

## Building Momentum Toward F.I.R.E.: Fostering Independent Reading Effectively

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### Abstract

*Allowing students time to read independently during the school day is an option that schools consider to improve motivation to read and reading achievement. Two main questions guided this study: Does providing time to read independently in class improve reading achievement? and Does providing time to read independently in class have an impact on a student's motivation to read? A quasi-experimental design employing quantitative and qualitative methods was used. The quantitative portion consisted of data collected from the Texas Primary Reading Inventory (Texas Education Agency, 2006), and the Motivation to Read Profile (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni, 1996). The qualitative portion consisted of second grade student interviews of six participants. Results indicated a general improvement in the reading comprehension and motivation to read of students in a second grade class that implemented structured daily independent reading with follow-up activities as well as higher student engagement and more time spent on task during independent reading.*

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Since the release of the National Reading Panel Report (NRP) in 2000, many schools have re-evaluated the practice of allowing students time to read independently during class. The NRP did not advocate that independent silent reading be eliminated but instead recommended that more research be done on the practice. The purpose of this research was to determine second grade students' motivation to read and their subsequent reading achievement. Allowing students time to read independently during the school day and providing various reading materials such as trade books in the classroom are options that

some school districts consider to improve motivation to read, and in turn, to improve reading achievement.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The problem of illiteracy in the United States has long been a concern of both politicians and educators. As early as 1647, the belief that citizens must be able to read to be productive citizens was established (Smith, 2004). Since then, it has been the goal of educators to ensure that all students are able to read. However, even toward the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was estimated that one in five adult Americans was illiterate while only 20% of literate adults read on a voluntary basis (Woiwode, 1992). A National Reading Research Center poll of United States teachers revealed that teachers are concerned with ways to motivate students to read (Koskinen, Palmer, & Codling, 1994). Teachers want to know if it is possible to help motivate students to read and, if it is, how to do so.

Why does it matter if our students are motivated to read? Research supports what common sense tells us—that those who are motivated to read do so more often, and they then become better readers (Stanovich, 1986). Children who score at the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile in reading achievement spend five times as many minutes reading per day than children who score at the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile, and they read 200 times as many minutes per day as those children in the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile (Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding, 1988). Thus, educators should strive to provide time during the class day in which students are able to read. In studies of effective elementary teachers, the volume of reading done in classrooms was the distinguishing feature of high-achieving classrooms (Pressley et al., 2000; Allington & Johnston, 2002). Students do not generally choose to read outside of school (Anderson et al., 1988), so educators must provide opportunities for them to read while in school.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were developed for this study:

1. How does structured daily independent reading of self-selected texts impact second grade students' motivation to read?
2. How does structured daily independent reading of self-selected texts impact second grade students' reading achievement?

### **Design**

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a significant difference in motivation to read and reading achievement between second grade students participating in an intervention classroom that implemented time for students to read independently out of self-selected texts with follow-up activities and second grade students in a classroom without follow-up activities. The students in the control classroom had independent reading time, but there were no follow-up reading activities. Students in both classrooms read independently for up to 30 minutes per day. The study utilized mixed methods within a quasi-experimental design.

### **Procedure**

This study utilized mixed methods. Quantitative data were collected and analyzed to determine if there was a difference in motivation to read scores and reading achievement scores between a treatment group and a control group. Qualitative data were gathered in order to gain a more in-depth understanding of the thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and perceptions of the participants in the study.

### **Quantitative Methods**

#### **Subjects**

Subjects were two groups of students enrolled in second grade in 2008-2009. The subjects were students at an elementary school in a large suburban school district. Forty-four students in two second grade classrooms were asked to participate in the study. The teacher of the intervention classroom had completed a teacher certification program in conjunction with her bachelor's degree through a university. She was in her second year of teaching. The teacher of the control classroom held a Bachelor's degree in

Business and obtained her teaching certification through an alternative certification program at an Educational Resource Center. She was in her fifth year of teaching.

### **TPRI Instrument**

The Texas Primary Reading Inventory, or TPRI, (Texas Education Agency, 2006) is a teacher-administered reading skills assessment that is given to students in kindergarten, first, and second grades (Foorman et al., 1998). The TPRI was developed in 2006 by the Texas Education Agency (TEA). The TPRI was used to assess student reading achievement.

