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# An Investigation of Public Library Summer Reading Programs: Examining Common Principles for Motivation of Leisure Time Readers

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AN INVESTIGATION OF PUBLIC LIBRARY SUMMER READING  
PROGRAMS: EXAMINING COMMON PRINCIPLES FOR  
MOTIVATION OF LEISURE TIME READERS

THESIS

Submitted to the Graduate Committee of the  
Department of Education and Human Development

State University of New York

College at Brockport

In Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Science in Education

by

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## Abstract

This investigation was conducted by interviewing twelve children's librarians, visiting nine summer library programs, and corresponding with two librarians to gather information about their programs. The purpose of the investigation was to research the commonalities in programs and the ideas that librarians use to motivate leisure time readers. This study describes some of the attributes of summer leisure reading library programs and identifies commonalities in their goals and program guidelines. Also examined was the range of possibilities for summer programs and ideas for implementation.

From the information gathered in this investigation, it can be concluded that there are several commonalities to a successful summer leisure library program.

The attitudes of the librarian are instrumental in drawing readers into the program. By matching personalities with interests and literature, modeling their love of books and reading, and using stimulating activities to accompany programs, librarians encourage participants to use the library. Librarians who

view these types of programs as important have the most success with their programs.

This is lovingly dedicated to my family

Mark

Katie, Chris, Meg and Bridget

A special tribute to my mother,

Rita C. Wolfe

who taught our family the value  
of libraries and instilled in us  
a love for reading

"The library is not a shrine for the worship of books. It is not a temple where literary incense must be burned.....A library, to modify the famous metaphor of Socrates, should be the delivery room for the birth of ideas."

Norman Cousins  
ALA Bulletin  
(October 1954)

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## Chapter I

### Statement of the Problem

#### Overview

When children and books come together, reading is likely to begin. If books are plentiful and attractive, there is apt to be more reading. Every child can be a reader. To be the person who unlocks the door and broadens a child's horizons...what greater satisfaction could there be? The ultimate thrill for educators is to see the excitement unfold for a person who begins to view the unexamined world through books. That first glimpse of a child being involved with a book is entrancing.

According to Harris (1971), reading is the meaningful interpretation of printed or written verbal symbols (p.13). Some children need help in acquiring this skill. For others, it simply evolves.

Researchers have always been fascinated by children who come to school knowing how to read and finding a love for books. They are fascinated by the children who have found the way to interpret

printed words meaningfully. What is happening outside of school that is different?

Researchers have found common attitudes among the children who do have a love for books and reading. All of them were very familiar with libraries and considered the library an important part of their leisure environment. A child will feel closer to the library if he begins his visits early and is allowed plenty of time...leisure time...quality time to linger and look. The more accustomed he is to going to the library the sooner he will feel a part of it, connected to it and relate to it personally.

#### Need for the Study

The research into the area of whole language, emergent literacy and motivating a reluctant reader all suggest the use of literature to stimulate an interest in reading as a helpful activity.

A child's reading ability can be fostered from birth. Reading is about the excitement of wanting to know more. Reading is the result of the child's keen desire to understand what letters

and words are and what they mean. The desire to figure things out and to constantly learn motivates a child to read. It is the excitement of the written word as it conveys a story, inspires, and stimulates the imagination. It is the library's responsibility to create an environment in which the child's natural desire to absorb information is nurtured and encouraged. A child needs to understand, react, and learn from the printed page in order to read and understand the love for books (Burgess, 1985).

Research proposes that the presence of leisure time reading indicates a stimulated mind (Huck, 1986). However, there is research to suggest that there is a decline in the time spent in leisure reading among Americans (Boorstin, 1986). Visual technology has reduced the need for literary entertainment.

Hillerich (1989), states that because this is a modeling type activity, the chain reaction caused by leisure time readers is evident. For this reason, there is a need to increase the desire for reading. Teachers, librarians, and parents need to set examples as readers of fine fiction and share their enthusiasm with young people. Research shows that literature helps

students understand human motivations and makes them more sensitive people (Harris, 1971). They need to feel, through literature, a relationship and kinship with the human family.

There is a need to design ideas, programs, techniques and activities to involve children in books and to extend their reading experience by making reading so much fun a child cannot resist.

