Evaluation of high school reading motivational programs

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EVALUATION OF HIGH SCHOOL READING MOTIVATIONAL PROGRAMS

by

Jeffrey A. Dilks

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
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Approved by
Professor

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Purposes of this study were to identify 1) what were some of the reading incentive or reading motivational programs used in grades 9-12 throughout the country; 2) and which programs were deemed successful by library media specialists and on what basis. In order to achieve this goal, high school library media specialists throughout the country were surveyed via LM_Net listserv to see what reading incentive programs they were using, if any at all, and if they determined the programs were successful, how they measured the success of the programs. There were a total of 21 respondents. Results demonstrated that there were few programs in place; most were believed to be successful; and methods for implementation, and program evaluation for success were very diverse. Results also indicated that there was a relationship between measured success rates and media specialists’ role in identified program.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is with great appreciation that this project is dedicated to those individuals that made this accomplishment possible. None of this would be possible without the love and support of Mrs. Mary Jayne Dilks, Miss Tabitha Dilks, Miss Hannah Dilks, Miss Alayna Dilks, Mrs. Karen Ann Sheldon and Dr. Marilyn Shontz. Thanks for all that you have done.
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Significance of the Topic

Basic consensus among educators is that there is a positive correlation between reading skills and test results on standardized tests. While high school literacy test scores have increased in the past, research is showing that increases do not keep up with the demand for increased literacy skills. It is not that people cannot read, it is that they are not reading well enough to handle today's complex literacy demands (Krashen, 1993, p. ix; McQueen, 1999, p.1). With the importance of increasing and improving literacy skills at the high school level, it would only seem natural that there would be a large selection of programs available to increase reading interests and thereby increase the tide of improving literacy scores. Reading incentive programs could include a wide array of approaches to promote an increase in reading interest and levels. One such approach is the use of a book fair. Yet, over the past few years, book fairs companies have merged or gone completely out of business. Consequently, today there is little if any choice in what kind of program you can use at the elementary level (k-8) and there is even less choice when it comes to high school (9-12) reading incentive programs.
Purpose of the Study

The purposes of this study were to identify 1) what were some of the reading incentive or reading motivational programs being used in grades 9-12 throughout the country; 2) and which programs were deemed successful by library media specialists and on what basis. In order to achieve this goal, high school library media specialists throughout the country were surveyed via LM_Net listserv to see what reading incentive programs they were using, if any, and, if they determined the programs to be successful, how they measured the success of the programs.

Definition of Terms

For clarification and understanding, the terms listed below were defined for the purposes of this study.

High school: Any school with a grade span of 9-12 is the working definition applied and used in this project. Schools that limit their span, as long as they are within this range, were also included. For example, an 11-12 high school was included, as was a 9-10 or a K-12.

Library media center: For this study is defined as the location or access point in a school setting for print material as well electronic information sources. In this thesis it may also be referred to as LMC.
Library media specialist: As outlined in Information Power, is the person with the fundamental responsibility to provide the leadership and expertise necessary to ensure the library media program is an integral part of the instructional program of the school (ALA, 1998, p. 125). In this thesis, may also be referred to as LMS.

LM_Net: An electronic listserv, for media specialists and professional interested in the field of school librarianship, hosted by AskERIC Clearinghouse on Information And Technology, at Syracuse University. The purpose of this listserv is to provide resources and discussion arenas for professionals in school library media services. Access to this listserv is found at http://askeric.org/lm_net

Reading incentive program(s): Any high school reading program that has a primary objective of increasing high school patrons reading achievement or interests is the working definition used in this study. These programs can include book fairs, Sustained Silent Reading (SSR), Drop Everything and Read (DEAR), Accelerated Reader (AR), Reading Counts (RC), Free Voluntary Reading (FVR), and others. This term is interchangeable with reading motivation programs.

