

Final Evaluation of Barbershop Books-Year 2

Susan B. Neuman

New York University

The purpose of this evaluation in Year 2 was to examine the most promising features of the Barbershop Book (BSB) program, an intervention designed to promote reading engagement among Black boys. Our goal was to provide feedback to the leadership of the program to support the further development of the intervention in their efforts to become highly scalable and effective. This report summarizes the activities of the evaluation and the findings from Year 2.

In Year 2, we concentrated our evaluation on several key aspects of the program. Specifically, the focus was to examine the following features of the program:

- The effects of BSB on the reading identity and implicit reading attitudes of Black boys
- To examine the perceived value of the program from the barbers' perspectives
- To review certain organizational program features including the role of the program coordinator, as well as barbershop training materials and handouts.

Methodology-Year 2

The research design of the evaluation in Year 2 began with six barbershops, evenly divided into treatment and control sites. Those in the treatment group were provided with barbershop training, and a bookcase filled with 25 child-friendly titles, assisted by a program coordinator who was responsible for training, replenishing books and establishing community partnerships. However, due to a number of challenges (e.g. changes in leadership; control sites closing down), the evaluation focused on three treatment barbershops throughout the year: ESPM; Levelz215, and Major League. These barbershops represented different neighborhoods in Philadelphia. Together, a total of 40 hours of observation occurred during this initial period.

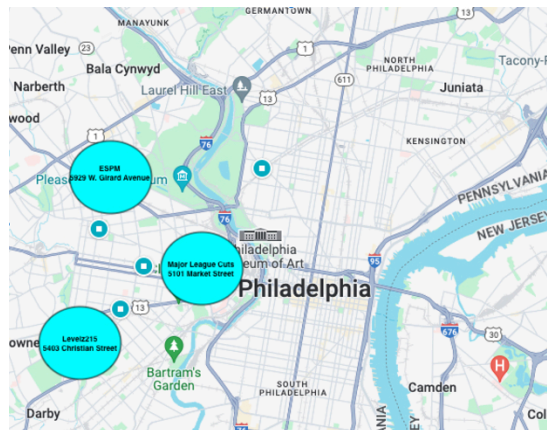
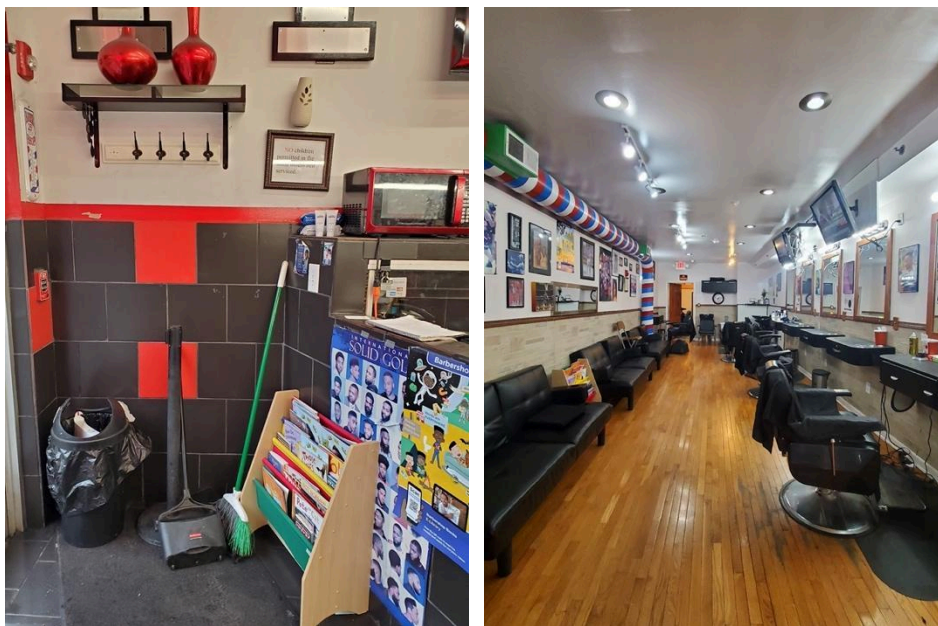




Figure 1. Exterior and interior of Major League Barbershop



Figures 2a and b: Bookcases in barbershops

Three African-American research assistants were assigned to conduct observations in the settings. Initially, research assistants reviewed the settings, the area in which the bookcases were located, and students' activities while visiting the barbershop (see below). Following this observational period, and using the comments from our previous evaluation, research assistants administered brief surveys to each barber, with the intent of providing quantitative data on their perceived views of the BSB program. A total of 19 barbers were surveyed.

