

INTERMEDIATE STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS RECREATIONAL
READING AND CHOICE OF FREE-TIME ACTIVITIES

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between students' attitudes to recreational reading and the free-time choices they make as they progress through the intermediate grades. A convenience sample of students in grades four through grade seven responded to questions on the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey regarding their attitudes towards recreational reading. In addition, students prioritized their choices for free-time activities on a scale of 1-5. Results from these two measures provided information on both variables, which showed significant differences between grade levels. According to results in this study a moderate to moderately high relationship exists between attitudes toward recreational reading and reading as a free-time activity. It appears that students in the intermediate grades do not tend to read for recreation; this pattern shows them increasingly unlikely to choose reading as they go from grade four to seven. This study raises concern over growing aliteracy in our schools, with particular concern for boys and their negative attitude towards reading for recreation. Both parents and teachers were surveyed on different measures. Parents spoke strongly in favour of the importance of recreational reading, yet half of the parents reported that their children did not read for recreation. Teachers are implementing many of the recommended strategies to promote recreational reading in their classrooms. Recommendations include the importance of parental modelling of recreational reading, as well as home and school providing materials of interest for students to read in their free-time.

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Intermediate Student's Attitudes towards Recreational Reading and

Choice of Free-Time Activities

CHAPTER ONE

Problem

In my experience as a teacher-librarian, circulation rates in the library drop dramatically as students progress through the intermediate grades. In grade four the majority of students eagerly search for both fiction and non-fiction books. On the other end of the spectrum are the grade sevens who, when given an opportunity for free reading after a library lesson, generally avoid looking directly at books but choose instead to socialize. A small minority will go directly to the shelves and hunt for books of interest to them. When asked why they do not look at books, students often claim they don't like to read, or don't read books, or simply don't have time to read. I was curious to find out what choices students make for their free time. I focused on the changes in students' attitudes towards reading as a recreational activity as they progress from grade four through grades five, six, and seven. The purpose of this project was to look at the relationship between students' attitudes to recreational reading and the free time choices they make as they progress through the intermediate grades.

Background

Throughout my teaching career, I have been in a number of different roles, each one affected in some way by students who had a poor attitude towards reading. Initially, I taught primary grades one, two, and three. I was struck by the few students who would come in and, within the first month, especially in grade one, predetermine whether they were going to be good or bad at reading. At that time, in my teaching I used a whole language approach to

reading, and assumed the positive climate I created would influence the students. My next role as a learning assistance teacher involved interactions with students, most often boys, with a poor attitude towards reading. I worked with many of these students across a number of grade levels.

I am currently working as a teacher/librarian at a large elementary school. I teach all grades from kindergarten to grade seven. The younger students are enthusiastic about searching for a book during their library period. As the students age, choices for books change from picture books, in the younger grades, to chapter books in grades three and up. By grades four and five, the students continue to choose from a variety of areas, including both chapter books and a variety of topics from the non-fiction areas. The classes of grade six and seven students come to library for seventy-five minutes a week. When given the opportunity to look for books, many simply stand around, talk, and do not engage in any book-oriented activity, much less make an effort to find a good book to take home and read. Occasionally, when I recommend a book to them, they will take it and read it. I assume students read the books taken out of the library at home, although some teachers allow students to read during class time. I imagine the students who are reading at home are choosing reading as a form of recreational activity.

In my role as teacher-librarian, I order books for the library each year in order to meet the curricular needs of the teachers and the required program in areas of both fiction and non-fiction. I attempt to purchase books matching the reading levels appropriate for elementary school. I make decisions about purchasing library books in response to interests of students. The fiction section of the library includes 1949 volumes, 21% of the total collection. Last year 31% of new books purchased were fiction selections. Within the fiction section there is

a range of reading levels from grade two through to high school level. Considering the size of our fiction and the non-fiction sections in the library and the breadth and scope each offers, I feel our library collection appeals to a broad spectrum of abilities and interests.

Rationale

Most members of our society would agree that reading is a lifelong skill. We tend to see a skilled and enthusiastic reader as a person who is capable of achieving much in our society. Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkinson, (cited in Gallik, 1999) in their *Report of the Commission on Reading in the United States* argued that “without the ability to read well, opportunities for personal fulfilment and job success will inevitably be lost” (Introduction section, ¶ 3). Lippe and Weber (1996) claim “there is no skill more basic to success than the ability to read....Reading is the foundation for children’s success in school as well as throughout life” (p. 8).

A growing concern amongst adults and children in our society is aliteracy, or the lack of the reading habit. Children are taught how to read, and yet are not choosing to use their skills. For these children reading is an activity done in school, not for personal growth or enjoyment. The attitude students have towards reading has a tremendous impact on whether they will choose to read in their free time. Smith (1988; cited in McKenna & Kear, 1990) observed that “the emotional response to reading...is the primary reason most readers read, and probably the primary reason most nonreaders do not read” (p. 626). Since one of my goals as a teacher-librarian is to foster positive attitudes towards reading, this study will provide me with an overall measure of reading attitudes.

Children in the 21st century have a number of opportunities for use of their free time. Our world abounds with entertainment technology, from television, radio and the Internet to

video and computer games. Our children are immersed in that world. According to Morrow and Weinstein (cited in Blaisdell, De Young, & Pederson, 1999) "the attraction of electronic entertainment is undoubtedly one reason for the low level of voluntary reading among the young" (p. 16). Many sources have stated alarming statistics regarding the amount of time the average student spends watching television. This time is often greater than the time spent in school (Blaisdell, De Young, Hutchinson, & Pedersen, 1999). Many students are also involved in activities to develop healthy lifestyles or musical skills through team or individual sports clubs and music lessons. This organized and scheduled activity takes the place of recreational reading time for some students. All of these things add up to concern over the diminishing interest children have in choosing reading as a free-time activity. If students are not choosing to read outside of school, their skills in reading can suffer (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). Numerous studies indicate a decline in reading attitudes and interest in reading for recreation (Gallik, 1999; Guthrie & Wigfield, 1997, 2000; Shapiro & Whitney, 1997; Wigfield, 1997; Worthy, 1996). My own personal observations reinforce these conclusions.

Parents hold a special role in influencing their children's attitude towards reading. Many challenges exist for parents in this area. Despite the claims of more free time, Smith, Tracy, and Weber (1998) state parents are increasingly busy. Many parents hold down more than one part time job, and some are single parents. With so much changing in our world, many parents find it hard to model reading as a recreational habit, much less as an enjoyable thing to do in their spare time. The importance of parents modelling reading for recreation appears frequently in the literature (Shapiro, 1997, Lippe & Weber; 1996, Jensen, Papp, & Richmond, 1998; Smith, Tracy, & Weber, 1998). This modelling is not only necessary as

parents read for their own pleasure, but as parents read aloud to their children, they make reading a pleasant and rewarding experience. This study included a survey for parents to complete.

This study took place in North-central British Columbia, a province which embraced the whole language movement for a number of years. The Ministry of Education, during the 1980s, introduced massive changes in curriculum. These changes were focused on the Year 2000 Program, which promoted whole language philosophy and influenced many teachers in this area. Strategies adopted at this time may still reflect how teachers approach curriculum today. Classroom teachers have their own degree of influence in the area of reading attitudes. The teachers' personal attitudes toward their students, their commitment to implementing activities to promote reading, and the materials provided within the classroom are certainly important aspects of that influence. In order to assess the way the teachers in this study view and influence reading for recreation, a small teacher survey was completed.

Many researchers note that students' attitudes to reading decline in the upper elementary or middle school years (Guthrie, Alverson, & Poundstone, 1999; Gallik, 1999; Shapiro & Whitney, 1997; Worthy, 1996). In addition, students in this age group are often increasingly busy in their lives outside school. Initially, I was concerned about the possible factors associated with the decline in circulation of books in our school library. I wanted to determine what affects students as they progressed through upper elementary school. Each of these concerns is addressed in the following research questions:

Research questions

1. What are intermediate students' priorities for free-time activities?

2. What differences are evident across the grade levels concerning student choice of reading as a free time activity?
3. What differences are evident between grade levels concerning students' attitudes to recreational reading?
4. Do students' attitudes to recreational reading correlate to their free time choices in grades four, five, six, and seven?
5. How do parents feel about recreational reading?
6. What are classroom teachers doing to promote recreational reading?

Definitions of key terms and variables

Recreational reading: Recreational reading is reading that students choose to do.

This reading is not assigned to the students, nor is it rewarded by extra reinforcement given to them for doing so. It is generally done outside of school during students' leisure time.

Students who choose to read during their free time are choosing from any number of texts including novels, comics, magazines or newspapers. This term used in the survey of reading attitudes (McKenna & Kear, 1990) is also used in the present study. Recreational reading is assessed separately from academic reading. Academic reading is considered reading that is assigned to students, may be rewarded extrinsically, and is done during school time, for the most part.

