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Motivating Reluctant Middle School Males to Read: The Perspectives of Middle School Teachers

Angela Watters

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Motivating Reluctant Middle School Males to Read: The Perspectives of
Middle School Teachers
Angela Watters

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Education

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

This is to certify that the Action Research Final Project of

Angela Watters

has been approved by the Review Committee, and fulfills the requirements for the
Master of Arts in Education degree.

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Abstract

The purpose for conducting this study was to find ways to motivate reluctant middle school males to read. To do this qualitative research methods were used. Data was collected through participant interviews. Four teachers who teach English, Language Arts, or Communications were interviewed to find out what strategies they have used to change the attitudes of their male middle school aged students have about reading. The problem is that many middle school males struggle to be motivated to read. The three major themes that emerged from the research data were book choice, promotion of books, and knowledge of books.

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Chapter One

Introduction

As a little girl I loved to read every chance I could get. Reading is something that has always come easy for me. As a family we would all be in our beds at night with our night-lights on reading. I grew up in a culture of reading and learning. Independent Reading time in class could not be long enough. I never struggled getting the required number of pages done each quarter. So, when most of my students struggle to get their required number of pages completed every quarter: I wondered why. I would confess my love for reading to my class and they would look at me like I was an alien. Currently, I struggle to get my students to complete the required number of pages that they need to read for their English classes. When they lack the motivation and a positive attitude toward reading they struggle to read, which hinders them not just in English, but in Social Studies and Science as well.

Previous research on students and reading attitudes included: Stokman's work (1999). Stokman reported that reading attitude had a positive influence on reading behavior. In their study, Cloer and Pearman (1992) asserted that male students' negative reading attitudes towards academic and recreational reading were associated with their low reading achievement. In a study done by Keskin and Bastug, findings suggested that children's reading attitudes are a factor in their school performance (Keskin & Bastug, 2014).

Purpose Statement

The purpose for conducting this study was to find ways to motivate middle school aged males to read. To do this I interviewed teachers who teach English, Language Arts, or Communications to find out what strategies they have used to change the attitudes of their male middle school aged students about reading. My main research question was: How do I change the attitudes my middle school aged males have about reading?

Importance of the Study

This research is important because if my middle school aged male students had a positive attitude towards reading they could become better readers and possibly do better in all of their classes.

Based on my experience teaching, I have found that students who have a positive attitude towards reading are better readers and therefore, do better in school. In addition, I hold the educational value that when students have a positive attitude towards reading in middle school, they become lifelong readers and learners.

Definition of Terms

Motivation- according to Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) is defined in terms of “beliefs, values, needs, and goals that individuals have.” The closer that literacy activities and tasks match these values, needs and goals, the greater the likelihood that students will expend effort and sustain interest in them.

Nonreader- is someone who cannot or does not read.

Reading attitude - is broken in to two areas: academic reading and recreational reading. Reading attitude is shaped by previous reading experiences and by one's perception of and beliefs about the outcome that is derived from reading (Keskin and Bastug, 2014).

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Would kids rather take out the trash than read? According to Dr. Marie Carbo (2013) of the National Reading Styles Institute they would. This is a problem for our society because approximately 80% of the population above the age of 12 now needs higher order literacy competency for full participation in society (Brown, 1991). Over the past twenty years, young adults have declined from being the most likely to read literature to those least likely to read literature compared to adults (Wilson, 2006).

This chapter will examine some of the available literature on how to improve students' motivation to read. This chapter will discuss the relationship of reading to learning and the history of attitudes toward reading, including the difference among genders. It will then examine how book choice, the use of book clubs, and having male readers come to your classroom can change students' perceptions of reading. Finally, it will consider how to motivate students to read their textbooks.

Background on Attitude

According to Ajzen and Fishben (1975), attitude is acquired, not innate, and is the product of innumerable episodes involving the object. Attitude is not something you are born with, but something that you can gain from experiences with the object. The three factors that affect attitudes are: direct experiences with the object, beliefs about the object, social norms concerning the object.

The interest someone has in something is essentially synonymous with attitude. If you have an interest in something you have a positive attitude toward it. One's interest in reading is the same as one's attitude toward reading. As Moje (2006), Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, and Morris (2008), and O'Brien et al. (2007) observed, adolescents develop positive reading identities when their out-of-school literacy practices are valued by their teachers and peers and connected to meaningful literacy activities in school.

Attitudes and Gender

Research has consistently shown that females generally have more positive attitudes toward reading than males (Keskin & Bestug, 2014). This gender difference exists at early grades, upper elementary, middle, and high school. The gender gap between males and females does widen with age. A gender gap in motivation has also been documented outside the U.S. including Brazil, Japan, England, and South Korea, (McKenna, Conradi, Lawrence, Jan, & Meyer, 2012). Research indicates that adolescent boys are often unmotivated to read because they see reading in conflict with their sense of masculinity (Keskin & Bestug, 2014).

The History of Attitudes toward Reading as Students go through School

Interest, competence, and motivation in reading and language arts decline as adolescents enter middle school (Guthrie, 2001; Wigfield, Eccles, MacIver, Reuman, & Midgley, 1991). Thirty-three to forty percent of fourth graders said they like reading and it was a favorite activity (2002-2007). Ten to fourteen percent of eighth grade students strongly agreed that they like reading and it was a

favorite activity, whereas 66-68% of eighth graders either disagreed or strongly disagreed with that statement, (McKenna, Conradi, Lawrence, Jan, & Meyer, 2012). This situation does not improve as students enter high school and start to view reading as a chore.

