Expo High School students' leisure reading habits

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Expo High School Students' Leisure Reading Habits

A Graduate Research Paper Submitted to the Division of Library Science
Department of Curriculum and Instruction in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by
Vicki Cox Cose
July 18, 1994
This Research Paper by: Vicki Cox Cose
Titled: Expo High School Students' Leisure Reading Habits

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Chapter 1

Introduction

During the middle and later 1960s a growing public disenchantment with public schools led to the development of a small number of "free" or "alternative" schools (Riordan, 1972). The alternative schools offered a choice of more than one educational option to students and their parents. An alternative school, Expo High School, was opened in 1974 within the Waterloo, Iowa, Community School District. It has been one of the leaders in alternative education since its inception.

Expo strives to fulfill the commitment of the Waterloo School District to provide an educational experience in a diverse cultural setting wherein all students are expected to learn. As an alternative school, Expo's mission is to provide an educational experience for at-risk students who have had limited success in the traditional high school setting.

Expo seeks to provide consistently a safe, loving, caring, and respectful environment in which students can succeed academically, socially, and emotionally. The characteristics of an alternative school are retained. They include: flexibility, small class size, and a diverse educational curriculum. Policies are applied in a way to encourage responsibility while allowing for individual differences.

In seeking to be consistent with the Waterloo School District's and Expo's mission statements, the purposes of Expo are:

1. Help students become productive members of society.
2. Enhance student self-worth.
4. Encourage respect and responsibility.
5. Develop appropriate interpersonal communication skills.
6. Cultivate personal wellness.
7. Teach basic academic skills to develop decision making, problem solving, and cooperative skills necessary for future success.

The objectives include:

1. Establish and maintain working student-teacher relationships.
2. Provide the opportunity for students to develop a positive one-to-one relationship with a staff member.
3. Foster the growth of individual accountability and responsibility.
4. Provide the opportunity for the student to acquire basic competencies in academic areas.
5. Create a healthy risk-taking environment in which students are encouraged to grow.
6. Promote students to be adaptive, creative, and flexible.
7. Recognize and appreciate one's own uniqueness as well as respect differences in other people and their thoughts.
8. Teach the skills that help students to develop, work toward, and achieve goals.
9. Encourage students to develop values, along with healthy moral, ethical, and spiritual concepts.
10. Encourage and provide the student with an opportunity to graduate with a high school diploma.
11. Develop healthy options that promote personal wellness.

(Expo Self Study for NCA Evaluation, 1994, p. 3)

The uniqueness of Expo High School can be seen through its purposes and objectives, which are translated by the staff into programs and causes.

Expo is a high school for students in grades 9 through 12. The enrollment cap is approximately 200, achieving a teacher to student ratio of 1:15. Students may enter at the beginning of each eight week quarter. They come to Expo with the goal of earning their high school diploma. Many choose to complete the educational requirements at Expo or re-enroll at one of the traditional high schools in order to graduate with their class.
The school day is organized into eight, forty-two minute classes, beginning at 8:00 a.m. and ending at 2:35 p.m. A twenty minute required time called Oasis is held in the middle of the day. Oasis is a time when all students meet with their advisors to address their academic or social progress. This helps the students to develop responsibility for their own actions, to interact within groups, and to build family feelings and camaraderie. The Oasis addresses the following purposes:

1. Helps students develop responsibility for their action.
2. Monitors the academic and social progress of each student.
3. Allows students to interact as individuals within groups by expressing their feelings or beliefs.

The Oasis or core teacher assists the students by:

1. Reviewing students' credits to help make scheduling plans towards graduation.
2. Scheduling students.
3. Promoting long range planning.
4. Acting as the student's advocate.
5. Being directly involved with school discipline.
6. Communicating with various community agencies on students' benefits.
7. Assisting students with academic and social problems.
8. Conducting home visits and communicating with parent(s).

(Expo Self Study for NCA Evaluation, 1994, p. 8)

The Oasis or core teacher acts as a counselor, a liaison between parents or guardians, and a surrogate parent.

Expo students range in age from sixteen to twenty-one years. These individuals enter after experiencing many personal difficulties, frustrations, and failures. They know that they want things to work out in their lives and have chosen Expo with the hope that it might be the place to experience success. Many have not had success in the traditional high school, are teenage mothers (there is a day care center housed on site), are
pregnant, or have been a drop-out for a number of weeks and wish to re-enter school.

The students begin school intending to succeed. Because of circumstances that happen in their lives, they often fail to find the success they seek. It is not uncommon for an Expo student to drop out of school to cope with personal dilemmas and re-enter school as soon as those problems become manageable.

As individuals mature and more effectively take charge of their own circumstances and behaviors, they discover more success in their personal lives and at school, making achievement of a diploma a believable goal. Not all students achieve the goal of receiving a high school diploma, but they depart with many of the skills they need to become a productive member of society.

Students are not categorized by grade level. Expo possesses a unique alternative which is a point and phase system. Students earn points based on the academic achievement of passing classes and showing efforts toward that goal. Points are also earned in each class in social achievements which are based on attendance, punctuality, attitude, and behaviors.

