Using Book Clubs to Increase Multicultural Students’ Interests in Reading
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Introduction
In a nine-month study, multicultural students participated in an interactive book club meeting every two weeks. About forty students previously taught by the book club leaders were invited to complete an application to participate in the club. Out of the approximate forty students who received applications, eleven were returned. At the first book club meeting and at the last meeting, students completed reading interest surveys. The surveys’ focus was the students’ personal reading habits as well as their enjoyment in pleasure reading. The ten students participating in the club represented the cultures of Egypt, Malaysia, Afghanistan, Vietnam, the United States, and several countries in Latin America. Throughout the nine months, students read books ranging in genres from science fiction to fantasy and realistic fiction. After completing each book, students participated in a discussion followed by an interactive language arts activity. The selection of books was chosen by the teachers with the exception of the final book being student chosen. At the close of the book club, students showed an increase in student-initiated reading for pleasure.

The Question
Does membership in an interactive book club increase multicultural students’ enjoyment of pleasure reading?

Research
In today’s society children’s desire and motivation for pleasure reading is declining. There are several factors that contribute to this decrease: the advanced technology that is at their fingertips: televisions, VCRs, computers, Internet, Nintendo, and other electronic games and all of these choices to consume their time with now.

Still another factor that effects pleasure reading is the child’s family dynamics. The dynamics are the child’s social, cultural, and economical statuses. Families that are led by a single parent, and even some working class families, may be limited at times by money. Children who have working parents may have increased responsibility at home such as watching younger siblings and cooking meals.

Parents have a great influence on younger children and their reading habits. Homes in which pleasure reading occurs on a regular basis and there is reading material readily available for the children greatly influences their desire for pleasure reading. As for older children, peers are the greater influence for
motivation to pleasure read. For this reason, book clubs offer motivation for pleasure reading in older children.

Book clubs offer students a new arena to enjoy recreational reading and to interact with other students. In particular, book clubs offer multicultural students an informal, natural setting in which to interact and learn the new language. Throughout the duration of book club meetings, research has shown that students’ participation, self-confidence and initiation within the book club groups have increased because of students’ increased comfort level with discussing and sharing about texts.

Many articles have cited that teaching students to acquire a new language is difficult, and there are many ways to increase their success. Many factors that add to the success of second language learners acquiring a second language can be found in book clubs.

For individuals to successfully acquire a second language, there needs to be some form of motivation for their learning the new language. Book clubs provide motivation for students learning a second language because of the interactions between group members through the activities and sharing. Within peer groups, children feel less pressure coming from the teacher. The interaction within the peer group is more often in the form of dialogue, as opposed to teacher directed instruction. Book clubs are a social aspect of school in which second language learners can participate in meaningful discussions about literature. The social interactions and discussions serve as motivation for students to acquire their new language.

Collaboration to complete specific tasks also assists second language learners in learning the new language. The collaboration assists all students in interacting and creating meaning of the text with the help of their peers. By utilizing peer groups, there is a larger range of background knowledge and experiences to assist students in creating meaning of text. It has been found that having students attempt to become actively engaged in reading is not as effective without the help of the students’ peer group. Simply the chance to interact and collaborate with peers is motivation for all students, especially multicultural students, to read more often.

Another aspect found in book clubs which increases enjoyment of reading among students, is the presence of a stimulating, high interest reading program for students to participate in. The program should include the discussion of books from a variety of genres. Often students should be given choices as to which books they read. Within this high-interest reading program, teachers should model reading as well as reading activities for the students to learn from. Creating a high-interest reading program allows students to collaborate and interact with the texts to create comprehension.

In conclusion, to increase students’ enjoyment of reading, especially multicultural students, a few factors must be present. Students must be given opportunities to collaborate and interact with their peers. Utilizing a stimulating, high interest program and allowing students to choose some of the books increases motivation for reading. Books and reading programs are a source of
motivation for students. Books help students relate to one another, create meaning of text, and increase enjoyment of pleasure reading.

Students

The students that were selected for this project were previous students of the teachers. About forty fourth and fifth graders received applications to participate in the book club. These students represented all reading levels from apprentice (first grade) to young adult (sixth). Out of the forty applications distributed, eleven were returned, five of which were from fourth grade and six from fifth grade. Throughout the course of the year, one fourth grader did not attend the meetings and the book club requested him not to participate. One fifth grader moved to another school half way through the year and another chose not to participate in the book club. In return, another fifth grader that did not receive an application requested to become a member of the book club. The book club voted on this and unanimously agreed to admit him. At the close of the year, there were eight fully active members. These eight members represented eight different nationalities.

Program

The book club’s program consisted of 45 minute meetings before school every two weeks. During these meetings, children were engaged in discussions as well as hands-on activities relating to the assigned book. Some of these activities included creating questions for game shows, locating unknown vocabulary, creating drawings to connect personal experiences with the novels, using Venn Diagrams to compare and contrast novels and their movies, and creating television advertisements for individually read books. These books focused on areas such as realistic issues, creativity and imagination, and the importance of literacy. On average, six students attended each meeting. In the middle of the year, the teachers found that not having full attendance was due to students’ inability to complete the books in the allotted time. After realizing students’ inability to complete the books within the two weeks allotted, the teachers extended the allotted time to three or four weeks between books. This change allowed students to increase their comprehension of each book as well as increase their level of enjoyment of pleasure reading, as opposed to feeling as though the books were class assignments. Changing the frequency of book club meetings increased student participation and decreased absenteeism.

Results

The teachers had the students complete a reading interest survey at the start of the school year (see Appendix A). Students’ devotion towards pleasure reading, on average, fell within the middle of the scale provided. At the close of the book club, the students completed the same reading interest survey. The end of the year surveys indicated that the students’ interest in pleasure reading increased throughout the year. Out of eight Book Club members, three students’ amount of enjoyment in pleasure reading increased, two decreased, and three students’ rating remained the same. Two of the three students whose ratings
remained the same indicated that their enjoyment surpassed the allotted scale so they chose the highest rating possible, which was equal to their pre-Book Club survey. The teachers observed that throughout the year various book club members became more involved in the book discussions and activities by making connections between the books and their personal experiences.

Conclusion

Book Clubs offer multicultural students an opportunity to informally discuss books that are read and the connections that are made. Through the course of the year, Book Club members became more insightful and took more initiative during each meeting. The students in the book club showed an increased enjoyment in pleasure reading. For the two students whose enjoyment in pleasure reading did not increase, television and video games were found to be more of a priority than reading. It is also possible that in these few cases, reading was not a priority partly because the students’ parents are not proficient in English and do not model reading for their children.

The book club yielded positive results, 75% of the participants either increased their enjoyment for pleasure reading or remained the same. Students spent more time reading independently, became more comfortable participating in oral discussions conducted in English, and increased their English vocabulary. Perhaps most importantly these children learned that reading can be fun - a lesson that can potentially impact them for years to come.

References


Appendix A

Using Book Clubs to Increase Multicultural Students’ Interests in Reading

The objective: to discover whether an interactive book would increase multicultural students’ enjoyment of pleasure reading.

Research: parental influence, family dynamics, social culture, economic status, motivation, and active involvement in reading

Student population of book club

Program of book club (activities)

Results of book club

Conclusions from book club