

# Increasing Intrinsic Motivation and Reading Comprehension in Children

An Action Research Report

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### Abstract

This action research studied the impact of strategic methods employed to help increase in intrinsic motivation of children to read while increasing comprehension ability. The study occurred in a private Montessori elementary classroom (grades 1-4). Eight students were exposed to a variety of literature genres strategically introduced and displayed and had the ability to choose literature at their leisure, participated in a book club, and completed weekly comprehension examines. Sources of data include dialogue recorded through teacher journaling, comprehension exam data, tally sheet containing data regarding book selections and also student self-evaluations. Following the implementation of the motivational techniques, participants' demonstrated a significant increase in motivation to read. In addition, the comprehension exam scores increased steadily throughout the course of the study. The motivational techniques have improved the participants' overall intrinsic motivation to read; therefore I will continue to implement these techniques into my curriculum.

As one walks into a Montessori classroom they may see children buzzing around performing various tasks to achieve their daily lesson goal. If one looks a little closer they may discover an environment rich with literature and the desire to read in each child or the stark opposite; an environment that is task oriented with little time remaining to read. In the latter environmental case the children may demonstrate little interest to read with results of low comprehension ability.

The environment observed is a small private Montessori classroom with a mixed-gender ratio and with a grade range of first through fifth grade. A total of eight students were studied. In this Montessori classroom, students lack motivation to read. They display evidence of little to no interest in reading for assignments, as a group, or for leisure. As a result their comprehension levels are low and a need for change is evident.

Students in the elementary grades have many opportunities to read on a daily basis. The interest of reading and comprehension ability can be a challenge for many students throughout the school year. The decline of motivation to read in educational environments have left educators puzzled at what can be done to make a shift towards an increase in the motivation to read for their student body (Baker & Wigfield, 1999). The purpose of this study is to determine the main motivational techniques that were successful in increasing of intrinsic motivation and reading comprehension skills in their students.

After six weeks of using motivational techniques, will an educator help increase their students' intrinsic motivation to read while increasing their comprehension skills in elementary students in a private Montessori school? This is the topic of examination for this action research.

### **Literature Review**

Many educators become increasingly concerned with the ability to meet each student's individual reading goal. Educators find that the foundation to enhancing reading skills is increasing their students' motivation to read. According to Williams, Hendrick & Tuschinski (2008), most scholars agree that increasing motivation to read in children will result in improved reading skills. Several factors can be considered when reviewing techniques for the increase of motivation. Wigfield et al. (2004) supports the increase in intrinsic motivation proves to be the most effective form of motivation. Increasing intrinsic motivation requires the educator to focus on the child's needs and interests versus external rewards for improvements (Williams, Hedrick, & Tuschinski, 2008).

Guthrie, et al. (2006) implemented the following techniques in efforts to increase intrinsic motivation:

1. Using focus goals for reading instructions- Students focus on specific goals they establish with the educator and self-review the mastery thereof.
2. Student book selection- Students select their texts and may perform with peers the text roles.
3. Student ownership of book collection increase- An increase of student's own book ownership.
4. Peer reading-Students read with peers in book clubs

After the four described techniques were implemented, comprehension ability and intrinsic motivation did increase in the student body. Classrooms were randomly assigned lengthy passages for student to review and comprehend. Comprehension examinations were

administered and results showed an increase of intrinsic motivation to read and examine material (Guthrie, et al. 2006).

Another key factor for educators to consider when attempting the increase of intrinsic motivation is to review how each student's reading interests change over the course of the school year or term (Guthrie, Hoa, Wigfield, et al. 2006). Tracking each student's interest and implementing reading material accordingly can be especially challenging for environments that contain several grade levels. Nonetheless, the data has proven to reflect what types of books the student body has interest in reviewing. The data, when used to create a literature-rich environment, has been proven to increase intrinsic motivation in the student body (Guthrie, Hoa, Wigfield, et al. 2006).

