

The JOY of Reading - Helping Children Connect With Books

Bob Hauser

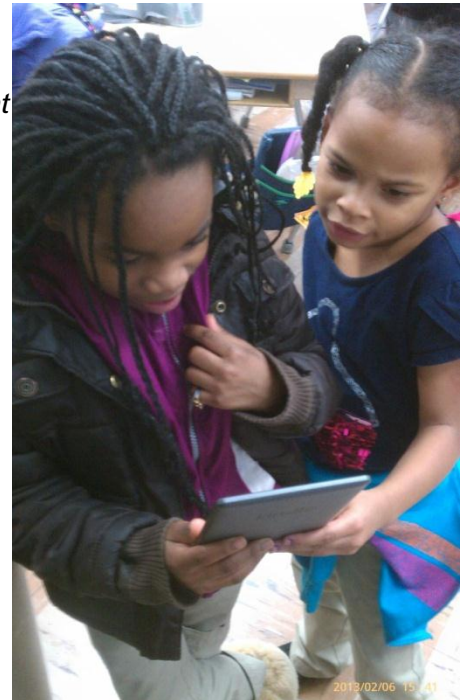
February 7, 2013 Entry from my Teacher Research Journal

"Kindle-mania!"

I downloaded about an additional 100 new free books onto the Kindles over the weekend. On Monday, during Morning Meeting, I announced this fact and highlighted some of the topics of books that were now available to them:

- *spiders*
- *dogs*
- *wolves*
- *dinosaurs*
- *special Valentine's Day books*
- *Joke Books*
- *Justin Bieber*
- *2 Fart books*

Oh dear! The fart books got them. As soon as the Kindles were available to read later that morning, Jhaniya immediately went straight to Broccoli Makes You Fart. She and her reading partner gave the book a great review!



Since Monday, I can't keep the Kindles in their boxes. Children always are asking for them. Yesterday, at indoor recess, three girls got into the Justin Bieber book. They had both Kindles open to the same page and were copying his quotes word for word. Hopefully the copyright police won't jail 8 year olds!"

Oh, the joy of reading and connecting with books!

Rationale:

Reading has been a weak part of my teaching practice, so I was keen to put the spotlight on it. I always tried to ensure that children in my classroom would experience the “joy of reading” and of books, but I didn’t really think I had ever done an adequate job of providing them with that experience. I felt doing this research “forced” me to try new strategies and to have new conversations. It gave me an opportunity to talk with children more about their views about reading and books, which have proved enlightening.

Additionally, our school has a goal to get 80% of students to grow at least one full year as a reader. Our current growth levels are pretty dismal and this research has helped to uncover some of the issues behind this lack of growth.

School/Teaching Context:

I teach second grade at an elementary public charter school in Chicago’s west side neighborhood of North Lawndale. The school is located in a small area called K-Town because of all the streets that begin with the letter “K”. According to a Wikipedia entry by John W. Fountain (2005):

K-Town is a city within a city, a fifteen-minute drive from downtown Chicago's skyscrapers... I used to joke that the "K" stood for "kill." I was only half-joking... it had developed a reputation for being one of the rougher places in the city.... K-Town is where my grandfather... and all the other black folk that flocked to the West Side during the mid-to-late-1950s bought proud brick houses on tree-lined streets with crackless cement sidewalks....

Jonathan Kozol devotes a chapter of his 1992 book, *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools* to North Lawndale, where he cites a local resident who called it "an industrial slum without the industry." At the time, it had "one bank, one supermarket, 48 state lottery agents ... and 99 licensed bars."

According to the North Lawndale Employment Network’s website, “North Lawndale’s unemployment rate has risen from an estimated 26% in 2000 to approximately 35% in 2012. Fifty-nine percent of North Lawndale households have an income below \$25,000 and 57% of adults in North Lawndale have a history with the criminal justice system.

Our physical school is located in one wing of an existing traditional Chicago Public School. We share the engineers, custodial, and cafeteria staff. We share their auditorium for assemblies. We have no gym or library. We’ve turned two classrooms into an art and music studio. We now have two P.E. teachers who have to mostly teach outdoors eight out of the ten months of the school year. We have turned two additional classrooms into computer labs, each with 26 computers. The school is cramped and we are maxed out. There is a rodent problem that persists year after year, with frequent rodent droppings found on the floor and on desks. You will often see rodents out and about during the school day. Roaches are also prevalent, as are ants on the first floor.

African Americans make up nearly 100% of the approximately 500 scholars in grades pre-K through eighth. Free and reduced lunches are provided for 91% of the children. About 11% of the population receive special education services.

The majority of our scholars come from the Austin and North Lawndale areas of the city, both of which are plagued by high levels of crime and violence. I once asked a parent leader why we weren't having our annual roller skating party in the neighborhood rather than in the nearby south suburbs, and he said, "Do you want your car here when you leave?" This from a man who was once incarcerated himself. It is a tough area and many of our children have seen and experienced a lot of things that most middle class children will never see or experience.

Despite these dismal facts, out of 58 Chicago elementary charter schools, our school ranked 14th in ISAT scores, with nearly 80% of scholars meeting or exceeding. In 2009 and 2010, our charter school was awarded two Illinois Honor Roll awards: Spotlight School & Academic Improvement. According to CPS, we are in Excellent Standing (Level 1).

Our school's mission "is to create an outstanding center for teaching and learning for children and their families that will recognize and nurture the full potential of every child, provide a foundation for a college education, and educate our scholars to be creative and critical thinkers and responsible citizens in school, at home, and in the broader community."

I would describe our school environment as very loving with a lot of hugging going on everyday. This atmosphere emanates from our founding principal who has been our school leader since it's opening in 2004. The charter founder is a major Chicago law firm that wanted to give back to the community when they celebrated their 100th year of doing business in the city of Chicago.

We are a Responsive Classroom school. Responsive Classroom, created by Northeast Foundation for Children, Inc. (NEFC), is a widely used, research-based approach to elementary education that increases academic achievement, decreases problem behaviors, improves social skills, and leads to more high-quality instruction. NEFC was founded in 1981 by a group of public school educators who had a vision of bringing together social and academic learning throughout the school day. I believe that this approach, combined with our leadership team's beliefs and their hiring of staff and teachers that are like-minded, help create the well rounded and sane environment that currently pervades our school.

While we no longer have an official afterschool program that the entire school population can take advantage of, we do have several dedicated teachers offering some weekly after school clubs and sports: art, drama, anti-bullying, boys and girls basketball teams. We are also blessed and fortunate to have partnered, just this school year, with two stellar organizations: *Chicago Run*, a non-profit organization whose mission is to promote the health and wellness of Chicago children through innovative, engaging, and sustainable youth running programs and the *Chicago Children's Choir*, a multiracial, multicultural choral music education organization.

There are two second grade classrooms, each with one classroom teacher. There is also an intervention teacher who supports both rooms. The intervention teacher pulls small groups of 3-4 scholars for reading using *Fountas & Pinnell Leveled Literacy Intervention System (LLI)*, which is a supplementary intervention program designed to help provide daily, small-group instruction for the lowest achieving children in the early grades. For math interventions, this teacher pulls small groups and pushes in services using the existing *Everyday Math* curriculum.

My class consisted of 26 second grade scholars, aged seven and eight. Ten are boys and sixteen are girls. Five of the 26 are new to our school; 21 were at our school in first grade. Other information:

- 3 scholars were retained
- 3 scholars have IEPs (reading)
- 1 scholar has a 504 plan (diabetes) / 1 in process (ADHD)
- 3 scholars are in Rtl (Tier 2) for reading and math
- 2 scholars are in Rtl (Tier 3) for reading and math

This year, as in my previous four years, I expected to be greeted with excited and enthusiastic children, many of whom would be carrying the additional burden of social-emotional challenges. Instead, I was pleasantly surprised to find a classroom that was, generally speaking, more self-aware, mild-mannered and kind, compared with any other class I've experienced. I really only have two children to whom I have to provide additional and regular social-emotional levels of support. This has been a huge relief and has allowed me to devote more of my time and energy into academics and less on the social-emotional.

As of the beginning of the first quarter only 27% (7) of my scholars were at the literacy benchmark or above, with the remaining 73% (19) scholars below. Here are the details:

- 2 scholars were 1 level above benchmark
- 5 scholars were at the benchmark
- 11 scholars were 1 level below benchmark
- 5 scholars were 2 levels below benchmark
- 1 scholar was 3 levels below benchmark
- 2 scholars were 4 levels below benchmark

As classroom teachers and as a school, we are fortunate that our administration takes literacy assessments seriously. Two full days of coverage are provided for every teacher at the end of each quarter to assess our scholars using the University of Chicago's STEP literacy assessment. This is a one-on-one, comprehensive assessment which measures reading fluency, rate, accuracy, comprehension (factual, inferential and critical thinking) as well as developmental spelling. Unfortunately, the current STEP assessment system only uses fiction. The intermediate grades are now using *The Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System (BAS)*, which also includes non-fiction. The primary grades are testing the BAS system this year. If the results appear to benefit the primary grades we may also be switching to the BAS system of literacy assessment.

