

# Children's Reading Programs for Enthusiastic and Reluctant Readers in Ontario

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## 要 旨

読書は子どもの学力に欠かせないし、感情発達などにも重要であることは一般的に認められている。読書を促進するために、学校や図書館は様々なプログラムを展開している。本研究では、カナダ・オンタリオ州における子どもの読書を促進するプログラムを調査し、その効果を考察した。その結果、複数のプログラムの同時展開がもっとも効果的であることがわかった。

## 1. Reading, Literacy, and Learning

The ability to read is an essential skill for any child. It is needed for the study of all other subjects. Moreover, the amount read is important; the more a child reads, the more likely they are to succeed in school and in life. Many studies have demonstrated a statistical connection between reading and higher test scores, and also a correlation to better and more stable employment in later years.<sup>(1)</sup> It has also been shown that increased reading is correlated with improved reading ability, meaning greater comprehension, enjoyment, and confidence.<sup>(2)</sup> For these reasons, it is important for libraries and schools to find ways of motivating reluctant readers. This paper examines some of the programs being conducted in Ontario elementary schools and public libraries which aim to do this.

But enthusiastic readers often need encouragement, too. It has been found that, on average, children read less and less as they grow older. The more children read to start with, however, the smaller the decrease, and the greater the likelihood that they will continue to read enthusiastically into adulthood. Adults who read frequently and for pleasure have been shown by long-term studies to have more successful and stable lives, to be able to continue learning independently, and to raise more successful children. They also tend to be more involved in local and community affairs, and are more charitable. In order to continue to read for enjoyment, even enthusiastic children may require encouragement through incentives from people outside the home or classroom. Libraries are best suited to

take up this task. In particular, libraries are well-positioned to encourage continued reading throughout the summer months, when children aren't reading at school. Libraries, and the summer reading programs they offer, can also help with the problem of "aliterate" children, who are able to read but lack the motivation to do so.<sup>(3)</sup> This paper therefore also examines the effectiveness of reading programs offered in Ontario libraries.

## 2. School Reading Programs

Schools have both the opportunity and the resources to help reluctant readers find more confidence and pleasure in reading. Public libraries are only able to engage with children who visit them, but because all children attend school, regardless of their reading skill, it is not difficult for schools to identify and encourage struggling readers.

The most direct method of encouraging reading at school, is for teachers to find time to do it during the school day. The teacher might read picture books or longer books to the children, for example. In this case, the teacher might choose books related to topics being studied in class, or books that challenge the students a little and increase their vocabulary. Students are often inspired to seek out and read similar books on their own. In addition, teachers are able to ask questions and begin discussions about the reading, which help the students become more focused and critical readers.

Teachers might also create a free-reading time slot during each day or week, in which students can spend

a few minutes reading a book of their own choice. Not only does this allow children to read material they are interested in, and provide them with a quiet time to do so, but it also allows them to watch the teacher enjoying personal reading as well, and the act of reading itself calms the students and prepares them for learning.

While the Ontario school curriculum does not specifically mandate these activities, teachers are encouraged to find time for them. As a result, most teachers include reading aloud or free reading in some form in their daily activities. The Ontario Ministry of Education has stated that "The teacher is the key to a child's success in learning to read."<sup>(4)</sup> In a booklet outlining successful teaching strategies for junior high schools, the ministry states,

"Educators across the province are continually expanding their professional expertise, seeking new ways to work with other educators, parents, and community members to support student learning inside and outside the classroom... By sharing successful strategies, teachers and board staff can enhance their expertise in reading and writing instruction and offer stronger literacy programs that will better support student learning and student success."<sup>(5)</sup>

In other words, teachers are expected to develop their own techniques for encouraging reading, and teach each other, so that no teacher and no class is without a successful strategy. This is essential because "Literacy instruction must be embedded across the curriculum. All teachers of all subjects, from Kindergarten to Grade 12, are teachers of literacy."<sup>(6)</sup>

Reading rallies, which use friendly competition between classes to encourage students to read as many books as possible, and author visits, are two effective strategies used by many Ontario schools to create interest in reading.

