



Adolescent Book Group Impact Report

ADOLESCENT BOOK GROUP IMPACT REPORT 2019

WHY READING & OUR PARTNERSHIP MATTERS

The ability to read is a gateway skill to positive life outcomes, and development of that skill begins early and continues throughout a student's scholastic career.

OUR SHARED PURPOSE

At Words Alive, we believe that empowering experiences turn students into agents of change and advocates for their own education. We also believe that reading is the foundation of community and economic development, and that when everyone can read, whole communities thrive! During the 2018-2019 academic year, Words Alive partnered with like-minded leadership at the following partner locations to deliver our Adolescent Book Group program with 157 students in 8-12th grade.

- Barrio Logan College Institute – Upward Bound
- Breaking Cycles
- Lindsay Community Day School
- The Monarch School
- Youth Day Center



This program and partnership supported strategic goals of both partners:

- To engage the whole community in working together to ensure that children and youth are poised for school success.
- To develop programs, competencies and linkages that support and promote student empowerment and self-sufficiency.

OUR PROGRAM METHOD & PROCESS CONDITIONS

In our research-based program designed to ignite a love of reading, trained Words Alive facilitators team up with students to discuss, write and create projects that bring books alive. The diverse and relevant texts make reading matter to teens who find deeper, more meaningful contexts while connecting books to themselves and the world. As students share perspectives with their peers and caring adults in a safe space, students improve their communication skills, gain confidence and enhance their ability to express themselves.

Research shows that the most effective forms of student engagement are those that engage students in working both independently and directly with their peers and caring adults on learning activities in and outside the classroom. Our program is designed to meet the *process conditions* needed to build the strong engagement that leads to positive learning routines and improved achievement. Each of our program sessions are:

- **Linked to learning:** Content and activities are directly connected to age-appropriate developmental milestones and what students are expected to do academically.
- **Relational:** Activities help students build relationships, get to know one another and build trust.
- **Developmental:** Students are learning new skills, and after participating, better understand how they support reading achievement.
- **Collaborative:** Students are working together to learn a new skill as a group and with caring adults.
- **Interactive:** Students practice new skills and have opportunities for corrective feedback.

OUTCOMES – WHAT CHANGED FOR STUDENTS

Research shows that providing books alone is not enough to jumpstart or strengthen reading habits among youth. Instead, the most successful program models elevate student interest in reading via relevant and relatable texts and incorporating group and project-based learning.

Using this research base and tools identified or developed by our third-party evaluative partners at Dialogue in Action and the University of San Diego's Caster Center for Non-Profit and Philanthropic Research, our Adolescent Book Group focuses on three key impact goals. That students:

Develop an enduring commitment to reading.

Objective: Students internalize the value of reading as they analyze a close reading of characters, plot and theme and experience life-changing ideas through discussion with their peers and adults.

Become life-long learners.

Objective: Students experience positive attitudinal shifts about learning and recognize their own ability to seek out information to solve problems, acquire critical thinking skills and transition successfully into post-secondary education or career environment.

Become advocates for themselves and their futures.

Objective: Students become empowered to invest in their futures by increasing self-esteem and clarity as readers, writers and speakers who use effective communication strategies to express themselves.

Our ultimate objective is that students believe in the power of reading and love what reading means in their lives. That is the tipping point between someone who can read and someone who calls themselves a *reader*. To get there, our program aims specifically to influence what students *know*, how they *feel*, and what they *do* about their own reading development and enjoyment.

WHAT STUDENTS SAID

Participating students were asked to complete a retroactive evaluation survey during the last week of the program. This survey intends to measure student skillsets, interest, confidence and value placed on reading, with importance placed on literacy building activities and literacy behaviors before and after the program.

STUDENT SURVEY RESPONSES

It is well documented in research on literacy development in adolescents that skills, motivation or interest to read and confidence as a reader work in concert to propel student ability forward.