There are four possible phases. Phase I is when students have earned 85% or more of the possible points. Individuals who earn Phase I are allowed to schedule classes from four to seven periods a day; to schedule first, which ensures they will get the classes they need; and are given first priority for use of the day care center. Phase II students have earned 75% to 84% of the points. They are allowed to schedule four classes over a five period block of time. They are the second group to schedule for classes in the morning or afternoon. Phase III students have earned 75% of the possible points. They have few scheduling choices and are assigned to four
classes either in the morning or afternoon. Phase IV students are those who have dropped from Expo for various reasons and are re-enrolling. They may be denied enrollment for a particular quarter if classes are filled or they do not meet staff requirements.

Class offerings meet the school district's requirements for graduation. The students take courses in social studies, science, math, English, and physical education. There is a wide variety of elective courses offered to meet the specialized needs of the student population. Classes such as art, parenting, life skills, bike repair, or current events are examples of subjects that may appeal to them. With class sizes of fifteen or fewer, individualized instruction is an integral part of classroom activity.

Many of the Expo students are non-motivated readers who possess complex characteristics such as low self-esteem, lack of motivation, excessive absenteeism, substance abuse problems, fear of failure, pregnancy, or alienation from their family, friends or self. They have not had enough successful experiences to enable them to rely or trust their own abilities. Reading for recreation is not a priority for them. The alternative high school is a supportive, learning environment for these non-motivated, at-risk readers.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to determine how much the students at Expo High School read for recreation, what specific kinds of materials they read, and the types of materials they prefer to read. Students were also asked why they choose not to read and state specific reasons why they do not enjoy reading.

Results of the study will enable the media specialist and classroom teachers to comprehend better the reading needs of alternative school
students. The current curriculum may be adapted to employ reading strategies to benefit the students. The media specialist will share the data with the Waterloo School District media facilitator and the Expo staff. Materials for the library media collection will be selected to interest students and encourage the promotion of leisure reading. Specifically, the study will investigate several factors:

1. Do Expo students enjoy reading during their leisure time?
2. What type of material do the students prefer to read? (e.g., fiction, magazines, comics.)
3. What reasons do Expo students give for limiting their leisure reading?

The hypotheses of this study are:

1. Eighty-five percent of Expo students will report they do not enjoy reading.
2. The preferred reading material most often reported will be fiction.
3. Time will be the most frequently reported factor limiting their leisure reading.

Assumptions

Several assumptions regarding alternative school students are inherent in this study. One basic assumption is that the alternative student is a non-motivated reader. This leads to a second assumption: non-motivated, alternative students do not read or enjoy reading during their leisure time. In addition, the data gathered from the students will benefit the media center, classroom teachers, curriculum, and the Waterloo School District central administration. The final assumption is that the Expo
students feel comfortable talking to the media specialist which presents honest and accurate responses to the questions.

**Definitions**

The term "young adult" possesses many vague or different perspectives. *Young adult* will be used in this study as "persons aged thirteen to twenty" (Nilsen and Donnelson, 1985, p. 9).

Recreational reading is reading that is done for relaxation or amusement, or to satisfy interests unrelated to educational or vocational obligations. Within the review of literature, the terms recreational reading, leisure reading, and voluntary reading are used interchangeably.

The federal government has defined a dropout as a student who leaves a school, for any reason except death,... who has been in membership during the regular school term and who withdraws... before graduating... or completing an equivalent program of studies... whether dropping out occurs before or after compulsory school attendance age (Barber and McCellan, 1987, p. 264). A dropout in Iowa is a pupil who has been in membership in a school in any of grades seven through twelve at any time during the twelve month period from July 1 through the following June 30 and withdraws from such school for reasons other than death or transfer to another school (Morley, 1985, p. 2).

"At-risk student" is a very recent label and is both complex and diverse. The National Center for Education Statistics defines at-risk students as those who live in a single parent family, have low parental education or income, have limited English proficiency, have a brother or sister who dropped out of high school, and are at home alone without adult supervision for a long period on weekdays (Hafner, 1990, p. 12).
The Iowa Administrative Code defines at-risk as those students who have difficulty mastering the language, academic, cultural, and social skills necessary to reach the educational levels of which they are capable (p.1). Three categories are identified: not meeting goals in the education program (poor attendance, suspension, lack of friends, negative changes in classroom performance, low motivation and inability to cope with a full class schedule), not completing high school (pregnancy, dropout, teen parent, homeless, frequently tardy, negative peer influence, and culturally or geographically isolated), and not becoming a productive worker (no identified career interests, no reasonable career plans, no plan for post high school training, low motivation to seek employment and low aptitude/skills for competitive work) (p.5).

Alternative schools serve dropouts and/or potential dropouts who are at-risk. An alternative program is a school or school program which meets the objectives of the school district but differs from the conventional programs in instructional methods and environment (Morley, 1985).

Limitations

This study was conducted with a small, homogeneous population. The students currently enrolled at Expo High School in Waterloo, Iowa, grades nine through twelve, are the subjects. The reading required for class assignments or activities was not included in the study. The appropriateness and quality of the materials students read or may read was not investigated.
Chapter 2

Review of Related Literature

The at-risk alternative high school student is a current, 1990s, concept in education. Because this is a new idea, there are a limited number of studies published on this topic. This review of literature will focus upon alternative schools, at-risk students attending those institutions, and how to inspire these young adults to read for pleasure.