Beginning in kindergarten, Ontario school-children are escorted to the school library several times a week to choose books for individual reading. Often these books are sent home to be read at night and returned one or two days later. In the very early years,

students are sent home with beginner books to read by themselves, which are a little less appealing and feel more like homework. But the books chosen individually are often read together with a parent, which creates a positive feeling toward the reading experience.

All of these activities help teachers identify students who are weak or reluctant readers, so that ways can be found to encourage them.

Many schools, and many public libraries as well, run a Reading Buddies program to help younger students practice reading with an older, more enthusiastic reader. Schools pair primary level students with older students or volunteers from local high schools; libraries, like the Kitchener Public Library, use adult (often senior) volunteers to do the same thing.<sup>(7)</sup>

There are also PHAST (for Phonological and Strategy Training, now known as Empower) Reading Programs, which are "comprehensive literacy programs that transform students with significant reading, spelling, and writing difficulties into strategic, independent, and flexible learners."<sup>(8)</sup> They were developed by the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto, and are intended mainly for older students. These programs

"...address core deficits in phonological processing, letter-sound knowledge, and strategy training that characterize disabled readers with the primary goal of facilitating the acquisition of independent decoding strategies and basic literacy skills. Each program builds on these foundations to incorporate additional training in reading comprehension and/ or fluency for greater reading success."<sup>(9)</sup>

Teachers who conduct them must receive special training, but their presence means that students who are willing but unable to read effectively, are able to get effective help.

### 3. Preschool Programs at Public Libraries

Public libraries provide service to patrons of all ages, from newborns on up. It is not only in their mission, but also in their interest, to familiarize children with reading from as young an age as possible. Children who read enthusiastically are much

more likely to continue reading for pleasure as adults. As a result, most offer reading programs for preschool children.

A study of several preschool literacy programs in Ontario public libraries found that they were usually designed to “support three- and four-year-old children’s early literacy and school readiness as well as their parents’ and caregivers’ literacy interactions with their children.”<sup>(10)</sup> The researchers found that both librarians and parents shared the goals of having children learn to sit still and listen, learn to interact with other children and socialize, and learn to love reading. In addition, librarians also hoped to instill a love of the library, and develop relationships with the children and their parents.

It was found that the most effective programs were carefully planned but still flexible. Because attendance was inconsistent and children sometimes did not sit still for longer books, the librarians had to be prepared to change their plans. Consistently repeated and predictable elements, such as songs to begin and end each session, were effective in getting children settled down. Questions and discussions about the books, and related activities such as songs and crafts, increased the children’s enthusiasm. Parents often said that the children sang the songs or retold the stories at home, which demonstrated that the program was succeeding in instilling interest.

The researchers also looked at the children’s motivation, phonological awareness, vocabulary development, narrative awareness and competence (the ability to guess what is coming next and retell the story afterwards), and print awareness (understanding whether the book is right side up, for example), and found that in most cases these improved over the course of the program. The result was a general trend towards what they called “school readiness.”

Additional benefits for the parents included an increased knowledge of children’s books, songs, and activities, and indirect training in livening up their own storytelling and presentation ability.

It was concluded that the programs were effective in both their primary goal of fostering school readiness, and their secondary goal of inspiring an interest in reading in both parent and child. It went

on to recommend additional preparation time and professional training for the veteran librarians running the programs, because of the importance of the activity for everyone involved.

#### **4. Reading Programs for Older Children at Public Libraries**

Public libraries in Ontario have several options when considering reading programs for school-aged children. They can participate in one or more pre-existing programs, they can create their own program, or they can choose not to run a program at all.

According to the 2006 report by Library and Archives Canada, library summer reading programs

“...utilize a variety of techniques to encourage reading, such as reading games or challenges, discussions of books, book related crafts, author visits, storytelling, rewards and incentives for reading, and more. A child’s reading may be recorded on a record or game sheet or via other means.”<sup>(11)</sup>

Most use a read-and-report format of some kind, because this provides concrete evidence of reading, creates a record for the child, allows the reader to express their impressions of the books, and provides an incentive through either friendly competition or signs of progress towards a goal. Filling boxes with stickers, comparing reading totals on a chart, and other similar motivational strategies appeal to the psychology of children.

