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## SSR: ITS EFFECTS ON STUDENTS' READING HABITS AFTER THEY COMPLETE THE PROGRAM

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An important objective of any reading program should be to establish the habit of recreational reading in children. To accomplish this, programs such as Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) have been implemented in many classrooms.

Research on SSR has been conducted to show its effects on both achievement and attitude. While several short term studies (Evans & Towner, 1975; Vacca, 1977) showed no gains in achievement, studies conducted over a six month period (Pfau, 1966; Langford, 1978; Milton, 1982; Wiesendanger, 1982) found that students involved in SSR made significant improvement in both word recognition and comprehension, indicating that such gains are realized after the program has been in operation several months.

Likewise, students' attitudes toward reading improved when enrolled in an SSR program. Cline (1980), Pfau (1966) and Hanson (1973) all reported that SSR contributed significantly toward fostering a more positive attitude in children. Although these studies contributed to a greater understanding of SSR, they all measured its effects on attitude and habits of students while they were still involved in the SSR program. For a program to be truly effective, improved reading habits should remain after its termination; however, no research has been conducted in this area.

The present study tried to ascertain what happened after the termination of SSR. Upon completing the program, would students previously enrolled in SSR continue to have better reading habits than those who had not been exposed

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to SSR?

A second area of concern was whether the reading ability of the students influenced the effectiveness that SSR had in changing reading habits. Do students of high, middle or low ability reading levels receive the same benefits from SSR, or are its effects greater with one particular group?

### Procedure

We decided to monitor the summer reading habits of both children who had, as well as those who had not been exposed to SSR during the previous school year. Included were four heterogeneously grouped classrooms of students who had completed third grade, two of which had SSR incorporated into their reading program. Prior to the third grade, none were involved in SSR.

A simple form was developed so students could record on a weekly basis the number of minutes they read each day during the summer. Each student was given nine forms. Letters explaining the forms, along with follow-up phone calls were sent to parents requesting their participation. In order to more closely monitor progress, they were asked to complete and return one form in the self-addressed stamped envelope every week for a total of nine weeks. Phone calls were made when reminders were necessary. Of the 93 students originally asked to participate, 54 returned the survey for at least eight weeks. We separated the returned responses according to whether or not the student had participated in the SSR program. Of the 54 returned, 25 had participated in an SSR program while 29 had been enrolled in a traditional reading program that did not include SSR.

The second question of the study was answered by dividing the responses into above average, average, or below average categories, based on stanine results from the recently administered California Tests of Basic Skills. Of the 25 SSR students, eleven ranked in the above average, nine in the average and five in the below average categories. Of the 29 students not enrolled in SSR, nine were above average, ten were average and ten were below average. We then compared the summer reading habits of these various groups.

### Results and Conclusions

Results of the survey showed students who had partici-

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pated during the academic year in a reading program that incorporated SSR read considerably more during the following summer than did those students who had not been part of the SSR program. The average number of minutes read per week over the summer for the SSR group was 90, as compared to 76 minutes per week for the other group. This implies that if teachers help children develop the habit of reading, it is sustained for a period of time, even after they leave the grade. The study emphasizes the importance of incorporating SSR into the primary grade because its benefits remain after the completion of the program.

### Above Average Readers

Since the second area of focus was to determine if reading level influenced the effects of SSR, we compared the summer reading habits of students in the above average, average, and below average range to determine if SSR had more impact on any particular group. Overall, the above average students read far more during the summer than did those in the middle or low reading groups. The number of minutes read weekly by the above average group was 137 as compared to 90 for the average and 22 for the below average readers. This supports the premise that the more students read, the better readers they become.

Interestingly enough, the amount of time read by the above average groups was not affected by the SSR program. Above average readers who had been involved with SSR read a total of 140 minutes per week while their counterparts not involved with SSR read a total of 135 minutes. Perhaps SSR had a lesser impact because they had already developed positive reading attitudes and habits. Proficient readers probably came from families who promoted literature or had a teacher in a previous grade who had encouraged recreational reading.

### Average

SSR had the greatest effect on the average group. Those who had participated in the SSR program during the academic year averaged, during the summer, a total of 110 minutes per week reading as compared to only 70 minutes for those students who had not been involved in SSR. This indicates that teachers can substantially increase the interest and amount of reading done by the student in the middle

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ability group by using effective classroom techniques. It appears more crucial to incorporate SSR into the reading program for these students, because, unlike those in the above average group, they have not fully developed an interest in recreational reading. Since SSR seemed so instrumental in creating this interest, its implementation may make a major contribution toward their improved reading habits.

### Below Average

Students in this group read substantially less in the summer than did those in the other two groups regardless of whether or not they had participated in SSR during the academic year. The average amount of recreational reading done weekly was 22 minutes, substantiating the thesis that children who can't read, don't read. SSR had least impact on low ability students. Those who were involved in SSR during the academic year read 21 minutes weekly as compared to 23 minutes for those not involved in SSR. Because students in the above average reading group read substantially during the summer, there would be different reasons for the minimal impact of SSR on the high and low ability groups. If we consider the fact that the students had only completed the third grade and the instructional reading level of the below average group was lower, the below average students would not have attained a proficiency level that would allow for much independent reading. They would have been hampered by the amount of manageable reading material available. If the survey had been conducted on older students, the effect of SSR on the lower ability student may have been more evident.

### Summary

The results of this survey indicate that SSR can affect the reading habits of students even after they have completed the program. SSR had the greatest positive effect on students of average reading ability. Excellent readers have already established positive reading habits. These children find time to read regardless of the program. Below average readers were least affected by SSR, which indicates the need to develop motivational techniques that would encourage recreational reading. Teachers should give particular thought to the poorer reader by supplying reading material at their

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independent reading level. More time may need to be spent on word identification instruction with this group before the benefits of SSR are realized.

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