The proliferation of alternative schools in America arose because of various philosophic and practical reasons. The events of the late 1960s resulted in widespread dissatisfaction with America's political, social and economic institutions. Public education underwent critical institutional reassessments (Young, 1990). The schools did not appear to mean what most people hoped they would mean in American society (Carr, 1977).

A group of writers: Jonathan Kozol, Nat Hentoff, Herbert Kohl, and John Holt called for changes in educating children. The U.S. Office of Education awarded federal grants to three school systems: Berkeley, California; Franklin Pierce, Washington; and Minneapolis, Minnesota, to develop options within their public school program (Alternative Schools, 1976, p. 1).

In 1973, the National Committee on Reform of Secondary Education declared each school district must provide and establish a wide range of alternative schools and programs (Smith, 1976). The rationale was to give students and/or their parents an opportunity to choose an appropriate educational structure and methodology to suit individual needs (NSBA, p. 1).
Lyn Board (1977) stated that alternative schools were begun as a commitment to educate all students to their full potential and to recognize that individual differences were not being met by a monolithic system. A variety of approaches to educating students was needed (p.10). Vernon Smith (1977) wrote that the establishment of the educational reform was to serve students who are "academically motivated but frustrated by traditional structures" (p.120).

Alternative schools were all based on the assumption that they were ultimately accountable not to a specific body of knowledge or to a set of bureaucratic rules and procedures, but to their clients, the children, and parents, whom they serve. Their aim was to foster self-respect and a sense of community through processes of shared decision making, in which students assumed a major role in determining the nature and direction of their own education (Riordan, 1972).

In 1977, the Illinois legislature led by Robert Fizzell, mandated that alternative education programs were defined as those which meet at least all of the objectives and requirements of a traditional school of the same developmental level, but which differ from the traditional program in environment, structure, or teaching styles. These schools must ensure that every young person may find a path to the educational goals of the community. Programs must focus on what they can offer the student, not on what problems the student has had in the past (Alternative Schools, 1976, p. 58).

Alternative education is represented by: alternative schools, both public and private; alternative programs for students to pursue common goals through varying approaches within the same schools; and a set of teaching strategies, beliefs and support services that facilitate growth in
academic, personal/social and career development initiatives (Morley, 1991).

Tim Young (1990) categorized the common types of alternative schools and programs as schools without walls, schools within a school, multicultural schools, continuation schools, learning centers, fundamental schools and magnet schools (pp. 12-18).

The various types of alternative education possess many common characteristics that make them effective. The first trait is that the client is voluntary. Students may enter an alternative school because of frustration, dissatisfaction, alienation, general dislike or the impossibility to function within a public high school (Deal, 1978). Students attend because of their own or their parents' desire. Other students may choose an alternative school because of alienation from peers, pregnancy or marriage, and employment (Hahn, 1987).

The second characteristic of alternative schools is smallness. The median enrollment is usually less than 200 (Board, 1977, p. 96). The class sizes are smaller, therefore students receive more attention (Alternative Schools, 1976).

A third characteristic is the concern for the whole student.

Personal attention is the key to student success in alternative schools. Small size, the expectation of teachers to serve as counselors and get involved in the problems of students, and the goals of establishing a family environment are three main ingredients in the environments of alternative schools that make them emotionally supportive for students. (Morley, 1991)

Students are seen not as "empty vessels but as ceaselessly active, seeking organisms. They are respected as whole people who develop and learn in interaction with their total environment. Creativity and curiosity
are valued and encouraged" (Korn, 1991, p. 22). A comprehensive set of goals and objectives are stated, including developing basic skills and preparation for careers, but there are also other aims, which include improving self-concepts, developing individual talent, creativity, uniqueness, and encouraging cultural diversity (Board, 1977). Teachers are close to their students, attend to a variety of academic and nonacademic needs through a concern for the whole student. They take students' feelings, needs, and abilities into consideration (Young, 1990).

A fourth characteristic of alternative schools is the supportive environment. Alternative schools are more effective when they encourage a family atmosphere that supports cooperation rather than competition (p. 49). Students in alternative schools believe they have a "space that is theirs. Many of the environments are more like home than a conventional school. Teacher-student relationships are established for one-on-one experiences with teachers being advisors" (Morley, 1991, p. 23). Teachers are helpers and guides instead of authorities. Maladaptive actions and misdeeds do have consequences, but the consequences help the students learn and grow. Teachers are partners in creating an atmosphere in which self-discipline will grow (Korn, 1991).

A fifth characteristic is the sense of community. Students and staff collaborate to make the school work. "Students and staff share responsibilities for building self-discipline and independence" (Morley, 1991, p. 24). Students feel as if they "belong to the school and the school belongs to them. Alternative schools do not hassle them and many opportunities are available for making their own decisions" (Fritz, 1975, p. 10, 11).
A sixth characteristic of alternative schools is the teachers who are enthusiastically committed to the program and students.

Their concern is not so much with designing effective learning packages but with creating a setting where students can play an active, creative role in deciding the direction their education should take. (Riordan, 1972, p. 11)

Teachers are individuals who can participate with unstinting cooperation in shaping new designs, have a high tolerance for ambiguity, and a willingness to work toward resolution (Fritz, 1975). Staff must be able to move from "the active to reflective, creative to analytical, diagnose, assess and evaluate" (Board, 1977, p. 83).