Then, as other activities, new friends, and various media compete for our students' time; the motivation for reading goes down. As new technology has developed over the last twenty years, students have even more activities to compete for their time. There are students that still like to read, but now it is reading on their iPad or eReader. More recent studies have suggested that few adolescents choose to read on their own (Strommen & Mates, 2004). When students judge reading and literacy activities to be unrewarding, too difficult, or not worth the effort because they are peripheral to their interests and needs they can become nonreaders (Strommen & Mates, 2004) or illiterate adolescents (Alvermann, 2003) who are capable of reading but choose not to do so.

The Impact of Reading Attitudes on Performance

Children's reading attitudes are a factor in their school performance (Keskin, 2013). Cloer and Pearman (1992) asserted that male students' negative reading attitudes to academic and recreational reading were associated with their low reading achievement.

Results of the 2002 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) exams indicated that 25 percent of eighth graders and 26 percent of 12th graders were reading at the "below basic" level. In 2003, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004) discovered

that girls outperform boys in literacy assessments and this gap widens, as students get older.

The Relationship of Reading to Learning

In school, students are asked to read a fiction or non-fiction text and then either take a test on that material or do a research paper. They are asked to read instructions for a worksheet or read directions for a lab they are doing in science. Reading is all around them and is important to their learning. Students need to be taught how to organize ideas, question authors' conclusions, make predictions, draw inferences, and use and apply the information they learn to a variety of situations (Brunner, 2009). If students are not motivated to read this can be a problem for them in school. Children's reading attitudes are a factor in their school performance (Keskin, 2013).

Three Ineffective Reading Instruction Practices

According to Richard Allington (2014) in his article, "Reading Moves: What Not to Do," three common classroom errors are overemphasizing oral reading, interrupting students as they read, and asking low-level questions. The ultimate goal of literacy instruction is to be able to read independently, usually silently, and to understand what we have read.

Yet many teachers have students reading aloud for the majority of class. Being proficient at one does not have much impact on the other. In addition, teachers tend to have their best students doing most of the reading aloud. The result is that the low-achieving students are reading fewer than half as many words a day as good readers (Allington, 2014).

Allington (2014) goes on to say, another ineffective practice is interrupting students as they read. If you interrupt students as they read you are breaking their momentum and therefore their comprehension. This pattern creates two types of readers: good readers who self-regulate and struggling readers who stop after almost every word and look up at their teacher for a cue (Allington, 2014).

The third ineffective reading practice is asking low-level questions. Most of the reading questions in textbook manuals are low-level interrogations that don't improve reading comprehension. These literal questions do not get our students to think about the text in a higher level. If you ask higher-level questions you will get your students to have literate conversations about the text.

Allington (2014) makes the following suggestions:

- Use oral reading selectively
- When students are reading aloud, “Consciously bite your tongue.”
- When responding to students’ errors, encourage self-monitoring and self-regulation
- After asking students to silent read, monitor comprehension by having students re-tell or write
- Have students turn, pair, and share after reading and work to develop discussion skills
- Explicitly teach discussion skills
- Gradually increase the amount of time students are engaged in literate discussion

How do Students' Perceptions of Reading Change if They Are Allowed to Choose Their Book?

So few teenagers read for pleasure that they find that phrase an oxymoron (Podl, 1995). In a study done by Jody Brown Podl (1995), she gave her students the choice of several texts to read. She put the titles and the authors on the board and then students got to vote for their choice based on the descriptions she gave in her book talk. Students were then eager to see which book was theirs. They felt a sense of ownership over the process because they had a say in it. Jody Brown Podl then spends five to nine days reading the books with her students. She takes out her book and they take out theirs. At the end of the time, students take a test on the book. This test is made up of short-answer questions that mostly have to do with the plot of the story.

After they take the test, students work in groups to present their books to the class. The benefit of this approach is that the students gained independence by making the choice of what book to read. They also did not view reading as a chore or as work (Podl, 1995).

In another study done by John T. Guthrie and Kathleen E. Cox (2012), the researcher used the Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI) method, which involves autonomy. Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI) is an instructional program that merges reading strategy instruction, conceptual knowledge in science, and support for student motivation. We define reading engagement as the interplay of motivation, conceptual knowledge, strategies, and social interaction during literacy activities. We believe engagement in reading is

crucial for the development of life-long literacy learners. The CORI program is designed to foster reading engagement and comprehension through the teaching of reading strategies, teaching of scientific concepts and inquiry skills, and its explicit support of the development of student intrinsic motivation to read. In the Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI) method step four is autonomy support. The reading and language arts activities are guided by student-generated questions (Guthrie & Cox, 2001). The reading class then revolves around projects that the students themselves help design. These forms of self-choice methods are motivating to the students.

Guthrie (1996) also points out that personal interests can be a jumping off point for selecting literature. Personal interests form the basis for questions and the point of departure for discussion about texts. Guthrie suggests encouraging students to write a list of their interests. Then they could then pick a book about one of those topics (Guthrie, 1996).

In a later 2004 meta-analysis, Guthrie and Humenick (2012) found that the two most powerful instructional design factors for improving reading motivation and comprehension were student access to books and personal choice of what to read. The experience of choosing the book in itself boosts motivation (Guthrie & Humenick, 2004). Offering choices, makes it more likely that every reader will be matched to a text that he or she can read well (Allington and Gabriel, 2012).

If students initially have trouble choosing texts that match their ability level and interest, teachers can provide limited choices to guide them toward successful reading experiences. By giving students these opportunities, we help

them develop the ability to choose appropriate texts for themselves, a skill that dramatically increases the likelihood they will read outside of school (Ivey & Boaddus, 2001; Reis et al., 2007).

