



Book Buddies Program Evaluation
July 2022

Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
Acknowledgements.....	5
Introduction.....	6
Program Background & Context.....	7
Links to BC Curriculum and Surrey’s Priority Practices	
Development	
Materials and Resources for the Project	
Location	
Goals	
<i>Book Buddies</i> Program Logic Model	
Evaluation Context.....	10
Rationale	
Purpose	
Evaluation Questions	
Stakeholder Engagement	
Methods.....	13
Evaluation Approach & Design	
Significance of the Study	
Informed Consent & Confidentiality	
Data Sources & Collection	
Data Analysis	
Outcomes.....	21
Findings & Discussion.....	29
Recommendation.....	61
Evaluation Limitations.....	65
Appendix.....	67
References.....	71

Executive Summary

Program

This one-on-one reading program, *Book Buddies*, was developed and implemented by the SFU Surrey – TD Community Engagement Centre (CEC) partnered with the Surrey School District Community School’s Partnership Department, the READ Surrey White Rock Society, and the Literacy Task Group with funding from Decoda Literacy’s Fostering Literacy Grant.

This pilot program supported 12 children who were reading below their grade level in grades 2-4, as research shows that strong early reading skills are a predictor of future academic success. Reading at the appropriate grade level has been identified as a protective factor for vulnerable children. The goal of this pilot program was not only to support learners to read at their grade level but, even more importantly to foster a love for reading and to encourage children to become lifelong readers. The activities focused on making reading fun and developing confidence and motivation to read. Activities also guided learners through reading exercises that focused on the following keys to reading success: Phonemic awareness, Phonics, Developing Vocabulary and Sight Word banks, Reading Comprehension, and Fluency. There also was a component of the program that focused on family literacy and empowering parents to support their child’s reading journey from home.

Purpose of Evaluation

Our main goal of the evaluation was to learn about the effectiveness of this program and the mentorship approach to shifting reluctant readers to enthusiastic readers. Therefore, our evaluation approach focused on an inclusive design where participants were able to have the opportunity to engage in self-evaluation connected to their attitudes and behaviours associated with reading and literacy – including measures such as confidence, motivation, and self-efficacy.

Methods

A mixed-methods utilization-based approach was used for this report. The evaluation was created in collaboration with stakeholders to assess the resources, inputs, and short-term outcomes of the program in relation to its objectives and goals. The focus of the evaluation was to consider how people in the real world would experience the evaluation process and apply the evaluation’s findings. Quantitative data, including financial, human, and material resource inputs, was summarized to demonstrate the program’s reach. Qualitative data was collected from interviews with volunteer mentors, program staff (volunteer supervisor and lead volunteer), and parents/guardians. Student participant data was collected through an interactive drawing and reflection exercise. Qualitative data were analyzed for basic frequencies using NVivo, a software program used for qualitative and mixed methods data. The

qualitative data were coded to identify themes and commonalities. All participants signed informed consent forms and were made aware of confidentiality and data safety.

Findings & Discussion

The evidence collected from various perspectives suggests that overall, *Book Buddies* contributed to a change in student participants' attitudes and behaviour towards reading and literacy activities. The trusting relationship that developed between the students and their mentors had a significant impact on the student's confidence and motivation in reading. Challenges experienced in delivering the program led to the generation of strategies through debriefing and discussion among volunteers and program staff, as well as listening to students and their parents/guardians' voices. The strategies later became the strength of the program. For example, because volunteers and the program staff noticed that many students struggled with focusing on their tasks in reading/literacy activities during the sessions, several strategies were worked out, such as taking a short break outside, incorporating physical components to literacy activities, and implementing a reward system, to help them through this. These strategies were received well by most of the students and became the strength of the program.

Recommendation

- Establish communication with student's classroom teachers and a principal prior to the start of as well as throughout the program.
- Consider longer and/or more frequent sessions.
- Incorporate homework to be done at home between sessions with an incentive system (for example, stickers).
- Create an opportunity for more parents/guardians in children's reading and literacy activities.
- Secure a larger number of volunteer mentors than the number of students.
- Use digital tools and/or games to make literacy activities and reading more fun.
- Incorporate more physical literacy activities throughout the program.

Acknowledgements

This evaluation would not be possible without the support, time, and ongoing enthusiasm from the *Book Buddies* team, partners, and stakeholders.

I am grateful to the program volunteers for providing weekly feedback and responding to a post-program survey and a follow-up interview with the evaluation research assistant (RA). Your involvement in the evaluation process was key to learning how students experienced the weekly sessions and interacted with you. It was also significant that you were able to act as a community researcher to conduct an evaluation activity with students.

I am grateful to the lead volunteer, volunteer and volunteer supervisor for providing detailed weekly reports throughout the program, which made the evaluation RA witness how the sessions went. Your thoughtful reflections on the program and tangible recommendations were valuable for evaluation and improving the program further.

I am grateful to the program administrators and lead partners for supporting me in planning and conducting the evaluation from the beginning to the end. You were always available and willing to provide advice and support whenever evaluation RA needed.

I am grateful to the student participants' parents/guardians for their willingness to complete surveys and for sharing their honest thoughts about their children's reading and feedback on the *Book Buddies* program. A special thanks to those older siblings who helped parents/guardians communicate with program staff by translating English to their first language.

Last but not the least, I would like to thank the students at the elementary school for always welcoming the evaluation RA to join in during program activities, providing honest and thoughtful feedback, and drawing on their feedback about the program.

*Please note that this evaluation was based on a detailed evaluation plan conducted by Akiko Ohta, the evaluation research assistant.

Introduction

This report is about an evaluation of an after-school literacy program named *Book Buddies*, piloted at Surrey school in British Columbia (BC) from February to June of 2022. The purpose of the evaluation was to learn about the effectiveness of this program and the mentorship approach to shifting reluctant readers to enthusiastic readers. The evaluation approach focused on an inclusive design where participants have the opportunity to engage in self-evaluation connected to their attitudes and behaviours associated with reading and literacy – including measures such as confidence, motivation, and self-efficacy.

Research results on after-school literacy programs have consistently been showing that these programs are key to children’s literacy and reading improvement (Bayless et al, 2018). Those who can read, read more, while those who cannot fall farther and farther (LaVenía & Burgoon, 2019). Without intervention, this gap expands. Thus, early intervention at the elementary school level is essential. Especially children from low-income communities benefit the most from these programs as adequate resources may not be available in their homes or within their community (LaVenía & Burgoon, 2019). Having trained volunteers as tutors makes it possible to run such programs in a cost-effective manner and to make them accessible to those who, otherwise, cannot afford to enroll in them (Bayless et al, 2018).

The existing research studies have examined the three key elements of after-school literacy programs—reading comprehension, tutoring and family involvement—and confirmed their efficiency and importance. Reading comprehension is a critical life skill which is needed even beyond school and is central to the empowerment of people (Blanch et al, 2013). To achieve such a skill, children must be given an opportunity to work on their reading comprehension skills rather than simply improve their language skills through “traditional” reading (Blanch et al, 2013). One-on-one tutoring with a structured and individualized curriculum enables to monitor and adjust the support provided to children, which is a prerequisite for their meaningful learning. One-on-one tutoring also provides emotional support and stability through mentorship (LaVenía & Burgoon, 2019). Further, family involvement is also crucial to improving children’s reading comprehension. In after-school programs, parents and caregivers can be provided with resources and strategies to strengthen their children’s reading comprehension, and, ultimately, parents and caregivers will be empowered to teach their own children (Blanch et al, 2013). Family involvement enhances children’s learning by facilitating continuity and coherence between the program and the home environment.

This one-on-one reading program, *Book Buddies*, was developed and implemented by the SFU Surrey – TD Community Engagement Centre (CEC) partnered with the Surrey School District Community School’s Partnership Department, the READ Surrey White Rock Society, and the Literacy Task Group with funding from Decoda Literacy’s Fostering Literacy Grant.

This pilot program supported 12 children who were reading below their grade level in grades 2-4, as research shows that strong early reading skills are a predictor of future academic success.

Reading at the appropriate grade level has been identified as a protective factor for vulnerable children. The goal of this pilot program was not only to support learners to read at their grade level but even more importantly to foster a love for reading and to encourage children to become lifelong readers. The activities focused on making reading fun and developing confidence and motivation to read. Activities also guided learners through reading exercises that focused on the following keys to reading success: Phonemic awareness, Phonics, Developing Vocabulary and Sight Word banks, Reading Comprehension, and Fluency. There also was a component of the program that focused on family literacy and empowering parents to support their child's reading journey from home.

Program Background & Context

Links to BC curriculum and Surrey's priority practices

The *Book Buddies* program is in line with BC curriculum and modeling some of the best practices for reluctant readers. Through comprehensive reading activities with their mentors, children are to learn not only reading skills but also listening skills and self-regulation skills through mentorship. Like Surrey's priority practices, our evaluation activities gave children an opportunity to reflect on their own reading practice and set goals to take ownership for their learning.

BC curriculum. The following are Big Ideas (Grade 2-4) indicated in the BC curriculum for English Language Arts:

- Language and story/text can be a source of creativity and joy.
- Stories/Exploring stories and other texts helps us learn/understand ourselves, (our families, and our communities) and make connections to others and to the world.
- Everyone has a unique story to share.
Stories/Texts can be understood from different perspectives.
- Through listening and speaking, we connect with others and share our world.
- Playing with language helps us discover how language works. / Using language in creative and playful ways helps us understand how language works.
- Curiosity and wonder lead us to new discoveries about ourselves and the world around us. / Questioning what we hear, read, and view contributes to our ability to be educated and engaged citizens.

Surrey's priority practices. The following are four inter-related priority practices central to Surrey Schools' district-wide vision of Learning By Design:

- Curriculum Design
- Quality Assessment
- Instructional Strategies
- Social and Emotional Learning

Development

The *Book Buddies* program offered free one-on-one reading support to 12 children reading below their grade level in grades 2–4 at elementary school in Surrey, British Columbia. The program was conducted through 60-minute weekly sessions after school and was supported by Simon Fraser University (SFU) student volunteer mentors. Volunteer mentors were supported by an upper-level undergraduate who was hired in a paid ‘volunteer and program supervisor’ role and who led the session planning, training, logistics, communication, and on-site supervision of the program. A ‘lead volunteer’, not originally planned for, was also hired to support the supervisor and compensated with an honorarium. Initially, we thought an outreach worker of Surrey School District No. 36 (SD36) may be available at the school to support the program; however, it turned out that they were busy with another program during the chosen day/time of our program. The lead volunteer role has been very helpful for our other after-school programs in supporting the program and volunteer supervisor with the various components involved with running an after-school program. Therefore, we decided it would be wise to include this position to ensure adequate support for the program.

A graduate research assistant was also hired to lead a comprehensive and inclusive evaluation of the program. SD36 provided space, registration support, and access to age and reading-level appropriate books. READ Surrey/White Rock Society and the Literacy Task Group provided support for parent learning sessions, which included orientation session support, a ‘Read with Kids’ workshop, and support for the final program celebration.

The students were selected for the program by the school administration, based on their recommendations for participants who could most benefit from the program.

Materials and Resources for the Project

The main resource was the space at the school. We used the StrongStart (early learning development program) room and two adjoining classrooms, which allowed the mentors and participants to spread out. We also had access to and used a variety of books (provided by the school) that accommodated different reading levels. Snacks were provided to the program participants every week and the parents during the parent/caregiver sessions. More food was purchased for the final celebration event. Other materials were used throughout the session including small prizes and “fidget toys” to help incentivize the participants to focus on reading for the duration of the program. Books were purchased to use during the sessions and for participants to take home with them at the end.

Location

The *Book Buddies* program site, an elementary school in Surrey, is located centrally within Metro Vancouver. Among 23 local authorities in Metro Vancouver, Surrey is the largest in land area and the second most populous after the City of Vancouver (City of Surrey Statistics, 2016). Surrey's population is 588,490 as of 2021 and is projected to increase by over 304,010 in the next 31 years.

More than half of students attending school in Surrey belong to households in which a language other than English is spoken. Of the more than 190 non-English languages represented in Surrey schools, the highest percentages belong to Punjabi, Mandarin, Tagalog (Filipino), Hindi and Arabic (Surrey Schools, 2021). In the elementary school, approximately 52% of students are ESL (English as a Second Language) (Fraser Institute, 2020). Their September 2016 reading assessment showed below grade-level achievement for two-thirds to half of their students in Surrey Schools (Surrey Schools, 2017). "All parents at the elementary school highly value literacy and do all they can to support their children, but in many homes daily reading with parents is very difficult. (Surrey Schools, 2017, Part 1: Analysis of Context)" While the elementary school offers Home Reading programs with the help of their classroom teachers and learning support teachers, students' participation rate has not been as expected.

"We were eager to work with Book Buddies as our staff are committed to promoting a love of reading in our students. We hoped that this additional support after school would continue to build momentum for those students who were developing an interest in reading and increasing their emerging reading skills. We were thrilled to see the high-interest level from our students each week and hope this partnership will continue for this upcoming school year." – the elementary school

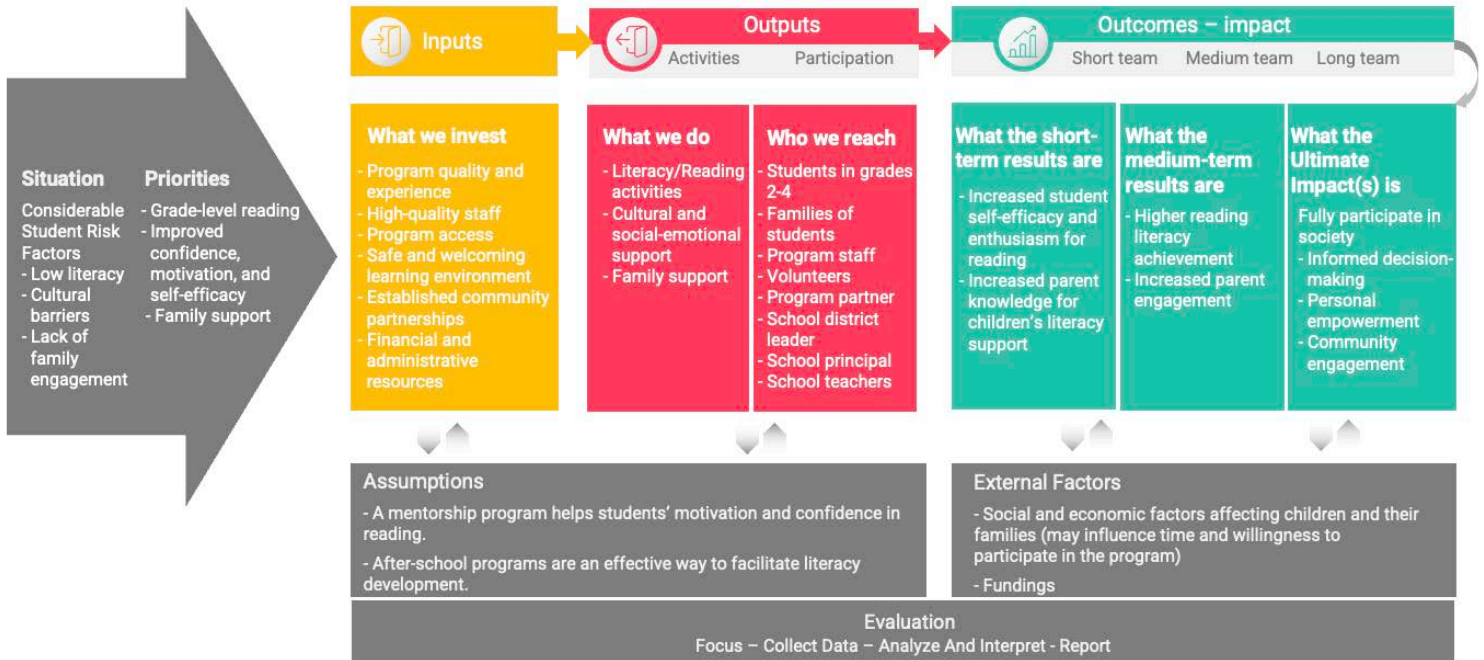
Goals

The goal of *Book Buddies* program has the following two goals implementing a tiered mentorship model composed of university volunteer mentors who will foster support, companionship, positive connections and learning through reading and literacy activities in a fun and informal environment.

- Support students in grades 2-4 at the elementary school to read at their grade level and foster a love for reading, and encourage children to become lifelong readers
- Improve student's attitudes and behaviours associated with reading and literacy – confidence, motivation, and self-efficacy

Book Buddies Program Logic Model

Figure1. Book Buddies Program Logic Model



Evaluation Context

Purpose

Our main goal of the evaluation was to learn about the effectiveness of this program and the mentorship approach to shifting reluctant readers to enthusiastic readers. Therefore, our evaluation approach focused on an inclusive design where participants were able to have the opportunity to engage in self-evaluation connected to their attitudes and behaviours associated with reading and literacy – including measures such as confidence, motivation, and self-efficacy.

Evaluation Questions

Overarching Evaluation Question:

- Do the *Book Buddies* program and the mentorship approach work for shifting reluctant readers to enthusiastic readers?

Table 1. Evaluation Sub-questions

Question Type	Evaluation Sub-question
Process Evaluation	1. What is the reach of the program?
	2. What was implemented and how?
	3. What human, financial, and material resources were provided and used?
Program Outcome Evaluation	4. What attitude and behaviour changes occurred in the students who participated in the program?
	5. What aspects of the program worked well?
	6. What aspects of the program could be improved?
	7. Are the program stakeholders satisfied?
	8. What difference did the program make for volunteer mentors and program staff (lead volunteer and volunteer supervisor) who were university students?

