

2014

# Influencing incoming fourth graders' reading habits through a summer literature circle: A case study

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## Recommended Citation

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*Graduate Research Papers*. 13.  
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# Influencing incoming fourth graders' reading habits through a summer literature circle: A case study

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## **Abstract**

Digital communications are profoundly influencing young adult communications; yet little is known about how novels that use digital communications such as text messages, e-mails, or blogs as the voice and point of view. The purpose of this qualitative content analysis was to analyze how select young adult novels portray digital communication themes using the following research questions: What digital communication themes are portrayed in young adult literature that use digital communication as the voice and point of view? In what ways are the digital communication themes developed in these young adult novels? In what ways might these themes inspire young adults to consider issues such as ethics and safety in their own digital communication practices and experiences? The study found that the novels used many forms of communication to support the narrative voice including blogs, e-mail, IM, text messages and social networking sites. The themes of establishing interpersonal connections, constructing identity and relationships with family were also analyzed through the books.

INFLUENCING INCOMING FOURTH GRADERS' READING HABITS THROUGH  
A SUMMER LITERATURE CIRCLE: A CASE STUDY

A Graduate Research Project  
Submitted to the  
Division of School Library Studies  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction  
In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by  
Brandy E. Bingman  
May 2014

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Titled: Influencing incoming fourth graders' reading habits through a summer literature circle: A case study

has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the  
Degree of Master of Arts.

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Date Approved

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Graduate Faculty Reader

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Date Approved

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Graduate Faculty Reader

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Date Approved

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Head, Department of Curriculum and Instruction

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this case study was to create a summer reading program for incoming fourth graders, in a group setting, to motivate continual summer reading, practice comprehension strategies and vocabulary development, and thus prevent regression. Participants met for five weeks, one hour per week to listen to book talks, select a book to read for the week, discuss the previous weeks' book with provided questions employing comprehension strategies, and listen to a read aloud book. The focus of the study was to determine factors that influenced participants' reading habits as well as what activities maintained participant engagement. Results showed participants were more likely to read when regular, structured time was provided, in addition to hearing promotional booktalks about books in a variety of genres and having immediate access to those books from which to choose. Participants reported that discussing the books with peers and being able to share their opinion of a book kept them engaged.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Imagine a classroom of third graders on their last day of school. Their teacher says, “Remember to go to the public library or participate in the summer reading program and check out some books to read.” How many of those children are excited by the idea of reading over summer vacation? Most students are probably thinking: “I am going to the swimming pool; I have baseball/softball practice and games; I plan to watch TV/play on the computer/or gaming system; I’m on vacation! I don’t have time or need to read.” In the fall, this becomes a common challenge facing classroom teachers who work to boost students reading levels after they have dropped off over the summer break. The Graduate School of Library and Information Science at Dominican University received a National Leadership Grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, from 2006 to 2009, to study the impact of summer reading programs and the impact on student achievement. A brief report of the study, published in the ILA Reporter (2010), shared this key result:

Students who participated in the public library summer reading program scored higher on reading achievement test at the beginning of the next school year than those students who did not participate and they gained in other ways as well. (p. 20)

Implementation of summer reading programs is justified; the next step is to make it engaging for incoming fourth graders.

#### **Problem Statement**

This project will focus on fourth grade students in an attempt to counteract the typical reading slump that occurs over the summer months. Throughout the school year, teachers are able to reinforce the importance of reading with programs such as Accelerated Reader or Reading Counts!, to name two. Additionally, students have

frequent and regular access to the school library as well as a classroom library provided by their teacher. Classroom teachers are able to model questioning techniques regarding the books students are reading. Moreillon (2007) highlights the importance of text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-world questioning to aid comprehension. Students don't have access to a teacher to continue to guide them in those questioning strategies over the summer, though they still need guidance. Consequently, students often neglect reading regularly or lose interest in reading.

Public libraries conduct summer reading programs to engage students in reading throughout the summer vacation. The Collaborative Summer Library Program (2012) "is a consortium of states working together to provide high-quality summer reading program materials for children at the lowest cost possible for their public libraries" (About CSLP section, para. 1). Materials provided serve children, teens, and adults. Public libraries may be limited in the number of staff available to provide additional reading activities to specific ages. Staffing limitations can force libraries to focus programming toward the highest participating groups, often preschoolers and the youngest readers. Consequently, students in the upper elementary grades may not be interested in participating in activities they do not find age-appropriate and may not be as motivated to visit the library and read.

### **Justification**

"The data available consistently portray summer reading setback as the most potent explanation for the widening of the reading achievement gap between rich children and poor children across the span of the elementary years," (p. 71) according to Richard Allington (2003), a recognized researcher in reading education. Additionally, other studies specifically identify the drop-off in interest in summer reading in fourth grade

students in general. An article by Bryan Goodwin (2011) in *Educational Leadership* points to a shift in reading purpose in children of this age. They begin to “read to learn” instead of “learn to read” and vocabulary development can foster interest and understanding. In order to build vocabulary, students need to have consistent exposure through reading.