Eileen Toley's studies of 1982 and 1984 found the following characteristics of eight alternative schools: a) positive student teacher relationships, b) student-centered curriculum, c) varied roles for teachers, d) noncompetitive classrooms, e) clear mission and tailored programs to fit their needs, and f) school size.

In 1983, Gary Wehlage identified six effective characteristics: a) smallness, b) program autonomy, c) empowerment, d) teacher optimism, e) family atmosphere, and f) experimental curriculum. The at-risk students' success in an alternative school setting is based upon the factors of "enabling students in pain to identify and express their feelings, validate themselves, and gain a sense of self-worth and personal power. The academic program is structured to ensure students will experience success" (Helge, 1990, p. 11).

The alternative schools "make their school a personally and intellectually non-threatening place to be. They don't believe the at-risk students when they say they are not interested. They know that home is the
most unequal opportunity environment in American education" (Conrath, 1987, p. 42).

The key element to alternative education is to provide support services for the at-risk student. Anne Hafner's 1990 study discovered at-risk issues begin at the eighth grade level. Although the majority of students succeed in school, one third are identified as being at-risk of failing to achieve in school or of dropping out. By the year 2000, as many as one third of the nation's children may be disadvantaged or at-risk (Trevino, 1991).

In April of 1983, A Nation at Risk was published. This report was published by the White House and stated that education needed drastic reform. The term "at-risk" was used in this document. The intent "was to call the attention of the American people to the need to rally around their schools" (Bell, 1993, p. 593). Education is a major, high priority national concern. Ten years after the recommendation from A Nation at Risk, the nation learned that "the social environment for our young people has severely deteriorated" (p. 603). The American youth are not free.

Some are not free to receive equal opportunities. Some are not free because they are minorities. Some are not free because of poverty. Some are not free because they are female. Some are not free because they are teenage mothers. Some are not free because their families have disintegrated. Some are not free because of violence, drugs, and guns in their environment. All of them are not free because we are unwilling to free them. (p. 604)

Many of our youngsters do not believe that their performance in school will have a great deal of impact on their later life; education is not an opportunity but a burden, one to be tolerated at best or more frequently, avoided altogether.
A profile of at-risk students indicates that they are less motivated toward achievement, have low self-concepts as learners, and desire a more informal and nontraditional approach to learning. Their experiences appear to be filtered through a belief system, which includes a marginal sense of personal empowerment for effecting change, coupled with a devaluing sense of personal competence and deflated confidence (Nunn, 1992, p. 438).

Harry Sartain (1989) confirms that many students become discouraged about education because of the unfair competition where all are expected to learn at the same rate with equal success. They often quit trying, join an alienated group, and become social problems. Others become discouraged because of lack of parental support or because schools do not offer what they need. Some do not see the benefit of education (p. 5). At-risk students have not had enough successful experiences to enable them to rely on and trust their own abilities (Lehr and Harris, 1988). They decide to give up entirely and drop out of the educational environment.

Barber and McCellen (1987) reported from a 1984 study of dropouts that the major reason students leave school is their poor attitude toward school. Many viewed school as irrelevant (p. 266). A study in 1987 by Andrew Hahn stated alternative schools are often the best option for both potential and actual dropouts, especially if the program employs reasonable criteria for eligibility, teaches real skills and accommodates working students (p. 261).

Nationally, a dropout is defined as a person who is not in school and is not a high school graduate (Gage, 1990). The United States' high school dropout rate is approximately 20% (Needham, 1992, p. 4). Students drop out because of low test scores, particularly in reading; low grades; no
feeling of competence in any subject; low attendance; and retention in a grade (Webster and Larson, 1991).

Robert Morris (1991) defines the "classic dropout" as an individual who is a member of a racial, ethnic, or language minority group; is from a family where education is not a high priority; will have academic difficulties; and, will be bored or frustrated with school. The decision to drop out is rarely impulsive, but is most often based on a set of interrelated factors which have been operating for many years.

Dropping out varies by socioeconomic status. Significant numbers of whites, blacks, and Hispanics succeed in school and significant numbers of each group also drop out (Wehlage, 1989).

Iowa's high school dropout population remains a product of our schools as well as a product of other social and biological conditions. Over the past 23 years, Iowa schools reported 161,725 dropouts, which averages 7,031 students per year. Most of the dropouts left school between grades 9 and 12, with the highest rates in grades 10 and 11 (Morley, 1993, p. 1). Lisa Bartusek (1989) reported that about one in every thirty students in Iowa drop out (p. 3). Fifty-four percent of dropouts are male and 46% are female. Annually, nearly five thousand students will drop out of Iowa schools. Iowa remains in the top five states in the United States with the lowest dropout rates for students age 16 through 19 (Morley, 1993, p. 4).

In Waterloo, a composite of the District's 1991-1992 dropout rate was recorded for grades 7-12. Out of an enrollment of 6,112 students, 496, or 8.1% were dropouts. The reasons given were primarily due to attendance and truancies. In Morley's 1993 state report, Waterloo was cited as having an enrollment of 4,786 students; 485 students (10.13%) were dropouts (p. 5).
Students who are potential dropouts like subjects that require little reading ability (Bartusek, 1989). A primary factor relating to the dislike of reading is poor self-concept; scholastic performance directly affects self-esteem. Students who come to school believing they will not succeed in reading anticipate failure. Their behavior and efforts during reading instruction contribute to making these expectations come true (Ekwall, 1973, p. 190). Poor concept is detrimental to a child's ability to read. Low self-esteem results in a less motivated student which is one of the definitions of a dropout.

