

Rowan University

Rowan Digital Works

Theses and Dissertations

1-8-2018

How choice in daily independent reading affects book talks with peers

Deirdre Rae Glynn
Rowan University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd>



Part of the [Language and Literacy Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Glynn, Deirdre Rae, "How choice in daily independent reading affects book talks with peers" (2018).
Theses and Dissertations. 2492.
<https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd/2492>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Rowan Digital Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Rowan Digital Works. For more information, please contact graduateresearch@rowan.edu.

**HOW CHOICE IN DAILY INDEPENDENT READING AFFECTS BOOK TALKS
WITH PEERS**

by

Deirdre Glynn

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Department of Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Education
College of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirement

For the degree of

Master of Arts in Reading Education

at

Rowan University

December 6, 2017

Thesis Chair: Stephanie Abraham, Ph. D

© 2017 Deirdre R. Reilly

Dedications

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my wonderful husband, Bill, for supporting me and encouraging me through my entire Master's program, even as he studied for his CPA exams and helped to plan our wedding. I would also like to dedicate this to my parents, Lynn and Jim, who always tell me how proud they are of me and gave me confidence in myself when I felt I couldn't do it.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge and thank my administration, co-teachers, colleagues, and students at the study site for helping me to complete my research. I would also like to thank my sisters Brianna and Kayla, as well as my in-laws, Janice, Bill, Brittany, and Joe for cheering me on. Thank you to my colleagues in the MA in Reading program who I could lean on for support and go to with questions, especially Larae, whose friendship, reminders, and humor I could not have lived without during this journey together.

Abstract

Deirdre Glynn
HOW CHOICE IN DAILY INDEPENDENT READING AFFECTS BOOK TALKS
WITH PEERS
2017-2018
Stephanie Abraham, Ph. D
Master of Arts in Reading Education

The purpose of this study was to examine any effects that daily choice independent reading had on peer book talks in regard to reading motivation and engagement. The specific aim was to see what happened in weekly peer book talks when students were given daily independent reading time with a book of their choosing. Motivation profiles, audio recording of student talk, anecdotal notes, and student interviews are all analyzed. The implications for implementing daily independent reading with a choice book and peer book talks are discussed.

Table of Contents

Abstract	v
List of Tables	ix
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Purpose Statement.....	2
Statement of Research Problem and Question.....	5
Story of the Question	5
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature.....	8
Sustained Silent Reading Programs	8
Middle School Program	9
High School Program.....	10
A Wider Lens	10
A Changed Perspective	11
Social Interactions of Independent Reading	13
Many Names, Same Concept.....	13
Applying Gee’s Theory.....	15
Engagement, Motivation, and Choice.....	16
Choice’s Connection to Motivation and Engagement	18
Conclusion	19
Chapter 3: Context	20
Community	20
School	20
Classroom	21

Table of Contents (Continued)

Teacher.....	22
Students.....	23
Research Design & Methodology.....	27
Procedure of the Study.....	28
Data Sources	29
Data Analysis	30
Chapter 4: Data Analysis	31
Introduction.....	31
Defining Engagement	32
Engagement in Peer Book Talks.....	34
Social Skills	35
Etiquette	36
Interest.....	37
Synthesis	39
Engagement in Interviews.....	40
Social Skills	41
Interest.....	41
Chapter 5: Conclusions.....	43
Limitations	44
Implications.....	44
References.....	46
Appendix A: Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile.....	48

Table of Contents (Continued)

Appendix B: Student Interview Script.....	50
---	----

List of Tables

Table	Page
Table 1. Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile Results.....	23
Table 2. Evidence of Engagement in Peer Book Talks	34
Table 3. Independent Reading Book Choices.....	40

Chapter 1

Introduction

Since high school, I knew that I had wanted to be a teacher. My English teachers had inspired me to pursue the career and even encouraged me once I shared my dream with them. Some teachers let me help them with teacher tasks after school, and I willingly did so. I was always the one helping other kids and wanting to share what I had learned with others growing up; teaching just felt natural to me. I studied secondary education and English and completed my clinical experience. I was so excited to someday have my own classroom, as I found student teaching to be both fun and exhilarating.

As graduation approached, I filled out around 50 school applications all over New Jersey and only received one phone call in return- Grassy Knoll Middle School¹. Once I was hired, it felt like a dream come true. That first day of school flew by. It was a transition into my adult life and the first day of my career; I was no longer the undergraduate student or student teacher- I was THE teacher.

My classroom was the one others had coveted for years, and I was lucky enough to be replacing the teacher who had been in it for the past two years. There was a high ceiling, since I was the second-floor, corner room connected to the stairwell. One entire wall was windows that almost reached the ceiling with a view of the tree-lined, peaceful street. It was long and slightly narrow, which allowed me to have a separate classroom library and comfortable reading area in the back- which I had come to truly value during

¹ Pseudonym

the course of my student teaching- with the desks and whiteboard up front. I finally had my own classroom and it couldn't have been more perfect in my eyes.

I have since moved on from my beginnings, but I often find myself reflecting back on the lessons I learned there. In the beginning, as I still am, I was enthusiastic, dedicated, and hard-working. I want to always be those things for the kids. They deserve nothing less. They deserve my best self; someone who always strives to do better, and sees the value in collaboration. So I will continue to work towards that. Every. Single. Day.

Purpose Statement

Part of the continuation of that passion and drive to bring my best every day for the kids means constantly reflecting and improving things from year to year. I wanted to provide not only quality instruction, but to instill a love of reading in my classroom. The way I chose to do that was through dedicated independent reading time. This year I wanted to make it even better and more enjoyable, so I added weekly peer book talks.

