships Between Creativity and the Reading Preferences and Choices of a Group of Sixth Graders

JESSIE A. RODERICK*

Introduction

Toynbee's (11) appeal to Americans to cherish and nurture all the creative ability available and Russell's (7:305) dictum that the progress of civilization depends on people with new solutions attest to the urgency of identifying and cultivating creative potential.

The importance of literature in the life of an individual is also recognized. Hazard warns that "we can disregard the literature for childhood only if we consider unimportant the way in which a national soul is formed or sustained" (1:111). Educators and society in general have to some degree

*Jessie A. Roderick, Assistant Professor of Education, University of Maryland, College Park

heeded these exhortations, but little attention has been focused on whether or not there exists any relationship between creativity and literary experiences. The need to investigate this problem was justified by the results of a review of pertinent research. Kheiralli's (3) study of the free-reading of students of varying degrees of creativity was the only directly related inquiry found.

The Problem

Since reading is a medium of communication which is unstructured and leaves much to the reader, literature experiences are perhaps one of the best stimuli for developing creative potential. To explore this supposition and perhaps provide direction for implementing the ideas inherent in it, a study

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of the reading preferences and choices of a group of sixth graders ranging from high to low in creative ability was undertaken.

The purposes of this study were to determine whether or not more creative children differ from less creative in reading choices and preferences and if these preferences agree with a panel of authorities' predictions of them. Choice was defined as a child's reading a book and preference as his stating he liked it. Answers to the following questions were sought:

1. Do more creative and less creative children differ in the number of books they read, in the number of "likes" they express for a list of titles, and in their preferences for book categories?

2. Do boys and girls differ in their preferences for book categories?

3. Do book preferences of children of varying degrees of creativity differ from authorities' predictions of them?

4. Do more creative and less creative children differ in their reasons for liking or disliking books?

5. Do children's reasons for liking or disliking books differ from authorities' predictions?

6. Is there any interaction effect between intelligence and creativity in relation to the number of ideas per response children offer in reaction to a book?

Procedure

To obtain data for answering the proposed questions, one hundred sixth graders in three schools in central Pennsylvania were enrolled in the Explorers' Book Club. Scores on three verbal tasks of the *Minnesota Tests of Creative Thinking* were available for each subject. The composite scores which ranged from 28 to 248 were ranked from high to low, and the subjects in the top, middle, and bottom thirds were designated as high, middle, and low creative respectively. Scores on the *Large Thorndike Intelligence Scale* for this population ranged from 78 to 143.

During a three-month period the children were asked to read from a set of thirty titles provided by the investigator. Twenty-

five titles had been selected from books which children's librarians nominated as popular with sixth graders, and five were chosen from among the best juvenile books of 1964 as designated by the children's editor of the *New York Times Book Review* (4:50-53).

The children indicated in a log whether they liked a book, if it was all right, or if they did not like it. They also gave reasons for their reactions. A panel of authorities in children's literature rated each of the thirty titles in terms of its appeal to the most or least creative child. The judges also gave reasons for their predictions. The contents of the children's logs and the judges' responses in rating the books provided the data for statistical treatment.

Analysis of Data

Analysis of variance was employed to test the significance of differences among the high, middle, and low creatives in their preferences for book categories and in the number of books they read. A summary of analysis of variance is presented in Table 1. The interaction effect of creativity and intelligence on the number of ideas expressed in reaction to the books read was also tested by analysis of variance. The significance of differences between book category preferences of boys and girls and among high, middle, and low creatives was tested by chi-square, and children's reasons for liking or disliking books and authorities' predictions of them were subjected to content analysis. Preliminary analysis indicated that in this study reading choices and preferences were not a function of intelligence.

Findings

The high, middle, and low creatives differed significantly ($p < .01$) in the number of books they read from the total list and from those rated as appealing to the most creative child but not from those titles rated as appealing to the least creative. Significant differences among the three groups also occurred when the number of "likes" or pref-

erences they stated for all books was tested. When preferences for book categories among the three groups were tested by chi-square, biography was the only type literature for which differences among the high, middle, and low creatives were significant ($p < .01$). In this case, the χ^2 was observed to be 10.25 at two degrees of freedom. Contrary to this, boys and girls differed significantly in preferences for fantasy, realistic fiction, biography, and information but not poetry.

The high, middle, and low creatives did differ significantly ($p < .05$) in their preferences for books judged to appeal to the most creative child but not for those judged to appeal to the least creative. The preference means for books rated as appealing to the most creative child decreased in value from the high creative to the low, but preference means for the titles judged to appeal to the least creative did not increase in value from high to low as might be expected. The failure of the preference means for the latter

group of books to increase in value from the high creatives to the low suggests a lack of agreement between authorities' predictions and children's preferences for these titles. It should be noted that in the analyses testing differences among subjects of varying degrees of creativity the means for the high and middle creatives appeared to cluster and together differed more from the means for the low creatives than from each other.