Reading is a developmental process. Students apply the knowledge that they have obtained from various strategies and previously stated goals. Dilemmas exist in schools that hinder support for the leisure, lifetime literacy habit. Teachers become frustrated or lack time during the school day to help students attain this goal. Instructors must fulfill the language arts curriculum and meet state education department mandates (Sanacore, 1992). Children who are given materials that are interesting and motivating will view reading as an integral part of their lives. Children tend to start with favorable attitudes toward almost everything related to school, but somehow they become progressively unenthusiastic as they progress through the grades (Gross, 1986).

A lack of motivation to read is not limited to only poor readers; both good and poor readers are reluctant to engage in recreational and independent reading. Many perceive reading as only school or work-related because of the way it is taught and practiced in classrooms (Turner, 1992). Many students are pressured to read! read! read! Persistent stress proves counterproductive and leads to a loss of an inclination to read (Shepherd, 1982). Young people may not have role models in their lives
who read or have appreciation for reading. Some view reading as a part of the adult world and automatically reject it (Gentile and McMillan, 1977). Many at-risk students were not read to as a child (Shepherd, 1982). Many come from homes where there are few books or magazines (Pilla, 1987).

The climate in which reading instruction occurs becomes one of the most influential factors for developing motivated readers (Holbrook, 1983). Classroom curriculum which fosters students' self-acceptance and self-worth and "focuses upon the person rather than the reading skill needs to be the main emphasis" (Holbrook, 1983, p. 11). Reading instruction should focus on the learners' achievement level, experiential background, and maturation level as well as promote the desire to continue learning (Turner, 1992).

Teachers need to find ways to increase the at-risk students' motivation to read, provide time for them to do so, improve their knowledge of reading strategies, promote their thinking about what they are reading and encourage them to view reading as a useful, joyful activity (Kletzien and Hushion, 1992). Students should be involved in reading activities that are successful and meaningful to their world. Students' interests should be considered (Ciana, 1981).

Television viewing dominates a student's out of school activity. The average number of hours per week students spend watching television is 21.4, which is four times the number of hours spent on homework or reading (Hafner, 1990). It is entirely possible that because of the influence of television and change in a student's environment, his/her reading interests have changed and will continue to change (Ekwall, 1973). In giving at-risk students an opportunity to select reading materials on their own, we have in reality influenced their decisions (Turner, 1992).
The key to reading is meaning. When given the opportunity to read about relevant subjects that they value, students will choose to read. Their ability to read will develop, their self-esteem will be enhanced, and their desire to engage in reading as an independent lifelong activity will be strengthened (Moniuszko, 1992). Students should be valued as "who they are" rather than how well they perform (Holbrook, 1983).

The major consensus of the experts is to expose young adults to literature with a wide range of interests and readability from which they select or reject on the basis of their own personal interest. Students must be given many opportunities for recreational reading (Noland and Craft, 1976). Recreational reading enables the student to practice the skill of reading (Pilla, 1987). By providing them with time to read in school, we send a message that lifetime literacy is a major instructional activity (Sanacore, 1992). Manning and Manning (1979) believe recreational reading increases vocabulary, improves the attitude toward reading, reading skills are refined, provides pleasure, imparts information and broadens one's range of experiences (p. 71).

The reading area in classrooms must be crammed with reading materials of every sort (Shuman, 1982). If we surround students with books, newspapers, magazines, and other materials, they will be tempted to browse and to read (Sanacore, 1992). The student should be able to read within a supportive non-threatening environment (Gross, 1986). When selecting materials for the classroom, teachers should work closely with the library media specialist (Sanacore, 1992). At-risk readers must feel welcome in the media center. A rapport between the adolescent and media specialist will increase the likelihood of success. Students can find in-depth
information about their interests and may not be aware of the "treasure trove" that can be found in the school media center (Shepherd, 1982).

A media center program can stimulate reading for pleasure. The media specialist can be aware of a wide variety of materials that are well matched with interests and needs (Manning and Manning, 1979, p. 475). The media specialist can guide, encourage, and give suggestions to get and keep the student reading (Pilla, 1987). The teaching staff and media specialist must work cooperatively. The school media center is central to the school's reading program. Teachers and the media specialist must respect the students' choices of reading materials. Often professionals become anxious about students' choices, but we need to believe that as readers gain experience in reading for pleasure, they tend to select appropriate materials. This positive experience with reading builds independence and self-esteem. Cooperation between the teaching staff and media specialist requires time and hard work. The ideal program must include what we know about human learning. Reading experiences must be allowed to engage students' emotions as well as their intellects (Gentile and McMillan, 1977).

Various strategies can be utilized by the total staff to increase the at-risk student's success with reading. "The love for reading and the desire to read is not taught, it is created; is not demanded, it is exemplified; is not extracted, it is quickened; is not solicited, it is activated" (Pilla, 1987, p. 5).

