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A K20 Center Research Brief

Exploring the Effects of Book Clubs on the Reading Attitudes of Middle School Students

Whittingham, J. L. & Huffman, S.

2009

Introduction

Whittingham and Huffman (2009) address a critical issue in adolescent literacy: the decline in interest, competence, and motivation toward reading as students enter middle school. Drawing on prior research, the authors highlight how traditional classroom reading methods often fail to engage students, especially reluctant readers. They cite studies emphasizing the importance of choice, social interaction, and engagement in reading activities. The literature supports the idea that book clubs—particularly those held outside the classroom—can foster a more positive reading environment by treating reading as a social and enjoyable experience rather than an academic task.

Methodology

Research Design:

The study employed a pre-post survey design to measure changes in students' attitudes toward reading after participating in an independent book club.

Sample:

Sixty middle school students from two schools volunteered to participate. They were randomly assigned to small groups led by middle-level education interns from a local university.

Data Analysis:

Students completed a 10-question Likert-scale survey at the beginning and end of the semester. Correlational analyses (Pearson's correlation and Spearman's rho) were conducted to examine relationships between time spent in the club and changes in reading attitudes.



Results

The study found that participation in book clubs positively influenced students' attitudes toward reading, particularly among those who initially had negative perceptions. Students who spent less time in the club but started with poor attitudes showed the most significant improvement. Key areas of growth included self-worth related to reading, interest in lifelong reading, and perceived access to reading materials. The findings suggest that even minimal exposure to a socially engaging reading environment can benefit reluctant readers.

Application into Practice

To replicate this intervention, schools can:

- Establish voluntary book clubs that meet weekly before or after school.
- Use small groups facilitated by trained educators or interns who model enthusiasm for reading.
- Allow student choice in book selection to promote engagement and ownership.
- Encourage book talks and peer discussions to foster a social and inclusive reading culture.
- Monitor attitudes using simple pre- and post-surveys to assess impact.
- Collaborate with library media centers to ensure diverse and accessible reading materials.

This model is scalable and adaptable to various school contexts and can be a low-cost strategy to improve reading attitudes and literacy outcomes.

Work Cited

Whittingham, J. L., & Huffman, S. (2009). The effects of book clubs on the reading attitudes of middle school students. *Reading Improvement*, 46(3), 130-136.