Free-time activity choices: Free-time activity choices, for the purpose of this study, are considered activities students do for entertainment during their time outside of school time. A number of choices are included in this survey: playing with friends, reading, participating in sports teams/clubs/music lessons, playing video and computer games, and

watching T.V. This term, free-time activity choices, is taken from the survey given to students (Blaisdell, et al., 1999). Therefore, when speaking of the rankings given to reading from the results of the present survey, the term reading as a free-time activity will be used.

Summary

The proof for this problem lies in declining circulation rates in school libraries for intermediate students in elementary school. Students who are capable of reading are choosing not to read and are beginning a cycle of aliteracy (Arthur, 1995), a reality which is a growing concern in our society. In addition, our society currently provides children with innumerable opportunities for their leisure or recreational time. The combined result of these factors is that children are not choosing to read as a recreational pursuit. Two important adult groups can have an impact on the way students use their leisure time. Parents continue to have an influence on the development of childrens' attitudes towards reading. In addition, the activities and environment provided by classroom teachers have an impact on their attitude. Perhaps my study will provide some answers about why students are not choosing to read for their own recreation.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Much research exists in the area of reading attitudes, recreational reading, and the choices students make about reading in their free time. Several studies mention aliteracy as a concern (Arthur, 1995; Lippe & Weber 1996; Shapiro & Whitney, 1997). Various aspects of reading attitudes and their relation to choosing to read for recreation are discussed (Blaisdell et al., 1999; Guthrie & Wigfield, 1997; Lippe & Weber, 1996; Wigfield, 1997). Many research studies and articles document changes that occur in students' attitudes toward reading and most identify the middle school years as the time of initial change (Gallik, 1999; Guthrie & Wigfield, 1997, 2000; Shapiro & Whitney, 1997; Wigfield, 1997; Worthy, 1996). Evidence in research of students' choices in their free time cites the impact of technology, a growing concern with access to home computers, video games, and television (Blaisdell et al., 1999; Smith, et al., 1998; Jensen, et al., 1998; Shapiro & Whitney, 1997; Arthur, 1995). An aspect of concern for this study is the trend of decreasing time spent reading as a free-time activity, coupled with diminishing attitude towards reading as a recreational activity. Each of these topics will be outlined in more detail in subsequent sections of this chapter.

Aliteracy

Aliteracy is a term describing the lack of the reading habit amongst children and adults with the ability to read (Harris & Hodges, 1995). In the present study, my concern about aliteracy is the increase in the number of students who are capable of reading yet who choose not to access any books from the school library. Jerolds, Benton, and McCutcheon (1975; as cited in Arthur, 1995) state the problem clearly when they argue:

We have hundreds of thousands of people who have the skills to read and do not read. We have legions of children who have the intellectual potential to learn to read, but who resist the instructional process. At least partial answers to these two problems can be found if we became more skilful and knowledgeable concerning the measurement and modification of attitudes toward reading. (p. 3)

Lippe and Weber (1996) blame the emphasis on workbook pages and boring skills activities which have “often instill(ed) a dislike for reading....These unpleasant reading experiences have produced aliterate children...nationwide” (p. 9). Shapiro and Whitney (1997) reiterate this growing concern about aliteracy, and intimate it may be a larger problem for our society than illiteracy.

Students' attitudes towards reading

Alexander and Filler (as cited in Cramer & Castle, 1994, p. 19) define reading attitude as “a system of feelings related to reading which causes the learner to approach or avoid a reading situation”. Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) argue that with a positive attitude towards reading, the likelihood exists that students will read for pleasure during their free time. Wigfield (1997) suggests that “beliefs, values, and goals relate to children’s and adolescents’ performance in school, choice of activities to pursue, and persistence on those activities” (p. 59). Therefore, if students hold reading as a valued activity, they will choose to excel in it at school, choose to pursue this as an activity in their free time, and persist in reading as they age.

One concept described in a number of articles is the tendency of readers to become lost in what they are reading; an idea called “flow” by Csikszentmihalyi (1988; cited in Guthrie & Wigfield, 1997; Wigfield, 1997). Nell (1988; cited in Wigfield and Guthrie, 1997)

describes the intensity of someone who is fully engrossed in reading as an “intense and highly energized state of concentrated attention” (p. 421). This is the reason many students give for choosing to read as a leisure time activity. Reading allows them to get lost in a book.

Wigfield and Guthrie (1997) define childrens’ attitudes towards reading as the “individuals’ feelings about reading” and suggest that these feelings “influence how much individuals involve themselves in reading” (p. 421). Their study relates childrens’ reading motivation to amount and breadth of their reading and finds that “the highly intrinsically motivated children spent three times as much time reading outside of school” (p. 426). A number of theories and models describe how students with a positive attitude are more likely to engage in an activity and therefore improve their achievement in that activity. Stanovich’s theory of “Matthew effects” (as cited in Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000) describes the tendency of “high achievers to improve more rapidly than low achievers over time in school” (p. 405). Cullinan (1992; cited in Lippe & Weber, 1996) describe this as the “Success Cycle” which is “based on the idea that practice leads to proficiency which leads to pleasure thereby increasing the desire to read” (Lippe & Weber, 1996, p.18). This reinforces the theories of “Matthew Effects” and the “Success Cycle”; students who are good at reading read more, and therefore get better at reading. Thus emerge the students who were the impetus for this project: students who have not experienced the “Success Cycle”, students who are able to read but do not like to read, read less, and don’t get better at reading. Henk and Melnick (1995; as cited in Blaisdell et al., 1999) concluded that students who do not feel proficient at reading would be unlikely to choose to read recreationally.

Changes in Attitude as Students Age

The changes occurring in student's attitudes to reading between Grade four and seven are primary to my study. Many studies are quite general when reporting upper elementary or middle grade students attitudes towards reading. One of the aspects of motivation is students' perception of their abilities (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). Guthrie, Alverson, and Poundstone (1999) explain that motivation for reading declines throughout childrens' elementary school years. According to Guthrie, et al. (1999), "generally speaking, enjoyment in reading for its own sake and childrens' perceptions of themselves as readers decrease from grade 3 through 8" (p. 9). Gallik (1999) cites several authors who support the belief that "the amount of time spent in recreational reading declines in the middle school years" (Introduction, ¶ 7). Research by Shapiro and Whitney (1997) supports this change in interest in reading, and tracked the tendency for students not to choose reading as a free time activity. A number of studies cited in Worthy (1996) identify sixth grade as a population of interest "because many students have begun to lose interest or have already lost interest in reading by preadolescence" (Introduction section, ¶ 4). Bloom (1964; as cited in Arthur, 1995) claims that "the kind of reader a person is going to be throughout life has been established by the sixth grade"(p. 7). Research by Wigfield and Guthrie (1997) found differences between Grades four and five more apparent in the autumn, and found the mean scores did not change between the pre- and post testing over the course of the year. They found "few grade or time-related differences in children's reading motivation" (p. 430). The researchers felt this may have been different if the study had continued over a longer period. By studying only the two grades, researchers may have limited their sample, whereas if the grade differences were broader, they may have seen more variation in their results.

Choice of Free Time Activities

One growing concern for our culture in North America is the way people use their leisure time. Most members of our society no longer spend their waking hours in the struggle for survival. The workday has shortened and conveniences abound in our homes, and we have more free time than did people fifty to seventy-five years ago. Children have access to many sources of entertainment. Technological advances allow many people to have in their homes personal computers, video games, and one, if not more, televisions. In order to fill our leisure time we pursue organized activities from art courses to music lessons to exercise classes. Many children are involved in organized activities after school and spend a large portion of their free time each day watching television, or playing computer or video games. Blaisdell et al. (1999) suggests that the factors affecting students' interest in recreational reading include watching television and movies, playing video games and participating in a variety of organized sports.

Smith, et al. (1998) noted that as students grow older, they tend to want to socialize more. In addition, these same students often become more involved in organized sports. Smith (1998) argues that "children have been attracted regularly to modern technology and media, outside interests and activities" (p. 7). A study by Vorhees (1993; as cited in Smith et al., 1998) concluded "students are more intrigued with watching television, listening to music, or participating in sports and hobbies than in independent reading" (p. 8).

We find in the literature alarming statistics regarding television viewing habits. Blaisdell, et al (1999) remind us that today's parents are the first generation of television viewers. The presence of a television in the home is now commonplace. Trelease (1995; as cited in Jensen, et al., 1998) reports "ninety eight percent of homes in America have a

television set (the average home contains 2.3 sets) and that set is on for an average of seven hours and one minute a day" (p. 12). Trelease goes on to claim children younger than five watch television 30 hours per week, the same amount of television as the average ten-year-old. Jensen, et al. (1998) found that 90% of students devoted 1% of their free time to reading books as compared to 30% of their free time watching television. According to Healy (1990; cited in Blaisdell et al., 1999), students spend more time during the week watching television than going to school. Shapiro and Whitney (1997), in their study of avid and non-avid readers, report heavy television viewing as an activity which even the avid readers participated in. They did not find significant differences and felt, for these avid readers, "television viewing does not displace time for leisure reading" (p. 361). Arthur (1995) reports that "television and electronic games will not interfere with voluntary reading habits if they [those habits] are formed early in life" (p. 10). The present study determined what the reading habits are of this sample of students from grade four through seven.