My intent for this program is to encourage student motivation to read by helping them create connections with peers in a summer reading discussion group. The main audience for this project was incoming fourth grade students. Students who participated will benefit through participation in a program designed to motivate and encourage summer reading through group discussion and peer influence. As stated by Allington, “children who read during the summer months were less likely to experience summer reading setback and more likely to have their achievement remain steady or modestly increase.” Fourth grade teachers of the students participating in this program will benefit from having the students begin the next year having retained many of their reading skills while building new vocabulary requiring less re-teaching for those students. Allington (2003) affirms the importance of summer reading:

Children need an enormous supply of successful reading experiences, both in school and out, to become proficient, independent readers. The potential role of voluntary summer reading in closing the reading achievement gap has been neglected too long by educators, researchers, and policymakers. (p. 72)

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this project is to create a summer reading program geared toward incoming fourth graders, in a group setting, to spur interest for continual reading to practice comprehension strategies, to develop vocabulary, and prevent regression. The

program was open to all incoming fourth grade students who attended Grundy Center Elementary. For book talks, Wilson's Core Collection and *Read Aloud Handbook* (2001) and a website by Jim Trelease were consulted. Wilson's Core Collection identifies quality literature with positive reviews, while Trelease offers selections that appeal to interests of young readers. Students were paired and then given the opportunity to select a weekly book from those presented during book talking. The goal of this project was to create a sense of community among incoming fourth grade students so they may encourage each other to read and enjoy conversation surrounding the books they are reading.

### **Research Questions**

1. What type of summer reading program and activities will maintain student engagement over five weeks?
2. How might incoming fourth grade students' reading habits be influenced by a summer literature circle?

### **Assumptions**

A number of assumptions surround this project. The first assumption is that some young people have no interest in reading over the summer, and joining a group will motivate them to read. A second assumption is that participation in the summer program will positively influence students' reading skills. It is also assumed that students will frequently attend the group sessions and actively participate in discussion with each other, as well as read on their own time.

### **Limitations**

This project was limited only to incoming fourth grade students within the Grundy Center Community School District. Additionally, the program ran for five weeks (June through July), once a week, meeting for one hour.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The purpose of this project is to provide incoming fourth graders with a reading group to motivate and aid in reading comprehension, thus preventing summer loss, over the summer vacation. Research regarding this issue takes on many facets; the focus is on students' free time and summer reading habits, students' motivation to read, and the impact of peer and group discussion on reading interest.

#### **Students' Free Time and Summer Reading Habits**

Some students choose free reading as an activity while others see it as a task they are required to perform only for school purposes. McKool (2007) conducted a study of fifth grade students to examine the factors that contribute to students' decisions to read or not outside of school. She identified four research questions, but for the purpose of this project, I will focus only on the second question: how the "factors (i.e. television viewing, homework, organized activities, play, chores, attitude toward recreational reading, attitude toward academic reading, self-concept as a reader, and value of reading) contribute the most in predicting out-of-school reading" (p. 113). A total of 199 fifth grade students were surveyed. Students came from two elementary schools located in the Southwest; however, each school was different in that one was in a rural area with an ethnically diverse population and the other was part of a larger district with somewhat less ethnic diversity.

All students in the study filled out a survey about individual reading attitudes and motivation. Based on those surveys, McKool (2007) chose to interview ten students from each school identified as avid readers. Additionally, ten students from each elementary

considered reluctant readers were interviewed. Participants recorded their daily activity in a log for a ten day period. Data concerning reading achievement information from state testing, free or reduced lunch status and researcher reflexive journals and memos over a four month period factored into the results/conclusions. This study employed both qualitative and quantitative data analysis. In terms of research question number two, the grounded-theory method was used to perform a qualitative analysis from student interviews, journal entries, and notes. McKool's (2007) findings led to the understanding that students can be encouraged to read outside of school if titles of interest were suggested to them through readers' advisory or read aloud opportunities, discussion and book recommendation with peers, and unscheduled time without television or other forms of media.

Similarly, in Finland, Leppänen, Aunola, and Nurmi (2005) focused their study on younger students' reading habits and reading performance. Their research question, as it pertains to this project, inquired as to whether or not the types of materials students read affected out-of-school reading practice. A total of 195 children participated in the study, with 47% boys and 53% girls. Students were from two medium-sized communities, representing both suburban and rural environments, in central Finland. Students were assessed on three occasions; the first took place in the fall of first grade, the second in the spring of first grade, and the third during the spring of second grade. Assessments consisted of sentence comprehension, word recognition skills, and text reading skills at all three junctures. Additionally, students were interviewed regarding their out-of-school reading habits during the second and third assessments.



The authors conducted statistical analysis to discover the association between reading performance and reading habits, word recognition, and book reading and reading skills. The study's results showed that even in the early elementary learning years, children's reading skills contributed to their reading habits. The researchers acknowledged three limitations: the children only participated at three points through two grades, the results found may not be reflective of languages that are orthographically deep, and alternative ways to assess reading and television viewing habits may be preferable. The aim of the current project will serve to provide students with continued summer practice to boost reading skills thus leading to confidence in reading out-of-school.

Likewise, improving reading outcomes was the focus of Kim and White (2008). They performed an experimental study to determine how scaffolding affected fluency and silent reading ability by using four experimental conditions in voluntary summer reading. A random sample of 514 children in grades 3, 4, and 5 from two public schools with a large percentage of minority children in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States served as the participants of this study. Due to mortality effects, the final number of participants dropped to 401, and the final sample totaled 400. Students were then "randomly assigned to one of four groups within their grade level: control, books only, books with oral reading scaffolding, and books with oral reading and comprehension scaffolding" (p. 8). Teachers administered and modeled strategies for students' use prior to the conclusion of the school year.

The researchers sought to answer four research questions: however, for the purpose of this study, only one is examined: "Compared to books only, what are the effects on

reading achievement of books with oral reading and comprehension scaffolding?” (p. 5). The measures used in the study included: pretest, June reading survey, posttest, and a September reading survey. Analysis of data was performed by using mixed methods and the determination was made that “children in the books with oral reading and comprehension scaffolding group performed significantly higher on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills than the control group and marginally better than the books only group” (p. 16). One item of note, Kim and White (2008) acknowledge their “experiment lacked sufficient power to detect small differences between the scaffolding conditions” (p. 17). Even so, this researcher sees the potential to continue the ideas outlined in Kim and White’s study to impact a smaller group of readers and their summer reading habits.