Stakeholder Engagement

Table 2. Stakeholder Matrix

Stakeholder	Interest in the Evaluation	Involvement in Evaluation Process
<p>Program Administrators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SFU Surrey - TD Community Engagement Centre Rachel Nelson (Associate Director, Partnerships and Programs) Saba Fatemi; and Trisha Duku (Program Manager, Civic and Community Engagement) <p>Lead Partner</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Surrey Schools - Community-Schools Partnership Department Meredith Verma (Manager of Community Schools Partnership) <p>Lead Partner</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> READ Surrey/White Rock Society & Literacy Task Group Shanti Ang (Literacy Outreach Coordinator) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To determine whether funds and resources have been used appropriately and efficiently To have documented benefits of the program To ensure the program meets the community and partner needs To understand whether the program can be replicated in other elementary schools and assist with securing additional funding To have a means to identify program strengths and opportunities for improvement 	<p>Involvement to Date</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actively participated and showed visible support for changes Provide sufficient funding Held the project team accountable for results Established clear expectations and objectives for the evaluation Served as a liaison between Surrey Schools - Community-Schools Partnership Department, READ Surrey/White Rock, the elementary school and SFU students Provided feedback on data collection methods Provided personal insight on their experience with the program <p>Future Involvement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that the program is meeting its established goals and objectives Ensure that any recommendations from this evaluation are viable and sustainable
<p>The Elementary School Staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Principal Teachers of <i>Book Buddies</i> Program Participants 	<p>Principal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To understand the benefits of the program to their school and students To understand areas for program improvement <p>Teachers</p>	<p>Principal</p> <p>Involvement to Date</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participated in the evaluation data collection activity (Principal) <p>Future Involvement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that the program is meeting its established goals and objectives

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To understand whether the program is meeting their student's literacy • To determine the role they will play in the future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that any recommendations from this evaluation are viable and sustainable
<i>Book Buddies</i> Program staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maddy Alvarez (Volunteer and Program Supervisor) • Itcel Arevalo (Lead Volunteer) • Akiko Ohta (Evaluation Research Assistant) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To determine whether planned activities met the established goals and objectives of the program • To determine how program activities can be improved upon to better meet the program objectives and goals • To aid in determining their future roles with the program • To understand and communicate the benefits of the program and their contributions for the purposes of personal and professional development 	Involvement to Date <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Served as a liaison between parents/guardians, student participants, student volunteers and teachers (Maddy & Itcel) • Participated in the evaluation data collection activities and provided personal insight on their experience with the program (Maddy & Itcel) • Led a comprehensive and inclusive evaluation of the program (Akiko)
<i>Book Buddies</i> Program Volunteers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SFU students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To determine the role they will play in the future of the program • To identify the benefits that participating in the program will have in the future • To understand and communicate the benefits of the program and their contributions for the purposes of personal and professional development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided constructive input, feedback, and advice to identify any gaps • Trained and conducted an evaluation activity with students as community researchers • Participated in the evaluation data collection activities to provide personal insights on their experiences with the program
<i>Book Buddies</i> Program Participants (select grades 2-4 students) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Elementary School 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To identify the benefits that participating in the program will have in the future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participated in the evaluation data collections activities to provide personal insights on their experiences with the program
Parents/Guardians of <i>Book Buddies</i> Program Participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Elementary School 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To understand the program is meeting their child(ren)'s literacy and social connectedness • To determine the role they will play in the future • To identify the benefits that participating in the program will have in the future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided constructive input, feedback, and advice to identify any gaps • Participated in the evaluation data collection activities to provide personal insights on their experiences with the program

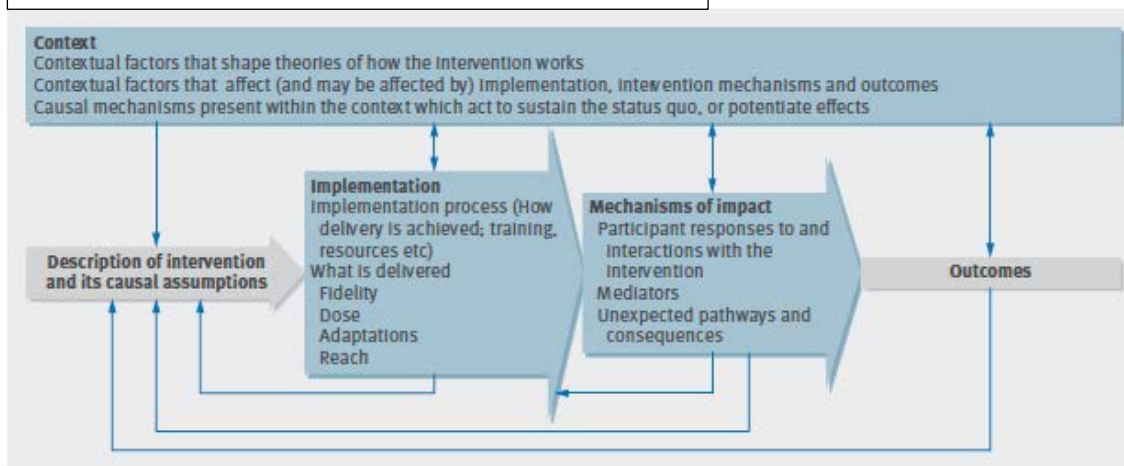
Methods

Evaluation Approach & Design

As our evaluation framework, we employed the four domains of evaluation from Moore et al. (2015) to analyze and evaluate the *Book Buddies* program:

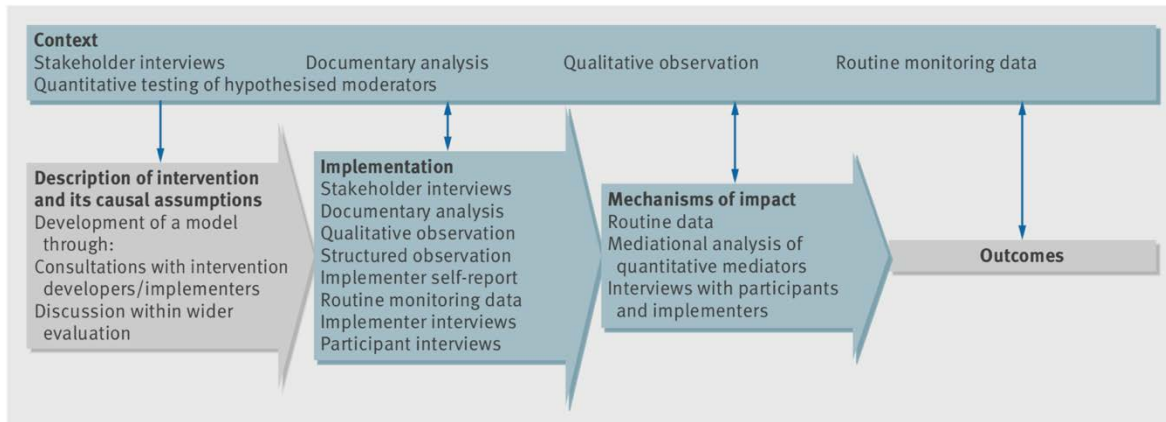
- Description of the intervention and its causal assumptions
- Implementation
- Mechanisms of impacts
- Outcomes

Figure 2. Elements of evaluation; Source: Moore et al. (2015)



The *Book Buddies* program was analyzed and evaluated by applying Moore's four domains framework to identify key information and/or generate new knowledge (data). Figure 1 further breaks down elements of evaluation to be covered under each of the Moore's four domains. For example, in order to analyze and evaluate (a) description of intervention and its causal assumptions of the program, we will (1) gather existing data available, (2) explore potential new data sources, (3) collect new data from possible sample populations, (4) employing various methods of data collection, and (5) data analysis. We went through the same elements in analyzing and evaluating (b) implementation, (c) mechanisms of impact, and (d) outcomes. Figure 2 below indicates how the evaluation methods link to the aims of the evaluation framework.

Figure 3. Methods of evaluation; Source: Moore et al. (2015)



Significance of the study

Various after-school literacy programs have been researched and evaluated to inform the most effective evidence-based reading instruction (Graham et al, 2018). For instance, some of the studies compared the results of participating children’s reading assessment within the program or compared them with the results of children who did not participate in the program. Moreover, the effectiveness of manualized curricula was also compared with embedded literacy interventions on one-on-one tutoring. However, there exists a gap in research evaluating the programs based on children’s self-assessment; these are needed to reflect children’s perspectives and experiences about their program involvement. In our evaluation study, participating children are the centre of the evaluation process, which covers aspects such as drawing and follow-up conversation. Children’s weekly progress reports written by volunteer mentors and interviews with mentors and children’s families were the supporting data to help understand and interpret children’s voices.

Young children are often marginalized in social research as it tends to privilege verbal voice as research data (Blaisdell et al, 2019). To elicit children’s inner voices and perspectives, we planned to take a child-sensitive approach by applying an arts-based method, where the participating children were asked to draw pictures, for example, “Draw yourself participating in the *Book Buddies* program.” (Driessnack & Furukawa, 2012). Subsequently, they were asked to talk about the drawing and make stories around it. This activity was introduced as “draw-and-tell” to children (Driessnack & Furukawa, 2012). This approach helped evaluate a program by learning the most about it from the participating children themselves. It would enable child-centred program evaluation and differentiate the study from the existing evaluation of the literacy programs. This evaluation added new insights and understanding to the existing studies and help improve the program experience for children (Driessnack & Furukawa, 2012).

Informed Consent & Confidentiality

Informed consent was obtained from all evaluation participants prior to the evaluation process. The consent form stated the purpose of the evaluation, details on how their confidentiality was to be maintained, that their participation was voluntary, that they could refuse to answer any question for any reason, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

A signed consent form was collected from volunteer mentors at the beginning of the program, as they were asked to submit weekly feedback to capture students' progress as part of the evaluation data.

A student assent form was created using simple wording for students' understanding and distributed among them during their weekly session. The evaluation RA explained what was written in the form, and volunteer mentors supported each student to ensure they fully understood its contents and sign the form if they wished to participate in the evaluation activity. Then, the students took the assent form home to obtain their parent's/guardian's signature on it.

Parental/guardian consent form regarding their child's involvement (if they wished) in the evaluation activity was created separately. Considering the parents/guardians' comprehension of English, the evaluation RA handed the form to the parents/guardians directly when they were at school to pick up their children at the end of the session and explained the form's contents and the evaluation purpose to them and answered any questions asked by them.

All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. These transcriptions and a key sheet containing the participants' names and other identification details were stored in a personal, password-protected online repository. The files were stripped of any information that could identify the participants (e.g., names, email addresses) to ensure confidentiality. These files also were backed up on a password-protected external hard drive at the evaluation RA's home. Only the evaluation team had access to the data.

Data Sources & Collection

To answer the evaluation questions, both quantitative (students' demographic data, specific program data such as budget and attendance lists) and qualitative data (surveys with open-ended questions, interviews, student participants' drawings and reflections) were collected.

The qualitative data was designed to evaluate the *Book Buddies* program from various perspectives. The surveys and interviews were based on a list of questions soliciting each of these perspectives. The questions were deliberately general to give the evaluation participants the ability to present their experiences as openly as possible. In addition, if there were any

aspects not addressed by our questions but which the evaluation participants wanted to discuss, then it was encouraged. These data sources are outlined below.

1. Baseline Survey & Interview with Parents/Guardians

The baseline survey, which consists of the five questions mentioned below, was conducted to understand the students’ attitudes and behaviours with respect to reading at home and school prior to participating in the *Book Buddies* program, as well as parents/guardians’ challenges in helping their children read, and the support they wish to have. The questions were created by the evaluation RA in consultation with the program administrator.

- What kinds of books does your child enjoy reading?
- What is her/his reading habit at home?
- What is her/his reading habit at school?
- What kind of challenges do you face in helping your child read?
- What kind of support do you wish you had to help your child with reading?

The survey was distributed to parents/guardians in person by the evaluation RA when they were at school to pick up their children or was sent home with students to be given to their parents/guardians. The completed surveys were brought back to the program by students; they were collected by the volunteer supervisor and lead volunteer and handed over to the evaluation RA. Considering the parents’ comfort with and command of English, the option to respond through an interview/conversation with the evaluation RA instead of filling out the survey was given to the participants. The same questions were asked during the parent/guardian orientation to talk about the topics in a group setting.

Table 3. Number of responses to Baseline Survey & Interview with Parents/Guardians

	Responded		Not Responded	TOTAL
	Baseline Survey	Baseline Interview		
Parent/Guardian	5	2*	6	12

*One parent responded to both the survey and conversation.

2. Weekly Lesson Plans

The weekly lesson plan was created by the volunteer supervisor and shared with the volunteers, program administrators and evaluation RA by email, typically a few days before the next session, after considering the feedback from volunteers and students for the session just delivered. A total of 19 sessions were conducted during the program period between February and June 2022.

3. Volunteer Mentors’ Weekly Feedback on Students’ Progress

Volunteer mentors were requested to fill out a weekly feedback form regarding students’ progress immediately after the session onsite before the debriefing among volunteers, the lead volunteer, and the volunteer supervisor. The forms were collected and scanned by the lead

volunteer and shared with the evaluation RA by email every week. The feedback form includes the following items:

- Check-in & Check-out scores:
- Reading strategies observed:
- Tricky words/vocabulary: What words caused the student to hesitate or stumble?
- Comprehension conversation: What did the student say that told you they understood the meaning of the text?
- The mentee struggled with:
- Here is how I helped:
- How the mentee engaged in the session today:
- The highlight of today's session:
- What could be improved for next time?

These items in the form were created by referring to a similar program that was delivered by the SFU Surrey-TD Community Engagement Centre (CEC) in the past and modifying it for the *Book Buddies* program.

4. Program Staff's Weekly Report on the Sessions

The volunteer supervisor was requested to complete a weekly report to reflect on the session and take a note for the next session. Later, the lead volunteer was also requested to complete the report, as she mostly oversaw the session by supporting the volunteer supervisor instead of working with an individual student. When she worked with specific students, the volunteer mentor's feedback form was used. The items in the report were also created by referring to the similar program that the SFU Surrey-TD CEC delivered in the past and modified to the *Book Buddies* program. The report includes the following items:

- Session Activities
- Issues that took place during the session (and how/if they were solved)
- Positive moments during the session
- Overall observation and feedback from today's session
- Notes for next week

5. Student Participant's Drawing and Reflections

On Thursday, June 15th, one week before the day of evaluation, community researchers—volunteer mentors trained by the evaluation RA—conducted an evaluation activity with the student participants (grades 2–4). One room was used for students' regular literacy or reading activities, while the other quiet rooms were used for students paired with their volunteer mentors for the day to complete the evaluation activity. In these rooms, 2–3 students, along with their volunteer mentors, worked on the evaluation activity at the same time but separately. Students were provided with coloured markers, pens and paper. They were first asked to draw pictures of their best moments in the program and then about the drawings, their feelings toward reading, and their reading practice, compared before and after

participating in the program. This activity took approximately 20 minutes for each student during the regular session.

Table 4. Number of participants in the evaluation activity with students

	Participated in evaluation	Absent	No Consent	TOAL
Volunteer Mentor	9	4		13
Student	9*	2	1	12

*Seven students completed the evaluation activity on June 15th, and two students completed it on June 22nd, the day of celebration, as they were absent on June 15th.

6. Program Completion Survey & Interview with Parents/Guardians

The program completion survey, which consists of the following six questions, was conducted to understand the changes in children’s attitudes and behaviours toward reading that the parents/guardians observed over the course of the program and their own learnings in supporting their children’s reading. The questions were created by the evaluation RA in consultation with the program administrator.

- Have you noticed any changes in your child’s **interest** in reading since starting the program?
- Have you noticed any changes in your child’s **confidence** in reading since starting the program?
- What has your child told you about her/his experience in the program?
- Through your participation in this program, what new things have you learned to help your child with reading at home?
- What kinds of challenges do you still face in helping your child read?
- Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your or your child’s experience participating in the *Book Buddies* program?

For this completion survey, the evaluation RA first tried to have an interview/conversation with the parents/guardians, with the help of the program administrator, to make it easy for them to share their answers and stories that they may want to talk about in relation to the topics. The interview took place when the parents/guardians were at school to pick up their children at the last regular session, as well as on the celebration day when the parents/guardians were invited to mingle in a separate room with food and drinks. The conversation took approximately 5–10 minutes with each parent.

The survey was distributed to those who preferred to write down their answers on the celebration day. In addition to the English version of the survey, the Arabic version of the survey was prepared by SFU’s Arabic-speaking volunteers, with the help of the program administrators. Two parents chose to fill out the survey in Arabic; these answers were translated to English by the same volunteers.

Table 5. Number of responses to completion Survey & Interview with Parents/Guardians

Parent/Guardian	Responded: 7		Not Responded	TOTAL
	Completion Survey	Completion Interview		
		2 (in Arabic)	5	5

7. Program Completion Survey & Follow-up Interview with Volunteer Mentors & Program Staff

The program completion survey, which consisted of the following six questions, was distributed to all the volunteer mentors by email to learn about their perspectives on students' experience in the program and any changes in their attitudes and behaviours towards reading. The questions were created by the evaluation RA in consultation with the program administrator.