### **Student MRP Survey Instrument**

The Motivation to Read Profile (MRP) survey (Gambrell et al., 1996) was chosen to assess student motivation to read. The MRP survey items were developed and reviewed by experienced classroom teachers and graduate students in reading. It consisted of 20 items and used a 4-point Likert response scale. The survey was a self-report instrument that assessed the participant's Self-concept as a Reader and Value of Reading. The MRP was selected because its contents were designed to be easily understood by second grade students.

## **Qualitative Methods**

Qualitative data were collected from six student participants who consented to be interviewed. The six student participants were purposefully selected by the researcher to participate in the interview. Three students were chosen out of the intervention classroom, and three students were from the control classroom.

### **Student Interviews**

The MRP conversational interview was conducted with six student participants. Conversational interviews were conducted individually with participants to provide greater depth of understanding (Burgess, 1980). This type of interview allows children to share much more information about their motivation and reading experiences than can be reflected in tightly scripted interviews (Denzin, 1970).

The semi-structured interview protocol consisted of 8 questions:

1. Did you read anything at home yesterday? What?
2. Do you have any books that you are reading at home?
3. Tell me about your favorite author.
4. What do you think you have to learn to be a better reader?
5. Do you know about any books right now that you'd like to read? Tell me about them.
6. How did you find out about these books?
7. What are some things that get you really excited about reading books?
8. Who gets you really interested and excited about reading books? Tell me more about what they do.

### **Intervention**

The researcher modeled various independent reading follow-up activities for the intervention teacher in the intervention classroom. The activities that were modeled included choosing appropriate books using the five-finger test (Morgan, Mraz, Padak & Rasinski, 2009), side-by-side conferences (Segel, 1990), discussion after reading (Bryan, Fawson, & Reutzler, 2003; Parr & Maguiness, 2005), book talks (Morgan et al., 2009), and journal writing after reading (Pilgreen, 2000). In the intervention classroom, students read independently each day from books that they chose themselves. Students read independently approximately 30 minutes per day in both classrooms.

### **Research Findings**

#### **Reading Comprehension**

Students were asked in both the pre and post assessments to answer eight reading comprehension questions after orally reading stories on the TPRI. Students who answered between zero and five questions correctly were considered to be *still developing*. Students who answered between six and eight questions correctly were considered to be *developed*. A comparison of the two classes' comprehension results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

*Frequency of Students' Comprehension Levels in Control and Intervention Groups Pre and Post*

		Control Pre (n=18)	Intervention Pre (n=16)	Control Post (n=18)	Intervention Post (n=16)
Reading Comprehension	Still developing	4	11	0	6
	Developed	14	5	18	10

*Note.* Still developing = 0 to 5 questions correct; Developed = 6 to 8 questions correct.

After the intervention, five out of 16 students in the intervention class were able to move up to the developed level in reading comprehension. Only four students out of 18 in the control classroom were able to move up to the developed level. The control class had a gain of 32% between the pre and post tests, while the intervention class had a gain of 31%.

**Motivation to Read Profile Survey Scores**

The descriptive statistics for the pre and post full survey scores are presented in Table 2. The control class had slightly higher pre scores on the full MRP survey than the intervention class. However, by the end of the intervention, the intervention class post score showed more growth than the control class. Neither within-subjects [ $F(1, 32) = .1.279, p = .266$ ] nor the between-subjects effects [ $F(1, 32) = 4.27, p = .518$ ] were statistically significant.

Table 2						
<i>Descriptive Statistics for MRP Full Survey</i>						
	Pre			Post		
Group	<i>n</i>	Mean	Standard Deviation	<i>n</i>	Mean	Standard Deviation
Control	18	63.94	10.519	18	65.44	8.046
Intervention	16	62.69	12.345	16	65.19	5.845

### **Analysis of Student Interviews**

Students were asked identical interview questions from the Motivation to Read Profile (MRP). In addition to the MRP survey questions, three students from each class were also asked follow-up and probing questions based on their individual responses. Throughout the interviews of the six students, the following themes emerged: *discussion* and *becoming a better reader*.