### **Students’ Motivation to Read**

How to motivate students to be active in their education has been an ongoing topic of research. and will likely continue to be a focus of research as educational methods adapt to learners. A longitudinal study performed by Gottfried, Fleming, and Gottfried (2001) sought to “investigate the continuity of academic intrinsic motivation from the middle elementary through the high school years” (p. 3). Gottfried et al. (2001) hypothesized that academic intrinsic motivation continually decreased starting in late elementary through late adolescence. Since this study was initiated in 1979 and was longitudinal, it started with 130 full-term, normal birth weight infants with the majority of them participating through age 17. Data were collected by way of the Children’s Academic Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (CAIMI), developed by A.E. Gottfried in 1986, in the subjects of “reading, math, social studies, science, and school in general” (p.5). The hypothesis of interest was tested with MANOVA and it was determined that indeed

“intrinsic motivation declines significantly from middle childhood through late adolescence” (p. 9). Of the subjects researched, math showed the greatest decline, followed by science and reading. The implications from this study leads this researcher to identify the importance of helping students develop a love of reading for the sake of loving it with no external reward or motivation driving reading.

The ability to read is central to progressing through education, but others have researched whether incentives to read promote or inhibit student’s desires. A study of fourth graders undertaken by Edmunds and Tancock (2003) examined how tangible incentives affected students’ motivation to read. The study involved 91 fourth grade students from a mid-size city in the South that consisted of six classrooms within one elementary school. The researchers divided students into a control group that received no incentives for reading, a treatment group that received free books as incentives, and a second treatment group that received non-reading related rewards as incentives (i.e. pencils, erasers, and restaurant coupons). As an aside, all students participated in the Accelerated Reader program for the nineteen week duration of the study. Data were collected by having students complete the Motivation to Read Profile at the beginning and conclusion of the study. Parents were also given a survey of their perceptions of their children’s reading motivation. Lastly, students kept a book log detailing the number of books read including title and author, the number of pages in the book, quiz score if applicable, and dates books were completed.

The data were then analyzed using the Multiple Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) method for the parent and student reading surveys. Additionally, a one-way ANOVA was used on student book logs. The authors acknowledged four limitations of the study:

students self-reporting regarding book logs, a small number of participants, variance in classroom instruction, and construct validity. The findings of the study were somewhat inconsistent. The data did not support a conclusion that receiving books or non-reading rewards increased students' reading motivation. However, the study was able to show that the control group that did not receive any incentives was not harmed by that fact. As a result, researchers suggested increasing motivation through teacher read alouds, booktalks, and peer discussion.

Marinak (2013) completed a study that examined the ideas posed by Edmunds and Tancock specifically through implementation of an intervention to improve elementary reading motivation. The 76 fifth grade students from two suburban school districts in the mid-Atlantic region were divided into a treatment group and control group. The treatment group received reading instruction including “student choice in the teacher read-aloud, utilizing Jigsaw during informational text reading, and providing book clubs in addition to self-selected silent reading” (p. 44); while the control group received traditional reading instruction. Marinak employed a mixed methods design using quasi-experimental and qualitative PAR analysis with the *Motivation to Read Profile* developed by Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni in 1996. It was determined that students in the treatment group “self-reported higher reading motivation” (p. 46) in addition to valuing reading more than students in the control group. Because this study was performed with a small group of participants within a limited age range, the ability to generalize the effect of this intervention across constructs is restricted. The findings of Marinak's (2013) study reinforced the impact of student autonomy on motivation.

### **Impact of Peer and Group Discussion on Reading Interest**

Peer influence becomes increasingly important as children age. Vaughn et al. (2011) attempted to “determine the efficacy of Collaborative Strategic Reading” (p. 943) in regards to reading comprehension through cooperative grouping and peer discussion. Collaborative strategic reading, here after referred to as CSR, is “a multicomponent reading intervention aimed at improving students’ text comprehension” (p. 940). One element of the strategy involves interactive dialogue groups, including students and teachers together; this is an element of particular interest for this study. The researchers identified one overarching research question for the study in hope of determining if CSR produced the desired effect in adolescent readers when implemented by trained and supported teachers, new to teaching CSR, compared to the school’s established reading and comprehension program.

The population of this study included three school districts within the states of Colorado and Texas; of the three districts, two were near urban while one was urban. This study consisted of seventh and eighth grade students and teacher participants with 866 students at the outset; however that decreased to 782 students for the primary comparison. In a near 50/50 split, 400 students were in the treatment group while 382 were in the control group. Teachers in the study represented a disproportionate gender split with 14 females and 3 males for a total of 17 teacher participants. Years of teaching experience varied across a range of 1 to 35 years with a mean of 9.5 years. As the study progressed, the researchers assessed students prior to and immediately following treatment. The measures included: Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test, AIMSweb Reading

Curriculum Based Measure, Metacomprehension Strategy Index, Test of Word Reading Efficiency, Test of Silent Reading Efficiency and Comprehension, and Implementation logs. Subsequently, quantitative analysis was used to determine the findings of the study.

Though there were a number of findings of the study, the result that has bearing on the current project indicated “that the collaborative group structure that promotes student engagement and discourse about text is the essential element and using collaborative groups to enhance text comprehension without teaching the comprehension strategies of CSR would be sufficient” (pp. 958-959). The impact of this research on the current project indicates the importance of group discussion with students and teachers participating as a means of increasing comprehension. The researchers of the CSR study identified the possibility that unknown treatment contamination may have been present as a limitation of the study.