Assumptions and Limitations

There were some basic assumptions with this type of study. First of all, it was assumed that reading is good, and consequently, reading more is better. Also it was assumed that there is a positive correlation between achievement test scores and reading achievement and improvement. Furthermore, it was assumed that the use of an email
survey and digest posting would produce reliable results. Lastly, it was assumed that
library media specialists, because of their direct involvement, were able to determine the
success of reading incentive programs. Therefore, one of the key limitations was the
membership of LM_Net, their responses, and response levels, and the fact that they all
volunteered to participate in this study.
References


In Stephen Krashen’s book The Power of Reading, he posed the question...Is there a literacy crisis? His answer was quite complex and yet very interesting. He soundly answered NO, but qualified it at the same time. “There is, however, a problem. Nearly everyone in the United States can read and write. They just don’t read and write very well” (Krashen, 1993, p. ix). So, it seems that while others also agree that there may not be a literacy crisis in the United States, there is at least some concern regarding the need for, and the degree at which, improvement is occurring. Despite improvement in high school reading scores as shown in the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress, “an alarming number of U.S. school children still cannot read at a basic grade level” (McQueen, 1999, p. 1). To compound the problem even further, increases in achievement have not been keeping up with the demands for literacy. “Although basic literacy has been on the increase for the past century, the demands for literacy have been rising faster” (Krashen, 1993, p. ix).

The Importance of Reading and the Role of the Library

Media Center on Academic Achievement

Since reading is important, did the literature identify one form or type that was more indicative of success over any other? According to some researchers, independent
reading was most beneficial. “In face to face comparisons, reading is consistently shown to be more efficient than direct instruction” (Krashen, 1993, p. 22). Independent reading provides the learner with several benefits. “Reading is a behavior that potentially carries a large measure of intrinsic value” (Fawson & Moore, 1999, p.335). First and foremost, reading promotes better reading. “Reading researchers have concluded that we learn to read by reading” (Krashen, 1993, p. 22). “The single factor most strongly associated with reading achievement more than socioeconomic status or any instructional approach is independent reading” (Reading to Learn Institute, 1996, p.1). “Reading promotes reading, the more they read, the more their vocabulary grows, the more words they can read, the more reading they can do” (Reading To Learn Institute, 1996, p. 1).

Another key benefit of independent reading found in the literature was the after-effects that reading has on the reader, namely skill development. It is widely accepted that the stronger the individual’s skill level, the stronger their academic achievement. “Reading as a leisure activity is the best predictor of comprehension, vocabulary, and reading speed. Spelling is also improved when reading is done” (Krashen, 1993, p. 5). Research has shown a direct correlation between the amount of free reading and skill development. “The amount of free reading done outside of school has consistently been found to relate to growth in vocabulary, reading comprehension, verbal fluency and general information” (Cullinan, 2000, p. 2).

Given the importance of the relationship between reading and academic achievement, it was important to examine the impact that the roles of a library media center and library media specialist had in promoting reading.
It seems to go without saying that the more instructionally active the LMC specialist, the stronger students’ academic achievement. Some studies have shown this to be true. “Students whose LMC specialist played an instrumental role tended to achieve higher test scores” (Lance, 1994, p. 14). Another study conducted further validated the importance of involvement. “Well-equipped, quality school libraries that have professional staff involved in instruction contribute to the academic success of their students” (Lance, Rodney, & Hamilton-Pennell, 2000, p. 25). Krashen (1993) also concluded that the role of the LMC specialist was to provide access. “The impact of school library programs on academic achievement is well documented in research literature” (Lance, et al., 2000, p. 25). Modeling and encouraging good reading habits have also been associated with the LMC specialist. “Adults who develop the reading habit... can lead them to further reading” (Cullinan, 2000, p.8). “Children read more when they see other people reading” (Krashen, 1993, p. 42).

What is it that makes libraries key to achievement? Research reported that access and delivery were two key indicators to reading achievement. These two are directly related to LMC programs/services (Lance, et al., 2000, p. 17). “Schools and public libraries develop programs intended to increase the amount and quality of reading students do” (Cullinan, 2000, p. 10). The delivery of programs was also addressed by Krashen who found that the more appealing and attractive the displays and environment, the more reading occurs (Krashen, 1993, p.37). In so far as access was reported, it was found that “libraries are a consistent and major source of books for free reading” (Krashen, 1993, p. 37). The size of the collection was also found to be indicative of achievement. “Larger and enriching school library’s print collections mean higher
reading scores. The research supports the commonsense view that when books are readily available, more interest is shown and therefore, reading is done” (Krashen, 1993, p. 33).

Beliefs and Practices About Reading Motivational Programs

“Initial data analysis indicated that reading incentive programs are varied, widespread and generally perceived as desirable by all groups surveyed” (Fawson & Moore, 1999, p. 330). The results found so far have been quite contrary to the initial objectives of this researcher. What was previously thought as just a lack of formal motivational programs has turned into deeper understanding as to the complexity surrounding the ‘whole school of thought’ regarding reading instruction and motivation. There seems to be a great deal of criticism around certain types of reading motivational programs at all levels.