Creating an independent reading program is costly in terms of time and budget. It was usual for larger library systems to do this before the advent of the larger province-wide and corporate-sponsored TD Summer Reading program in 2001. Each library would choose a theme for the summer, produce its own materials, including advertising, booklists, and notebooks for recording the books read. In most cases, there would be tie-in events and activities. Local schools, day care centres, and day camps had to be contacted. And staff would need specific training to conduct the program. In most cases, these programs were well received, and led to increased circulation for the duration of the

program, but did not necessarily succeed in increasing the number of new children visiting the library.

For smaller libraries in small communities, particularly in northern Ontario, choosing not to run a program is not necessarily a poor choice. The cost in time and money required to operate a program may be too much for a library with a tiny budget and one part-time librarian. Nor would the program necessarily increase the number of children visiting the library. Data from programs like the TD Summer Reading program suggest that there may only be a 2 or 3 percent increase in the number of registered users, which in a small town might represent an addition of only one or two children. In this type of community, the library is able to reach out to children and encourage readers at the individual level on a daily basis, which may in fact be even more effective than simply offering a reading program.

The TD Summer Reading Program, created in Toronto by the Toronto Dominion Bank together with the Toronto Public Library in 1996 and expanded, first throughout Ontario in 2001, and then nation-wide in with the assistance of Library and Archives Canada in 2004, is the largest and most comprehensive program in Ontario. It is modelled on programs that had been created independently by the Toronto Public Library, the North York Public Library, and other Toronto libraries each summer in the years before they amalgamated. Participation is free for both libraries and children. Materials are also provided free, but libraries are expected to do their own promotion, including visiting schools and day camps. Libraries must also contribute their own time and expertise, and create their own tie-in activities. This means that the program quality experienced by participants at different libraries varies greatly, but the fact that materials and guidance are available free of cost makes it possible for many libraries to offer summer reading events that otherwise could not do so.

The TD Summer Reading Program's report for 2014 states that 855 Ontario libraries offered the program that year (the number counts branch libraries separately), and that a total of 153,332 children participated.<sup>(12)</sup> The participation figures include estimates for non-reporting libraries extrapolated

from the reported results. These figures show that 5.69% of all children in the province participated in the program. Broken down by age groups, 5.93% of children aged 0-5, 14.05% of children aged 6-8, 6.67% of children aged 9-12, and 0.37% of children older than 13 participated in the program. Girls (54%) outnumbered boys (46%) by a significant margin. This correlates with anecdotal evidence from schools and libraries that boys are less likely to be enthusiastic readers. It also shows that themes and activities that will attract boys require consideration when planning the program.

The report does not state what percentage of registered users at each library took part in the program, which is an unfortunate omission.

In addition, it was shown that roughly half of the participants were taking part for the first time.<sup>(13)</sup> While a 3% increase in participation looks good on the surface, in fact the low level of repeated participation suggests that on average, children only participate twice during their entire childhood. Clearly the program is not able to consolidate any of the gains it makes from year to year.

The program did, however, inspire considerable activity within the libraries. About 18,500 program-related activities were conducted by Ontario libraries in 2014, (roughly 21 activities per library on average), with an average of 19 children attending each.<sup>(14)</sup>

One third of the libraries reporting on their activities stated that the program kept children excited and reading, and 21% reported that the participants had read more because of the program.<sup>(15)</sup> While these figures are encouraging, they demonstrate that the program did not change reading patterns for as many as 4 out of 5 participating children. But in terms of benefits, it was found generally that children enjoyed the puzzles and challenges included in the program, and that parents enjoyed taking part in the crafts and other tie-in activities.

It was also found that participation in the reading program helped carry children through the summer learning slump with less loss of reading ability than non-participants. If all children were to participate actively throughout the summer, schools would be able to avoid the month of remedial reading practice

required at the beginning of each school year. As it is, children who avoid the summer slump are positioned to move ahead of their non-participating peers in all subjects, because of their greater reading ability.