Prior to the research conducted by Vaughn et al. (2011) was a study specific to literature circles administered by Blum, Lipsett, and Yocom (2002). The purpose of the study was to determine if special needs students “can function in an inclusive classroom without major accommodations in the areas of literature and reading” (p. 101). Though the focus and purpose of the research conducted by Blum et al. (2002) differs slightly from the current research, the overall findings are relevant. The participants consisted of 14 eighth and ninth grade students from a middle school in Wyoming. To determine if student’s perceptions of their reading abilities were impacted by literatures circles, the researchers administered pre- and post-literature circle surveys in addition to student documented task organizers and student interviews. Following the collection of data, an ANOVA was used to compare survey responses. Results of the survey indicated that

"students believed that literature circles helped them to focus and become better readers and helped them participate in class discussions of literature" (p. 107). A limitation of this study was the small group of participants.

Recent research conducted by Reznitskaya and Glina (2013) explored the impact of dialogic teaching as opposed to traditional teaching methods. In dialogic teaching students have more flexibility in learning by participating in and serving as a monitor of class discussion and disagreement. The purpose of Reznitskaya and Glina's (2013) study was to "gain a more nuanced understanding of dialogic teaching" (p. 50) using 60 fifth grade students and six classroom teachers from two public, urban, with a predominately white population school districts in northern New Jersey. Classroom teachers used traditional teaching materials and methods while three Philosophy for Children trained instructors used methods associated with that strategy. A mixed methods design was used to collect and analyze data. The findings revealed that learners preferred environments that allowed for flexibility in terms of participation and dialog with peers and teachers through social interaction.

Lastly, a study by Howard (2008) was conducted to "examine the role of recreational or pleasure reading and the public library" in the lives of teens (p. 103). This study holds particular bearing on the current research as it includes aspects of: student reading habits, reading motivation, and peer influence on reading. One relevant research question was to determine why teens read for pleasure. The population included in this study consisted of 68 children between the ages of 12 and 15 years old from Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada; 70% of were female participants while 30% were male. Students voluntarily participated within nine focus group discussions that were then analyzed

using a grounded theory method. The data from discussions were then transcribed into text and coded and analyzed using computer software and provided qualitative output. The findings revealed a correlation in “the role of teens’ peers in supporting or motivating their recreational reading” (p. 104). A limitation of this study is the small number of participants.

### **Summary**

After careful review of some of the literature available on motivation, free and summer reading habits, and literature circles, this researcher sees the need to incorporate findings to create a program that allows for flexibility of reading choice and discussion mixed with questioning igniting an intrinsic excitement for reading during summer vacation. Providing students with a summer reading opportunity that focuses on autonomy, adult modeling and questioning, and positive peer influence through discussion can positively impact them for a lifetime of reading.



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

Teachers and teacher librarians want to help students develop intrinsic motivation to choose to read in their free time. The purpose of this case study was to provide incoming fourth graders with a summer reading group to motivate them to read and aid in reading comprehension, thus preventing learning loss over the course of summer vacation. In following human studies protocol, the researcher received approval from the University of Northern Iowa Institutional Review Board before proceeding with the study.

#### **Research Design**

This researcher employed a case study methodology because the proposed population was “examined in a natural setting” (Choemprayong and Wildemuth, 2009. p. 51). Other characteristics of case studies as provided by Babansat in Choemprayong and Wildemuth (2009) also made this an appropriate method: data were collected using multiple means, research questions asked how or why, and one group was examined with no experimental controls. The strength of a case study in answering the research questions posed in this study was the ability to observe participants in a natural setting. A commonly cited limitation of case studies is the lack of generalizability of these findings to other groups.

#### **Data Collection**

The population of convenience consisted of seven volunteer participants, four girls and three boys, who had just completed the third grade in a rural community in north central Iowa. This age group was selected based on a study by Fiore and Roman (2010)

stating: “between the end of third grade and the beginning of fourth, students are especially susceptible to summer learning loss” (p. 28). Considerable research has studied high school students and even emerging readers. However, studying the fourth grade group is important because they are entering a transitional phase in their reading and learning attitudes. In order to attain triangulation, as discussed by Choemprayong and Wildemuth (2009), data sources included a student reading survey (see Appendix A), weekly participant observation form (see Appendix B), semi-structured exit interview I (see Appendix C) and post-study reading habits questionnaire (see Appendix D).

The case study ran for a five week time period that involved face-to-face interactions with participants and researcher meeting at a local public library. Participant observations were recorded during each weekly meeting. Though face-to-face interactions were preferable, alternate communications, such as e-mailed responses, were included due to summer vacations and students desiring to participate even though they were physically elsewhere. The first semi-structured interview was conducted face-to-face while the second semi-structured interview was conducted via e-mail. There were seven participants total however, the weekly number fluctuated due to summer activities. Of the seven participants, five attended the first meeting with one joining the second week and the final participant joining at week three.

### **Procedure**

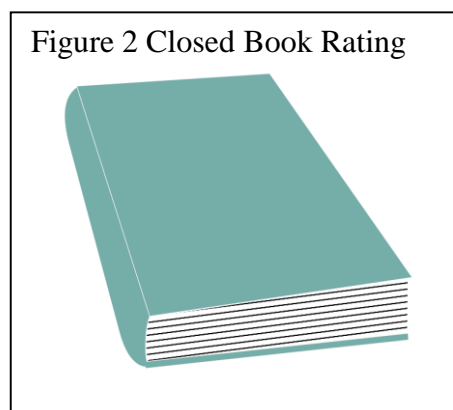
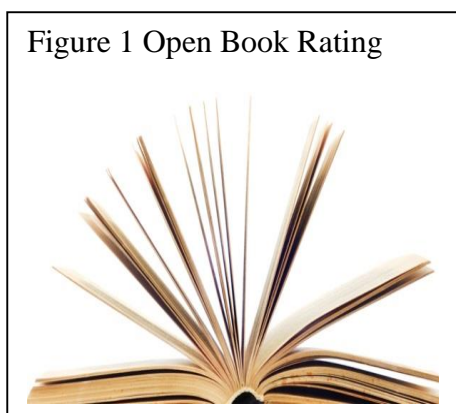
The researcher met with participants weekly for an hour at the local public library for five weeks. Prior to each weekly meeting, the researcher selected five books to book talk, with two copies of each book available for students to borrow. The researcher chose books using Wilson’s Children’s Core recommendations of Most Highly Recommended

and Core Collection categories, with attention given to finding books with a variety of interest areas, subject matter, page lengths, genres, and reading levels. Since the researcher was unaware of the student's reading levels, it was important to choose books in a variety of ranges to accommodate all participants (see Appendix E). Upon initial discussion, it was noted that most participants were also participating in the summer reading program at the public library.

