

What Works Clearinghouse



Book Clubs

Effectiveness¹ No studies of book clubs that fall within the scope of the Adolescent Literacy review protocol meet What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards. The lack of studies meeting WWC evidence standards means that, at this time, the WWC is unable to draw any conclusions based on research about the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of book clubs on adolescent learners.

Program Description² Book clubs provide a reading framework designed to supplement or organize regular classroom reading instruction for students in grades K–8. This review focuses on *Book Club* (Raphael & McMahon, 1994)³ and *Literature Circles* (Daniels, 2002),⁴ but it uses the general (lowercase) term *book clubs* to embrace both *Literature Circles* and *Book Club* activities, as well as small-group discussion activities that closely resemble either strategy but may leave out one or more key elements of these originally conceived instructional paradigms.⁵ The book club framework aims to improve students' comprehension skills and ability to interpret and think critically about text. In book clubs, small

groups of students gather together to discuss a piece of literature in depth. The discussion is guided by students' responses to what they have read, which might include events and characters in the book, the author's skills, or personal experiences related to the story. Book clubs emphasize students' autonomy in selecting texts and topics for discussion and social interactions among students over solitary experiences with texts. Although both *Book Club* and *Literature Circles* were developed for use in regular classroom instruction during the day, they also may be used during after-school programs.

1. The studies in this report were reviewed using WWC Evidence Standards, Version 2.0 (see the WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook, Chapter III), as described in protocol Version 2.0.
2. The descriptive information for this program was obtained from publicly available sources: the research literature (Daniels, 2002; Raphael & McMahon, 1994) and the website (no longer active) of a distributor of components and materials for book clubs.
3. Raphael, T., & McMahon, S. (1994). Book club: An alternative framework for reading instruction. *The Reading Teacher*, 48(2), 102–116.
4. Daniels, H. (2002). *Literature circles: Voice and choice in book clubs and reading groups* (2nd ed.). Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.
5. Other models of literature discussion groups are not included in this review, as no research is available on them (e.g., Routman, R. [1994]. *The Blue Pages: Resources for teachers: From "Invitations."* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann).

Program Description

(continued)

The WWC identified 284 studies of book clubs for adolescent learners that were published or released between 1989 and 2009.

Eleven studies are within the scope of the Adolescent Literacy review protocol but do not meet WWC evidence standards.

- Eight studies do not establish that the comparison group was comparable to the treatment group prior to the start of the intervention.
- Two studies have confounding factors, such as combining book clubs with other interventions, which makes it impossible to attribute the observed effect solely to book clubs.
- One single-case design study did not meet the minimum threshold of at least three attempts to demonstrate an intervention effect.

Two hundred seventy-three studies fall outside the Adolescent Literacy review protocol:

- One hundred thirty-one studies have an ineligible study design.

- One hundred eighteen studies do not have a comparison group.
- Thirteen studies are meta-analyses or literature reviews.
- One hundred forty-two studies are outside the scope of the Adolescent Literacy review protocol for reasons other than study design.
 - Forty-nine studies do not measure the effectiveness of book clubs in a manner defined by the WWC.
 - Forty-two studies do not evaluate the impact of book clubs on student literacy outcomes.
 - Thirty-five studies feature a sample that does not include students in grades 4–12.
 - Fifteen studies feature a sample that is less than 50% general education students.
 - One study occurred outside the geographical area covered by the Adolescent Literacy review.

References

Studies that fall outside the Adolescent Literacy protocol or do not meet evidence standards

Adams, B. (1998). *Using the book club approach to improve readers' engagement, enjoyment and comprehension* (Unpublished educational specialist's thesis). Georgia State University, Atlanta. The study is ineligible for review because it does not include an outcome within a domain specified in the protocol.

Alger, C. L. (2007). Engaging student teachers' hearts and minds in the struggle to address (il)literacy in content area classrooms. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 50(8), 620–630. The study is ineligible for review because it does not examine the effectiveness of an intervention.

Allen, J., Möller, K. J., & Stroup, D. (2003). "Is this some kind of soap opera?": A tale of two readers across four literature

discussion contexts. *Reading and Writing Quarterly*, 19(5), 225–251. The study is ineligible for review because it does not examine the effectiveness of an intervention.

Allen, S. H. (1994). *Talking about literary texts: Research findings on literature discussion groups in the elementary classroom*. Columbus, OH: Martha L. King Language and Literacy Center. The study is ineligible for review because it is not a primary analysis of the effectiveness of an intervention, such as a meta-analysis or research literature review.

Alwood, C. S. (2000). *Exploring the role of the teacher in student-led literature circles* (Unpublished manuscript). Western Washington University, Bellingham. The study is ineligible for review because it does not examine the effectiveness of an intervention.

Anderson, K. M., & Salem State College. (2002). *Will literature circles improve students interest in reading?: An action research*

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- Andrews, S. V., & Wheeler, P. J. R. (1991, November). *Learning teams in the college classroom: The one-room schoolhouse revisited*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Lilly Conference on College Teaching, Oxford, OH. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a sample aligned with the protocol—the sample is not within the specified age or grade range.
- Baker, B. C. (2006). *Optimizing the effectiveness of literature circles: An after-school reading club intervention model* (Unpublished master's thesis). California State University, Stanislaus. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a comparison group design or a single-case design.
- Bales, J. (2008). *Supportive online learning environments for primary students: Literature circles in an educational MOO* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Charles Sturt University, New South Wales, Australia. The study is ineligible for review because it does not examine the effectiveness of an intervention.
- Bandermann, E. (1997). Engagement with text through social interaction (collaboration). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 59(06A), 176–1913. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a comparison group design or a single-case design.
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- Biedermann, M. R. (2000). *The effects of literature circles on fourth grade students' quality of discussion* (Unpublished master's thesis). Carthage College, Kenosha, WI. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a comparison group design or a single-case design.
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- Bowron, R. K. (2001). How teachers' use of literature circles reflects a transactional view of reading. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 62(06A), 75–2056. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a comparison group design or a single-case design.
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- Brock, C. H., & Raphael, T. E. (2003). Guiding three middle school students in learning written academic discourse. *The Elementary School Journal*, 103(5), 481–502. The study is ineligible for review because it does not examine the effectiveness of an intervention.
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- Buck, C. C. (2008). *Young readers respond to international children's literature* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). The University of Tennessee, Knoxville. The study is ineligible for review because it does not include an outcome within a domain specified in the protocol.
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