The purpose of this study was to examine how choice in daily independent reading affected book talks with peers. Independent reading is not new to the American English Language Arts classroom. However, the most effective structure and educational benefits have been questioned in the past. The National Reading Panel (NRP) results of a study conducted in 2000 was interpreted by some as meaning that since independent reading was not found to directly improve reading skills in the report, it was deemed ineffective. However, the study has since been criticized for its sample size by Sanden (2014) and others (Garan & DeVoogd, 2008; Lee, 2011; Reutzel et al., 2008). Upon reading this report, one can see that the panel did not find conclusive evidence itself, but

that it calls for more empirical research to be done in this area, such as “well-designed studies capable of testing questions of causation to substantiate causal claims” (NRP, 2000). It goes on to explain that it does not suggest that there are no positive benefits to Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) as part of a curriculum, but that the available research at the time had found that it was not effective when it was the only instruction given. My inquiry is significant in that it contributes to the call for more research on the effects of independent reading with teens.

I work in a middle school classroom, so motivating my students is a top priority as their attitudes towards school and reading are shifting. My district values the ELA classroom and provides a daily two hour block for students. This extended time allows me to both instruct more deeply and requires students to be engaged for longer than any other class. Fostering an environment that values students’ interests and encourages independent exploration of reading connects the classroom ELA instruction with “real-life” reading situations. I hoped that through this research I could discover how student choice during a set independent daily reading time affected the attitudes of my students towards reading in my classroom as evident in their peer book talks and in interviews with me. Through this research, I also hoped to foster positive attitudes towards reading and talk regarding books that my students could carry with them beyond the classroom.

One study that I found early in my research period resonated with me. Dickerson (2015) wrote about her high school classroom where she had set up what she named Reading Zone. She felt there was a great need for student choice and a set time to read during the school day that students could look forward to. It was her belief that if students were engaged during Reading Zone, because of the routines and procedures she had put

in place and students choosing their own books, it would limit disruptions that many teachers fear when implementing independent reading. Her rationale and purpose seemed to be closely connected to my own. As teachers of older students, we knew how critical it was to foster a love of reading within an academically rigorous school day to keep them engaged.

As I continued to read about and research independent reading, I noticed how many variations of implementation were studied in the past decade. Garan and DeVoogd (2009) state that “such extensions of SSR do not detract from the value of independent reading. Rather they can be unobtrusive and natural and serve to increase student engagement” (p. 342). There was no singular correct way to implement independent reading in the classroom, and Sanden (2014) explored that idea in her study that looked into the classrooms of multiple highly effective teachers who utilized independent reading time that strayed from the traditional Silent Sustained Reading structure. While each teacher approached it differently, whether in structure or in name, the common themes were teacher support, monitoring growth, and student-centered practices (p.161).

In another study, Wozniak (2011) provided opportunities to discuss books. She would discuss and share her books with the class, the students would share with her in conferences, and they would share with each other during partner talks. Dickerson (2015) also used social interaction to build rapport with her students through sharing her reading with them and letting them share with her. Other studies I found also incorporated social interactions around books. Lee (2011) allowed “purposeful, quiet talking” (p. 212) in her high school classroom. Hall, Hedrick, and Williams (2014) used two-minute turn-and-

talk time, and Kasten and Wilfong (2005) used a Book Bistro experience at the end of the month to discuss books and exchange ideas.

The research I read and the themes that emerged inspired me to look into choice and independent reading. I wondered how it would affect how students talked about books with one another when given that chance. While the body of research on independent reading has grown over the past decade and has informed the educational field, additional inquiry on specifically pairing daily independent reading and weekly peer book talks had yet to be studied in more detail, which is what this study was designed to do.

Statement of Research Problem and Question

The purpose of this study was to examine any effects that daily independent reading with a choice of book had on peer book talks, reading motivation, and engagement. The specific aim was to see what happened in weekly peer book talks when students were given daily independent reading time with a book of their choosing. What were the behaviors of students during peer book talks when discussing a book of their choice? How does the choice of book affect the way students talk about books with each other? Would the conversations seem authentic and flow easily since they were talking about something they were interested in?

Story of the Question

As I alluded to earlier, my collaborating teacher from my student teaching experience helped me to see the value in creating a classroom library in middle school. I had always imagined that was an “elementary thing” since that was what I had experienced growing up. She had created a separate area with a rug and pillows that the

kids found enticing. I was surprised when I saw eighth grade boys get excited to use the reading area, pick a book off the shelf, and sit on a pillow on the rug to read. Independent reading was a new concept to me too, since I was never given that opportunity in my own schooling experience. I believe that it's one of the reasons it took me so long to fall in love with reading, as I had only read what I was told to read in school, and I didn't enjoy most of them. If I had been given time to read and explore genres in classrooms where my teachers valued the joy of reading by providing such time, I suspect I would have figured it out faster. These are the reasons why I made it my personal mission to make the time and space for my students to read books of their choice.

At first, I started small and gathered donations of books and used free points through Scholastic book orders. I added an area rug and some donated saucer chairs. Over the years, the library grew and I added sofa pillows that people in my life no longer needed. I began to organize and label the library to make it more accessible. When I moved to my current school district, I scanned in every single book to a digital library system that allowed the students and myself to check the classroom library for a title they wanted or to check out a book. This helped me keep track of missing books and increase accountability and responsibility when borrowing books. I also increased the amount of daily independent reading time. Every year I strived to improve it. This year, I wanted to make it more social and interactive, like reading in real life is. I wanted to make it an authentic experience so that my students could carry the habits into their lives beyond my classroom, hopefully, for years to come.

The group of eighth grade students that I worked with this year was a mixture of general education students and special education students. In the past, I have worked with

basic skills intervention students, as well. I am experienced with helping reluctant readers, struggling readers, and even avid readers who are stuck in a reading rut. I knew how important independent reading and weekly peer book talks would be in helping each of those types of readers in my classroom this year. I knew the results of this study would help me, and others, to become more informed and, in turn, even better educators for our students in the future.