A few notes on the various roles I play at my school. A new role I have this school year is new in our school: Teacher-Leader. There are six teachers assuming this role. Our leadership team wants to increase the role of teachers and the influence they can have in our school community. Part of this role is to co-lead an Academic Work Group (AWG) that is tied to our three major school goals. The goal I am co-leading is the Math AWG which is to help our school get at least 30% or more of our scholars achieving at the “exceeds level” on the ISAT.

I also wear other hats:

- Coordinator for Community In Schools Chicago
- Liaison for Fresh Moves Mobile Produce Market
- Member of our school’s Compensation Committee

Literature Review



“One of my favorite ways to read is on the Kindles because I get to know about the books that I don’t know. Some of the books are funny.”
Jarrah, 2nd grade Legacy scholar

Reading -- A Mystery

Reading workshop, silent reading, direct instruction, guided reading, word work, literacy centers, one-on-one conferring, phonics, conversations about books, fluency, comprehension, basals, expanded vocabulary, reading motivation: hasn’t it all been researched to death? After my many weeks of reviewing the literature I think it has. So, why do I still have the desire to conduct action research in my classroom if it’s all been looked at “six ways from Sunday?”

Quite simply -- reading, despite the plethora of research on the topic, remains a mystery. A mystery because if researchers had unlocked THE secret to reading, then all children would be reading at their appropriate and respective levels. Or, perhaps researchers have unlocked the secret to reading, but educators have not implemented the secret in a way for their unique and individual children to successfully access it. Which is it?

Success Remains Elusive

In Chicago there has been a nearly constant lament about the poor quality of education for over fifty years, especially among minorities, namely Latinos and African-Americans. The 2012 ISAT

(Illinois Standards Achievement Test) reading score for all children meeting or exceeding was 70.3%. A mere 0.08% of a percentage point increase from 2011. The achievement gap between whites and African-Americans was 22% (Ahmed-Ullah, N.S., 2012). Nationally this achievement gap has been similarly wide: 27% when comparing fourth graders and 26% when comparing eighth graders. (Vanneman A., Hamilton, L., Anderson, J.B., & Rahman, T., 2009)

Since I teach in an all African-American school in a poverty stricken and violent-prone neighborhood in the inner city of Chicago, I have great concerns about these statistics and how to overcome them. So, what to do?

Taking Action (Research)

As I began my fifth year of teaching and saw lackluster reading results from my own practice, I decided that I needed to take a different approach to teaching reading. Additionally, our school has a school-wide goal to have 80% of children gain one level of growth this school year. As many of the educator-researchers believe, I also believe that as a teacher I hold an immense power and play an important role in helping children to become lifelong lovers of reading and books. So, as I expand my own horizons and learn what the experts are saying about how to engage children in reading, how to get them motivated and curious, how to get them to feel the joy of reading books; I began my own journey of researching myself, my practice, and my second grade readers.

Deceptively Simple

I have my Master of Teaching degree and I've been trained to teach children how to read. I have over four years of teaching experience under my belt. I've taken many literacy workshops from some of the gurus like Debbie Miller and Kathy Collins; have read and taught from the books by "The Sisters", Gail Boushey and Joan Moser (2006 & 2009). They, and others, make teaching children how to read seem so deceptively simple:.

Lucy Calkins (2001) put the art of teaching reading into perspective for me:

“Desperate not to leave anything undone, we race our children through everything ever recommended: leveled books, phonemic awareness, cueing systems, literature circles, shared reading, author studies, writing workshop, inference and interpretation questions, running records, interactive writing ... the sheer quantity leaves us breathless. The problem is that if our teaching is to be an art, we need an organizing vision that brings together all of these separate components into something graceful and vital and significant. It is not the number of good ideas that turns our work into art, but the selection, balance, coherence and design of those ideas.” (p. 4)

Ahhh...selection, balance, coherence, and design. These have been some of the missing components of my practice. I might also add the lack of, or at least inconsistent sharing of my own joy and love for reading and books to my children. I really have left myself out of the

equation. I must have taught reading as if I were a robot. How will children learn to love books and be engaged if their teacher seems removed from the joy of reading?

So, what seems so simple at it's core -- teaching reading -- is really complex, and I'm finding to be a very delicate and tricky art.

Teaching reading, then begins with helping children to want the life of a reader and to envision that life for themselves. It is important for the child just learning to ride a bike to see others riding with vigor, joy, and power. "I want that for myself," the child says. In a reading workshop, children watch each other swapping books, gossiping about the characters, reading favorite passages aloud to friends, or searching for information on a hobby, and they say, "I want that for myself." (Calkins, 2001: p. 9)

Recipe for the Reading Workshop

Many reading experts agree (Boushey & Moser 2006 & 2009; Calkins 2001; Fountas & Pinnell 2001; Serravallo 2010), to a large extent, that the reading workshop is comprised of several major components:

- Read aloud with minilesson (comprehension, accuracy, fluency, vocabulary, etc.)
- Silent reading (a.k.a. independent reading)
- One-on-one conferencing and coaching
- Guided reading (small groups)
- Assessment

Considerations must also be given within the reading workshop structures to also include:

- Buddy reading
- Shared reading
- Choral reading
- Listening to reading
- Writing about reading
- Word work
- Story time

Added to that are the more delicate and subtle ideas that are wrapped around the core reading workshop structures:

- Conversations about reading (teacher and children; children and children)
- Where reading takes place
- With whom can one read
- Book diversity
- Book choice
- Teacher involvement
- Creating a rich reading environment
- Reader motivation and engagement

Focus 1 -- Silent Reading

Much of the research indicates that reading more (volume) increases reading achievement (Allington, 2001). This sounds logical and goes with the age old saying that “practice makes perfect.” Interestingly, not all schools include enough silent reading or even include it at all in their school day. As a new-ish teacher, silent reading has felt a bit dubious, unnatural. I’m thinking, “I’m not teaching those children who are silent reading. I wonder if they are really reading? I also wonder if they are reading a “just right” book (a book at their appropriate reading level). I wonder how much they are on task and stay on task.” It makes it all the more dubious because I’m trying to teach small groups of children in guided reading. So, while I have up to six children reading in front of me, there are twenty “out there” supposedly reading to themselves. Can they be left to their own devices? It’s an unsettling feeling on many levels.

As I become more experienced and my practice matures, I am finding that the research is so compelling around silent reading that I am energized and insistent that all children are reading for twenty plus minutes daily the first half of second grade, to increase to thirty minutes daily the latter half of the year. It’s up to me to create and model a reading environment that encourages and motivates children to treat that time as if it were gold.

Differences in the Volume of Out-of-School Reading in Fifth Grade

Reading Achievement Percentile	Number of Words Read
20th	155,000
50th	883,000
70th	1,719,000

(Hiebert & Reutzel 2010)

When you think of reading as an adult, we read silently. However, if we don’t give our children in the classroom the opportunity to practice that skill, how will they develop it? Being read to all the time and/or reading out loud is not what happens in the “real world.” If teachers don’t model and teach children how to read silently then they are not preparing them for how most reading is truly done in the “real world.” Teachers will be doing their children a very big injustice.

In my education and on the job as an educator, silent reading seldom comes up. Yes, for those of us that use reading workshop in our classrooms, it’s included, but not really talked about as the “gold” that it truly is. Not really talked about in terms of how to get children motivated, engaged to enjoy the silent reading time. Because many children’s intrinsic motivations for reading are low, silent reading especially needs more emphasis. It’s easy to put silent reading in a teacher’s reading workshop schedule, but it’s far more difficult to ensure that the “gold is being mined” by those children readers.

There’s not a panacea for getting children to read independently. Research shows that extrinsic reasons like grades, rewards or competition do not result in any long term result in increased

reading comprehension. For increased reading achievement, intrinsic motivation to read comes when reading is done for its own sake.

Now, I'm really feeling even more unsettled, uncomfortable, and concerned about how to influence a child's personal and internal desire read when reading is competing against some pretty powerful pulls like television, movies, video games, sports, toys, cell phones, the internet, and friends.

Focus 2 -- Guided Reading & Conferencing

While teaching reading, I often become that stereotypical teacher: lecturing whole class lessons, standing in front of the class, spouting off various reading strategies. These lessons in the past have lasted 20 minutes, 30 minutes, and embarrassingly even up to 45 minutes. I teach 2nd grade, not middle school! My minilessons should probably be 10 minutes, certainly no more than 15 minutes.

I've learned that there are times to be that stereotypical teacher lecturing to the whole class, albeit not for 30 or 45 minutes. However, I'm now striving to more frequently be a *mentor* to children as I help them navigate the mysteries of reading and books.