In that vein, survey responses from students who participated in the program were overwhelmingly positive and demonstrated growth in

AUTHOR VISITS

Words Alive hosted three authors talks this year where students met the creators of the characters they love! Authors discussed the value of representation in literature, told relatable experiences from their own lives, revealed their initial failures and then persistence required in their journeys to get published and encouraged students to make their own voices heard. The chance to interact with these diverse and talented role models showed students no goal is out of reach.



Mark Oshiro, *Anger is a Gift*



Jessica Therrien, *Carry Me Home*



Kwame Alexander, *The Crossover*

these three key areas. Students stated that the books chosen were relevant to their lives and that reading in the program had broadened their perspective; improved their ability to express themselves as readers, speakers and writers; and influenced their perceived value of reading.

Figure 1 below shows the percentage of students who agreed or strongly agreed that a specific skill was strengthened via participation in the program. (Note that n=46).

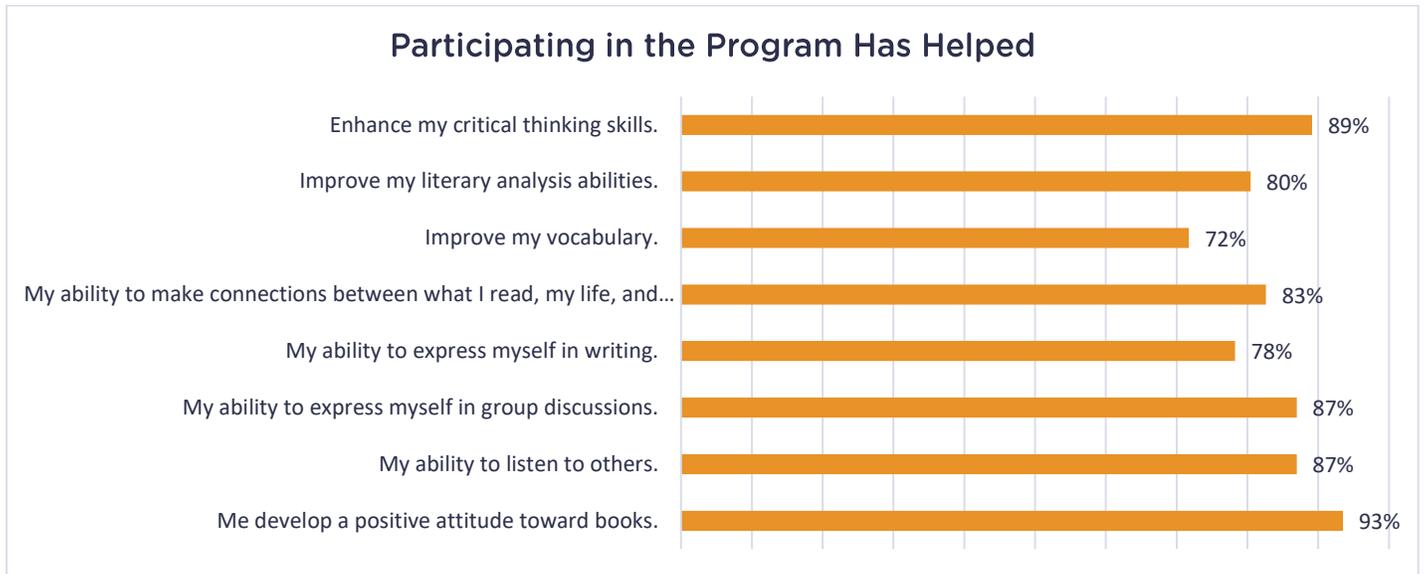


FIGURE 1

In addition to strengthened skillsets, students identified themselves as better readers after the program. Figure 2 depicts, on a Likert Scale of 1-5, the percent of students who rated themselves a good (4) or very good (5) reader before and after participating in the program.

By the end of the program, more students also considered reading to be an enjoyable thing to do. Figure 3 depicts, on a Likert Scale of 1-5, the percent of students rating reading as a good (4) or great (5) way to spend their time.

Correlated to this improved opinion of reading, 81% of students reported that they planned to spend at least some of their future free time reading because of their participation in Adolescent Book Group.