- How was your experience working with your mentee throughout the program?
- Have you noticed any changes in your mentee's **interest** in reading since starting the program?
- Have you noticed any changes in your mentee's **confidence** in reading since starting the program?
- What kind of challenges did you face helping your mentee read? How did you work through those challenges?
- What were some moments of success during your sessions? Can you share some examples?
- In what ways do you think this program will benefit your mentee on their journey to become lifelong readers?

The volunteer supervisor and the lead volunteer had a separate survey, which consisted of the following eight questions, because of their role in overseeing the program.

- How was your experience working with the students throughout the program?
- What did you observe on overall students' experience in the program?
- How was your experience supporting the volunteers with their work with the mentees throughout the program?
- In your observations of the program and your connection with the volunteers, have you noticed **changes in the mentee's interest** in reading since starting the program?
- In your observations of the program and your connection with the volunteers, have you noticed **changes in the mentee's confidence** in reading since starting the program?
- What kind of challenges did you notice the volunteers facing when helping their mentees read? How did you help them with working through those challenges?
- What were some memorable moments of success from these sessions? Can you share some examples?
- In what ways do you think this program will benefit the mentees on their journey to become lifelong readers?

After the survey was completed, volunteer mentors, including the lead volunteer and the volunteer supervisor, were invited to an online follow-up interview with the evaluation RA to gain more detailed perspectives and stories based on the answers they provided in the survey. The conversation was relaxed, semi-structured, and conducted on Zoom in the timeslot that they had signed up for.

Table 6. Number of responses to completion Survey & Interview with Volunteer Mentors & Program Staff

	Responded	Not responded	TOTAL
Evaluation Survey	9	4	13
Follow-up Conversation	9	4	13

8. Book Buddies' Volunteer Reflections

This is an online survey that is mandatory for the volunteers to complete and submit to the SFU Surrey-TD CEC to obtain a certificate of volunteering. These reflections were reviewed to learn the difference *Book Buddies* made for the volunteers themselves.

9. Evaluation RA's Field Notes & Research Journal

The evaluation RA took notes of her observation every time she visited the program site. She also used a research journal to keep notes and write down reflections and thoughts as a means of deepening her understanding of the emergent themes and monitoring any biases that may arise for us.

Data Analysis

A mixed-methods, utilization-based approach was used for this evaluation. Quantitative data including financial, human, and material resources inputs was summarized to demonstrate the reach of the program. Qualitative data collection and analysis were processed iteratively, with each conversation being transcribed shortly after it was conducted. The text of each conversation was analyzed for emergent themes using NVivo, a software program used for qualitative and mixed methods data, before being proceeded to the next conversation. Three levels of coding were undertaken. First, the textual data was broken up into discrete parts line-by-line. Second, connections between the initial codes were drawn, and lastly, one central category that connects all the codes from the analysis and captures the essence of the evaluation was generated. This process continued until saturation was reached; that was until no new insights or codes were being gleaned from new conversations.

The surveys with open-ended questions, volunteer mentor's weekly feedback on the student's progress, and program staff's weekly reports from program staff were also added in NVivo along with the conversation data for coding and analyzed for emergent themes. The drawing components of this evaluation were analyzed and coded by the Evaluation RA and themes, commonalities and contrasting ideas were recorded and added in NVivo. All the data were used to cite a constructivist grounded theory, which focuses on generating new theories through inductive analysis of the data (Delve, 2021), to answer the evaluation questions on *Book Buddies* to demonstrate participant satisfaction levels, strengths and challenges of the program, and whether *Book Buddies* is meeting participants' needs.

Outcomes

1. What is the reach of the program?

The student participants in this evaluation project were those who wished to participate in *Book Buddies* from among students who were identified as those who would benefit most from the after-school literacy program. A total of 11 students registered initially, and two new students joined from the 3rd session. One registered student never attended the session; later, their parent notified the program administrator of the student's intention to withdraw their registration. Below is the profile of the student participants and their families.

"We selected our students for this program through consultation with our Learning Support Team, classroom teachers and administration. Those students who were 2 years behind in their reading, at a minimum, were given priority of selection. We also screened students for interest/enthusiasm, commitment to prior programs offered at the school, and parent support."
– the Elementary School

Table 6. Grades of the Students Participated in *Book Buddies*

Grade	# of student	Percentage
2	2	16.67%
3	7	58.33%
4	3	25.00%
TOTAL	12	100.00%

Table 7. Gender of the Students Participated in *Book Buddies*

Gender	# of student	Percentage
Male	5	41.67%
Female	7	58.33%
TOTAL	12	100.00%

Table 8. Family's Country of Origin

Family's Country of Origin	# of family	% of family
Iraq	7	58.33%
Canada	2	16.67%
Egypt	1	8.33%
Syria	1	8.33%
The Philippines	1	8.33%
TOTAL	12	100.00%

Table 9. Language Spoken at Home

Language Spoken at Home	# of family	% of family
Arabic	5	35.71%
Assyrian**	4	28.57%
English	3	21.43%
Tagalog	1	7.14%
Turkish	1	7.14%
TOTAL	14	100.00%

*Some families speak more than one language at home.

** The language spoken in the northern part of Mesopotamia, which corresponds to most parts of modern-day Iraq as well as parts of Iran, Kuwait, Syria, and Turkey. (National Geographic, 2022).

Table 10. Length in Canada

Length in Canada	# of family	% of family
3-7 years	5	41.67%
8-12 years	4	33.33%
All life	2	16.67%
20 years	1	8.33%
TOTAL	12	100.00%

2. What was implemented and how?

Volunteer training session. Volunteer training was 2.5 hours long and mandatory for all 14 volunteers to complete prior to the program’s start. Volunteers were required to submit completed criminal record checks to the program administrators in advance. The training was provided by the volunteer supervisor, who was trained by the program administrator prior to the volunteer training, with the help of the program administrator. The training covered a PowerPoint presentation, volunteer manual, icebreaker activities, and scenario activities where the trainees had to use the information they learned in training to solve situations in small groups. Information in the manual and presentation included the following:

- Expectations and Program Structure
- Roles and Responsibilities
- Train the Trainer:
 - Reading Strategies and Prompts
 - Phonics and Sight Words
 - Game Ideas
 - Trouble Shooting
 - Review of Forms
- Parent Engagement
- Volunteer Engagement
- COVID and Youth Safety Protocols

After the training, the research RA spoke to the volunteers about the evaluation of the program, explained the confidentiality of the information shared and the consent to participate in the evaluation process, and distributed a consent form for them to sign if they wanted to participate in the evaluation.

Weekly sessions. *Book Buddies* operated once every week on Wednesdays after school, between 3 pm to 4:00 pm (60 minutes) from February 2nd to June 22nd, 2022, including two weeks of March break. The total number of sessions was 19. The average attendance and absence are indicated below.

Table 11. Attendance of the Students and Volunteer Mentors

	Average Attendance	Average Absence	TOTAL Sessions
Students	16.08	2.92	19
Volunteer Mentors	15.50	3.50	19

The session schedule was planned as follows:

Session schedule:

- 2:45 p.m. – Prep time and set up (this includes sanitizing and setting up session supplies by volunteers)
- 3:00 p.m. – Students arrive, check-in + sanitize, welcome, reminders, announcements
- 3:10 p.m. – Students get a snack, seated group literacy game
- 3:20 p.m. – Students work with their volunteer buddy (reading or literacy games)
- 3:50 p.m. – 5-minute break/icebreaker game or riddle
- 3:55 p.m. – Students resume working with their volunteer buddy
- 4:00 p.m. - 4:15 p.m. – Student check-out + Dismissal
- 4:20 p.m. – Clean-up and sanitize (by volunteers)
- 4:30 p.m. – Debrief (among volunteers)

Every week, the volunteer supervisor assigned each volunteer specific duties to divide them into teams to complete all the necessary tasks effectively.

Specific Assigned Duties – This is what you need to do:

- **Safety Captain:** When participants check-in, give them some hand sanitizer and make sure they have a mask. If they are not already wearing a mask, give them a new mask to wear.
- **Bag Boss:** Before participants arrive, section off an area of the room where they can put their bags. Use masking tape in small strips to identify separate areas for the kids to put their items. After participants have checked in and gotten their hand sanitizer and mask, the bag boss is responsible for helping the kids find their area to put their bags and coats.
- **Snack Leader:** After participants have sanitized and put their bags/coats down, the snack leader is responsible for helping them get a snack, and getting settled in a seated area.
- **Material Lead:** This role is responsible for setting out the materials for the session (ie. making sure the cart of books/literacy materials that the school has put together is brought to the room, setting out any printed material from (the Volunteer Supervisor) so it is accessible, putting out other books or material that (the Volunteer Supervisor) has brought).
- **Room Setters:** This role is responsible for wiping down surfaces using the school district sanitizer and paper towels (this is available in the office area on the other side of the washroom). Volunteers in this role should also move tables/chairs around in the room as needed to try to achieve some distance between the pairs of readers.
- **Dismissal Game Leaders:** Volunteers in this role will help (Lead Volunteer) lead a game/activity during dismissal to keep the kids busy while we ensure that each child goes home with the right parent/guardian.

- **Clean Up Crew:** Volunteers in this role will clean up and organize the room while (the Volunteer Supervisor), (Lead Volunteer) and the Dismissal Game Leaders are handling dismissal of the kids at the end of the program.

Below is an example of the weekly session plan created by the volunteer supervisor.

Table 12. Example of the Weekly Session Plan

Time	What's Happening?	Volunteers Will...
2:45pm – 2:55pm	<p>Participants are arriving to the room, checking in, getting a snack and getting settled.</p> <p>Welcome, Reminders, Announcements</p> <p>Reminders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Free for all when dividing into rooms - Ask them to write down what books they would like to get more of and to write their answers down with their buddy to hand in later - Review classroom rules - Breaks should be taking place at 3:35pm - We will go outside at 3:35pm for a break — stay in the rooms until then (unless you need to use washroom, get water, etc) - Remember to do Check In/Out scores <p>Announcements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ** Introduce new Rewards/Incentives ticket system! <p>Shape of the Day:</p> <p>2:45 - Snack 2:55 - Rewards Program & Silent Ball 3:05 - Reading & Board Game 3:35 - Break w/ Riddle & Outside time 3:40 - Reading & Connect 4 4:00 - Duck, Duck, Goose & Dismissal</p>	<p>Volunteers with assigned roles (above) are performing their roles.</p> <p>(The volunteer supervisor) will check kids in as they come into the room.</p> <p>(The lead volunteer) will go to the front desk and see if any of the registered kids were absent today.</p> <p>Volunteers will help students find a spot/seat and make sure everyone is silent/paying attention</p> <p>Volunteers will sit with their buddy at tables for snack and participate/support students during the group game</p>
2:55pm- 3:05pm	<p>Group Game:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Silent Ball 	<p>(The volunteer supervisor) and (the lead volunteer) will lead the game</p> <p>Volunteers will stand with the kids and encourage their participation</p>

<p>3:05pm – 3:35pm</p>	<p>Volunteers work with their buddy on reading or literacy games.</p> <p>Reading [10-15 mins]</p> <p>Board Game [10-15 mins]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pick one word for the student to learn (ideally one they have struggled with routinely in the past) - Using this word, roll the dice and see complete the task outlined on the space you land on. Use coloured paper pieces provided as markers to keep track of the space you're on. 	<p>Volunteers will pair off with a buddy for this time frame.</p> <p>Like we discussed last week, room dividing will now be a free for all — it's up to you and your buddy which room you would like to be in for the day</p> <p><u>*Note:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - You do NOT have to stick to this exact schedule, feel free to mix the order up. For example, if your buddy doesn't want to jump into reading right away you can start with the Board Game, or Connect 4 as a warm up - If these games/schedule aren't working try a game/activity you think your buddy would enjoy more. (The Volunteer Supervisor) will have other games from previous sessions on hand including - Roll, Say Keep - Roll It, Pick a Letter, Build a Word - Tic Tac Toe - Roll It - Matching game - iSpy - Stickman
<p>3:35pm</p>	<p>5 minute break/icebreaker game or riddle:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What sport has four letters, is played all around the world, and begins with a G? <p>A. Golf</p>	<p>Use this time to give your buddy a break.</p> <p>As a group we will go outside to the outside hallway in front of the Annex doors.</p> <p>If they need a break you can introduce the 'Riddle of the Day' to them.</p> <p>If they want to keep reading/playing scheduled activities feel free to continue</p>

<p>3:40pm</p>	<p>Volunteers resume working with their buddy:</p> <p>Reading (remember to try out different literacy methods, like the ones demonstrated in the videos)</p> <p>If this extra 20 mins of reading is too much for your buddy feel free to try playing Connect 4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Write 16 words total, one in each circle. Take turns reading the word and placing your designated coloured dot (from the board game above) over the word you have read aloud. The first person to connect 4 dots in a row (horizontal, vertical, diagonal) wins! 	<p>Help your buddy to choose a book they are interested in from the resources provided (or offer a PDF book if you have brought your device).</p> <p>If your buddy needs a break from reading, you can play Connect 4, go back to the Board Game, or try another game/activity you think your buddy would enjoy more.</p> <p><u>*Note:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - You do NOT have to stick to this exact schedule, feel free to mix the order up. For example, if your buddy doesn't want to jump into reading right away you can start with the iSpy, the Alphabet Game, or something else as a warm up - If these games/schedule aren't working try a game/activity you think your buddy would enjoy more. (The Volunteer Supervisor) will have other games from previous sessions on hand including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Roll, Say Keep - Tic Tac Toe - Roll It - Roll It, Pick a Letter, Build a Word - Matching game - iSpy - Stickman
<p>4:00pm</p>	<p>Buddies check-out scores and dismissal</p> <p>Do your check-out score with your buddy</p> <p>Dismissal – we will be bringing the buddies to the front of the school so we can release them to their parents/guardians. While (the Volunteer Supervisor) is asking the parents to line up outside of the school and getting their names, (the Lead Volunteer) will lead a game.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Duck, Duck, Goose <p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gWNZMziSI4k</p> <p>Clean Up – while dismissal is happening, the clean up crew will clean up the room, sanitize, organize materials, etc.</p>	<p>Everyone – do your check out score with your buddy, and help them get their coats/bags</p> <p>Dismissal Game Leaders – go with (the volunteer supervisor), (the lead volunteer) and all the buddies out to the front of the school, and help with Silent Ball</p> <p>Clean Up Crew – Clean up!</p> <p>Cleanup Checklist:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stack chairs (in both rooms) - Wipe tables (in both rooms) - Wipe whiteboard (in both rooms) - Gather all resources and put away

Parent/caregiver sessions. The parent/caregiver sessions were offered three times during the program period.

The first session was delivered on Zoom about one week after the start of the program on the evening (19:00–19:30) of Thursday, February 10th, for 30 minutes. It was an orientation to the program and a chance to get to know the parents and any challenges they were experiencing with regard to reading with their kids at home. The program administrator explained the program using a PowerPoint presentation, and the research RA facilitated the discussion with the parents/guardians about their children’s reading habits at home and the challenges of supporting their reading at home.

The second session was delivered in person on Wednesday, April 13th, for about one hour at the elementary school in April during the *Book Buddies* session. Children carried on with their regular sessions with their buddies while the parents gathered in another room, where food was offered to learn about strategies for reading with children. Personnel from READ Surrey/White Rock gave the ‘Read with Kids’ presentation and provided community resources through which they could access their own or their children’s reading practice.

The third session was a program celebration on Wednesday, June 22nd. For the first half of the session, the parents were gathered in a separate room and mingled with each other, food being offered, while the research RA talked with some of them through a list of questions from the Program Completion survey. Two parents wrote down their answers in Arabic. For the second half of the session, the parents joined the children in the other room and participated in celebration activities with them, which included food, a certificate ceremony, and a craft activity.

While only a handful of parents participated in the first and second parent/caregiver sessions, most of them attended the third session and celebration and watched their children receive their certificates.

Training Session for Community Researchers/Volunteer Mentors. On Thursday, June 9th, six days prior to the evaluation day, the evaluation RA held a training session for the volunteer mentors on Zoom to teach them to conduct an evaluation activity with students. The volunteers were paired with a student they had had the least opportunity to work with during the program to make the student feel free to talk about both the positive and negative aspects of their experience.

The training session covered various aspects, including the purpose of the evaluation; reasons why the volunteers were asked to act as community researchers; tips for conducting a good interview, including dos & don’ts; pairing with students for the evaluation; and detailed instructions for the evaluation. In addition, the session was video-recorded for those volunteers who did not participate live.

Some of the advantages for the volunteers to act as community researchers include:

- Community researchers can understand what students are talking about and navigate conversations with them.
- Engaging with community researchers encourages the students to reflect on their program experience and self-evaluate.
- Training and allowing volunteer mentors experience acting as community researchers helps them reflect on their volunteer experience and the impact they have made on students.

Table 13. Number of the Volunteer Mentors Attended the Community Researcher Training

Volunteer Mentor	Attended: 10		Not attended	TOTAL
	Live training session	Recorded training		
		6	4	3

*There were 14 volunteers initially; however, 1 had to drop out toward the end of the program.

3. What human, Financial, and Material Resources were provided and used?

Table 14 displays the *Book Buddies* resources use and budget breakdown. Three SFU students were hired as the program staff (the Volunteer Supervisor, the Lead Volunteer, and the Evaluation RA) to deliver and evaluate the program. The total cost of these employees was approximately \$6,800.00.

