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That's a RAP! Using Reading Adventure Packs to improve students' involvement in and attitude to reading at home

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Summary

A school–home literacy partnership was established to involve family members in supporting children’s involvement in and attitude towards reading. The texts and activities contained in each Reading Adventure Pack centre around a common theme, explored by the child in relationship with a parent, grandparent, sibling or carer.

Research in Australia and overseas has shown that the creation of school–home reading partnerships is important for the development of positive attitudes towards reading and sustained involvement in reading beyond the early years of schooling.

The Reading Adventure Packs (RAPs), adapted and designed by an Australian teacher, Margaret Gill, provide an engaging stimulus for shared experiences around reading in the home. Data collected from student and parent surveys, and testimonials from teachers implementing the program, highlight the value of school–home literacy partnerships to students’ engagement in reading.

Target student group

The RAPs strategy is directed at students in Foundation to year 3.

Method

‘The students really looked forward to taking home a Reading Adventure Pack to share with their family. They enjoyed the variety of activities and the response book gave them a real purpose for writing. Some students who did not normally read a lot of books at home wound up reading/sharing all the books in the pack and read more in the week they had the backpack than they would in a normal week.’ (Classroom Teacher)

The RAPs strategy complements both in-school and home-reading programs and is directed at students in Foundation to year 3. The texts for each RAP have been selected by Margaret on the basis of assumed interests that are gender related and non-gender specific (for example, building, cooking, dinosaurs, dogs).

Each RAP includes a soft toy indicative of the theme; a Note of Explanation to parents/carers; an inventory listing the literacy activities; an Instruction sheet for parents/carers on how to use the activities in the RAP; an exercise book for writing stories, comments etc; a variety of literacy activities designed for students Foundation–year 3 (different texts, games, puzzles, videos, CDs); and associated materials for completing activities such as left- and right-handed scissors, coloured pencils, pencil sharpener and eraser (Fisher 2007, see also Gill & Morey 2009).



Four students each week are selected to take home a RAP and they read the texts and complete the activities over this time.

The RAPs have been trialled in two schools, one in New South Wales and one in Victoria, over two school terms (16 weeks in total), with students aged 6, 7 and 8. The total number of students in Trial 1 was 33 in New South Wales and 20 in Victoria. In Trial 2, the total number of students was 130 in Victoria only.

Results

Evaluation data were collected in the form of pre- and post-surveys to students and parents/carers to determine the extent to which students displayed a deeper engagement in reading and reported positive attitudes towards reading.

Likert scale pre- and post-surveys were administered by Margaret Gill to each student and distributed to parents and carers. Comments from parents and carers in Trial 1 (pilot study) led to changes in the RAPs in that they were modified with the aim of increasing students' self-direction in terms of reading and follow-up activities.

Post-survey questions for students

17. How do you feel about reading now that you've been taking the RAP home?

☺☺ ☺ ☹ ☹

18. How do you feel when it's time, at home, to read the RAP?

☺☺ ☺ ☹ ☹

19. How do you feel if someone reads a book to you from the RAP?

☺☺ ☺ ☹ ☹

Detailed description of image text

Students respond to the following questions by choosing a face with the correct expression:

- How do you feel about reading now you've been taking the RAP home?
- How do you feel when it's time, at home, to read the RAP?
- How do you feel if someone reads a book to you from the RAP?



Post-survey questions for parents

Post-Study Parent Survey about Home Reading.

1. *What is your response to the amount of material in the RAP? Tick one box.*
 too much about right too little
2. *Do you feel that the RAP material was suited to your child's age/need?*
 yes no
3. *How would you rate the interest level your child showed with the RAP? Tick one box.*
 showed great interest showed slight interest didn't show any interest
4. *Who was the person most involved in using the RAP with your child? Tick one box.*
 Mother Father Carer Grandparents Siblings
5. *Who else was involved in using the RAP with your child? Tick any box.*
 Mother Father Carer Grandparents Siblings

In both studies, the responses from parents/carers and students suggest that the RAPs had a positive effect on students' attitude towards and involvement in reading. The greatest impact of this strategy was on seven- and eight-year-old girls and eight-year-old boys. Girls were shown to be more inclined to initiate both shared and independent reading activities with family members. The survey data also showed that mothers were the main family members involved in sharing the reading packs with their children and that time was an important determinant of whether the reading and associated activities were completed. The results from both parents and students indicate that the RAPs strategy, while successful, needs to account for students' reading maturation in grades 1 and 2 and, thus, the texts and the activities may be quickly perceived by them as 'below' what the child can read and comprehend.