Whittingham and Huffman (2009) implemented a study on whether book clubs create student motivation to read. Their research consisted of 60 middle school students who participated in a book club one day a week. The results of the book club demonstrated that peer engagement had a positive correlation to the students' attitudes in reading. The results also indicated the student population desired to read more often, however, had limited amount of reading resource available. In this study, Whittingham and Huffman (2009) concluded that a classroom environment which contains a vast array of literature selections has increased students' intrinsic motivation to read.

Pardo (2004), supported that the student body should make choices in their reading selections and educators in turn should select themes and texts based on interests of the students. In addition to selection of material, Pardo (2004) encouraged the use of authentic literacy such as writing letters to others in the community or reading and/or reviewing

community current events. These methods, when implemented, demonstrated the increase of motivation to read in several student bodies studied.

Ivey and Broaddus (2001) conducted a student survey regarding the interest of the process of personal reading for a student body from a school group with a total of 31 participants. Results demonstrated that 55% of the participants enjoyed reading alone silently while the remaining enjoyed reading out loud or in small groups. These results support that there is an inconsistency to whether reading alone or with others provides increased intrinsic motivation to read and that the literature selection could be a casual factor to increase the motivation to read.

### **Increasing Reading Comprehension**

Once intrinsic motivation exists, reading comprehension can increase substantially (Morgan & Fuchs, 2007). Furthermore, comprehension has been proven to increase through the child's intrinsic motivation and through the teacher's greater understanding of their pupil's needs (Windstead, 2004). Guthrie, Hoa, Wigfield, et al., (2006) believe that while the children's intrinsic motivation to read increases, the need for tracking comprehension ability is a major component to maintaining the interest of the reader. This has been shown to give the educator insight on what literature materials are appropriate to make available for the students to further increase their comprehension ability.

Baker and Wingfield (1999), assert that techniques proven to track and increase reading comprehension could include reading activities revolving around an author focus and comprehensive tests to measure basic skills of each student. For more accurate tracking, each comprehension test is designed to be administered during specific times of the year (Baker & Wingfield, 1999).

Reading motivation and comprehension are two main aspect of creating successful readers. The examination each of these areas in action research will provide the educators with another perspective on how to increase their students' motivation to read and reading comprehension abilities.

### **Methodology**

The process of implementing motivational techniques and weekly book club meetings to increase elementary student's intrinsic motivation to read while increasing their comprehension skills required several methods. The time span consisted of a six-week observational and data collection process. The primary methods of research consisted of implementing motivational techniques by the teacher, student-run book club, and daily creative literature readings.

The students chosen were from a mixed age Montessori elementary class. Two participants were two first graders, three participants were second graders, and three participants were fourth graders. A preliminary comprehension and reading level exam was given to determine a baseline knowledge prior to beginning the intervention. This allowed for data collection regarding each student's comprehension level. With this information I was able to properly formulate the book club groups and also select the level of comprehension exams geared for each student. In addition to the comprehension exam, a student feedback (see Appendix A) form regarding motivation to read was completed by each student. Each child was instructed to complete the student feedback form independently during a designated time of the class day.

The first intervention was a strategic book display with an author or genre focus for each week. The literature on the creative display and supplemental materials (to increase understanding of the literature) was introduced as a group lesson. Each week had a different



genre focus: traditional literature (fables, fairy tales and traditional rhymes), fiction (animal fantasy), non-fiction (auto biography), poetry and religious (bible focus, books about Jesus).

Implementation of the student-run book clubs involved three meetings each week during the length of the study. Two book club groups were formed that consisted of students with similar reading abilities. The first set of books I selected for each group. Each subsequent book chosen was from a designate group reading section from the classroom library and was determined by a vote rule by the book club members. The group read two times a week together and once a week to discuss the material. The meetings lasted between 20-30 minutes.

The first data collection tool (see Appendix C) was a teacher observational field was established to track the motivation of each student reading. The observation form tracked what reading material was selected, the ability level of the material, the time spent on reading, and whether or not the reading selections were self-motivated.

A second data collection sources were weekly comprehension assessments. Each comprehension assessment was chosen according to the baseline knowledge of each student. This assessment was an individual assessment given during the reading cycle as a means to measure comprehension ability throughout the study. I administered the assessment during our class time. Each student completed the assessment individually and could take as long as they needed to finish. The data it provided was the students' comprehension skills of text read.

