Understanding the Relationship Between Attitudes Toward Reading and Home Literary Environment

Angela Nickoli, Ball State University
Cindy Hendricks, Bowling Green State University
James Hendricks, Ball State University
April Smith, Ball State University

It is generally acknowledged that positive reading attitudes lead to positive reading experiences, which, in turn, lead to higher academic performance. Wang (2000) explains that children’s literacy development determines their future success in reading and whether or not children read is determined by their attitudes toward reading. According to Wang, “If children do not like reading or they think reading is boring, their negative attitude toward reading will hinder their reading improvement” (p. 120).

In 2001, Panofsky reported that the marginalization of research and theory on affective domain issues in literacy “reflects a much larger avoidance in the dominant traditions of western science…The consequence of this avoidance is that issues of feeling/emotion/affect can become invisible in both research and, importantly, practice” (p. 45). Ignoring or marginalizing attitudinal research may cause teachers to downplay the importance of developing positive attitudes toward reading, particularly at the secondary school level (Panofsky). Tchudi and Mitchell (1999) argue, “Too often the affective domain in secondary classrooms is pooh-poohed” (p. 199).

Factors Affecting Attitudes Toward Reading

A number of recent studies have focused on identifying factors that influence the development of positive attitudes toward reading in secondary students (Bintz, 1993; Kubis, 1994; Metsala, 1996; Spiegel, 1994; Walberg & Tsai, 1983).

Walberg and Tsai (1983) concluded that factors contributing to a positive attitude toward reading among adolescents included believing that reading is important, enjoying reading, having a high self-concept as a reader, and having a verbally stimulating home environment where verbal interaction takes place regularly.

In a study by Bintz (1993) secondary students identified the presence of positive role models (parents, grandparents, siblings, friends, neighbors, relatives) as one of the factors responsible for their love of reading. Bintz reports that these role models created “reading families” or “communities of readers” whose members valued and supported reading.

Spiegel (1994) reported that what parents do in their homes (their literacy environment) significantly affected the development of positive attitudes toward reading in their children. According to Spiegel, home literacy environments included, among other things, artifacts (books, newspapers, pencils, paper, letters, junk mail) and events (reading to children).
Kubis’ (1994) research investigated factors influencing attitude development. She concluded that students attribute their positive attitudes toward reading to a significant event or person. According to Kubis, students who were read to as children and who owned personal book collections had more positive attitudes toward reading than those who did not. Also, in her study, families of students with positive attitudes toward reading received more magazines and at an earlier age than the families of those with negative attitudes. One event that influenced positive attitude development was visiting the public library and possessing a library card.

Metsala (1996) reported that one factor that contributes to successful experiences in school is the children’s literacy-related home experiences. Metsala identified a common core of characteristics associated with positive reading outcomes: readily available children’s books, frequent reading to and with children, special space and opportunities for reading, positive parental attitudes and models of reading, frequent visits to libraries, and many parent-child conversations.

More recently, Reutzel and Fawson (2002) identified eight themes that permeated six national reading research reports. One such theme was Home-School-Community Partnerships. It is important to note that four of the six reports cited here specifically mention that school-home partnerships are essential for children’s reading success. It is this connection that the present study sought to investigate.

**Present Investigation**

Understanding home experiences and parents’ perspectives on literacy are important considerations in building connections between the home and the school. Although there are factors known to positively affect attitude toward reading, the relationship between adolescent attitudes toward reading and home literary environments should be more fully explored. The purpose of this investigation was to examine the relationship between the attitudes of college students toward reading and the literary environment in which they were raised.

**Participants**

A total of 402 college freshmen volunteers from two Midwestern universities participated in this study. Students at both state-supported universities were predominately Caucasian. Two survey instruments were used to document these students attitudes toward reading. The survey instruments were administered in the fall; thus, most of the students at both universities were in their first few months of college.

**Instruments**

The two instruments used to measure attitudes toward reading were the The Rhody Secondary Reading Attitude Assessment Survey (Tullock-Rhody & Alexander, 1980) and The Home Literacy Environment Survey (Kubis, 1994). Test-retest reliability of the Rhody Secondary Reading Attitude Assessment Survey scale was determined to be 0.84. Validity of the survey was established by including items constructed from secondary students’ comments, a t-
test score of 4.16 discriminating between students perceived as having a positive attitude and those having a negative attitude; and by acceptable correlations between items retained on the final scale and the total scale (Tullock-Rhody & Alexander). The survey included 25 statements that allowed students to respond with a five point Likert scale. A very positive score received a score of five, and a very negative score received a score of one (Tullock-Rhody & Alexander); thus, scores on the survey range from a minimum of 25 to a maximum of 125.

