PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING AN EFFECTIVE
SUMMER READING PROGRAM

by

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requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Education.

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Project Overview

This project was designed in an attempt to answer the question, *How can a summer reading program be implemented in order to most effectively close the achievement gap and allow students to maintain literacy skills over the summer months?* This is a question I asked myself throughout the process of planning the pilot year of the reading program at my own school in the summer of 2017. After the initial attempt of implementing a reading program the first year, I decided to explore this question further to increase the effectiveness of the program, and share my findings with other educators through the creation of a website.

Project Rationale

The purpose of this project is twofold: to educate teachers about the need for a summer reading program in their own settings, and to provide them with resources to be utilized throughout the planning and implementation of the program. To most effectively meet these two goals, a website has been created using Google Sites. This seemed like the most appropriate method, as a website can reach a large audience and can easily house important resources. During the planning of the summer reading program at my own school, Clear Lake Elementary (name has been changed for the purpose of confidentiality), I did not encounter a website such as this, with information and resources all in one location. The goal of the website is to help more educators implement a summer reading program in their own schools, and make the process of planning an effective program a little less daunting.

Audience and Setting

The target audience for this project is all educators, including teachers and administrators. The website as a whole would be most useful to elementary teachers with the intent of designing
and implementing a summer reading program, as this project is modeled after a real-life summer reading program, which takes place in an elementary school setting. However, elements of the project could be utilized by administrators and teachers in any K-12 setting. All resources available on the website can be adjusted to suit a variety of contexts and settings.

**Web Design**

Throughout the process of creating this website, I regularly referred to the web design principles created by the United States Department of Health and Human Services ([HHS], 2006). This thorough document includes 209 guidelines to assist individuals and organizations in website creation and design (HHS, 2006). I referred to this document frequently to ensure my own website includes information that is relevant for the target audience, is easily accessible for users, and is simple to navigate.

**Website Description**

As per the HHS’s (2006) guidelines, I needed to ensure users would remain on the website long enough to discover its contents. The HHS (2006) explains users spend very little time on most sites when searching for information, so the site’s purpose should be explicitly stated on the homepage. However, prose text on the homepage should be concise, as some users may avoid reading lengthy text (HHS, 2006). Additionally, the HHS (2006) encourages web designers to limit the homepage to one screenful, as some users may avoid scrolling for further information, or may leave the site altogether if there is critical information “below the fold”. With this principle in mind, I made the decision to include a succinct preview of the site’s content and purpose on the homepage, ensuring it remained only one screenful of information. In addition to a preview, I included a short video for the purpose of engaging the audience.
In addition to the homepage, my Google Site is broken down into several other pages and subpages. As per the HHS’s (2006) recommendation, the homepage will be easily accessible from each of these pages and subpages. These additional pages of the website include: “About”, “Summer Reading Loss”, “Book Selection”, “Parent Involvement”, and “Student Engagement”. Users can access each section by clicking on the navigation bar at the top of the page.

**About.** The first page after the homepage is titled “About”. This includes a more detailed explanation of the purpose of the site along with my personal journey leading to the creation of the reading program in my own setting, and ultimately the creation of the website. This page also includes a subpage, “Reading Program: Year One”, which includes information about the pilot year of the reading program at my school. In addition to prose text, this subpage also contains an embedded Google Slides presentation, which includes information about attendance and funding of the first year of the program. Finally, this section will also house a subpage with references to ensure I am properly citing the information on each page of the website.
Purpose:
This website was designed in an attempt to guide educators in answering the question: How can a summer reading program be implemented in order to most effectively close the achievement gap and allow students to maintain literacy skills over the summer months? The site includes relevant research along with resources to help educators designing and implementing a summer reading program in their own settings.

Personal Journey:
The idea of developing a summer reading program at my own school came about while I was enrolled in the course Foundations of Reading, K-12 at Hamline University. Week after week I would read about how access to books is one of the greatest factors leading to the achievement gap. This lead me to the realization that students are living in poverty, and likely do not have access to many books when they are not in school. This is when it really clicked for me: we must do something about it if we maintain the status quo, we will continue to see the same results.

“About” page

Reading Program: Year One
The first year of our summer reading program far exceeded our expectations. There were 81 students who attended at least one session, with the average participant attending 3.1 sessions. We received an abundance of positive feedback from families. For example, one mother sent me an email explaining what a difference the reading program made with her son. Through the program, he discovered a new book and went on to read the rest of the series. She explained this was one of the first times she had ever seen her son sit down to read by choice, and he read five books in a matter of weeks.