Book club dialogue was recorded in the teacher observation book. At the beginning of the study I initiated the student book club discussion with focus questions primarily on key components of the book. Some of the questions were regarding the literature components such as plot, setting, or perspectives. Other questions were about how they enjoyed the book or what they would change about the ending. In the second half of the study the students in both book

club groups developed discussion questions that they felt were important to discuss for the book club meetings. This allowed the students to fully engage in the reading process because as they read their book club literature they were able to discover the answers to their group's questions. This resulted in a much deeper discussion base for the book club students.

The study concluded with a final student self-feedback form which included the same questions as the baseline to help collect and track interest increase or decline among the student body. After six weeks of the study all of the data was collected for examination of several key components. I was able to formulate a summary on the comprehension level change for each student, the general increase in the interest in reading, and also the motivation feedback difference.

### **Analysis of Data**

Upon completion of my research I was able to fully analyze the data I cumulated throughout the duration of my study. These data sources consisted of teacher observational field studies, weekly comprehension assignments, dialogue and discussion observation records, and student feed data. This data was collected over six weeks.

The initial data tool collected consisted of a baseline study of my student body's perception of reading calculated through a self-evaluation (see Appendix B). The data collected from the student self-evaluation consisted of 20 questions that the students were asked to respond individually on a rating scale of: excited, happy, nervous or unhappy. The scores from the first self-evaluation (Figure 1) show that most students enjoy reading but are still need motivation to read. The second self-evaluation was administered after the six-week study and results shows an increase in motivation and desire to read.

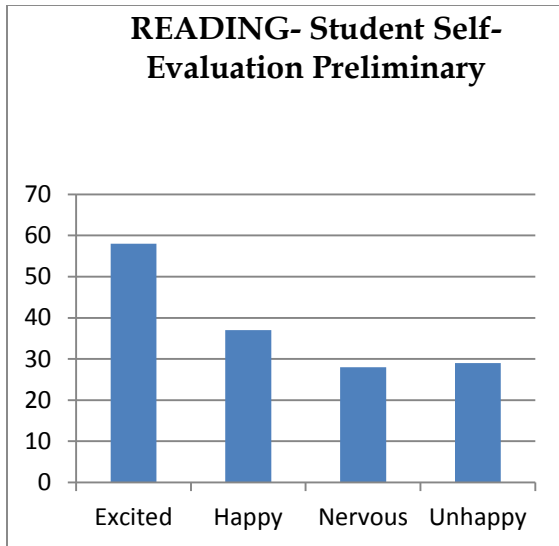


Figure 1. Self-Evaluation Prior to Study

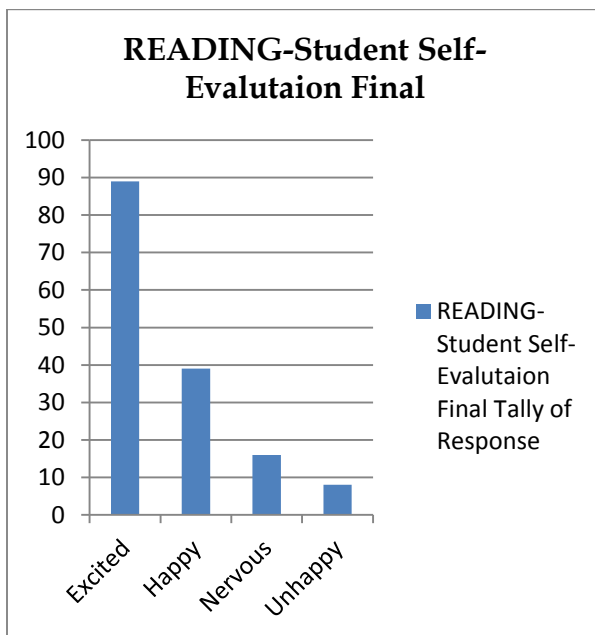


Figure 1. Self-Evaluation After Study

The second data tool was a preliminary comprehension examination to place each student at the appropriate reading examinations in the weeks to follow. The preliminary data cumulated supported that some students have the need to increase their comprehension skills. In addition, comprehension scores from Core Reading Maze and Kelly Wingate Publications examined each

student's comprehension ability. The questions were in a paragraph format where the student needs to discern which word best suits the completion of the paragraph. The final data collection indicated that majority of most students stayed at the same comprehension level or increased comprehension ability.

