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RECREATIONAL READING PROGRAM FOR SIXTH GRADE STUDENTS

by
Angela M. Smith

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
May 7, 2007

Approved by

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ABSTRACT

Angela M. Smith
RECREATIONAL READING PROGRAM FOR SIXTH GRADE STUDENTS
2006/07
Dr. Marilyn Shontz
Master of Arts in School and Public Librarianship

The purposes of this study were to determine how much time was dedicated to recreational reading by sixth grade students and what were the topics and genres that interested them. Questionnaires were administered to 201 out of 257 regular education sixth grade students regardless of gender and reading level. According to the results, there was a direct correlation between the types of books that the students enjoyed reading, their opinions on student choice of recreational reading books versus teacher choice of assigned books, and the types of books that they would like to have more of as required reading for English class. Recommendations about how to formulate a sixth grade recreational reading program are discussed.

Acknowledgements

From a young age, my parents have fostered a love of reading in me and my sister. As a family, we traveled to the local public library every Monday night to seek out new adventures through the written word. Looking back, I never could have anticipated that I would take this love of reading and parlay it into a career as an adult. My parents, grandparents, sister, brother-in-law, additional family members, and close friends have always supported me throughout my graduate studies. Without them, I would have never made it to this day.

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CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Background

In 1996, the National Association of Educational Process (NAEP) concluded that as students grow older, the amount of time they read for fun declines. The results of this study indicated that about one half of the tested 9-year-old students reported reading for fun on a daily basis, whereas only about one quarter of the 17-year-old students reported doing so (National Institute for Literacy, 2002). As a result of this study and other similar studies, the International Reading Association formed the Adolescent Literacy Commission in 1998. The authors of the study concurred that the time spent reading correlates with academic success, vocabulary development, standardized-test performance, attitudes toward additional reading, and the development of world knowledge. Furthermore, they found that adolescents deserved access to a wide variety of reading material that they can and want to read (Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999). However, the needs of the typical adolescent reader are often ignored by educators at the middle and high school levels.

As the 21st century continues, adolescents need to be able to read, write, and communicate to transact business in the international community. They need literacy skills to act as responsible citizens. Because we live in a complicated and tumultuous world, the ability to read, interpret, analyze and apply knowledge to a variety of situations is paramount to success. Middle school students are experiencing the transition between childhood and adulthood. In elementary school, recreational reading

is promoted as part of the daily classroom routine. However, in middle school, the students' literary interests change dramatically according to their talents, interests, peer group, culture, and reading level. Many studies' findings support the idea that a large number of middle school students lose interest in reading for fun because of a lack of appropriate materials in the school library media center. Therefore, the students become aliterate. Social scientists and educators continue to conduct studies in order to address these issues. How do we effectively establish a foundation for recreational reading from elementary school to middle school? How do we encourage middle school students to become lifelong learners through reading for knowledge and enjoyment? What role does the school library media center play in promoting this endeavor?

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this study was to determine how much time was dedicated to recreational reading by sixth grade students and what were the topics and genres that interested them. Questionnaires were administered to all sixth grade students regardless of gender and reading level. The results of this study will be used to develop a recreational reading program for sixth grade students. Additionally, they will be used as a basis for analyzing library resources, services, and facilities. Then, the school media specialist can ascertain how to provide a positive environment in which a love for reading will be fostered throughout the students' middle school experience.

Definitions

Aliterate: able to read but not interested in reading (*American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 2000).

Booktalk: an event, usually scheduled in a library, bookstore, or educational institution, at which the author, a librarian, or other interested person discusses a book and reads excerpts from it to encourage readership and promote reading in general (Reitz, 2006).

Collection: the information base contained within the library media center including print and nonprint materials and the necessary equipment to manage, produce, and use them (American Association of School Librarians (AASL), [&] Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT), 1998).

Collection development: the process of planning and building a useful and balanced collection of library materials over a period of years, based on an ongoing assessment of the information needs of the library's clientele, analysis of usage statistics, and demographic projections, normally constrained by budgetary limitations. Collection development includes the formulation of selection criteria, planning for resource sharing, and replacement of lost and damaged items, as well as routine selection and deselection decisions (Reitz, 2006).

Gender: classification of sex into male and female (*American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 2000).

Lifelong learner: the concept that "It's never too soon or too late for learning", a philosophy that has taken root in a whole host of different organizations. Lifelong learning is attitudinal; that one can and should be open to new ideas, decisions, skills or behaviors. Lifelong learning throws the axiom "You can't teach an old dog new tricks" out the door. Lifelong learning sees citizens provided with

learning opportunities at all ages and in numerous contexts: at work, at home and through leisure activities, not just through formal channels such as school and higher education (Ornstein & Levine, 1997).

Literacy: ability to read and write with a minimal level of proficiency (Reitz, 2006).

Middle school: transitional institution between elementary and high school generally including grades 6, 7, 8, ages 11-13 (Ornstein & Levine, 1997).

Reading group: an organized group, usually sponsored by a library, school, church, or bookstore, whose members meet to talk about books they have read.

Most groups coordinate their reading so that everyone has read the same book, or a work by the same author, in advance of meeting. In some groups, a facilitator is selected, sometimes on a rotating basis, who begins the session with a brief talk about the author or the book before opening the floor to discussion (Reitz, 2006).

Reading list: a list of recommended resources (books, articles, Web sites, etc.) on a topic, usually compiled by a teacher or librarian with an interest in or expertise on the subject, for distribution to students enrolled in a course of study or available to readers on a library display rack, kiosk, or bulletin board, not as comprehensive or scholarly as a research bibliography (Reitz, 2006).

Reading preference: a reader's taste in reading matter as to format (books, magazines, comic books, etc.), genre (fiction or nonfiction), subject (biography, crime, travel, etc.), and author. Although reading preferences often change with age, studies have shown that in some individuals they remain remarkably

constant. Gender and age are important factors in fiction preferences (adventure and westerns for men, mystery and romance for women, science fiction and fantasy for adolescents). Psychological factors such as mood may also influence reader choice. Niche publishing appeals to consumers who have developed specific interests. Publishers rely on survey research to examine consumer choice. User surveys enable librarians to develop typologies of borrowers, based on habitual preferences. In public libraries, experienced public services librarians often make an effort to learn the reading habits of regular patrons, and may select materials with the preferences of specific individuals in mind (Reitz, 2006).