Research indicates that access to self-selected texts improves students' reading performance (Krashen, 2001); whereas, no evidence indicates that workbooks, photocopies, or computer tutorial programs have ever done so (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998; Dynarski, 2007). Educators are very quick to go to the quick fix, which is the workbook or the computer tutorial program. We need to remember that students' self concept as readers and their values of reading coincide with their reading choices and overall enjoyment of reading.

When adolescents are asked about their literary lives, they clearly identified the importance of choice of their literature (Ivey & Boaddus, 2001; Oldfather, 1993). When adolescents feel that all choices have been taken out of their lives; book choice becomes very important.

Book Clubs

Book clubs as a method to motivate boys to read are becoming more and more popular. These book clubs focus on topics, genres, authors, and themes that the boys identify as important to them. Each month a new genre, series, or topic is selected. The book choices always fit the theme of the month, but may vary by length, difficulty, and content. According to Mitchell, Murphy, and Peters (2008), boys connect best when literacy experiences are tied to real life situations. To tie these books to real life situations in the BILLI group (Boys in Literacy Initiative) the book club members go on a field trip to a museum, has a guest speaker,

attends a sporting event, hikes or has a bonfire. Book clubs that emphasize reading as an experience rather than an academic task can attract students, even reluctant ones, to participate because they view the club as a social event rather than the typical demands of daily classroom assignments (Mitchel & Harris, 2001). Roller and Beed (1994) agreed, adding “Good exchanges and discussions help build feelings of competency, acceptance, and motivation that provide an entry point for less able readers to the literate world” (p. 510).

The significance of being a member of a club was documented years ago by Hinchman (1917) when he proposed that students given the choice of participating in a reading club, rather than a traditional literature class, chose the club, resulting in greater levels of independent reading (Whittingham & Huffman, 2009). Four tenets are followed at every BILI session: only boys can participate: authentic reading happens each week: boys have agency over the book selection: and boys keep the books (Murphy and Peters, 2009).

The books are kept because says the BILI organization is that it is important for urban boys to be able to create their own libraries. In order for the BILI organization to be successful with the book club they are constantly informing and involving parents, teacher and students. They need the community and school to help monitorial support the BILI organization (Murphy and Peters, 2009).

The Impact on Using Authors and Literature from the Student’s Home State

Children and adults like to read about familiar people and settings. One suggestion to fill that need is to read books from authors from the students’ hone

state. For example, a child referred to in the article, “Motivating Students to Read: Using Authors and Literature from Their Home State,” was the student who loved historical fiction and informational books. As a child she soon discovered that she could not read enough about her home state and the people (Richardson & Miller, 2009). Joyce, a student in a graduate course in Children’s Literature made the following comment, “I found reading very difficult and unenjoyable as a child but I remember having Little House on the Prairie read to me as a child at school and it sparked an interest in our home state and its people and history that I pursue yet today” (Personal Communication, 2000).

Using Physical Education Teachers, Coaches and Athletes to Motivate Readers

Richardson, Richardson and Sacks (2011) recommended asking your physical education teachers, coaches and athletes to come to the classroom as guest readers, to motivate students to read.

The guest reader would read aloud a book to students of their chose or the book the teacher is reading in class. In many cases the literacy teacher is female so consider inviting the male physical education teacher. This is important as many struggling readers are boys and often think that “men do not read books or it is a girl thing” and it is important for them to see a man reading (Richardson, Richardson, & Sacks, 2011). The guest reader should share the importance of reading in his/her life and what he/she is currently reading including books, magazines and newspapers.

In a school district in Washington, the reading specialist invited the high school football team and coaches to come to an elementary school once a month

to read to children. The boys on the football team wore their jerseys and rode the team bus to the school. This positive experience would be a way to build self-esteem for the football players and the children. Potentially, this could lead into the development of life-long readers for the children and the football players (Richardson, Richardson & Sacks, 2011).

Motivating Reluctant Students to Read Their Textbooks

A common problem that teachers face in every discipline is getting their students to read the textbook. We know that textbook reading not only enhances content comprehension but also improves overall reading comprehension. The more students read in that content area the better we become at understanding the information in that content area (Shenkman, 2002). Students need additional incentives to do the reading, such as a quiz to motivate them.

Without the extrinsic reward or consequence, they will not be motivated to do the hard work at home (Ruscio 2001: Sapington, Kinsey & Munsayak, 2002: Solomon 1979).

According to Ryan (2006), the motivation to read the textbook and textbook reading skills are inextricably linked. As a way to increase self-motivated learning from the textbook she has developed shorter, more focused homework assignments for her courses (Ryan, 2006).

The assignment forces the novice student to find important information in the textbook and reinforces comprehension through personal examples. That way the student will have had to at least read part of the chapter before coming to class. The students can also use the assignments as exam guides. Ryan did a

subsequent study to see if the students using the focus worksheets did better on a midterm and final examination. She found that the students who had the focus worksheets performed the best on the examinations (Ryan, 2006).

Making Textbook Reading Meaningful for Middle School Students

As students enter middle school, textbooks reading dominate the majority of their classes. Textbook reading not only requires basic reading skills, but also higher-order reading comprehension and reasoning. Most students say textbook reading is boring, dry and uninteresting. Another problem is that students may be able to read fluently, understand literal meanings of sentences, and make simple inferences, but they struggle with higher-order literacy skills. Most textbooks are geared toward the 20 percent of students in the middle ability level.

Students at the high end may quickly comprehend the text and students at the low end may have trouble decoding the words (Guthrie & Klauda, 2012). Middle school content area teachers don't want to teach literacy skills.