Going to the heart of motivation, there are two commonly held terms associated with motivation- extrinsic and intrinsic (Fawson & Moore, 1999, p. 325). Extrinsic motivators are those tangible items that are given at the completion of a given task such as candy, stickers or even points. When used as a reading incentive the overall objective is to encourage the reader to read more. Conversely, an intrinsic motivator is not a tangible item but rather a “feeling of accomplishment” that drives the reader to read more.

Several studies conducted concluded that there must be care shown when using a commercialized reading motivational program. “The widespread use of reading incentive
programs support the need to more clearly understand the influence this practice has on reading engagement" (Fawson & Moore, 1999, p. 330).

What was found was that too many of the motivational programs used were based on extrinsic rewards as the primary motivation. Students participating were scored on task completion and not task competence (Fawson & Moore, 1999, p. 336). Such programs as Book-It, Accelerated Reader and Reading Counts based on good intentions, may not provide a long lasting interest in reading unless the program was altered and expanded. The belief was that “these programs need to allow for collaboration with others in their literacy environment” (Fawson & Moore, 1999, p. 336).

Researchers Fawson and Moore (1999) concluded that extrinsic rewards needed to be used cautiously and for readers who needed a jump start in their reading and reduced as literacy competence and interest increase. “Reading incentive programs may countermand positive attitudes for reading since control for reading is placed outside the child” (Fawson & Moore, 1999, p. 334). Others concluded with similar thoughts. “Some extrinsic reading rewards may not be necessary and may backfire” (Krashen, 1993, p. 41). Some studies suggested that rewards might serve in some cases as a jump start, once the child starts reading, the intrinsic pleasure of reading takes over at which point the extrinsic rewards were then removed (Fawson & Moore, 1999, p. 338; Krashen, 1993, p. 42). “There are, however, cases in which extrinsic motivation apparently works” (Krashen, 1993, p. 41). “Any effort to motivate children should have as a focus the long-term goal of generating self-maintaining and actualizing interest in the task” (Fawson & Moore, 1999, p. 328).
Given the concerns and criticisms regarding reading motivational programs, it was even more important to investigate options for truly beneficial programs and activities. Krashen identified a method of reading motivation that involved modeling, independence, choice and most importantly, promoted an intrinsic reward approach to reading. Krashen (1993, p. 3) stated that based on his analysis, free voluntary reading programs (FVR) were consistently effective and the longer the implementation, the more consistently positive the results. "Other researchers have also demonstrated a relationship between free voluntary reading and academic achievement" (Lance, et al., 2000, p. 18).

"Voluntary reading involves personal choice, reading widely from a variety of sources, and choosing what we read" (Cullinan, 2000, p. 1). "FVR provides students the opportunity to choose their own reading for the purpose of pleasure rather than reading to produce a book report or answer questions" (Language Arts Cadre, 1996, p. 1).

What about the long lasting attitude toward reading itself? "The common sense notion that students who do a substantial amount of voluntary reading demonstrate a positive attitude toward reading is upheld both in qualitative and quantitative research" (Cullinan, 2000, p. 2). "Reading itself promotes reading. A consistent finding in in-school free reading studies is that children who participate in these programs do more free reading than children in traditional comparison programs" (Krashen, 1993, p. 40).

The measurable results of studies on FVR, compared to traditional programs were impressive, as well. Krashen (1993) reported that FVR promotes increased vocabulary, grammar, test performance, writing and oral or aural language ability. Further studies indicated that the longer this was practiced, the more consistent the results. While the
results of the relationship between FVR and literacy development results were not always large, they were consistent (Krashen, 1993, p. 7).

Other researchers have validated Kashen's results by reporting that ..."research shows that in 38 of Kashen's 41 studies, students using FVR did as well or better in reading comprehension tests than those students given traditional skill-based instruction"... (Language Arts Cadre, 1996, p. 1).

Summary

Given that reading was essential to overall achievement and life-long learning, little evidence was found to show that many high school library media centers were involved in reading incentive programs, and thus the success of such reading incentive programs at high school level was unknown. So, with library media centers and specialists in every high school, what is the role that they do play? Or, what is the role that they could play?
References


CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

The objectives of this study were to identify 1) what were some of the reading incentive or reading motivational programs being used in grades 9-12 throughout the country; 2) and which programs were deemed successful by library media specialists and on what basis. In order to achieve this goal, high school library media specialists throughout the country were surveyed the LM_Net listserv to see what reading incentive programs they were using, if any and, if they determined the programs to be successful, how they measured the success of the programs.