The positive response of the students to the RAPs is evidenced in the following comments:

'I liked the books the most. The book I liked the best was *Deep Deep Space*. The most interesting page was the moon shadows – new moon, crescent, first quarter and full moon. I like the colouring-in space activity because you get to colour the space parts and stick them together. You cut them out and there are only five colours: black, blue, brown and hazel.'



‘On Tuesday I took the dinosaur backpack home. I played with the dinosaur toy. Then I played the computer game. Then I played with the jigsaw puzzles and there was a piece missing. I read three books and I did the three work sheets. I played with the dinosaur toy in the bath and it got water in it. It was fun having the bag. I tried the CD and it worked. I read one book and then I read another book. I did all four puzzles. I did the maze. I came up with 21 words.’

Lessons learned

The RAPs strategy highlights the importance of fostering young students’ pleasure and engagement in reading. It offers teachers a complementary program to enhance students’ motivation to read, and to build and extend a reading partnership between the school and home, and between family members. These aspects of the RAPs are highlighted in comments from parents:

‘RAP has been an exciting and tremendous asset for my child’s reading and writing skills. The anticipation of bringing RAP home is overwhelming.’
(Parent, Questionnaire comment, Study 2)

‘I find the pack to be a good ‘break’ between the daily home readers as his enthusiasm for the daily readers has dropped, but when he brought the pack home he couldn’t wait to start it. It’s a good way to introduce variety in the homework.’
(Parent, Questionnaire comment, Study 2)

Next steps

The RAPs program continues with other teachers in the Victorian school in which it has been established, as Margaret now works there in a part-time capacity. The results of the trials in New South Wales and Victoria have been disseminated to other teachers via conference presentations and published journal articles. It is hoped that this dissemination will assist other schools to establish a similar program to sustain their students’ motivation to read.

Research base

Studies have shown that creating a classroom where students are engaged in literacy learning and see the pleasure in reading is conducive to early years literacy development (Louden et al 2005). It is thought that positive attitudes towards reading developed in the early years may sustain a student through the upper years of schooling. Teachers therefore play a vital role in maintaining and promoting students’ motivation to read and their positive attitudes towards reading (Snow, Burns & Griffin 1998). Strong school–home partnerships and programs that encourage family participation in children’s literacy education further enhance this focus on motivation and attitude (see Cairney & Ruge 1998; Hall & Harding 2003).



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The creator of RAPs, Margaret Gill, had observed that her students were eager to progress to the next level of their home readers, but did not demonstrate a high degree of pleasure in their reading. She had also observed over many years of teaching younger students that many boys and some girls quickly became disengaged from reading. On a visit to schools in New York, Margaret came across a program similar to the RAPs (see, for example, Barbour 1999). Margaret adapted this with the aim of reading enrichment and to focus her students' attention on the pleasures of reading and of sharing this reading with family members.

Further reading and links

Barbour, A 1999, 'Home literacy bags promote family involvement', *Childhood education*, vol 75, no 2, pp 71–75.

Cairney, T & Ruge, J 1998, *Community literacy practices and schooling: towards effective support for students*, DEETYA, Australia.

Fisher, B 2007, 'Can Reading Adventure Packs (RAP) complement and enrich the literacy program in your classroom?', *TEACH: Journal of Christian education*, vol 1, no 1, pp 4–5.


Gill, M & Morey, P 2009, 'An evaluation of the impact of reading adventure packs on a six-, seven- and eight-year-old child's attitude towards literacy', refereed conference paper for the National Conference for Teachers of English and Literacy.

Hall, K & Harding, A 2003, 'A systematic review of effective literacy teaching in the 4 to 14 age range of mainstream schooling', in *Research evidence in education*, EPPI- Centre, Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, London.

Louden, W, Rohl, M, Barrat-Pugh, C, Brown, C, Cairney, T, Elderfield, J, House, H, Meiers, M, Rivalland, J & Rowe, K 2005, *In teachers' hands: That's effective literacy teaching practices in the early years of schooling*, Department of Education, Science and Training, Canberra.

Snow, CE, Burns, MS & Griffin, P (eds) 1998, *Preventing reading difficulties in young children*, National Academy Press, Washington, DC.

Contacts

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