Reading is no longer seen as only a set of skills needed to decode the printed work, but as receiving and giving messages through creating one's own texts as well as recreating and extending one's horizons from messages recorded by others. Regling (1985) states the following:

The teacher is no longer the sole instructor working through a predetermined set of activities. The teacher is one who shares responsibility and response ability with the learner. Thus, the teacher becomes a facilitator and respondent, ever mindful that true readers and writers are "self-winding" and choose to read and write well beyond the care and guidance of the school system. A leisure time library program for children should be "self winding." (p.26).

Studies have shown what happens when children take a vacation from print. Hillerich (1989) states that the skills of reading and writing are like any other skills: we use them or we lose them. Youngsters who continue to read and write

over the summer actually gain in skill; those who do not, usually the ones with the weaker skills, often regress. Summer is the time to break the routine of typical reading activities done at school. Programs that seem "special" are going to attract the reluctant reader. This is the season to show that reading can be fun.

Linguist (1988) observes that children must discover the potentials of literacy. An environment which is rich in natural, meaningful literacy activities, low in risk to a learner's self esteem, and which offers opportunities to sharing learning with others, nurtures an awareness of print enjoyment.

Trelease (1987) makes the statement that many of our efforts have been concentrated on teaching children how to read, but we have forgotten to teach them to want to read.

The range of summer library programs available to the public is diverse. To assess the attributes of a summer program it is necessary to study the motivational elements, goals of the program and principles that comprise it. By examining all points, programs may be evaluated for effectiveness.

### Definitions

leisure time - time that is not structured with any other demands, a time for personal decision as to how to spend it.

public library programs- programs set up in a public library setting, attracting children during their leisure times, with the specific purpose of motivating them to spend more time in the library and to read.

### Summary

Reading is a part of living. It gives new dimension to a person's personality and views on life. Exposure to reading as a leisure activity, capable of entertaining and fulfilling a need to be stimulated to new worlds and ideas will be of lifelong value.

This study attempted to find commonalities of successful summer leisure reading programs. It examined the motivational techniques and the

programs used to bring children and books together during leisure times.



## Chapter II

### Review of the Literature

#### Reading Habits and Attitudes

The lack of interest in reading is apparent in children's present lifestyles. Trelease calls television "the largest stumbling block to reading enjoyment and achievement in this country" (1987, p.16). He calls the public library the town's or city's most important cultural and intellectual asset.

Holdaway (1979) suggests strategies to use for promoting voluntary reading for a developmental approach to literacy. Through regularly scheduled literature activities and library corners stocked with books and literature materials that inspire interest and active participation in a social context, children will associate reading with pleasure and develop an appreciation for books. If given the time to utilize the library corner, literacy skills will have the opportunity to be practiced and learned. This strategy could help to develop individuals

who are not only capable of reading, but who choose to read voluntarily.

How children feel about reading is intimately related to their success with it. McClendon (1966) adds that since attitudes about reading develop early, the elementary school years are crucial. Therefore it is necessary to provide positive experiences with literature so that good attitudes are developed. Students need to understand how reading affects every aspect of their lives and how they can participate fully in literature activities.

In 1982, Morrow involved students in a literature based library program emphasizing the enjoyment of books. She found that students' attitudes about reading were positively affected by this program. She observed that libraries used motivation techniques that served to create an interest in books, and once the attention was captured, the interest in books and reading remained. Boorstin (1984) stated that voluntary reading will determine the extent of self-improvement and enlightenment, the ability to share wisdom and the delights of our civilization, and our capacity for intelligent self-government.

### Summer Reading Gap

A study by the Nebraska Library Commission in 1986 found that children can lose up to one year in their reading skills and motivation during summers. The study also indicates that the continuation of programs throughout the year develops the continuity of library participation. The programs should be planned to incorporate interesting attention-getting themes, along with a variety of activities. The program needs to be carefully planned to include the promotion of theme, along with projects, activities, events, games and giveaways.

In a study conducted with first graders, Hillerich (1984) found that a summer reading program of fun activities rather than tutoring or drill on skill worked very well. The poorest readers, still below mid-primer level at the end of first grade, were identified and encouraged to enter a special summer program. The focus was to help these children enjoy books, even though their skill development was limited. Skills were deliberately avoided. When the children returned to school in September, instead of regressing, most had maintained their skill development and

some had even advanced. The most important gain was that all of the children had an enjoyable summer and returned to become much-improved readers.

#### Goals of Leisure Programs

Taylor states that children need to be put on the "other side of the fence"- actively participating in literature rather than passively accepting its finished products (1980).

Cooperman maintains that schools tend to focus on mechanical competency, so it's up to leisure time directors to expose children to the magic of literature. The goal has to be pleasure (1988). The goal of a program should be to sensitize the child to the pleasure and enjoyment that books can provide.