Summary

A review of literature on this topic indicates students' attitudes towards reading are connected with whether they will choose to read as a free-time activity. A change in attitude towards reading is increasingly evident as children grow through their intermediate years in elementary school. Extensive choices available to children for free-time have shown to impact on students' tendencies not to read during their recreational time.

CHAPTER THREE

Design and Methodology

I now outline various details involved in my study. I describe the setting, population, and methods used for the study. A detailed explanation of the instruments used for the research is included. Also described are the methods of data collection and analysis. Ethical considerations are also discussed in detail in this section.

Setting, Population, and Sample

This study took place in a small town in the Interior of British Columbia. This community supports a majority of workers in the forestry sector. Other areas of employment include ranching, tourism, and recreation. While a majority of employment in this community is labour related, a portion is based in the public sector.

The research for this project was completed at one of the larger schools in the school district. The total student population, kindergarten through to grade seven, is between 250 and 300 students. Students surveyed were from grades four, five, six, and seven. Students of interest to this study were situated in six different classes: two classes of grades four and five combined, one class of a grade five-six split, and three classes of split grades six and seven. These classes included all the intermediate students in the school.

The school has been established in this community since the mid 1960s. The catchment area includes some suburban areas, in addition to a predominantly outlying rural area. Current statistics available through the school district reveal that the socio-economic status of families in the area range from upper middle class to lower middle class. Of the 72% of parents who responded to a recent school district survey, 78% of children were from

two parent family homes, while 13% percent were from single-family homes. Of the total number of parents who responded to the survey, 82% have a Grade 12 education or higher.

The Foundation Skills Assessment, a measure of reading ability conducted by the British Columbia Ministry of Education, indicated that 70-75% of Grade 4 and 7 students were at or above grade level expectations. Recent documentation based on report card information shows an average of 93% of students are meeting or exceeding expectations in Language Arts. Of the students included in the present study, 48% are female and 52% are male. The students chosen for this study attend my library classes, and are therefore considered a convenience sample.

The teaching staff and administration at this school have been very stable over the past six years. The teachers in the classrooms involved in the study are all women. Their average years of teaching experience is sixteen years. The average age of the teachers is between 40 and 50 years.

In the late 1990s the Ministry of Education introduced for each course, a guideline for curriculum entitled *Integrated Resource Package* (IRP). Before these guidelines were introduced, the province followed the Year 2000 Program and included components of whole language. At that point teachers were free to choose to what degree they would implement whole language strategies in their classroom

As a teacher librarian in this school, I take each class on a once-per-week basis to allow the teachers preparation time provided by in the collective agreement. Students in three classes (Grade 4/5 and 5/6) come to the library for book checkout time and a short lesson for 40 minutes per week. The remaining three classes (Grade 6/7) come to the library two times a week for a total of 75 minutes. Because of the age of this latter group of students

and the additional time available to them for library period, most often the lessons focus on novel studies, research skills, or some area of study related to their classroom themes. This year I have tried to allow for no less than ten to fifteen minutes for students to find and take out a book per week. This may vary depending on the class tone and work assignments to be completed, and whether the teacher specifically requests time for research on class topics or novels for class study.

Instruments

Elementary reading attitude survey. The attitude survey I used for this study was the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS) (McKenna & Kear, 1990) (Appendix A). It is available in the public domain for use as a tool to assess students' attitudes in reading for both recreational reading and academic reading. It was normed on a population of 18,000 students across the United States in January of 1989. At that time students from 95 school districts in 38 states were surveyed.

The ERAS comes complete with a scoring sheet which is divided into two distinct portions, with one score for attitudes for recreational reading and another for attitudes for academic reading. The results from this survey are calculated as raw scores out of 40. The lowest score a student can achieve is 10.

For a measure of reliability, McKenna and Kear (1990) used Cronbach's alpha for both subscales and the composite score. The coefficients were between .74 and .89. Since this instrument was used to draw conclusions about groups of students, this measure is considered reliable for the purpose of this study. With regards to the validity of this instrument McKenna and Kear (1990) state "taken together, the factor analyses produced evidence extremely supportive of the claim that the survey's two subscales reflect discrete

aspects of reading attitude” (p. 639). My goal for this study was to focus specifically on the scores for recreational reading, although the students complete the survey in its entirety.

This instrument is available for use in the public domain. However, use of the cartoon character Garfield, shown in the original survey, was only permitted up to December 31, 1999. I applied to PAWS for permission to use the survey with the Garfield character, but did not receive a reply. Because of this, I replaced the character with simple faces to represent each of the four responses; “excited”, “happy”, “okay”, and “unhappy”. A study by Jensen et al. (1998), with similar questions, used the same faces.

Free-time activity choices survey. The source for this survey instrument was an action research project completed by Blaisdell, et al. (1999) (Appendix B) which studied a population of 105 first-, second-, third-, and fourth-grade students in a suburban area near a large midwestern city. The students in this study were asked to rank their free time choices in the order in which they would choose to do them. Number 1 would be their favourite thing to do, while number 5 would be their least favourite. This instrument was used to show the changes in students’ choices during the implementation of specific activities to increase motivation to read. Use of this instrument for my study identified the general trend of the sample population in regards to choice of free time activity. It allowed comparison between grades for the rank of reading and examination of any relationship between students’ attitudes to recreational reading and the priority they place on reading as a choice for free time. The Free-Time Activity Choices Survey provided valid information for the purpose of my study.

Elementary teacher survey. This instrument also originates from the Blaisdell et al. study (1999) (Appendix D) in which 45 elementary teachers completed the survey. The

aspects it addresses are consistent with the recommendations found within the research on this topic. In this study, teachers were asked to describe their classroom library by responding to questions given two categories of “yes” or “no” responses. In addition, they were asked to indicate the frequency of use of the following strategies during a week: reading aloud, Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) time, personal reading habits, and assigned home reading. Choices for these include 4-5 times a week, 3 times a week, or fewer than 3 times a week. This information was necessary in order to more fully understand the context of the students in this study. I did not request any identification on the part of the teachers but reported the results in terms of the group of intermediate teachers at this school. This survey provided important information for my study.

Parent survey. A majority of the questions from the parent survey were taken from Jensen et al. (1998) entitled “Improving Students’ Habits Toward Recreational Reading” (Appendix C). Two questions, which related directly to their study, were omitted from my survey. These questions focussed on whose responsibility it was to promote recreational reading, the school’s or the parents’. I included a question more directly tied to the aims of my study: “How often does your child bring a book home from the school library?” to which parents responded by circling: always, sometimes, seldom, or never. As well, I included the statement “Recreational reading is one of your child’s top three choices for a free time activity”, to which parents responded by circling: strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree. I assigned letters and numbers to the student surveys according to the grade level in order to match results by grade level and to preserve anonymity.

Procedure

The nature of this quantitative study is based on a non-experimental research design. It is descriptive research in terms of student attitudes and explores correlations between recreational reading attitudes and students choices for their free time (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). Prior to completing the surveys, students filled out a personal information sheet that provided specifics about themselves but preserved their anonymity. This included students' grade level, gender, opinion about reading and book checkout habits. I administered the ERAS survey and the free-time activity choices survey to each class using identical instructions. The surveys were completed during library classes within the period of one week. The process for administering the ERAS begins with reviewing the four figures describing possible responses to the statements. The students looked at the figures that represent how they felt about the statements. Each sentence was read aloud two times. The first time the students were to think of their response and the second time they circled or marked an X on the figure that told how they felt about the statement.

At the same time the students were given the Free-time Choice Activity Survey. Each survey set for the students included a parent survey. All sheets in the set were labelled with A, B, C, or D, according to the grade level. Each set of surveys were numbered according to the number of students in the grade.

After administering the surveys to students, I distributed the Elementary Teachers surveys to the staff members.

Data Analysis

Since there are six separate questions involved in my study I looked at a number of different analyses of the data. Both measures provided a discreet variable for consideration. The ERAS provided scores with a maximum of 40 and a minimum of 10, depending on the choices made by the students. The Free-time Activity Choice Survey gave a rank score from 1 to 5, as each child chose which activity they preferred in their spare time. This provided a ranking of priorities for students.

The rankings of activities taken from the Free Choice Activity survey gave an overall ranking of each activity. Using the mean rank for the choice of reading from each grade, ANOVA compared the priority for reading as a free-time activity between grades. Grade level means were compared using the attitude scores from the ERAS, by means of an analysis of variance (ANOVA).

For the purpose of the present study, I was also interested in determining the correlation between attitudes held by students in a particular grade towards recreational reading and the average ranking these students gave to reading as a free-time activity. As such, I compared the two measures using Pearson's r .

Parent surveys provided overall parent opinions of intermediate students; these opinions are reported in terms of percentages. Information gathered from the teacher survey is reported in a table form based on number of responses.