The following chapters outline the teacher research journey where I explored my question. Chapter Two will share the current research that I used to frame my study. The research was based on the history of independent reading in American English Language Arts and English classrooms in elementary, middle, and high schools, social interactions related to reading, and the seemingly endless “spins” that a teacher can put on independent reading in their own classroom. Chapter Three provides context for the study site and participants and also outlines the research design and methodology used. Chapter Four will examine the data collected during the study and explain my analysis. Chapter Five will offer my conclusions, the study’s limitations, and its implications for the educational field.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

“Don’t be afraid to give up some of the control you have over your class and put it in the hands of your students. Experiment. Explore. Enjoy.”

(Dickerson, 2015, p. 8)

The debate on the usage of independent reading in American English Language Arts and Reading classrooms across grade levels is not new. However, a report in the National Reading Panel on independent reading and its benefit in regard to reading fluency was released in 2000. Since then, the debate has again come to the forefront of educational research. While many administrators and educators were surprised and worried about the results presented in the report, there were also many criticisms within the educational community. Much of the current research from the past decade is in response to the NRP (2000) findings, both to counter the findings through teacher research or to expand on the empirical research called for in the conclusion of the report. Chapter Two will review the literature regarding independent reading practices, including Silent Sustained Reading (SSR), the social interactions of reading, and the effects of motivation and choice on adolescents’ reading habits. The chapter ends with a summation of the research and its findings and how it has informed this study.

Sustained Silent Reading Programs

Independent reading can take many forms in the reading classroom. A common term for independent reading is Sustained Silent Reading, or SSR. Teachers may choose to use this term or to use another, but the overall concept is the same. While there are many variations depending on the needs of the teacher, such as grading purposes or

mandates from administration for accountability, there are some basic features that are common to successful, modern SSR programs- designated reading time in the classroom, student choice of text, and social interaction. Garan and DeVogd (2009) state that “such extensions of SSR do not detract from the value of independent reading. Rather they can be unobtrusive and natural and serve to increase student engagement as well as afford teachers a way of monitoring student involvement” (p. 342). The following studies explore the variations of independent reading in real classrooms.

Middle school program. Daniels and Steres (2011) studied a middle school that made reading a priority school-wide to foster a “family of readers within the school” (p. 1) through the use of designated time each school day to read, allowing student choice of texts, and time and support of administration and staff in the form of reading and talking about their books during the school day (p. 4). Daniels and Steres (2011) were working from a motivational framework for this study and stated that, “teachers can plan brilliant lessons and closely monitor student progress, but the students need to care enough to engage with the curriculum and complete the work” (p. 1). The new principal at Parkdale Middle School believed that enacting a “reading culture” school-wide would “build student interest in school through reading” (p. 2) based on the sociocultural theory and the work of Gee (1999), Au (1997), and Wertsch (1991). Not only do the “interactions they have with peers and adults, and the physical characteristics of their learning environments all contribute to their motivation to learn and their desire to engage,” but Daniels and Steres (2011) asserted that “human beings need to feel that they are in control of their actions and decisions” (p. 2). This study wanted to give students at the middle school level the opportunity to have control over part of their day in an otherwise

structured environment through choosing what they wanted to read (p. 3), which other studies showed led to an increased desire to read (Stairs & Burgos, 2010).

High school program. Lee (2011) also conducted a study in her own high school classroom to try and implement a successful SSR program that would engage all of her students in reading of their choice. She discussed that her first attempts at incorporating SSR failed in her classroom, and she realized that “an SSR program was not as easy as making time and providing a bookshelf of books” (p. 211). After self-reflection and further research into Pilgreen’s *The SSR Handbook* (2000) and the listed eight factors for success, she tried again and used her new insight to “model for my students what engaged readers do” (p. 212). When it came to accountability, Lee (2011) chose to use follow-up activities. She claimed that “successful SSR programs allow students who are enthusiastic about a book the option of completing activities of their own choosing” and that “these choices should reflect reading practices such as sharing a book with others through a book talk” and more (p. 214). In her study, not only did students choose what to read and were given that time to read in school, but they shared that reading through a choice of meaningful follow-up activities to practice reading skills and increase accountability.

A wider lens. Sanden’s (2014) work is a direct response to the NRP (2000) findings on independent reading as a classroom practice. The article focused on a study she conducted in 2012 “exploring how highly effective teachers understand and implement independent reading in their classrooms” (p. 161). This was in response to the impact the NRP (2000) had on real reading classrooms. She studied eight, in-service, and “highly effective” elementary teachers in the northwestern United States (p. 163). Sanden

(2014) claimed that even though the report “did not find conclusive research evidence...that was not the message received by thousands of educators who interpreted these results as an edict that student reading didn’t matter” (p. 161). An analysis of the results showed three common themes among the variations of independent reading programs across these eight classrooms: teachers supporting reading independence, monitoring student reading growth, and student-centered practices (p. 166). For example, Sanden (2014) found that “students were provided with opportunities to choose books that reflected their interests, but teachers oversaw their choices and maintained the final decision-making power based on perceived student needs” which was even more so in the lower grades, like first grade, when students were still learning how to properly select an appropriate book (p. 169).

Sanden (2014) also observed social interactions in “partner reading and conversations around text” (p. 171-172). She concluded that since the teachers of her study implemented successful independent reading programs in divergent ways from the traditional definition of SSR outlined in the NRP (2000), it reveals “a disconnect...between the theoretical characterization of reading and...application of classroom reading practices” (p. 173). Therefore, Sanden (2014) claimed that this research showed teachers that the NRP (2000) findings should not be seen as a blanket statement for all variant independent reading practices that stray from the traditional SSR definition.