Material supplies included those used throughout the session, including small prizes and “fidget toys” to help incentivize the participants to focus on reading for the duration of the program. Books were purchased to use during the sessions and for participants to take home with them at the end. Snacks were provided to the program participants every week, and snacks were also provided to parents during the parent/caregiver sessions. More food was purchased for the final celebration event. The cost for the *Book Buddies* program by SFU totalled \$10,003.76.

Table 14. *Book Buddies* Program Budget and Resource Input 2022

Item	Additive Cost SFU	In-Kind Cost SFU	In-Kind Cost SD36	In-Kind Cost READ
Salaries and/or honoraria - Volunteer and Program Coordinator - Lead Volunteer - Evaluation Research Assistant	\$6,800.00			
Snacks and /or meals	\$314.72		\$1,000.00	
Program Supplies (books, etc.)	\$789.04		\$1,000.00	\$500.00
Space			\$1,000.00	
Transportation	\$2,100.00			
SFU/SD36/READ Coordination and Admin		\$6,000.00	\$2,000.00	\$1,250.00
Total	\$10,003.76	\$6,000.00	\$5,000.00	\$1,750.00
Grand Total		\$22,753.76		

Findings & Discussion

The results of this evaluation are organized by the guiding evaluation questions. Qualitative data sources were coded by themes and applied to answer each of the questions. To best capture and demonstrate the perspectives of stakeholders and provide more reliable and detailed results to highlight the findings, direct quotes from the conversations with stakeholders and answers to the open-ended survey questions were included as often as possible.

4. What Attitude and Behaviour Changes Occurred in the Student who Participated in the Program?

Change in Attitude (Feeling). At the beginning of the program, most of the students who participated in *Book Buddies* had low interest and confidence in reading. The testimonials from the students and volunteer mentors indicate that the more the students built a relationship with their mentors and worked closely together, the more they gained interest and confidence in reading. The students continuously received encouragement and recognition from their volunteer mentors for making an effort, which had a significant impact on their confidence; however, some students' attitudes remained the same as before *Book Buddies*.

- Student's testimonials
- Gaining more interest in reading
- Gaining confidence was correlated to relationship-building with each of their mentors
- Encouragement from mentors helped students gain confidence
- Becoming more confident in a one-on-one setting
- Enjoying more challenging books
- Some students' level of confidence remained similar to what it had been at the beginning of the program

- **Student's testimonials**

"I hated reading because of a different reading program, Kumon, but I started enjoying reading because of BB." – Student

Community Researcher: *"How do you feel about reading? How did you feel about reading before you started the BB program?"*

Student: *"I feel good. I feel like I know how to read better. My understanding of the books got better."*

- **Gaining more interest in reading**

"There was this one moment of success during the sessions that always stands out to me personally as a mentor. (Student) was my mentee, and she came up to me and told me that she wants to learn how to read because she loves her piggy books. I was glad that she had come up

to me because this gave me the opportunity to help her with details such as pronunciation. At the end of it, she felt proud and accomplished and thanked me for helping her. This was a sweet moment because (student) actually took interest in her part and let me be a part of it as well.” – Volunteer Mentor

- **Gaining confidence was correlated to relationship-building with each of their mentors**

“I think a lot of the confidence might have gained as time went by, and we got to know each other more. She will now sometimes tell me to bring her books to read, and she can read sentences with more confidence.” – Volunteer Mentor

“She was able to pick up books she enjoyed and read through them compared to the beginning when she was more closed off.” – Volunteer Mentor

- **Encouragement from mentors helped students gain confidence**

“I do think that once the student becomes comfortable around their partner, they gain that confidence to attempt and improve. If the mentor is consistently encouraging the students, then they would gain self-confidence. If I talk individually, (student), (student), and (student) were quite confident when they read the book and would attempt to sound out the words that they found difficult. For the other students, I would read along with them.” – Volunteer Mentor

“Confidence was a big challenge for (student). I was able to help her by using words of encouragement and reading books she excelled at to boost her confidence like ‘Cat in the hat’.” – Volunteer Mentor

- **Becoming more confident in a one-on-one setting**

“(Student) is more confident in a one-on-one setting than when grouped with her peers.” – Volunteer Mentor

- **Enjoying more challenging books**

“Bringing in my own book near the end of the program seems to re-spark an interest/excitement in reading. Mentee seemed excited to both be challenged by something I told him would be more difficult as well as excited to read something that I was familiar with from around his age.” – Volunteer Mentor

“At the beginning, she seemed to read on her own, but over time, she was able to develop the confidence to do so and also read more challenging books as well.” – Volunteer Mentor

- **Some students’ level of confidence remained similar to what it had been at the beginning of the program**

“In some students, their confidence was certainly boosted. They were excited to come to Book Buddies every week and read to their buddies. The praise and tickets they received for doing it gave them that push that they knew they were smart readers. However, in some students, I believe due to a lot of absences and just their personalities, their confidence has remained the same. They have the same relationship with reading as they did before. Although they loved

coming to Book Buddies, a few students didn't care about reading and wanted to do other things, such as colouring or playing outside." – Program Staff

"Confidence is still lacking in both (student) and (student). However, with (student), it seems like more just a lack of interest than a confidence issue. (Student) is more confident in a one-on-one setting than when grouped with her peers." – Volunteer Mentor

Change in Behaviour (Action). Students and their parents/guardians testified that the students read more at home at the end of the program. The volunteer mentors also recognized that the students increased their positive behaviour at their own pace; these behaviours include, for example, being able to finish reading an entire book, being able to comprehend the content of the books, and not being afraid of sounding out unfamiliar words.

- Student's improvement in reading
- Reading more at home
- Giving a positive influence on each other in terms of reading
- Being able to finish entire books
- Improving reading comprehension
- Not being afraid of sounding out unfamiliar words

- **Student's improvement in reading**

"Another small moment of success was that when it was necessary for me to issue corrections to my mentee, such as how to pronounce or spell a word, further instances were often correct, demonstrating that my actions did have an effect." – Volunteer Mentor

"She has improved her reading a lot. I think we can try chapter books next week. I was proud that she spent time reading during her spring break, and her reading skills have really improved." – Volunteer Mentor

- **Reading more at home**

"I read books for 5-10 minutes everyday. I read at home more." – Student

"(I was) not into reading that much. Only sometimes my mom reads before going to bed. Still not much, but I read more at home than before. Sometimes I ask my mom to read some pages."
– Student

Community Researcher: *"How often do you read at home?"*

Student: *"15 minutes almost everyday"*

Community Researcher: *"How often did you read at home before BB?"*

Student: *"Not that often"*

“Last time, no understanding anything. This time he understands everyday. “Mama, I need to read everyday. I need to read books.” Last time, “Mama, no, no understand anything.” This time, no, he understands everything, and he reads everyday.” – Student’s mother

Evaluation lead: *“Do you see any change in his reading since he started BB?”*

Student’s mother: *“Last time, (student) needed help in reading; now, he doesn’t need help. He reads by himself and even helps mom read so much.”*

Research RA: *“Before starting this program?”*

Student’s mother: *“No good. My big son, who is in high school (14), was helping (my child). Now, no. (He) reads every day by himself.”*

“Sometimes, I buy new books (now). Sometimes, I go to library with my son. This program helps my son, (student), and (he) helps the younger son. (He) reads very very too much now. Last time no. Big change.” – Student’s mother

- **Giving a positive influence on each other in terms of reading**

“(My mentee) was more motivated to read and helped my other buddy when she found her struggling. She and (another student) are really close, so if (another student) is focused, so is she.” – Volunteer Mentor

“(My mentee) brought a book she read during her Spring Break, and she was able to summarize the main storyline. The highlight of today’s session: Seeing how much she improved in reading compared to our first session students help other students and give a good influence on each other.” – Volunteer Mentor

- **Being able to finish entire books**

“With some students, it was a moment of achievement when we would finish reading one complete book. For example, (student) and (student) are energetic and do tend to get distracted, so it was difficult to keep them focused on reading. I remember with (student), after giving frequent breaks, we were able to finish reading a book. When I was partnered with (student), (student), (student), and (student), they seemed to be very engaged and wanted to earn tickets. They would read their book and want to complete the other activities (program staff) had planned as well.” – Volunteer Mentor

- **Improving reading comprehension**

“Some moments of success are when my mentee is able to answer correctly the questions I asked about the book. This makes sure that they are not mindlessly reading but instead also understand the words they are reading.” – Volunteer Mentor

- **Not being afraid of sounding out unfamiliar words**

“A moment of success during my time with (student) was when he sounded out the words by himself without my assistance. For example, when we first worked together, I usually had to

sound out the letters, and he repeats after me; however, during our last session, he sounds out unfamiliar words on his own and barely needs my help.” – Volunteer Mentor

5. What Aspects of the Program Worked Well? (Program Strength)

The Reward System. The reward system where students who completed the expected reading or literacy activities received tickets was implemented in *Book Buddies* from session 6 (March 9th, 2022) onwards, after the program staff brainstormed a way to make students more motivated and focused on reading during the sessions. According to the testimonials, the students enjoyed the reward system—some tried to collect tickets to get the rewards, while others simply enjoyed collecting them to see how much they had read and feeling proud of themselves. The reward system also gave authority to the volunteer mentors and helped them manage the students’ reading and literacy activities. Although a few students did not show interest in the reward system, overall, the system made them excited to read with a goal in mind.

“The ticket system was an incentive program (program staff) suggested to help keep students motivated throughout the program and give the volunteers the ability to maintain a level of authority. For the ticket system, we used raffle tickets which were given to students each time they completed an activity related to the Book Buddies program. For example, if a student read a book, completed a literacy game, etc. they would receive one ticket for each task completed. Students would then accumulate tickets and could redeem them for a prize. Prizes included drawing for three tickets, whiteboard time for five tickets, outside time for ten tickets, and fidget toys for ten tickets. Each prize had a time limit of five minutes associated with it.” – Program Staff

- The reward system made the students excited about reading and performing literacy activities
 - The system helped students focus on reading and performing literacy activities.
 - Student’s testimonial
 - The prize toys could be given to students instantly and permanently (without waiting until the end of the program)
 - Some kids were not interested in the tickets
 - The reward system helped the volunteer mentors gain more authority
 - Some students enjoyed simply collecting tickets without exchanging them for prizes
-
- **The reward system made the students excited about reading and performing literacy activities**

“Introduction to the reward system worked wonderfully as the students were intrigued, and as soon as I finished explaining how it worked, our buddies were ecstatic to begin reading.” – Program Staff

“I think the most memorable moment that was super successful for Book Buddies was implementing the ticket system. If reading wasn’t already a goal for them during the hour, it was definitely now. But not just an easy 1-minute read book would do. They knew they had to try extra hard to read a book that was not too challenging and not too easy for them. I would like to say that this boosted the interest as well as the confidence with reading because they knew there was an end goal or some of them saw it as a game in which they had to collect as many as they could to try and win their prize but also an experience. I’m very glad we also introduced it early on in the program so that I could actually say that this system really worked for them. I would’ve liked for them to be able to keep the prizes they chose throughout the program, but due to budgeting, it wasn’t very practical.” – Program Staff

“With the new ticket system, students were so excited to tell me what books they had read/games they played because it meant they could come to collect some tickets. This helped to create more open communication and establish a system centred around positive reinforcement.” – Program Staff

- **The system helped students focus on reading and performing literacy activities.**

“I also feel like the ticket system that (program staff) and (program staff) integrated in the middle of the iteration worked. Because kids were more intrigued to read and earn some prizes and stuff, so, that kind of motivated them to get their work done, read books and do the activities that were laid out for them, and that’s... for that day. ... Before the ticket system, it was hard for us to get the kids to focus and then, I noticed stuff like, after the ticket system, the kids were intrigued in getting the tickets. And that kind of helped them stay in focus. That’s what I think for the Book Buddies that worked. Like, if we had done that earlier, like in the first session or the second session, it would have them more intrigued throughout the whole program.” – Program Staff

- **Student’s testimonial**

Community Researcher: *“What did you like about BB?”*

Student: *“When they got the ticket thing because then you get to draw, go outside, and do some other stuff.”*

- **The prize toys could be given to students instantly and permanently (without waiting until the end of the program)**

“The only thing if I may, like, as a change, if it’s possible, I think I mentioned it in the evaluation as well, in the form, they should have kind of permanent prizes and stuff. Because some of them are like, could I get this fidget toy, but I’m like yeah, you can have it, but it’s only for that day because we can’t keep buying toys for the kids because of the budget, right. So, that was the only issue. It’s like they didn’t get to keep them (without waiting until the end of the program).” – Program Staff

- **Some kids were not interested in the tickets**

Volunteer Mentor: "I think it just varies from kid to kid, but (student) ... with her ticket system worked because she was very motivated to get a toy at the end of the session, but I noticed with (student), he wasn't really interested in the ticket system, so I'm not sure if there were other ways we could have done motivated the kids to read. Because I know the ticket system like, ... other kids like (student) was really like, ... what you call it? really motivated? But (student) was kind of just there. Even if I mentioned to him, like, oh like, "Let's read a book, and you can get a ticket for it.", he wouldn't care."

Research RA: "But, has he ever responded to anything to motivate him?"

Volunteer Mentor: "Usually, we just move on to a different task and not worry about the tickets because I even asked him if he keeps his tickets, and he always said he left them at home. Yeah, so I was just like, okay. I guess the tickets meant nothing to him."

- **The reward system helped the volunteer mentors gain more authority**

"Implementing the ticket system allowed volunteers to have more autonomy over the students they worked with, as they were the ones to give out the tickets. The ticket system helped volunteers maintain respect and authority by keeping students motivated through a reward system as students could be redirected into a Book Buddies activity using tickets as an incentive." – Program Staff

- **Some students enjoyed simply collecting tickets without exchanging them for prizes**

"I think the ticket system really work well because, at the beginning, there was no ticket system, and the kids were not motivated to read because they didn't have an incentive to... a prize or something, but after the tickets, the kids started so like, "oh! if I read one book, I get one ticket, and if I do this, I have more tickets," And so, a lot of them started to collect tickets. I... I know some kids have like 90 or 80 tickets, but they have never exchanged them for a prize. But I think there's just like: "Oh, I would gain something if I do this" I think there was a good thing to do, like the tickets, like some motivation for them to do things. ... The purpose of the tickets was to exchange some toys or free time to go outside or write or draw on the whiteboard, but I don't know why the kids never exchanged the tickets. I... I just don't know, but I just know that a lot of kids just started to collect tickets. I know that my buddy has exchanged it once, just one time. I think she exchanged to play with the toys, like for ten or...

M: ...five minutes, that's it. But then, at the end, she's just started to collect tickets just like the other kids." – Volunteer Mentor

"I think just the idea of like having the most tickets to them, that's enough. There doesn't necessarily need to be a prize for some of them. Like, I can already think of one kid who just wanted to get as many tickets as he could. He doesn't really care about the prizes, but I think we truly won't know until this week because then we'll see if some of them go, like, "hey, what are these tickets for finally?" I don't know. We'll see, I guess, on Wednesday. ... This week, we'll give them away, and we'll see if they finally spend their tickets, or they're just gonna keep their tickets for... just to say that they have a certain amount. I don't know, we'll see." – Program Staff

Spending Time Outside. The volunteer mentors and program staff noticed that the students desired spending time outside during the sessions. Some volunteer mentors took them outside for a break, and time outside was incorporated as a prize in the reward system; later, scheduled time outside was incorporated into the sessions in fairness to all students. Spending time outside allowed the students to burn energy for a short while before returning to reading mode.

Figure 4. Outside time 1



Figure 5. Outside time 2



“I only had like three sessions with him, and most part, he just really wanted to go outside. So, I sometimes use that to motivate him, like, yeah, if we finish this activity, we can go play soccer downstairs. ... We would just usually use that as a reward after reading. We just play a bit downstairs. I know he could have used to take like five tickets to go downstairs, but he said he left them at home. I kind of just let him do his thing. Because the more I kind of say no, the more fussy he gets, or he starts walking around the whole classroom making a mess.” – Volunteer Mentor

“Within the ticket system discussed above, outside time was a reward. However, we did not want to discriminate against students who did not have as many tickets as others. This way, regardless of the number of tickets each student had, each week every student had five to ten minutes of outside time as a group. Ensuring outside play was part of the schedule helped to motivate students to continue participating in Book Buddies activities as they knew a break was coming.” – Program Staff

“Today was the first session where I asked the students and volunteers to remain in the room until it was the scheduled break time. In the past, I have noticed students begin to take their breaks outside, it distracts other students, and they too want to go outside instead of reading. By sending the expectation that there will be scheduled outside time for everyone, all at the same time, this allowed for volunteers to use time as a motivator (i.e. 3 more minutes and then we can play outside) and helped to keep students focused as they were not distracted by others,

and the students knew that they would have an outdoor energy break soon. This scheduled outdoor break is something we will continue to do for the duration of the program.” – Program Staff

Incorporating (Physical) Literacy Activities into Reading. Besides reading time with each of their mentors, students were exposed to a variety of literacy games during the sessions, such as ‘Sight Word Bingo’ (searching sight words on a Bingo card), ‘Colouring’ (incorporating reading into colouring activities), and ‘Roll, Say, Keep’ (playing with word cards for the list being studied), to name but a few. The students were actively engaged in the activities and enjoyed performing them with their peers and mentors. As they learned more literacy activities during the sessions, the students were given the option to choose the activities they wanted for the day, thus giving them more freedom to tailor their own learning process. Later in the program, more physical literacy activities were used, as they worked well with students who had lots of energy.