Participants were asked to complete a reading attitudes survey at the beginning of the first meeting (see Appendix A). Following survey completion, the researcher presented a brief program introduction pertaining to the weekly structure of the meetings. Participants then engaged in a discussion providing input as to what they knew about various types of literature including nonfiction, historical fiction, fantasy fiction, realistic fiction, biography, mystery, and poetry/books in verse. Next, the researcher shared book talks on five books. Participants were then given the opportunity to select to read for the week, the book that most interested them. The first meeting concluded with participants listening to *The S.O.S. File* by Laurie Myers, a read aloud book chosen by the researcher using Jim Trelease's *Read Aloud Handbook*. Participants were reminded to return a week later, having read their chosen book with the understanding that they would share and discuss it with the group. At each meeting, the researcher observed and recorded student interactions, information shared with the group, and body language using a participant observation form (see Appendix B).

The second meeting began with a brief review of book genres. Next, the researcher explained to the participants that each group or individual would be given two to four questions to aid in reading comprehension and discussion. The questions were designed

by the researcher based upon Moreillon's (2007) suggestions: questions focusing on text to text, text to self, and text to world to aid comprehension and facilitate group discussion (see Appendix F). The researcher devised a simple rating system to allow participants to share their opinion of the book. An "open book" (see Figure 1) means participants would recommend this book to their peers as one they should read. Conversely, a "closed book" (see Figure 2) means participants would not recommend this book to their peers.



After an explanation of the rating system, participants were given time to consider discussion and comprehension questions, individually or in pairs. Each participant had the opportunity to share their thoughts and answers to the questions and their rating of the book. Participants were given the image of the open and closed book, each glued to a craft stick, to allow them to end their sharing session with a visual book rating and explanation. The rating system was included to provide participants with the chance to share their opinion of each book, whether or not they would recommend it to a friend, and why. The meeting ended with participants choosing to begin reading their next book instead of read aloud time.

During Weeks 3 through 4, the researcher again had a new participant fill out the Student Reading Survey. Book talks continued and a student-produced book trailer from

Book Trailers for Readers was shown, in order to highlight quality books designed to encourage discussion, as suggested by Harvey Daniels (2002). Each meeting began with students, in pairs or individually, reviewing comprehension and discussion questions provided by the researcher. Group sharing and book rating, followed by individual reading or read aloud time concluded the weekly meetings.

The fifth and final meeting gave students the opportunity to share the last book read by answering comprehension questions posed by the researcher and to rate the book. Participants met individually with the researcher in order to conduct the face-to-face semi-structured exit interview (see Appendix C). Responses were recorded by the researcher on a form for later analysis. The program concluded with time spent reading *The SOS File* by Laurie Myers aloud. A second interview was conducted via e-mail six weeks after the program concluded (see Appendix D), in which only four participants responded.

### **Data Analysis**

The data collected in this case study have been analyzed for frequency as well as for the qualitative content of responses to interviews, a survey, and observations during discussions. The researcher tallied the seven participants' responses to a brief survey which indicated the participants' initial motivation toward reading. Those notes and students' responses to the exit interview and post-study reading habits questionnaire were analyzed using "conventional qualitative content analysis" (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009, p. 309). The researcher allowed coding themes to emerge from the data using the Glaser & Strauss "constant comparative" method (p. 311). Guided by the research questions about student engagement and influences on summer reading, the researcher sought

original insights and used comparison to interpret interview and observation data pertaining to the research question categories (p. 311).

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

A number of studies have been performed identifying the drop-off students experience over the summer. The purpose of this project was to create a summer reading program for incoming fourth graders, in a group setting, to spur interest for continual reading to practice comprehension strategies, to develop vocabulary, and prevent regression.

#### Student Engagement

The first research question this study aimed to answer was: What type of summer reading program and activities will maintain student engagement over six weeks? Participants completed an initial Student Reading Survey prior to the first of five weekly meetings. The results are in Table 1.

Table 1

#### *Initial Student Reading Survey Results*

Survey Question	Yes	No
1. Do you like to read?	7	0
2. Do you talk to your friends about books you have read?	4	3
3. Do friends tell you about books they have read?	6	1
4. Have you ever read a book based on a friends' suggestion?	6	1

In reviewing the Student Reading Survey, all participants reported that they liked to read. The fact that participants are interested in reading showed that this group of students likely volunteered for the program because they like reading. Participant

responses show friends share book suggestions with them and they listen to friends' suggestions when making decisions about books they'll read. However, participants reported they are somewhat less likely to share their opinion with friends about a book they deem to be worthwhile.

The researcher conducted a semi-structured exit interview with each participant that allowed participants to provide further insight into their reading engagement. One participant stated that he liked to read because there are "so many different books available to read," and because learning can occur through reading; see Table 2 for additional participant responses.