A changed perspective. In another study (Wozniak, 2011), a six-week intervention was used that incorporated independent reading and social interactions. The structure consisted of a teacher book talk or interactive read aloud from six genres,

independent reading time with choice texts, and peer interactions to discuss what they were reading. It was observed that “During the book talks, students were engaged and wanted to know more about the books” and were “eager to read many of the books the teacher introduced” (p. 18). The interactive read aloud occurred twice a week and used the books shared during the book talks with instructional purposes, like making inferences; it also included time to discuss their thinking (p. 19). Wozniak (2011) reported that in her interviews, “several [students] noted that the interactive read-alouds piqued their interest in reading books they otherwise may not have chosen to read” (p. 19). While this approach differed from the other studies, it still proved successful in engaging the students in reading.

Like Lee (2011), teachers in this study had not previously given reading time to students during their class. However, in both studies, there was an increased engagement and interaction among the students where students would groan in disappointment, ask for more reading time, or regulate the behaviors of their peers to ensure reading time would not be cut short by the teacher (Lee, 2011; Wozniak, 2011). In Wozniak’s (2011) study “students who previously had not been engaged during language arts participated more during class discussions” (p. 19). As a result, teachers and students had a changed perspective and positive attitudes towards reading and talking about books in the classroom (Wozniak, 2011).

The research calls for further inquiry into variations of independent reading programs. The studies discussed showed positive results regarding the practices used in real classrooms, despite the modifications in structure and implementation from the traditional definition of Sustained Silent Reading programs of the past. This research also

suggests there should be a continued effort to gather evidence on the effects of independent reading in response to the NRP (2000) report.

Social Interactions of Independent Reading

Independent reading, in its many forms, often provides social interaction opportunities. While this component has already been alluded to as part of many successful independent reading programs, more can be said about this aspect. Wozniak (2011) believes “students should be encouraged to read together and then talk together about their literacy experiences” (p. 17). She provided this opportunity in her intervention through the use of interactive read alouds with the teacher, but also through partner talk at the end of independent reading time. During these discussions, “students were given an opportunity to learn from each other what books might appeal to them for future reading,” taking on various forms such as discussing why they were reading what they chose, recommendations, or sharing particular passages (p. 20).

Many names, same concept. Another study conducted in a third-grade classroom in the southeastern United States utilized what they called ISIR (in-school independent reading), using two-minute book talks or turn-and-talk time (Hall, Hedrick, & Williams, 2014). They found that “students who seemed to be outwardly social particularly looked forward to [turn and talk] time” and that students used this time to share predictions, connections made, passages, and illustrations from that day’s reading (p. 95). It was also found that some students who had previously been talkative during inappropriate times in class “seemed to be able to regulate...behaviors during the ISIR because he knew that he would get a chance to talk about his book at the end” (p. 95). Like in other studies (Lee,

2011; Wozniak, 2011), students helped manage behaviors because they saw the value in the reading time and saw the social interaction as a reward.

Dickerson (2015) also provided social interaction opportunities in her two-year classroom study that incorporated choice in independent reading. Her version of independent reading was named Reading Zone and took place for fifteen minutes at the start of each class. One of her findings was that the social interaction of sharing what she was reading with her students, sharing interests with one another, giving recommendations, and quick talks about what's happening in their books produced "genuine relationships" and "lead to strong bonds" with her students (p. 7). Dickerson (2015) created five Reading Zone rules, one of which was "We talk about our books" and consisted of a "three-minute think, pair, share session," her sharing something about her book with the class, or giving recommendations (p. 3). Survey results showed that students had positive attitudes towards Reading Zone (p. 3) and showed the benefits of social interaction between students and adults.

Kasten and Wilfong (2005) incorporated social interaction opportunities for students in their study through the use of a strategy called Book Bistro. This event consisted of independent reading leading to a once-a-month, café-like atmosphere event where students were grouped and shared food and conversations about their books (p. 657). It was based on the research of student talk in which Kasten and Wilfong (2005) concluded that "as students share and discuss books, they tend to become interested in what peers have read" and that those interactions with peers can "change student perceptions of a book, causing students to believe it to be easier to read or to consider a particular title or new genre" (p. 658). This was meant to be modeled after real-life, adult

reading habits and so they believed children this age would see the value in the connection to their lives (p. 658). Teachers in this study reported positive findings and noted that students enjoyed hearing about books that “they otherwise would not have known” (p. 662). Students were observed being “on task and focused for the hour...smiling and laughing during their discussions” (p. 662). This study showed students were engaged and did not exhibit distracted behaviors since they placed value on the task.

Studies conducted by Lee (2011) and Sanden (2014) also showed the benefits of social interaction as part of a successful independent reading program. Lee (2011) found that being silent during SSR was not always conducive to success and allowed “purposeful, quiet talking” (p. 212) about texts and to ask questions. She also used this time to conference with students about their reading, read aloud, conduct book talks, and ask for student recommendations (p. 212). She claims that mentoring students through the use of making recommendations and “talking about reading during SSR time” would encourage “reluctant readers” (p. 213). Similarly, Sanden (2014) found that many teachers perceived a limit on social interaction due to the name independent reading and “has prompted an understanding of a silent and solitary endeavor, which may be contrary to the tendencies of young learners” (p.170). In her study in the elementary setting, teachers allowed students to discuss books with peers when it added value to the reading experience (p. 170). These social interactions enhanced the benefits of reading for students.