#### **Theme: Discussion**

Many students mentioned that they valued having discussions about books. The two main categories of discussions students indicated were *book talks* given by the teacher and talking *with peers* about books they had read or wanted to read. None of the students in the control classroom made comments in the category of *book talks* during the pre or post interviews. All students in the intervention classroom mentioned *book talks* only during the post interviews. One student in the control class and one in the intervention class mentioned *discussion with peers* in the pre interview, whereas five out of six students mentioned it in the post interview.

**Category: Book Talks.** During the post interviews, all three students in the intervention classroom said that they learned about new books to read because of book talks conducted during the intervention. Dan stated that he liked the book *Dogarella* “because you shared it with us.” Joe said that he liked having the teacher “talk about books that I can read later.” Anna said “I really wanted to read those books you shared with us because I thought they’d be fun and funny, and they’d be interesting.” Anna went on to say that she hoped her teacher would continue having book talks. “I want her to share books so I can read them. It helps to have your teacher tell you about other books.”

**Category: With Peers.** All three students in the intervention classroom also revealed that talking with peers about books was very valuable to them as readers. They said that they enjoyed sharing information with their peers about books they read and that they liked hearing about the books their peers had read. Dan said that he liked to “talk with my friends about what I read,” This is something that he had not done prior to the intervention. Anna said that talking with her peers after reading helped her find

out about new books to read because “my friends tell me about them.” Joe said that he especially liked “sharing with a partner because when I told them about books they were excited, and when they told me, I was excited too.” He continued to say that he then wanted to read their books.

**Theme: Becoming a Better Reader**

All students were asked what a person had to do in order to become a better reader. The category that emerged: *keep reading*. In the pre interview, five out of six students said that knowing words was how to become a better reader. In the post interview, four of the students again mentioned words. The one student who did not mention words instead said that knowing how to read and pronounce letters was the way to become a better reader. In the pre interview, three students said that the actual act of reading was involved in becoming a better reader. In the post interview, all of the intervention students and one of the control students said that in order to become a better reader, one must read.

**Category: Keep Reading.** Tom stated that readers needed to “read more books” in order to become better readers. Dan also said, “You have to read more books and keep on reading and reading. It makes you better.” Emma said that to be a better reader, “You have to read a lot.” Anna said, “You have to keep on reading.” Joe stated that to become better at reading, people “have to read and reread and when they make a mistake, they keep trying.”

**Conclusions**

This study was designed to determine if structured daily independent reading of self-selected texts had an impact on students’ reading comprehension and motivation to read, thereby introducing students to reading in such a way that might lead to a lifelong interest in reading. Based on the results of this study, the following conclusions were made:

1. Students enjoyed reading independently each day in self-selected texts.
2. Students valued teacher book talks.
3. Students valued talking with peers about books.
4. Students believed that reading more books and practicing reading more often helped one to become a better reader.



5. Students in a classroom with structured daily independent reading were more likely to remain engaged and on task during independent reading time than students in a class without follow-up activities.

### **Implications for Practice**

Students and teachers in this study valued structured daily independent reading. The students also valued discussing books with peers and having their teacher do book talks. Thus, teachers should be encouraged to schedule time into their daily schedules for the practice of independent reading. Teachers should also strive to work diligently to ensure that they have enough varied, interesting reading materials in their classroom.

The researcher modeled book talks, discussion with peers, and journal writing after reading for the intervention teacher and students. The intervention teacher began using these follow-up activities and improved student engagement while reading. Therefore, teachers who have had successful experiences with this practice should model these components for less experienced teachers. School administrators could provide staff development opportunities for teachers to learn more about structured independent reading. The more information that the teachers have, the more likely it is that they will implement this practice. Likewise, universities should instruct preservice teachers about the importance of independent reading. Preservice teachers should be encouraged to observe teachers implementing this practice.

Campus administrators should be trained in the importance of daily structured independent reading to improve student engagement. They should strive to be supportive of and encouraging to teachers wishing to implement this practice so that students are, in turn, able to spend more time reading. Administrators should work to ensure that teachers have access to funds to purchase interesting books for students on all reading levels. Likewise, administrators should make teacher schedules flexible enough for teachers to schedule a chunk of uninterrupted time for reading daily. Campus administrators who find value in having students read independently and do not see it as a waste of time will easily be able to support this type of instruction.

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