In summary, alternative schools must see themselves as transitional, not as ends in themselves, but as flexible, changeable institutions that will facilitate transition to educating the at-risk student. The at-risk student needs to believe that schools are good places to be, feel a sense of belonging and increase self-esteem in order to promote academic performances.
When their self-esteem is boosted, their interests and confidence will expand. These adolescents need to have a wealth of fiction and non-fiction materials available to meet their reading and interest levels. The most important effort is to encourage these youth to read in a positive learning environment, whether that environment is a traditional, alternative or nontraditional setting.
Chapter 3

Methodology

The study population was composed of male and female students, grades nine through twelve, ages fifteen to twenty-one who were enrolled at Expo High School in Waterloo, Iowa, during May of 1994.

Interviews were conducted in order to ascertain attitudes of Expo students about their reading habits. The interviews were conducted with the students on prearranged days from May 9 - 26, 1994. All students who were present on their particular day were asked the questions. No attempt was made to reschedule interviews with students who were absent.

Approval from the building administrator and staff were requested to receive their cooperation in assembling the research information. A cover letter and schedule for conducting the interviews were given to each of the fifteen teachers at the school.

The interviewer collected the data for such questions as How much time do you spend reading outside school? A half hour? Hour? In the past week, have you read a newspaper, fiction book, magazine, comic, or computer messages? In the past month, have you read a newspaper, fiction or non-fiction book, comic, magazine or computer messages? (See Appendix A.)

The students were interviewed during a twenty minute period entitled Oasis, which is similar to a homeroom in a traditional high school. Since the population was a small, homogeneous group, the media specialist conducted the interviews. The majority of the students know the media specialist.
The interviews were conducted individually. Each student was questioned in a quiet corner in a classroom or media center where one or more students or staff were present. Each student was given ample amount of response time for each question. The students understood the interviews were being conducted for the media specialist's research paper.
Data were obtained from 128 students who were enrolled in Expo High School during the month of May, 1994. The total enrollment during that month was 158 students, which resulted in 81% of the population being interviewed. Out of the 128 students, 65 or 51% were males and 63 or 49% were females. The average age of the young adults was 17 years. The average phase classification (I, II, III, or IV) was I, or the phase for students who have earned 85% or more of the possible points for academic achievement. The average number of years students had attended Expo was 1.75.

The first question requesting information from the young adults was to clarify whether they enjoyed reading during their leisure time. Sixty-seven students or 52.34% answered they did enjoy reading, 44 or 34.37% responded they did not enjoy reading, while 17 or 13.28% stated they sometimes liked to read.

The first hypothesis "Eighty-five percent of the Expo students will report they do not enjoy leisure reading" is rejected because the data show Expo students do enjoy reading, as shown in Table 1.
Table 1
Expo Students Response About Enjoyment of Reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>36.92</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15.38</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>47.69</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>99.99</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Total percents do not equal 100 due to rounding.

The second question asked what kind of materials they prefer to read. Many of the students chose several materials, therefore, the data in Table 2 represent responses, not the number of respondents.

Table 2
Kinds of Materials Expo High School Students Prefer to Read During Their Leisure Time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Materials</th>
<th>No. of Responses</th>
<th>% of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fiction</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>32.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazines</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>26.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>21.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comics</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-fiction</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer games or messages</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read all of these</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read none of these</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>99.99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Total percent does not equal 100 due to rounding.
Thirty-one females and 24 males indicated they preferred to read fiction. The second hypothesis that Expo students who read prefer fiction is accepted -- 55 or 32.93% of the responses were for fiction. Magazines were the second choice with 44 or 26.35%. As revealed in Table 2, the responses were varied and many students chose several kinds of material that they read.

Table 3
Factors Limiting Expo High School Students

Leisure Reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Limiting Factors</th>
<th>No. of Responses</th>
<th>No. of Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No time</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>39.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't want to read</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>15.98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't like to read</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read at home</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No access to material</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No materials</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other things to do</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watch TV instead</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just don't read</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lose interest</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never read an entire book</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>169</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.48%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Total percents do not equal 100 due to rounding.
Hypothesis three predicted "time will be the most reported factor limiting their leisure reading." The data in Table 3 show that 39.05% of the responses were that lack of time is the reason for not reading. Many students also chose several of the other categories.

When the researcher requested students' responses about the current material they had just read at the time of the interview, the young people were forthright in naming the titles. These data were not connected with any hypothesis, but it was enlightening to see if any similarities occurred between the choice of materials they read and comparison of genders. Table 4 displays the pertinent data.

Table 4
Kinds of Materials Read by Expo Students
During the Month of May, 1994

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Materials</th>
<th>No. of Females</th>
<th>No. of Males</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Books (fiction)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazines</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-fiction</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comics</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer messages or games</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the above</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As stated previously in the analysis of data, fiction is the top choice of both genders. Magazines and newspapers are second and third choices,
respectively. Magazines are accessible for students in the Expo Media Center. Students confirmed that they subscribe to magazines. Magazines are more affordable to them than paperback books.

Both genders indicated a wide variety of genre selected for leisure reading. Table 5 reveals the types of literature females and males select.

Table 5
Favorite Genre Chosen by Expo Students
in May of 1994

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Female Choices</th>
<th>Male Choices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mystery</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science fiction</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realism</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love stories</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horror</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fantasy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teenage problems</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All of the above</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the above</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The six male students who responded with "other" stated they enjoyed adventure/action, comics, biographies, war books, humor, and westerns. Both genders pursue mysteries, horror, and teenage problems. The males tend to select the opposite of the favorites of the females: science fiction,
fantasy, sports, and history. The females readily chose love stories as their second choice.

