

Do Literature Circles Impact Social Activism and Reading Motivation? A Critical Examination

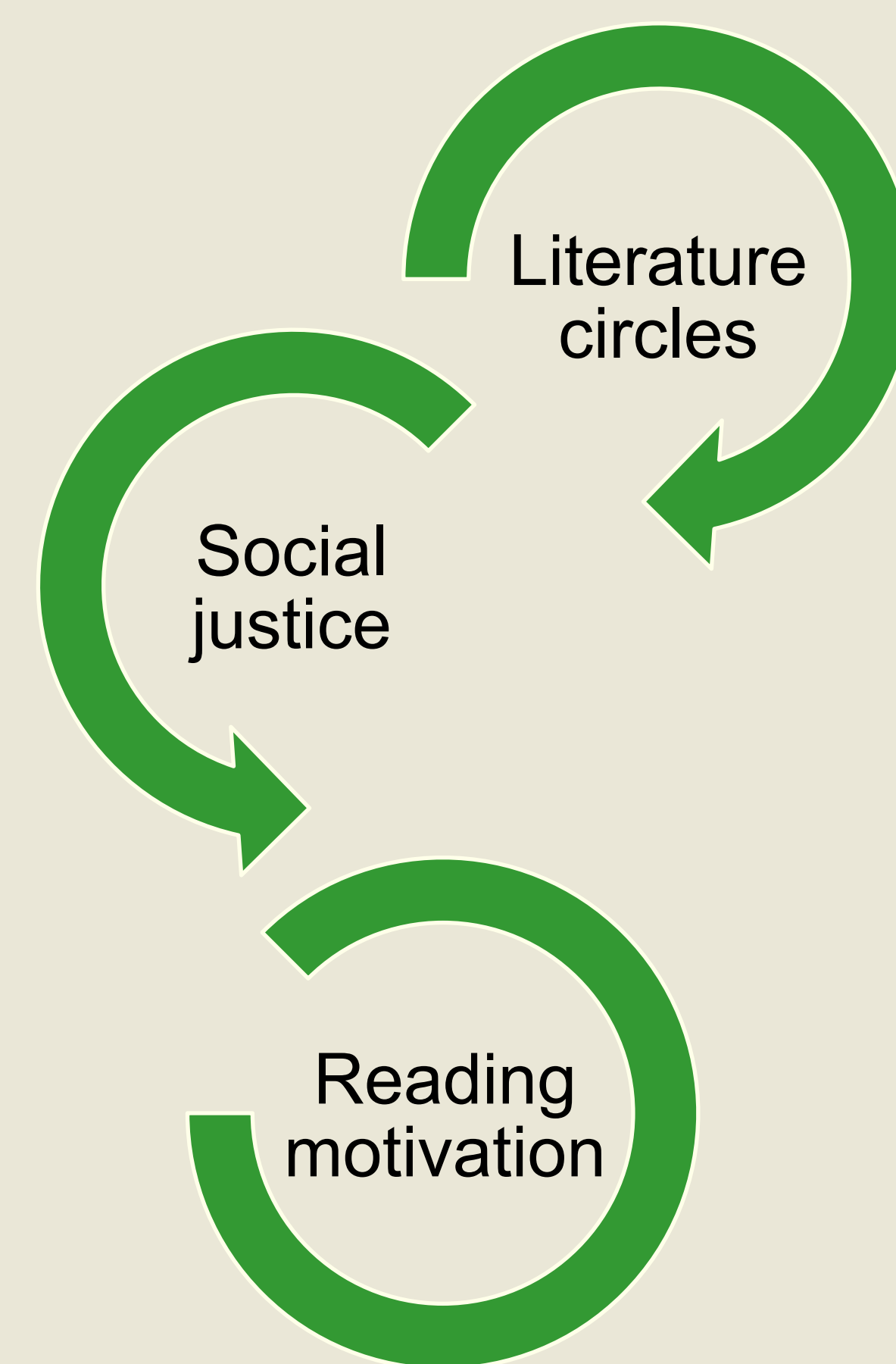
De'Keria Hunter, Florida A&M University

Introduction

Abstract

The purpose of this action research study is to examine how literature circles can promote social activism in elementary classrooms. This mixed-methods study is grounded in a three-tier foundational model which explores the intersection of sociocultural, reader response, and critical race theories and the impact on the reading motivation of participants in literature circles which feature culturally relevant literature. This study will explore the interpretations and the response to the literature of eight middle school boys and girls attending a Freedom School summer reading program. This topic is important to study because literature circles in the classroom help to promote reading motivation and social engagement in connection with developing literacy skills. However, no previous studies have addressed how those factors are impacted by use of literature featuring racial issues. Moreover, literature circles will be used to analyze how literature circles contribute to developing critical social activism.

Aims of the Research



The purpose of this study was to explore the impact literature circles have on students' social activism and reading motivation in a Freedom Schools literacy program. Literature circles are an effective way to help motivate students to read (Daniels, 2002; Murphy et al., 2009). Literature circles allow students to work cooperatively with one another in a safe environment. Students need the opportunity to engage in discussion about literature to foster a sense of comprehension.

Research Questions

What impact, if any, do literature circles have on students' a) social activism? b) reading motivation?

Method

Research Design

This study was designed using the three-tier foundational model which explores the intersection of sociocultural, reader response, and critical race theories and the impact on the reading motivation of participants in literature circles which feature culturally relevant literature. The implications of this study center around heightened cultural awareness, social justice promotion, increased reading motivation, and the exposure of young readers to the realities of social injustice and the benefits of using literature circles to address those issues.

Participants

The participants for the study were selected using a non-random, purposeful sampling technique based on the following predetermined criteria:

- Middle school students attending FAMU DRS Freedom School
- Five girls, four boys

Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected using the following primary instruments and data sources:

1. Reading Motivation Inventory (RMI)
 - Self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and reading avoidance
2. Basic Reading Inventory (BRI)
 - Passage fluency and reading comprehension
3. Focus group interview questions

At RMI post-test, scholars felt efficacious in their reading "most of the time" on average. The scholars' reading avoidance was lower on average, suggesting the scholars sought to avoid reading only "sometimes" on average, with the next lowest response option being "never."

Scholars intrinsic motivation only slightly decreased on average from pretest to posttest, but it is important to note that scholars started highly motivated on average and generally stayed high.

There is only data for 3 of the 8 scholar participants. For these scholars, all tested above grade level at pre- and post-test in passage fluency and reading comprehension.

Results

Conclusion

Analysis of the literature circles observations and discussions is ongoing. Preliminary results suggest that within the six-weeks, eight of the scholars showed significant interest in social justice, reading motivation, and literature circles as a whole. However, one out of eight of the scholars did not show any gains in regards to social justice, reading motivation, nor literature circles.

Discussion

- Previous studies have suggested significant gains in student talk from the use of literature circles.
- Teachers as well as students are at the precipice of understanding the impact that literature circles have on students.
- Additional research is needed in culturally-relevant literature environments to explore correlations between literature circles outcomes, social justice attitudes and behaviors, and reading motivation.

Key References

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