The Commission on Reading of the National Academy of Education made these points:

1. Parents should support the school's mission by helping children to learn at home.
2. As children grow, parents should talk with them, discuss their children's experiences, daily activities, favorite stories or movies, and urge trips to the library (1985, p.6).

Wiener (1988) states that "mom and dad's important responsibility is to read aloud to their children. Children who hear about the library, who visit libraries often, not only to find good stories to read but also to find answers to problems or questions, are children who learn to esteem books" (pg.66).

Burgess (1985) sees leisure reading as an additional opportunity to foster reading confidence, competence and captivation. By activating a leisure activity of reading, children will become increasingly aware of their literary

interests and preferences as their ability to individually select books is refined.

Larrick (1958) pointed out that third and fourth grade is a particularly opportune time to encourage the use of children's literature as recreation. This is at the age at which children discover their reading independence, no longer require adult assistance, and in many cases, develop insatiable appetites for books.

Huck (1986), in recommending that independent reading be a priority for children, emphasizes the idea that in addition to providing settings for independent reading, including something to make it memorable, a hands on activity, for instance, will add to the motivation to read.

Crowell (1981) states that children who have been enjoying books during the summer need less time to orient themselves to the demands of a reading curriculum in the fall and are able to start at a higher level than those who do little summer recreational reading.

## Summary

This chapter has reviewed the need children have to be stimulated by reading. The topics of motivation, targeting interest areas, and the importance of programs for maintaining reading skills have all been discussed.

## Chapter III

### Design of the Study

#### Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate existing summer library programs and gather the best ideas for motivating elementary school age readers through such programs.

#### Questions

1. What is the range of possibilities for public library summer programs to motivate elementary school age children?
2. What are the principles that a public library summer program can use that will motivate and attract elementary school age children?



## Methodology

### Procedure

Following a review of the literature to establish motivating aspects of summer library programs, information was gathered about existing summer library programs. These programs were examined for commonalities and ideas for motivating children as readers. Of particular interest were the ideas that seem to spark a desire for more participation in activities with books and literature.

Information was gathered by visiting nine summer library programs in western New York, interviewing twelve children's librarians, and corresponding with two librarians about particular aspects of their programs.

Interviews were open-ended so that researcher would have a wide range of views from which to abstract commonalities. Visits to programs were made during actual program activities or functions so that assessments could be carried out.

Librarians located out of the western New York area provided information through correspondence. Responding to questions about

their programs, they sent literature and handouts, noting ideas that were successful.

Articles printed about library programs, publicity, and information written for public awareness were of particular interest for research. Reviewing articles written for The Reading Teacher, Journal of Reading, Language Arts, Reading Research and Instruction, and Reading Research Quarterly, provided the background for research. Use of publicity for programs was noted and degree of effectiveness was informally evaluated. Pamphlets distributed to the public were gathered and used to select programs that were part of the research.

### Descriptive Analysis

After all research, interviews, and examination of existing programs were completed, the researcher reviewed findings for commonalities, successful ideas and programs and grouped them.

The data were organized and analyzed according to specific age groups and examined for the commonalities of motivational ideas.

### Summary

Children are often limited to reading basals and skill sheets in classrooms. Beyond life in school, focus has to be drawn to public resources, or libraries for leisure reading materials. Unless exposed to them, many children may not know the benefits of leisure reading.

This study describes some of the attributes of summer leisure reading library programs and targets commonalities in their goals and program guidelines. Also examined was the range of possibilities for summer programs and ideas for implementation.

## Chapter 4

### Analysis of Data

#### Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate existing library programs and, after examining research of motivational reading activities, gather the best ideas for motivating elementary school age readers to become "hooked" on reading. Library programs are designed to motivate children to read. This chapter will describe motivational techniques of area programs and will conclude with a discussion of the commonalities and variations among them.

#### Descriptive Analysis

##### Five to Eight Year Old Children

Children at this age need to see a reason for reading and find personal meanings in stories. They need to be immersed in literature, surrounded by books, art, and writing materials of all kinds for extending and interpreting books, and given time to listen to and read stories.

Librarians who had successful summer programs believed in the philosophy that the magic of a good story can engage readers, keep them reading,

and help them discover the joy of a good book. Programs for the emergent reader require careful planning. At this stage attention span is low and captivating activities and stories are necessary.