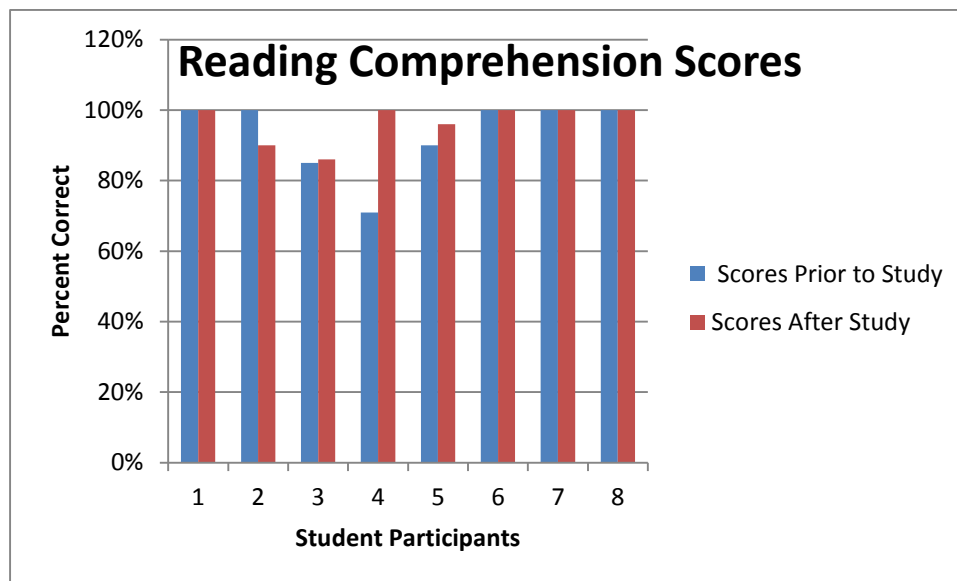


Figure 2. Reading Comprehension Scores

The next three data sets I examined were implemented simultaneously. The first set of data decoded was the teacher observation field study regarding the motivation of student reading. The tracking technique was a tally system on a Teacher Observational Tool-Reading sheet (see Appendix B). This tracking system allowed for a quick collection of data. The specifications of each tally represented one student in their reading selections. The categories are based on genre focus as well and each student's choice of reading for leisure during worktime or during recess. The quantitative data in this collection shows that the increase of motivation to read was present during several different times of the day.