At the University of Maryland, Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly (2007) came up with five crucial practices that motivate adolescents to read informational texts. The five crucial practices are to develop dedication, build self-efficacy, and show students the text's value, use social motivation, and give students choices (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews & Kelly, 2007).

The findings from some studies have found that this kind of dedication or self-discipline is more important than IQ in predicting high school grades (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews & Kelly, 2007). Textbooks rarely motivate students to develop dedication. To encourage dedication, effective teachers go

beyond the textbook, incorporating the Internet, relevant trade books, and articles from journals (Guthrie & Kaluda, 2012). In order to develop dedication, students must believe they can comprehend the text. According to Guthrie, Wigfield, & Klauda (2012), nearly one-half of middle school students find science and history textbooks intimidating. Students should not avoid the textbook. When students gain expertise in a topic by engaging in the text, they then believe in themselves as readers. An important step in motivating students to read content textbooks is to match the text to the student's reading levels. For struggling readers, teachers must ease into difficult texts by providing more manageable texts and ensuring initial success (Guthrie, Wigfield, & Klauda, 2012).

Using different media, such as videos, can also support students' understanding by supplying background knowledge that students can link to informational texts (Guthrie, Wigfield, & Klauda, 2012).

Social Motivation can inspire dedication to text reading if students want to impress their peers and not let them down by failing to fulfill their role in the group. Effective middle school teachers should provide frequent opportunities for collaborating with students supporting social motivation for reading information texts. One simple way to encourage collaboration is to pair desks and have students do two-minute activities with each lesson in the book. Another successful approach is collaborative reasoning, in which a group of students discusses a story or an informational text (Chinn, Anderson, & Waggoner, 2001). Students build on one another's thoughts to explain the major theme of the text by successively adding key elements as they take turns contributing to the synthesis process.

Middle school students need to feel in control of their world. By giving them simple choices, they feel this control. Guthrie and Klauda (2012) do not suggest giving them the choice of to read the textbook or not to, rather, providing choices such as but which paragraph to emphasize or which examples to read closely. Choice helps teenagers find materials that are relevant to them; this ability to choose increases their delight in reading (Guthrie & Klauda, 2012).

There is a plethora of research on reading, motivation and males providing multiple strategies to motivate reluctant males to read. This chapter highlighted a number of these research findings.

Chapter Three

Methodology and Data Collection

This research project is a qualitative action research project. Qualitative research “uses narrative, descriptive approaches to data collection to understand the way things are and what the research means from the perspectives of the participants in the study” (Mills, 2007, p.6). Action research is a four-step process in which researchers identify an area of focus, collect data, analyze and interpret data, and develop an action plan. A teacher, or other professional in the educational environment, conducts an action research project to gain understanding about a topic, with the goal of improving the learning environment (Mills, 2007). The main goal of action research is to “enhance the lives of children. But action research can also enhance the lives of professionals” (Mills, 2007, p.13). This action research project was designed to do both. By understanding what teachers do in their classroom to motivate their male students to read, the researcher, other teachers and students will benefit.

Participants. The participants in this study were teachers at the middle school where the researcher teaches. The school is located in a south suburban area of the Twin Cities of Minnesota. The four teachers included: an 8th grade English, general and honors teacher, a 7th grade Language Arts and Communications, Honors, and Gifted and Talented Grades 6-8 teacher, an Autism Program and serving high functioning students with Autism Spectrum Disorder teacher, and 7th grade Language Arts and an 8th grade AVID teacher.

Below are descriptions of the participants with pseudonyms used to provide the teachers' anonymity.

Kelly. Kelly is a Caucasian female, in her 40s married with two children, a girl and a boy. She is native to northern Minnesota where she attended elementary, middle and high school. She also attended a college in northern Minnesota for her undergraduate degree. She did her graduate degree at a school with satellite campuses all over the Twin Cities metro area. Kelly was selected because she has taught elementary, middle, and high school. She has taught struggling readers, honor students and gifted and talented students.

Leeza. Leeza is a Caucasian female, age 40s, a wife, and a mother of two children, a girl and a boy. She is a native of the Twin Cities in Minnesota where she attended elementary, middle and high school. She attended a college out of state and received her undergraduate degree in Business. She completed her graduate degree for Education at a school with satellite campuses all over the Twin Cities metro area. Leeza was chosen to be a participant because she has taught both elementary and middle level. She has also taught struggling readers, honors students and gifted and talented students.

Christy. Christy, is in her 30s, Caucasian, and single. She is native to the Twin Cities in Minnesota where she attended elementary, middle and high school. She attended a college in northern Minnesota where she received her undergraduate degree in Elementary Education. She did her graduate degree for Education at a school with satellite campuses all over the Twin Cities metro area.

Christy was selected as a participant because she has taught both elementary and middle level. Christy taught elementary in an Asian country for one year. She has also taught struggling readers and now teaches AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination).

Suzie. Suzie is a Caucasian female, in her 40s. Suzie is married and has three daughters. She is a native of the Twin Cities in Minnesota where she attended elementary, middle and high school. She attended a college in northern Minnesota where she received her undergraduate degree in Elementary Education. She did her graduate degree for Education at a school with satellite campuses all over the Twin Cities metro area. Suzie was chosen as a participant because she has taught both elementary and middle level. She has taught elementary and special education in Florida while she lived there. She has also taught struggling readers and now teaches in the Autism Program at my school.

