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## **U of L study shows middle school literacy program improves reading skills and motivation**

A three-year study by Dr. Robin Bright, a University of Lethbridge education professor, shows middle school students who sometimes struggle with reading can become engaged and motivated readers with the right resource materials and a focused approach.

Typically, literacy is a focus of elementary education as children learn the basics of reading.

“We lose that focus somewhat in middle and high school or else it just falls to the English teachers. What makes this study groundbreaking is that teachers from all subject areas committed to wanting to learn how literacy will make the work they do as teachers better,” says Bright.

The study came about after Bright was contacted by Dean Hawkins, principal at Wilson Middle School in Lethbridge. Teachers at the school told Hawkins they wanted to focus on literacy because their students didn’t seem interested in reading, and achievement scores showed some were reading at a primary school level.

“Not everybody is a great reader by the time they get to middle school or even likes reading,” Bright says. “The teachers at Wilson were most interested in increasing students’ motivation for reading and engagement and felt reading achievement would naturally follow.”

Hawkins adjusted the school’s timetable to allow for a six-week long literacy program with 50 minutes of instruction each day. Bright offered professional development to the teachers to help them teach reading. However, finding the right resources for middle school students proved to be a challenge.

“They need resources that are going to be fun and applicable to their lives and they also needed activities that would be interesting and worthwhile,” she says.

Such literacy resources are expensive so teachers either borrowed them or created their own. Each year the school applied for a grant from Chapters-Indigo to help them buy the needed resources. Their application paid off this year when the school was awarded \$125,000 over three years.

In each year of the study, Bright measured the effect of the literacy option by administering a questionnaire to a random sampling of students in each grade level and surveying teachers about their students' motivation.

"The results show that, through the literacy option, children got the message from their teachers that they can learn to succeed in literacy. Even if they're struggling readers, they still believe they can learn to read and learn to love reading," says Bright.

The teachers also observed that their students seemed very excited about the literacy option and were more interested in reading.

The study was published last fall and Bright has since been contacted by a number of teachers and schools asking for her assistance in setting up a literacy program. This summer, she will present the results of her research in Vienna at the European Literacy Conference.

Bright will continue working with the school for the next three years, continuing to provide professional development, to act as a resource person for purchasing materials, and to measure the impact of the grant by surveying students, parents and teachers yearly.

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**Contact:**

Caroline Zentner, public affairs advisor

University of Lethbridge

403-394-3975 or 403-765-5403 (cell)

[caroline.zentner@uleth.ca](mailto:caroline.zentner@uleth.ca)