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DELAWARE READING FIRST STUDENTS' MOTIVATION AND OPPORTUNITY TO READ: STUDENT SURVEY RESULTS

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This study surveyed and compared reading motivation and reading behaviors of first, second, and third graders in Delaware Reading First (DERF) schools with that of similarly aged students in comparison schools and a national sample. Data for this study was gathered in the fourth year of DERF's five year implementation and was used to answer broader questions of the program's impact on students: Do Reading First students read more frequently? Are they more positively disposed toward reading?

Sample

The sample included 496 1st- 3rd graders, 258 from DERF schools and 238 from Delaware comparison schools. Comparison schools were selected prior to the outset of Reading First based on similar size, baseline achievement, income and racial make-up. They were also selected from the same district as their matched DERF schools. Classrooms were randomly selected from each grade, K-3, in each of the schools. Because one comparison school chose not to participate, students from its matched Reading First school were not surveyed.

Instrument

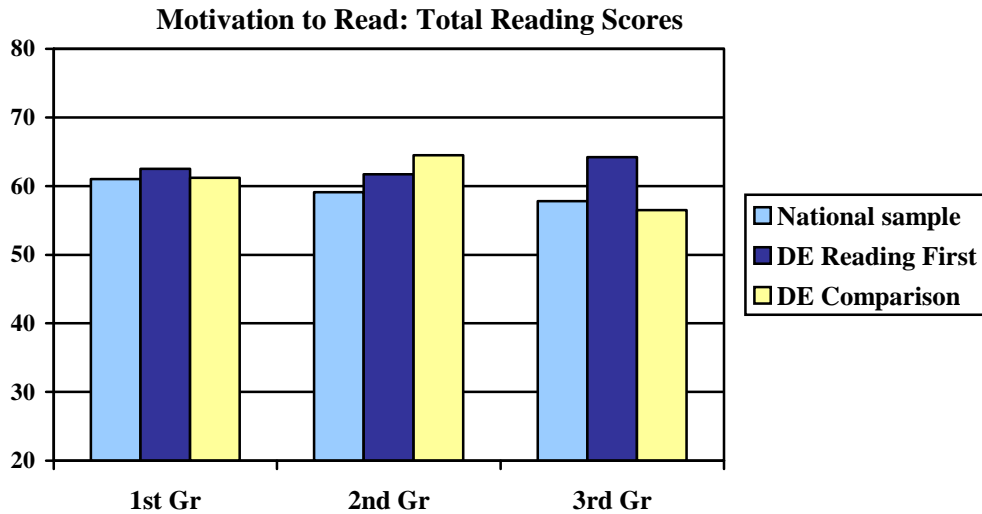
The Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS)¹ was administered to determine student attitudes on two scales- academic and recreational reading. Together these produce an overall reading attitude score. DERF students' scores were compared to those of a national norming sample and to local comparison school scores. Additionally, four items, adapted from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)² were administered to determine student reading behaviors and their perceptions regarding opportunity to read. These were compared to local samples only.



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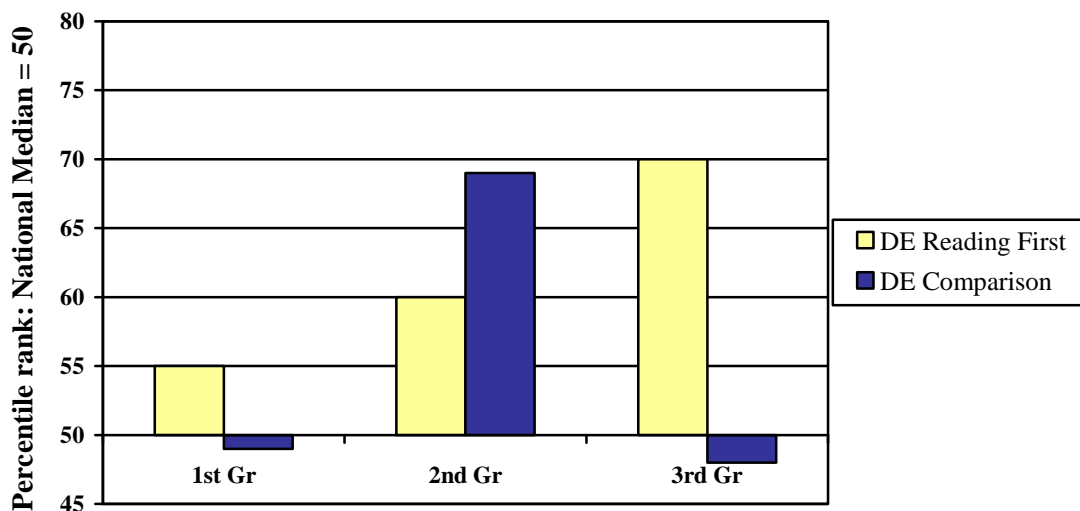
Findings: Attitudes toward reading

