

# Finding the Links

## To Independent Reading

Research by Barbara Poole and Kerry Smith

Deer Park Elementary School

Centreville, Virginia

### **Rationale:**

As fourth grade teachers, we were very interested in discovering what is motivational for children to read independently. In the past we have implemented independent reading programs to encourage the children to read. We have often questioned whether or not these approaches were truly motivational. Therefore we explored the impacts of our methods. As a result of this exploration, our questions became more defined and led us to new conclusions. Our research became a chain of links where each link created the next. This chain helped us unlock our question *What motivates children to read independently?*

### **Students and Programs:**

We each teach 24 students at Deer Park Elementary School. As an independent part of our reading program we require the children to read 20 minutes nightly. At the completion of a book the students must complete various assignments. Depending on the quarter, the students may be asked to respond to written questions about their book, write a summary, or complete a book project. Throughout the quarter, their progress is visually charted on a motivational display.

## First Quarter Reading Program:

Our first quarter program had a competitive aspect to encourage the children to read many pages. For every 50 pages read, the students earned a sticker on the reading progress chart. At the completion of a book, students responded to written questions and recorded the number of pages read on a [reading application](#).

### **Link One:** Is our reading program effective?

After three weeks into the first quarter, each of us had four or five students who read less than 50 pages in three weeks. On the other hand, we also had four or five students who read over 500 pages in three weeks. We wanted to understand why there was such a discrepancy so we began our research by individually interviewing students about their opinions towards the current reading program. Before we began, we divided the children into two categories based on the amount of pages they had already read.

*Does the reading progress chart encourage you to read?*

We got mixed results. Some children were not motivated by the chart at all.

**"I'm OK about not getting stickers. I'm not going to rush. I want to get stuff done good."**

**"I'm OK about not getting stickers. I'll get one soon."**

A few others were disappointed with not having any. On the other hand, some children were motivated by the chart and wanted to get the

most stickers. However, some of these students agreed that they would be reading a lot even without a progress chart.

*How do you feel about completing page applications?*

Most children felt that page applications were not difficult even though some did not like the extra work at home.

## **Second Quarter Reading Program:**

Based on the results of their first quarter reading, our children were now prepared to set individual reading goals indicating the amount of pages they would read for a specific grade. Again, we used a motivational display to chart their progress towards their "A" reading goal.

### **Link Two: What Insight Can Parents Provide?**

Parents are an important link in understanding our students and their behaviors. As a result of our student interviews, we felt we needed more information. Therefore, we created a [parent survey](#).

Based on this survey, the majority of parents indicated that their child was most inspired to read when they were engaged in a book they enjoyed reading. Reading after dinner or before bed time, as well as finding a comfortable place to read, were other patterns that developed. Parents also expressed that their children were excited to set their own reading goals.

### **Link Three: Are Student Insights Compatible with Parent Insights?**

We felt that parents were very truthful in their responses to the survey. Therefore, we created yet another link to our chain and surveyed the students asking them similar questions on this [student survey](#).

The children's replies to the survey were compatible with those of their parents. They too stated that they were excited to set their own reading goals, and that they valued finding a comfortable place to read. However, the students chose reading a book they enjoy as the most motivational key to reading. We were surprised to discover that this was selected above earning a prize, seeing a competitive chart, or trying to reach a goal.

After many observations in the library, we realized that the students needed guidance to find a book best suited for them. They often stated, "I can't find a book to read." These observations along with the results of our parent and student surveys led us to realize that the children must be taught how to select an appropriate book. The book should be at their reading level yet enjoyable for them to read. Thus, we created the final link to our chain.

### **Link Four: How Can We Help Students to Select Appropriate Books?**

Our last link was to construct a lesson which would enable our students to independently locate and select a suitable book that they would enjoy. The first step was to choose four books of different levels and genres for our classroom lesson. We then modeled how to follow the "Book Analysis". Next, groups of students used the "Book Analysis" to teach themselves techniques that can be used in selecting a book. Through our direction, we were able to show the children that print size, pictures, and a book's cover are not always good elements for selecting an appropriate book. On the other hand, the children also realized that reading the summary, an uncommon behavior for most

fourth graders, helped them to decide whether they would like to read that book. In addition, the five finger rule proved to be very helpful. Finally, we took a trip to the library and each child used the "[Book Analysis](#)" to aid them in choosing a book. We observed that the children were able to emulate what was modeled in the classroom. As a follow-up, we questioned the class and obtained the following results:

- Did you enjoy the book you selected? 75% yes | 25% no
- Have you used techniques from the "Book Analysis" to choose a book since? 78% yes | 22% no

A second student survey asked the students to rank topics in order of importance when choosing a book. This [survey](#) supported our earlier observations that children once again chose the type of book as the most important element when selecting a book.

During our following visits to the library, we observed and interviewed the students to see if they were able to link the techniques taught with their book selection. Our findings showed that many children were using a variety of the techniques taught, although some were reverting back to old techniques which did not prove to be successful in the past.

When asking individual students about how they chose their book, these were some responses:

- "I liked the cover because there were mice on it. I did not read the summary."
- "I was intrigued by the title so I opened to the middle of the book, did the five finger rule, and four fingers were still up."
- "I looked for a president book, checked the size of the print, and then read the summary."
- "I went to The Boxcar Children because I wanted a mystery. Then, I looked for a cover that I liked. I read the summary too."