Applying Gee’s theory. Knoester (2009) looked deeper into the social effects of reading in his study that used the theoretical framework of Gee (1996). This was a case

study of 11 to 13 year-old students in an urban setting in the eastern part of the United States. During data analysis, he found that many reading experiences “were tied to social interactions” such as when “students seemed to love to talk about reading material if they enjoyed or found a connection with what they were reading” (p. 680). Looking at the texts that students chose, he noticed a pattern of students choosing to “read in subjects that they could talk about with peers or siblings,” (p. 680) like hobbies or interests they had in common with others. In interviews, the majority of students “reported remembering, long after they had read a book, from whom they had received a recommendation to read that book” (p. 680). His results suggested that reading is a social experience (p. 677). Through the lens of Gee’s theory of Discourses, Knoester (2009) came to the conclusion that “adolescents benefit if teachers view reading as a public act and use strategies that acknowledge reading as social” (p. 677). Knoester (2009) did not view reading and social interaction as separate, but rather as something intertwined.

All of the results in the mentioned studies suggest positive attitudes from students towards combining reading and social interaction. Not only did it reduce the need to redirect social behaviors at inappropriate times, it allowed students a genuine opportunity to express themselves in relation to real reading. Student talk was enjoyed and valued by students, no matter the structure of the independent reading program used in the classroom.

Engagement, Motivation, and Choice

In talking about independent reading, naturally the topics of engagement, motivation, and choice come up. In all of the aforementioned successful independent reading programs, engagement, motivation, and choice were ingrained in things like

choice in text, follow-up activity, or social opportunities in which students engage in meaningful conversations around books. In Wozniak's (2011) study, "students were so engrossed in their reading that often there was not one pair of eyes in the room not focused on a book" (p. 19). The fears of teachers participating in the study prior to it had been that there was simply not enough time for both instruction and reading for enjoyment, a sentiment also felt by Lee (2011) prior to her own study. Stairs and Burgos (2010) countered that fear by affirming "the fact that students are actually reading only enhances the teacher's ability to teach the standards, as students are engaged with practicing the tested skills" (p. 43). What Wozniak (2011) found was that "the components of the intervention not only improved the reading attitudes and reading self-efficacy of their reluctant readers, it changed everyone's attitudes and self-perceptions, including [the teachers]" (p. 20-21). When Lee (2011) and the teachers of Wozniak's (2011) study observed the increase in the level of student engagement, it had an impact on their previous outlooks regarding independent reading.

Not only were the students in Lee's (2011) study engaged, but they were exhibiting motivation to read. They showed these behaviors through "learning how to pursue texts related to their interests...and developed intrinsic reasons for reading and established a habit of reading for their own pleasure" (p. 216). She relates the reason to the "cornerstones" of motivation that were being utilized: "relatedness, or a sense of belonging; competency, the sense that reading tasks are challenging but not frustrating; and autonomy, or freedom for choice and interest in reading" (Ryan, Connell, Grolnick, 1992 as cited in Lee, 2011). Her study suggests that motivation to read and engagement are linked.

Choice's connection to motivation and engagement. Kasten and Wilfong (2011) also sought to increase student engagement and motivation in their Book Bistro setting. In the introduction of the study, they state that they, and literacy educators in general, had two goals: "The first is to teach our students to read. The second is to teach our students to *want to read*" (p. 656) which is motivation in itself resulting in student engagement. In other words, if students are engaged in what they are reading, they will be motivated to read, and if students want to read, they will be engaged when they are reading. The authors of this study posit that "youths need to see literacy as personally relevant and [have] substance for their lives" in order to be motivated to read (p. 657). One way they attempted to do that was through choice. They claimed that "students need to be able to choose what they read at least some of the time, and especially until they are firmly and unshakably hooked on reading" in order for them to "fall in love with the stuff of books" (p. 658) which would foster both motivation and engagement in the students. As a result, they found that Book Bistro encouraged independent reading in the students and led them to believe that "these strong, enthusiastic responses are likely to result in students' enjoying their independent reading and finding things they genuinely want to read" (p. 663) which shows engagement in reading and motivation to continue to read.

Choice was of utmost importance in Dickerson's (2015) study, as well. She observed student engagement in reaction to choice "on my students' faces every day. I can hear their disappointment if we have to read for a shorter amount of time than they had expected. I can tell that they are grateful for their autonomy in the way they interact with me" (p. 6). Their reactions during independent reading and when it was over is evidence of engagement. Dickerson (2015) understood in her conclusion that "too often,

we ignore each student's interests and individuality; we forget that students, like teachers, are people" (p. 8). Through student choice of text and social opportunities to connect, students can be engaged in reading and motivated to read.

Even when teachers in these studies were initially reluctant, they found that the results changed their outlook on independent reading. Instead of being a management issue, things like choice of text engaged students in authentic reading. The results also showed that students were motivated by their positive reading experiences through the program to continue to read more and to share the good things that they had read with others whether through a turn-and-talk or a bistro setting.

Conclusion

After reviewing the literature regarding independent reading practices, it has been determined that there is a further need to add to this body of research. There is limited data on what students are discussing during their peer interactions in what my study calls book talks. Sanden (2014) specifically calls for more research on the "impact of student achievement of independent reading experiences conducted in a manner more akin to the practices of these teachers" (p.173). While my study may not be able to provide enough data for this specific task, it can provide what she calls "theoretical and practical knowledge" in my "local context" (p. 174) and further examine what effect choice has on the engagement of students during peer book talks. The hope of this study is to provide additional insight into the effects of independent reading practices on students in real classrooms.

Chapter 3

Context

Community

The study took place in a middle-school English Language Arts classroom in New Jersey. The district had two elementary schools, serving students in grades Kindergarten to fifth and a middle school serving grades six to eight. According to the 2010 United States Census, there were 6,042 people, 2,087 households, and 1,635 families residing in the study site's township. The racial demographics were listed as 81.5% White, 12.5% Black or African American, 0.1% American Indian and Alaska Native, 2.5% Asian, 2.1% two or more races, and 4% Hispanic or Latino of any race. The median household income was \$87,200 with about 3.7% of residents below the poverty line, including 2.4% of people under the age of 18.