Expanding on the work in Year 1, research assistants surveyed students' implicit attitudes toward reading in this year. The implicit attitude measure examines students' interests in sports, music, screen media and reading, asking each student whether the activity is cool/uncool, like

me/not me or ‘point to me.’ Research assistants would visit the barbershop and invite a student to participate in the survey. No one declined the invitation. A total of 111 students were surveyed.

In addition to these methods, the evaluation team interviewed the program coordinator to get a better sense of the specific job responsibilities of this role. We also reviewed a one-page document designed to provide essential information about the program as a recruiting tool. Finally, we reviewed a virtual training session, and provided feedback to the administrative team.

In total, the evaluation was designed to examine the initial influence of the program in the field, as well as to provide useful feedback to the administrative team as they extended their reach into the community.

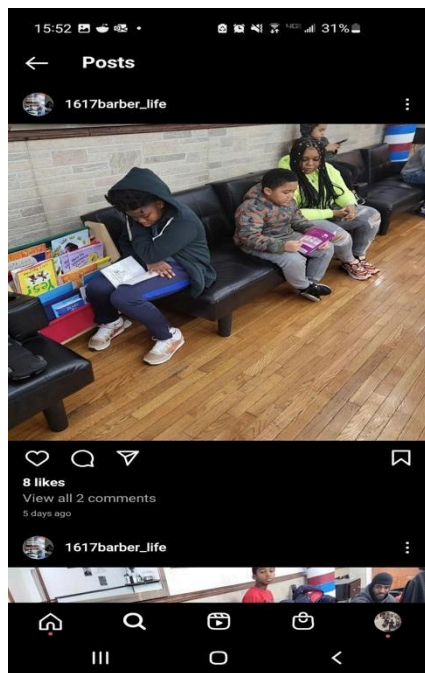


Figure 3. Picture taken by a barber of children using the books.

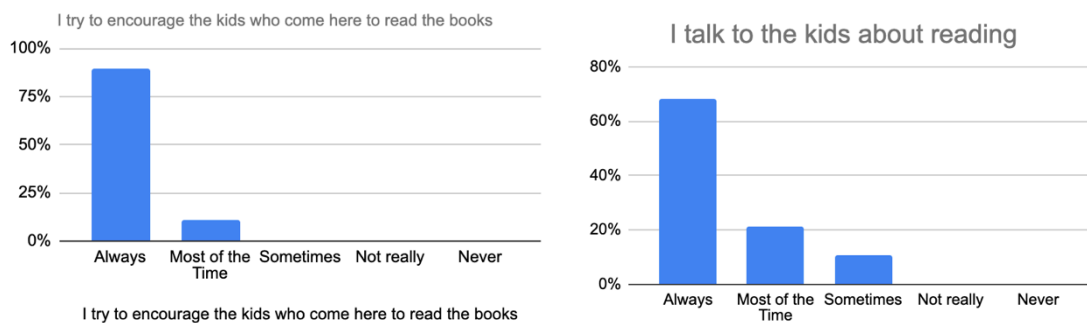
Key Findings

The following key findings reflect our results from the Year 2 evaluation.

Unanimous Agreement on the Benefits of the Program

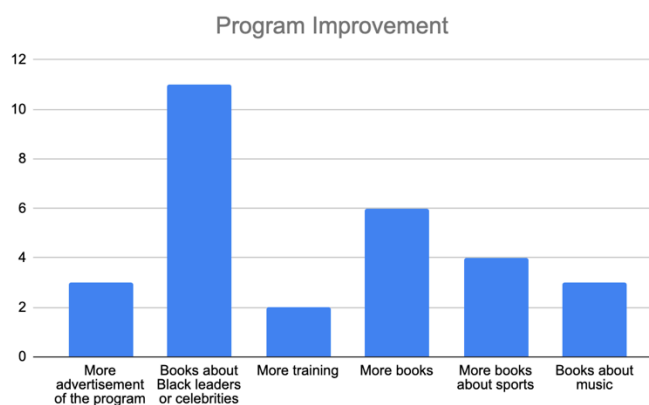
All of the barbers surveyed found the program highly beneficial for their clients, and all believed that reading is an important skill for Black boys to succeed in school and in their later life. Most try to encourage students to look at books during their visits, and most try to talk to

them about their reading. Therefore, to a degree, barbers seemed to act like trusted messengers to their young clients.