There is a second large-scale reading program in Ontario, available to libraries, schools, and even individual participants, at a nominal cost. This is the Forest of Reading (Evergreen) program, run over the winter months by the Ontario Library Association. The goals stated for the program are

- To develop recognition for Canadian authors and Canadian books
- To contribute to the financial stability of the Canadian publishing industry
- To provide teachers, teacher-librarians, librarians, library staff and parents with a meaningful tool for improving literacy in schools and libraries
- To respond to community interest and needs<sup>(16)</sup>

The focus on supporting Canadian authors and publishers is central to the program. Each participating library or school is issued with booklists and requested to purchase all of the materials on them. These are then displayed in the library or school, where readers may use them freely and vote on their favourites. Winners are chosen and awards given at ceremonies in the late spring.

This is significantly different from other reading programs, in that it encourages reading only indirectly, and in a fairly limited way. Children do not need to register to participate, and except for filling in a survey sheet for each book, they may not even realize that they have taken part.

The program does have the benefit of providing libraries and schools, and by extension, children, with a list of books they can be sure to enjoy. It also ensures an outlet for excellent children's literature, which publishers may not otherwise find sufficiently financially rewarding to publish. In this sense, it supports reading from the content side, by ensuring a supply of excellent books that will draw readers in, rather than by trying to engage readers with whatever is available, as most book programs do.

## 5. Conclusion

It can be seen that reading programs are somewhat effective in fulfilling the two major goals of encouraging reading for pleasure, and avoiding the summer learning slump. In order to do this effectively, the programs must reach and engage a wide range of children. No one program, however, is able to achieve both goals to a significant degree. Summer reading programs can help avoid the slump, but they tend to attract children who are already readers. School programs are able to reach large numbers of children, but do not extend over the summer.

For this reason, a variety of concurrent and overlapping programs, run by schools and libraries, would be most effective. In the case of Ontario, children are further benefitted by the Forest of Reading's encouragement of authors and publishers. Children and good books are brought together effectively by the multiple programs.

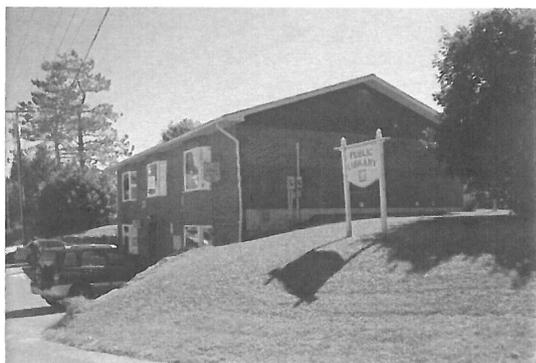
However, participation in library programs is still low, and ways need to be found to increase participation in them.

## 6. Appendix



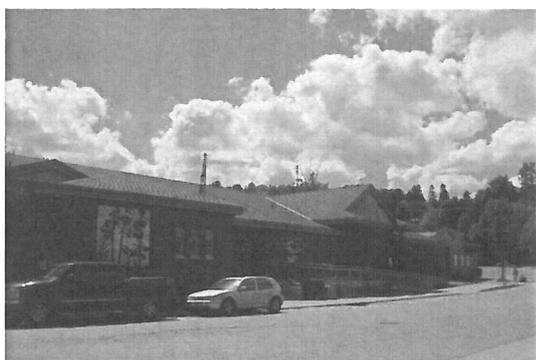
Kearney Public Library, Kearney, Ontario.

This library serves a town of roughly 800 residents, which quadruples in size during the summer vacation. The library holds about 10,000 volumes, many of which rotate through the Ontario Library Service - North to keep the collection fresh. It did not offer a special reading program in 2014, but did hold several one-time reading-and-craft sessions.



Burks Falls Public Library, Burks Falls, Ontario.

This small library occupies the lower floor of a building near the centre of this town of 1200 people. It is well-used by resident children during the school year, and by seasonal residents during the summer holiday.