Ethical Considerations

Parents of all students and teachers involved in the study were informed of the details of the study in a letter. Any parents wishing further information or a copy of the results were

informed where and when I could be contacted. The students and parents were informed of their choice to participate or drop out at any time during the survey. Parents were asked to return the signed form to the school before the administration of the survey. In addition, other stakeholders informed of the study included the District superintendent, School board members, and the school principal. As a courtesy, I also informed the Parent Advisory Council of the school. In offering to present results at a parent meeting, I hope to increase awareness of the importance of recreational reading and inform parents of ways they can affect their childrens' attitudes toward reading. Copies of these letters are included in Appendix E.

During the administration of the surveys, the students were made aware of their right to withdraw with no consequences of any kind now or in the future. I explained to the students that their survey was identified by letter and number and did not require any other identification. There was no record kept of which survey set belonged to which student. Because results were reported in terms of grade means, there was no individual tabulation from this study. Consequently, I am unable to report individual's attitudes to recreational reading.

If the Parent Advisory Council is interested, I look forward to presenting my study during one of their monthly meetings. My complete study will be available at the school for any parents who wish to read it. Copies of survey data are secured in my home for a period of five years, and will then be shredded.

Summary

This study combines information from two survey tools to compare student's attitudes towards recreational reading and their choices for use of their recreational time.

Using the ERAS, and a survey ranking choices for free-time this study will provide information on a number of levels. Results from both instruments provide means across each of the four grades in the study. In addition, survey results are compared using Pearson's r to draw a correlation between both variables. Parent input provides information about their attitudes to the topics in this study. Lastly, information from classroom teachers should reflect strategies employed in the school to encourage reading as a recreational pastime.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

This chapter reports the results of the analysis of data obtained from the various survey instruments administered for this project. In total 117 surveys were completed by students, 60 by parents and 5 by teachers. The covering sheet for the students provided general information about each respondent: grade level, gender, opinion about reading, and book checkout habits.

These results include the ranking given by the intermediate students to the five different free-time activities. The means for each grade level were compared for the two variables of recreational reading attitude and ranking of reading as a free-time activity using analysis of variance (ANOVA). In addition, the variables were correlated according to grade level. Additional mean scores from the ERAS results were reported in the categories of gender, opinion about reading, and book checkout habits. Mean attitude scores for gender and general attitude toward reading were compared using a *t*-test. Attitude scores according to book checkout habits were compared by ANOVA.

To acknowledge the influence parents have on their children's recreational reading habits, I included information provided by the parent surveys, despite the fact only 51% of the surveys were returned. Results for the parent surveys are presented in terms of percent for each question. Because classroom teachers' attitudes and classroom activities have an effect on students' attitudes towards recreational reading, information was collected from the intermediate teachers in this study. A table presents specifics regarding teacher responses to the survey.

Demographics of Participants

Of the possible 150 students in the intermediate grades, 78% of surveys were completed. Of those completed, 51% were completed by males and 49% by females. Sixty-four percent of the participants reported they liked reading, while 36% reported they did not. Two thirds of students reported they always or sometimes check out books, while one third reported they seldom or never check books out of the school library.

Results

Free time choices by grade level. Students ranked their choices for free time on a five point scale (1 = first choice, 5 = last choice). They chose between playing with friends, reading, participating in sports teams/clubs/music lessons, playing on the computer or with video games, and watching television. The rankings of each activity were calculated for the entire group of intermediate students. This result indicates the general trend of this sample of students, Grades 4 through 7, towards choice of free time activity. Means and standard deviations for each activity are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Choices for Free-Time for All Intermediate Students

	Playing with friends	Sports teams/ Clubs/music lessons	Computer or video games	Watching T.V.	Reading
M (SD)	1.87 (1.03)	2.66 (1.49)	3.23 (1.19)	3.43 (1.11)	3.76 (1.34)

As seen in Table 1, students indicated they would choose playing with friends as their overwhelming first choice. The order for the activities is shown in the Table 1 with reading given the lowest priority overall for this group of intermediate students.

Ranking of reading as a free time choice activity between grade levels. Students ranked reading relative to the four other activities listed in Table 1 on the scale of 1-5. A low number indicates students placed reading in their free time as a high priority. A higher number indicates students put reading as a low priority during their free time. The mean and standard deviations of grade rankings for reading are presented in Table 2. The mean rankings for reading are compared using a 1 (reading rank) X 4 (grade level) ANOVA across grade levels. Results of this analysis of variance indicate a significant difference between grades, $F(3, 113) = 2.89, p = .04$. Grade five students ranked reading as more interesting than the other grades. Grade six gave reading the lowest rank.

TABLE 2. Ranking of Reading as a Free-Time Activity by Grade Level

	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7
M (SD)	3.57 (1.39)	3.1 (1.52)	4.09 (1.20)	3.97 (1.22)

In order to confirm what appears to be a significant difference between Grades 5 and 6 I ran a t test. The results of the t test for these two grades was significant, $t = -2.49, p = .02$. Between Grade 4 and 5, $t = 1.09, p = .14$, and Gr. 6 and 7, $t = -0.39, p = .35$, results did not show a significant difference.

Attitudes to recreational reading by grade level. Students responded to the ERAS to indicate their attitude towards recreational reading. The raw scores on this measure were used to compare means between grade levels. The lowest score possible (10), indicates a negative attitude towards recreational reading. The highest score (40), indicates a positive attitude towards recreational reading. Group means and standard deviations for each grade on the ERAS are presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3. Recreational Reading Attitude Scores by Grade Level

Grade level	4	5	6	7
M (SD)	27.36 (5.70)	27.55 (7.05)	23.2 (8.07)	22.6 (7.93)

A 1 (attitude) X 4 (grade) ANOVA revealed a significant effect for student's attitudes to recreational reading by grade level, $F(3,113) = 3.6, p = .015$. This supports the argument there is a significant difference in attitudes towards recreational reading between grades four, five, six and seven. Figure 1 provides further information about the trend amongst the intermediate students.

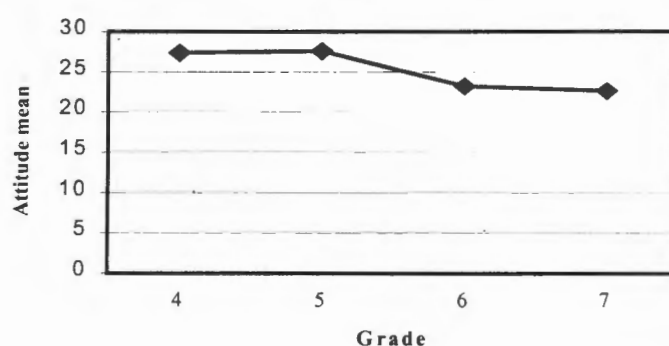


Figure 1. Mean attitude scores by grade level.

Because of the significant results from the ANOVA, I ran a t test between mean attitude scores by grade level. There was a significant result from the test between Grade 5 and 6, $t = 2.01, p = .049$. Results between Gr. 4 and 5, $t = -0.10, p = .92$, and Gr. 6 and 7, $t = .30, p = .76$, did not show significant differences.

Relation between attitude towards recreational reading and ranking of reading as a free time activity. Participants' attitude scores towards recreational reading, as measured on the ERAS, and their subsequent ranking for reading as a free time activity were subjected to a correlation analysis. This analysis was compared by grade level. The grade level correlations are presented in Table 4.

TABLE 4. Relation According to Grade Between Attitude Scores and Reading Rank

Grade	4	5	6	7
Pearson's r	-.514	-.701	-.649	-.785
df	26	18	33	32
Critical value of r ($\alpha=.05$, non-directional)	$r_{crit} = .349$	$r_{crit} = .444$	$r_{crit} = .349$	$r_{crit} = .349$

Moderate to moderately-high correlations between the variables of recreational reading attitude and students' interest in reading as a free time activity were demonstrated. The *negative* relationship is an artifact of the scales used: the higher the attitude score [e.g., 5], the higher priority students gave to reading as a choice for free time [e.g., 1]. In contrast, students with a lower attitude score gave the activity of reading a lower priority on the activity scale. Table 5 shows the r_{obs} depending on the degrees of freedom (df) for each grade. Pearson's r for each grade was analyzed accordingly. The correlation coefficient for the grade four class ($r = -.514$) indicates a moderate correlation between reading attitude and free time reading rank. The correlation coefficients for grade five, six, and seven students (Gr. 5 $r = -.701$, Gr. 6 $r = -.649$, Gr. 7 $r = -.785$) all show a moderately high relationship between the variables.

These results support the argument that there is a relationship between students' recreational reading attitude and their tendency to choose reading as a free time activity. Students' reading attitudes diminish as their priority for reading diminishes. Correlation coefficients show a pattern of becoming more closely related as students from this sample go from grade four through to grade seven. Although there is evidence in this study that the variables are related, there is no proof that a positive attitude towards recreational reading causes a student to choose to read in their free-time. Students could have a positive attitude about recreational reading and still not choose to read in their free time.

Reading attitude by gender. The numbers of males and females completing the surveys were reasonably equal. One of the findings from the literature argues that males and females differ on their attitude towards reading, with males having a more negative attitude. In this study, the mean attitude score for females was 26.69 with a standard deviation of 7.6, while males mean attitude score was 23.16 with a standard deviation of 7.2. To explore this I ran a *t* test comparing the two genders. The result of the *t* test comparing means by gender was statistically significant, $t = -2.596$, $df = 116$, $p = .01$. Males and females in this study report significantly different attitudes towards recreational reading.