School

The study site was a middle school in the northeastern region of the United States that served grades six to eight with a total enrollment of 271 students, with 20% of students categorized as economically disadvantaged. On standardized testing, 62% of students Met or Exceeded Expectations on ELA PARCC testing and 53% of students Met or Exceeded Expectations on Math PARCC testing in the 2015-2016 school year. The demographics of students in this school were as follows: 69.4% White, 12.2% Black, 10.3% Hispanic, 5.9% Two or More Races, 2.2% Asian; 52% Male, 48% Female, 4% ELL, and 13% were classified as Students with Disabilities. The faculty to student ratio was 11:1 with a faculty attendance rate of 98%.

The school's mission statement reflected its commitment to providing opportunities for students to engage in 21st century skills that would prepare them for college and career. Students had access to a 1:1 ratio of Chromebooks that allowed them to collaborate and interact on the Google Classroom platform. In addition to 125 minutes of daily English Language Arts and 75 minutes of daily Mathematics instruction, the student schedule included Science, Social Studies, World Language, Art, Music, Physical Education, and STEM/technology. Some additional educational opportunities supported the school's belief that all students are willing and capable of learning, such as, Algebra 1, Gifted and Talented, and a Language and Learning Disabilities classroom.

Classroom

The study site was my eighth grade English Language Arts classroom that met every day for 125 minutes. The student population was made up of 16 general education and special education students, eight boys and eight girls. There was one general education teacher (me), one in-class support special education teacher, and one teacher's aide to support the learners in the classroom.

Every day followed the same routine in my classroom, starting with independent reading time for twenty minutes. Next, word study instruction was conducted for twenty minutes. Every Friday was "Book Talk Friday" where students used part of their independent reading time to pick a partner, or be randomly placed with a partner using popsicle sticks or clock partners, to discuss their independent books. Students then transitioned into a workshop model for reading and writing for fifty minutes each. Some days consisted of whole group instruction and read alouds while others started with a mini lesson and then moved into small group instruction and independent practice.

The physical space of the classroom consisted of 19 student desks grouped into five pods of three to four and two additional standing desks used as flexible seating options. The space was equipped with a Chromebook charging station, SMARTboard, whiteboards, and bulletin boards. One whiteboard listed the day's agenda, hanging folder with workshop materials, a reminders board, and the unit's learning goals. Two of the classroom's walls contained bookshelves that housed the classroom library selections, organized by genre. In the back of the classroom, there were two small group meeting tables, a rug, and pillows for a comfortable reading space.

Teacher

During the study, it was my fifth year teaching; however, it was my third year teaching at the study site. My undergraduate degree was in English and Secondary Education with an endorsement in Teacher of Reading from Rowan University; I graduated from Rowan in 2013. I worked in a Northern New Jersey school for the first two years of my career and then moved to my current Southern New Jersey district in 2015. My career as a graduate student in a Master's in Reading began in the 2015-2016 school year where I hoped to gain more insight and resources to help my middle school students succeed.

In my current district, all English Language Arts teachers teach two grade levels. In the first two years, I taught seventh and eighth grade, but during this study I taught grades six and eight. While it was a possibility to have students more than once in three years because of this structure, I did not have any repeat students during the study period. The main reason was that I had been teaching the general education and basic skills sections in past years and switched to teaching an in-class support section.

Students

The students who participated in this study were selected from my eighth grade classroom. All sixteen students met the criteria to be included in the study and both consent and assent forms were distributed along with information about the study. Students and parents or guardians of nine students who wished to participate indicated this on their consent and assent forms. The participant group discussed in this study consisted of six girls and three boys. To protect their privacy, all students have been given pseudonyms. The girls in this study were Alexa, Madison, Annie, Abby, Emma, and Savannah. The boys were Jacob, Mason, and Ethan. For the results of the *Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile* (Pitcher, et al., 2007), refer to Table 1 below.

Table 1

Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile Results

Name:	Self-Concept:	Value of Reading:
Jacob	85	82.5
Alexa	55.6	62.5
Madison	60	35
Mason	70	50
Annie	72.5	72.5
Abby	67.5	47.5
Emma	87.5	75
Savannah	61	70
Ethan	85	60

Alexa was a quiet girl who enjoyed writing humorous stories and liked to doodle. On a motivation to read profile, she expressed that she almost never talked about her ideas with others and thought of herself as an OK reader. When she came to a word she did not know, she marked that she almost never figured it out. However, Alexa indicated that when her teachers asked her a question about what she read, she always thought of an answer. Overall, her reading self concept was a 55.6% and her value of reading was rated a 62.5%, which shows she was not that positive about her strength as a reader and did not enjoy reading that much.

Madison was quiet in class, but talkative in more social settings with friends and enjoyed softball. On her motivation to read profile, she expressed that she never liked to read and never told her friends about good books she was reading. However, she did mark that when she was in a group talking about what they were reading, she almost always talked about her ideas. She also viewed people who read a lot as boring and when reading by herself, claimed to understand almost none of what she read. Madison's reading self-concept was 60% and her value of reading was 35%, which shows a very negative feeling towards reading and that she felt okay about her reading abilities.

Annie was willing to participate in class and enjoyed after school activities like choir. She expressed on her motivation to read profile that while her friends viewed her as a good reader and she claimed to understand almost everything she read when reading by herself, she marked that it was not very often that reading a book is something she liked to do. However, she indicated that people who read a lot were very interesting. Once in a while, Annie worried about what others kids thought about her reading. Her

reading self-concept was 72.5% and her value of reading was also 72.5%, which means she had a positive view of herself as a reader and saw the value in reading.