Regarding The Home Literary Environment Survey, Kubis states that its purpose is to establish the literary richness of the environment from which the student has come (1994). The survey consists of 30 questions; 20 require a yes/no response; 6 require students to select from alternatives (multiple choice), and 4 require subjective answers. Kubis field-tested The Home Literary Environment Survey using two freshman English classes and two senior-level Advanced Learning Program classes. No items were changed on the survey after the field-testing.

To facilitate a comparison between the students' reading attitudes and home literary environment and for cohesiveness in responding, the two instruments (The Rhody Secondary Reading Attitude Assessment Survey and the Home Literary Environment Survey) were retyped and combined. Questions, deemed not relevant to the investigation were eliminated from the Home Literary Environment Survey. Questions eliminated were three subjective response items related to titles of magazines, one subjective item related to critical reading event, two multiple-choice items related to birth order, one multiple-choice item related to “real” readers, and one yes/no questions related to parents’ restriction of television viewing (see Appendix).

**Procedures**

Students were told that the purpose of the study was to evaluate the relationship between their attitudes toward reading and the home literary environment in which they were raised. All students were told that completing the survey was voluntary; they were also instructed not to write their names on the surveys, regardless of whether or not they completed the surveys.

**Data Analysis**

All 402 students completed the combined inventories. After scoring the responses on the Rhody Secondary Reading Attitude Assessment Survey, the researchers identified the top 25% of the scores (n = 116) as having the most positive attitudes toward reading and the bottom 25% (n = 120) as having the most negative attitudes toward reading. While 25% of the scores would be closer to 100, all surveys with the same score were included in the investigation. The researchers further analyzed these 236 surveys for home literary variables.

Finally, frequencies of responses on the Home Literary Environment Survey from the students in both the positive and negative attitude groups were calculated. A Chi-square Test for Independence (p = .05) was used to determine whether significant relationships existed between variables in the students’ home environments (according to the Home Literary Environment Survey) and the students’ attitudes toward reading as defined by the Rhody Secondary Reading Attitude Assessment Survey.
Results

Attitude scores for the 116 students with most positive attitudes toward reading ranged from 95 to 124 (125 points possible), with a mean of 106.19 and a standard deviation of 7.56. The range for the 120 students with negative attitudes toward reading was 29 to 65; the observed mean was 52.86 with a standard deviation of 8.5. The frequency of responses on the Home Literary Environment from the students in both the positive and negative attitude groups were compared (See Appendix). Note that Item 22 (“Do your parent(s) or guardian(s) restrict the number of hours or the TV shows that you watch now?”) was eliminated since most of the responders were living on campus.

The Chi-square Test for Independence (p = .05) compared each item on the Home Literary Environment Survey with those students who demonstrated a positive attitude toward reading and those who demonstrated a negative attitude toward reading as determined by the Rhody Secondary Reading Attitude Assessment Survey (see Appendix). Significant differences were noted between those students identified as having a positive attitude toward reading and those students identified as having a negative attitude toward reading on all items except two. The items were Questions 2 and 4.

Question 2 asked about the person who read to the student the most. There did not seem to be a significant relationship between the responses given by those identified as having a positive attitude toward reading and those identified as having a negative attitude toward reading. A similar conclusion can be drawn for Question 4. There did not appear to be significant differences between the responses given by those identified as having a positive attitude and those identified as having a negative attitude toward reading regarding whether the primary caregiver worked outside the home.

Discussion

The results of this investigation are similar to the results obtained by Bintz (1993), Kubis (1994), Metsala (1996), Spiegel (1994), and Walberg and Tsai (1983) and as reported earlier. Further, using Spiegel’s (1994) notion of “artifacts and events” that lead to a positive attitude toward reading, it is evident that students who were identified as having a positive attitude toward reading report experiences in the home that include both artifacts and events. That is to say, this investigation lends support to the argument that there is a correlation between owning and having access to books, newspapers, magazines, and library cards (Items 7, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16, 17) and positive attitudes toward reading.

This study also lends support to the position that specific kinds of events contribute to positive attitudes toward reading. Such events include such things as being read to as a child, visiting the library, attending story hours, discussing books or magazines with family or friends, having educated parents who show an interest in what the children are reading and who ask about school learning, who recommend books and restrict television watching, and the like (Items 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 11, 12, 13, 18, 20, 21, 23).
Among her observations about reading attitudes, Stokmans (1999) concludes that attitudes are stable dispositions that have been acquired over time through direct and indirect experiences with reading. The kinds of experiences to which Stokmans refers may be the “artifacts and events” found and occurring in the homes of students who have positive attitudes toward reading. Perhaps what is created in these homes is what Walberg and Tsai (1983) called “reading families” or “communities of readers” whose members value and support the activity of reading.