“Volunteers have expressed how hyper students are when they arrive and begin the program. We suggested in order to help with this, instead of our 10-minute seated literacy game, we will do a literacy game that includes a physical activity to get the students moving, such as Simon Says with sight words.” – Program Staff

“After the first session where there were a couple kids where I was helping them find a book, and I think... would you like to read at home, and they're like “I hate reading, I don't want to read”, so I was like, all right let's kind of pivot from just reading. Like, obviously they're still reading, but if I can... when I structured it as like, oh it's a game, their engagement was so much more involved and happy to participate.” – Program Staff

*“Students enjoyed the mix of literacy-based games alongside the reading materials as they shared it made *Book Buddies* feel more like a play-based program than a classroom strictly reading for a set period of time.” – Program Staff*

“I think, like, not just sticking to books, but also including literacy activities. Because these kids, I know some of them didn't really like just sitting down and reading books together. I think it was very nice to have (volunteer supervisor) bringing in different types of worksheets in that... like, have a bunch of variety, like, colouring sheets and the crosswords. I find that the kids really enjoyed them, and they enjoyed doing those more than reading, and I think it helped them with their reading fluency as well.” – Volunteer Mentor

- Acknowledging the different learning types of the students and utilizing a variety of tools
- Allowing the students to choose the games they preferred
- Incorporating physical literacy games/activities

- **Acknowledging the different learning types of the students and utilizing a variety of tools**

“More specifically, by adapting student goals to the individuals enrolled in Book Buddies, I was able to understand the different learning types better and practice a variety of tools for these learning styles. For example, while some students gravitated towards and excelled with reading and writing as their primary learning type, other auditory learners preferred information to be presented vocally to develop their reading skills. One example implemented to support auditory learners was to use sounds by sounding out words and letters to help students decode words when practicing their literacy skills. Another example of a different style of learner was a student who preferred to learn in a hands-on method, falling into the Kinesthetic category. With this student, we utilized games and activities. For example, flashcards were utilized so the student could move the letters and words around to practice their literacy skills in a hands-on method. By learning about the several learning styles and tailoring literacy materials to suit these different types of learning, I was able to grow my resource repertoire as an educator, which will help prepare me for future educating endeavours.” – Program Staff

- **Allowing the students to choose the games they preferred**

“Something I found useful when Book Buddies activities did not go as planned was pivoting to an activity that had been successful in previous sessions. This way, I knew the students enjoyed the activity and knew how to participate appropriately. One way I implemented this solution was by keeping extras of past activities and games on hand as a default to pivot to if necessary. Having past games on hand went for both group and individual activities. Students had access to these activities and could choose to play them at any time during the program sessions. The ability to choose their own activities helped give students autonomy and motivated students to participate.” – Program Staff

- **Incorporating physical literacy games/activities**

*“At the start of every session, a seated literacy game was scheduled. However, we found that sometimes the students had so much energy they needed to physically move around to get it out before sitting down for scheduled *Book Buddies* activities. I found it beneficial to alternate scheduling a seated literacy game, such as BINGO, with a physical group game, as Simon Says. By alternating approaches, this ensured all students had an activity they enjoyed at some point, and students could join their volunteers ready to practice their literacy skills.” – Program Staff*

Mentoring System. Having a mentoring system had a significant impact on the students’ learning. They enjoyed working with the same mentor every week, and through many sessions together, they developed trust and strengthened their bonds. For the mentors, it was easier to work with their mentees when they learned about their preferred learning styles and favourite books to read. Some mentees felt safer taking their time to read and making mistakes during the one-on-one sessions, while others preferred being in a small group and participating in

literacy games with their peers. However, there were challenging situations where some students felt too comfortable with their mentors and began to take their reading activities too lightly, and some pairings of mentors and mentees became complicated due to the absences of volunteers and students.

- A one-on-one learning environment worked
- Building a trusting relationship between volunteer mentors and mentees/students
- Receiving continuous encouragement and praise from mentors worked
- Some students and volunteers did not have the same buddies every week and therefore did not have the same experience as those who did

Figure 6. Reading time 1



Figure 7. Reading time 2



- **A one-on-one learning environment worked**

“I think that a one-on-one system is really good for helping them, getting them comfortable, and giving them, like, just more time to practice. In my own experience, I struggled a lot learning how to read in the public school system, but I did. And I ended up getting a private tutor after school to help me learn how to read. And I still remember, I initially hated that program, but afterwards, I started to feel more confident and was... especially... it wasn't as embarrassing to read in front of and make mistakes in front of my peers. So, I think having this one-on-one smaller session it's especially good for making it a little bit more fun and making it a little bit more accessible, and more people are helping them. But I think also the privacy helps to foster that mistakes are okay, and it can occur... like, you know, it's just your buddy... you know your buddy, your buddy you interact with the same person every week. You know them. You know they're there to help you. They're not going to make fun of you. So, I think that privacy helps kids to feel more confident.” – Volunteer Mentor

“The mentor answered every questions she had. Once her mentor read something wrong, and (student) corrected her. (Student) is really chatty and she enjoyed having a mentor and talking with her. She likes to be with somebody while reading.” – Volunteer Mentor

Community Researcher: *“What did you like about the BB program?”*

Student: *“I liked Book Buddies because I got help with everything.”*

“I liked playing soccer outside with my buddy, (volunteer mentor). I liked reading “Captain underpants” with (volunteer mentor). I like funny books.” – Student

“I liked reading with my buddy. I like when my buddy sounds out the words difficult to me.” – Student

“Overall, I would say the overarching consensus was that students thoroughly enjoyed Book Buddies and shared a positive experience alongside their peers and with volunteers. On a more individual level, given the one-on-one element of Book Buddies, I was able to float between the pairings, observing and jumping in when necessary. This helped me to connect with both the students and the volunteers involved with Book Buddies.” – Program Staff

“I think one of the biggest things is the one-on-one. Like having one volunteer per child, so they just get... because I think especially in their classroom setting, they don't get that and... so I think it's nice. And even at home, I think a lot of them have siblings, so I think it's nice for them to just have like one hour... that's just for them to work with an adult. And it's like, to help them.” – Program Staff

- **Building a trusting relationship between volunteer mentors and mentees/students**

“I observed that over time students became super comfortable, and we all became a community within Book Buddies. I believe most of them enjoyed coming every week and seeing their partners. I think many of them would want to come back and show their partners in the future the progress that they've made with reading and just generally how they have been. I think they enjoyed that our program, although it was meant about reading, allowed them to make friends with volunteers as well. They could share if they were having a bad day or share the good news! Someone to talk to was good for all the students.” – Program Staff

“They really liked whom they were paired with. I think that really helped them. It's not like... it's not like... we treated them like teacher-student kind of relationship. It was more like a friend or like a buddy relationship. So, there was more like class and... Yeah. They were like comfortable.” – Volunteer Mentor

Student's mother: *“Thank you for teaching my daughter for me. Now she is good. she is interested, and she likes. Before she was in Kumon, she didn't like it. I paid money. It was so expensive. They are good, but my daughter didn't like it. She didn't want. She didn't like how the teacher teaches. “What is this B?” “Book.” She didn't like it. We paid so much.”*

Evaluation RA: *“What was the difference between Kumon and this program?”*

Student: *“I just liked this program.”*

Student's mother: "I asked do you want me to bring some teacher at home. She said no. She doesn't want a teacher to come to home, she want it here at school. We need this program more. ... Kumon gave stress to my child. In BB, a child has a mentor, but it is more relaxed. They ask children what they want to read. They also do some literacy games. At Kumon, they just read. Here too much fun time. At Kumon, just read and read."

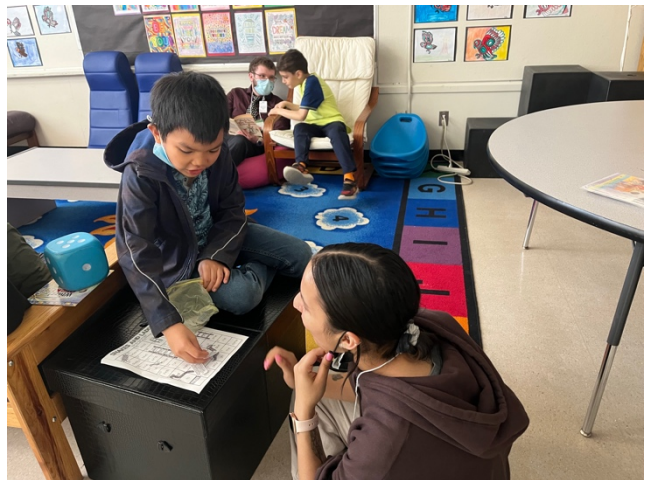
"As I touched on above, initially, many of the students enrolled began Book Buddies timidly with little confidence in their reading skills. However, as relationships were built among the volunteers and their peers, students quickly opened up and gained more confidence when participating in Book Buddies activities. I think Book Buddies gave students the space to feel comfortable making mistakes which in turn helped students grow and expand their literacy skills." – Program Staff

"Looking back on the first sessions, it is inspiring to see how far all the students have come. Initially, most students were unsure of their reading abilities, and this translated into the kids being very shy for the first few weeks of Book Buddies. However, as the program has gone on and the students have built relationships with the volunteers, the kids' confidence in their literacy abilities has soared!" – Program Staff

Figure 8. Literacy activities 1



Figure 9. Literacy activities 2



- **Receiving continuous encouragement and praise from mentors worked**

"Yeah, so a lot of the times she wasn't really interested in reading but when we were able to get her to read a book, I would tell her that she's doing like a really good job almost after every other page, and I found that kind of like, wanted her to read more. And she had this really strong connection with (program staff), so I'd say like, if you read two or three pages, we can go show (program staff) and she'll be super proud of you. And I found that she really got like, I guess, so inspired by that, and that made her want to read more." – Volunteer Mentor

“Near the end she was reading books on her own and ones that we did at the beginning. She was like, improving a lot and (student) didn't really like breaks, she preferred to kind of like, sit and color and draw, so I didn't really use the tickets as an incentive for her to go play outside. So, more like encouraging words and telling her how much she's improving out.” – Volunteer Mentor

“I know my daughter improved when someone encouraged her. For example, when her teacher asks her to do something or when someone says you did a great job, you are very good or something like that. Someone keeps looking after her. She likes to be good in front of you or her teacher.” – Student's father

- **Some students and volunteers did not have the same buddies every week and therefore did not have the same experience as those who did**

“I'm confused with having new buddies every week. I like having my buddy.” – Student

“I love my buddy – I had different buddies and don't remember their names.” – Student

“I think only like, some one or two of us didn't have that, like, same buddy. So, like, it becomes like... Like (student) was really connected to (student), like... and I could see that, like, whenever she would come to, like, the sessions, like, she was always excited to see (student) and give her... like make drawings for her and everything, right? So, it like, it was different because, like, I couldn't really have that connection with anyone because I was with different people every week. Whoever didn't have a buddy. So, yeah.” – Volunteer Mentor

Having a Lead Volunteer. While the position of lead volunteer was created only at the last minute of program implementation, it contributed to the overall success of *Book Buddies*. The flexibility of the position allowed the lead volunteer to take on a different role in each session; a volunteer supervisor or volunteer mentor, depending on what was necessary. The lead volunteer was an essential buddy for the volunteer supervisor to consult with to discuss strategies for improvement and plan the upcoming sessions. In addition, the lead volunteer was able to observe the activities that the volunteers and students were performing and give advice.

“While it was sometimes a struggle juggling 24 individuals, I feel that between (program staff) and myself, I was able to cultivate meaningful relationships with everyone involved in Book Buddies. Between the weekly debriefs with volunteers, emails, and generally touching base throughout the program, I feel that I was able to connect with each volunteer to understand their teaching style. With that information and after connecting with the students, I was then able to shuffle volunteer and student pairings around to best suit students' needs with the skills each volunteer possessed.” – Program Staff

“Positive feedback that I’d like to see continue in the future would be to have the 2 roles of Volunteer Supervisor and Lead Volunteer. I believe having those 2 leaders made it easier in times that did go awry. It also allowed for backup leads on days when there might be an emergency or prior commitments.” – Program Staff

“As the program went on, there were a handful of students who wanted me to spend my time with them and their buddy, and while I always did my best to meet this desire, it was hard, given there were more students than there was me! When this did pose an issue, in the sense that I could not be in two places at once, (program staff) and the volunteers were great at stepping in to give me the space to connect with students who needed my one-on-one support and attention.” – Program Staff

“At times, I noticed volunteers would be a little bit too hard or too easy when working with their students. For example; I observed a pair where the student was clearly struggling with a difficult book and was missing most of the words in the book. The volunteer let them try to figure out the words, but it was making them lose interest and confidence. To which I came in and suggested they could echo read; volunteer reads 1 line – mentee repeats or echoes it, or they could try another book if this one was proving to be too difficult. Another time I observed a volunteer and mentee reading a book that was also too hard for them to read and with every word that the student didn’t know, the volunteer would say the word and not help them decode the word so that they could have a skill instead of memorizing how to say a word. I suggested they could use that word and break it apart or “chunk it” and the student could make out the sounds when it was in chunks or pieces rather than a very large and daunting word.” – Program Staff

Giving Away Free Books. Some students did not seem to have many books of their own at home. Therefore, giving away the books they chose from the ones available at *Book Buddies* excited them and encouraged them to read at home.

“Through SFU’s partnerships, we were able to provide families with books for their children. The program itself, alongside the books provided, encouraged students to demonstrate their literacy skills to their parents, which in turn helped families to establish reading rituals at home.” – Program Staff

“One of the highlights from today was having the students choose 1 book to take home from some of our Book Buddies pile! Many of them were so delighted to take something home since some had expressed not having books at home. Especially for (student) who was ecstatic!” – Program Staff

“With help from (staff) from READ Surrey White Rock, we were able to receive many books for the students and some specific books students requested. It would be nice if the program supervisor and/or the lead volunteer had access to purchase specific books requested by students. Especially for students who struggled to start reading, I think having access to

preferred books would mitigate some resistance students may have towards books and reading.” – Program Staff

“The mentee’s interest in reading has changed! I believe they really enjoyed choosing a book every week to read with their partners but also, whenever we had extra books to donate, the students were ecstatic to receive free books! I think allowing them to have books at home, which many of them didn’t, will also give them that extra push to read if they are bored.” – Program Staff

“There were so many memorable moments that it is impossible to keep track! However, here are a few standouts. This first memory is bittersweet. One day this student was very off, unhappy and did not want to be at Book Buddies. A major switch as this student is usually the one who is most excited for Book Buddies. After chatting with a volunteer for a while, the student disclosed that they were sad because they enjoyed reading at Book Buddies, but they did not have any books at home, so they could not continue practicing and could not show their parents how much they have learned. Originally, we had saved several books for students to take home on the last day of Book Buddies; however, after hearing this from the volunteer, I could not hold onto those books any longer. Through donations, I was able to bring a bunch of books to the kids, and for the last 4 weeks of Book Buddies, they have all chosen books to keep.” – Program Staff

“(Student) expressed to (volunteer mentor) privately that she doesn’t have any books at home and wishes she could have some. She also mentioned anything that she has at home is usually taken by her two older brothers.” – Program Staff

“During a session, one student shared with me that they have been reading their Book Buddies books every night before bed for practice. All the kids love having books to keep!” – Program Staff

Communication (Debriefing) Among the Volunteer Supervisor, Lead Volunteer, Volunteer Mentors and SFU TD CEC Worked Well. Feedback was shared among the volunteer mentors, the lead volunteer and the volunteer supervisor immediately after each session to plan for the upcoming meetings. This allowed the sessions to evolve continuously and improved them each week. Feedback from the students and parents was also collected when the opportunity arose. The students were asked for their opinions during the sessions. For example, the idea of having a relay race which incorporates physical activities and literacy games outside emerged from listening to the students’ voices/input. By giving feedback, the students felt that their voices mattered and that the *Book Buddies* program was not forcing them to do anything but instead trying to find out ways to help them enjoy reading; this was a different approach from other programs.

“Responsiveness from my Volunteer Supervisor as well as SFU Surrey’s TD office made this program run as successfully as it did. When things didn’t go according to plan or whenever I

shared an issue in my weekly reports, I was quickly met with guidance and support. It felt good knowing that I could have more people's feedback to flourish in my role." – Program Staff

"Book Buddies was an effective embodiment of the SFU Surrey – TD Community Engagement Centre values in that it did build healthy relationships within the volunteers and leaders but also our (elementary school) students. Our debriefs after every session allowed us to become closer and comfortable enough that if problems did arise, we could be prepared to handle any situation." – Program Staff

"My Site Supervisor played a huge role in my success as Lead Volunteer for Book Buddies. I felt like I had excellent communication throughout the program, and we worked as a team to be successful. As stated previously, through my weekly reports, any problem that I might've had, I was quickly met with support and suggestions. After volunteer debriefs, having another conversation between the two of us gave us time to brainstorm new ideas and solutions. I learned a lot from (program staff), and she made me feel very comfortable to run the program when she couldn't be there. I'm very glad to have had a great partnership with her throughout the program." – Program Staff

"Reliability in our community allowed the program to run as smoothly as it did. If things came up, me or the Volunteer Supervisor were notified, and we were given enough time to readjust as needed. Lastly, Book Buddies embodied the last value of responsibility, by setting standards that our volunteers knew what they were going to do through weekly lesson plans." – Program Staff

"Although more absences than usual from our buddies, this meant that some of our volunteers didn't have anyone to work with so, (volunteer mentor), (volunteer mentor), and I brainstormed group activities we could do for future sessions." – Program Staff

Communication with Students and Parents. The program staff tried to ask for the students' and their parents' feedback whenever possible to make the sessions more meaningful for them, for example, through planning future sessions, making the classroom atmosphere better or learning how parents observed the students' reading habits at home. These efforts partly aided the success of the program.