Recreational reading: synonymous with free voluntary reading and leisure reading, is a well supported hypothesis that student gains in reading can be encouraged by giving them time to read what they want without too many evaluative measures (Krashen, 2001).

Silent sustained reading (SSR): a form of school-based recreational reading, or free voluntary reading, where students read silently in a designated time period every day in school . An underlying assumption of SSR is that students learn to read by reading a lot. Successful models of SSR typically allow students to select their own books and require neither testing for comprehension nor book reports (Chow & Chou, 2000).

Young adult or YA: an abbreviation of *young adult*, an adolescent aged 12-18, usually in the ninth to twelfth grade (Reitz, 2006).

Young adult book: a book intended to be read and enjoyed by adolescents 12 to 18 years of age. Also refers to a book intended for adults but considered suitable by reviewers and librarians for mature ninth- to twelfth-grade readers. Public libraries usually maintain a separate section for young adult literature managed by a librarian who specializes in YA services, including collection development (Reitz, 2006).

Assumptions and Limitations

Several assumptions were made in this study. The first assumption was that the questionnaires were correctly administered by teachers in the English classes. Another assumption was that the results were tabulated and interpreted correctly. The third assumption is that the students did choose materials for recreational reading purposes. A fourth assumption was that the students were honest in their responses to the surveys.

One limitation of the proposed study was the lack of distinction between gender, ethnic, racial, academic, and/or socioeconomic groups. Another limitation was that this study was valid for this particular sixth grade class only. A third limitation was that the students may not have access to the types of reading materials that they enjoy through the school media center, public library, and/or bookstore. Finally, a fourth limitation is that there may not be available funds allocated for relevant reading materials to the school media center collection.

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CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

On January 8, 2002, President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which contained extensive modifications to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. This new act is comprised of four primary education reform components including stronger district and state accountability for standardized test results, increased curricular flexibility and local control, extended school-choice options for parents, and a focus on established successful teaching methods. With the advent of these federally-mandated standardized testing requirements, New Jersey students in grades three through eight must be tested in math and literacy annually and at least once in grades ten through twelve. Therefore, many elementary and secondary school teachers have undertaken prolific curriculum revision projects over the past five years in order to meet these standards. However, according to National Education Association member and assistant professor of literacy education and director of the Literacy Center at California State University, San Bernardino, Diane Brantley (2006), it seems that NCLB created an environment of quantification of reading with little regard to the quality of understanding a piece of text. Furthermore, she stated that the pressure of the federal No Child Left Behind Act's required testing is ruining students' appetites for reading (Brantley, 2006).

In dealing with the pressures of having to succeed through standardized testing, educators have focused on incorporating reading strategies and instilling a love of reading into the elementary school classroom landscape. Nevertheless, by the time these students are ready to enter seventh grade, most of the opportunities to enter popular nationwide recreational reading programs have been eradicated. For example, the National Education Association's "Read Across America" program's premise is to motivate students to celebrate reading on or around Dr. Seuss's birthday. The NEA provides related resources for teachers, government officials, and community members that they can use to develop engaging activities. Six Flags offers a similar program for students in grades kindergarten through six. As a part of the 'Six Flags Read to Succeed' and 'Six Flags Six Hour Reading Club' program, students are rewarded according to their hourly commitment to recreational reading by giving them Six Flags theme park tickets. For that reason, it is imperative to create a student-centered recreational reading program that will spur students sixth grade and beyond to incorporate individual reading time into their daily schedules.

Recreational Reading and Students

Over the past thirty years, there have been numerous studies conducted concerning the recreational reading habits of elementary and middle school students. In 1981, an article entitled "Recreational Reading: Do We Practice What is Preached?" (Mangieri & Corbi, 1981) was published in *The Reading Teacher*. This article reported information that was compiled from a survey given to 571 elementary teachers from three states during the 1979-1980 school year. The sample included teachers from urban, suburban, and rural areas of the United States from schools containing students of various

socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. The purposes of the study were to ascertain elementary teachers' knowledge of current children's literature, children's books in six literary genres, and activities that they could use to promote students' recreational reading (Block & Mangieri, 2002). The authors of this study decided to repeat the study in 2001 using a similar number of teachers and conditions. In 2001, they found that many school libraries were able to purchase recreational reading materials at a significant rate. On the other hand, because of the state-mandated high-stakes literacy tests, teachers were drawn toward teaching disconnected literacy skills and strategies. In contrast, the results of another study conducted in 1999-2000 among 549 elementary school teachers engaged in professional development activities in Georgia, Texas, Missouri, and New York reinforced the validity of recreational reading. This study found that students who spent more time in recreational reading activities scored higher on comprehension tests in grades two, four, eight, and twelve, had significantly higher grade-point averages, and developed more sophisticated writing styles than peers who did not participate in recreational reading (Block & Mangieri, 2001). In addition, students increased their vocabulary skills without the benefit of direct instruction. Therefore, it was concluded that teachers should employ methods to promote recreational reading such as holding children's literature author visits and including the librarian in classroom activities.

Beginning in 1982, the U.S. Bureau of Census has collected data in the form of a survey given every ten years. This survey contains information associated with national trends in adult literary reading. It takes into account that the results include a cross-section of over 17,000 adults regardless of age, gender, education, income, region, race, religious, or ethnic background (National Endowment for the Arts, 2004). Named

Reading at Risk, the results of this descriptive survey point to an isolated existence for more adults and a decline in the participation in civic and cultural life since 1982. This was attributed to the advent of interactive electronic media devices including the Internet which demand little active participation with others. Additionally, the survey report included the literary reading rates in terms of age grouping. According to long-term reading assessments summarized by the National Institute for Literacy, a smaller percentage of 13- and 17-year-olds read for fun daily in 1999 than in 1984; a smaller percentage of 17-year-olds saw adults reading in their homes in 1999 than in 1984; and a greater percentage of 17-year-olds were watching three or more hours of television each day in 1999 than in 1978 (National Endowment for the Arts, 2004; National Institute for Literacy, 2006). The authors did stipulate that the increased usage of these devices would not erase literature and the arts from the cultural landscape, particularly because they allow people to experience culture from distant locations. However, they affect local participation in cultural events, political activities, and interpersonal exchanges which could adversely impact the continued development of a free and democratic society.