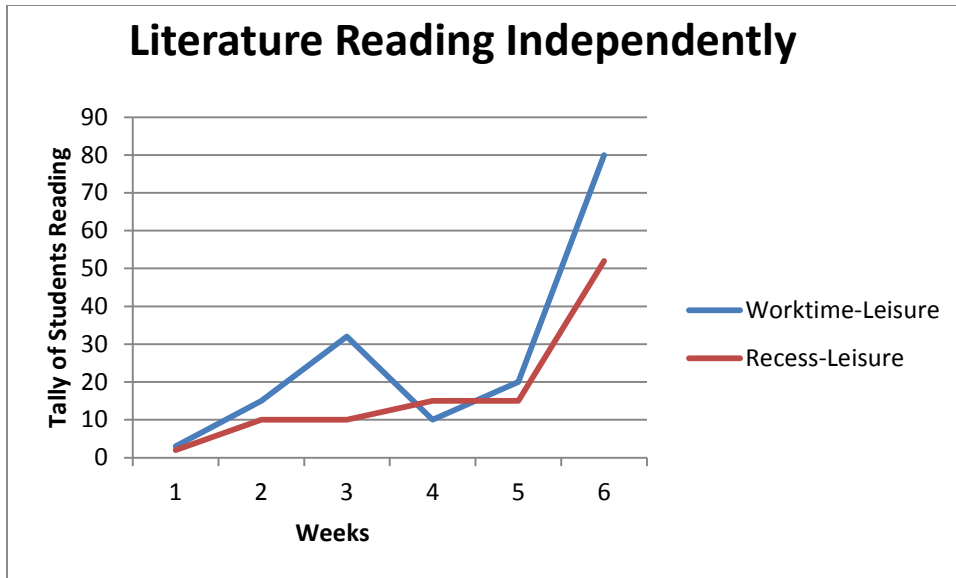


Figure 3. Student Motivation

One subsequent data examined was the dialogue discussions recorded during the student-run book club for tracking of motivational progress. The book club meetings took place in the classroom and consisted of two groups of readers. Each meeting took place for the duration of 20 minutes. The qualitative data was examined for level of motivation in the eagerness in to join the book club meeting, the dialogue and engagement of the meeting as a group, and also the excitement in choosing the next book club readings. The trends I examined were selected because they were repeated regularly throughout the data analysis. I coded the motivation intensity to formulate visible data.

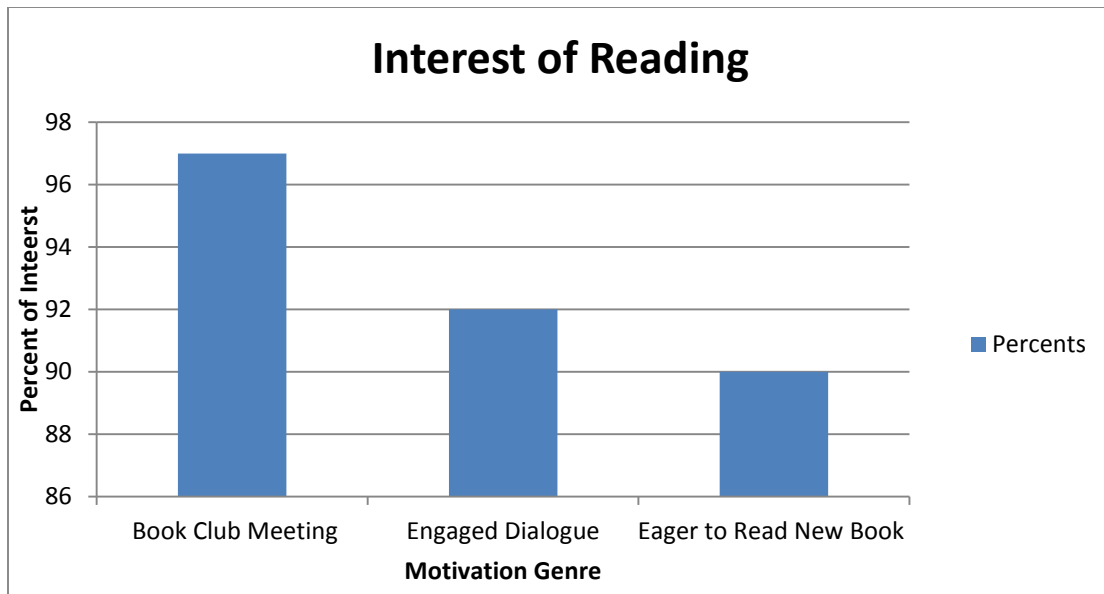


Figure 4. Motivation at the End of The Six Week Study

In addition, weekly comprehension examinations were distributed to the student body. Each student completed an individual comprehension exam to demonstrate progress throughout the duration of the study. The format of these examinations consists of a paragraph with questions about the paragraph. It required the student to critically analyze each question and provide a written response to successfully complete the report. Thus far, the exams demonstrated a general trend in growth in reading comprehension in three of the individuals where the other students maintained their mastery scores of 100 percent correct.

The final examination of data consisted of a final comprehension exam by the same format as and by the Core Reading Maze and a final student self-evaluation survey. The final comprehension exams showed a clear increase in comprehension ability (see Figure 2).

The final student final self-evaluation examination (see Appendix A) tracked a change of motivation for reading for each student. An increase of motivation to read can be noted (Figure 5).