Unanimously, librarians felt that a positive attitude and environment were the most important factors in a successful program. They felt that such factors will overcome other obstacles to the program. It was emphasized that without them, the programs would never reach their potential.

Librarians maintained that children need to make connections between books and real-life experiences in exciting and sometimes unexpected ways. In this way, stories gave added meaning to their lives. Extending that experience and deepening their joy in literature paves the way for connecting books and their pleasure as a lifetime habit.

The physical environment of the library facility was also deemed important. By stimulating interest in stories with posters, colorful advertisements and comfortable accommodations, children were welcomed, and then enveloped into an environment that was pleasing and soothing. They would take the time to explore the hidden treasures in the shelves. Observing

adults and other children physically handling the books in a loving, appreciative manner, encourages young readers to emulate the approach and find out what they are missing.

Librarians also pointed out the advantage of putting reading into a social context. By drawing opinions from members of the program about the books they enjoyed together and individually, participants viewed books and reading as a social activity to share with others. One program set aside time each week to allow children to share thoughts about the book they read. This was especially motivating when it was scheduled just before book exchange time when the children would be drawn to books others had read.

A key factor in the success of a program was the individual attention that librarians would give to children concerning the child's interests. A librarian who would greet a child with a suggestion of a "perfect book" for the individual could make a friend for life. Indeed, librarians rated the necessary component of making friends and being knowledgeable in what their "customers" desired as an extremely important factor in the success of the program.

Because individual attention was a key factor in this program, a commonality was size of the group. At any level, a group size of ten children was considered maximum. To develop a personal relationship in order to access the needs of the children and monitor success of ideas, smaller groups were related to the degree of success.

In advertising the availability of the program, use of motivational themes was considered important by the librarians. To catch the attention of the public, a theme is a traditional motivator. Chosen from popular children's subjects, it is usually changed from year to year to keep interest high. Animals, cartoon characters, toy or adventure series all provide stimulating interest in a program.

Librarians divide the programs into two segments:

- a. The reading club- the traditional reading club asks the children to read a certain number of books in order to receive a certificate and a prize.
- b. Activities- In addition, activities are offered in the reading program. Usually centered around a holiday,

season, or current event, the activity follows the theme of the story read at that session and enables the reader to see a correlation between reading and fun activities. It was noted that providing the participants with something they made to take home keeps interest and excitement levels high about the program.

Records were kept in all library programs studied. Two major factors seemed to characterize the programs that had completion rates of over 90% of children enrolled. These factors were

1. There was a great deal of emphasis in those libraries on informal, on the floor, one to one reader advisory service. Librarians knew and cared about what each child was reading.
2. The entire staff, not just the children's department staff, was aware of the program, understood its purpose and rules, believed in its value, and was interested in it.



Another important factor is the involvement of parents. Several libraries educated the parents by sending suggestions for reading in the home, and providing information on recommended books. Libraries using these strategies showed a marked increase in completion attendance and continuation of library facility usage after the program was completed.

Librarians also believed in the philosophy that books are treasures that should be accessible to all. In that regard, programs were set up with the "customer" in mind, with attention to details such as timing of programs, popular themes, and making every effort to be accessible to everyone.

#### Nine to Eleven Year Olds

Motivation is critical for children at this age. By this time they have had experience with language in print, and have either found success or failure in it. Library programs could hold the key to opening up a wonderful reading experience for developing readers. By providing children access to good books, perhaps finding an interest that was previously unnoticed, new avenues may be explored. A library program where achievement is

not the objective, but success is guaranteed, may prove to have desirable effects on a reader.

Children at this level are motivated by programs that reflect on their life experiences. Enjoyment of experiences to which they relate enhances the idea that books are a source of entertainment, companionship, and information that they will use the rest of their lives. It is especially critical to choose subjects and themes to which the children will relate.

Librarians planning programs for this level strive toward making reading an active experience. Some strategies are discussions, artwork, public display of creativity, and some type of reward for efforts shown. Children respond to public display of their work. Librarians report much success with this age level when peer approval and admiration is evident.

Librarians attribute success to the amount of trust the participants have in them. The library is still a mysterious place to them, and if they realize that they have someone to give guidance in obstacles they have, they will make use of the services available.

Librarians planning programs for this age use literature that reflects on life experiences for

this level. When the participants realize that there could be a common bond between books they read and their feelings, beliefs, and problems or worries, they will become personally involved in reading. By building on individual interests the child will feel personally connected to the library, librarian, and books in general.