In the summer of 1983, Susan A Burgess worked with 8- to 12-year-old independent readers at the Westwood Public Library under the auspices of a Massachusetts Arts Lottery Council grant. This grant allowed her to conduct book talk sessions which were designed to expose young people to the range of available books, both new and old, to develop their critical thinking skills, and to foster the sharing of books among peers (Burgess, 1985). Because of her concern over the students' lack of independent reading skills, Burgess decided to conduct a study named *ChildRead: The Recreational Reading Selection of Students 8 to 12 Years Old*. This study asked the

questions, “How do children find out about reading material?” and, “What do they know of their own literature, its organization and scope?” The study was administered through a three-page questionnaire of short answer questions, including a General Information page, an Interest Survey page, and a Recent Reading page along with half-hour taped interviews. In compiling the results of the General Information page, it was found that the students chose books based on a combination of appearance author, and recommendation (Burgess, 1985). However, as the students progressed through school, they were less likely to rely on peer reviews as opposed to book reviews in magazines and/or easily accessible reviews in the library. The Interest Survey was divided into two sections: informational, which included the ten major Dewey Decimal groups, and fiction, which included the categories of folklore, realism, historical fiction, fantasy, and biography. The students were required to provide examples of each type of book to substantiate that they knew the implication of the terms (Burgess, 1985). Burgess found that the students enjoyed contemporary realism and fantasy most of all in contrast to folklore. Finally, in the Recent Reading section, it was found that the students relied almost equally on three sources for their reading suggestions: adults, children, and themselves. The students cited that adult influences most likely included female relatives and school librarians, although this variable deviated significantly from school to school (Burgess, 1985). Eventually, the questionnaire was completed by 253 students in grades three through eight, although only the responses from grades four through seven were tabulated due to the small populations of students from grades three and eight. After compiling all of the results of the surveys and the taped interviews, it was found that students desired personal interaction and recommendations when looking for books in the

library (Burgess, 1985). Furthermore, it was found that advertising new books through bulletin boards, book talks, and critics reviews from publications such as *School Library Journal*, *Horn Book*, and *Booklist* did entice elementary and middle school students into the library and encourage independent reading inside and outside of the school walls.

In 1992, a questionnaire about reading was sent to middle, junior, and senior high schools in Indiana from the Middle Grades Reading Network and was followed up by a report of their findings. This survey was revisited and sent in its original form to the same schools in 2003. A total of 460 or 74.8 percent of the schools responded to the questionnaire in 1992. However in 2003, only 208 or 33.8 percent responded to the survey. The reasons given in the report include severe budgetary problems within Indiana during the 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 school years (Holland & Humphrey, 2004). The purpose of this report was to share the results about what happened during that period of time in Indiana middle, junior, and senior high schools concerning staff development, special assistance in reading, time for reading instruction, school library media centers, major influences on reading programs, voluntary reading, family support, school and public library relationship, and priority for reading in schools. In the interim between the administration of the two surveys, there were numerous literacy initiatives implemented by the Middle Grades Network to create a Community of Readers program in which each young adolescent was able to fulfill his or her potential as a reader and the distribution of over 300,000 books appropriate for young readers in Indiana middle school, junior, and senior high schools from 1992 to 1997. Moreover, in 1997-2003, the Network supported legislative efforts to fund the Library Materials Grant Program in Indiana that provided thirteen million dollars for Indiana Kindergarten through grade

twelve school libraries which was matched by school district funds until 2000 and 2001. It was found that when these funds were reduced, book purchases and circulation increases decreased. This demonstrated that a direct link between purchasing new books and book circulation existed and led to less independent or leisure reading (Holland & Humphrey, 2004).

In terms of voluntary reading, there were many factors that contributed to students' positive perception towards reading. According to the results of the 1992 and 2003 surveys, almost two-thirds of the schools, or 63.8 percent in 1992 and 54.3 percent in 2003, estimated that 40 percent or fewer of their students read for pleasure. Only 4.4 percent of the respondents believed that 80 percent or more of their students in 1992 and 15.1 percent in 2003 read for pleasure; and 12.7 percent in 1992 and 27.2 percent in 2003 said that more than 60 percent of their students read books not connected with schoolwork (Holland & Humphrey, 2004). Therefore, there was a documented improvement in voluntary reading in the schools from 1992 to 2003. It was assessed that the most severe impact to interest in voluntary reading remained the lack of current materials in either the school or public library. There was not a significant correlation between the amount of family support for adolescent reading development or the relationship between school and public libraries and voluntary reading. Thus, the recommendations given based on the results of the surveys focused on providing professional development for teachers and school librarians and increasing funding school libraries through state and federal agencies as well as private and public corporations and foundations.

Student Motivation in Reading for Recreation

In the 1950s, Dr. Martin Ediger observed a seventh grade student leafing through encyclopedias in order to view the illustrations and read their accompanying captions at random. After occurrences such as these, the author observed that students may be encouraged to read materials according to their interests. These interests can include magazines, encyclopedias, almanacs, literature selections as long as they are based upon the interests of the students. Additionally, the author offered a variety of suggestions as to how to foster interest in leisure reading such as allowing students the time to explore materials of interest available in the classroom and school library paired with alternative assessments to evaluate what the student has learned and provide updated materials considering various genres and topics. Ediger proposed that then the students would be able to realize continued success in reading which would hopefully be carried over to adulthood (Ediger, 2002).

In 1962, novelist and poet Robert Penn Warren wrote an article in which he questioned why we [general public] read fiction. He hypothesized that we read fiction because we like it. In explaining this assumption, Warren stated that we enjoy fiction because it makes up for the defects of reality (Warren, 1962). When engaged in the reading, the reader takes on the roles of the characters including their hopes, dreams, and flaws that we see in ourselves. He compared this process of role-taking to a child's idea of play. Moreover, Warren stated that fiction is a "telling" in which we as readers participate, and is, therefore, an image of the process by which experience is made manageable (Warren, 1962). It assuages the fear of the unknown consequences of

particular actions that we may or may not take in certain life-changing situations, whether positive or negative in nature. Finally, the author contended that fiction provides the reader with a release, because each work of fiction offers some sort of resolution to a conflict that is experienced by the characters. Therefore, the work of fiction provides the reader with a sense of relief which can be applied to his own life.

