
Review of Literature for “What Interests Students in Recreational Reading?”

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There has been much discussion about how to interest students in recreational reading. But why exactly is recreational reading such an important issue? To start off, reading is a foundational skill from which all other skills grow, and those skills increase as reading proficiency increases (Pavonetti, Brimmer, and Cipielewski 3). Unfortunately, according to Kirsch et al., nearly 44 million adult Americans function at the lowest level of literacy; that's around 23% of America's population (16). Inferring from Cullinan, a program that promotes interest and positive attitudes towards recreational reading will foster sustained reading throughout students' life spans (qtd. in Kush and Watkins 315). There are several topics that must be examined first in order to better understand what will help students cultivate a lifetime of recreational reading. These topics include the characteristics of recreational readers, previously developed reading programs, and other influences on student reading.

Recreational Readers

Several researchers state that students choose not to read for enjoyment or for information and that those students express that reading is something they do not like to do (Corcoran and Mamalakis 141; Manning and Manning 375; Morrow 221). However, conflicting reports suggest that students do, in fact, like reading, but it is not an activity they are likely to choose as their favorite (Rosenheck et al.13; Pachtman and Wilson 682). Regardless of this conflicting data, researchers have shown time and time again the characteristics of a recreational reader.

Researchers agree that recreational readers tend to be girls more so than boys (Rosenheck et al.11; Corcoran and Mamalakis 140; Morrow “Home” 221; Morrow and Weinstein 340). Recreational readers also typically “come from small, middle- and upper-class families, . . . have a high level of reading achievement, . . . [are] cardholders at public libraries, . . . and come from homes in which there is a supportive 'literary environment'” (Morrow 221).

Accelerated Reader

Many have argued that Accelerated Reader (AR) is the program to get students interested in reading. Swanson claims, “Accelerated Reader gets students excited about reading books. . . . Students who never read before suddenly become voracious readers after they experience success with Accelerated Reader. . . . With AR, you will . . . build lifelong readers and lifelong learners” (qtd. in Pavonetti, Brimmer, and Cipielewski 3).

But, in follow-up research, Pavonetti, Brimmer and Cipielewski used a title recognition test designed to “assess [children’s] exposure to print” to show that there was not a favorable difference in children who used the AR program in elementary school versus those who did not (7, 10). In fact, the data showed that the students who did not use the AR program had a greater exposure to literature (Pavonetti, Brimmer, and Cipielewski 11). Likewise, Rosenheck et al. did not find a relationship between use of the AR program and attitudes towards reading (12).

Sustained Silent Reading

According to Mikulecky and Wolfe, students who were exposed to Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) had a more positive attitude toward reading than other test groups (qtd. in Collins 110). But Collins’ research—which is further supported by the study done by Manning and Manning—uses empirical research to discover the effects of SSR. Collins uses six different assessment tests at the beginning and end of the intervention to assess the effectiveness of the technique (110). Her research shows that there was no difference in attitudes between the experiment and control groups and that both groups’ attitudes became more negative by the end of the study (Collins 111). Manning and Manning support this finding and demonstrate that there was less gain in attitude than the other groups they surveyed for their research (379).

Peer and Teacher Interaction and Influences

One of the most promising methods of interesting students in recreational reading seems to be peer interaction. When students feel like they have control over their learning environment they tend to be more motivated to work, and this motivation is increased when students work in groups (Guthrie and Wigfield 410). Morrow and Weinstein show that, when children choose to do something in the in-class library center, 45% of the time is spent with another student (340). Manning and Manning’s research indicates that peer interaction study groups had the most success over the SSR and teacher-student conferences as influences that lead to recreational reading (380). There is a relationship between teacher motivation and student motivation that has been proven by Atkinson’s research (51). Two earlier studies also demonstrate that students are more likely to be engaged in the classroom and their work when they feel that their teachers are involved and supportive of their learning (Roeser, Midgley and Urdan 417; Skinner and Belmont 576). So, it is safe to say that a teacher involved with a student’s education in a positive manner can influence his or her interest and motivation in recreational reading. According to Manning and Manning, when compared to peer interaction and the SSR program, the teacher-student conferences gave students the second highest positive attitude toward reading—it was just behind peer interaction (379).

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Conclusion

It is evident that we must find what motivates and interests students in order to promote lifelong recreational readers since “motivation is crucial to engagement because motivation is what activates behavior. A less motivated reader spends less time reading, exerts lower cognitive effort, and is less dedicated to full comprehension than a more highly motivated reader” (Guthrie and Wigfield 406). As Pavonetti states, “much remains to be determined as to the best way to increase motivation to read and to get students into books” (13). My research is dedicated to finding out similarities between students interested in reading and the differences that distinguish them from those students who are not recreational readers. This information will be useful in determining the effectiveness of classroom practices and programs and could eventually lead to an increase in students who participate in recreational reading and achieve higher literacy levels.

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