Abby was athletic and enjoyed playing soccer and reading fantasy books. She indicated that reading a book is never something she liked to do and people who read a lot were boring on her motivation to read profile. She also marked that her best friends thought reading was no fun at all. She viewed herself as an OK reader and that she understood what she was reading some of the time when reading by herself. Abby also thought that knowing how to read well was very important but that she would spend very little time reading as an adult. Her reading self-concept was 67.5% and her value of reading was 47.5%. This means that while she felt mostly positive about her ability to read, she did not enjoy reading.

Emma also enjoyed fantasy books, writing, and playing volleyball. On her motivation to read profile, she had many positive responses towards reading such as believing that people who read a lot were interesting, thought that reading was an interesting way to spend time, and understood almost everything she read when she was reading by herself. She also viewed herself as a good reader whom reading came very easily to. Emma's reading self-concept was 87.5% and her value of reading was 75%, which shows both high confidence as a reader and high interest in reading.

Savannah enjoyed reading horror stories and hanging out with her friends after school. She expressed that reading is something she liked to do sometimes and would tell her friends about good books she was reading some of the time. However, she did not believe that she read as well as her friends. Savannah saw herself as an OK reader who could sometimes figure out words she didn't know, but once in a while she worried about

what other kids thought about her reading. She thought people who read a lot were interesting and that libraries were a great place to spend time. Her reading self-concept was 61% and her value of reading was 70%. This shows that while she valued reading, she had some doubts about her strength as a reader.

Jacob enjoyed hanging out with his group of friends and watching funny cartoons. He indicated on his motivation to read profile that he often liked to read a book and viewed himself as a good reader who understood almost everything he read by himself. He also thought that people who read a lot were interesting and reading was a great way to spend time. When in a group talking about what they were reading, he almost always talked about his ideas. Jacob thought that he would spend some of his time reading as an adult. His reading self-concept was an 85% and his value of reading was an 82.5%, which demonstrated his confidence in his reading abilities and that he really enjoyed reading.

Mason loved to listen to music and use his skateboard. Him and his friends viewed Mason as a good reader. He thought reading was a boring way to spend time and his best friends thought reading was no fun at all. He thought people who read a lot were interesting but believed he would spend very little time reading as an adult. He would like for his teachers to read aloud once in a while. When he came to words he didn't know, he expressed that he sometimes figured it out and understood some of what he read when he reads by himself. His reading self-concept was 70% and his value of reading was 50%, which shows his confidence as a reader, but that he did not enjoy reading.

Ethan played soccer, liked to talk about computers, and loved his dog. While reading was something Ethan did not like to do very often, he indicated that his friends thought he was a very good reader. He also viewed himself as a very good reader who read a little better than his friends but thought he was a poor reader when he read out loud. He believed knowing how to read well was very important and would like for his teachers to read out loud almost every day. His reading self-concept was 85% and his value of reading was 60%, which shows he was fairly confident about his reading ability but that he would most likely choose other activities over reading.

Research Design & Methodology

The study used the qualitative practitioner research paradigm as a framework. Teacher research can be defined as a practicing or prospective K-12 educator formulating a question they want to explore in their own classroom, rather than an outside researcher in a controlled environment. The practitioner must research and read literature on the topic to become more knowledgeable, which would further inform their inquiry. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) explained that teacher research is research used by practitioners to inform their own practice or to be an agent of change. This kind of research is also “often in collaboration with university-based colleagues and other educators” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 40). While teacher research may not have been seen as “traditional” research in the past, it collects real data from real classrooms to answer a question or explore an issue and has become a growing and important part of the educational research sphere. This study aimed to answer what happened in peer book talks when students chose what to read during daily independent reading time.

Procedure of the Study

This teacher research study used qualitative methods and data to analyze what happened in peer book talks when students were given choice and daily independent reading time. Independent reading was something I had incorporated into the classroom routine before, but I was curious about how the students viewed it and what happened when they were given the time and freedom to discuss books of their own choosing. The premise of the study was meant to simulate authentic reading experiences outside of the classroom so that students could foster an appreciation for reading and talking about books. Some qualitative data collected over the duration of this study consisted of a motivation profile, audio recordings of peer book talks, interviews with participants, and observational notes taken by myself during peer book talks and independent reading time.

An important part of the procedure was to chronicle my teacher research journey through the use of an inquiry journal. In this journal, questions and reflections throughout the process were recorded about once a week on average. This served as an additional data source where the co-investigator could recognize patterns in the research prior to deeper analysis of the other data.

This study's data collection began in October and extended through November of 2017. However, prior to the study's collection period, students were introduced to daily independent reading with a choice book as part of the classroom routine. I also conducted a mini lesson about what peer book talks should include, such as sharing the name of the book, things that were enjoyed, things that the reader would change, a general plot and character overview without any spoilers, and a 5-star rating with an explanation. An

anchor chart was created as a reference to help guide students in productive book talks with their peers throughout the year. After I introduced the study and determined participants through parental consent and student assent, the study commenced and took place over three instructional weeks in the 2017-2018 school year. Students were given twenty uninterrupted minutes of reading time with a choice book Monday through Friday. On Fridays, including weeks one to three of the study, students were paired with a peer to audio record and discuss their books. On Tuesdays of weeks two and three of the study, I interviewed the study participants.

Data Sources

Multiple sources of data were used throughout the study to look at what happened in peer book talks when students were given daily reading time with a choice book. To understand the context of the study's participants, the *Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile* (Pitcher, et al., 2007) was used. I used this to gain insight into the reading attitudes of students during the study through an analysis of their reading self-concepts and value of reading.

To analyze the peer book talks, audio recordings were necessary. It would not have been possible to gather authentic student talk from all groups at once without this data tool. I transcribed and re-listened to the student talk whenever necessary during the analysis to understand what things were being discussed, in what way they were discussing and interacting with one another, and their level of engagement through things like asking questions of their peer or expanding on their own ideas.