Reading attitude by opinion about reading. In order to confirm the consistency of the attitude scale with students' opinion about reading, I included a statement on the personal information sheet describing the students' opinions about reading. Students were to circle "I like reading" or "I don't like reading". Mean attitude scores were compared using a *t* test. The 64% who claimed they liked reading had a mean attitude score of 28.40, with a standard deviation of 6.2. The remaining 36% of students had a mean attitude score of 18.68, with a standard deviation of 5.58. The *t* test indicated a statistically significant difference, $t = 8.54$,

$df=113, p = .00$. This supports the argument that reading attitudes on this scale accurately reflect students' opinions about reading.

Reading attitude by library checkout habits. On the covering letter of the survey, students were asked to choose what best describes their library checkout habits: always, sometimes, seldom, or never take out books. One assumption I made as a teacher-librarian is that students with a more positive attitude towards recreational reading would be more likely to take books out of the library. Conversely, I assumed students with negative attitudes towards recreational reading would be less likely to take books out of the library. In order to confirm this assumption I ran an ANOVA between the means for each category. Table 5 shows means and standard deviations for each category always, sometimes, seldom, and never.

TABLE 5. Attitude Means Based on Checkout Habits

	Always	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
M (SD)	32.19 (6.86)	25.88 (6.72)	20 (5.96)	17.62 (4.48)

The 1 (mean attitude scores of all students) X 4 (library checkout choices) analysis of variance indicated a statistically significant difference based on library checkout habits, $F(3,111) = 17.314, p = .00$. This result supports the argument students who sometimes or always take books out of the library have a more positive attitude towards recreational reading. Figure 2 demonstrates the declining attitude scores between groups based on library checkout habits.

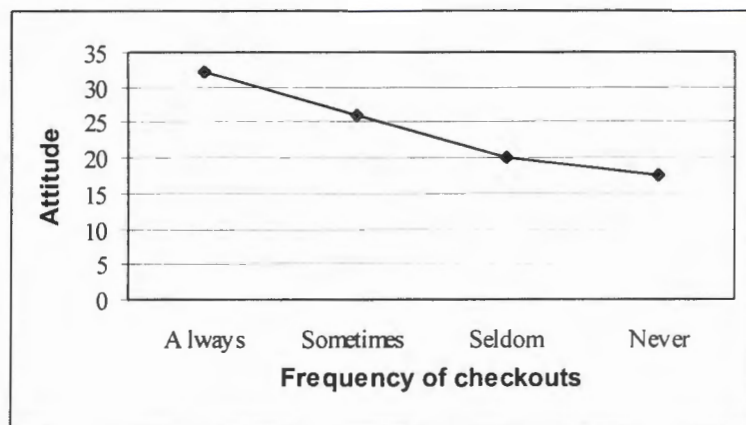


Figure 2. Mean attitude scores by library check-out habits.

Parent survey. The parent surveys (Appendix C) provide valuable information regarding factors that influence childrens' attitudes towards recreational reading. Of the parent surveys, 51% were returned. Parents responded to questions on a variety of aspects of recreational reading. On questions 1 through 7, parents responded on a four-point scale: always, sometimes, seldom, and never. For questions 8 through 10, they responded on a four-point scale: strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. I grouped the questions in six categories: parental attitudes, reading aloud, choosing to read for enjoyment, access to books, television viewing, and priority for reading. Each category will be reported using percent of responses.

One question showing a particularly strong response was Question 8. It stated: "Recreational reading is important." All parents responding indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

Two of the questions, Questions 1 and 9, asked about parents reading aloud to their children. In response to the Question 1, 95% of parents indicated that they read to their children always or sometimes. For Question 9, 95% of respondents said they strongly agreed or agreed that reading to their children influenced their children to read for fun.

Results were more varied when parents were asked how much their children choose to read for enjoyment from a variety of sources. Thirty-three percent said their children always read during an average week, 50% said their children sometimes read, while 17% said their children seldom read for enjoyment.

Three questions on the survey dealt with the frequency with which children acquired books from the school library or local library and from book orders or a bookstore. The school library was a source used always or sometimes by 75% of the children. The local library was the least likely place to acquire books with 48% of parents saying their children always or sometimes visited there. Eighty-five percent of parents said their child would always or sometimes buy books through book clubs or bookstores.

Two questions on the survey inquired about students' reading and television watching habits. Question 6 asked how often their children watch more than two hours of television per day. Seventy percent of parents said their children always or sometimes watched television more than two hours per day. Question 7 asked how often the child would choose to read instead of watching television. Fifty-nine percent said their children would always or sometimes choose to read. The remaining 41% of parents reported their children seldom or never chose to read instead of watching television.

Lastly, Question 10 asked parents to respond to the statement "Recreational reading is one of your child's top three choices for a free time activity". Of the parents responding to the survey, 50% said they would strongly agree or agree with that statement. The other 50% disagreed or strongly disagreed that their children would place reading as one of their top three choices for free time.

Teacher survey. The teachers' surveys covered questions relevant to factors shown to influence student reading for recreation (Appendix D). These questions included teacher's personal reading habits, their use of Sustained Silent Reading and student home reading. In addition, questions were included about the extent of each classroom library. Table 6 outlines responses to the survey by five of the six teachers whose students were involved in the study.

TABLE 6. Intermediate Teacher Responses

Frequency per week	4-5 times	3 times	Less than 3 times
Read aloud	1	3	1
Provide SSR	1	4	0
Read during SSR	0	0	5
Ask students to read at home	0	3	2
Read at home	4	0	1
Class library	YES	NO	
Four books per child	5	0	
Reading corner	2	3	
Variety of materials	2	3	
Range of levels	5	0	

Summary

Subjects were asked to rank their choices for free time activities (1 = first choice; 5 = last choice). Playing with friends was the most popular choice, with reading ranked as their last choice. When the rank given to reading as a choice of free time activity was

compared across the four grade levels, this study indicated there was a statistically significant difference particularly between Grades 5 and 6.

Results of the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey indicated a number of trends. Significant differences in attitude toward recreational reading were found between students in a number of categories: by grade, gender, opinion about reading, and book checkout habits. A particularly interesting result was found when means for reading attitude was compared between grades, as a *t*-test indicated the significant difference between Grades 5 and 6.

Correlation of the recreational reading attitude score and rank given to reading indicated a significant degree of relationship for each of the grades. The degree of relationship varies from moderate to moderately high. I am not able to conclude that childrens' attitudes cause them to choose reading, only that the results show a significant relationship.

Results from the parent surveys were reported as in terms of percent for the whole group. Most significant was the very positive response to the statement, "Recreational reading is important." Equally significant was the 50% response to the statement; "Recreational reading is one of your child's top three choices for a free time activity". Although parents do believe it is important to read for recreation, they reported that only 50% of children always or sometimes choose to read.

Most of the teachers reported they frequently read at home. Teacher responses to the survey indicated most teachers do SSR during the week. It appeared from the responses that most teachers had a classroom library, although the classroom libraries varied in quantity and levels of materials for students.

In Chapter Five these results will be analyzed and compared to the review of the literature. As well further discussion of results, implications, recommendations, limitations and suggestions for future research for this topic will be addressed.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion and Conclusions

This chapter interprets the data presented in Chapter Four. The chapter covers the following topics under their respective headings: discussion of results, educational implications, recommendations, limitations and, finally, suggestions for future research. The discussion for this study connects the results to theories presented in research on the topic of reading attitude.

Discussion of Results

Intermediate students ranking of free time activities. Results of the Free-Time Activity Choices Survey indicate students would choose first, playing with friends; second, involvement in an organized activity; third, playing on a computer or with video games; fourth, watching television; and fifth, reading in their spare time.

Students stated they prefer to play with friends in their free time. This finding supports the findings of other researchers (e.g., Smith et al., 1998). The overall second choice among the intermediate students is to be involved with sports teams, clubs, or music lessons. This is also supported by findings in research (e.g. Smith et al., 1998; Blaisdell et al., 1999). It is interesting to note that at the time the survey was administered, students were looking forward to beginning their soccer season, a popular sport in this community. The third priority reported is playing on the computer or with video games. Little concern, or evidence for concern, is found in the research in this area. This may reflect the recent growth in influence of electronic media on students at this time. Interestingly, the survey results indicate that students choose to use the computer or play video games rather than watch television. However, a significant difference was not found between these activities, when

mean ranks are compared through a *t* test. Television is the fourth out of five choices for students in this sample. Much research cited in this study expresses concern over the amount of free time spent watching television (Jensen et al., 1998; Blaisdell et al., 1999). However, the results of this survey indicate this is not prevalent in this sample. Another possibility may be that electronic media is more readily available and children's free time is divided between an increased number of options. As their last choice, students choose reading in their spare time. This is a strong indication that students in this sample are not choosing to read. Smith et al. (1998), Blaisdell et al. (1999), and Jensen et al. (1998) noted a number of options children choose for their free time rather than reading, and survey results in this study support their conclusions.