The survey was designed to be interpreted in two ways. In the first, scores can be analyzed to determine students' general attitudes toward reading. Possible total scores range from 20-80, and total scores above 50 indicate more favorable attitudes toward reading. There were a few notable differences in total scores: second grade comparison classes were significantly higher than DERF classes, and DERF third grades were significantly higher than DE comparison third grades.



In the second form of interpretation, Delaware grade level scores were compared to national (norming) percentile rankings. The figure below illustrates the difference in percentile points between each of the two DE groups and the national norming sample. Both DERF and DE comparison scores for second grade students' were higher (attitudes more favorable to reading) than the US median at 50%. When third grade student scores are compared, DERF students scored higher than the US average, while students from comparison schools scored slightly lower. **Note:** While this comparison does not indicate statistically significant differences, it does allow for *relative* comparisons; for example, the average DERF third grade score was more than 20 percentile points above the average of the third grade comparison sample.

ERAS Total Score: Delaware Samples' National Percentile Rankings by Grade



The range of possible scores on either of the reading scales- academic or recreational- is from 10 to 40. Scores above 25 indicate a more positive attitude relative toward that *type* of reading. DERF students more frequently indicated more positive attitudes toward both recreational and academic reading than either local or national students, with one exception. Although DERF second graders reported higher levels of motivation than the national sample, they did not score higher than second graders in Delaware comparison schools. Data did not allow tests of statistical significance regarding the national sample; however, statistically significant differences between Reading First schools and comparison schools are indicated below (*).

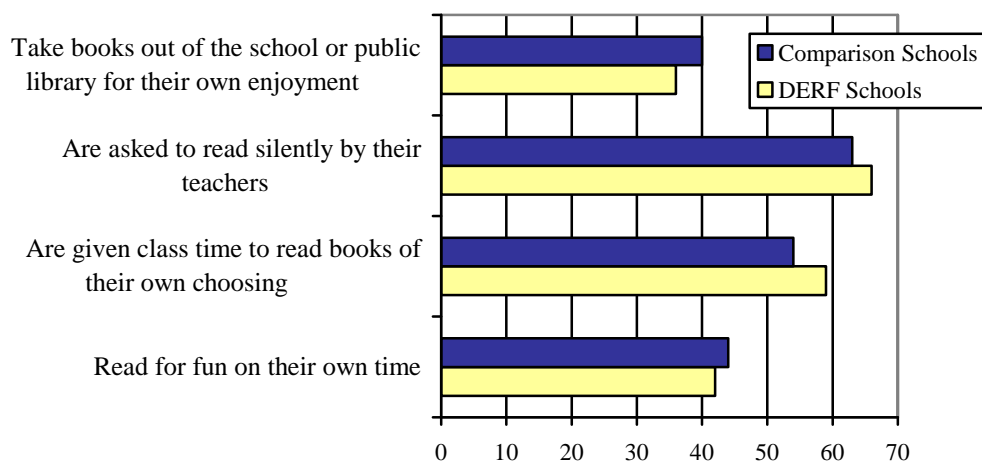
Motivation to Read: Recreational vs. Academic Scales			
GR 1	Recreational	Academic	Total
National	31.0	30.1	61.0
DERF	31.5	31.0	62.5
Comparison	30.9	30.3	61.2
GR 2	Recreational	Academic	Total
National	30.3	28.8	59.1
DERF	30.8*	30.9	61.7*
Comparison	32.8*	31.7	64.5*
GR 3	Recreational	Academic	Total
National	30.0	27.8	57.8
DERF	32.1	32.1*	64.2*
Comparison	28.6	27.8*	56.5*