Setting

School. The school where the participants teach is located on the south side of the Twin Cities of Minnesota. The population is predominately Caucasian with less than a one percent minority. This middle school, which will from here on out be known as Miller Middle School, is located on the southern edge of town. Students that populate this school come from the town's center or downtown and from the country. Some students that live in the outskirts of the city will ride on the bus for up to 50 minutes one way. The families of these students are from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.

The school is made up of grades six to eight. Miller Middle School has a male principal, one male dean and one female dean. There are approximately 60 teachers at Miller. Subjects taught include: Language Arts, Communications, Science, World Studies, Minnesota History, U.S. History, Math, Algebra, Physical Education, Health, Art, Industrial Technology, FACS (Family and Consumer Science), Choir and Band. There are students that receive special education services and four ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) programs are housed out of Miller Middle School.

Community. The community that Miller Middle School is located in, which will be called Louisville, has a rich history. The town can trace its origins back to the mid-1800s when a captain of the army came from the east to serve in military forts in the territory of Minnesota. By the mid-1800s Louisville had two hotels, a blacksmith shop, a carpenter shop, a gun shop, a shoemaker shop, and a saloon. By the 1900s, the township and village populations neared 1,000. The east side of the township was rich open farmland. The western half of the township had trees, lakes, and rolling hills where people summered and fished. From 1900 to 1950, Louisville's population grew to almost 2000 people. At the turn of the 21st century, Louisville's population was over 42,000 people. Louisville has always been a mix of country and city. It has a wonderful downtown area with shops and restaurants, yet there are farm fields directly out of town.

Procedures. The method of data collection in this study was qualitative action research carried out through participant interviews (Mills, 2007). “Action research is any systematic inquiry conducted by teacher researchers, principals, school counselors, other stakeholders in the teaching/learning environment to gather information about how their particular schools operate, how they teach, and how well their students learn” (Mills, 2007, pg. 5). The researcher decided that one-on-one interviews with teachers would be the most relevant and authentic form of data she could collect. The researcher interviewed the four teachers, using her iPad to record the interviews and a clipboard with the questions, writing as they talked. After the interviews were complete the researcher replayed the interviews from my iPad and transcribed the interviews on her Macbook computer using Microsoft Word. The action researcher began each interview with a brief explanation of why she was interviewing them, then researcher handed the participant a list of seven questions. The action researcher then asked clarifying or follow-up questions based on the responses.

This study was qualitative in nature, and based on thorough examination of primary data collected from interviews with four female teachers. A grounded theory approach was utilized, allowing data that was collected to drive the study forward.

Rather than relying on preconceived notions or assumptions, Grounded Theory allowed the researcher to focus solely on the data at hand in order to develop a more objective system of describing and explaining human behavior (Glaser, 2009).

Interviews for this study were conducted over a period of two months in January and February of 2015. Each participant was initially pulled aside before or after school and asked if they would like to participate in this research study. The action researcher only approached teachers that had taught reading, language arts or communications in the last five years. The researcher-recruited participants she knew would be willing to share and be open and honest.

Analysis

The analysis utilized grounded theory. According to Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967), grounded theory is a general method of constant and ever evolving interplay between analysis and the data collected in a research study. As soon the interviews were transcribed, the researcher analyzed the data, attempting to identify themes and patterns. The action researcher did not categorize data as a “theme” unless at least two of my interviewees had expressed similar statements. The researcher did this because of the principles of guided theory (a component of grounded theory) as explained by Strauss and Juliet Corbin (1997). Most of the themes that developed out of the research were previously outlined in my literature review. There were themes from the literature review that were not themes generated from the interviews.

The continuity of the themes provided “verification” of my hypothesis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and (Corbin & Strauss, 1997). Only ideas or concepts are noted as actual themes when examples of like or similar concepts were evident across all or most participant interviews (Corbin & Strauss, 1987).

Chapter Four

Findings

The purpose of this study was to find ways to motivate reluctant middle school males to read. My main research question was: How do I change the attitudes my middle school aged males have about reading? Every participant indicated that they felt that by giving the student the choice of what book they could read would lead them to be more motivated to read. As for the other themes that arose in the participants' responses, I found prior research, as a guide identifying themes, but the research did not necessarily determine the themes. I began to develop these themes from my own perspective.

Book Choice. The participants in this study shared that they felt that book choice was one of the most important components to motivating their students to read. Each participant in this study had a different method of book choice, but all used it. Book choice is when a teacher lets a student choose the book he/she is reading for independent reading.

For example, Christy stated, "That as long as it is a book they are interested in I let them read it." Christy makes her students preapprove their books with her. Christy does this because she has noticed that some of her unmotivated boys will just go to a shelf and grab any book. Christy also says:

It is all about the right book at the right time. You need to guide them to something they are interested in. If they choose the right book it will not be as painful for them to read. As long as it interests them I let them read it.

Christy does not pay attention to book level as much as others. Christy does ban some books though. She will not let them read anything that they have read before or easy books like Hatchet and Diary of a Wimpy Kid. Christy says:

The majority of my kids do a good job. I am the Book Nazi. There is no more Hatchet and Diary of Wimpy Kids. I feel like they are picking good books because I am leading them to the right books.

She wants them to explore new books and open their minds to new things. When the students get their preapproval for their book, Christy writes it down so that she has a record of what each student is reading. This is a way for her to make sure no one is reading something they have already read and she can also ask them for a summary at any point of what they are reading. Christy states:

One of the books they read in a quarter needs to be an Accelerated Reader (AR) book. The AR books have a computer based comprehension check to see if they understand what they have read.

Students need to pass the check with a 70% or better. This is one of the ways I use to make sure they are reading. They need preapproval before they can choose their own book.