Aliteracy, or the lack of the reading habit, is a focus in this study. Results showing reading is the last choice amongst these intermediate students indicate this concern is warranted. The British Columbia Ministry of Education Foundation Skills Assessment determined that 70-75% of Grade 4 and Grade 7 students in this school are reading at or above grade level expectations. Furthermore, the results of school assessment show that as many as 90-95% of students are performing at or above grade level expectations. It would appear the majority of our student population, in the intermediate grades, are able to read. However, as the survey indicates, they are not choosing to read in their free time. This concurs with the definition of an aliterate population. Concerns for educators regarding the lack of reading relates to Cullinan's "Success Cycle" (1992; cited in Lippe & Weber, 1996). If indeed students are not choosing to read, they will undoubtedly miss practising the skill, thereby leading to decreased pleasure when reading, which can result in students' lack of desire to read.

Another concern about this lack of reading relates to the positive impact reading outside of school can have on students' achievement. Krashen (1993, as cited in Gallik, 1999) connects recreational reading to student's improvement in reading comprehension, writing style, vocabulary, spelling, and grammatical development. Gallik (1999) also cites Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding's findings concerning grade five students and the time spent reading outside school. Not surprisingly, their results related time spent reading outside school as a predictor of reading comprehension, vocabulary, and speed. Gallik (1999) describes findings of researchers who have linked independent reading with improved reading achievement and reading comprehension.

Rank of reading as a free-time activity between grade levels. Results of the ANOVA show a significant difference between mean ranks students in each grade assigned to reading as a free-time activity. A graph of the grade means provided in Figure 2 indicates a distinct decline between Grade 5 and 6. Posthoc analysis confirms there is a statistically significant difference between Grades 5 and 6. Interestingly, Worthy (1996) notes Grade 6 is a time when many students' interest in reading declines. Indeed Bloom's claim "that the kind of reader a person is going to be throughout life has been established by sixth grade" (1964, as cited in Arthur, 1995, p.7), strikes a familiar chord, as this portion of the sample places reading the lowest amongst the grades.

Differences in recreational reading attitude between grade levels. Students' attitudes towards recreational reading were measured with the ERAS. Comparison between grade means using an ANOVA indicated a significant difference between grade levels. The trend showed a steady decline in attitude towards reading as students age. This confirms conclusions drawn by several researchers (Guthrie, Alverson & Poundstone, 1999; Gallik,

1999; Shapiro & Whitney, 1997). Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) reiterate this point, identifying the middle childhood and early adolescent years as a time of significant change in motivation. Again, significant differences exist between the Grade 5 and 6 students in this sample. Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) argue that as students age, their perceptions become more tied to their performance, as they begin to understand that they may not be as capable as others. Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) also point out a possible change in these grades in instructional practices, which may focus on social comparison and increased competition. Sweet, Guthrie and Ng (1998) state that as students age they become more aware of their abilities; therefore the older they are, the more aware they are of not being as competent as others at the skill of reading.

Relationship between reading attitude and choice of reading as a free-time activity.

Results of the analysis between the two variables of reading attitude and reading rank are outlined in Table 5. Correlations between these variables range from moderate to moderately high. The degree of relationship increases from Grade 4 to Grade 7. Perhaps as students age their opinions become more established. It may be that younger students want to tell me what they think I want to hear. As students get older, however, they may be more inclined to say what they think, or are simply more aware of their attitudes as they age. The negative side of Stanovich's "Matthew effects" (as cited in Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000) is exemplified with a negative attitude towards reading for recreation and a lower priority for reading in their spare time. This conclusion is supported by Henk and Melnick (1995; as cited in Blaisdell et al., 1999) who suggest that "how an individual feels about herself or himself as a reader could clearly influence whether reading would be sought or avoided" (p. 18).

Reading attitude and gender. The difference in recreational reading attitude between boys and girls in this study is significant. Results based on gender, using the ERAS, cited in McKenna (1997) “indicated that girls possessed significantly more positive attitudes toward recreation reading at all grade levels than did boys, a gap that widened with age” (p. 2).

McKenna’s study concluded that reading was perceived as an activity more suitable for girls, and showed an increase in this perception around fifth grade. Wigfield and Guthrie (1997) found gender differences in motivation, with girls showing a more positive motivation than boys. They felt boys’ achievement could be affected by their lack of motivation to read.

Reading attitude and opinion about reading. Results compared in this study between those students who stated they liked reading and those who stated they did not like reading provided confirmation of student’s overall attitude towards reading. Not surprisingly, the comparison of these two scores is significant. From the perspective of a teacher-librarian, I was pleased to find the proportion of students who liked reading is 64%, compared to 36% who stated they did not like reading.

Reading attitude and book checkout habits. Students in this study categorized their book checkout habits as follows: Always, 14%; Sometimes, 56%; Seldom, 18%; Never, 11%. Although 29% of students in this study seldom or never take out books, 70% always or sometimes take out books. The difference in attitude towards reading is statistically significant between the four categories of book checkout habits. These results support other research findings that demonstrate that students with a positive attitude towards reading will choose to read for recreation (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Lippe & Weber, 1996; Wigfield, 1997). Conversely, students with poor attitudes do not choose to read for recreation (Henk & Melnick, 1995, as cited in Blaisdell et al., 1999).

Intermediate teacher surveys. This survey asks teachers about the frequency of their reading aloud and employing sustained silent reading as teaching strategies, and about the content of their classroom libraries. Each of these has been shown in research to improve students' attitudes toward reading (Arthur, 1995, Blaisdell et al., 1999; Jensen et al., 1998; Lippe & Weber, 1996; Smith et al., 1998).

According to the survey, teachers do read aloud to their class, some more than others, but three times per week was chosen by three of the five teachers who responded. One teacher commented that how frequently she used these strategies depended on the specific unit she was covering. She varies her language arts instruction between times when she reads a novel aloud, and when the students were reading a novel as a class, or doing individual novel studies. Castle and Cramer (1994) cite a long list of researchers who agree with the statement: "The evidence is overwhelming: reading to students is one of the most effective methods for creating capable readers who continue to choose reading for a lifetime" (p. 147).

An important component of many language arts activities in the elementary grades has been labelled Sustained Silent Reading (SSR). All five teachers involved in the teacher survey implement this strategy in their classrooms at least three times a week. Throughout much of the literature, educators recommend that teachers include SSR in their daily routine to promote recreational reading (Arthur, 1995, Blaisdell et al., 1999; Jensen, Papp, & Richmond, 1998; Lippe & Weber, 1996; Smith, Tracy, & Weber, 1998). The push for increasing content in curriculum, as well as frustration with students choosing not to engage in reading, has resulted in fewer teachers implementing SSR in their classroom (Pinnell, 1988; as cited in Castle & Cramer, 1994). Gardiner (2001), a high school teacher, promotes

daily sustained silent reading. Arthur (1995, as cited in Gardiner, 2001) found several studies that correlated daily reading opportunities with improved reading attitudes. He goes on to highlight other research which shows improvements not only in attitude but also in comprehension, spelling, and vocabulary in students who read on a daily basis.

One component of Sustained Silent Reading is teachers reading at the same time as the students. All of the five teachers chose the category "less than three times a week" on this question. According to Castle and Cramer (1994) the importance of teacher modelling is paramount to the success of SSR. On the other hand, most teachers reported they read at home themselves between four and five times a week, which indicates they are active members of our literate society. The portion of intermediate teachers is split on whether they ask their students to read at home. Several teachers require their students to read at least three times a week. One teacher has a program in which the students are encouraged to read 200 minutes each month.

Some questions in the teacher survey inquired about student access to reading materials from the classroom library. All teachers provided a classroom library with at least four books per child. One question which drew a mixed response focussed on the variety of materials, including magazines, newspapers, and comics, in a classroom library. Worthy (1996) concludes that "making interesting materials available for free reading may encourage otherwise reluctant readers to read" (p. 7). All teachers felt they provided a range of levels of materials for their students, which indicates a clear sensitivity towards various reading levels within their classroom

Parent surveys. Of the parent surveys distributed, 51% were completed and returned. The results were described by percentage of responses on the four point scale: always,

sometimes, seldom, never. For the last three questions, the four-point scale differed: strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree.

All respondents agreed with the statement, "Recreational reading is important." Such a result is encouraging as it indicates agreement by parents with what so many educators feel. Many teachers aim to develop a lifelong love of books and reading. In the study by Jensen et al. (1998), 100% of parents agreed that it was parents' responsibility to promote recreational reading. In my survey, 95% strongly agreed or agreed that their children read for fun. However, when asked how often their children read during the week, 33% said their children always read, 50% said their children sometimes read, while 17% said their children never read. I am heartened by the fact that 83% of parents said their children always or sometimes read during an average week. I am unable to determine how respondents interpret the word "sometimes". I am also unable to determine if the 17% of the children whose parents say they never read have difficulty with reading or perceive themselves as poor readers.