Fifth-grade teacher Kathleen E. Cox and University of Maryland educational psychologist John T. Guthrie desired to find out why students were motivated to read. They began this process by examining how to increase long-term reading engagement among a class of twenty-eight fifth grade students from diverse cultural backgrounds in a Chapter I school (Cox & Guthrie, 2001). Most of the students involved in this study came from low-income households. As Cox and Guthrie continued this exercise, they identified the steps that they used to measure their results such as identifying the learning goal in a science classroom, devising a hands-on activity in which all students could participate, and following up the activity with a unit on reading about parallel science topics. Furthermore, they focused on three major questions: (1) How can we increase long-term reading engagement in the classroom? (2) Is our approach for increasing reading engagement and motivation more effective than traditional reading instruction? (3) What are the critically important features of a classroom context that fosters long-term reading engagement? (Cox & Guthrie, 2001). Although the students were motivated to read, they required direct instruction as to how to read for information first. They actively sought out resources on their own because they were engaged in the subject matter. At the conclusion of this study, the authors presented a model of context for engaged reading which included providing real-world experiences related to the learning

goal and giving students choices as to what aspects of the topic upon which they can study. The researchers concluded that if these conditions were present, the students would most likely be empowered to seek out information outside of the classroom setting while the activity was taking place as well as afterward.

In 2004, University of New Mexico researchers Terri Flowerday, Joseph Stevens, and University of Nevada-Las Vegas' Gregory Schraw conducted a study in order to find out whether the positive effects of choice in reading materials were dependent on choice itself or interest in what one chooses. The authors studied the effects of choice, topic interest, and situational interest on reading engagement, attitude, and learning among ninety-eight college students enrolled in an undergraduate educational psychology course. These students were divided into two groups: choice condition, of which there were forty six-participants, and non-choice condition, of which there were fifty-two participants. The results of the authors' experiments were assessed using scores on a multiple-choice test, a content essay, a personal reaction essay, and the completion of an attitude checklist (Flowerday, Schraw, & Stevens, 2006). The results of experiment one revealed that there was a minor negative effect on choice when the participants were required to compose a content essay. Those students in the control group who were not given choice generally wrote higher quality content essays. Additionally, the researchers found that situational interest had a positive effect on attitude (Flowerday, Schraw, & Stevens). When conducting experiment two, the researchers repeated the process employed in experiment one. However, different texts were used in experiment two. Once more, situational interest had a positive effect on attitude. Likewise, higher quality content essays were interrelated with situational interest. There was not a significant

effect established in relationship to choice or topic interest. Therefore, they concluded that these results reinforced the idea that situational interest, as opposed to choice or topic interest encourages motivation in reading text.

Given in a president's message, former International Reading Association President Lesley Mandel Morrow proposed that educators should not only focus on reading and writing skills, but also on what motivates children to read for recreational purposes. She stated that motivated readers and writers initiate and sustain literacy activities, and they choose to read and write for pleasure and for information (Morrow, 2004). In her message, she further offered suggestions as to how to motivate children to read in a classroom setting such as creating a literacy-rich environment in the classroom, setting up a literacy center, providing time for choice and collaboration between students and/or between students and the teacher, and supplying relevant reading materials according to students' interests. She maintained that when students retain some control over what they read, they will be more likely to participate in discussions as well as hone their literacy skills. Additionally, the author inferred that the students will be able to think critically about what they have read and make meaningful connections to the themes revealed within the text. Finally, the author surmised that students will be more motivated to read more challenging in content on their own accord.

Summary

According to the literature, there were several common threads as to why typical middle school students were motivated to read. When they were able to choose their own reading materials, the students were able to form real-life associations to the story and the characters in the text. Oftentimes, they were prompted to seek out books of the same

genre or topic based on their prior positive reading experiences afterward. In Chapter 3, the methodology that was employed in conducting this study is explained.

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CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Thomas Jefferson Middle School has never carried out an interest survey of any of its students concerning how much time was dedicated to recreational reading. The purpose of this study was to determine how much time is dedicated to recreational reading by sixth grade students and what were the topics and genres that interested them. Questionnaires were administered to all regular education sixth grade students regardless of gender and reading level. The results of this study will be used to develop a recreational reading program for sixth grade students and as a basis for analyzing library resources, services, and facilities.

Methodology Selected

According to Kendra Van Wagner (2006), applied research refers to scientific study and research that seeks to solve practical problems. In order to design an appropriate recreational reading program based on student preference, it is essential to conduct a survey among the sixth grade students that will provide baseline information. After categorizing the results of this survey, a recreational reading program can be devised for these students as well as future sixth grade classes. This program can be used by the school librarian in order to consider popular recreational reading materials when ordering new books. The sixth grade English teachers can include these types of books in their recreational reading collections, which may motivate the students to read for

pleasure on an ongoing basis. Moreover, as reading across the curriculum becomes the norm, teachers of all subject areas can consult these sources. Then, they can make educated choices as to what the students enjoy reading as well as design lessons which provide opportunities for students to relate certain themes to what they are reading.

Research Method

There are many advantages to using surveys. Most are easy to analyze, they can be quickly administered, and they can be easily adapted to fit specific situations (Trochim, 2006). Thus, because the sample population consists of 201 students, the most viable way to collect information was through a recreational reading survey. The survey contained ten close-ended questions and three open-ended questions. With the help of the sixth grade English teachers, the survey was administered in their classes during the week of February 18-23, 2007. No report was made as to how many students were absent in their classes and/or how many students were not able to take the survey for other reasons.

Data Collection

In order to collect data for this study, a group administered questionnaire was designed and dispensed to all regular education sixth grade students (see Appendix A). By using this type of questionnaire, the researcher was assured of a high response rate (Trochim, 2006). Additionally, if the respondents need any clarification about the meaning of certain terms, they were able to ask questions and receive answers from their respective teachers immediately. Finally, because the surveys were administered by the sixth grade English teachers at Thomas Jefferson Middle School in a controlled setting, distributing and collecting the surveys was simple.

Sample and Population

Thomas Jefferson Middle School is located in Edison, New Jersey. According to *Money Magazine*, the median salary per household is \$86,205, while 60.7% of the population completed at least some college (Cable News Network, 2006).