After our interviews and observations we realized that many students had become comfortable using these methods to select a book. Others still seemed to need to practice these techniques.

## **Conclusions:**

As first time researchers, we feel that our conclusion might not be as specific as we had originally hoped. However, we feel that our research has taught us more about our reading programs and has enabled us to be more insightful about the reading process of our students.

One surprising realization to us was that our charts were not as motivating as we originally thought. Only two or three students in each class were truly motivated to "get the most stickers." Many of our "readers" were self-motivated while those not reading were unconcerned by the chart. We will continue to use our charts due to the fact that it did motivate some and did not discourage others.

Along with our chart, we discovered that other aspects of our program were also motivating. Setting individual goals boosted enthusiasm for some students while others enjoyed the opportunity to write about what they had read. In addition, selecting book projects excited the artistic students. Many enjoyed reading for certificates or other rewards. Others just enjoyed having a comfortable place to read a good book.

Overall, we discovered that offering a reading program with a wide variety of motivational aspects is the key for successful independent reading. However, after exploring the four links, we found that children are best motivated when they select a book they enjoy. This is the most important link of all. As educators we believe that our teaching must be directed to helping our students find this book.

In planning for next year, we will begin the year by using the book analysis to teach the students how to select an appropriate and enjoyable book to read. We will continue to use various types of motivators in our reading programs, but we will always emphasize the importance of book selection throughout the year. Our hopes are that we can instill the love of reading by helping to motivate our students in any way we can.

Reading Page Application

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Author: \_\_\_\_\_ # of pages: \_\_\_\_\_

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Please write in **COMPLETE SENTENCES!!!!!!**

**Who** is the book about? (MAIN CHARACTERS)

**When** and/or **where** does the story take place? (SETTING)

\_\_\_\_\_

**What** is the MAIN PROBLEM?

\_\_\_\_\_

**How** is the problem solved? (SOLUTION)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Did you like this book? \_\_\_\_\_ Why or why not?

\_\_\_\_\_

Approved : yes \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Book Analysis

### I. NOTICE THE BOOK FACTS:

A. Title: \_\_\_\_\_

B. Number of pages: \_\_\_\_\_

C. Are there pictures in this book? (circle one) yes or no

D. The size of the print in this book is (circle one):

small | medium | large

E. Is there a reading level listed? \_\_\_\_\_ If yes, the level is

\_\_\_\_\_

F. Do you like the cover? (circle one) yes | no

### II. READ THE SUMMARY:

A. Who is the main character? \_\_\_\_\_

One detail about this character:

\_\_\_\_\_

B. What genre is this book?

historical fiction | fantasy | poetry | adventure

non-fiction | mystery | science fiction | biography

other \_\_\_\_\_

C. What is the setting? (where and/or when does the story take place?)

\_\_\_\_\_

**III. FOLLOW THE FIVE FINGER RULE:**

- A. Hold up 5 fingers as you read one full page from the book.
  - B. Put down a finger every time you come to a word you do not know.
  - C. How many fingers were up when you finished reading the page?
- 

**IV. MAKE A DECISION:**

- A. Would you choose to read this book? (circle one) yes or no
- B. Give one detailed reason why or why not:

## Parent Survey

1. My child was motivated to read when he/she came home with the Bull's Eye Reading Goal? (Circle one) Yes No Indifferent
2. My child reads (circle one):  
  
7 days a week | 5-6 days a week | 4 or less days a week
3. My child needs to be reminded to read. (Circle one) Yes | No
4. If my child was bored, he/she would choose reading as one of his/her top three things to do for entertainment. (Circle one) Yes | No
5. My child usually reads between \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ (give the time of day)
6. His/her favorite place to read is \_\_\_\_\_
7. His/her favorite thing to read is \_\_\_\_\_
8. I have found that my child is best motivated to read when: (give comments)

Thank you for your time!

Parent Name \_\_\_\_\_ Student Name \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Book Selection Survey

Listed below are different parts of a book. Which of these parts is the most important to you when you are choosing a book to read?????

**Directions:** Rank these items in order of importance when choosing a book. Put a number **1** next to the MOST important thing when choosing a book. Put a number **2** beside the next most important thing and so on.

..

(You will put an 8 next to the LEAST most important thing.)

\_\_\_\_\_ the title

\_\_\_\_\_ the cover

\_\_\_\_\_ the amount of pages

\_\_\_\_\_ the type of book (genre)

\_\_\_\_\_ the size of the print

\_\_\_\_\_ the reading level (easy, hard, just right)

\_\_\_\_\_ the pictures in the book

\_\_\_\_\_ the author

Is there anything that is important to you when choosing a book that is not listed above?

\_\_\_\_\_

Imagine you are in the library. You can choose ANY type of book you want. Describe the kind of book you would choose to read. What would it be about?

# Student Survey

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_

1. The Bullseye Reading Program (Circle one):

Motivates Me | Doesn't Motivate Me | Doesn't Make a Difference

2. I read (circle one):

7 days a week | 5-6 days a week | 4 or less days a week

3. My parents need to remind to read. (Circle one) Yes | No

4. If I was bored, I would choose reading as one of my top three things to do for entertainment. (Circle one) Yes | No

If you answered no, what would you choose to do? \_\_\_\_\_

5. I like setting my own reading goals. (Circle one) Yes | No

6. My favorite place to read is \_\_\_\_\_

7. My favorite type of book to read is \_\_\_\_\_

8. I am best motivated to read when: (give comments)