In terms of taking books out of the library, a combined 75% of parents said their children always or sometimes took out books. The word "sometimes" is open to a number of interpretations. Only 48% of parents said their children always or sometimes accessed the local town library for reading materials. Eighty-five percent of parents said their children always or sometimes purchased books from book clubs and local bookstores. A number of teachers participate in commercial book clubs on a regular basis to encourage reading amongst students, and to help provide free books for classroom libraries. In addition, the parent group of the school puts on two book fairs as fundraisers to sell books to students at reasonable prices.

Two questions from the parent survey focussed on watching television. One question asked how often their children watched television more than two hours a day. Parents responded with 70% saying their children always or sometimes watched television for that length of time. This is similar to findings cited by Jensen et al. (1998) and Blaisdell et al. (1999). Teachers and parents can take heart from findings by Shapiro and Whitney (1997) and Arthur (1995) who argue television watching does not necessarily interfere with reading habits. On the question about how many children choose to read instead of watching television, 59% of parents reported their children always or sometimes would do so, while 41% reported their children seldom or never did so. On this topic we can refer to the importance of modelling by parents, parents who are, in fact, the first generation of parents who grew up watching television (Blaisdell et al., 1999).

One of the final statements, which prompted a 50% response, was; "Reading is one of my child's top three choices for free time". It is possible to look at this response in two ways. It can be viewed from an optimistic perspective: 50% of the children in this study do choose to read. On the other hand, many may find this number unsettling, as it also means there are 50% of children who do not choose to read.

Results of this survey indicate a positive response regarding reading aloud. Many researchers emphasize the importance of parents reading aloud to their children (Jensen, Papp, & Richmond, 1998, Smith, Tracy, & Weber, 1998, Lippe & Weber, 1996). Ninety-five percent of the parents claimed they had always or sometimes read to their children, and that this had influenced their children to read for fun. Spiegel (1988, as cited in Cramer & Castle, 1994) claims that, although parents know that reading to children is important, they do not always do so. She paints the "portrait of parents of successful readers: they read to

their children often; they serve as role models as readers themselves" (p. 82). Many parents, themselves, do not choose reading as a leisure time activity; thus, students are lacking important role models (Shapiro, 1997). One question not answered by this survey is whether these parents are readers themselves, or whether they are also a portion of our aliterate society.

Implications

Implications of these findings include concern for the achievement of this population and concern for increasing aliteracy amongst this age level. Of particular concern is the suggestion that boys may be at more risk because of their decreased attitude overall.

What may be a positive result of this study is the placement in order of priority the students gave to watching television. This could be a reflection of the increased access to other forms of electronic entertainment, which may split choices for spending free time.

The grade six students in this study have an increasingly negative attitude towards recreational reading. This finding can not be generalized to any other population. Considering the significant change between Grade 5 and Grade 6 in reading attitude and rank of reading, there could be a need for focus on the Grade 5 population.

Research recommends students' choices of reading material may not match with what is currently available within our classrooms and school library. Teachers and parents need to continue to provide students with opportunities to get lost in the world of reading, whether in the pages of a book, magazine, newspaper, or, possibly, on the Internet.

Robert MacNeil (1994), addressing a convention of the International Reading Association, touched on one important implication of this study:

Respect for words, as opposed to images; thinking with words, the disciplined use of words are all being pushed out of popular culture. Even in literate homes, time given to television, the consumption of images, cannot be given to words. (p. 8)

Is literacy as we know it changing? Are we turning away from stories told by print towards stories told through images? In becoming increasingly an aliterate society with respect to text, should we focus instead on developing students' interpretation of other non-print media? Do teachers need to adjust our pictures to what reading is? Children are exposed to print across a variety of media, including magazines and the Internet. Perhaps educators need to be aware of our interpretation of recreational reading, limited to pages bound in the form of a book.

In addition, teachers need to remember the importance of modelling. As adults, we need to make clear our personal attitudes towards reading. Much of what teachers are doing is confirmed by research; we provide opportunities for sustained silent reading, and we also take time to read aloud to students. Classroom libraries provide students with accessible materials.

Parents in this study overwhelmingly support the worth of recreational reading and many are providing their children with experiences to promote recreational reading. Perhaps some parents would benefit from sharing strategies to increase their children's interest in reading. It is not clear from the present study the level of modelling parents provide for their children in terms of recreational reading.

Recommendations

My recommendations are based on research on this topic and the results of the present study. These recommendations are directed towards classroom teachers, teacher-librarians

and parents, adults who, as prime role models, are most influential in developing and maintaining positive attitudes towards reading.

For classroom teachers, the present study indicates that much of what they are doing meshes with recommendations in research findings. They may consider modelling reading during their sustained silent reading time and maintaining their commitment to it throughout the course of their weekly schedule. Research suggests teachers make a wide-variety of print forms accessible, based on students' interests. Modelling positive attitudes toward reading is equally important across a wide range of members of our society, including modelling done by males, sports figures, pop stars, and representatives of various minority groups in order to positively influence children. This study has implications for classroom teachers and teacher-librarians in terms of materials and modelling. With regularly scheduled class time with students and access to a myriad of materials, teacher-librarians, offer opportunities to expose children to a variety of reading experiences. In addition, they can provide teachers with ideas for reading materials. Issues concerning access to a variety of types of reading material, such as magazines and comics, or popular series, need to be addressed by classroom teachers and teacher-librarians. In some cases teacher-librarians could co-ordinate opportunities for school wide sustained reading programs, or provide opportunities for younger children to read with older student models. As well, they could be instrumental in providing students with information about adults who model and promote reading as a recreational activity.

Parents need recognition as prime teachers and partners in developing positive attitudes towards recreational reading. Many parents understand the importance of their reading to their children and of continuing to read aloud even when children are able to read.

Parents can encourage discussion of stories they read and ensure that their children make connections between these stories and their own experiences. Many parents in this study already ensure their children have access to a variety of reading materials in their homes. Despite busy lives, parents need to allow their children to observe them enjoying reading. Parents may also need to consider the balance in their homes of childrens' access to electronic entertainment. For example, individual families or the school's parent group, may wish to promote a "T.V. Free Day" each month to promote literacy as an alternate form of recreation.

Limitations

A number of factors may contribute to the limitations of this study. No random selection was used therefore no attempt is made to generalize beyond this sample. The instruments used are all self-report measures and as such it is impossible to determine whether the subjects actually feel, believe, or do the things they report.

Within the population, there was no attempt to control for the varying influences on individuals from their home background and previous experiences. Although individual classroom teachers were surveyed for the current year, influences from other years cannot be controlled.

The instruments used may cause some concern. The ERAS was not normed on a Canadian population and was developed more than ten years ago. It also was not normed on grade seven students, since elementary schools in the United States typically include students from first to sixth grade. Neither the Free-time Activity Choice Survey, the Elementary Teachers Survey, nor the Parent Survey have been subjected to norming or reliability testing

based on large populations. However, my use of these surveys for a similar purpose has served to demonstrate their validity.

The fact that I am the students' teacher/librarian may be considered a limitation. Some students may choose to respond more positively to the ERAS, in order to give me the impression they have a positive attitude towards reading. I hope I minimized this effect by assuring the students that I would not know who completed which survey and that I want only want to learn what students of their age group feel.

This research is also limited by the fact that survey results only show trends in attitudes among the school population. The results will not provide information regarding why students feel the way they do, or what can be done to change the situation from these students' perspective.

Future research

In terms of future research, I have a number of recommendations to consider. Another study could be conducted with students being asked to identify their actual free time habits as opposed to preferences. In a survey which asks for preferences results could indicate students' philosophy, as opposed to actual behaviours.

Students in the present study were asked to rank five different activities from 1-5. This made children choose one activity over another, rather than allowing them to indicate which activities could be viewed equally. Another study could use the same activities and ask students to rate them on a scale of 1-5, according to how much they like to do each particular activity.

Because this study focussed on intermediate students, another approach could be to widen the scope, by studying grades two, four, and six, or grades one, three, five, and seven.

This inclusion of younger grades could provide more information about attitudes towards recreational reading amongst the broader spectrum of elementary aged students.

The parent survey used did not include questions about recreational reading habits of parents, nor the parents attitudes towards recreational reading. In another study parents could be surveyed on their own modelling of reading as a free-time activity, or on their personal attitudes towards recreational reading.

Summary

The present survey produced a number of significant results. Students in the intermediate grades do not typically choose to read as a free-time activity; this pattern shows them increasingly unlikely to choose reading as they go from grade four to seven. Of note, is a repeated pattern of significance between Grade 5 and Grade 6, which is supported in research. Students' attitude toward recreational reading also diminishes as they progress through the intermediate grades. Parents in the survey responded strongly in favour of recreational reading, yet reported their children often did not choose to read. Research demonstrates the importance of both teachers and parents demonstrating positive attitudes towards reading and modelling reading as a free-time activity. Girls were found to have a more positive attitude toward reading than boys, which raises a concern for the general academic performance of boys. This study raises concern over growing aliteracy amongst intermediate students. A number of suggestions for future research include surveying a broader range of grade levels, approaching the ranking of activities differently, and including questions for parents on their own attitudes and habits.