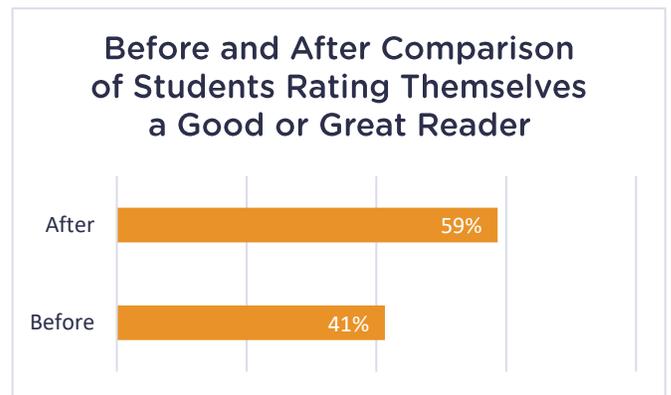


FIGURE 2



FIGURE 3

STUDENT COMMENTS

Students were also asked to identify how the program had helped them change their story. Student statements suggested a broadened world view and increased comfort expressing themselves.

About changing their story, students said:

"Before I didn't like reading. I would skip chapters just to get to the end of the book. But we read interesting books with Words Alive that are relatable and current. I wasn't curious before, now I can read a book nonstop. Sometimes, the teachers tells us to stop at a certain point and I can't, I have to keep going!"

*"Before the program, I didn't care about reading. With the Words Alive program, I found the first book I ever really liked, which was *Anger is a Gift*. I re-read it all the time."*

"I have a bookshelf at home now and each book has a meaning to me."

"I've learned the importance of discussing as a community. This allows us to understand each other better."

"It made me open my mind to others' ideas and allowed me to open myself up much more."

"It gave me more confidence to read out loud in front of a big audience."

"I realized that there is more to life than just social media."

"Before I was bad at reading, I didn't like it because I wasn't able to do it perfectly. After participating in ABG, I find reading fascinating. I love memoirs and before I didn't even know that there were different genres of books. Like, I didn't even know the difference between fiction and non-fiction."

"The program has helped me know my peers better and just like I don't judge books anymore, I also try not to judge people."

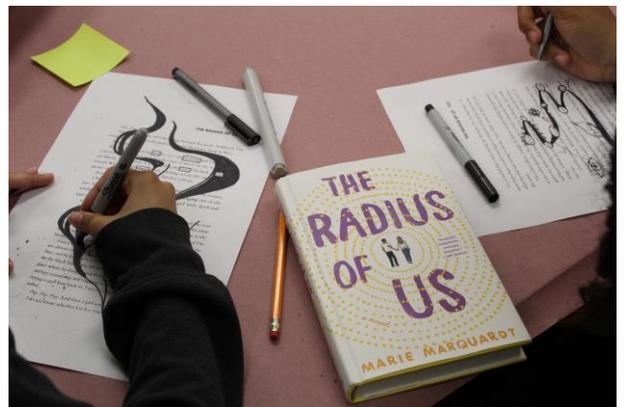
"Words Alive was a place where I can share my ideas and connect with others about situations occurring in a book. It was a place where I can be myself and speak from my own experiences. Words Alive helped me want to read more."

"It has opened my mind to so many things in this world. It has made me want to keep reading, learning and giving out that knowledge. It helped with my vocabulary reading skills and choice of words. It's also given me a new thing I enjoy doing than rather run the streets with the homies."



"The book made us laugh, smile, think and cry. Yes, there were a lot of tears because we all connected to the book, because all of us have been in similar situations as the characters. Thanks to our book group, I had a safe place where I could be myself...We created a circle where we were able to talk about our past and our present problems...this is our radius now, *The Radius of Us*."

- Luis, speaking at the exhibit of student work, San Diego Art Institute



Finally, we asked students to identify one word to describe their experience participating in the program. Their responses suggested an empowering experience for youth.

Student descriptions included:



REFLECTIONS

In our nineteenth year delivering the Words Alive Adolescent Book Group, we continue to observe a deep resiliency among students, and that supporting student engagement in reading development translates to stronger values of reading and learning in their lives.