A *mentor*, according to dictionary.com is a wise and trusted counselor or teacher; a synonym for *mentor* is "guide." That certainly doesn't sound like the stereotypical teacher does it? Re-envisioning and re-shaping myself into a guide or a wise and trusted counselor is an interesting and exciting proposition and one that sounds like the better way to help children become more engaged and independent readers.

Guided reading and conferencing are two of the strategies to become a mentor and guide to young readers.

It can be daunting to create a classroom where all readers build relationships with characters, encounter new experiences and emotions, and have conversations with books and other readers, but I know it is possible. Taking five minutes at least once a week to sit with every young reader offers you the opportunity to accomplish the lofty goals of fostering lifelong readers. (Serravallo & Goldberg 2007: page 6)

What's truly enlightening is that conferencing isn't just teaching one-on-one or in small groups the art of phonics, decoding, vocabulary, fluency, or comprehension strategies, as many of the reading experts had me believing (Boushey & Moser, 2006; Calkins, 2001; Fountas & Pinnell, 2001), but it can also be how to choose "just right" books, exploring interests, reinforcing student strengths, giving compliments, setting goals for purposeful reading, mentoring readers into developing a reading identity, and how to self-monitor and fix up disengagement (Serravallo, 2010).

Who knew that small group work and one-on-one conferences could be used to actually teach children how to be engaged readers...not just how to read the words and infer meaning, but encourage true engagement? This makes so much sense to me! Why have I never been taught how to teach this way? Again, there needs to be a lot of watching, listening, learning about my students so I can successfully apply the art of teaching reading. This new knowledge gives me much more freedom and flexibility.

Focus 3 -- Engagement

Is this the icing on the cake...or the cake itself?

While most children will learn how to read, the question is will they read? It appears that most Americans are literate, but they are choosing to read less and less. A new term is developing to describe this trend: "alliterate." Additionally, it's been well documented for years about the "summer slide," where children drop up to two reading levels while out of school during the summer because they are not reading while not in school (Serravallo, 2010).

As a mentor and teacher, I feel it is my role to help children learn how to create that "lost-in-a-book" feeling that makes reading so pleasurable. Like so many other aspects of literacy, this has been studied and researched quite a bit. How to do this has been a challenge for me. I always feel so pressured to get the lesson content in, often leaving no time to ice the cake.

One study (Gambrell, 1996) found that if a motivational reading program was offered to a classroom and parents, it did "promote engagement in reading in the classroom and in the home." In classrooms that did not offer such a program, researchers noticed that these classrooms often did not offer as many books in their libraries, they didn't have reading corners with rocking chairs and pillows, they had few visual displays relating to the celebration of reading, and that less time was offered for silent reading. It was also observed that there were less verbal interactions about books and reading that occurred between teacher and student as well as between students and their peers.

It's also been noted that teachers have to serve as explicit reading models for our students, to let them engage with us as real readers and just not as reading teachers. They need to see, hear, and feel our love for reading and books. They need to know about the things we read: newspapers, magazines, comics, professional texts, cookbooks, internet sites, as well as other fiction and nonfiction books.

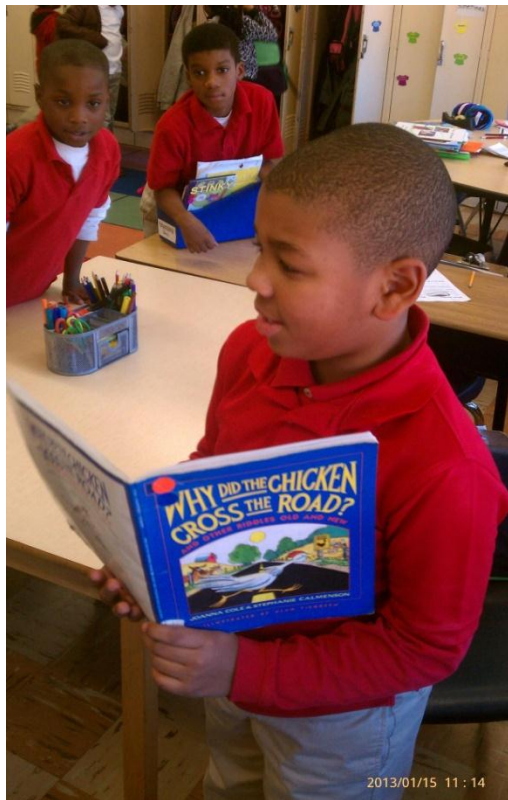
We must foster curiosity in our students, which is a driving force behind motivation. We have to present them varieties of books that will make them curious enough to crack them open. Teachers need to find every option available to them to supply their classroom with books, books, and more books.

Supporting children in their literacy learning is not an exact science, nor is it a simple matter. We can, however, make a real difference in the literacy lives of young children when we serve as reading models and motivators and create classroom cultures that are book-rich, provide opportunities for

choice, encourage social interactions about books, build on the familiar, and reflect the view that books are the best reward. (Gambrell, 1996: p. 23)

Whether engagement is the cake or the icing, it is an essential ingredient to the recipe of everything we do to promote reading in the classroom. It's unfortunate that teachers are not typically taught how to motivate or required to show how we will motivate children to read in our lesson plans and curriculum maps. I know from my own experience as a teacher, that I have to be intentional about remembering to include the motivational aspects of reading in my classroom each day, each week, and all school year long.

Implementation:



"One of my favorite ways to read is "Jokes & Riddles" because I would always like a good, quick riddle and I love telling my friends riddles. Sometimes they like them, sometimes they don't. But that's ok with me." Lawrence, 2nd grade Legacy scholar

In August of 2012, at the start of the school year, I started introducing and reviewing the nine core components of the Reading Workshop:

Core Components of Reading Workshop

(also includes a Reading minilesson)

Read To Self	Guided Reading	Centers: Buddy Reading	Centers: Listen To Reading on Computers
Centers: Library Center (exchange books)	Centers: Word Work	Centers: Writing About My Reading	Story Time

These are standard Reading Workshop components suggested by educators like Fountas and Pinnell as well as Lucy Calkins. It was from these core components that my research question emanated.

Research Question:

What happens to my second grade readers when I enrich my reading workshop?

Sub-questions:

- What happens to their attitudes toward books and reading?
- What happens to their performance on reading assessments?
- What happens in my classroom if I include some e-readers (i.e., Kindles)?

As I began my research and learned more about different ways in which to possibly “enrich” my classroom around reading and books, I began to add on to the core 9 Reading Workshop components.

From about the end of September through the end of January, I flooded my classroom with, what I call, the “enrichment pieces” or “enrichment ingredients” These ended up being 11 pieces that supported the 9 core reading workshop components. By flooding the classroom with these, the hope was that these pieces would really help engage children, truly getting them excited about reading and books - and *keep* them interested and engaged.

Enrichment Pieces of Reading Workshop

Big Bag o' Birthday Books	Kindles	Tribune Sports Section Raffle	Readers Theater
Carpet Reading	Big Books	Monarch Book Review	Tribune Comic Section
Reading Partner	Lawrence's Jokes	Sharing My Reading	

Big Bag o' Birthday Books - Around 60 books that our school donated to teachers. I stored them in a big canvas bag. Children in our classroom choose one on their birthday. I write a personal inscription to them and present them that book as their birthday present.

Carpet Reading - During Read To Self time, a pair of reading partners get to stretch out with pillows and read independently on the rug. This special reading spot rotates daily among the children.

Reading Partner - Children are assigned a reading partner that is on or close to their reading level and are usually the same gender. These partnerships sit in assigned areas, usually back-to-back to discourage talking. These partnerships often change on a quarterly basis.

Kindles - Purchased with a CFE Small Grant, these e-readers are available to one pair of reading partners during Read To Self time. Readers can read the hundreds of free books I have procured rather than the books in their book boxes. This special reading enhancement rotates daily, as well.

Big Books - These are various beautiful and oversized books covering dinosaurs, insects, animals, atlases, and picture dictionaries which are made available for reading and viewing to one pair of reading partners during Read To Self. This special reading enhancement rotates daily, as well.

Lawrence's Jokes & Riddles - A student created reading enhancement, whereby Lawrence and others who have the desire, read a joke or two a few days each week. Sometimes this occurs right after Read To Self, other times right after lunch or before dismissal.

Chicago Tribune Sports Section Raffle - I bring in my paper daily. During morning meeting, I conduct a random raffle of that day's sports section. Children get to take it home with them.

Monarch Book Reviews - Our school, upon my suggestion, participated in the Illinois Monarch Book Award program. Scholars got to hear read alouds of the 20 nominated books of the Illinois Media Library Association. Upon completion of hearing each book they got to rate the book and occasionally wrote a book review. These books were mostly read during our Story Time, which

follows recess. Some of the reviews were placed on a special Monarch Book Award bulletin board.

Sharing My Reading - Reading Partners, at the end of Read To Self, occasionally have the opportunity to read a page from the book they were reading and/or discuss various aspects of their books, i.e., their favorite, funny, or sad parts.