The final question which the interviewer asked of the students did not have any direct relevance to this study, but the researcher wished to obtain the information while visiting with the majority of the students. The interviewer asked each student the kind of material or materials he/she would purchase for the Expo Media Center, if given one hundred dollars. The answers correlate with their choices of materials. The choices are revealed in Table 6.

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories Chosen</th>
<th>No. of students choosing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fiction books</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazines</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-fiction books</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer games/ programs</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference materials</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comics</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data collected by interviewing students were valuable. The at-risk, alternative high school students do enjoy reading during their leisure
time, prefer to read fiction materials, and report lack of time as being the factor that most limits their recreational reading.
Chapter 5

Conclusions, Recommendations, Summary

The analysis of the data produced both expected and unexpected results. The most important result was the discovery that Expo High School students do read during their leisure time. "Leisure time" was not clarified as to the exact time and location, therefore students may read during their lunch hour, the five-minute break in-between classes, after completing assignments in class, at work, or at home. The study was not intended to divide the data by gender, but when gathering data, it was interesting to examine the difference between male and female populations.

Information collected by Ann Hafner in the longitudinal study begun in 1988, discovered females spend more time on outside reading than males. Of 63 females in this study, 43 or 68.25% confirmed they enjoy reading, while only 24 or 36.92% of the 65 males stated they do enjoy reading. The percentages of males who do not enjoy reading was 47.69%. The researcher thought that the percentages of males not enjoying reading would be lower. Many of the males dislike reading because of weaknesses in their reading skills. Many of the males were required in classes to read certain types of books, which did not interest them, and which discouraged reading on their own time. Male students are usually employed, which restricts the amount of free time they do possess.

One male student quietly expressed that he had never read an entire book. He had not sat down to complete a book from cover to cover because he became easily bored with the material and could not sit still to
read. The researcher was amazed, disappointed, but yet had empathy for this young man.

Another male indicated that he loses interest while reading. Twenty-two males said they just do not like to read. Of these twenty-two, many chose newspapers or magazines to read because they can browse through this type of material easily.

The percentage of young men who reported they enjoyed reading was 36.92%. Many of these males read the daily newspaper sports section, magazines, mysteries, and horror books. Stephen King is the top author chosen by males when they select a horror book. The amount of pages in the King books do not matter because they are enthralled with his writing.

Females who enjoy and like to read choose a variety of material. Fiction, newspapers, and magazines are the top choices; 63.49% read daily. The particular genres of books the females prefer are mysteries, love stories, and teenage problems. Their favorite authors are Danielle Steele, R.L. Stine, Dean Koontz, and V.C. Andrews. Many of the female students are also employed and 58.73% stated that time restraints keep them from reading. Many of them pursue reading when they are attending school.

The 20.63% of females who do not enjoy reading just do not sit down to read. Some said they have other things they have to do. Seven of the respondents do not have access to material, which severely limits any reading they may wish to pursue. Many of these girls may come from non-reading families where reading is not significant in their lives (Manning and Manning, 1979). Lastly, some of the females may be teen mothers who do not have much free time to read for pleasure.

This study was not intended to examine the types of materials the Expo students read, but when interviewing the population, the researcher
was intrigued to discover many unexpected results -- 55.55% of the females read the newspaper at least monthly. They choose to read the police log or other sections of the newspaper -- 30.16% read the newspaper daily; 58.46% of the males also read the newspaper at least once a month, while 33.985% read it daily. The males coincidentally read the police log and other portions of the newspaper. The researcher did not realize these students were reading the newspaper to this degree. One possible explanation may be that these students are reading the newspaper in the Expo Media Center as it is readily available for them to browse through or read at their leisure.

Females specified their choices of fiction books by particular themes/genres: love stories, true stories, teenage problems, and mystery. Many also requested certain authors: V.C. Andrews, Stephen King, Dean Koontz, and Danielle Steele. The similarities of each of these are what they confirmed they read the most in their leisure time. Two ladies wished to recommend for purchase repair books and black history books in the non-fiction category. The females did not recommend buying comics.

Male students requests for genre/themes were: horror, mystery, fantasy, adventure, and teenage problems. Young men preferred to buy Stephen King's fiction. They also would select biography, sports, Chilton Manuals, and people in sports for the non-fiction materials. Three males stated they would like magazines about sports, cars, and hunting.

Two out of three hypotheses were accepted within this study of Expo High School students' leisure reading habits. The students do prefer fiction as their top selection when reading for pleasure and time is the most reported factor that limits these young adults' leisure reading. The
hypothesis that 85% of Expo students do not read during their leisure time was rejected.

**Recommendations**

The purpose of this study was to acquire a better understanding of the leisure reading habits of Expo High School students. It was the researcher's intent to discover how many of the student body actually read during their leisure time, the amount of time they spend reading, the material they select to read, and what factor or factors prohibit them from reading in their recreational time.

The data collected show that the students enrolled at Expo need to have an ample amount of time to be able to read. These students are employed in full or part-time jobs, attend Expo, may be teen mothers, or be responsible for siblings. Their outside-of-school time is full, therefore, the students need to be able to read during school hours. The students could easily spend one day a week during Oasis, reading. This could be adapted into Silent Sustained Reading, where the students and core teacher read any type of material they desire. The students' would be viewing positive adult role models reading. They could read at their own pace and many may begin to develop an interest in leisure reading.