Table 2

*Semi-Structured Exit Interview: Why Students Read*

Question	Yes	No	Other	Response
Do you like to read? Why?	6	0	Sometimes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am encouraged by my mom to read.</li> <li>• Because there are so many different books to read.</li> <li>• I like to read to learn about things, some exciting and some I don't want to read again.</li> <li>• Reading takes me to different places.</li> <li>• Teachers can't teach you everything. If you don't read, how do you learn stuff?</li> <li>• Reading helps me learn.</li> <li>• Sometimes because I like the book but sometimes I don't. I like books that can really happen to you.</li> </ul>

### **Providing Reading Choices to Maintain Student Engagement**

Initially the participants were instructed to choose a partner, and then choose a book to read for the week. However, adjustments were made when students voiced their preference. They argued that they should choose the book first, and then choose a partner,



indicating the importance they placed on their reading interests. Additionally when participants were given time to choose their book following book talks, they were careful in opening the book, looking at any illustrations, reading the first page or jacket before selecting. There were weekly occurrences of a student choosing one book, but after a few minutes, the student would switch it for another choice. The previous examples demonstrate the theme that the readers' desire choices evident when selecting reading materials.

### **Providing Opportunities to Share Opinions of Books**

Participants pointed out that group discussion was the element of the program they liked most. In fact, five of the seven participants stated that reading and talking about the books with peers was a highlight of the program; see Table 3. Participants' desire to share their opinions is a second theme.

Table 3

#### *Semi-Structured Exit Interview: Opinions of Program Strength*

<b>Question</b>	<b>Response</b>
What did you like most about this program?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It was fun with interesting books to choose from. It was fun to read the books.</li> <li>• I got to read myself then discuss the book at the end of the week.</li> <li>• That I just got to read.</li> <li>• It was fun to hear what others thought about the books. That way I can go back and read the books later.</li> <li>• That we could read and talk about the books with one another.</li> <li>• Talking about the books.</li> <li>• I liked it when you read aloud The SOS File.</li> </ul>

The researcher performed participant observations during meeting times, especially noting behaviors during discussion time. Observations made during discussion include:

participants laughing when others were sharing a funny passage in their book, participants asking questions of those sharing, making eye contact when discussing the books, readily sharing a particular area of interest or humor from a book, talking about comprehension questions with a partner prior to group sharing, and providing their rating of each book following reading and discussion. All behaviors indicate the influence discussion has on student reading enjoyment.

### **Sharing of Books through Read Aloud**

A final measure of student engagement was the read aloud time provided by the researcher. The participants, when given the choice to use the remainder of meeting time to read alone or listen to a selected read aloud book, frequently chose the read aloud. One participant pointed to read aloud time as their favorite element of the program. All participants appeared to be actively engaged in the listening process through body language cues of leaning forward, making eye contact with the reader, responding with appropriate facial expressions, and responding to questions during reading.

### **Influences on Summer Reading**

The second research question sought to determine how incoming fourth grade students' reading habits might be influenced by a summer literature circle. The reading program length was five weeks and coincided with the public library summer reading promotion. Both began within a week of school's dismissal for the summer. Thus, the researcher sought to separate reading habits during the course of the study and the public library summer reading program from unstructured reading time the remainder of the summer. The post study reading habits questionnaire provided data as to the changes in students reading habits. Four of the original seven participants responded.

### Reading More Books While Engaged Through Summer Reading Programs

Participants self-reported the number of books they read during the study and in conjunction with the summer reading program; see Table 4 for a comparison.

Table 4

*Comparing Self-Reported Book Quantities During and After the Reading Group*

<b>Exit Interview Question</b>	<b>How many books did you read this summer (counting the public library and this summer reading program)?</b>	<b>Post Study Questionnaire Question</b>	<b>How many books have you read since the reading group ended?</b>
Student A	15	Student A	Maybe 5 to 10
Student B	11 or 12	Student B	7
Student C	25	Student C	5 or 6
Student D	50	Student D	25
Student E	100 including picture books	Student E	No response
Student F	20	Student F	No response
Student G	3 or 4 large chapter books	Student G	No response

Book totals ranged from three to 100 books, with books read being a combination of chapter books, picture books, graphic novels, and non-fiction books. However, in the six weeks following the program, participants reported only reading five to twenty-five books.

The decrease in the number of books read over a similar amount of time as the reading group, leads the researcher to surmise that a group setting positively influences students' reading habits.

In addition, greater opportunities for discussion may have prompted participants to read more during the summer reading program. Participants stated in the post study

reading habits questionnaire that they only discussed their books with one or two immediate family members, whereas for the duration of the reading group, they discussed books with five to seven peers and the researcher, in addition to family members; see Table 5.

Table 5

*Comparing with Whom Participants Discuss Books During and After the Reading Group*

<b>Exit Interview Question</b>	<b>Exit Interview Response</b>	<b>Post Study Questionnaire Question</b>	<b>Post Study Questionnaire Response</b>
Did you talk about the books you read with anyone else outside of the program? Who?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mom, dad, and brother</li> <li>• Dad and cousin</li> <li>• Friends</li> <li>• Mom, brother, and dad</li> <li>• Mom, dad, and sister</li> <li>• Mom and friends</li> </ul>	Have you talked with anyone about the books you've read since the reading group has ended? Who?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mom</li> <li>• Mom</li> <li>• Mom, dad, sisters</li> <li>• Mom, dad, brother</li> </ul>

Participants were purposefully exposed to the genres of realistic fiction, non-fiction, and graphic non-fiction through weekly book choices. Two participants reported on the Post Study Questionnaire that they had read a book by other authors or genres different than they typically read prior to the summer reading group. Student D specifically stated that he read a graphic novel that he would not have read before being exposed to it during the reading group. Student C also responded that her reading choices had changed as a result of the program but failed to elaborate further. Table 6 displays each participant's weekly book choice with genre in parentheses.