A sample of 201 sixth grade students who attended Thomas Jefferson Middle School were the subjects for this study. The total sixth grade population of 257 students is made up of the following ethnic groups: Caucasian (42.4%), African-American (11.3%), Asian (32.3%), and Hispanic (14%). As a result, the sample was comprised of students from diverse socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds.

The students were not required to provide any information regarding their socio-economic circumstances, ethnic backgrounds, or gender. Each of the sixth grade English classes surveyed was homogeneously grouped according to ability. However, because the survey was completely anonymous, grouping was not considered when recording the results.

Variables

The selection of dependent variables for this study was based upon research identifying conditions and factors related to recreational reading among sixth graders. One of the variables consisted of how the student perceives himself/herself as a reader. Another variable included what factors would motivate the students to read for pleasure that the students were willing to reveal. Moreover, another variable was comprised of how the students find out about new books to read. Finally, the students were asked to calculate the amount of time that they spent reading for their own enjoyment per week as well as their level of motivation to read a book after a movie version was released.

Reliability and Validity

When assessing the reliability of the results of this study, external reliability will be established. In future school years, this survey could be conducted among sixth grade students under the same conditions. The results of this survey would most likely mirror any previous results. Although new books are published yearly, the types and genres that the sixth grade students enjoy will generally continue to motivate them to read, particularly for recreational purposes.

When calculating the results of the survey, predictive reliability will be demonstrated. Teachers, including the school librarian, can utilize these results in order to predict what genres and types of books that current and future sixth graders would generally enjoy. A long-term recreational reading program can be designed based upon the students' choices. This could propel student motivation for recreational reading including incentive programs. Additionally, the results of this survey could aid in crafting recreational reading programs for seventh and eighth grade students at Thomas Jefferson Middle School.

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CHAPTER IV
ANALYSIS OF DATA

Procedures

Currently, there are 257 sixth grade students who attend Thomas Jefferson Middle School. With the aid of the five regular education English teachers, 201 sixth grade students were surveyed in each of their respective English classes during the week of February 18-23, 2007. Afterward, each teacher returned the surveys to the researcher's faculty mailbox anonymously. Therefore, the names, ages, ethnic backgrounds, genders, and/or academic levels of the students cannot be reasonably identified. Additionally, the number and names of the students who were absent during the administration of the survey were not reported.

After extensive conversations with the English Language Learners' teachers, it was determined that this survey would be inappropriate and unmanageable for the students involved in this program at this time. Currently, all of these students are placed in ELL 1, which is defined as newly arrived students to the United States with little to no exposure to the English language before enrolling at Thomas Jefferson Middle School. Therefore, their opinions were not included in the results of the survey. Furthermore, after several consultations with the sixth grade Special Education teachers, it was determined that it would not be in the best interests of the resource room students to complete this survey at this time. However, they did express interest in adapting the survey to their students' needs and ability levels. For example, one suggestion included simplifying the questions and reducing the amount of choices for some of the questions.

In the future, this survey could be modified to accommodate the needs of either or both of these student groups to formulate a potential sixth grade recreational reading program to reach all sixth grade students inclusively.

Following the collection of the paper-based surveys, the spreadsheet program offered in Microsoft Works was utilized in order to compile the data for each question. This spreadsheet program is compatible with Microsoft Excel, which was also used in this process. Tables were created in order to present the data for questions one through ten. Because questions eleven through thirteen were open-ended in nature, the results are reported through a narrative summary.

Statistical Analysis

The method of descriptive statistical analysis was employed in order to describe the basic features of the data given in the survey. The information was tabulated and summarized in tandem with a narrative explaining each question and the significance of the results. This method of statistical analysis was applied in recounting the results of questions one through ten.

In contrast, the method of inferential statistical analysis was utilized in order to relay the opinions given as part of the open-ended questions in the survey. Upon reading the students' responses, it was found that a direct connection existed between what types of books that the students like to read and their desire for a revised recreational reading program.

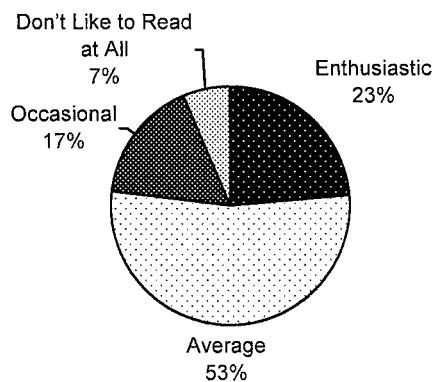
Survey Results

Question one asked the students how they rated themselves as readers. Using a Likert Scale, they were given a range of five choices as to how they felt about their reading abilities. The results of this question are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Rating as a Reader (n = 201)

Enthusiastic	Average	Occasional	Don't Like to Read at All
47	107	33	13



Question two asked the students what factors would motivate them to read for pleasure more. In answering this question, the students were able to choose three out of nine categories. However, they were not required to rank their choices in any particular order. The results of this question are presented in Table 2. The highest ranked categories were finding my favorite kinds of books in the school library/public library, more time to read for fun in school, and going to a bookfair.

Table 2

Motivational Factors in Reading for Pleasure

Motivational Factor	Frequency of Student Choices
Rewards from Book-It and Read Across America	76 (4)
Going to a bookfair	83 (3)
Listening to Book Talks	29
Finding my favorite kinds of books in the school library/public library	109 (1)
Finding books by my favorite authors in the school library/public library	46
Visit by an author of a book that you have read or may read in the future	51
More time to read for fun in school	104 (2)
More time to read for fun at home/outside of school	33
More time to look around in a bookstore	72 (5)

When answering question three, the students were asked to circle the top three categories of books in which they are interested. There were eighteen categories from which to circle their preferences. It was not compulsory to rank their three choices in any order. The results of this question are presented in Table 3. The highest ranked categories were murder/mystery, horror/supernatural, and adventure. In contrast, the lowest ranked categories were families, biographies, and hobbies.