Mixed Views by Barbers on Book Selection

The majority of barbers were very positive about the selection of books for their barbershop. Over $\frac{3}{4}$ of the barbers reported that students liked the books. At the same time, many believed that there was room for improvement.



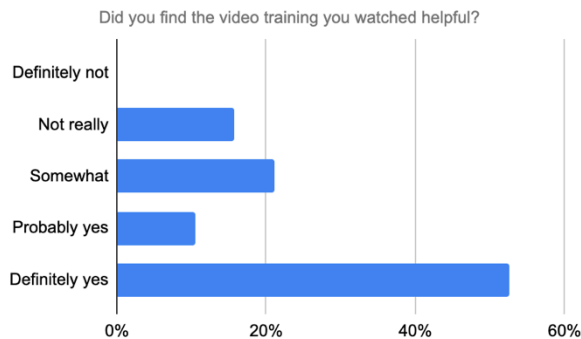
Over half of the barbers wanted to see more books about Black leaders and/or celebrities. Others wanted more book about sports, and music. Still others, wanted more frequent replenishments of books, since at times barbers would allow students to take them home. However, at the same time, asked if the books were liked by the students, there was a resounding ‘yes.’ Consequently, what adults might perceive as meaningful to students may not reflect students’ own opinions.

Barbers had a number of suggestions in answer to the question, “What might get kids excited about reading.” These include:

- Funny books that might catch the child’s attention
- Pictures of the books or characters
- Books from TV shows
- Interesting topics
- Reading books with black characters
- Certain things the kids think are popular at the time

Mixed views on the value of the training video

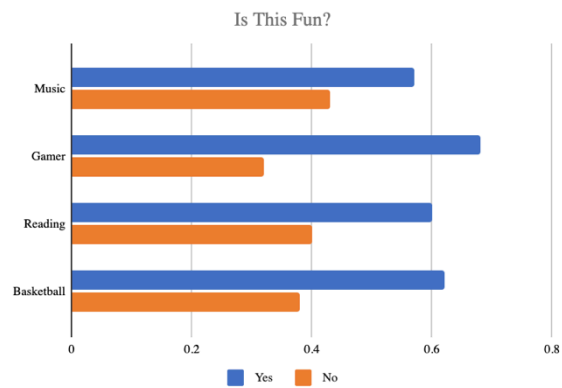
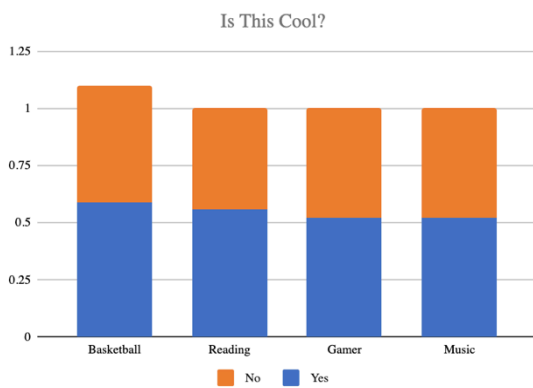
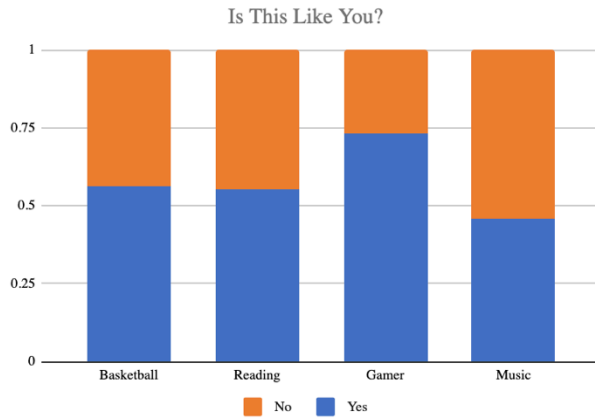
Slightly more than half of the barbers found the video which introduced the program very helpful.



Others, as indicated in interviews with the program coordinator preferred a personal one-on-one conversation with someone which could provide them with answers to questions, to help them clearly identify the program's expectations, and to better understand their role in the program. Since there is considerable turn-over in barbers in these sites, it might be helpful to consider both face-to-face training, and video training to ensure that barbers have sufficient knowledge of the program.