Table 6

*Participant's Weekly Book Choice*

<b>Student</b>	<b>Week 1</b>	<b>Week 2</b>	<b>Week 3</b>	<b>Week 4</b>
Student A	Like Pickle Juice on a Cookie (Realistic fiction)	Alvin Ho: Allergic to Girls, School and Other Scary Things (Realistic fiction)	Participant did not attend this week.	Smile (Graphic non-fiction)
Student B	Uh-Oh Cleo: I Bared on Mrs. Kenley (Realistic fiction)	Alvin Ho: Allergic to Girls, School and Other Scary Things (Realistic fiction)	The Dunderheads (Realistic fiction)	Smile (Graphic non-fiction)
Student C	Like Pickle Juice on a Cookie (Realistic fiction)	Lulu Walks the Dogs (Realistic fiction)	The PS Brothers (Realistic fiction)	Spunky Tells All (Fiction)
Student D	Basketball Bats (Realistic fiction)	Knights of the Lunch Table: The Battling Bands (Graphic non-fiction)	The Dunderheads (Realistic fiction)	Gold! Gold From the American River (Nonfiction)
Student E	Participant did not attend this week.	Lawn Boy (Realistic fiction)	Participant did not attend this week.	Participant did not attend this week.
Student F	Basketball Bats (Realistic fiction)	Lawn Boy (Realistic fiction)	The Lemonade War (Realistic fiction)	Spunky Tells All (Fiction)
Student G	Participant did not attend this week.	Participant did not attend this week.	Clementine (Realistic fiction)	How Oliver Olson Changed the World (Realistic fiction)

## Summary

The data and observations from this study indicate that two themes regarding the design of a summer reading program have emerged: providing a range of genres for reading choices and providing opportunities to share opinions of books maintain student engagement. Finally, the influence of the summer reading program was best portrayed through evidence that students read more books, discussed books with more people, and read a wider variety of genres while engaged in the summer reading program. Students thrive on reading group meeting and discussion in relation to summer reading. They valued book choice over reading with a partner and a weekly one hour meeting met the needs of participants and encouraged their continued reading for enjoyment. It is possible that the participants of this study may have been less susceptible to summer reading loss than students who aren't as strongly interested in reading.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

At the present, researchers acknowledge that as students' progress in school, their interest and frequency in reading decreases (Eccles, Wigfield, & Schiefele, 1998; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000), as referenced by Edmunds and Tancock (2003). Fourth grade students are particularly susceptible as they transition from learning to read to reading to learn. The intent of this study was to identify practices to maintain and encourage positive reading habits to prevent regression, develop reading comprehension, and a love of reading.

#### **Conclusions**

The five week summer literature group provided students with an opportunity to not only read books but discuss them with peers in a relaxed atmosphere. The books selected exposed students to quality texts, in a variety of genres, of varying lengths and reading levels. The meeting time was arranged to allow for partner discussion, if there were two students who read the same book, group discussion and sharing, and individual reading or read aloud time. Modeling of questioning and comprehension strategies served as learning opportunities for the participants. Participants reported the importance of group discussion and its impact on the favorable review of the program.

In an effort to identify what elements contribute to incoming fourth graders reading habits, the number of books students read declined after the program ended. It would seem that access to books at regularly scheduled intervals impacts students' reading habits. If students are to become readers by choice, frequent and regular access to quality

materials with appropriately modeled reading comprehension strategies and a love of reading should guide the formation of such habits.

### **Recommendations**

Reading is a skill needed for life; to that end, the previous research, data collected, and results of this study move this researcher to make the following suggestions for future research. A small group setting worked well but potentially offering more time slots to provide flexibility for students who may have been unable to participate due to restricted scheduling would be beneficial. The possibility of expanding the program for all reading levels and grade levels beyond fourth grade during the summer months would address the issue of regression while attempting to maintain reading fluency and student interest.

A summer literature group would best be served if it were scheduled to complement rather than compete with the local public library's summer reading program. The researcher consulted the public librarian to ensure that the reading group would complement the reading program administered by the public library. It might be possible to arrange a literature group to meet after the public library summer reading program concluded so that students have the opportunity and motivation to continue reading for the duration of the summer vacation. One question to consider is: Should this type of literature group be administered by local public librarians or school librarians?

Similar studies can provide further evidence in the importance of programming for continual reading during summer vacation. Another study could be undertaken to emphasize informational text or paired texts to encourage reluctant readers, or those who



prefer nonfiction to attend a similar program, as all participants of this study already had a strong interest in reading.

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## APPENDIX A

## STUDENT READING SURVEY

Student A

1. Do you like to read?
  - A. Yes
  
  - B. No
  
2. Do you talk to your friends about books you have read?
  - A. Yes
  
  - B. No
  
3. Do friends tell YOU about books they have read?
  - A. Yes
  
  - B. No
  
4. Have you ever read a book based on a friend's suggestion?
  - A. Yes
  
  - B. No

## APPENDIX B

## WEEKLY PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION FORM

Date:

Student	Did he/she participate by speaking?	Does it appear that he/she read for the week?	What is the body language being displayed?	Is he/she being an active listener?	Book Rating: <b>Open</b> (my friends should read this!) or <b>Closed</b> (I don't think my friends would like it).	Comments/Quotes:
Student A						
Student B						
Student C						
Student D						
Student E						
Student F						