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Appendix A

Information Sheet for Student Survey

Circle the information that best describes you:

1. Grade 4 Grade 5 Grade 6 Grade 7
2. Boy Girl
3. Ride a bus to school I don't ride a bus to school
4. I like to read. I don't like to read.
5. I take books out of the school library

Always Sometimes Seldom Never

ELEMENTARY READING ATTITUDE SURVEY



excited



happy



okay



unhappy

1. How do you feel when you read a book on a rainy Saturday?



2. How do you feel when you read a book in school during free time?



3. How do you feel about reading for fun at home?



4. How do you feel about getting a book for a present?



5. How do you feel about spending free time reading?



6. How do you feel about starting a new book?



7. How do you feel about reading during summer vacation?



8. How do you feel about reading instead of playing?



9. How do you feel about going to a bookstore?



10. How do you feel about reading different kinds of books?



11. How do you feel when the teachers asks you questions about what you read?



12. How do you feel about doing reading workbook pages and worksheets?



13. How do you feel about reading in school?



14. How do you feel about reading your school books?



15. How do you feel about learning from a book?



16. How do you feel when it's time for reading?



17. How do you feel about the stories you read in class?



18. How do you feel when you read out loud in class?



19. How do you feel about using a dictionary?



20. How do you feel about taking a reading test?



Appendix B

Free-time Activity Choices

Number these things in the order in which you would choose to do them. Number 1 would be your favourite thing to do. Number 5 would be your least favourite.

_____ playing with friends

_____ reading

_____ sports teams/clubs/music lessons

_____ computer or video games

_____ watching T.V.

Appendix C

Parent Survey

As a part of my graduate work at the University of Northern British Columbia, I am studying student attitudes towards recreational reading and their choices of free time activities. To provide me with further information your opinions are valuable. All information you share with me is confidential and there is no need for you to put your name anywhere on this survey.

"Recreational reading" -- reading outside school for fun.

- | | | | | | |
|-------|---|----------------|-----------|----------|-------------------|
| 1. | Throughout your child's lifetime, how frequently have you read to your child? | Always | Sometimes | Seldom | Never |
| <hr/> | | | | | |
| 2. | On an average week, how often does your child choose to read for enjoyment? (This may include picture books, magazines, comics, newspapers, etc.) | Always | Sometimes | Seldom | Never |
| <hr/> | | | | | |
| 3. | How often does your child bring a book home to read from the school library? | Always | Sometimes | Seldom | Never |
| <hr/> | | | | | |
| 4. | How often does your child visit the local library for unassigned reading materials? | Always | Sometimes | Seldom | Never |
| <hr/> | | | | | |
| 5. | How often does your child like to buy books through book clubs or local bookstores? | Always | Sometimes | Seldom | Never |
| <hr/> | | | | | |
| 6. | How often does your child watch television more than two hour per day? | Always | Sometimes | Seldom | Never |
| <hr/> | | | | | |
| 7. | How often does your child choose to read instead of watching television? | Always | Sometimes | Seldom | Never |
| <hr/> | | | | | |
| 8. | Recreational reading is important. | Strongly agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
| <hr/> | | | | | |
| 9. | Reading aloud to your child has positively influenced him/her to read for "fun". | Strongly agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
| <hr/> | | | | | |
| 10. | Recreational reading is one of your child's top three choices for a free time activity. | Strongly agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly disagree |

Thank you for your input, Wendy Forsythe

Appendix D

Elementary Teachers Survey

As a part of my graduate work at the University of Northern British Columbia, I am studying student attitudes towards recreational reading and their choices of free time activities. To provide me with further information your opinions are valuable. There is no need to identify yourself in this survey, as the results will be viewed in terms of all intermediate teachers at our school. Thank you for taking the time to respond to this survey.

- | | | | | |
|----|-------------------------------------|------------------|----------------|--------------------------|
| 1. | I read aloud to my class. | | | |
| | | 4-5 times a week | 3 times a week | less than 3 times a week |
| 2. | I provide SSR time in my classroom. | | | |
| | | 4-5 times a week | 3 times a week | less than 3 times a week |
| 3. | I read during SSR time. | | | |
| | | 4-5 times a week | 3 times a week | less than 3 times a week |
| 4. | I ask my students to read at home. | | | |
| | | 4-5 times a week | 3 times a week | less than 3 times a week |
| 5. | I find time to read at home. | | | |
| | | 4-5 times a week | 3 times a week | less than 3 times a week |

Classroom Library

- | | | |
|----|--|----|
| 1. | My classroom library contains at least 4 books per child. | |
| | YES | NO |
| 2. | My classroom is equipped with a reading corner. | |
| | YES | NO |
| 3. | My classroom library has a variety of types of reading materials.
(magazines, newspapers, comics) | |
| | YES | NO |
| 4. | My classroom library provides a range of levels of reading materials. | |
| | YES | NO |

Appendix E
Letters of Permission

Dear Parent/Guardian:

My name is Wendy Forsythe and I am a teacher-librarian at XXXXXXXXX Elementary School. I am requesting permission for your son/daughter to participate in a survey of student attitudes towards recreational reading and their priorities for their free time. I am conducting the survey as part of my Master degree program through the University of Northern British Columbia.

As a teacher-librarian, I feel it is important for students to read for their own enjoyment in their spare time. I would also like to know where reading fits in student's priorities for their free time. I have noticed a general decline in interest for taking books out of our school library as students go through the intermediate grades. For this reason I am conducting this research and requesting your permission.

Your son/daughter's identity will not be revealed. Each survey will be coded according to their corresponding grade and numbered to match parent surveys. I will give the students specific instructions before completing the survey. They will be told that this information will be kept confidential and will not have any bearing on their marks in school. They may choose not to participate at any time without any penalty. Completing the survey should take between fifteen and twenty minutes maximum. A portion of my study includes a parent survey to provide me with further information. Parent surveys will be coded in a similar manner to your child's. I would appreciate it if you would fill this out and return it to the school after your child has completed their survey. I will keep the data provided by this survey secure in my home for a period of five years, after which the surveys will be shredded.

If you would like to hear more about the results of this research, I would invite you to contact me once I have completed my project. I hope to present the findings at a PAC meeting in the spring as well. In the meantime if you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to contact me at the numbers below. If you have any concerns regarding this project, you may contact the Vice President of Research at UNBC at 960-5820.

Thank you in advance for your support. Your reply would be appreciated by .
Yours truly,

Wendy Forsythe

Parent Permission Form

I, _____ give permission for my son/daughter _____
to participate in the survey of student's attitudes to recreational reading and free time
choices.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Dear XXXXXXXX, (principal), XXXXXX (superintendent)

I am writing this letter to ask your permission to conduct a research study with some students from XXXXXXXX Elementary School. The study is partial fulfilment of the requirements for a Masters degree through the University of Northern British Columbia. I wish to investigate intermediate students' attitudes towards recreational reading and its' relationship to student's free time activity choices.

As a teacher-librarian, I feel it is important for students to read for their own enjoyment in their spare time. I would also like to know where reading fits in student's priorities for their free time. I have noticed a general decline in interest for taking books out of our school library as students go through the intermediate grades. For this reason, I am conducting this research.

I will be surveying students from all of our intermediate classes using the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey, as well as a survey ranking student's level of priorities for free time activities. Students will rank their preferences between watching T.V., playing with friends, reading, playing video or computer games, and organized activities. Parents will receive a letter outlining the study and be required to give their permission for their child to participate.

Once I have completed my project, I will send you a copy upon completion. I hope to present the findings at a PAC meeting in the spring as well.

I believe this research may stand to benefit myself and other teacher-librarians in our school district, as well as for our school. Therefore, I am asking your permission to conduct this investigation at XXXXXXXX Elementary School. If possible, could you please respond to my request at your earliest convenience? Thank you for considering my request.

Yours truly,

Wendy I. Forsythe

Dear XXXXX PAC,

I am writing this letter to inform you of my plans to conduct a research study with some students from XXXXX Elementary School. The study is partial fulfilment of the requirements for a Masters degree through the University of Northern British Columbia. I plan to investigate intermediate students' attitudes towards recreational reading and the relationship to student's free time activity choices.

As a teacher-librarian, I feel it is important for students to read for their own enjoyment in their spare time. I would also like to know where reading fits in students' priorities for their free time. I have noticed a general decline in interest for taking books out of our school library as students go through the intermediate grades. For this reason, I am conducting this research.

I will be surveying students from all of our intermediate classes using the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey, as well as a survey ranking student's level of priorities for free time activities. Students will rank their preferences between watching T.V., playing with friends, reading, playing video or computer games, and organized activities. Parents will receive a letter outlining the study and be required to give their permission for their child to participate.

If you would like to hear more about the results of this research I would invite you to contact me once I have completed my project. If the executive would allow me, I would like the opportunity to present my findings at a PAC meeting in the spring as well.

I believe this research will benefit me and other teacher-librarians in our school district.

Thank you for your interest.

Yours truly,

Wendy I. Forsythe