Leeza like Christy also lets her students choose the book they are reading, but she has more requirements they need to meet during the quarter. Leeza also makes her students read one Accelerated Reader (AR) book and pass the test at 70% or better. Then, because it is an Honors Language Arts class the AR level needs to be 6.0 or higher. The AR level is based on Lexile level. Leeza states:

The Lexile level measure represents a student's level on a developmental scale of reading ability. Lexile measures are not generated from grade level norms and do not presume a specific grade level interpretation.

Leeza likes using the Lexile measure because most of her students are reading above their grade level and when she guides them to read books in their Lexile range they are being challenged. She explains, the Lexile range “is the student’s “sweet spot” for reading comprehension.” In this range the students will understand the most of what they are reading. The last requirement she has for her Honors students is that one book needs to be a non-fiction book. A requirement of her Honors class is the students need to do a research project and an informative speech so they need the non-fiction book to complete these requirements for her class.

Kelly, has no guidelines regarding what students choose for their books.

Kelly said:

Next year I am going to change this as I had a lot of students chose books they had read before such as Diary of a Wimpy Kid and Hatchet. I struggled with wanting them to choose their own books, but also not wanting them to read something that was too easy or something that they had read before.

Kelly explained:

I feel it is a fine line between taking the control away and guiding the choice. The students need to feel that they have the choice, but somehow I need to guide them to make a good choice.

Promotion of Books. The second theme that emerged from the data was that the participants in the study all promoted books in their classrooms. The participants in the study did this in many different ways. Some of these ways became sub themes in this study. The sub themes are book talks, classroom libraries with books that appeal to boys, guided library visits, and letting students know what you are reading.

Book Talks. All of the participants in the study do book talks in their classrooms. The first way the participants do book talks is by the participant sharing a book they are reading or a book they have read. The books they talk about are usually young adult novels they think the students in their class will like. Kelly said:

I like book talks the best because I feel that when students hear about a book I am reading or someone else is reading they might get excited about it and want to read it as well.

The second way book talks are done in the participants' classrooms is that after students have read a book they do a book talk in front of the class. Christy does book talks at least once a week. Christy has read over 1000 books, so it is easy for her to do a once a week book talk. Students in Christy's class have a sheet that is titled, "Books I'd Like to Read." When Christy does book talks, book

dating, or book orders students can add to this list. When students go to the library or go to pick their next book they have plenty on their list to choose from. Christy also does book dating. Christy explains:

Book dating is very similar to speed dating. Once a quarter I set out one girl book and one boy book on a desk. If the book is gender neutral I only put one book on the desk. Students get one minute to date the book. The students read the back, the inside cover and the first page. They learn they can actually judge a book by its cover. If the students want to date the book they add it to their sheet of "Books I'd Like to Read."

Christy also does book orders once a month. As she is going through the book order she book talks each book. Students can also add any of these books to their list.

Leeza also does book talks in her classroom. Leeza will share what she is currently reading. Leeza says, "You have to show excitement for things that you read." Leeza is constantly surprised that she will mention an author that she is reading and her students will have read other books by that author.

Classroom Libraries. The second way that the participants in the study promote books is by having classroom libraries. The participants in the study also have a good selection of books that will appeal to boys. Suzie says, "The boys I have in my classroom really like to get into series of books. They enjoy the science fiction or fantasy series the most."

The participants in this study have been building these libraries for years. They go to garage sales, half price bookstores and use book order points. Christy explains:

The fact that I have a library in my classroom proves that I feel that reading is important. It also is immediate access to books, so it eliminates the excuse that my students give of not having a book to read.

Leeza tries to have more challenging books in her classroom library for her Honors students. She wants to continue to challenge them and make them think critically.

Guided Library Visits. The third way participants in my study promote books is by guided library visits. Leeza wonders:

I wonder if in elementary school if anyone took them to the library and said let's look at books that you are interested in. I know when I taught sixth grade at an elementary school that is what I did. When I found those reluctant readers I would spend time in the library with them. I would suggest different series.

Most of my boys liked the Matt Christopher books. Now my students like books in the fantasy and dystopia genre like Maze Runner and the Divergent series.

Christy takes her students to the library every other week. The students need to check in with her and give a summary of what they are reading. Christy has all of the books the students are reading on a spreadsheet. She also wants to

know if they like the book. Kelly takes her students to the library four times a quarter and lets them go during homeroom time. During that time she is walking around and monitoring what the students are picking out or if they are reading if they already have a book. Suzie takes her class to the library once a week. Some of her students are worried about being cool. They do not want to be seen with a small book. They want to be seen with a large book. Suzie says, "I encourage them to check out a book that they can carry around from class to class and one that they can keep in my classroom to actually read."

Letting Students Know What You Are Reading. The fourth way my participants promote books is by letting their students know what they are reading. The participants did this in a variety of different ways. They have signs outside their door, they read their book during independent reading time and they do book talks on books they have read.

At Miller Middle School, everyone has a sign outside their classroom door with their name and the book they are currently reading. According to Suzie, this opens the dialogue up for students to ask you about that book or the author. Suzie likes it when students come up to her and say, "How are liking your book?" "I read it and I really like it."

Christy states:

It also proves that the men in the building are reading. Their books stay the same longer than most of the females, but they are reading. It is good for the boys at Miller Middle School to see what men are reading so they can get an idea of a book they might like.

The second way the participants in this study show the students what they are reading is by reading their books when the students have independent reading time. Leeza states:

It is great for kids to see what I am reading, but also me actually doing it. This shows my students that I think reading is important and that I take time out of my day to do it.