Readers Theater - at the end of each quarter, children are assigned different Readers Theater plays along with their special part. They learn new vocabulary, genres, increase comprehension and fluency skills. At the end of the week they perform for each other and/or the other second grade classroom.

Chicago Tribune Comic Section - Every Monday morning I add another issue of the Sunday Trib comic section to our classroom library. I usually raffle off the new issue to get it immediately into the hands of my young readers.

Miscellaneous Literacy-related Events/Activities

There were other literacy-related things I did to continue to flood my classroom:

- Purchased from the non-profit, Open Books, from their warehouse sale around 70 books for \$20.
- Wrote and received a CFE Small Grant to supplement our classroom and lending libraries with about 50 non-fiction books.
- Occasionally, during morning meeting, would excitedly ask them where they read the night before ("under the covers with a flashlight?") and/or what they read and why they liked it.
- We had a week of lessons on genres. When all the books from the CFE grant, Open Books, as well as other donated books arrived, we ended the week with a Genre Sticker Party. We drank juice, ate crackers while putting stickers on the books to identify their correct genre for our libraries.
- I cut my reading minilessons in half; now about 10-15 minutes.
- I added a timer to to my room to ensure I stay on schedule with all of our activities.
- I give more consistent Guided Reading lessons; meeting with each group about 2 times per week.
- I created a bulletin board outside our classroom with photos of teachers and children reading in their favorite reading spots. Families got involved and emailed and texted me the photos.
- Children shared books from their personal library as well as those borrowed from the public library with the class at morning meeting.
- Celebrating a child when they got their first public library card during morning meeting.

Bit by bit, step by step I just kept adding things into the classroom, be they ideas I learned from other educators, student-generated, or my own. I had to be intentional, planful, yet remain flexible and open to the possibilities to ensure the ideas of literacy flowed into the classroom on a frequent and regular basis. I found that each time I added something it created an energy and

a “buzz” in the classroom. Most everything that was added resonated with someone in the class.

Data Collection Methods:

1. Surveys
 - a. *Elementary Reading Attitude Survey* - This is a well vetted and long-used survey developed by researchers in the late 1980s. The survey has 20 questions. 10 of the questions deal with reading at home (recreational). The remaining 10 questions deal with reading at school (academic). It uses a 1 - 4 point scale using the comic strip Garfield character asking questions such as “How do you feel about getting a book for a present?” and “How do you feel when it’s time for reading in class?” I administered this survey to all my students in mid-November and re-administered it again in late May to see how attitudes toward reading had changed.
 - b. *Different Ways We Read Survey* - This is a survey I created which includes the 20 different ways we read in our classroom such as, Read to Self, Story Time, Kindles, Big Bag o’ Birthday Books, etc. Each “reading way” is rated on a 1 - 4 point scale. This survey includes a follow-up that asks students to pick three of their top choices and tell the reason they like this way of reading. I administered this survey in early February. I really wanted to know what students thought about these literacy-based “activities.”
 - c. *Books & Reading Survey* - This survey is a six question survey essentially determining if we had enough books and identifying the types of books students like to read. It also queries them on things like what they’d like to do more/less of during our reading time. This survey was administered in mid-February. Like the above survey, I’m very interested to hear what my students have to say about these types of things so that we have the right books and spend our time engaging in relevant literacy activities.
2. Teacher Research Journal - I used my journal to reflect on the day and the week about what is happening in my classroom. This goes beyond the reading workshop and continues throughout the day, as I try to make reading and books an integral part of our classroom community.
3. *STEP (Strategic Teaching and Evaluation of Progress)* is a comprehensive literacy assessment developed by the University of Chicago that uses authentic literature and is administered one-on-one, once per quarter. While a student reads, I assess their rate, fluency, and errors. After reading, I assess them on their comprehension, asking questions that include factual, inferential and critical thinking. There is also a developmental spelling component to the test that is usually administered in small groups. STEP levels correlate to Fountas and Pinnell levels. STEP is a mandatory assessment that our school uses for pre-K through 5th grade.

Analysis & Interpretation of Data:



“One of my favorite ways to read is Readers Theater because you can perform at school. You can watch the person perform too.”

DeDe, 2nd grade Legacy scholar

After I implemented quite a few literacy-based initiatives over the course of several months, I then administered the *Different Ways We Read Survey* in early February. This survey asked each student to rate each “way we read” (both the core components and the enrichment ingredients) using a 1 to 4 scale. This scale is one they are very familiar with. We often grade many of their projects and tests using this same scale. The survey included the following key:

- 1 = I don't like it.
- 2 = It's okay.
- 3 = It's good.
- 4 = It's excellent!

The chart below shows both the enrichment and core sorted by the most popular “ways we read” to the least popular. Interestingly, four of the top five are enrichment ingredients, while only two of the bottom five are enrichment ingredients.

Class Averages from *Different Ways We Read Survey* (n=24)

(From most popular to least popular. Purple = Enrichment / Yellow = Core)

3.92 Big Bag o' Birthday Books
3.84 Kindles
3.71 Tribune Sports Section Raffle
3.63 Story Time
3.46 Readers Theater
3.21 Carpet Reading
3.13 Big Books
3.13 Centers: Listing to Reading on Computers
3.08 Centers: Library (exchange books)
3.04 Guided Reading
3.04 Centers: Buddy Reading
3.04 Monarch Book Reivews
2.78 Tribune Comic Section Raffle
2.75 Reading Partners
2.71 Centers: Word Work
2.63 Read To Self
2.38 Lawrence's Jokes & Riddles
2.17 Centers: Writing About My Reading
2.00 Sharing My Reading

Enrichment Components Average 3.11

Core Components Average 2.93

With the core averaging below the enrichment, this chart is a clear illustration that leads me to believe that if I had only provided children with the core, their levels of interest may have even scored lower, possibly spiraling into a very uninterested and disconnected classroom of readers; replicating the experiences of my first four years of teaching reading. Flooding the classroom with a variety of reading components is absolutely necessary for engagement. You need nearly

as many different literacy-based components as you have children in your classroom -- to ensure you hook each child at different times of the school year.

From the Mouths of Babes

I knew that something had changed in my classroom compared to my previous four years of teaching reading in second grade.

- I could feel it: higher levels of energy around reading and books.
- I could see it: less distracted readers during Read To Self; more students wanting to read and/or have books with them.
- I could hear it: more conversations around books; more children bringing in books from home and the public library; wanting to share those books with the class.

I learned much later in my research that simply looking at the class averages were not good enough. Yes, all seemed well with reading in Room 221. But I needed to zoom in on a few specific children of different reading levels, levels of growth, and genders to see how they were feeling about the flood!

Here is a short profile of each of the children I selected to take a deeper dive into the data as of the end of the third quarter.

Cassidy (female)- middle of first grade reader (STEP 5); three levels or one full year behind. She has made no growth after three quarters of intensive reading interventions. She is failing in most other subjects. Cassidy is a very precocious 7 year old who is quite social. She is messy and unorganized. She often speaks before she thinks. She receives many redirects and reminders throughout the day about her talking and other poor choices. She is a talker and is not shy to speak with anyone and even challenges them with questions immediately. She will talk with me anytime, any place, regardless of recent reprimands or not. Cassidy is all about fun!

DeDe (female) - end of first grade/beginning of second grade reader (STEP 6). She had only made one level of growth by Q3, after being in intensive reading interventions in first grade and Q1 of second grade. She does well in all other subjects. DeDe is a 7 year old who has lots of friends, but is very quiet around me, exhibiting little or no emotion and acts as if she does not like me in the least. I get mostly indignant stares; she appears nonplussed. During her STEP reading tests, she either will not answer the comprehension questions and/or she takes a really, really long time to answer even the most basic factual questions. I've had to actually call her mom during a test to try to get her to answer questions. I've also offered her different times and days to take the test when she is feeling most comfortable, as well as taking it with other teachers with whom she perhaps has a better relationship. Despite all of this we all get mostly similar results.

Lawrence (male) - middle of second grade reader (STEP 8), right on grade level. He had intensive reading interventions in first grade and the first quarter of second grade. While he tested out of the intervention, he continued to struggle with his fluency. However, his quarter 3

STEP results indicated an improved rate and accuracy compared with quarters 1 and 2. Lawrence is a deep thinker and really understands what he reads. He is very thoughtful when answering comprehension questions. He always goes beyond the literal. Lawrence is our premier joke and riddle teller. Is it possible his getting up in front of the class telling jokes impacted his fluency? Lawrence is slow to start and complete work; it is a constant struggle to get him to engage. He has improved slightly. Lawrence has a very supportive family.