- Communication with students
- Communication with parents
- *Book Buddies* Classroom Contract
- Celebration at the end of the program
- Communication with students

- **Communication with students**

"I do ask the kids that when I'm dismissing them and like there's always a couple stragglers like,... waiting for parents to come. So, when I'm waiting for them, I ask them, what do you want

to do next week? Is there any..., or if any of them who I could tell weren't super engaged that week, I'm like, oh well what would you like to do next week instead? So like, a couple ideas that they've thrown out was like a scavenger hunt. So, I've done that two... in two different ways. I did one in the... in the school, and then, I did a book scavenger hunt which was like gave them a checklist and they had to read a book to check it off. Like, this was the main character, this was a noun. I found things like that. That's just one example of like, getting the kids input on some things.” – Program Staff

“When I asked the students what they would like to do next week, they wanted a board game, I planned to introduce Snakes and Ladders but with Sight Words on the board for them to read as they play.” – Program Staff

“I asked him about things he would like to see in the program or things he would like to do. He expressed that the only thing he looks forward to in the program was playing catch (ball) with us at the end. So, I’ve been looking for lessons that could incorporate both reading and sports and at some point, I would like to have the opportunity to play a game if the weather permits and possibly have a competition with reading as well as involving movement. Although nothing is set yet, I am still looking for alternatives to help (volunteer mentor) with this.” – Program Staff

“When I asked the students what they would like to do next week, they wanted a board game, I planned to introduce Snakes and Ladders but with Sight Words on the board for them to read as they play.” – Program Staff

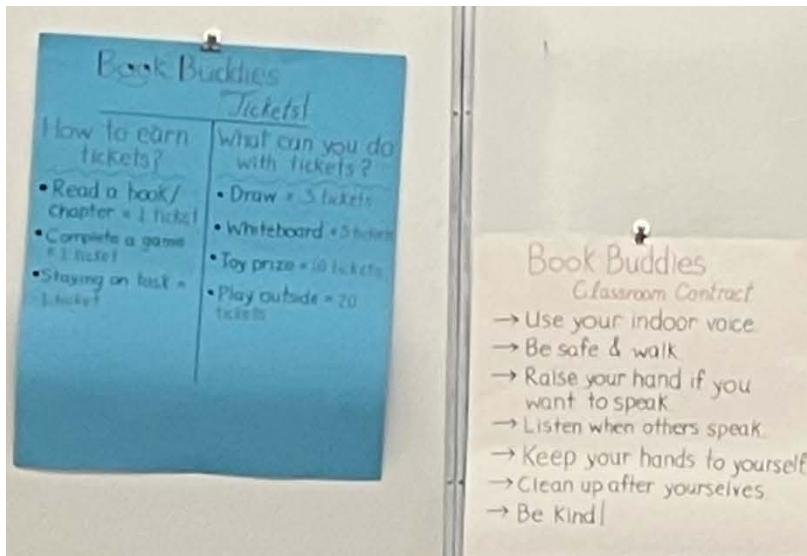
- **Communication with parents**

“At the beginning of the program, several students shared with me that they did not enjoy reading, and during conversations with parents at pick-up, parents explained that because their child(ren) believed they did not like reading, it was a challenge to motivate them, to begin with, and so many families stopped trying to encourage their child(ren) to read at home. As the program went on and students were consistently given a designated space to practice their reading and literacy skills, students' confidence in reading grew, and so did their willingness to read. At pick-up when I shared with parents how well their child(ren) was doing, families were amazed and so grateful.” – Program Staff

- **Book Buddies Classroom Contract**

- Use your indoor voice.
- Be safe and walk.
- Raise your hand if you want to speak.
- Listen when others speak.
- Keep your hands to yourself.
- Clean up after yourselves.
- Be kind!

Figure 10. Book Buddies Classroom Contract (& Tickets rule)



“Disrespect was never any issue in Book Buddies as everyone in our program showed vast respect to one another. We decided early on to make our ‘Book Buddies Code of Conduct’ so that we could have something the kids could look back on and remember that it’s something we all created together, and we should abide by.” – Program Staff

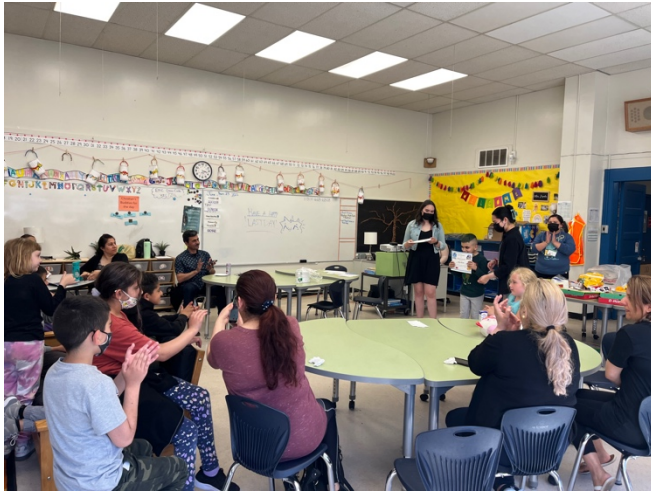
“As a group, we decided we would create ‘classroom expectations’ with the students next week to reiterate the rules and expectations in place when they arrive at Book Buddies. When students arrive, volunteers will be sitting with their buddies upon arrival — hopefully, this will minimize talking/interrupting and help students engage more.” – Program Staff

- **Celebration at the end of the program**

The celebration at the end of the program was planned based on the students’ requests.

“As the last session approached, we asked students to help plan the final session by suggesting activities and food they would enjoy. Students loved feeling involved in the planning process, and it made the last day even more special when they saw their ideas come to life. One activity the students wanted for the last session was decorating t-shirts. I ordered a white t-shirts and fabric pens from amazon.ca, and students loved decorating their shirts with their friends and the volunteers. Another activity that was a great success during the final session of Book Buddies was hosting an awards ceremony and handing out certificates to the students in front of their parents. Families were so proud of their child(ren) and took lots of pictures.” – Program Staff

Figure 11. Celebration



Volunteer Mentors' Strategies for Student Engagement

- Finger-pointing
- Giving the students options and “making deals”
- Before reading, making predictions or brainstorming about what’s going to happen in the story/what it is about
- Incorporating the students’ interests—for example, sports—with literacy
- Using technology to boost the morale of the students who are not interested in reading a physical book
- Asking literacy questions on whatever they are doing
- Using snacks as an incentive
- Continuously changing activities
- Appointing a student to be a weekly helper for the Volunteer Supervisor

“It was really tough to get him to read. Especially that last session we had when he was just like gluing stuff together. ... So, I would just ask him: can you spell glue for me? or can you... like, what colours are you using right now? can you help spell that out for me? and stuff like that. And then, he would usually comply, but oftentimes that's what I would do if I find them off task. I just ask them to spell words for me. That's the least they can do because if I ask if they want to like read or like, can you read out this word? they don't... they kind of just continue on with what they're playing with. So, I just asked them about the crayons they're using right now, like, what colour is it, can you spell it for me?” – Volunteer Mentor

“Wordsearches are continuing to be a big hit with the students, so I will continue to bring a new one each week for those who want to complete one.” – Program Staff

“Probably, like, after every book, talking about it and not going... going too fast. I find finger pointing with the words really helps because sometimes they can get distracted, so just like, going page by page. And even if we take maybe a little bit longer to read the book, I find get

going slower and making sure we understood it and got all the words helps.” – Volunteer Mentor

“1) (Volunteer mentor) and (student) – (volunteer mentor) does a really good job of giving (Student) options and making deals so that she meets her goal to read at least 1 book. She tells her in exchange for a walk outside, she wants her to finish 2 more pages in the book. Rita also asks for ice cream as a reward which leads me to believe that our ticket and prize incentive strategy we will implement next week will be a major improvement, although we won’t have food as a reward.

2) (Volunteer mentor) and (student) – (volunteer mentor) uses a wonderful strategy to get (Student) thinking about the book they will read. They sit down and begin predictions or brainstorming about what’s going to happen in the story/what it’s about.

3) (Volunteer mentor) and (student) – I observed (volunteer mentor) incorporating (student)’s interests, which are sports, with literacy. He enjoys basketball, and for a bit, they had pieces of paper with sight words in which he would read it, crumble the paper and throw it into the recycling bin.

4) (Program staff) and (student) – (program staff) found an iSpy PDF on her laptop that kept (Student) engaged for about 40 minutes, which is a huge improvement from last week. This leads me to believe that technology can be a great tool to boost morale in those that are not interested in reading a physical book for the day” – Program Staff

“The new mentor shared the strategy they employed was to continuously change the activity/discussion to keep the student from becoming bored/distracted with the material.” – Program Staff

“We know she’s not motivated by tickets, but (volunteer mentor) suggested perhaps a different variety of snacks could give us that boost to get her to be excited for Book Buddies because at the end of the day food and reading is a great combo!” – Program Staff

“As we neared the end of the Book Buddies 2022 program, some students occasionally arrived at the program unhappy and upset. Something we found that shifted their focus and outlook on the program was designating them as a “special helper” for the day. Each week I would ask one student to come with me and volunteers up to the Annex to set up the classroom while the remaining students stayed in the Strong Start classroom until 2:45 pm.” – Program Staff

6. What Aspects of the Program Could be Improved? (Program Challenges and Areas for Improvement)

Making Students Focus on Reading. One of the biggest challenges experienced by the volunteer mentors during the sessions was that the students were often distracted and wanted to take a break or go outside. To solve this problem, the mentors tried various strategies, such

as using different literacy activities to avoid boredom, incorporating something the students enjoy with literacy activities, using a reward system, etc.

- Students' moods are different every session
 - Students sometimes had a negative influence on each other
 - Strategies to make students more focused and engaged in reading and literacy activities
-
- **Students' moods are different every session**

"I think... honestly, something unexpected would happen every session. I think it was just depending on the kids' overall mood. Some kids would come to the session just in a bad mood, so like, it would affect how their part... their buddy would work with them. I don't think specifically how (program Staff) and (program Staff) laid out their agenda for that. Every week was really well planned out. I just think if... it just depended on the kids' general mood that day, like sometimes (student) wouldn't be in the mood of reading, so she would get distracted really easily, or like, even (student), like, he's really energetic, so it was just we had to work with their mood that day. I don't think there's, like, specific that I can point out, like, this didn't work out at all, like, it just depended like... all the activities just depended on the kids' mood that day. Like, if they wanted to do it, they would do it. If they didn't, they... we would... they didn't want to do it." – Volunteer Mentor

"I don't know what we can really do to have them stay focused. It honestly all just depends on their mood on that particular day. ... most of the time she didn't want to read, so we had these flashcards for her to try like, reading or like, there were activities like colouring, but even when she's colouring, there's still reading involved with it. So, like, she would have to read like the name of the colour." – Volunteer Mentor

"Majority of the time, the buddy that I would have for the week's session would be focused on reading. The ticket system that was integrated later in the program helped the students stay on task because they all wanted to gain many tickets so that they can earn prizes at the end. However, there were times with (student), (student), and (student) when I would find it challenging to keep them focused. They would want to do anything else but read. I found that giving them short breaks helped; however, I would also be firm that after the break, they would finish reading the book, which they would do." – Volunteer Mentor

"For both kids, the major challenge I had was trying to get them focused on the reading/activity. These kids were really energetic, and often times they just wanted to play and not sit down. How I dealt with this was by motivating them with tickets, so if they completed a reading task or activity, I would reward them with a ticket. If that did not work, I would let them do what they are doing but find ways to include literacy in it. For example, I would ask them to spell out a word for me." – Volunteer Mentor

“For next time, I would pull books I know of interest to her, so we don’t spend as much time looking for books, because I found this was the point where she became most distracted and wanted to wander off.” – Program Staff

- **Students sometimes had a negative influence on each other**

“Just like in general, the attention span of some of them. Some of them are like super excited and like, ready to go. And other ones are like, kind of bouncing off the walls a bit, and with that, once one of them starts, they kind of like drag the others down with them. So, it's like we've had... we've had days where it's kind of like, all right, we'll just try to survive. Like, just get through the program. Because once one of them is kind of causing issues, they all kind of feed into that.” – Program Staff

Strategies to make students more focused and engaged in reading and literacy activities:

- Switching between different literacy activities
- Incorporating literacy elements in other activities (e.g., colouring)
- Using flashcards
- Taking breaks
- Going outside
- Introducing a ticket system
- If a student spends too much time in choosing a book, recommend one based on their interests."
- Scavenger hunt: *“An alphabet scavenger hunt around the school where students have to walk around with their buddy and find things that start with the letter A through Z and write them down as they find them.” – Program Staff*
- Relay Race: *“As (Program Administrator) suggested, (Program Staff) and I thought it might be fun to run a literacy relay outside where the kids have to complete a circuit with a mix of literacy and physical activities.” – Program Staff*

Pairing Students and Mentors. Pairing up mentors and mentees was something that the volunteer supervisor and lead volunteer struggled with because many factors can affect how it works: volunteer mentors’ and students’ attendance; students getting too comfortable with mentors and not performing the activities as expected; and students’ having different preferred learning styles or personalities.

- Negative impacts of group activities on some students
- Pairing strategies that depend on each student’s preferred working conditions
- Some students preferred one-on-one learning and staying with the same mentor every week

- Some students enjoyed group learning

- **Negative impacts of group activities on some students**

“One thing I have noticed is that sometimes, the children with lower confidence in reading feel left out or not enough when being in pairs for such activities.” – Program Staff

- **Pairing strategies that depend on each student’s preferred working conditions**

“While it is challenging being short volunteers, especially when we have all students in attendance, volunteers showed that they are all adaptable and flexible to make the session work for each student, whether they have 2 students or just one. Going forward, I have made note of students who can be doubled up and which ones do best with individual support.” – Program Staff

“We thought maybe rotating buddies could be a potential solution but upon further discussion, others had reservations on switching based on personalities (i.e. some being very shy). So, we thought maybe we will trial and error and only rotate the students that are struggling and keep the ones that are doing well for next week.” – Program Staff

“Occasionally, students outnumbered volunteers which skewed the designated one-on-one partners that were created. When this problem arose, I would give a few volunteers extra students to work with so there would be occasionally groups of three. While this worked for some, other students struggled in a group environment, losing focus quickly, or becoming discouraged if the other student in their group was at a higher reading level than themselves. Solution: After trial and error and collaborating with volunteers to determine who worked well in a group and who succeeded most when working individually with an adult, volunteers helped identify pairing/group options for each student if we had more students than volunteers.” – Program Staff

- **Some students preferred one-on-one learning and staying with the same mentor every week**

“She did not say anything specifically, but the way she talked about home, and I haven't met her parents, there's been no bruises, no nothing, but it's just the way she talks about home, it's not fun. Maybe her parents both work. I don't know what the issue is, but she has a lot of attachment issues because she would be really upset when she was moved from volunteer to volunteer. She did not like it. She wanted to be with one person, and when that person wasn't there-- Her original partner was (volunteer mentor). She really liked (volunteer mentor). When (volunteer mentor) wasn't there, she was very upset. There were lots going on. I think (student) is a great kid, and I think the goal with her is just to find what she likes and incorporate that into reading.” – Volunteer Mentor

“(Student) is more confident in a one-on-one setting than when grouped with her peers.” – Volunteer Mentor

“Bingo time – it was boring. I didn't like a group game, I liked a game I did with my buddy.” – Student

“During debriefing today one volunteer shared that their usual buddy who was in a group with their usual volunteer and another student (due to being short volunteers) struggled more than usual, which they believed was from not having the typical one-on-one support.” – Program Staff

“A few volunteer absences for today caused some last-minute pairings/shuffling. This led to (student) immediately not wanting to be with her (new) partner, (Volunteer Mentor).” – Program Staff

“While it was sometimes beneficial to switch the student/volunteer pairings, other students thrived by consistently working with the same volunteer. Implementing this consistency allowed students and their volunteers to create strong relationships, which the students benefited from. Switching student/volunteer pairs should be done on a case-by-case basis as some thrive with consistency while others may need a change.” – Program Staff

- **Some students enjoyed group learning**

“In contrast, the other volunteer who had an extra buddy this week said the buddy they usually have was more engaged during this session, which they attributed to seeing their peer participate and engage with the materials. I've made a note regarding those specific pairings for the future of who would be good to double up and who would be best to keep one-on-one.” – Program Staff

Students' reading levels were very different. While only students in grades 2–4 participated in the *Book Buddies* program, the actual reading levels between them differed significantly. Therefore, an activity suitable for one group of students was not ideal for the other. Hence, it was required to make strategies, such as preparing two levels for each activity.