Librarians also spend much time instructing and role modeling how to use the library. Without instruction, child and adults alike often wander aimlessly around the bookshelves either picking out books that are far too difficult, and therefore discouraging, or finding books on topics of little interest. Librarians feel it is well invested time to guide them in the book finding process. It also reinforces their availability as a resource. Librarians with successful library programs do not let the pressure of time cut out their role as counselors.

In general, librarians planning programs for this level follow common practices for successful summer leisure reading programs. Their techniques are:

1. treating the participant as an individual with individual needs and interests.

2. enticing participants with themes that are applicable to their life experiences and interests.
3. using peer motivation, by means of discussion and book talks to interest readers in books.
4. keeping program enjoyable and non-academic in nature, providing fun activities to accompany reading so that readers correlate reading and books as a social activity as well as a learning experience.

#### Summary

From the information gathered in this investigation, it can be concluded that there are several commonalities to a successful summer leisure library program.

The attitudes of the librarian are instrumental in drawing readers into the program. By matching personalities with interests and literature, modeling their love of books and

reading, and using stimulating activities to accompany programs, librarians will encourage participants to use the library. Librarians who view these types of programs as important have the most success with their programs.

Offering activities to accompany reading books motivates participation in the programs. Children should see that enjoying literature is more than reading a book. Reading a book changes attitudes about life and increases awareness about things around you. Activities serve to broaden the thought process and expand ideas.

Overall, the dominant goal was to make summer leisure reading programs enjoyable.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusions and Implications

#### Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate existing library programs, and after examining research of motivational reading activities, to gather the best ideas for motivating elementary school age readers to become "hooked" on reading.

#### Conclusions

From this investigation, it can be concluded that there are commonalities in programs libraries offer to successfully motivate leisure time readers in summer programs. As stated in the research review, children are exposed to reading skills in the classroom and unless exposed to enjoyable reading activities in public library programs, they may never know the benefits and enjoyment of leisure reading.

This investigation showed that successful summer leisure library programs share several commonalities:

1. Librarians need to understand the importance of role modeling and

demonstrate how to select an appropriate book and to expand on what they have read.

2. The children need to be effectively motivated with catchy themes and interesting follow up activities.
3. An attractive, appealing environment is employed to create an atmosphere that is relaxing, inviting and allows time for careful selection of literature.
4. Librarians select literature that shows participants that books can be about real life experiences and help with problems or emotions that are a concern to them.
5. Librarians must care about participants as individuals who have individual needs and interests to help secure that feeling of love for books and reading.
6. Parental involvement and support of program and modeling the importance of reading will reinforce all other aspects of the program.

### Implications for Research

This investigation answered two questions. Further investigation into summer leisure reading programs could include the following:

1. Comparing participation levels of programs with parental support and those with no parental support.
2. Comparing participation levels of boys and girls or age groups.
3. Investigating whether the educational background, socio-economic status, or family's enjoyment of literature affect the participation of children.
4. Comparing specific literature used in programs and successful ideas used with specific stories or themes.
5. Comparing incentive programs for different programs and how they affect participation.
6. Studying unsuccessful programs and analyzing the problems of the program.
7. Investigating long term effects of programs to determine effects on leisure reading habits of



participants.

### Implications for Library Programs

Public library summer reading programs are implemented to motivate leisure readers. The librarian plays an important role in the promotion of the program. In order to become more effective in that role, the librarian could:

1. Show interest in promoting leisure reading in children, enjoy working with children, and enthusiastically introduce books to children.
2. Create an inviting atmosphere of friendship. The library should have a relaxing environment with comfortable seating that enables children to feel comfortable and encourages attendance.
3. Show enthusiasm for books and the world they open up for children. The librarian should be familiar with children's selections that are available so that they can suggest books that are topics of individual interest.
4. Make use of record keeping or .

Incentive charts for books read. The library should have listening stations, and shelves that allow books to be displayed with their covers showing to attract attention to the selections that are available.

5. Allow children to share their experiences with books, and allow children to take home books that they enjoy.
6. Use literature props to attract children to the books. Posters, stuffed animals, bright colors and displays serve to entice children.
7. Provide literature activities to promote a social context for interaction of children with the books.
8. Be receptive to the ideas of the children, what they are interested in and what they need. Children will use the library as a leisure option when they realize they need it and enjoy it.

Librarians have the opportunity to offer reading experiences in an enjoyable, exciting and rewarding manner through their library programs. Motivating children to use a library and its resources as a leisure activity may open an interest in reading and literature.

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