“Reading Program: Year One” subpage

References

**Summer reading loss.** The next page on the website is called “Summer Reading Loss”, and it includes current research related to summer reading loss. To prevent users from becoming overwhelmed by too much prose text, the page is broken down into three sections: “Summer Slide”, “Implications”, and “Preventing Summer Slide”. After learning about summer reading loss on this page, users can move to the subpage, “The Achievement Gap”, which has a similar format. The research presented within this subpage relates to three topics: “Summer Loss and the Achievement Gap”, “The Faucet Theory”, and “Availability of Books”.

“Summer Reading Loss” page

“The Achievement Gap” subpage
Book selection. Many users may be visiting the website hoping to gain ideas for the implementation of a summer reading program. One major topic for consideration when implementing a summer reading program is the selection of books. Within the page “Book Selection”, users will find research related to the topics of “Self-Selecting Books”, “Reading Levels”, and “Interest-Based Selection”. This page also contains a subpage titled “Suggestions for Implementation”. This subpage includes three sections, each referencing specific research, and ways to use the research to inform decisions about implementation.
**Parent involvement.** The next page on the site is titled “Parent Involvement”. Similar to the previous one, this page begins by providing users with research related to parents’ involvement summer programming and their role in children’s literacy development. The page is broken down into three sections, “Parents’ Impact on Learning”, “Parents’ Self-Efficacy”, and “Supporting Parents”. This page includes two subpages: “Communicating with Parents”, which includes resources to be used to inform families about the reading program, and “Resources for Families”, which includes videos and articles for educators to share with parents about the importance of supporting literacy in the home.
“Communicating with Parents” subpage continued

“Children whose families encourage at-home literacy activities have higher phonemic-awareness and decoding skills, higher reading achievement in the elementary grades, and advanced oral language development” (Padak & Rasinski, 2007, p. 350).

The following resources are intended to be shared with families by educators in order to support literacy development in the home.

Tips for Encouraging Reading

This video could be shared with parents as a means for communicating simple tips to keep kids reading throughout the summer.

“Resources for Families” subpage

**Student engagement.** The final page of the website, “Student Engagement” includes research related to the role of motivation in reading performance. It also includes information related to both intrinsic and extrinsic sources of motivation. This page also includes two subpages: “Suggestions for Implementation”, which includes four research-based suggestions for addressing student engagement within the context of a summer reading program, and “Sample Schedule”, which contains a schedule, which is modified from the one used at Clear Lake Elementary.
Motivation’s Role in Reading Performance

Researchers have discovered motivation plays a critical role in reading development (Cambria & Guthrie, 2000).

- Cambria and Guthrie (2010) explain there are two sides of reading: on one side are the reading skills related to phonemic awareness, decoding, and vocabulary; and on the other side is reading motivation. In order to develop as a strong reader, one must possess both the “skill” and the “will” (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010).
- Students who enjoy reading the most tend to perform much higher than their peers who enjoy reading the

Suggestions for Implementation

The research suggests:

It is important for schools to help students increase their reading motivation, as motivation plays a major role in reading performance. However, traditional “sticks” and “carrots” approaches typically prove ineffective.

Suggestion for implementation:

In order to increase student motivation and engagement in the program itself, each week revolves around a particular theme. The themes included in the sample schedule were selected by fourth and fifth grade student council representatives at Clear Lake Elementary. The representatives selected the following themes: beach day, Star Wars, bugs, Legos, superheroes, outer space, Disney day, pajama day and animals. Each week, crafts and activities will be planned around these themes.

When students are motivated to come to the program, the hope is that attendance will increase, and students will be more likely to participate when they attend.

Sample Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date and Time</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Crafts/Activities</th>
<th>Volunteers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June 12th 10am-noon</td>
<td>Beach Day</td>
<td>Activity: Smoothie Making</td>
<td>Teacher Volunteer A, Teacher Volunteer B, Student Volunteer A, Student Volunteer B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Craft: Coffee Filter Jellyfish</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 19th 3-7pm</td>
<td>Star Wars</td>
<td>Craft: Star Wars Shadow Puppets</td>
<td>Teacher Volunteer A, Teacher Volunteer B, Student Volunteer A, Student Volunteer B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 26th 6:30am-noon</td>
<td>Bugs</td>
<td>Craft: Reading Dragons and</td>
<td>Teacher Volunteer A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This schedule is very similar to the one used at Clear Lake Elementary.

- Each week, we aim to have 3-4 volunteers (teachers, and sometimes high school students) signed up to help out.
- There is a craft and/or activity each week, which is related to the week’s theme.
- There are two daytime sessions, and one evening session each month to better suit the schedules of as many families as possible.
Website link: https://sites.google.com/hamline.edu/designing-implementing-srp
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