“The difference in reading levels for our buddies varies drastically.” – Program Staff

“We have several students whose abilities range greatly, it is difficult to find an activity that meets each individual's level. I think going forward, I will prepare two of each activity, a simpler one and a more complex one. This way, volunteers can help their students choose which choice would best suit their reading level.” – Program Staff

“I think there was just a couple of students who struggled more than others. Like, where they are at in their reading abilities. For example, (student) ... Since the beginning, she has always struggled. ... I've noticed reading a book is just... it's too much for her, and so, we saw what... from that support, she gets flash cards with very simple sight words. So, I was like, why don't we try to do that with her? And she has just memorized them, so she's not reading them. She'll just

memorize. So, you'll pull a card, but if it's out of order, she'll just say it whatever she thinks it might be, and she's not actually reading it. So, she's always been kind of a challenging one."
– Program Staff

The difficulty for students to respect boundaries with their volunteer mentors. The mentors in the *Book Buddies* program were all university students. While students and mentors enjoyed having a friend-like relationship, sometimes some students felt too relaxed with their mentors and chose not to listen to them. In such cases, the lead volunteer and volunteer supervisor had to give those students a warning that they would be switched to other mentors if they could not respect their current ones. The reward system implemented in *Book Buddies* helped the volunteer mentors maintain their authority to students, as they were the ones giving the tickets.

"I created the volunteer/student pairings before the first session with no prior knowledge of the students, and the initial pairings went surprisingly well. However, as the program went on and students became more comfortable with their volunteers, students began to test the volunteers' boundaries and misbehave. One example of this disrespect and behaviours were students bossing their volunteers around or openly defying what their volunteer asked them to do (i.e. come inside after break)." – Program Staff

"Throughout the duration of Book Buddies, an ongoing issue that arose was some students did not want to participate in scheduled activities. An example of this was that a student refused to participate, did not come into the classroom. Or when students failed to listen to their volunteer, for example, not returning to the classroom after playing outside when asked to do so." – Program Staff

Reading support at home. Some students did not have enough parental support for their reading at home. The majority of the students' parents had immigrant backgrounds, and English was not their first language. According to the parents' interviews, some of them felt they could not support their children's reading due to their own lack of expertise in English; others were too busy to read with their children or had issues with their own reading skills due to their educational level.

"(Volunteer mentor) had (student) and then, apparently, (student) opened up to (volunteer mentor) about her home life and how her mom is usually very busy, and how her siblings are also in the way. So, she doesn't really have that support system to help her with her reading, with her homework, stuff like that. I'm not sure if the mom is helping her or the dad, but it just sounded like it was a very busy home life, and she didn't really have anyone to help her read." – Volunteer Mentor

“(Volunteer mentor) started talking to her. Basically, it came out that (student) was like, I don't have any books at home, so I don't know a lot if... this is just me speculating, but I think a lot of it is, like, they don't have access to a lot of books, and I also think it's a combination of that, and also English is the second language for a lot of those families. And I think what they work not... like I know there's a couple nurses and stuff. Like, I don't think they work like routine hours, like, a nine to five. So, I don't... I... if I were to guess, I don't think they get that much support at home for that.” – Program Staff

“I don't know English well. I can't tell even if she reads something wrong. My child refuses to read and practice with me.” – Student's Mother

“It is hard for us to read even one page. No one at home reads English correctly with her. It could have been fun for her to practice reading with us if we did.” – Student's Mother

“We speak Arabic at home. He was born in Canada, but it is his first-time learning English. His father speaks English better than I do. When his father teaches him, he (father) sometimes raises his voice, and he (child) doesn't want to continue studying.” – Student's Mother

“I don't read much. I don't have much education or teaching. I went up to 7th grade myself. I don't have much education. So, I put all these programs to help her. ... Just anything helping Book Buddies or whatever. Just want to help her read instead of doing iPad. I try to read for her once in a while but she is not interested.” – Student's Father

“I don't have much time. Her mother is not good with English. Her bigger sister is busy. She doesn't have time. 2 in grade 1, 1 in grade 9, and a baby boy, 7 months old. Everyone was busy.” – Student's Father

Less energy towards the end. Interviews with the volunteer mentors and students' parents/guardians indicate that towards the end of the program, the students lost the energy to continue working on their reading, as they knew that summer vacation was approaching.

“I think, for Overall, I think for most kids, they did, reading, especially, in the beginning, they were interested... now, since the school is ending as well, they kind of get bored, they don't really want to read when they would come because the school year was ending.” – Volunteer Mentor

“Towards the end, I was kind of forcing buddy, you are not going to go outside if you don't finish this book, and before that, he was inclined to read, but towards the end, he was not interested in reading anymore. All the bad things happened towards the end. I think everyone was so excited about summer. School is over too, so they didn't want to do any more work.” – Volunteer Mentor

"I guess the reward system worked well, like tickets, whereas I don't know because the school year was ending, kids got less interest in reading. First, the ticket system worked really well. Towards the end, no one really wanted to read anymore. Summer was just coming, and they were done." – Volunteer Mentor

"My mentee was highly cooperative and interested. Some decline in interest near the end but nothing significant, and the trend was noticed among all students." – Volunteer Mentor

"The beginning she was interested, but last month she got bored. She was no longer interested. She just liked to play on the phone." – Student's Father

7. Are the Program Stakeholders Satisfied?

- Students' responses
- Parents/guardians' responses
- Volunteer Mentor's responses
- Program Staff's responses

- **Students' responses**

Community Researcher: *"If there will be BB again, would you like to sign up?"*

Student: *"I will sign up."*

"As we've been nearing the end of Book Buddies and planning for our last session with the kids, several students would ask how many sessions were left and get sad when I told them there would be only a few more. Several students asked if Book Buddies would come back in September when school started again. It is great that the kids have loved this program so much that they don't want it to end and are already looking forward to it possibly coming back again!"

– Program Staff

"I just really think that the program really helps kids to be more interested in reading. Because I remember, like, especially at the first session, (Student) was very... not as intrigued with reading. She did mention that she didn't really go to the library as much. But afterwards, I see her... she's really like, she really had an interest with one of the book... these books that she would always bring. So yeah, I think it really just helps help some of them." – Volunteer Mentor

"At dismissal time, as I was sending the students out one by one to their parents, a number of them told me they didn't want to leave yet and that they wished they could come back to Book Buddies tomorrow. It's so great to see how much the kids are enjoying the program and how excited they are for it each week." – Program Staff

"I had amazing feedback from the kids today about how much they loved Book Buddies. Multiple students told me they wanted to come to Book Buddies every day after school. When it was home time two different students told me they didn't want to go home and wanted to stay and keep reading. After leaving the room to go home, one student asked if I could walk them back so they could say goodbye to their buddy one more time before going home." – Program Staff

"Lastly, another memory is just simply how much students have enjoyed Book Buddies. Throughout this program, we have had several students that continue to share that they wished Book Buddies was more than once a week, they wanted to come every day, and as the program is wrapping up, they are now asking if they can come back in September!" – Program Staff

- **Parents/guardians' responses**

"I don't want the program to be finished. She doesn't want school, but she likes the program. Yeah, she likes it. She likes to read here with a mentor." – Student's Mother

Student's Mother: *"This program is very very good. You need to do it again. I have another son, Yousef, grade 2. He needs this program too. I need it again for my son."*

Evaluation RA: *"Is there anything else you want to say before we finish this conversation?"*

Student's Mother: *"My child is very very good. I thank you for that."*

Evaluation RA: *"If there is a program like this, do you like to sign her up again?"*

Student's father: *"Yes, for sure. If it comes back again next year, for sure."*

Student's mother: *"She (my daughter) is happy. I don't want the program to be finished. She doesn't want school, but she likes the program. Yeah, she likes it. She likes to read here with a mentor."*

Student: *"I like my buddy."*

(Another) Student: *"I like this program, not school."*

"Did you learn anything new to support him at home through this program? Sometimes, I buy new books. Sometimes, I go to library with my son. This program helps my son, (student), and (student) helps the younger son. (Student) reads very very too much now. Last time no. Big change." – Student's Mother

- **Volunteer Mentor's responses**

"I take away nothing but great things. I think this program is set up to be a hit, so hats off to you guys." – Volunteer Mentor

"I believe this program was a great creation in order to create and sustain in engagement for literacy. All the mentees I have worked with made big and small progress within themselves. I believe that this program will benefit my mentees in many ways for example, reading has many benefits. One of the benefits is that reading, and literacy helps you be creative. Being creative helps with so many aspects in life whether that's once you go to high school or university; you

need to have a skillset of being creative. When I was my mentee's age, I loved reading books, so once I got into high school, creative writing was super easy for me, and I enjoyed writing stories. Therefore, I think that if having the Book Buddies program helps children in their ability of literacy, they may find certain interests they weren't aware about before." – Volunteer Mentor

"Overall, I think this program will benefit all the students because it boosts their confidence and encourages them to read more often. Not only by reading a book but playing games and doing activities also helps students in developing their reading skills. Students also learnt strategies that they could try at home. For example, for the students who had difficulty with compound words, I advised them to try breaking the words down to smaller parts and read." – Volunteer Mentor

"I think having a mentor or just someone who is able to help them with something they have struggled with before is something memorable in their life. I have seen some improvements in any mentee's reading, and I think a lot of it might contribute to her willingness to improve and change the view that reading can be fun. After this program, I hope she is able to look back on the activities and the support the program has provided her because it might be something to help her remember the hard work she has done during that period of time." – Volunteer Mentor

"I believe this program made reading fun by engaging these kids in literacy games and pairing them with an enthusiastic buddy. The positive environment and attitude towards reading really influenced the children's interest in reading. I also think that the experiences they made with their buddies were very meaningful, and hopefully encouraged them to continue their love for reading even without us. I hope that the enthusiasm they show during our sessions will be carried all throughout their life." – Volunteer Mentor

- **Program Staff's responses**

"I feel so grateful to have the chance to share the power of books and reading with these kids. Another memorable moment is that after a few weeks of Book Buddies, before students arrived for the day, a teacher from the school approached me to say thank you! She said that every Thursday morning, her students in Book Buddies are always so excited to share what they did the day before, and she wanted to let us know how much of a difference we are making in those students' lives." – Program Staff

"This program will benefit mentees in that they will feel 100% more comfortable in their abilities to read with others. I observed many changes in the student's personalities throughout the program when it came to their desire to wanting to read. I believe a lot of them felt lucky to be able to hang out with university students and be praised on their reading skills as well as being given books to take home to give them that push to try new things to read." – Program Staff

"I observed that over time students became super comfortable, and we all became a community within Book Buddies. I believe most of them enjoyed coming every week and seeing their partners. I think many of them would want to come back and show their partners in the future the progress that they've made with reading and just generally how they have been. I think they

enjoyed that our program, although it was meant about reading, allowed them to make friends with volunteers as well. They could share if they were having a bad day or share the good news! Someone to talk to was good for all the students.” – Program Staff

9. What Difference Did the Program Make for Volunteer Mentors and the Program Staff (Lead Volunteer and Volunteer Supervisor) Who Were SFU Students?

All the university students who played key roles in implementing *Book Buddies* as volunteer mentors or as the lead volunteer and the volunteer supervisor saw their experience with the program as a rewarding and valuable opportunity to gain new insights in working with students, developing interpersonal and problem-solving skills and networking. Some of the quotes below were abstracted from their ‘Book Buddies Volunteer Reflections’ that they were required to submit to the SFU Surrey-TD CEC at the completion of the program.

“Through participation in the Book Buddies 2022 program, SFU CEC volunteers gained valuable experience supporting elementary-aged students in a learning environment. Volunteers had the opportunity to hone their leadership skills as educators, supporting students as they developed and practiced their literacy skills. Additionally, volunteers were allowed to make connections with their peers, SFU coordinators, (elementary school) faculty, and community organizers. The volunteers received valuable experience regarding what it takes to be a leader in a classroom setting which will support volunteers pursuing a position in the field of education.” – Program Staff

“My experience working with my mentees has been amazing. I loved being able to make a difference in these children’s lives even if it was the smallest factor that stood out. The experience of being able to communicate and guide literacy for each one of these kids was a learning as well as teaching moment.” – Volunteer Mentor

“I got to learn a lot, especially about how to maintain their focus on a task they don’t want to do and trying out new ways to help them improve their motivation to improve on their readings.” – Volunteer Mentor

“I have learned so much about different learning approaches to literacy and even learned about myself. First, I learned that literacy can be taught in a variety of ways and is not restricted to reading books. In this program, we participated in literacy games and worksheets such as wordsearch and crossword puzzles. I honestly thought this program focuses on helping kids improve their reading skills through reading books since the name of this program is Book Buddies. To my surprise, the program offered many materials for these kids to engage in. Secondly, I learned how to teach students to become better readers and to enhance their reading comprehension. The program taught me different ways to assess the student’s understanding of the texts, such as summarization and inferring. Lastly, this program taught me the value of patience. Working with children can be pretty difficult, especially the ones with so much energy. It took a lot of patience to wait for them to start reading or continue our activity.

It was a bit frustrating when they refuse to cooperate, but I liked to challenge myself and find ways to engage them again. Through being patient with these kids, I slowly began to notice small improvements in their literacy skills.” – Volunteer Mentor

“I have learned the importance of Flexibility when teaching and interacting with youth/children. Second, I have also learned a great deal of new reading and learning strategies which I was not familiar with before the beginning of this program. Thirdly, I have gained new insight into how best to understand and connect with children in order to better facilitate learning and to create a positive learning environment.” – Volunteer Mentor

“I have learnt to attempt variety of strategies for reading books to help children with their reading skills. I have learnt how to build a healthy relationship with the children by listening and understanding them. It is important to understand that each child is unique and different. It can't be expected that each child learns all skills at the same pace. I also learnt different types of activities that could be completed to encourage reading.” – Volunteer Mentor

“Working with students throughout the program was very rewarding and fulfilling. I was fortunate enough to be given the opportunity to work with a smaller group of 12 students in which I could observe and see their progress in a span of a few months. At times it was difficult to manage, especially with a lot of absences. But I believe this leadership role has given me lifelong skills to take to the classroom in the future.” – Program Staff

“One of them is developing my interpersonal skills and networking. Being out of the classroom for over a year definitely set me back in being able to effectively communicate with children. I found myself using larger words and quickly remembered that certain words aren't apart of their vocabulary yet and I needed to make directions clearer by using words that they could understand. I also wanted this opportunity to give me a chance to get to know school faculty (...), SFU students and staff. I think the networking and colleagues I befriended back home ... allowed me to be successful now. I thought no better way to get started by doing so through volunteering.” – Program Staff

“As the Program and Volunteer Supervisor for Book Buddies, I developed, practiced and honed my skills as a leader in an education-based setting. Additionally, through my work running the Book Buddies program, I had the opportunity to practice creating and implementing an elementary-aged curriculum for a literacy-based program. As I started to develop the curriculum for this running of the Book Buddies program, I was applying to SFU's Professional Development Program in the hopes of becoming a teacher in the future.

My involvement in Book Buddies over the last few months have given me experience as an educator. As I step into the role as a future educator in September, I will remember the resources, suggestions, and insights I have gathered throughout my time with Book Buddies. Not only did Book Buddies give me experience with curriculum development, but I had the opportunity to practice running a program in a classroom-based setting and further develop my

leadership skills by guiding students and volunteers. I am beyond grateful for my time with Book Buddies, and the experiences I have had.

As I enter SFU's PDP in September, I will take not only the literacy-oriented skills I learned as an educator with the Book Buddies program but also the problem-solving skills I developed as issues with students arose throughout the program. Like everyone, students in Book Buddies have life influences outside of the Book Buddies program that shapes the way they partake in program activities. As the supervisor for Book Buddies, it was my job to guide volunteers as we navigated not only the students' strengths and weaknesses but behaviours stemming from factors existing outside of the Book Buddies program. My participation in the Book Buddies program has allowed me to develop my skills as a future educator, as well as my interpersonal abilities regarding student and parent relationships and how these relations may influence students' learning abilities and capacities." – Program Staff

Recommendations

Establish communication with the students' classroom teachers and the principal prior to the start of the program and throughout it. The input from the teachers of the students who will be participating in *Book Buddies* next time can offer valuable perspectives on their reading progress, learning styles and any useful information helpful for planning strategies for each student. At the beginning of the program, it took a while for the volunteer mentors to learn each individual student's needs, attitudes and behaviours in terms of reading. Communication, either through an online meeting or emails with *Book Buddies* program staff (university supervisor and lead volunteer), can make a significant difference to effectively plan the start the program for each student and student-volunteer pairing. In addition, at the end of the program, the university supervisor can report the student's progress to their teachers, who can provide continuous support in class.

"When I was (student)'s partner, he would always want to go to his class. I got to know his teacher a little bit, (teacher). She had things to say about (student) that I would've been like, "Oh, this would've been nice to know at the beginning of the session." I think teacher input would be invaluable." – Volunteer Mentor

"I think it would be unfair to the volunteer, especially if the volunteer doesn't have any experience, and it would also be unfair to the kid because both of them would be having a difficult time if there was no plan in place. I think that's a great idea a to have a strategy." – Volunteer Mentor

"I think that would have been super helpful to have a little bit more input on that, or even just know like what she is working on. And instead of introducing something totally new, like, let's support her in succeeding at what she's already working on in school, instead of overwhelming her. I think having a little bit more information on the kids before starting. Especially we started

in January, so the teachers would have had the kids since September, so they would already know kind of what's going on with them. So, I think that would have been super helpful.”
– Volunteer Mentor

“When students enrolled in Book Buddies entered the program, we had no information about their strengths/weaknesses other than knowing they were referred to the program because they were reading below their expected age level. As students started the program in January, their school teachers knew the students' abilities. It would be useful if each student's classroom teacher(s) provided 5-10 sentences on the students enrolled, sharing their strengths and/or weaknesses related to reading. For example: what the student is struggling with, what the student is working on, and what the student has already succeeded at and/or is confident with. It would be beneficial to know if English is a second language for students or if they have any behavioural diagnoses (i.e. learning disabilities, ADHD, etc.) Information, such as the examples listed above, would help prepare Book Buddies activities to ensure each student is successful.” – Program Staff

“I don't mean negative thoughts or feelings in any way, but I think that some of the volunteers were really overwhelmed by the kids, especially the volunteers that were with (student). I will mention it now. I didn't mention it at the time because I was upset, and so I thought maybe I was just overreacting. I think there was a lot of-- What's the word I'm looking for? Animosity towards (student). ... There were a few. There was more than one. You could just tell in their interactions that neither (student) nor the volunteer wanted to be there. Nobody wanted to be in that pairing. I think that maybe it was due to a lack of experience with kids. That might be something that-- I don't know how you would fix it. I don't know how you would make sure that it didn't happen that way.” – Volunteer Mentor

Consider longer and/or more frequent sessions. During the conversation with the students and their parents, it was mentioned that they would prefer *Book Buddies* to offer more frequent sessions per week. The current program consists of one 60-minute session each week, and the impact it can make on students may be limited due to the short run time of the meetings as well as their infrequency.