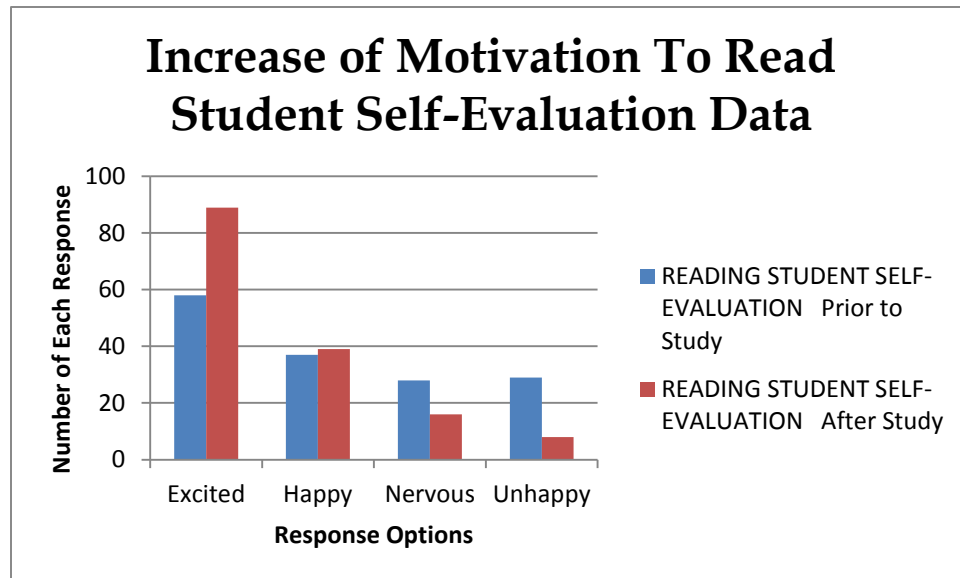


Figure 5. The Increase in Motivation to Read After Administration of the Study

In examination of the question of if after six weeks of using motivational techniques, will an educator help increase their students' intrinsic motivation to read while increasing their comprehension skill in elementary students in a private Montessori school; I have drawn the following conclusions. With the implementation of the methods described in this study and in response to the data collected, an educator can increase motivational to read while increasing comprehension skills in their students.

### **Action Plan**

My research showed increased reading motivation for the students throughout the duration of the study. This research has also indicated a slight increase in comprehension ability. The students demonstrated great enthusiasm in reading together.

To commence the study I selected from the following genres: traditional literature, fantasy (fiction) with an author focus, biography focus (non-fiction), poetry, bible literature and award-winning selections. Each new genre presented intrigued the children immensely. I

discovered that the students were drawn towards these selections for two reasons: the chosen material appealed to the group of students and the strategic display deemed an effective way to intrigue students to choose these particular materials. These results show that the children are thirsty for a literature rich environment.

One big change for the implementation of the study was the creative book display. I was able to have a parent volunteer assist in cataloging the books one week prior to the study to help better organize and create a book check-out system. I also displayed specific books that supported the genre focus for each week. One reason this display worked so well was because the children responded with amazing interest to the genre focus by frequently selecting these books during the day. I also noted that the books that were upright in individual book stands were more appealing to the students than the books that were horizontal. Previously, no display (except in certain areas of the classroom) took place in the classroom. Therefore, this change was a positive one in which the children responded to. The display consisted of four or five books strategically displayed upright for each genre presented. I rotated the books daily to intrigue the interest of the students. The final week displayed award-winning literature to help the children understand the achievements that each author was awarded after publishing their work. I found that this method drew the children to the entire library in search for more award winning literature pieces. I observed students sharing their literature pieces with other students and comparing their qualities of literature with one another.