Levi (male) - middle of third grade reader (STEP 11), two levels ahead of the benchmark. Levi is one of my top students. He has been on the Dean's List (highest academic award) all year. The first semester he frequently brought in books from his own library as well as the public library. His attitude toward all of his academics including reading was positive. However things changed second semester. Levi changed his attitude and became outwardly negative to some of our read alouds as well his own reading. He was openly and loudly opinionated about not learning anything from some of our non-fiction selections and wrote this on one of his surveys, "I don't like reading because it's not fun." I spoke with his mom about this and she was skeptical about this apparent "act". Now that the fourth quarter is well underway and after a report card conference discussing his attitude more fully, that negative attitude seems to have shifted to a more positive one once again.

Survey Results and Analysis - The Different Ways We Read Survey

The spreadsheet below shows how each of the above four students rated each component of "The Ways We Read" survey.

As a group, I noticed that all four rated Reading Partners and Sharing My Reading low. Interestingly, as their teacher, I feel Reading Partners (sitting mostly back-to-back), is a way to get more focused readers. Perhaps they do not like it because they cannot talk with each other as much? Or do they not like their Reading Partner? All four rated the Sports Section Raffle and Big Bag 'O Birthday Books high. This does not surprise me based on the general enthusiasm I experience in the room when these are used in class. The remaining 15 components are all over the board. This proves my earlier statement that you really do need as many literacy-based initiatives as you have children in your classroom. Not surprisingly, every child has different tastes and even those come and go as they get bored or develop a new appetite for something they didn't like to start with.

As I started to look at each student's responses individually the one that immediately caught my attention was **Cassidy's**. She either loves the component (4 ratings) or hates the component (1 rating). There is nothing in between. This goes right along with her personality. She likes about as many of the overall components as she dislikes. Interestingly, she likes half of the core and just under half of the enrichment. Again, what I learn from this is that if I had only implemented the core, I would predict that **Cassidy** would not stay interested in only those components. Those components alone would likely not have sustained her interest in reading through February.

DeDe appears to have thoughtfully rated each component, as she used all four rating possibilities. What’s interesting to me is that she rates Read To Self a 2, but Carpet Reading, (which is essentially Read To Self, but laying down with pillows) a 4. So, it’s good to know that when she is on the carpet reading she feels more contentment. Based on how she barely gives me the time of day, her rating of Guided Reading (3) surprised me in a good way. Because she is so difficult to size up, it’s good to know that she doesn’t HATE reading with me! Another surprise, because I view DeDe as such a “girly-girl”, is her high rating of the Sports Section Raffle. Similar to Chesley, DeDe has also rated about as many of the overall components low as she did high. She rates half of the core high; and nearly the same results for the enrichment.

Lawrence, on the other hand, only rated two components low: Reading Partners and Sharing My Reading. All other components, including Read To Self, he rated 3 or 4. What I have learned from Lawrence’s survey is that children who appear slow to get started and slow to complete their work are not necessarily bored, disengaged or negative about their work. My wondering...is his apparent joy around reading fueling his improvements and steady climb to remain at grade level and even improve his fluency?

Levi can be a little stinker! During the time of this survey Levi was in the midst of his evil attitude: most everything we did, most everything we read was terrible according to him. His attitude showed up in the results of his survey with thirteen 1 ratings; one 2 rating; one 3 rating; and three 4 ratings. It just occurred to me as I continued pondering this change of attitude...ah, I think I may have an insight. At the end of the first quarter Levi jumped two STEP levels (1 level is expected). At the end of the second quarter Levi did not advance at all, but was still above the benchmark. Was he so disappointed in himself and/or frustrated with me, that all of a sudden he “hated” books and reading? I’m sure that had something to do with it. Why was I so dense and slow to realize how sensitive, yet competitive he is and how these two personality traits would fuel his negative attitude because of zero growth in quarter 2. Now I feel bad. I could have talked with him more about it and possibly guided him through it faster and without the evil attitude. At the end of the third quarter he again jumped two STEP levels and his attitude was back on track...coincidence? Doubtful. Lesson learned...watch engagement and attitudes when a student does not advance a level, especially when they are so competitive and sensitive.

FIRST NAME	Q2 STEP	Read To Self	Reading Partner	Sharing My Reading	Carpet Reading	Big Books	Guided Reading	Buddy Reading	Listen to Reading	Library Center	Word Work	Writing About My Reading	Story Time	Sports Section	Big Bag B'day Books	Reader Theatre	Comic Section	Kindles	Jokes	Monarc Book Review
Cassidy	5	4	1	1	1	4	4	1	1	1	4	1	4	4	4	1	1		1	4
DeDe	6	2	1	1	4	1	3	2	4	2	4	1	4	4	3	4	2	4	1	3
Lawrence	7	3	1	2	4	4	4	3	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	4	4		4	3
Levi	9	1	1	1	1	4	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	4	4	3	1		1	1

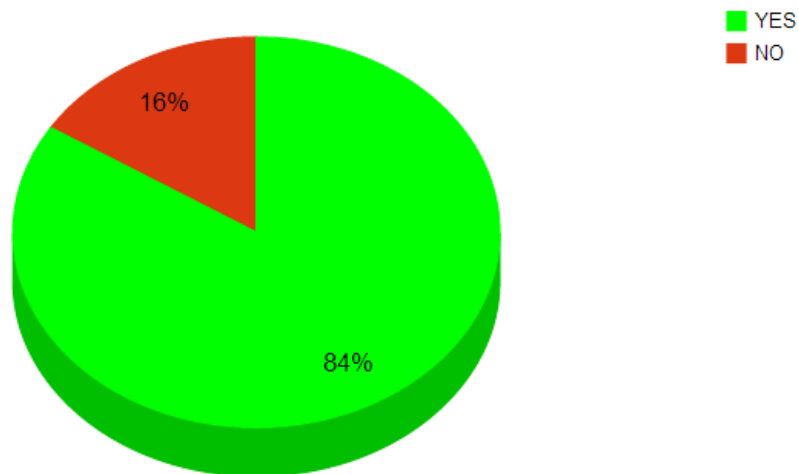
(Note: Cassidy, Lawrence, and Levi had not interacted with the Kindles when this survey was conducted, hence no answer.)

Survey Results and Analysis - Books & Reading Survey

I wanted to know a little bit more about what children in our classroom were thinking with regards to the amount and type of books they had access to in our classroom. This is especially critical feedback because our school does not have a school library or media center. Therefore, my students are solely dependent upon what books I have in our classroom. We have two libraries: a classroom library and a lending library. The latter is levelled and is filled with books that students can take home each night as long as they return them. The classroom library has books organized into genres like: fairy tales, realistic fiction, African American fiction, graphic novels/comics, biographies, science, animals, etc.

The first question I asked students was, “*Are there enough books to read in our classroom?*”

Enough Books In Our Classroom?

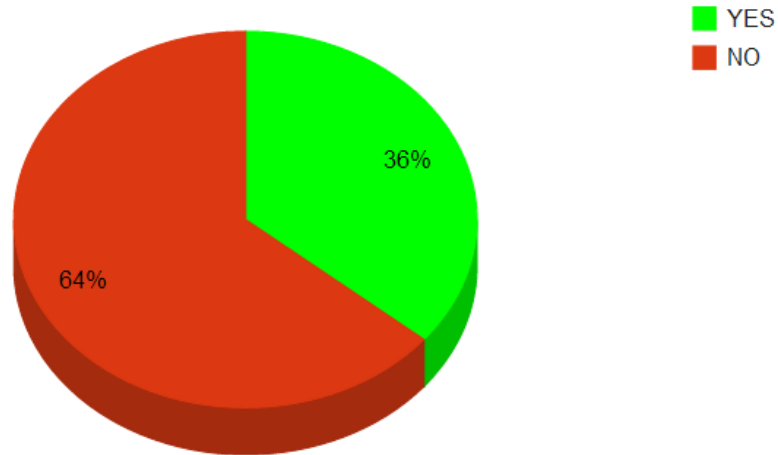


I was pleased with these results: 84% of the students saying we did have enough books and only 16% feeling that we did not. I have been working hard to include more books in both the lending and classroom libraries. This shows that these 25 children feel they have a lot of books surrounding them and available to read.

When I look at my four “case study” students, **Levi** and **DeDe** were two of the four students who said that we did not have enough books. Why doesn’t this surprise me? This survey was given around the same time as “The Ways We Read” survey, in February, when **Levi** was in his “unhappy” state and **DeDe** was in her usual, indifferent state.

The second question I asked was, “Can you find enough books that you like to read in our classroom?”

Enough Books You Like?



My surprise was how these 7 and 8 year olds discerned the difference between having a lot of books and having a lot of books you like. Bravo! Needless to say, the results here tell me that simply having a lot of books isn't enough. Of course, students need a lot of books that they like to read and are at their “just right” level.