Table 3

Choosing Topics of Books About Which to Read

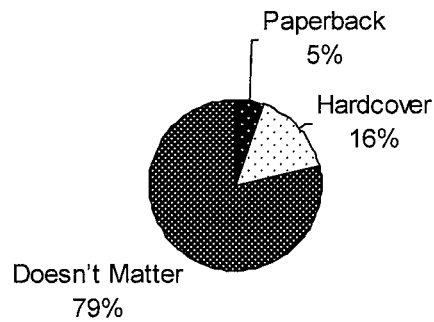
Topic of Book	Frequency of Student Choices
Sports	54 (5)
History	21
Families	4
Biographies	9
Love Stories	23
True Stories	24
Adventure	62 (3)
Murder/Mystery	83 (1)
Magic/Fantasy	61 (4)
Jokes and Riddles	34
Horror/Supernatural	64 (2)
Science Fiction	11
Animals	27
War/Combat	26
Life as a Tween/Teenager	34
Comics	33
Anime/Manga	25
Hobbies	9

Question four asked the students which format of book they preferred to read. They were given three choices from which to pick including paperback, hardcover, or doesn't matter. Of these three choices, they were required to select one option by circling it. The results of question four are presented in Table 4. A total of 79% said that the format was not important when choosing a book to read.

Table 4

Format Preference (n = 201)

Paperback	Hardcover	Doesn't Matter
11	32	158



Question five required the students to select three out of nine characteristics of a book that encouraged them to read if they were browsing either in a bookstore or a library. The students were expected to circle their three choices accordingly. However, they were not asked to rank their choices in any order of importance. The results of question five are presented in Table 5. The top three characteristics included an interesting title, an interesting cover, and the summary on the book. In comparison, the lowest three characteristics included the form, quotes on the cover, and an interesting first paragraph.

Table 5

Characteristics of a Book That Encourage Students to Read It

Characteristic	Frequency of Student Choices
Interesting Title	129 (1)
Interesting Theme	46 (5)
Summary on the Book	115 (3)
Author Whom I Like	86 (4)
Interesting Cover	122 (2)
Quotes on the Cover	21
How Thick It Is	35
Interesting First Paragraph	29
Form (Paperback, Hardcover, etc.)	15

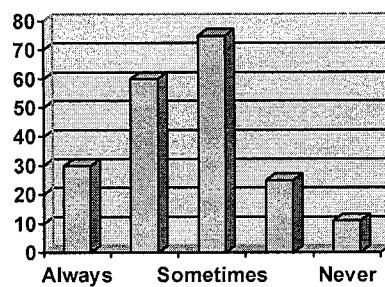
Using a Likert Scale, the students were required to decide how often they tried to find and read another book by the same author if they had enjoyed reading a book by that same author. The students circled one out of five options ranging from always to never. The results of question six are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Frequency of Choosing a Book by Same Author of Favorite Previous Reading Choice

(n = 201)

Always	Often	Sometimes	Not Usually	Never
30	60	75	25	11



Question seven called for the students to designate from mostly whom or what they find out about new books to read. They were asked to circle three out of twelve choices as part of their responses. They were not asked to rank their choices in any certain order. The results of question seven are presented in Table 7. The top three choices included friend's suggestion, browsing in a library, and browsing in a store. The bottom three choices included librarian's suggestion, parent's suggestion, and book club catalog.

Table 7

Source of Information for New Books to Read

Source of Information	Frequency of Student Choices
Parent's Suggestion	24
Book Club Catalog	31
Brother/Sister Suggestion	37
Teacher's Suggestion	59 (5)
Browsing in a Store	76 (3)
Store Display	45
School Reading List	34
Librarian's Suggestion	17
Library Display	61 (4)
Advertisement	48
Friend's Suggestion	89 (1)
Browsing in a Library	82 (2)

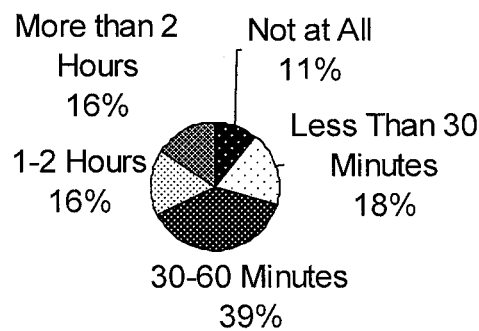
Question eight required the students to estimate about how much time that they spent reading for their own enjoyment per week. Using a Likert Scale, the students could choose from five options spanning from not at all to more than two hours. The results of question eight are presented in Table 8. In total, approximately 40% of the students indicated that they read thirty to sixty minutes per week. However, 30% of the students

read more than sixty minutes per week, while 30% of the students read less than thirty minutes per week.

Table 8

Time Spent Reading for Own Enjoyment Per Week (n = 201)

Not at All	Less Than 30 Minutes	30-60 Minutes	1-2 Hours	More than 2 Hours
22	37	77	33	32



Questions nine and ten asked for students to state if they were ever motivated to read a book before or after they saw the movie version of the book respectively. Using the Likert Scale, the students were asked to circle one choice out of five choices. These choices ranged from always to never. The results of questions nine and ten are presented in Tables 9 and 10 accordingly. According to these results, two-thirds of the students were influenced by movie tie-ins whether they saw the movie version before or after reading the book.

Table 9

Motivation to Read a Book Before Seeing the Movie Version (n = 201)

Always	Often	Sometimes	Not Usually	Never
26	51	59	44	21

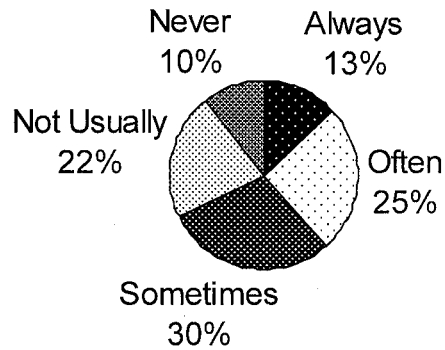
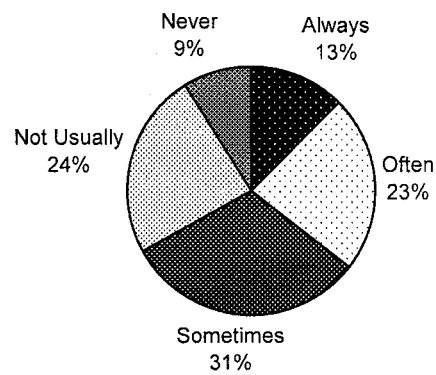


Table 10

Motivation to Read a Book After Seeing the Movie Version (n = 201)