George Norvell (1973) stresses that young people need to be supplied with an ample supply of literary selections in order to create interest. Gwendolyn Turner believes the learning environment determines the extent to which students will be motivated and successful in their reading and learning. Reading materials that students are most inclined to read may be biographies, computers, or books on audio tape, may be positive keys to promote interest. Students' academic achievements are directly related to the amount of reading which they do at school and home (Turner, 1992).
The Oasis environment would be supportive and non-threatening, promoting literacy rather than aliteracy.

The study caused the media specialist to begin to examine various avenues of funding in order to purchase the desired materials the Expo students would like to read. Outside sources within the community could be contacted for grant funds to increase the collection's size and selection. Expo's budget amount is determined according to our student enrollment; the school does not receive supplemental funds for the at-risk population which we serve.

The study will be shared with the district media facilitator to allow her to better understand the Expo students' reading habits and selection requests.

Another implication that would be easily obtained, is to discuss various options with Expo English teachers to create avenues to strengthen reading within the English curriculum. The English teachers are required to follow curriculum, but may be able to collaborate in efforts to increase the joy of reading within the present curriculum. As David Shepherd (1982) suggests, teachers can include techniques for increasing interest and competence in their lesson procedures while still carrying out the purposes of the lesson.

Finally, the findings will be shared with all staff people to inform them that several students have not read an entire book, cannot sit still to read, and do not like to read. Total creative staff commitment could aid these students' reading abilities, enjoyment, and help dispel their general dislike of reading. Since Expo is an alternative school, it is possible to experiment with classes or methods to better meet our students' abilities.
As data were being analyzed, several ideas for future research evolved. Expo students could be interviewed once again in the fall to discover if the students read in their summer leisure time. Other alternative high school students could be interviewed and the results contrasted with those of Expo students. Alternative high schools belong to an Iowa Association of Alternative Educators which would facilitate such a study. Fellow alternative educators would appreciate the results of such a study in order to better meet the at-risk student's needs.

Another way to conduct further research would be to gather data from students enrolled in the two traditional high schools in Waterloo, Iowa, and contrast their leisure reading habits with those of Expo students. The data may show similarities in the types of materials they choose to read and the factors most limiting their recreational reading.

**Summary**

At-risk students are becoming recognized in educational environments. These students are those who live in a single parent family, have low parental income or education, have limited English proficiency, and are home alone without supervision for a long period on weekdays (Hafner, 1990). Expo High School, an alternative school in Waterloo, Iowa, strives to provide an educational experience for at-risk students who have had limited success in the traditional high school setting.

The purpose of this study was to determine how much the students at Expo High School read and the types of materials they prefer to read. Students were asked why they chose not to read and to state specific reasons why they do not enjoy reading.

Students who were enrolled at Expo in the month of May, 1994, were interviewed by the media specialist. The interviews collected the data
for the following questions: Do you enjoy reading? What do you like to read? What limits your leisure reading? In the past week, have you read a newspaper, fiction book, magazine, comic or computer message? In the past month, have you read a newspaper, fiction or non-fiction book, comic, magazine or computer message?

The interview respondents were 128 students or 81% of students enrolled in the school. Sixty-five students, or 51%, were males who were 15 to 21 years of age. The average age of the males was 17 years. Sixty-three students, or 49%, were females. The average age of females was 17 years.

It was predicted that 85% of the Expo students would not enjoy reading. Only about 37% of the population reported they do not like to read. This hypothesis was rejected.

The second finding determined what type of materials students' prefer to read; it was predicted that most students prefer fiction. More responses, 32.93%, were for fiction than any other genre. The hypothesis was accepted.

The final hypothesis predicted that time would be the most reported factor limiting Expo students' recreational reading; 39.05% of the responses stated that the primary factor restricting leisure reading was time; the next highest response was "don't want to read" with 15.8% of the responses. The hypothesis was accepted.

Expo students are at-risk, alternative high school students who read during their leisure time, prefer fiction materials, and preventing their reading is lack of time. The study has important implications for anyone involved in, or interested in, leisure reading or at-risk students' reading habits.
As we approach the twenty-first century, we must keep reminding ourselves to take an active, enthusiastic role promoting leisure reading by all students. We must be dedicated to this issue to enhance interests and enthusiasm for reading.
Bibliography


Appendix A

Interview Questions:

Gender: M _____ F _____
Age: _____
Phase: I II III IV
No. of years at Expo: _____

1. Do you enjoy reading?

2. What kinds of materials do you prefer to read?
   fiction newspapers comics magazines
   non-fiction computer games or messages

3. How often do you read these
   daily weekly monthly

4. What was the title of the material you last read?

5. When you read the newspaper, how often do you read it?
   daily weekly monthly

6. When you read the newspaper, what part do you read?
   police log opinion entertainment
   comics sports metro news
   movies other

7. If you read a book, what kind do you prefer to read?
   mystery love story sports
   science fiction horror teenager problems
   history fantasy reality other

8. What is the biggest factor that keeps you from reading?
   no time don't like to don't want to
   no materials no access to materials
   reading is hard for me