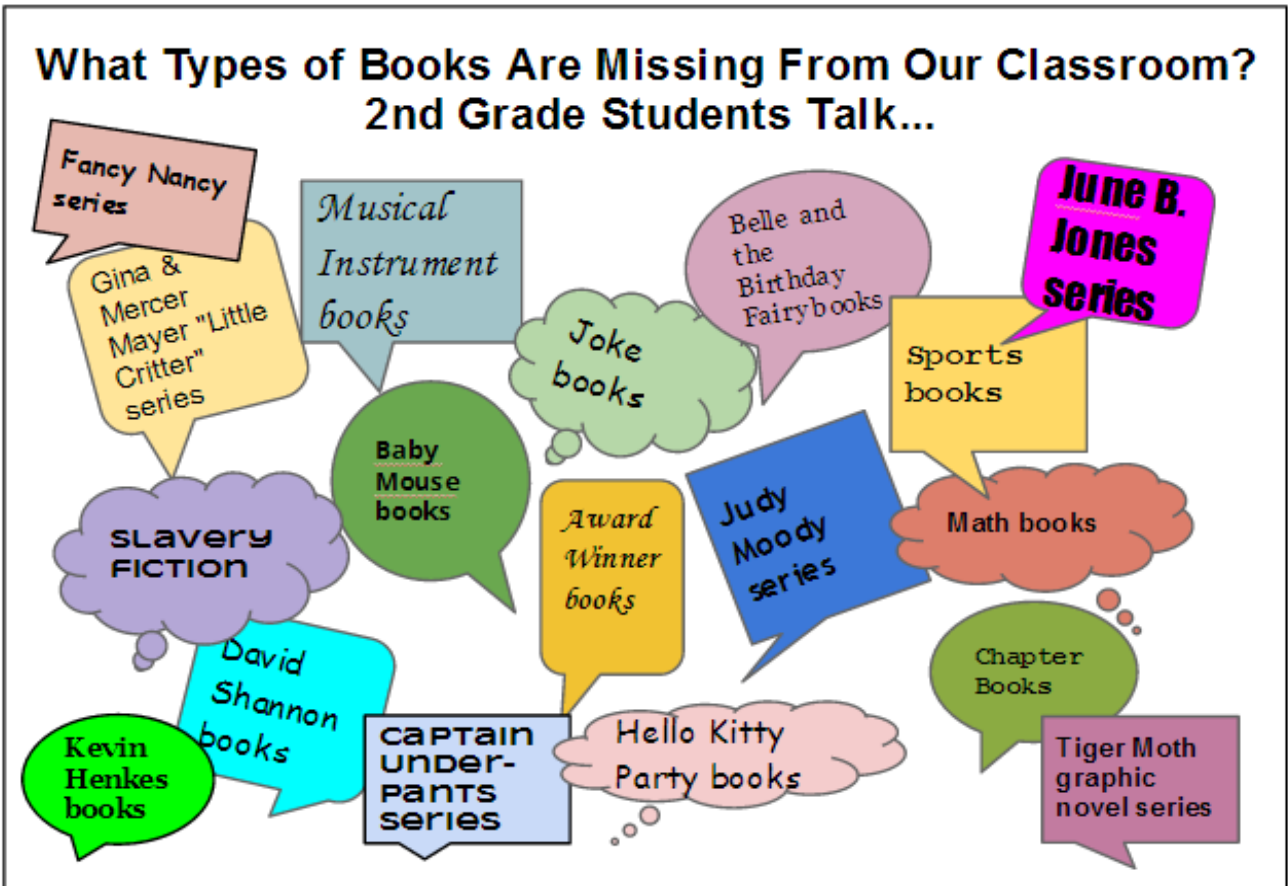
There was a mixed review with the four children who served as my case studies. It made logical sense that if **Levi** and **DeDe** didn't feel the classroom had enough books in our classroom, that there wouldn't be enough books that they liked to read, and of course that was their response. Hard to please? Perhaps. But 14 others agreed with them, including **Cassidy**. **Cassidy** felt that we are missing sportsbooks. Is she serious? She did rate the Chicago Sports Section Raffle a 4, so it's certainly possible. The number of books on sports or sports figures are greatly lacking, so she's right about that. I'm just not so sure if these books would truly be of interest to her. In any case, I hear the message: More Sports Books!

DeDe responded that she'd like more “fiction and nonfiction” but later on in the survey when asked to write down any other things you would like to say about reading and books, she says, “We need *Fancy Nancy* books and fiction.” Keep in mind our library is at least 65-70% fiction already. Perhaps just not the right fiction for **DeDe**?

Levi's response was not surprising, but it was tiresome to hear. He feels we need more *Captain Underpants* books, a series he has been reading all school year long. I guess I shouldn't be too upset at his “broken record” response, considering he let me know in this survey, “I don't like reading because it's not fun.” Regardless, I've learned it's my job to get him turned on to another series!

I have to admit, I'm not very good about, “if you like this book, you might like these books...” A quick google search of: “if you like *Captain Underpants*, you'll like...” did turn up a website

called, Choice Literacy. Choice Literacy is a multimedia resource of articles, videos, and professional development guides for teachers who are literacy leaders. Sure enough, it had recommendations of other series for those loving Captain Underpants. Problem solved! But it takes time to do this and not always do you get such amazing results so quickly.



Every student had at least one suggestion of the types of books that should be added to our library. Certainly good to know. While I can't guarantee to fulfill their every request, I can do my best to enrich our library with some of their suggestions. What I learned from this survey was that these children were thoughtful about their responses and certainly had their opinions. I really never thought to ask them what types of books they liked, but why not? How are we as teachers going to enrich and engage students if we simply buy what we like and/or what we think they like?

So from this one little survey, I have gained a whole lot of valuable information that I did not know before:

- 2nd graders have opinions about reading and books.
- 2nd graders can be very specific about what books they want.
- 2nd graders are more aware of the things teachers might want them to be doing more of (i.e., writing about their reading) than teachers think.
- Teachers have to be willing to ask and listen and follow through, whenever possible.

- Based on what children are currently reading, teachers need to be able to recommend like series, like authors, and like genres to broaden students reading worlds.

Survey Results and Analysis - Elementary Reading Attitude Survey

In mid-November and then again in late May, I surveyed my students on their attitudes about books and reading. This survey was developed by two researchers back in the mid-1980's and uses the comic strip character Garfield as a way to successfully enable primary aged children to take the survey.



4-Great



3-Good



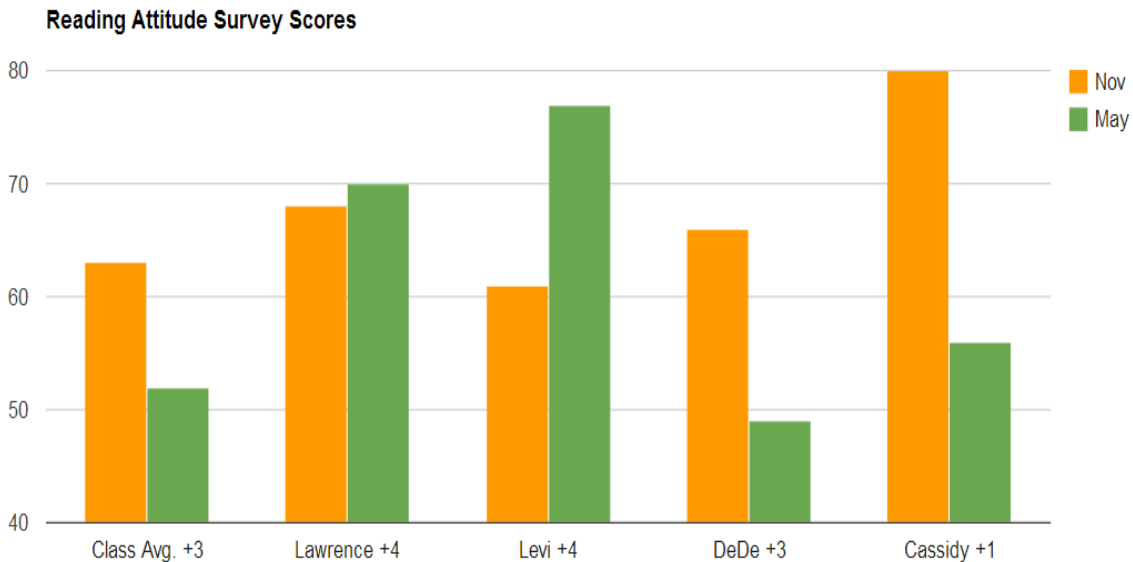
2-So So



1-Poor

This survey has 20 questions; 10 of which survey recreational attitudes and 10 of which survey academic attitudes towards books and reading

The overall classroom results were disappointing. The recreational attitudes of students dropped 6 points between November and May. The academic attitudes dropped 5 points. The chart below shows the total of both the recreational and the academic scores combined. It also shows the combined scores for each of the four case study children.



The +# refers to the levels of reading growth of the class as a whole as well as the four case study children.