Always	Often	Sometimes	Not Usually	Never
24	44	60	46	17



At the end of the survey, the students were expected to answer three open-ended questions concerning their reading preferences, particularly in reference to their English

classes. Question eleven asked the students what were their favorite books that they had read over the past year. Moreover, it asked them to elucidate why they chose this book. The answers revealed that the students enjoyed popular fiction titles such as *Stargirl* by Jerry Spinelli, various titles in the *Harry Potter* series by J. K. Rowling, *Maniac Magee* by Jerry Spinelli, *Eragon* by Christopher Paolini, various titles in the *Series of Unfortunate Events* by Lemony Snicket, various titles related to *Captain Underpants* by Dav Pilkey, *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen, *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* by Ann Brashares, and *Chasing Vermeer* by Blue Balliett. Additionally, they stated that they enjoyed books about sports, particularly ones in which they participated such as baseball and basketball. Finally, it was maintained that they predominantly liked books in genres such as mystery, horror, and fantasy. When asked why they chose that particular book, many of the students imparted that they relied on recommendations from their parents, teachers, sisters, brothers, and friends to guide them.

Question twelve asked the students how the books that they read on their own were different from the types of books which they were assigned to read by their English teachers. Overwhelmingly, the students noted that the books chosen by their English teachers were boring. They desired a wider variety when choosing a book for leisure reading although the researcher believes that they are given a great deal of autonomy through the English department's new balanced literacy program.

Question thirteen posed the question of what kinds of books would the students like to have more of as required reading for English class. Throughout the responses, there was a clamor for more books offered in the genres of mystery, horror, adventure, and fantasy. There was a direct correlation between the types of books that the students

enjoyed reading, their opinions on student choice of recreational reading books versus teacher choice of assigned books, and the types of books that they would like to have more of as required reading for English class. This notion was reflected throughout the responses of the survey.

Conclusion

Although the sixth grade students possessed a great deal of freedom in choosing their own books to read for their English classes, their perceptions of this independence were vastly different from the teachers' observations. These perceptions and potential reasons for them are examined in Chapter 5. Also, recommendations about how to formulate a sixth grade recreational reading program are discussed based on the survey results.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine how much time was dedicated to recreational reading by sixth grade students and what were the topics and genres that interest them. In order to collect data for this study, a group administered questionnaire was dispensed to 201 regular education sixth grade students. If the respondents needed any clarification about the meaning of certain terms, they could ask questions and receive answers to them immediately. The surveys were administered by the sixth grade English teachers at Thomas Jefferson Middle School in their respective classes. The students were not required to provide any information regarding their socio-economic circumstances, ethnic backgrounds, or gender. Each of the sixth grade English classes surveyed was homogeneously grouped according to ability. However, because the survey was completely anonymous, this was not considered when recording the results.

Each teacher returned the surveys to the researcher's mailbox anonymously. Therefore, the names, ages, ethnic backgrounds, genders, and/or academic levels of the students could not be reasonably identified. Additionally, the number and names of the students who were absent during the administration of the survey were not reported.

Following the collection of the paper-based surveys, the spreadsheet program offered in Microsoft Works was utilized in order to compile the data for each question. This spreadsheet program is compatible with Microsoft Excel, which was used in this process also. Tables were created in order to present the data for questions one through

ten. Because questions eleven through thirteen were open-ended in nature, the results were reported through a narrative summary.

Conclusions

In an elementary school setting, recreational reading is often an integral part of the daily schedule. However, as the students enter middle school, recreational reading is often considered as an extracurricular activity. Therefore, it is imperative to seek out methods which encourage sixth grade students to become lifelong learners through reading for knowledge and enjoyment.

According to the results of the surveys, the respondents were motivated to read by finding their favorite books in the school or public library. Overwhelming, their responses reflected that they enjoyed books related to the genres of murder and mystery, horror and supernatural, adventure, magic and fantasy, and sports. However, they were more likely to choose a specific title if the cover was interesting and contained a summary of the book. Additionally, the title of the book was an important factor in making a particular selection for recreational reading. Thus, a reallocation of the physical space of the library is vital to attracting the average sixth grade recreational reader. For example, instead of shelving the books in a traditional manner, special collections need to be pulled out and displayed on gondolas, where covers will be face out for the students to view. End cap displays can be utilized so as to highlight specific popular authors in a genre along with distinctive signage. Consequently, popular genres of fiction can be showcased while introducing the students to other materials of possible interest.

While the physical appearance of a book was important to many sixth grade students, the results of the surveys revealed that students were greatly influenced by peer and teacher recommendations when deciding on titles for recreational reading. By providing a forum for students to share their opinions about the novels that they are reading, they will feel a sense of ownership and responsibility over what their peers read also. To facilitate this process, the school librarian can demonstrate how to utilize the database NoveList in order to generate lists of books based upon certain popular categories. Then, he/she could provide a specific format as to how she wants the book review to be structured. After compiling a sufficient amount of book reviews in the same genre, the school librarian can have them printed on color coded bookmarks. These bookmarks can be distributed among their respective gondolas, end caps, or displays in display holders so the students can read the reviews as they are selecting materials for themselves. For example, if the student enjoys fantasy books, he/she can peruse the genre's related bookmark in order to find related titles and peer-generated reviews. Then, after selecting and reading the recommended book, the student can either concur or refute the reviewer's opinion through a brief reader's response questionnaire. These activities could inspire students to form book clubs based upon common interests.

After the students graduate from sixth grade, incentive programs such as Book-It! and Read Across America are officially discontinued. However, the results of the survey clearly indicate that a significant percentage of students were motivated by reading incentive programs. This information suggests that a similar school-wide incentive program should be extended through the school library in partnership with the other school departments and administration. A possible alternative to these two popular

programs is America's Battle of the Books. America's Battle of the Books is a voluntary reading incentive program for students in grades four through twelve. Not only does this program advocate recreational reading, but also it encourages students to have fun while competing with students from their school as well as other local schools. Initially, the students are given a pre-selected list of novels which are delineated by grade level.

While small groups of students read the novels over the course of a school year, they can discuss them through informal book clubs in order to gain understanding and make meaningful connections to the text. Finally, in March or April, the students from each school compete against one another in a tournament setting, including being assigned a team mascot and name. The student teams receive points for answering questions about the characters and events of the novel by answering with the correct novel's title. After several rounds, the winner(s) of the tournament are determined based upon the point totals. Ultimately, the winning teams can compete at the state and/or regional level based upon their performance at the local level. Although participating in a competition outside of the confines of the school building is not necessary, it could provide additional opportunities to promote recreational reading in another positive environment.

