

Book Club Impacts Reading Attitudes

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Guthrie (2001) reports that reading engagement is strongly related to reading achievement. One of the critical facets of this engagement is social interaction (Guthrie, McGough, Bennett, & Rice, 1996). Social interaction helps to build discussions which, in turn, impacts feelings of competence, acceptance, and intrinsic motivation (Roller & Beed, 1994). Students who have the opportunity to share books and participate in a reading community are likely to be intrinsically motivated readers (Morrow, 1996; Wentzel & Wigfield, 1998). This motivation can lead to increased amounts of reading and higher achievement (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000, p. 408). However, interest in reading tends to decline in the middle grades as students move from a self-contained environment to a more teacher-centered environment that allows for less social interaction (Wigfield, Eccles, MacIver, Reuman, & Midgley, 1991).

The purpose of this study was to determine the attitudes of middle level students toward reading when provided an additional venue for social interaction outside of the middle level classroom. This article describes the results of this study.

Method

Participants

Participants consisted of twenty-three middle school students who volunteered to participate in a book club offered one day per week before the school day began and six middle level interns enrolled in Internship I. As part of a professional education block of

courses prior to student teaching, middle level majors enroll in Internship I along with three other courses: Integrated Curriculum Planning, Literacy Development, and Integrated Methods. During Internship I, teacher candidates are placed in classrooms at a local middle school for two mornings per week.

A diverse group of seventh and eighth grade students volunteered to participate in the book club. Of the twenty-three students, there were five males and eighteen females, five minority students, four self-contained special needs students who read at the third grade level, one emotionally disturbed student, and four gifted and talented students. Complete pre- and post-responses were collected from 18 middle level student participants.

Survey Instrument

The attitude instrument used in this study consisted of ten questions using a Likert-type response scale asking participants to strongly agree, agree, render no opinion, disagree, or strongly disagree with statements about their attitudes toward reading. The questions, developed by the researchers, were based on the International Reading Association's *Position Statement on Adolescent Literacy* (Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999). The survey was administered at the first and the last meetings of the book club, and the students were given unlimited time to complete the 10 questions. Additionally, middle level students were asked to respond to four open-ended questions related to the book club experience on the final survey.

Book Club Meetings

For the purposes of this study, book club is defined as a voluntary weekly meeting of middle level students and middle level university interns. In a traditional book club, members meet to discuss the same book. Rather than limit the students to focusing upon one book at a time, and to address various reading levels, a more individualized approach was used. Facilitators and students talked about whatever books they were currently reading in order to stimulate others interest to read the book.

The book club met each Wednesday before school and lasted for approximately 25 minutes. The club met each week for one semester with the exception of the day before Thanksgiving, a school holiday.

Using essays written by the students, the interns formed six small heterogeneous groups based upon gender, written communication skills, and common reading interests. In weekly sessions the interns modeled their own enthusiasm about reading as they shared early adolescent books currently being read. They also delivered mini-book talks and encouraged the students to talk about books. Helping the students to move beyond telling merely plot summaries was a challenge for the interns. Between book club meetings the interns wrote weekly responses to three students' reader response journals and posed questions to promote higher level thinking. These journals were either exchanged during book club, or placed in a "mailbox" located in the interns' classroom.

Results

Means were calculated for surveys administered both pre- and post-book club participation (Table 1). The students surveyed had a positive increase in attitude means on all questions. The three questions with the lowest pre-participation means and the largest difference in means were the questions related to adults and reading. The first of these questions concerned whether

adults helped students to select reading materials (Question 6). The mean score shifted from 1.94 to 2.94. The second question concerned adults and their desire to read (Question 7). The mean score shifted from 1.81 to 3.44. Finally, the third question related to whether or not adults could help improve reading ability (Question 8). The mean score shifted from 1.56 to 3.13. The low initial means on these three questions suggests that middle level students do not always view adults in their schools as having an impact on their reading. However, the interaction with the adult interns during the book club seemed to have a significant impact on the students' attitudes.

Discussion

The idea for starting this book club came from the school principal. Teacher educators must continually look for meaningful ways to contribute to the schools where field placements are made. This opportunity became a chance to model collaboration, to strengthen the existing partnership, and to integrate the interns more directly into the life of the school.

During early book club sessions the interns were unsure about what to say and to do with the middle level students. The researchers assisted interns with the development of facilitation skills. Based upon book club session observations, they taught the interns how to involve the quiet students, how to curtail the loud ones, and how to talk about books at a deeper level. Additionally, researchers assisted in finding books that would interest the broad range of abilities and personalities.

Some of the challenges faced while conducting this project included getting the parental consent forms returned and the early meeting time. In the future the researchers plan to hold a parent meeting to explain the program and to get the consent forms signed. There will also be an attempt to move the meeting time to lunch time which would have fewer conflicts with bus schedules and other activity club meeting times.

Table 1. Mean Pre- and Post- Bookclub Participation

| Question | Pre-Participation Mean | Post-Participation Mean | Difference in Means |
|---|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1) I have access to many types of reading materials. | 2.25 | 3.44 | 1.15 |
| 2) Reading helps me think for myself. | 2.31 | 3.50 | 1.19 |
| 3) Reading makes me feel good about myself. | 2.75 | 3.44 | 0.69 |
| 4) I hope to be a reader my entire life. | 2.56 | 3.25 | 0.69 |
| 5) Reading helps me identify with people who are different than me. | 2.56 | 2.94 | 0.38 |
| 6) Adults in my school help me select reading materials. | 1.94 | 3.25 | 1.31 |
| 7) Adults in my school like to read. | 1.81 | 3.44 | 1.63 |
| 8) Adults in my school can help me improve my reading ability. | 1.56 | 3.13 | 1.57 |
| 9) I always have a choice in what I read. | 2.94 | 3.56 | 0.62 |
| 10) Reading is important to me. | 2.81 | 3.56 | 0.75 |

The researchers also plan to expand this study by increasing the number of student participants. This expansion will be done by adding another middle school and by including more interns as they become available. Participation by middle level students will be also be measured in time spent in book club interactions.

The results of this study indicate that during the middle school years, a time when interest in reading tends to decline, social interaction with peers and adults can help improve students' overall attitudes toward reading which should also increase engagement. Most significantly, positive interaction with adults appears to be vitally important.

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