Methodology Selected

The research methodology utilized by this researcher in this study was an applied survey questionnaire to self-selected group members on LM_Net, an electronic listserv that was available to anyone wishing to participate in discussions and postings related to library media centers/specialists. This group was selected based on their current or recent high school level experience in a library media center and to achieve responses from across the nation.
Population and Sample

The population and the sample group were the same. Those members of the listserv who answered an email questionnaire (see Appendix A) with a response about high school reading programs and identified themselves as a high school LMS formed the sample group of respondents. All responses from school media specialists were considered in data analysis.

Variables

The variables investigated consisted of: 1) the existence of high school reading incentive programs; 2) type of program used; 3) involvement of library media specialist; 4) role of library media specialist; 5) degree of success; 6) means by which success was measured.

Method of Data Collection

Data were collected by means of an electronic inquiry for members to respond to an email questionnaire. In order to fully research the possible ways in which high school library media centers and library media specialists were involved in and with reading incentive programs, an invitation (see Appendix B) and survey were posted on LM_Net on February 10, 2003, reposted on February 17, 2003, and lastly on February 21, 2003. These postings were for any interested high school media specialist. The questionnaire was directed to any LM-Net listserv member who had experience with a high school reading incentive program and / or the roles. Several attempts or postings were made to solicit responses. See Appendix A for a copy of the questionnaire.
Reliability and Validity

In an effort to ensure reliable and valid results, the questionnaire was pre-tested in January 2003 with a group of current library media specialists. Minor changes were made to better code responses for tabulation purposes. Results were valid for those who responded.
CHAPTER IV
PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

Procedures Used

In order to ascertain the nature and scope of reading motivational programs currently in use throughout the United States, an electronic survey was e-mailed to the entire listserv membership of LM_Net. The stipulation for completion was that the member was currently, or previously involved in a grade K-12 or grade 9-12 setting. Responders did not have to be a current library media specialist.

After the initial posting, it became evident that an additional posting would be needed beyond the second to produce more usable results. As a result of the three postings, twenty-one usable surveys were returned.

Once each survey was returned, it was coded by a simple tabulation of responses. Each of the three postings produced responses that were tabulated with all responses combined. Each survey respondent was asked for their zip code to aid in tracing. The use of Microsoft’s Excel program was utilized to aid and assist with tabulation and creation of figures. Descriptive statistics including counts and percentages were used.

Reading Incentive Programs Used

Figure 1 shows the different reading programs respondents used (question 2). Results showed that there were five predominate programs used, namely Accelerated
Reader, Scholastic Counts, Gateway Reading Award, Sustained Silent Reading and STAR. Respondents indicated all programs utilized. Some indicated more than one program in place.

Figure 1. Types of Programs Used

Responsibility For Program Implementation and Evaluation

Participants were then asked to denote from a list all persons responsible for program implementation and subsequent evaluation (question 3). Consequently, more than one choice was allowed. Respondents were also given the opportunity to list any and all individuals responsible that were not listed. Figure 2 shows the responses.
Figure 2. Persons Responsible for Program Evaluation and Implementation

Degree and Role of Involvement of Library Media Specialist in Reading Incentive Program

The degree of involvement of library media specialists (question 4) is shown in Figure 3. Respondents rated Library Media Specialist's involvement from "very significant" to "no involvement". In regard to their roles, respondents indicated the roles that they or their library media specialist colleagues (question 5) served as shown in Figure 4. Said roles were either consultant, design, evaluation and/or implementation.
Responses for this question could include more than one answer.

Figure 3. Degree of Involvement of Library Media Specialist in Reading Incentive Program

Figure 4. Type of Role Played by Library Media Specialist
Success Rate

Survey respondents were then asked if they felt that the program they used was overall successful (question 6). Figure 5 shows the responses received.

Figure 5. Respondents Perception of Success Rate

Yes
74%

No
26%

Measured Results

Lastly, participants were asked to indicate the basis of success or failure (question 7). No list of possible choices was given. Specifically, they had to denote how their conclusions were reached. Results are shown in Figure 6.
Figure 6. Ways Program Success Was Measured

Number of Responses

Circulation Records  Reading Scores  Increase Funding  Grades  Staff Observation and Feedback
CHAPTER V
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

As previously reported, “initial data analysis indicated that reading incentive programs are varied, widespread and generally perceived as desirable by all groups surveyed” (Fawson & Moore, 1999, p. 330).