Despite flooding the classroom throughout the year with enrichment ingredients and feeling good energy from the children, like no other year prior, I have to say I am a bit astonished by the drop in attitudes toward reading and books. Certainly not the results that I was hoping for. There was a drop in ratings in responses to all 20 questions ranging from a low of -0.14 to a whopping -1.48. Happily, more than half of the questions dropped less than half a point. I did not have the opportunity to interview individual children to ask why, so I can only have my own “wonderings” and hypotheses:

- I wonder with only three weeks remaining in the school year, did this have an impact on the results? Meaning, most adults and children alike at this time of the school year are “done”...we have had enough and are ready for summer vacation. Would I have received better results if I’d administered the survey six weeks earlier? How much, if any, of the survey results were skewed because of this timing?
- Children in the primary grades can dramatically change and develop over the course of one school year. In November, were my second graders developmentally more like first graders: not as developed in their abilities to answer the questions with a more critical eye? How much did they want to please their teacher at the beginning of the year compared with that same desire in late May?

There was better news when looking at individual children. Well, at least with two of the four case study children. Both the boys, **Lawrence** and **Levi**, increased their attitudes toward reading and books. **Lawrence** only minimally, but **Levi** dramatically. **Levi’s** dramatic improvement doesn’t really surprise me because of the “evil attitude” that I described him to be in when I administered the first survey. I believe the second survey results ring more true. Both boys exceed the growth goal (3 levels) by gaining an additional level each. Does this have something to do with their attitudes? Perhaps, but I don’t think this holds true for other children who also exceeded their growth goal.

Ironically, both girls decreased their attitudes toward reading and books...dramatically! **DeDe** had a 17 point drop and **Cassidy** a 24 point drop. Both girls had been struggling all year with reading. **Cassidy** was in a reading intervention all school year. **DeDe** started Q1 in an intervention, then was taken out because of growing one level, then stagnated and was placed back in an intervention Q4. On June 4, with one week of school remaining, I was informed by **Cassidy’s** mother that she was diagnosed with severe vision issues; something I had warned mom about all year long. Were all of these things contributing to their waning attitudes? Again, perhaps. But there are other children that didn’t have these issues and still their attitudes fell off as well. If I had it to do all over again, I’d do some follow-up interviews to try and figure out “the why.”

Survey Results and Analysis - STEP Test Scores

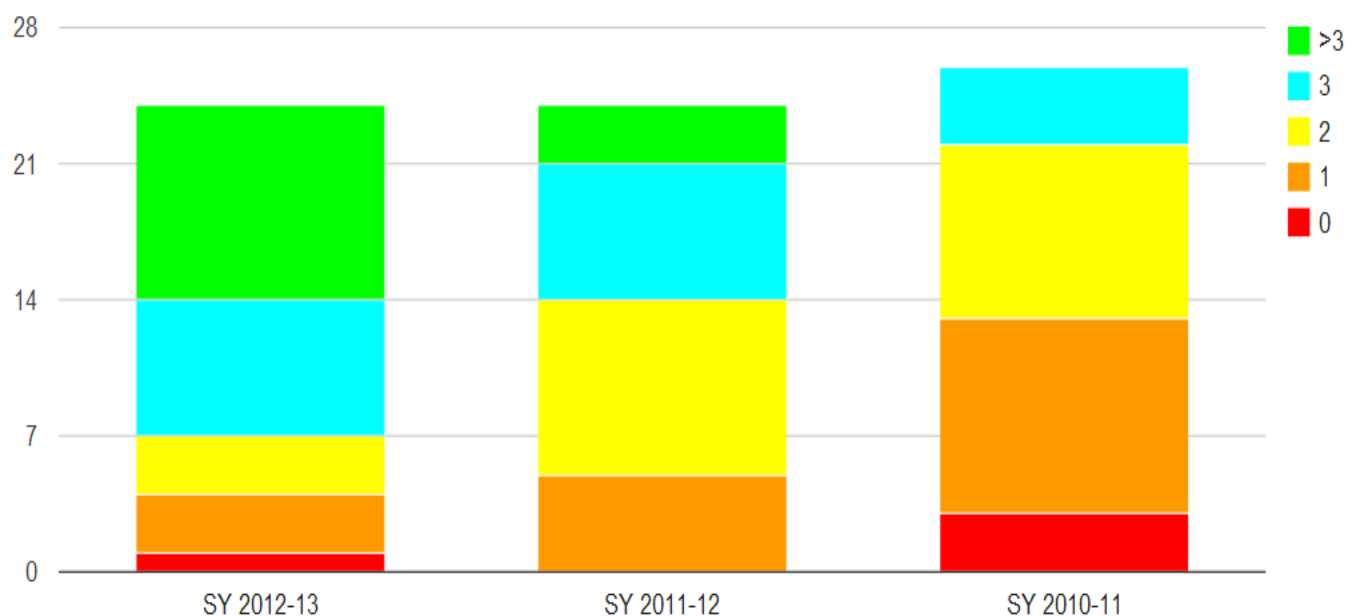
At our school the comprehensive STEP literacy assessment is the sole assessment that determines if a child advances in their reading level. This assessment tests reading rate, accuracy, fluency, developmental spelling, retelling skills and comprehension (factual, inferential, and critical thinking). Once a student reaches STEP level 9 and above, some

comprehension questions are answered in writing while some questions are answered orally. Our goal for each child is that they advance at least 3 STEP levels in one school year.

I have been teaching second grade for five years. So, interestingly, I have a lot of data to compare with this year's class. Of course one cannot say for certain that the differences in data prove any conclusions. Each year the reading levels of children are different, the personalities are different, the skill levels are different, and I am different! However, I can wonder if my attitudes and certain actions I implemented this year, like what I did with this research, did have any effect on this year's STEP results.

One way I analyzed the STEP reading scores was to look at growth levels at the end of the school year. I then compared these growth levels to two previous classes. The results were compelling. I had 71% of students this year meet or exceed the goal of growing three reading levels. Compared to last year's class, when only 42% met or exceed the goal; a 29% difference. Two years ago that number drops even further to only 15% of the class meeting or exceeding the goal; a 56% difference when compared with this year's class!

Student Reading Growth (Goal: 3 Levels)



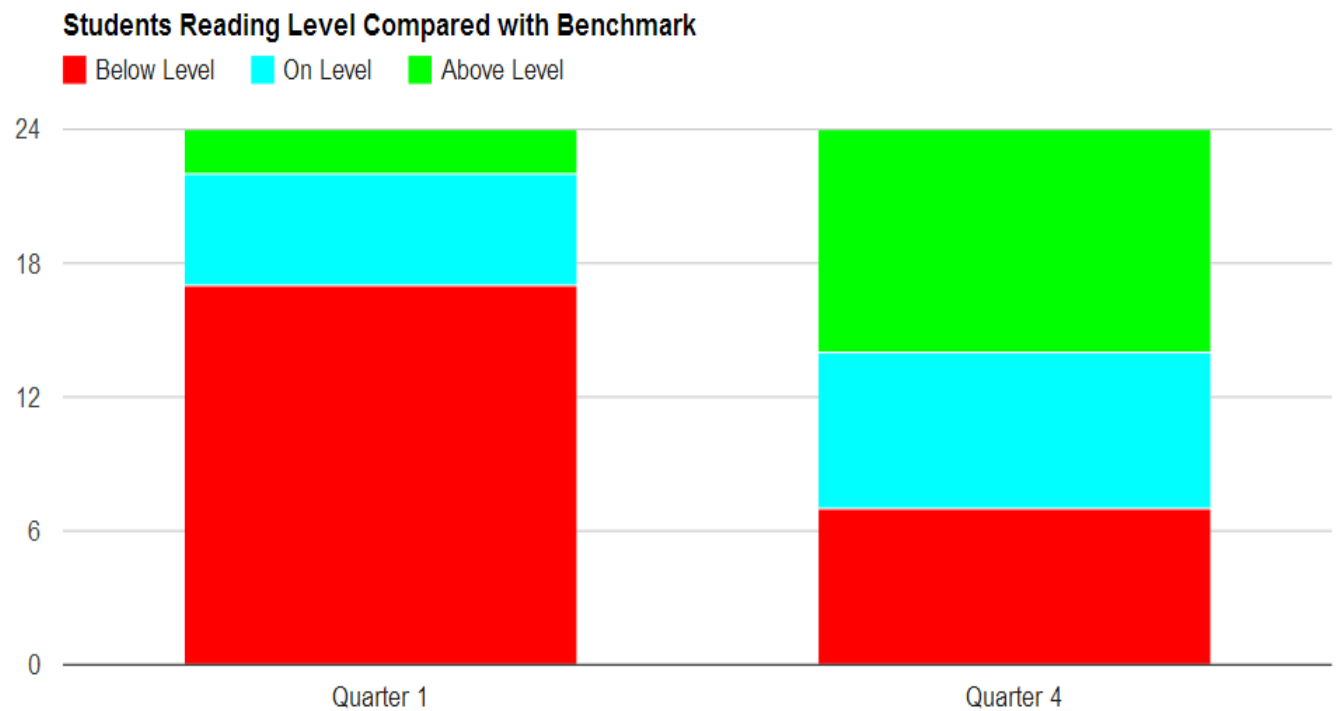
So, how did the four case study children fare?