## APPENDIX C

## SEMI-STRUCTURED EXIT INTERVIEW

Student A

1. Do you like to read? What makes you like to read?
  
2. How many books did you read this summer?
  
3. What book(s) that we read this summer would you would want to tell someone about?
  
4. Can you tell me a book read by other members that you read because they made it sound like a great one to read?
  
5. What did you like most about this program?
  
6. What didn't you like about the program?
  
7. Did you participate in the Kling Memorial Library summer reading program?

## APPENDIX D

## POST-STUDY READING HABITS QUESTIONNAIRE

Student A

1. How many books have you read since the reading group ended?
2. Have you talked with anyone about the books you've read since the reading group has ended? Who?
3. Have you read any of the books I shared during booktalks, either by checking them out of the library, interlibrary loan, or downloading them to an e-reader (such as Kindle or Nook)?
4. Have you read any books mentioned by anyone from the book group since the end of the reading group? These may not just be books that were read for the group activity, but may also include books or authors they read on their own.
5. Did you find yourself reading books by authors or genres you hadn't read prior to the summer reading group

APPENDIX E  
BOOK SELECTION

<u>Book Title</u>	<u>Author</u>	<u>Wilson's Recommendation Level</u>	<u>Genre</u>	<u>Interest Level (Grade)</u>	<u>Page Count</u>	<u>Week Offered</u>	<u>Subjects</u>
Basketball Bats	Betty Hicks	Core	Fiction-realistic	2, 3, 4	55	1	Basketball
The Lemonade Wars *this title was available every week	Jaqueline Davies	Core	Fiction-realistic	3, 4, 5	173	1	Money-making projects Siblings
I Barfed on Mrs. Kenly	Jennifer Harper	Core	Fiction-realistic	K, 1, 2, 3	60	1	Birthdays Parties
Like Pickle Juice on a Cookie	Julie Sternberg	Core	Fiction-realistic	3, 4, 5	122	1	Baby-sitters Novels in verse
Summer Reading is Killing Me!	Jon Scieszka	Core	Fiction-fantasy	3, 4, 5	73	1	Books and reading Fantasy fiction
Alvin Ho: Allergic to girls, school and other scary things	Lenore Look	Most Highly	Fiction-realistic	2, 3, 4, 5	170	2	Chinese Americans Fear
Lulu walks the dogs	Judith Viorst	Core	Fiction-realistic	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	144	2	Cooperativeness Money-making projects Dog walking





<b><u>Book Title</u></b>	<b><u>Author</u></b>	<b><u>Wilson's Recommendation Level</u></b>	<b><u>Genre</u></b>	<b><u>Interest Level (Grade)</u></b>	<b><u>Page Count</u></b>	<b><u>Week Offered</u></b>	<b><u>Subjects</u></b>
All Stations! Distress!: April 15, 1912 The day the Titanic sank	Don Brown	Most Highly	Non-fiction	2, 3, 4	un	4	Titanic Shipwrecks
Spunky Tells All	Ann Cameron	Most Highly	Fiction	2, 3, 4	105	4	Cats Dogs
How Oliver Olson Changed the World	Claudia Mills	Most Highly	Fiction-realistic	2, 3, 4	103	4	School stories Science projects
Moxy Maxwell Does Not Love Stuart Little	Peggy Gifford	Most Highly	Fiction-realistic	2, 3, 4	91	4	Family life Summer Books and Reading
Gold! Gold from the American River	Don Brown	Most Highly	Non-fiction	2, 3, 4	un	4	Frontier
Smile	Raina Telgemeier	Most Highly	Non-fiction Graphic	5, 6, 7, 8	213	4	Autobiographical Graphic Friendship

## APPENDIX F

## WEEKLY DISCUSSION STARTER QUESTIONS

**Week 1**

No questions as the group was just getting started and no books had been book-talked.

**Week 2****I Barfed On Mrs. Kenly by Jennifer Harper**

- Can you tell us who the main character is and one or two other important characters?
- Have you ever been in an embarrassing situation like Cleo? One that you wished everyone would quickly forget about?
- What is an important idea you took away from the book?
- What is your rating of the book and why?

**Like Pickle Juice on a Cookie by Julie Sternberg**

- Can you tell us who the main character is and one or two other important characters?
- Can you identify with Eleanor and dealing with loss or someone moving, or moving yourself? Is the idea in this book common?
- What is your rating of the book and why?

**Basketball Bats by Betty Hicks**

- Can you tell us who the main character is and one or two other important characters?
- Have you played a sport that requires a team? What about an individual sport? How does this book show the difference between team vs. individual?
- What is your rating of the book and why?

**Alvin Ho: Allergic to girls, school, and other scary things by Lenore Look**

- Can you tell us who the main character is and one or two other important characters?

- Why is Alvin afraid of everything, do you think? Have you ever been afraid of something? Did you attempt it and then were no longer afraid?
- What do you know about being afraid?
- What is a PDK and what would you put in yours? ☺
- Tell us about a funny part or your favorite part of the book.
- What is your rating of the book and why?

### **Lulu walks the dogs by Judith Viorst**

- Can you tell us who the main character is and one or two other important characters?
- Why doesn't Lulu like Fleishman? Do you understand why she won't take his help or not?
- Tell us about a funny part or your favorite part of the book.
- What is your rating of the book and why?

### **Lawn Boy by Gary Paulsen**

- Can you tell us who the main character is and one or two other important characters?
- So, Lawn Boy gets an old riding lawn mower for his 12<sup>th</sup> birthday and it ends up being a great present! What is the best birthday present you ever received?
- Did you find a name for Lawn Boy? Why do you think the author didn't give him one?
- Were you shocked at how this story went?
- Tell us about a funny part or your favorite part of the book.
- What is your rating of the book and why?

### **Knights of the Lunch table: the battling bands by Frank Cammuso**

- Can you tell us who the main character is and one or two other important characters?

- This book addresses friendship and loyalty; do you know what that means? Can you give an example from the book?
- Tell us about a funny part or your favorite part of the book.
- What is your rating of the book and why?