With the importance of increasing and improving literacy skills at the high school level, it would only seem natural that there was a large selection of programs available to increase reading interests and thereby increase the tide of improving literacy scores. Results showed just the opposite.

Results indicated that there were primarily 5 reading motivational programs utilized by respondents. Further results overwhelmingly indicated that out of 5, they used Accelerated Reader 30% more than the second most used program. The bottom 3, STAR, SSR and Gateway only accounted for 19% of responses.

When asked to indicate all persons responsible for their school’s reading program implementation and evaluation, results indicated an overwhelming level of involvement of library media specialists. What is interesting to note is that library media specialists and teachers accounted for 40 out of 48 responses or 83%, while library media specialists alone accounted for 46% of person indicated as responsible.
In order to examine the role of just library media specialists in reading incentive programs, a narrowly worded question (question 4) was also posed to respondents. Results proved interesting. A total of 86% percent of respondents indicated that in their opinion, library media specialists were involved at or above the “significant” level, while only 14% rated a “moderate” to “little involvement”.

Further information given showed that there was a relationship between a respondent’s level of involvement and determination of their programs’ success. Specifically, when a respondent indicated “moderate” to “little involvement”, they also tended to indicate a less than satisfactory success rate. Conversely, while 74% respondents judged their program successful, 86% also indicated that their library media specialist had “significant” or better involvement.

Of further interest was the type of role respondents indicated their library media specialist played. Results indicated that there were 3 predominant roles played. Specifically, they were consultant, evaluation and implementation. A much lesser percentage indicated involvement at the design stage.

Finally, it was important to know on what basis a respondent determined their program a success or failure. Given no formal prompt, surveys were returned with primarily 5 consistent means for determination of success rate. One significant note is that reading scores were not by far the greatest gauge of success. Instead, individual circulation records were. Staff observation and feedback proved a strong third. Also, something so subjective as funding level was indicated by survey respondents as their gauge of success.
Conclusions

Based on the results given, most respondents indicated that they valued a reading incentive program. What was disappointing is the number of responses returned given the global based approach as to what an email survey can provide. A more direct snail mail approach, while more laborious, might have provided better return rates.

What would be of interest would be to determine if the results would have been different at another time of year. Does the time of year impact result rates and responses themselves?

It became obvious that library media specialists can and do play an key part in a high school reading incentive program. Furthermore, results showed that there were few programs available to choose from.
REFERENCES


If your library media center is involved with a 9th - 12th grade reading incentive program, please answer the following survey.

1. What is your school's zip code? ______________

2. What specific program is used?

3. Who is/are responsible for implementing and evaluating your reading incentive program? (Check all that apply)
   - [ ] Library Media Specialist
   - [ ] Teacher(s)
   - [ ] Curriculum Specialist(s)
   - [ ] Administrator(s)
   - [ ] Other (Please specify_____________________

4. Do you consider the library media specialist's role in your program significant? (Please select ONLY ONE)
   - [ ] Very Significant
   - [ ] Significant
   - [ ] Moderate
   - [ ] Little involvement
   - [ ] No involvement

5. What role(s) do you as library media specialist play? (Please select all that apply)
   - [ ] Program design
   - [ ] Program implementation
   - [ ] Program evaluation
   - [ ] Consultant
   - [ ] Other—please specify

6. Do you consider your reading incentive program successful?

7. Please share specific ways that you are able to measure success rates.
February 11, 2003

Dear LM_Net Subscriber:

Reading incentive programs, whether commercially packaged or individually created, can prove to be academically beneficial to all socio economic groups. I am conducting a study is to examine different high school reading programs currently used, their success rates, and the level of involvement that the library media specialist plays.

Surveys are being made available to all media specialists with 9-12 experience. Participation is strictly voluntary and responses are kept confidential. You may request a copy of the results by sending me an e-mail listing, an e-mail or snail-mail address where the results can be sent.

Please complete the survey below and forward to jdilks@prodigy.net or you can fax it to me at 856-453-7909. If you have any questions regarding this survey, please contact me by e-mail at jdilks@prodigy.net or Dr. Marilyn Shontz at shontz@rowan.edu.

Thank you for taking the time to assist me with this research.

Sincerely,

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