Another method that can be employed to motivate recreational reading is initiating an author-in-residence program. According to the results of the survey, a significant amount of responses indicated that sixth grade students were motivated to read recreationally when an author of a book that they had read or may read in the future participated in an author-in-residence program. When inviting authors to work with students, it is important to introduce the author to them before the actual visit. Moreover, his/her books should be integrated into the recreational reading program.

Hopefully, this will encourage students to read and review the author's books as well as generate evaluative questions for the author to answer. Furthermore, it may spark an interest in them to become a writer in the future. Finally, the students will be able to connect a real person to the author's name printed on the cover of the book

Because of financial or geographic constraints, an author visit may not be possible. In the technological age, it has become commonplace to communicate with authors who reside in other states through a process named blogging. A blog is often displayed in the format of a journal or personal commentary on a particular subject. Numerous blogs have been set up with authors in order to exchange ideas about their works. Additionally, blogs have been created in the format of informal book clubs for students to discuss various aspects of a book and how it relates to their lives.

While providing interactive experiences for students to make connections between what they have read and their lives, students wish to have time allocated for silent sustained reading or SSR as part of the traditional class routine. According to the results of the survey, the second highest ranked motivational factor in reading for pleasure was more time to read for fun in school. During SSR time, students should be able to choose what they read without any standardized assessment component. Instead, the students can be brought together periodically in order to share their thoughts and opinions of what they are reading as well as providing informal peer reviews.

The sixth grade recreational reading program requires a multifaceted approach. As indicated in the results of the surveys, sixth grade students were more motivated to read when they had a choice in what genres and types of books that they were reading. Moreover, the responses of the surveys indicated that the physical appearance of a book

was a great influence on whether the students might choose one title over another.

Therefore, providing visually pleasing materials will attract readers based upon their reading preferences. If they perceive that the library provides contains materials that they will enjoy, they will be more apt to return on As the students progress into adulthood, they can continue to participate in recreational reading programs including blogs and book clubs. These practices will lead to lifelong learning opportunities and enrichment.

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APPENDIX A
SURVEY

What do you read and why?

We are conducting this survey in order to find out more about what sixth graders like to read for fun. Please answer each question honestly. Don't worry; this is not a test! There are no wrong answers. PLEASE DO NOT PUT YOUR NAME ON THE PAPER!!! Thank you!

1. How do you rate yourself as a reader? (Circle **one** answer.)
enthusiastic average occasional
don't like to read at all
2. What would motivate you to read for pleasure more? (Circle **three** answers.)
Rewards from Book-it and Read Across America
Going to a book fair
Listening to book talks
Finding my favorite kinds of books in the school library/public library
Finding books by my favorite authors in the school library/public library
Visit by an author of a book that you have read or may read in the future
More time to read for fun in school
More time to read for fun at home/outside of school
More time to look around in a bookstore
3. When choosing a book for yourself, **circle the top three** that you are most interested in reading about:
sports adventure animals
history murder/mystery war/combat
families magic/fantasy hobbies
life as a tween/teenager biographies jokes and riddles
comics love stories horror/supernatural

anime/manga

true stories

science fiction

4. When you read a book, which form do you **PREFER** to read? (Circle **one** answer.)

paperback

hardcover

doesn't matter

5. If you are browsing in a bookstore or a library, what **three characteristics** of a book encourage you the most to read it? (Circle **three** answers.)

interesting title

author whom I like

how thick it is

interesting theme

interesting cover

interesting first paragraph

summary on the book

quotes on the cover

form (paperback, hardcover, etc.)

6. If you enjoy reading a particular book, how often do you try to find and read another book by the same author? (Circle **one** answer.)

Always

Often

Sometimes

Not usually

Never

7. How do you **MOST OFTEN** find out about new books to read? (Circle **three** answers.)

parent's suggestion

book club catalog

brother/sister

suggestion

teacher's suggestion

browsing in a store

store display

school reading list

librarian's suggestion

library display

advertisement

friend's suggestion

browsing in library

8. Other than for school assignments, about how much time do you spend reading for your own enjoyment per week? (Circle **one** answer.)

Not at all Less than 30 minutes 30-60 minutes 1-2 hours More than 2 hours

9. Are you ever motivated to read a book **BEFORE** you see the movie version? (Circle **one** answer.)

Always Often Sometimes Not usually
Never

10. Are you ever motivated to read a book **AFTER** you see the movie version? (Circle **one** answer.)

Always Often Sometimes Not usually
Never

11. What is your favorite book that you have read over the past year? Why did you choose this book?

12. How are the books you read on your own different from the types of books which you are assigned to read by your English teacher(s)?

13. What kinds of books would you like to have more of as required reading for English class?

APPENDIX B
PARENT LETTER

Angela M. Smith
Thomas Jefferson Middle School
450 Division Street
Edison, NJ 08817
(732) 650- 5290

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I am a graduate student in the School and Public Librarianship program at Rowan University as well as a Social Studies teacher at Thomas Jefferson Middle School. I will be conducting a research project under the supervision of Dr. Marilyn Shontz as part of my master's thesis. The purpose of this study is to determine how much time is dedicated to recreational reading by sixth grade students and what are the topics and genres that interest them. Questionnaires will be administered to sixth grade students regardless of gender and reading level. Also, these questionnaires will be anonymous. The results of this study will be used to develop a recreational reading program for sixth grade students. Additionally, it will be used as a basis for analyzing library resources, services, and facilities. All data will be reported in terms of group results. Therefore, the students' identities, gender, English level, and English teacher will not be revealed.

Your decision whether or not to allow your child to participate in this study will have absolutely no effect on your child's standing in any of his/her classes. At the conclusion of the study, a summary of the group results can be made available to you. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at (732) 650-5290 or you may contact Dr. Marilyn Shontz at (856) 256-3500 ext. 3858. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Angela M. Smith

Please indicate whether or not you wish to have your child participate in this study by checking the appropriate statement below and returning this letter to your child's teacher by February 15, 2007.

I grant permission for my child _____ to participate in this study.

I do not grant permission for my child _____ to participate in this study.

(Parent/Guardian signature)

(Date)