Another part of the intervention that had a positive effect on the student reading development was the implementation of the book club. Twice weekly the children met for an organized book club meetings. This stimulated quite a stir in the desire of the students to read. I discovered children wanting to read right after lessons were accomplished for the day, when



students were waiting for morning announcements or pick up from parents, and even during recess. They were so entranced by the chosen book club material that they discussed the book even when the students were not in a book club meeting. This unorganized discussion demonstrates an increase in motivation to read. During the meeting the children displayed excitement to meet as a group and discuss the main points of the book. This was their opportunity to share their insights and perspectives from the readings. They demonstrated fully engaged correspondence focused on the book itself. They also showed great enthusiasm when as a book club group they decided on what book to read next. This supports that this research has been a positive change for the students participating in this study. Although this is not part of my data collection I want to note that I have also had great feedback from parents during conferences that their child's interest in reading is prevalent over other activities

I plan to continue incorporating these practices to increase reading motivation and comprehension. However, I believe that there are a few areas I would like to change to strengthen the effectiveness of the method. First I would extend this method throughout the entire class and possibly suggest a school-wide implementation. I would also invite students to choose some of the books club selections at the beginning of the year so that the class has ample copies of each book club book. I would like to incorporate a literature reflection journal for each student to help them track their growth and interest in reading. In addition, I would implement further feedback from parents through a parent feedback survey on their child's interest in reading at home.

These changes will allow for a deeper understanding of what the student body is in need of for the school year to come. This change will potentially increase the motivation in a wider spectrum by incorporating these methods school-wide.

The results of my research will change my practice as an educator in several aspects. First, my literature implementation will never be as it was before; rather, it is much more thought out and detailed considering the students' motivation rather than a set schedule of accomplishments. The comprehension exams have now become a permanent part of my curriculum to measure each student's comprehension ability.

Second, because the motivational techniques implemented, student-run book club and daily literature presented showed great success with the students through their response to the literature changes I will continue this yearly. I will also invite other classrooms to follow a similar pattern because of the success of this research.

This method is one that may positively impact many children in the learning process while aiding in the comprehension expansion process. The more children practice their reading skills the more their comprehension ability expands. I believe that the method I have chosen to use to increase intrinsic motivation to read while increasing comprehension has been a productive study and has been a success.

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## Appendix A

**READING Self-Evaluation**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Circle the face that matches your feedback.



Excited



Happy



Nervous



Unhappy

1. I enjoy reading.



2. I am good at reading.



3. I enjoy reading out loud to myself.



4. I enjoy reading out loud to others.



5. How do you feel when you read at home?



6. How do you feel when you read at school for recess?



7. How do you feel about getting a book for a present?



8. How do you feel about joining a book club?



9. How do you feel about starting a new book?



10. How do you feel about reading minutes towards a book bank purchase?



11. How do you like book stores?



12. How do you like reading to the teacher?



13. How do you feel about reading a magazine?



14. How do you feel about reading for lessons?



15. How do you feel about reading to a younger friend?



16. How do you feel about looking up words in a dictionary?



17. How do you feel about reading for homework?



18. How do you feel about reading while you travel?



19. How do you feel about reading to a parent?



20. Do you like to read?



Appendix B

**Reading Self-Evaluation Scoring Sheet**

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

Grade \_\_\_\_\_ Administration Date \_\_\_\_\_

Scoring Guide:

4 points = Excited Smile

3 points = Happy Smile

2 points = Nervous Smile

1 point = Unhappy Smile

**Score**

1. \_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_

7. \_\_\_\_

8. \_\_\_\_

9. \_\_\_\_

10. \_\_\_\_

11. \_\_\_\_

12. \_\_\_\_

13. \_\_\_\_

14. \_\_\_\_

15. \_\_\_\_

16. \_\_\_\_

17. \_\_\_\_

18. \_\_\_\_

19. \_\_\_\_

20. \_\_\_\_

**Raw Score:** \_\_\_\_\_



Appendix C

**Teacher Observation Tool-Reading**

**Teachers Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Dates Observed:** \_\_\_\_\_

A=alone      P=with peer      \*Each Tally represents one student’s selection

	<b>Specifics</b>	<b>Chosen at own leisure-work time &amp; Min. read</b>	<b>Chosen at own leisure-during recess &amp; Min. read</b>	<b>Read when prompted &amp; Min. read</b>	<b>Additional Notes/Comments</b>
<b>Author Focus books</b>					
<b>Subject Focus books</b>					
<b>Book Club books</b>					
<b>Creative Literature selections</b> P= poetry T=theatre B=bible readings					