Christy explains, "It is so tempting to do other things that need to get done, like grades, but I also love reading so I use the time for that."

The third way the participants in this study show students what they are reading is by doing book talks about the books they have read. Christy does one book talk a week. She takes 10 minutes on a Friday and talks about a book she thinks her current students will be interested in. Leeza does a book talk whenever she finishes the current book she is reading. Leeza says, "I choose to do the book talk immediately after finishing the book so that it is fresh in my mind."

Knowledge of Books. The knowledge of a lot of books was the third theme all participants shared. All the participants in this study were avid readers. Most of them were in book clubs with friends or colleagues. The participants read young adult novels and adult novels. They read fiction, non-fiction, and magazines.

Kelly stated:

I have a middle school aged boy at home and I have started reading whatever book he is reading. This has helped my knowledge of

middle school aged boy books. I have read more books about war in the last couple years than I have read in my entire life.

Kelly also felt that her reading of more books that boys will like lead her to make a decision do to do a book that boys will like as one of her whole class novels.

Kelly goes on to say:

This year we did the book, Touching Spirit Bear. The main characters in this novel are all males. It is also about the outdoors. The boys seemed to like it and most of the boys did a good job of reading the book. There is also a sequel to the book called The Ghost of Spirit Bear. I noticed the next quarter that book was on a lot of my boys Independent Reading Logs. If I had not been reading books with my son I would have never known about Touching Spirit Bear.

Christy states:

It is all about the right book at the right time. You need to find something they are interested in. Skateboarding, dirt biking, murder mysteries.... I think my knowledge of a lot of books helps. I have read over 1000 books. If you give them the right book it will not be as painful to read. I do not pay attention to book level that much. I will look at it. As long as it is a book that they are interested in I let them read it.

The first theme that emerged was book choice. The participants in this study all said that they let their students have some control over the choice of the

book that they are going to read. Many of the participants stated that they guide them towards choosing the “right book for them,” but in the end the choice was the students. The participants felt that students in middle school need to feel a locus of control and when the students got to choose the book they were more motivated to read it.

The second theme was that all participants promoted books in their classroom. Under this theme are the sub-themes of: book talks, and classroom libraries, guided library visits, and letting students know what you are reading. The participants in this study felt that the more they promoted books in their classroom the more motivated the students were to want to read.

Lastly, the third theme is that all the participants in the study have knowledge of books. The participants in this study could not promote books the way they do in their classroom if they were not familiar with the books that middle school students want to read. The participants have read or know about what books are out there for their students.

Chapter Five

Conclusions

Overview of the Study. Research has consistently shown that females generally have more positive attitudes toward reading than males (Keskin & Bestug, 2014). The purpose for conducting this study was to find ways to change the negative attitudes some of my middle school aged males have towards reading. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to interview teachers to find out what strategies they have used to change the attitudes of their male middle school aged students about reading. As I interviewed the participants in this study, they revealed to me techniques that worked to motivate their male students to read. In this chapter, I review key findings from the study relevant to the guiding research questions and discuss their significance in understanding the impact of motivating males to read. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of the implications of the study and strategies, limitations of the research, and future research suggested by my findings.

Summary of Findings

The findings in this study haven't broken new ground. Many of the themes that have emerged in my research have also been observed in previous research. Book Choice, Promotion of Books, and Knowledge of Books: these themes can be found in discussions related to best practices with reading education. Most of the themes found within my participants' responses were what I expected them to say.

However, hearing first-hand what works for them in their classrooms to motivate readers helped me to be confident with what I am doing in my own classroom.

It was interesting to hear what my colleagues thought had worked for them and what they still struggled to understand. I also realized that the participants are unaware of what others are doing in the building in regards to reading. We are all so busy and consumed with our own classrooms that we struggle to find time to venture out and see others classrooms. That is why this action research project was important.

Conclusions. This research contributes to a growing body of literature on reading and motivation. The data from this study contributes to an examination, from the teacher's perspective, of how effective their techniques are for motivating male students to read. All the participants in this study felt that the techniques they were doing in their classroom were motivating males to read. I feel this research study has provided a workable, comprehensive, effective solutions with which to apply to my reluctant readers and hopefully guide them from reluctance into at least willingness if not motivated. If males are motivated to read, they will be more likely to read. For that moment when the reluctant male reader tells me he hates reading, I feel that I have a basket of tools I can use.

The first tool in my basket would be guided choice. Guided choice would be me as the teacher guiding them to the book of their choice. One participant in this study said, "It is all about the right book at the right time."

I think that if we get to know our students we can do that. We would know what they are interested in reading and help guide them to the right book. If the student

had something that they were interested in reading they would be more motivated to read it.

For many teachers it is easy for them to have these relationships with students where they would know what book a student would like. Some teachers seem to put building relationships with students as a priority. Others struggle to have good rapport with students. You need to open the arena with your students so that they feel that they can tell you their interests. I have found that as I reveal more about myself, students are more willing to open up. As this arena opens I will be more likely to find the right book for them at the right time.

The second tool I would carry in my toolbox would be my knowledge of books. I similar to the participants in the study am an avid reader. I enjoy reading. Over the years I have read many books including books for young adults. Armed with this knowledge of so many books I am more apt to find the right book for the right kid.

The third tool I would carry would be book talks. With my knowledge of books I could do a book talk every week in class. I could show my enthusiasm for the book and reading. I would also encourage my students to keep a list of "Books I'd Like to Read." That way as I talked about the books they could jot down ones they liked.

I know as an adult reader I relay on other adults telling me about a book that just read that they couldn't put down. It then gets me excited to read the book. I would also encourage my students to do book talks. If a student has read the book it becomes even cooler.