- **Levi** grew 4 levels
- **Lawrence** grew 4 levels
- **DeDe** grew 3 levels
- **Cassidy** grew 1 level

Levi came into second grade already exceeding the benchmark level by one step, so he continued doing well, despite his episodic mid-year funk. **Lawrence** really did an amazing job as he came into second grade one level below the benchmark and ended up right on grade level.

He had struggles with reading fluency at the beginning of the year and by the end of the year overcame those challenges. Was it the frequent reading of jokes and riddles to the class? **DeDe** did meet her goal of growing three levels. Was this because in Q4 we placed her back into a reading intervention? **Cassidy** only grew one level all year. Does the revelation her recent diagnosis of some type of serious vision issues link back to these results?

Another way I analyzed the STEP data was to look at the students' reading levels compared to the benchmark (the level at which they should be reading) at the beginning of the school year and then compared to the end of the school year. Again, compelling results: 71% of students were *below* the benchmark at the beginning of second grade. That percentage flipped by the end of second grade, with 71% *meeting or exceeding* the benchmark!



The four case study children ended the year as follows:

- **Levi** - STEP level 11 (middle of 3rd grade): exceeding the benchmark by 2 levels
- **Lawrence** - STEP level 9 (end of 2nd grade): hitting the benchmark and being right on target
- **DeDe** - STEP level 8 (middle of 2nd grade): missing the benchmark by one level
- **Cassidy** - STEP level 6 (end of 1st grade): missing the benchmark by 3 levels; she's one full year behind where a typical end of year 2nd grader should be in her reading abilities.

Conclusion



“One of my favorite ways to read is “Carpet Reading” because I can get a pillow. And I can relax and read good books.”

Karyn, 2nd grade Legacy scholar

Bringing it full circle, I realize I am going to repeat part of an earlier quote from Lucy Calkins (2001), but I feel it is important to do so to underscore my final points:

“Desperate not to leave anything undone, we race our children through everything ever recommended: leveled books, phonemic awareness, cueing systems, literature circles, shared reading, author studies, writing workshop, inference and interpretation questions, running records, interactive writing ... the sheer quantity leaves us breathless.” (p. 4)

So, as teachers are left breathless, including myself; after we race our students through everything we want and need them to learn; unless we engage them, motivate them, and make them feel that their lives are not complete without books and reading, much of that energy will be in vain. I can attest to it! I’ve often felt like I sprinted a marathon and still finished way behind the rest of the pack. My past reading test scores are proof, the lack of motivation and engagement around reading and books by so many of my previous students are also proof.

At the end of each school year, I’ve reflected and wondered if only I would have done Guided Reading and Read To Self more frequently, if only I would have pulled students into my minilessons with better hooks, if only I would have selected better books to read to them, if only I created more effective anchor charts, if only, if only, if only. Reflecting on the results of my action research this past school year, I really don’t believe that doing any more of that would have resulted in what I was hoping for. Instead, what I forgot to do, and quite frankly didn’t know how to do, was to instill in children the joy and love of reading and books.

To do that I need to genuinely and frequently share with my students my own love of books and reading...to provide my students daily doses of different ways to experience the joy of reading all throughout the day, all throughout the year. All the things that Lucy Calkins talks about must be taught, but if that's all I do, then I'm afraid that I won't be fostering lifelong readers.

While all the things that I flooded my classroom with was at times daunting: securing grants for Kindles and more books for our libraries, making space for book sharing and joke telling, assigning reading spots and reading partners, creating specialty independent reading opportunities, setting up and maintaining six computers for a space to listen to reading, taking the time to survey and analyze what types of books children want, remembering to bring in and raffle the sports section every day, finding appropriate graphic novels, etc., etc. It's worth it! It's worth it because I saw the payoff of my investment. All the required stuff: minilessons, word work, reading assessments, writing about your reading became more meaningful to me and my students.

Looking back, ensuring that I had a lot of different "enrichment ingredients" was also essential because I learned I needed almost as many different ingredients as I had children in my classroom, probably more. Students get bored after awhile doing the same thing and/or their tastes change as they develop. Oh, and I learned to never assume that I know what an individual child would or would not like; children were forever surprising me!

As I created space to flood the classroom with the reading enrichment pieces, I didn't realize that some of my children were taking my cue: wanting to create their own pieces, like when Lawrence tugged on my hand and asked if he could read a riddle to the class during a very crazy and rushed part of the day. Lawrence helped me to pause and realize how much he (and the class) needed that! So, a valuable lesson was learned: give students the opportunity to help me flood *their* classroom with reading enrichment pieces.

I had lamented both my classroom and lending libraries since the first day I stepped into my classroom five years ago. I realized that if I were to be even remotely successful with helping my children to find the joy in reading and books, I'd better have a lot of books that they would get excited about. So, I finally bit the bullet and began to organize the books that were donated to me, along with buying additional new/used books using some of my classroom budget dollars and from Open Books, and writing and securing a CFE Small Grant to buy even more books. It takes a lot of work, but children have to have a lot of choice, because as they grow their interests grow, most advance in their levels, and each child is unique in what they enjoy. The books in my classroom have to connect with and to them.

Comics, graphic novels, and "big books" (coffee table-style books) are great additions to classroom libraries. I've always wanted these genres in my classroom, but I've also always been reticent to have them. Why? Because I felt that these types of books would not get my children to become better readers. Notice that I said better, not excited or engaged readers. I discovered that this was not true of my readers and that the more big books, graphic novels, and comics I had in the classroom the better. They generated a lot of joy in the classroom.

I learned that while this flooding of the classroom with all these enrichment pieces was changing my classroom -- getting myself and the children more engaged and excited about reading and books -- I now had to give them the time to engage; to read books; to think about their reading; to write about their reading; to have conversation with me and other students about their reading. I learned that, while Read To Self was a core component of the reading workshop, it was truly "gold to be mined." It became the richest part of our day that was not to be missed. If children are not able to read independently during their school day then I am losing precious opportunities with them to become better readers -- lifelong readers.

And finally, if my student reading growth levels can be, even in the slightest way, linked to what I've fostered in my classroom this year, it was worth it times ten. To have an energized, engaged, and excited classroom that hums with joy all the while students grow as readers -- there's nothing like it. Isn't that why most of us got into teaching in the first place: to inspire and motivate?

For the first time, my students and I have enjoyed both "the cake and the frosting" of reading. Now I am setting the table again for next year's second graders. I'm certain we can take this amazing recipe and make it even richer.

Policy Recommendations



"One of my favorite ways to read is Read To Self because it is quiet and you can jump into the books. I like Read To Self...it is fun."

Cassidy, 2nd grade Legacy scholar

1. Teachers must be intentional about engaging students with reading. For example, in lesson plans teachers must include an "engagement objective" similar to a learning objective.
2. Over the next 3 years, administration must provide all primary classrooms with a budget to ensure their libraries have a 50/50 ratio of fiction and nonfiction books, including graphic novels and comics. (This ratio is a Common Core directive.)
3. Provide all primary classrooms with at least 6 e-readers to be used as a center. Provide teachers with the necessary training to download free books on multiple devices and provide the support to keep the e-readers' batteries charged.

References

- Ahmed-Ullah, N.S. (2012, July 16). State test scores up in CPS — but increase is the lowest in 7 years. *Chicago Tribune*. Retrieved from <http://www.chicagotribune.com>
- Allington, R.L. (2001). *What really matters for struggling readers: Designing research-based programs*. New York, NY: Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers Inc.
- Boushey, G. & Moser, J. (2009). *The CAFE book: Engaging all students in daily literacy assessment & instruction*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers & Markham, Ontario: Pembroke Publishers.
- Boushey, G. & Moser, J. (2006). *The daily 5: Fostering literacy independence in the elementary grades*. Portland, ME; Stenhouse Publishers.
- Calkins, L.M. (2001). *The art of teaching reading*. New York, NY: Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers Inc.
- Fountas, I.C. & Pinnell, G.S (2001). *Guiding Readers and Writers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Gambrell, L.B. (1996). Creating classroom cultures that foster reading motivation. *The Reading Teacher*, 50(1), 14-25
- Hiebert, E.H., & Reutzel, D.R. (Eds.). (2010). *Revisiting silent reading: New directions for teachers and researchers*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Serravallo, J. (2010). *Teaching reading in small groups: Differentiated instruction for building strategic, independent readers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Serravallo, J. & Goldberg, G (2007). *Conferring with readers: Supporting each student's growth & independence*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Vanneman, J., Hamilton, L., Anderson, J.B., & Rahman, T. (2009, July). Achievement gaps: How black and white students in public schools perform in mathematics and reading on the national assessment of educational progress: Statistical analysis report. *U.S. Department of Education - National Center for Education Statistics - Institute of Educational Sciences*, 35.