

Free-Time Literacy Activities

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Abstract. While literacy continues to be important during the secondary school years, motivation to read in middle school declines [1, 2, 3, 4]. There is little research on adolescents free-time activities that could include reading [5]. Less is known about differences in urban or rural communities. The purpose of this study was to determine to what extent sixth graders in an urban and rural public school differ in their preferred types of literacy activities, amount of time spent engaging in literacy activities, and the effect of time spent doing homework on leisure reading. Survey results of students from urban and rural sixth grade classes indicated urban students spent more time reading for fun as well as the girls in the study.

1. Introduction

The transition from elementary school to middle school is very complex for sixth grade students. Reading becomes the primary tool for learning [5] and a skill critical to success in school. As school work changes, motivation and interest in reading begins to decline [1, 2, 3, 4]. Although motivation to read in school may decline, outside of school students do engage in other reading activities, e.g., reading magazines and surfing the Internet [4]. Understanding what types of reading materials middle school students are motivated to read can aid educators in improving reading instruction and help Speech-Language Pathologists to provide appropriate intervention methods. Unfortunately, there is little research on the leisure reading interests of adolescents. In addition, less is known about the amount of time sixth graders spend doing homework and the impact it has on their available time for leisure reading.

The purpose of this study is to determine to what extent sixth graders in an urban and rural public school differ in their preferred types of literacy activities, amount of time spent engaging in literacy activities, and the effect of time spent doing homework on leisure reading. A pilot study was conducted to construct and determine the effectiveness of a survey to address these questions.

2. Methodology and Results

Two sixth grade classes (45 girls; 33 boys), with approximately 35 students in each from two different communities, one urban and one rural, were selected to participate. These schools were chosen because demographics for each school were similar. Participants and their parents or caregivers provided signed informed consent.

Data were collected using a 16 question, multiple choice survey constructed to obtain information about students' after school and weekend activities as they relate to time spent engaging in literacy activities and homework. Included in the survey was a reading vocabulary assessment that consisted of twenty-seven real words and nonwords to determine the similarity of each groups' reading vocabulary knowledge. The survey and reading vocabulary list was administered during the students' English class and took approximately fifteen minutes to complete.

Comparisons between the urban and rural students and the time they read for fun indicated that the amount of time the urban sixth graders read for fun ($M = 1.92$, $SD = 1.10$) was significantly greater than the time the rural sixth graders read for fun ($M = 1.36$, $SD = .826$), $t(2.550) = .221$, $p = .013$ (two-tailed). An independent sample t-test was used to analyze the data. There were no statistically significant differences between time spent on homework and time spent reading for fun.

The students in the present study were asked what types of activities they engage in during their free time. Both groups rated listening to music (Urban 76%; Rural 89%) and participating in group sports (U 80%; R 75%) highest. More students from the rural community rated hanging out with friends (89%) and watching TV/movies (68%) as most preferred free-time activities. Sixth graders from the urban community indicated a high interest in shopping and playing computer and video games. Both groups rated reading as a solo activity similarly (Urban 38%;

Rural 36%). Other free time activities which were potentially literacy related were rated similarly: texting (Urban 40%; Rural 43%), cooking (Urban 48%; Rural 46%), computer/video games (Urban 72%; Rural 68%). However, there was more than a 10% difference between groups in two other literacy related activities: instant messaging (Urban 26%; Rural 39%) and creative writing (Urban 22%; Rural 36%).

The urban students least favored activity was 4-H (10%) and individual sports (12%) and the rural students least favored activity was the Boys and Girls Club (7%), 4-H (14%), and individual sports (14%). Both urban and rural students preferred magazines (44%; 46%), nonfiction books (32%; 36%), and comics (46%; 29%). Students from the rural community reported liking novels (29%). The least preferred types of reading materials for both communities was newspapers (Urban 8%; Rural 4%) and plays (8%; 7%). Both boys and girls preferred magazines (39%; 49%). The girls preferred novels (42%), and non-fiction books (42%). Boys liked to read comics (58%), and articles from the internet (30%). The least preferred types of reading materials for boys and girls were also newspapers (Boys 6%; Girls 7%) and plays (Boys 0%; Girls 13%).

3. Conclusions

Results indicated a significant difference in the amount of time students in the urban community read for fun when compared to the students in the rural community. All of the students in the present study preferred activities that involved their peers. In addition, the most preferred type of reading materials were magazines. Incorporating activities using preferred media and peer interactions may facilitate continued interest in expanding literacy interests.

4. Acknowledgements

A special thank you to the sixth grade students, their teachers, and school principals who participated in this research. Also, thank you to Dr. Doug Parham, whose assistance in the analysis of the data was greatly appreciated.

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