The fourth tool that I would carry in my toolbox would be to start a book club for kids at my school. All of the literature that I have read pointed to great success in motivating students when they were involved in book clubs. We currently do not have any book clubs at Miller Middle School. I know personally that my book club motivates me to read each month. I also venture into genres that I normally would not choose for myself because of my book club. I am hoping that the book club I will have here at school will do the same for those students.

The fifth tool that I would have in my toolbox would to make sure that my students can see themselves in the characters of the books that they are reading. If a student does not identify with the main character of the book they will have a hard time understanding the book and therefore be motivated to read it. For an example, if I have a student that is Vietnamese I need to find books that have a main character that is Vietnamese. If I have a female African American student I need to find books that have female African Americans as the main character.

The sixth tool I would carry would be to give students time in school to read. Schools have a lot of content they need to teach students. It would be nice if we could give more independent reading time in school.

This is not a reality with all of the standards we have to teach. We need to motivate our students to want to do it outside of school if we want them to become better readers. Teachers could take time during homeroom where students could be independently reading. If the students felt that the teachers were given them some time at school, they might be more motivated to read at home.

The mission of my school is striving for excellence, growing and learning for all students. If we cannot motivate our male students to read we are not meeting that mission. We need all students to learn and to do that they need to be reading.

Limitations. The major limitations of this study are the absence of the voice of the students themselves. Their voices could have told me why they are not motivated to read, and what would motivate them to read at this particular time. While their perspective could have added a different dimension to understanding the challenges and successes of how to motivate middle school aged males to read, they could not speak to the teachers' experience over the course of their careers. I felt that it was beneficial for me to see how over the years reading as changed and what the teachers have learned over the course of their careers.

Another limitation is that all participants were from the same school; their experiences might have been unique to Miller Middle School. If I would have interviewed teachers from a different school in the same city or different city all together the results could have been quite different.

The students at Miller Middle School are unique to that school and by only interviewing teachers at that school I found what works best at Miller Middle School; not necessarily at all middle schools.

The third limitation was that the sample size of my research study was small at four participants, which can narrow the perspective. When I started this

process I had six teachers in mind. I was only able to interview four of the six because of schedule and peoples busy lives.

The fourth limitation was that I only interviewed females that taught English, Language Arts, or Communications. I would have liked to include males that teach English, Language Arts, or Communications. It would also be nice to interview teachers who teach the other disciplines to get a varied perspective.

For future research, it would be beneficial to speak to teachers at different schools, from urban and rural settings, and interview students and male teachers across multiply grades and disciplines.

Chapter 6

Self-Reflection

As I completed my action research project, I have learned more about myself, my practice as a teacher, and my future goals as an educator. This has been a long process in which I have had to keep my end goal in mind and know that if I persevere I can finish it. I chose this topic, because I love to read and it is hard for me to understand why my students do not like to read.

Over the years the image of a reader has changed. When I was younger it was much more uncool for a boy to like reading than it is today. If a boy enjoyed reading he was known as dorky or a geek. This was never the case in my house or in my family. We were all readers and loved to read. I think that the example my dad set helped my brother to not feel that he was uncool for reading. My dad read all kinds of books and then so did my brother. It was something they could share. My brother did not feel that it was not masculine if his dad was doing it.

I think that many of my students struggle to have that male adult in their life that enjoys reading and reads in front of them. As students go to school and are in elementary school they have few male teachers. They do not see males reading. As students enter middle school, they begin to have more male teachers, but in the disciplines of science, math and social studies. We only have one male English teacher in the building. Our students at Miller Middle School do not see a ton of males reading or teaching reading.

After completing my interviews, it was enlightening to see that these female teachers are making an impact on their male students: and they are

motivating them as well as the females to read. Some admit that they have work to do and want to continue to improve how they are requiring students to read independently.

My experience with interviewing these teachers has made me realize that both females and males are struggling to enjoy reading. I know now that we have a systemic issue and not just an issue of how to get boys to read. The teachers I interviewed all expressed concerns that they see fewer and fewer students that enjoy reading and actually read for pleasure. Even the honors students who we would think would be more likely to do so were just getting the Independent Reading projects done for the grade and not necessarily because they enjoyed reading.

This truly saddens me because as a kid I loved reading. I owe this love of reading to the fact that I did so well in school and later became a teacher. I feel that a love of reading will lead to a love of learning. I cannot imagine that if these kids do not enjoy reading that school would be enjoyable for them as well. That is a big chunk of their life and their days that they are not having enjoyment. That is sad. I loved school.

I do recognize my biases. I enjoy reading and I am a female. I do know that not all males are reluctant readers. I did have a male student this year that liked reading more than all my females combined. He could not put books down. Sometimes to the dismay of his other teachers and I he would be reading instead of listening to a lecture or completing an assignment. As a teacher I was excited to see this kind of enthusiasm for reading.

As a professional I know that it is my job to reach all of my students. I know that in order for my students to be successful they need not to be reluctant readers. This is the case if they are female or male. This action research project as made me see how important building relationships are with my students. It is also made me see that the more I know about my students the more I will be able to help them. Whether it is to find the right book for them to read or for them to succeed in middle school.

This process has made me aware of how rewarding it is to further my knowledge about my profession and in particular my knowledge of reading. I wish that we all as teachers had more time to research. I know that this process has made me a better teacher. The information I have gathered will make me a more effective teacher and hopefully will influence some student to like reading as much as I do. It has also made me want to find out more and to continue my research on this subject. Through this process, I have become a more effective professional who is ready to go on and help others succeed.

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