p<.05

Findings: Opportunity to read

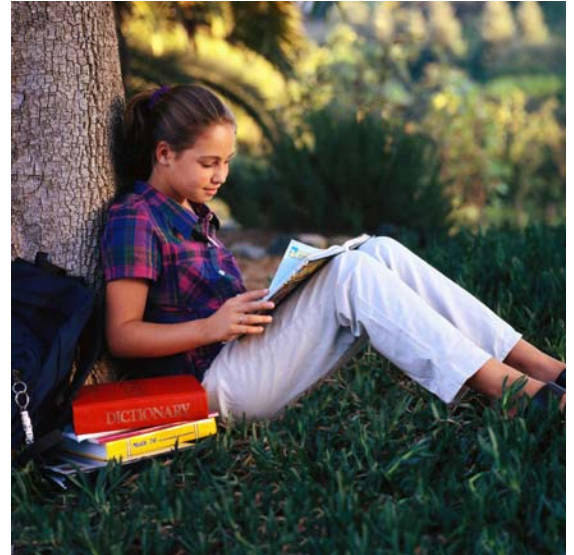
Motivation to read and opportunity to read are closely correlated with frequency of reading. All three factors have positive correlations with reading achievement.³ Students were asked to estimate the relative incidence of four opportunities for reading as either “everyday”, “some days”, or “never or hardly ever.” Two were explicitly classroom based opportunities, while two might occur either inside or outside of a classroom. In both treatment and comparison groups, the majority of children reported that the two classroom-based practices occurred “everyday.” In both groups, the reported frequency of all practices was similar and no statistical differences were noted when sampling error was considered.

Percent students responding that “almost everyday” they.....



Discussion

In the national study, older students did not report *higher* motivation toward reading than younger students.⁴ Instead they validated a commonly held belief: as children grow older, they seem to enjoy reading less and less. However, we did not see this in Delaware's Reading First third grade classrooms. Additionally, when the ERAS scales were examined separately, DERF third graders' attitudes toward *academic* reading were significantly higher than those of Delaware comparison third grade students. One frequently stated criticism of Reading First is that instruction is dumbed-down, narrowly conceived, and scripted.⁵ If so, these findings are puzzling and deserve further investigation.



Additional questions relevant to these findings might include the following:

- + Why do comparison schools' second and third graders report such different attitudes toward reading? Are there classroom or school-wide practices that might build on previous positive motivations- or alternatively- diminish them?
- + Will the positive attitudes reported by DERF third graders maintain or grow as they advance in school, or, like the national sample, will they decline?
- + Is there a relationship between a child's motivation to read and his or her number of years in a Reading First program?
- + When examined with regard to Reading First's intermediate goal to effect change in classroom practices, the last four items- opportunities to read- take on greater significance. Is it appropriate and desirable for these practices to occur "everyday"? How might they impact student motivation to read and ultimately, student achievement?

¹ McKenna, M. C., Kear, D. J., & Ellsworth, R. A. (1995). Children's attitudes toward reading: A national survey. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 30, 934-956.

² National Center for Education Statistics. (2004). The Nation's Report Card-NAEP Data. Retrieved September 27, 2004 from <http://www.nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata>.

³ Guthrie, J. & Wigfield, A. (2000). Engagement and motivation in reading. In Kamil, Mosenthal, Pearson, & Barr (Eds.), *Handbook of Reading Research, Vol. 3* (pp.403-422). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

⁴ McKenna, M. C., Kear, D.J., & Ellsworth, R. A. (1995). Children's attitudes toward reading: A national survey. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 30, 934-956.

⁵ Allington, R.L. (2002). Preface. In R. L. Allington (Ed.), *Big Brother and the national reading curriculum* (pp.v-vii). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.