“Students preferred to take their breaks outside to play on the playground. With that in mind, I would consider adding 15 minutes to the length of the program to allow for time for students to play outside for longer. As specified in the lesson plans, ... the first 15-minutes of the program was dedicated to snacks. I found we used this time to let students settle in and quiet down before program activities started. I would consider extending the program length by 15 minutes to account for the 15 minutes typically lost in the few minutes of every program session.” – Program Staff

“After a few sessions, several students would routinely attend Book Buddies and beg that we have sessions more than once a week. Students wanted to come to Book Buddies every day!

Present-day, as we're nearing the end of the program, students are now asking if they can come back to Book Buddies in September when school resumes." – Program Staff

Incorporate homework to do between sessions with an incentive system (e.g., stickers). All the parents who talked with the evaluation RA at the end of the program hoped that their children were exposed to reading/literacy activities more frequently. One idea shared by a father was incorporating homework; giving the students homework between sessions would provide a chance for their parents to be engaged in their learning, especially after participating in the parent's session as part of the program. Ultimately, it would be ideal if students were accustomed to reading at home regularly, even after the end of *Book Buddies*.

Evaluation RA: *"How can we do better next time?"*

Student's Father: *"Just some support. Additional support like stickers. When kids read something, give them stickers because they were good. I think this works. Also, if you do that for homework, home reading, it works. Because this program is only for once a week, eh Yeah, it's once a week, so she needs to read at home to be good."*

Create an opportunity to involve more parents/guardians in children's reading and literacy activities. Inviting the students' parents in the actual sessions with their volunteer mentors and working together to practice how to read and play some of the literacy activities would develop the bond between the students and their parents/guardians and prepare them to continue the activities at home. It would also be a chance for parents/guardians to be a bigger part of the children's school community through interacting with volunteer mentors as well as other parents and their children.

Student's Mother: *"She just says, today was good, today was good. She likes the program. She likes the kids here. But she doesn't want to speak about it with me."*

Evaluation RA: *Did she tell you how she is doing in the program?*

Student's Mother: *"No, she doesn't tell much about school stuff."*

Evaluation RA: *"If we have this program, do you want to come again?"*

Student's Mother: *"Yeah, they want. I want too (laughing). Summer, you don't have?"*

Evaluation RA: *"Summer, no. Maybe fall. I don't know. So, you want to read too?"*

Student's Mother: *"Yeah ... I want. I can speak what I want, but I cannot understand everything. If you tell me something, maybe I don't understand, but if I look, I understand. When I see I understand. I need to make my listening stronger. We need to practice. Because we don't meet together with anyone speaks English. All Arab Arab. Yeah, we speak Arabic and Syrian all the time."*

Secure more volunteer mentors than students. Due to the absence of volunteers, one of the biggest challenges during the program was student-volunteer pairings, as some volunteers

were responsible for more than one student. While this co-relation has not been confirmed, towards the end of the program, the volunteers were more frequently absent, and the students simultaneously lost their enthusiasm for reading. However, a student who had two volunteer mentors with her one day enjoyed the attention and help she received. Therefore, having more volunteers than students could ensure a smoother implementation of the program.

“I think also having more volunteers than students would be helpful I think in the future too. There were lots of times when we had a lot of absences, and it was just so overwhelming. And I think if we had like maybe at least one extra volunteer, like 13 volunteers and 12 kids, it would be worthwhile in the future for programs.” – Program Staff

“And like, the volunteers were great, I had no issues with that, it's just I think as we've come near to the end, and I think part of it was the scheduling mix up, but we've kind of... like they've dwindled quite a bit, and it's that's kind of been a little challenging just trying to keep everyone together until the end of the term.” – Program Staff

“There were two volunteers with one student. The student loved this and was very excited to have two volunteers working with them. I think additional help, especially coming back, supported the student to remain focused and motivated throughout the entire session.” – Program Staff

Use digital tools and/or games to make literacy activities and reading more fun. Today, many students enjoy using digital tools. Therefore, you could enhance their curiosity and excitement by trying reading/literacy activities on a digital device or using digital tools, such as a projector, in a group setting and iPad in a one-on-one setting.

Community Researcher: *“What more do you like to do in the BB program?”*

Student: *“Video games. Bingo games. It's fun. I just like playing games.”*

“Yeah, I think he's incorporating games. Because I know (student) also mentioned he wanted to see more games in the program. Like, including he said video games, but I said, what about if we put up stuff on the projector and have a little activity up there, like jeopardy or something like that.” – Volunteer Mentor

“Something I was able to do to help these volunteers and students was to find activities these students liked and incorporate them into Book Buddies session plans. For example, one student who stated they did not like reading. I brought this student a digital iSpy book. This helped the volunteer keep the student engaged with reading while the student felt they had a preferred activity.” – Program Staff

Incorporate more physical literacy activities throughout the program. Physical literacy activities were generally successful, although some students were not always in the mood for

them. Physical literacy activities where students can stand up and move their bodies could be incorporated throughout the program.

"I think regardless of that, both (program staff) and (program staff) were very good about making it a welcoming place, that the whole purpose of this was just to enjoy reading a little bit more, to make it entertaining. I really liked when they did the relay race. I know some kids had an issue with it, but a lot of kids really enjoyed it. I think more activities like that spread throughout the typical reading sessions would be great. When you offset the classes where you sit down and read with classes when you get up and play games. Because also, the kids, they come from where they've been sitting all day, so the last thing they want to do is sit more. You could really tell some days that the kids were like, "Nope, I want to move. I want to be outside." I think having a balance of that would be awesome." – Volunteer Mentor

"We want them to read books normally, but a lot of the kids, especially the younger guys, were very, very hype and very hyperactive, and they responded very well to... to more physical activities involving reading. So, perhaps, a little bit more focus on that kind of aspect of trying to incorporate reading and support might appeal to certain kids a little bit more. I know (program staff) did attempt to do that one day. We had a relay set up... supposedly, it was really popular with the boys. I didn't actively get to see that as I got pulled away and ended up spending that day with a group of kids inside. So, I... but apparently, the little boys really liked it, and (student) did tell me he had a really good time." – Volunteer Mentor

Evaluation Limitations

There were some limitations to this evaluation in terms of methods, data collection and analysis.

First, the evaluation activity with students was conducted by volunteer mentors who were trained by the evaluation RA. The student-volunteer pairings were coordinated in such a way that they were paired with those students whom they had had the least chance to work with throughout the program. Although the students were encouraged to express their feelings, either positive or negative, conducting the evaluation with their regular buddies could have ensured smoother communication, and talking with their regular mentors may have allowed them to voice any negative comments more freely. Additionally, the training could include practice with some role-play activities for volunteers to try a few scenarios where students do not know what to draw or do not respond to questions to ensure the volunteers are prepared for such scenarios.

Second, two parents/guardians opted to fill out the program completion survey instead of talking with the evaluation RA. However, although they were able to write in their preferred language, Arabic, their answers consisted mostly of one word for each question. For data collection with parents/guardians, an in-person interview/conversation when they are at school waiting to pick up their children could allow them to give feedback more freely.

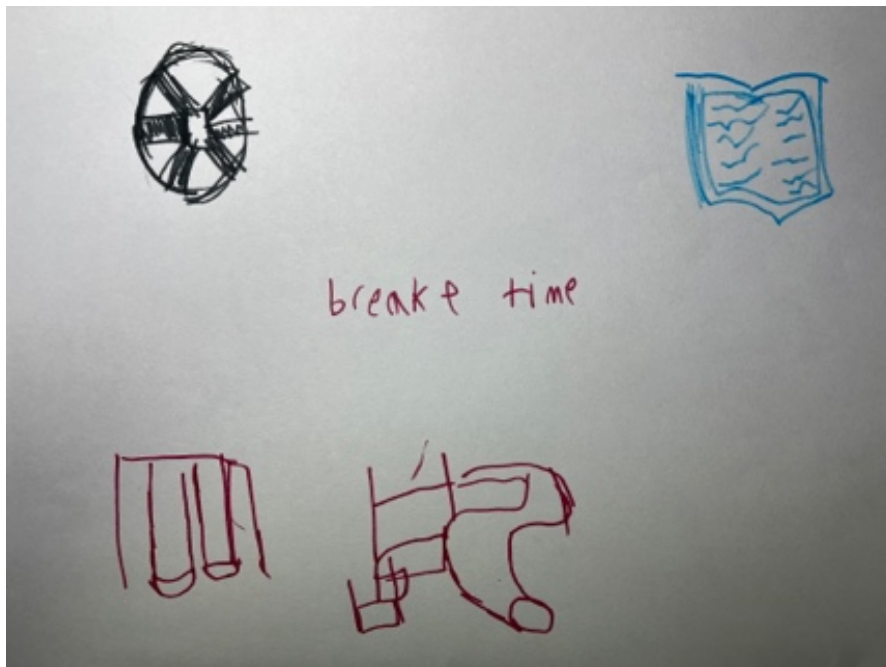
Third, if more time had been allowed for the program evaluation, it would have been useful to interview classroom teachers, the principal, program administrators and partners to cover the perspectives of all the stakeholders for *Book Buddies* in the evaluation.

Appendix

My Favourite Moments in *Book Buddies* – students' drawing from the evaluation activity



Note. Me and my buddy – Drawing (swing, monkey bar, pizza, literacy game, student & buddy)



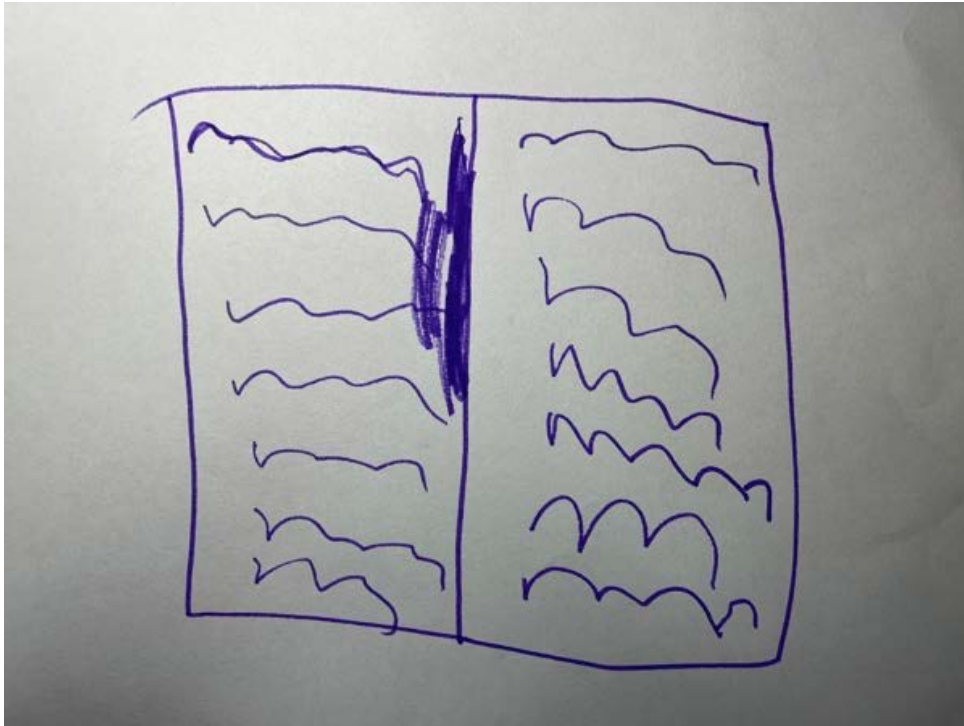
Note. Break time, swing, slide, soccer ball, and reading because it gives me a ticket. Drawing ('break time', swing, slide, soccer ball, and book)



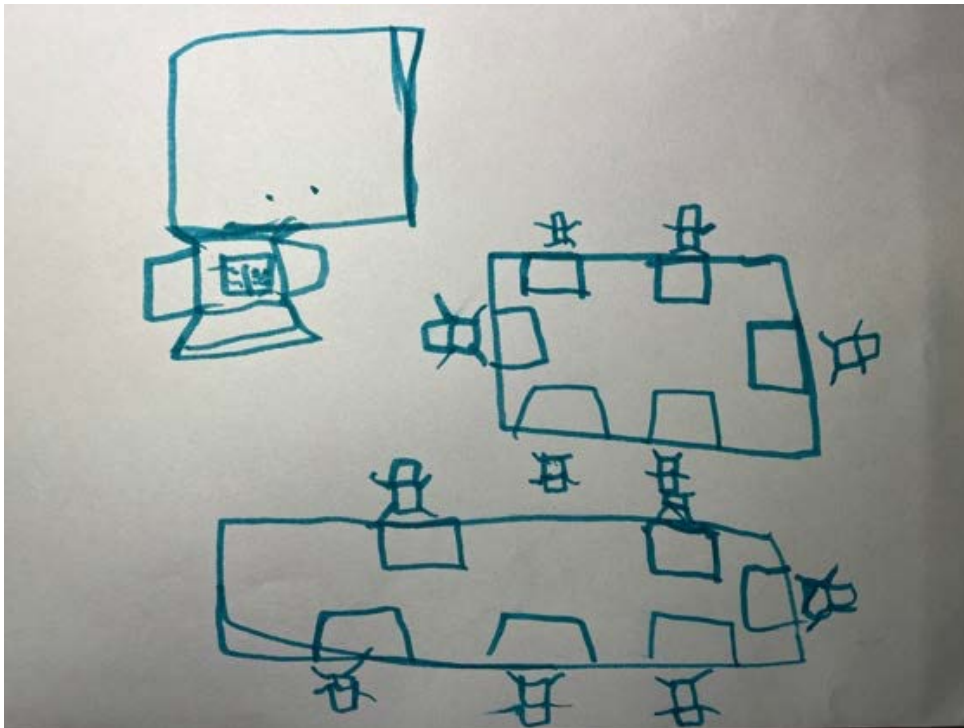
Note. Reading books with my buddy – Drawing (a student and his mentors/buddies)



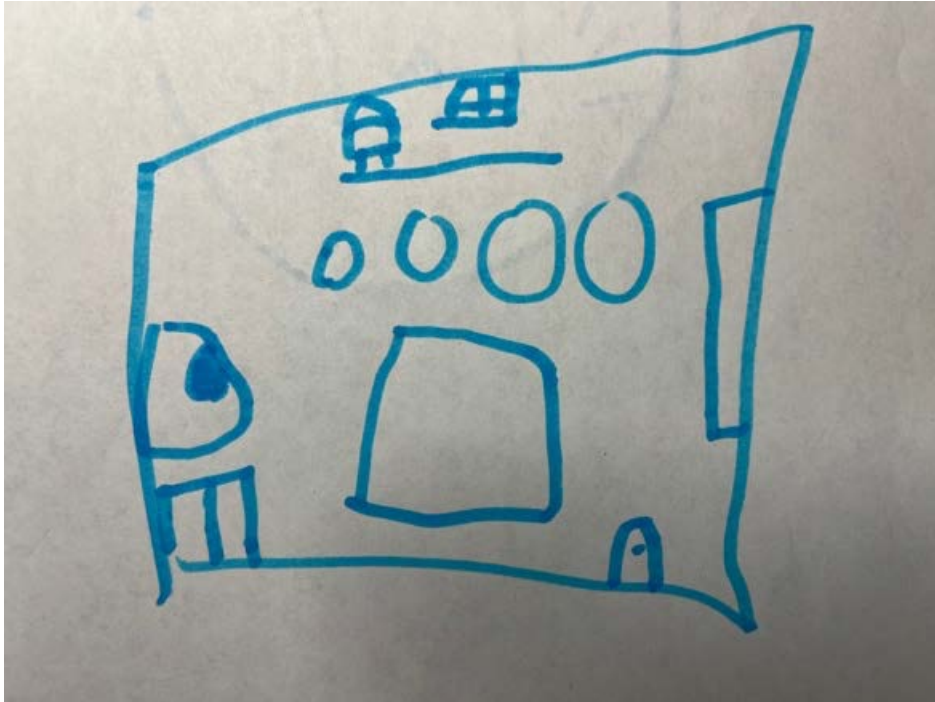
Note. Going outside – Drawing (playground)



Note. Reading books at *Book Buddies* – Drawing (book)



Note. Bingo game – Drawing (Tables, bingo sheets, and chairs)



Note. Scavenger hunt, exploring and looking for words – Drawing (My classroom)

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*Some information is intentionally hidden due to confidentiality.