Huntsville Public Library, Huntsville, Ontario.

This library serves a winter population of 18,000, which increases considerably during the summer. It has a collection of about 100,000 items, which are heavily used. The library runs fall, winter and spring preschool reading readiness activities, and the TD Summer Reading Club.



Region of Waterloo Library, Elmira Branch, Elmira, Ontario.

Elmira is a town of about 11,000 people, located in southwestern Ontario. This branch is one of ten

branches in the RWL system, and contains about 30,000 items, including about 10,000 for children. It offers the TD Summer Reading Club during the summer vacation, as well as many preschool programs. It also participates in the Ontario Library Association's Forest of Reading program, by displaying and promoting its materials. This branch is heavily used by residents, and especially by the many Mennonites in the area, whose religious beliefs prohibit them from owning televisions and other electronic media.



Toronto Public Library, Don Mills Branch, North York, Ontario.

The Don Mills Branch is one of 100 branches in the TPL system, all of which participate in the TD Summer Reading Program. This branch has offered summer reading programs since it opened in 1961; until the establishment of the TD program, the TPL (and in the case of the Don Mills Branch, the pre-amalgamation North York Public Library system) created its own program theme and materials. There are also many preschool reading programs offered throughout the TPL system.

## 7. Endnotes

- (1) For a survey of these studies, see Andrew Dewar, *The Effect of Reading on Child Development* (in Japanese), 東海学院大学紀要 第7号、平成26年3月.
- (2) Library and Archives Canada, Program Branch, *Literature Review on the Impact of Summer Reading Clubs*, March 27, 2006, p.7.
- (3) Library and Archives Canada, Program Branch, *Literature Review on the Impact of Summer Reading Clubs*, March 27, 2006, p.5.
- (4) Expert Panel on Early Reading in Ontario, *Early Reading Strategy: The Report of the Expert Panel on Early Reading in Ontario* (Toronto: Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003), p.4.
- (5) Grades 7-12 –Effective Practices of Ontario School Boards, <http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/brochure/literacy/index.html> (last accessed 12 January 2015)
- (6) Expert Panel on Early Reading in Ontario, *Early Reading Strategy: The Report of the Expert Panel on Early Reading in Ontario* (Toronto: Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003), p.10.
- (7) Volunteer Opportunity : Become a Reading Buddy, <http://www.kpl.org/volunteer/opportunities/readingbuddies.html> (last accessed 12 January 2015)
- (8) Empower Reading Program and the Provincial Schools' Research Partnership, [http://www.psbnet.ca/eng/schools/trillium/empower\\_reading\\_program.html](http://www.psbnet.ca/eng/schools/trillium/empower_reading_program.html) (last accessed 12 January 2015)
- (9) Ibid.
- (10) Shelley Stagg Peterson, Eunice Jang, Carol Jupiter, Maggie Dunlop, *Preschool Early Literacy Programs in Ontario Public Libraries*, <https://journal.lib.uoguelph.ca/index.php/perj/article/view/1961#.VLNXFSusWCo> (last accessed 12 January 2015)
- (11) Library and Archives Canada, Program Branch, *Literature Review on the Impact of Summer Reading Clubs*, March 27, 2006, p.2.
- (12) Library and Archives Canada Group, *2014 TD Summer Reading Club Final Report of Program Statistics*, 2014, p.86.
- (13) Library and Archives Canada Group, *2014 TD Summer Reading Club Final Report of Program Statistics*, 2014, p.91.
- (14) Library and Archives Canada Group, *2014 TD Summer Reading Club Final Report of Program Statistics*, 2014, p.88.
- (15) Library and Archives Canada Group, *2014 TD Summer Reading Club Final Report of Program Statistics*, 2014, p.109.
- (16) About the Forest, [https://www.accessola.org/WEB/OLAWEB/Forest\\_of\\_Reading/About\\_the\\_Forest.aspx](https://www.accessola.org/WEB/OLAWEB/Forest_of_Reading/About_the_Forest.aspx) (last accessed 12 January 2015)