Content analysis of children's and authorities' reactions to the books revealed that the children commented more on factors relating to the literary components and format of the books, whereas the judges spoke more of character, reader involvement, and external influences. High creatives commented more frequently about reader involvement, literary components, and format than did the low.

The interaction effect of creativity and intelligence on the number of ideas per response that the subjects gave in reaction to

Table 1. Summary of Analysis of Variance for Testing the Significance of Differences Among Book Preferences and Choices of High, Middle, and Low Creatives

| Factor Tested | Means | S.D. | Analysis of Variance Summary | | | | |
|--|-----------------|------|------------------------------|--------------|----|-------|--------|
| | | | Source | df | MS | F | |
| Preferences for Books Rated as Appealing to Most Creative | High Creative | 3.21 | 1.97 | Between | 2 | 13.46 | 3.46* |
| | Middle Creative | 3.18 | | Within | 96 | 3.88 | |
| | Low Creative | 2.09 | | Total | 98 | | |
| Preferences for Books Rated as Appealing to Least Creative | High Creative | 1.76 | 1.38 | Between | 2 | 2.10 | 1.09 |
| | Middle Creative | 1.64 | | Within | 96 | 1.92 | |
| | Low Creative | 1.27 | | Total | 98 | | |
| Preferences for All Books on List | High Creative | 5.82 | 2.88 | Between | 2 | 34.46 | 4.15* |
| | Middle Creative | 5.58 | | Within | 96 | 8.30 | |
| | Low Creative | 3.84 | | Total | 98 | | |
| Books Read (Choices) of Those Rated as Appealing to Most Creative | High Creative | 5.36 | 2.46 | Between | 2 | 39.10 | 6.46** |
| | Middle Creative | 4.58 | | Within | 96 | 6.05 | |
| | Low Creative | 3.21 | | Total | 98 | | |
| Books Read of Those Rated as Appealing to Least Creative | High Creative | 2.42 | 1.52 | Between | 2 | 3.46 | 1.50 |
| | Middle Creative | 2.21 | | Within | 96 | 2.30 | |
| | Low Creative | 1.79 | | Total | 98 | | |
| Total Number of Books Read | High Creative | 9.06 | 3.83 | Between | 2 | 83.65 | 5.69** |
| | Middle Creative | 7.88 | | Within | 96 | 14.69 | |
| | Low Creative | 5.91 | | Total | 98 | | |
| Interaction Effect of Intelligence and Creativity on the Mean Number of Ideas Expressed in Reaction to the Books | | | | Intelligence | 1 | 1.15 | 4.49* |
| | | | | Creativity | 2 | 2.19 | 8.59** |
| | | | | Interaction | 2 | .09 | |
| | | | | Residual | 93 | .25 | |

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

the books was negligible and assumed to be zero. The analysis did reveal, however, that on an average the more intelligent subjects offered a greater number of ideas than the less intelligent, and the middle creatives more than either the high or low creatives.

Conclusions and Implications

Since the high and perhaps the middle creatives in this study liked and read more books than did the low creatives, less creativity appears to be more of a detriment to reading than more creativity an asset. The reading patterns of the low creatives in this investigation suggest that the onus for opening the doors of literature to this group be placed on the classroom teacher.

Efforts to provide worthwhile literary experiences for such children might encourage and cultivate their imagination and sense of wonder. The greater appeal that reading had for the more creative child concurs with Selye's (8) statement that some creative scientists can be classified as bookworms. C. W. Taylor's (10) findings also support this conclusion.

Results of this investigation suggest that children's preferences for types of literature generally appeared to be related to sex but not to creativity. The one exception in relating category preferences to creativity was biography. Since biography was preferred by the high and middle creatives, and since both groups commented more on factors relating to reader involvement as reasons for liking a book, perhaps group readings and discussion of biography would be profitable. Both the high and low creatives might benefit from this activity even if the low creatives participated in an audience capacity at first.

In addition, since the high creatives tended to be the least fluent, discussion may encourage verbalization of the empathy felt and at the same time assure them that their ideas do have merit. C. W. Taylor (9) proposes that a person can be so critical of himself that the outward flow of his ideas is restricted.

The findings of this study also suggest

that to some extent book preferences of children of varying degrees of creativity tended to agree with a panel of authorities' predictions of them. This agreement is consistent with the findings of Landau (4) and Jefferson (2). On the other hand, the disagreement in this study is supported by Norvell's (6) findings. Further insight into the reading of children might be obtained by asking children of varying degrees of creativity to recommend books for their peers.

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