Students seemed to identify themselves as readers as a result of the program

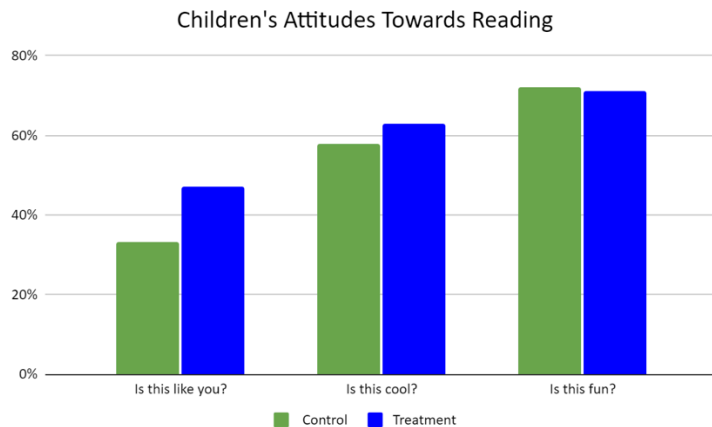
The implicit attitudes assessment examined how students viewed themselves as readers in contrast to other activities such as playing basketball, seeing themselves as gamers, or listening or playing music. In Year 2, we first compared students' responses to these activities among a sample of 60 Black boys. As shown in the following graphs, students saw themselves most often as gamers compared to other activities, followed by reading and basketball which are about even.



Interestingly, reading is perceived as being pretty cool compared to gaming and music, and fun. Though reading lags behind gaming and basketball, it seems to be identified positively as a leisure activity.

We then combined the sample from Years 1 and 2. By doing so, we were able to compare students' attitudes toward reading in treatment and control sites (Year 1). The sample in this analysis was substantial including 111 students in treatment sites compared to 60 students in the control sites (who were not part of the Barbershop program).

The analysis indicated that there was a significant difference in boys' views of themselves as readers. This suggests that the presence of books in these barbershops, along with barbers' support for reading appears to have a positive effect on students' self-image. However, there were no significant differences in the other two categories.



Consequently, these analyses indicate that BSB has made a positive contribution to their immediate community. Barbers praise the program, and are supportive of its mission, and the students seem to benefit substantially from the presence of books in these businesses.

Key Findings relevant to the BSB organization

In addition to our analysis of these barbershops, BSB requested feedback on a number of issues related to its organization and delivery of services. Below are several key findings that might be helpful in their effort to scale-up the program.

Consider an ongoing analysis of job positions and job descriptions in the program's organization.

BSB requires a good deal of administrative assistance. Given that barbershops are independent organizations, it appears that there is no easy way to create a network that might facilitate ongoing review and feedback from the field. Barbershops tend to have different hours of operation on different days; some may even scale back during certain times of the year. Having a dedicated person to track and maintain contact with barbershops may be necessary to ensure that all are conducting the program with appropriate fidelity.

Reconsider the role of the program coordinator

The program coordinator in the BSB organization has a complex and difficult role. He or she is expected to recruit barbershops, train them, set of the bookshelf and books, replace materials when needed and set up community partnerships which can support the program and find a place to house books. The position has been part-time, ranging from 10-20 hours a week. Some of the specific challenges, according to one coordinator include:

- The time lapse between recruiting barbershops and receiving materials. Because of the frequent turn-over of barbers, one might commit to the program at an earlier point, while others might want to reconsider their participation.

- Books are frequently taken (for some good reasons). As a result, there is a need for someone to check in with barbershops to determine their needs.
- More training is needed for barbers. In addition, some barbers are willing to talk about books with students, but others would prefer not. Getting all barbers on the same page with clear guidance is needed.

Create materials that identify the requirements of the program

The evaluation team examined new materials that clearly define the mission of BSB, and provided feedback to the leadership team. These materials will help in the recruiting and training of barbers in the future, and may help establish a ‘fidelity of implementation’ criteria which may be useful in the future as the program scales up.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The results of our evaluation in Year 2 indicate a highly promising intervention for supporting reading engagement among black boys. The intervention features most prominently observed throughout our observation period and surveys were: (i) the close physical access to books in an attractive open-faced bookshelf; and (2) barbers who seemed enthusiastic about the program and seem to take on a role as trusted messengers, although some engaged in this role more than others. Students appeared to benefit from the program in their views of reading as fun and cool, and scored statistically higher in identifying themselves as readers compared to the control group.

Scaling up will require the leadership team to make certain adjustments in their organizational model. Job descriptions should reflect clear time parameters and assignments. Recent efforts to define roles and responsibilities will enhance the effectiveness of the program, and potentially support a sustainable intervention model.