The importance of knowing the reading attitudes of students has relevance for teachers of all students. Understanding how students feel about reading early in their academic careers may allow teachers to construct courses and employ instructional strategies that build on positive attitudes toward reading and eradicate negative attitudes. The results of this investigation demonstrate that it is important to provide both reading artifacts (books, newspapers, etc.) and reading events (reading circles, reading aloud, etc.) if students are to develop positive attitudes toward reading.

References


Appendix:

Summary of Student Responses to Home Literary Environment Survey

1. Were you read to as a child?
   \[
   \begin{array}{l|ccc}
   \text{N} & \text{Often} & \text{Sometimes} & \text{Never} \\
   \hline
   \text{Positive} & 102 & 14 & \\
   \text{Negative} & 30 & 75 & 15
   \end{array}
   \]

2. Who was the person who read to you the most?
   \[
   \begin{array}{l|ccccc}
   \text{Female} & \text{Male} & \text{Older} & \text{Grand} & \text{Other} \\
   \hline
   \text{N} & \text{Parent} & \text{Parent} & \text{Sibling} & \text{parent} & _- \\
   \text{Positive} & 12 & 9 & 3 & 16 & 76 \\
   \text{Negative} & 8 & 9 & 4 & 5 & 92
   \end{array}
   \]

3. Did more than one person read to you on a regular basis?
   \[
   \begin{array}{l|cc}
   \text{N} & \text{Yes} & \text{No} \\
   \hline
   \text{Positive} & 107 & 9 \\
   \text{Negative} & 39 & 80
   \end{array}
   \]

4. Did your primary caregiver work outside of the home when you were young?
   \[
   \begin{array}{l|cc}
   \text{N} & \text{Yes} & \text{No} \\
   \hline
   \text{Positive} & 72 & 44 \\
   \text{Negative} & 63 & 56
   \end{array}
   \]

5. Did you visit the public library when you were young?
   \[
   \begin{array}{l|cc}
   \text{N} & \text{Yes} & \text{No} \\
   \hline
   \text{Positive} & 114 & 2 \\
   \text{Negative} & 98 & 22
   \end{array}
   \]

6. Did you attend story hours or other programs at the public library?
   \[
   \begin{array}{l|cc}
   \text{N} & \text{Yes} & \text{No} \\
   \hline
   \text{Positive} & 87 & 29 \\
   \text{Negative} & 34 & 86
   \end{array}
   \]

7. Do you presently have a library card?
   \[
   \begin{array}{l|cc}
   \text{N} & \text{Yes} & \text{No} \\
   \hline
   \text{Positive} & 103 & 13 \\
   \text{Negative} & 72 & 48
   \end{array}
   \]

8. Do you and your family give each other books as gifts?
   \[
   \begin{array}{l|cc}
   \text{N} & \text{Yes} & \text{No} \\
   \hline
   \text{Positive} & 99 & 17 \\
   \text{Negative} & 33 & 87
   \end{array}
   \]

9. Does your parent(s) or guardian(s) have a collection of books they own at home?
   \[
   \begin{array}{l|cc}
   \text{N} & \text{Yes} & \text{No} \\
   \hline
   \text{Positive} & 111 & 5 \\
   \text{Negative} & 66 & 54
   \end{array}
   \]
10. Do you have a library of your own books at home?
N = 236
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11. Does your parent(s) or guardian(s) show interest in what you read?
N = 236
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12. Does your parent(s) or guardian(s) often ask you what you learned in school?
N = 236
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13. Do you ever discuss books or magazine articles with your parent(s) or guardian(s)?
N = 236
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14. Does your parent(s) or guardian(s) subscribe to magazines which are mailed to your home?
N = 236
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15. Do you have your own magazine subscriptions?
N = 236
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16. Do you remember having subscriptions as a child?
N = 236
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17. Is there a newspaper coming to your home on a daily basis?
N = 236
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18. Do your friends like to read books and/or magazines?
N = 235
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

19. Do you discuss books you’ve read with your friends?
N = 236
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

20. Do you and your friends recommend good books to each other?
N = 236
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
21. Did your parent(s) or guardian(s) restrict the number of hours or the shows you watched on TV when you were young?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

22. What is the educational level of the parent or guardian with whom you spent the most time when you were a preschooler?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>College Graduate</th>
<th>or higher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To obtain the positive and negative attitude responses, the Rhody Secondary Reading Attitude Assessment Survey (Tullock-Rhody & Alexander, 1980) was used. It was typed in its entirety and labeled Section A on the handout given to students. The 23 items from the Home Literary Environment Survey (Kubis, 1994) were typed on the same handout and identified as Section B. Eight items were eliminated from the original survey. Questions eliminated were three items related to titles of magazines, one item related to critical reading event, two items related to birth order, one item related to “real” readers, and one related to parents’ restriction of television viewing.