Another important data source for the study was student interviews. I met with the students to have them answer questions regarding independent reading, reading attitudes,

past reading experiences, and book talks. The interviews were especially useful in understanding the students' perspective of the related activities. Students were also asked for feedback regarding if the study's activities of daily choice reading and weekly book talks should be continued in the future in order to determine the value students placed on this type of reading experience in the classroom.

Lastly, I used observations and an inquiry journal to record student actions and teacher researcher reflections. Anecdotal notes were written during peer book talks and daily independent reading time to report what happened that could not be examined through audio recordings. The inquiry journal traced the questions, concerns, considerations, and my musings throughout the research process.

Data Analysis

Data collected over the duration of the study was used to identify patterns and come to conclusions about independent reading, choice, motivation, and peer book talks. The initial contextual data that I gathered from the *Adolescent Motivation to Read Profiles* (Pitcher, et al., 2007) helped me to better understand the reading attitudes of the study participants in order to further inform the analysis of peer book talks. To get an insider's perspective of authentic student talk during peer book talks, I utilized audio recordings to collect the details of each conversation. I compared student interviews to the responses from the *Adolescent Motivation to Read Profiles* (Pitcher, et al., 2007) to discern emerging patterns of engagement and motivation through inductive coding; the coding was based on recurring themes that emerged related to engagement. The observation notes and inquiry journal were a triangulated data source to confirm any patterns that existed.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

Introduction

At the start of the school year, there was an initial reluctance towards independent reading and peer book talks from many of the eighth grade students in my classroom. In their interviews, students expressed the reluctance in their answers. They were honest, like when Abby responded with, “I don’t really like reading, so at the beginning of the year I thought it was going to be boring until I found a book I really liked.” Others, like Alexa, were even more blunt. I had asked her, “At the beginning of the school year, how did you feel about reading and books?” and her immediate response was, “That it was boring and hard.” There was no doubt that many of the students I had before me were not excited about the prospect of daily independent reading and weekly peer book talks. I hoped that what would come could change their minds.

Over the course of this study, the tide had turned within the students. There were several times that I simply paused and took everything in for a moment, whether it was the silent focus of students engrossed in books or their choosing or the rushing to grab pillows and a friend to share their book with, excited to share what had happened since they last spoke. It was in the way the students would try to fit in more reading time by settling in quickly when they entered class or Jacob, Ethan, and Abby groaning when time was up and asking for more time because they were at a really good part or almost finished with the chapter.

I knew something had truly changed when a Friday came, and I had forgotten it was Book Talk Friday. As they began their routine of independent reading after the

morning announcements, Abby asked, “Isn’t it Book Talk Friday?” while some of the other students immediately looked up with eager eyes. When I realized my error, they closed their books and paired up. For some, the book talks were a welcomed “break from reading,” (Madison, personal communication, October 31, 2017) but what those students did not realize that I, as a teacher research rejoiced in, was that their excitement to socialize was about books and reading; this was evidence of engagement. It was not a chore of a book club meeting with a teacher-selected book or an activity that they had to meet certain criteria for a grade in the grade book. What those students did not realize was that what they were discussing was just as valuable as the act of reading since it camouflaged itself, simply, as a social event during class.

The following describes, first, the process of defining engagement over the course of this study, as it influenced the way the data was analyzed. After the new definition of engagement was applied, analysis was applied using this lens to each area of the data collection in this study- engagement as evidenced in book talks, which consisted of audio recordings and anecdotal notes, and engagement as evidenced in interviews with participants.

Defining Engagement

At the onset of this study, I had confidently defined engagement in my mind as a student being an excited participant in an activity expressing physical behaviors like eye contact and positive body language. This was based off of the undesirable behaviors I read about in studies like Lee (2011) and Dickerson (2015). In Dickerson’s (2015) study, disengaged behavior was described as students being talkative rather than reading (p.1).

In Lee's (2011) study, the behaviors looked the same; students took naps, passed notes, and there was a sigh of relief when reading time was over (p. 211). I took these disengaged behaviors and decided that the opposite must be engaged behavior, such as those mentioned in my above definition. Therefore, during book talks, I expected to observe such behaviors in most students to express how excited they were about their books. However, over the course of this study, how I defined engagement developed; I found it often to be more subtle and expansive than originally thought.

I was concerned that I had not found what I considered to be engagement. However, I knew from my experience that sometimes students show things in ways you don't expect or immediately see. Then, I began to specifically think about Jacob and how he showed he was listening to Abby when he said, "Uh, that's strange because in most books, it's slower in the beginning and then it starts getting good" in response to when she said, "it's pretty boring right where I'm at now. It was good in the beginning but it just got really, really boring...I'm almost done with the book so hopefully it will get better" during a book talk (October 27, 2017); his reaction shows not only that her comment surprised him, but that he had been engaged in listening to what she had to say about her book. Even though I had not observed good eye contact or expressive body language in this instance, his behavior told me he was indeed engaged in the activity, just not in the way I had expected to observe. When discussing my musings with colleagues, I realized that the physical behaviors I had been looking for were not the only way my students were showing that they were engaged with their partners. The behaviors observed in my first analysis related to social skills, etiquette, and showing interest *were* evidence of engagement.

Armed with this revelation, I knew I needed to analyze my data a second time to carefully confirm the new definition of engagement I suspected would surface. I scrutinized the pieces of data that comprised the three themes, and I found that each category had a relationship with the theme of engagement. They were all subcategories of engagement rather than three distinct categories.

Engagement in Peer Book Talks

Data collected during peer book talks show how students exhibited engagement. Since the effects of choosing a book and daily independent reading time on book talks were the main focus of this study, the majority of data collected came from the weekly peer book talks conducted in the classroom. Table 2 reveals the various indicators of engagement during peer book talks found in observational notes and audio recordings of these book talks.

Table 2

Evidence of Engagement in Peer Book Talks

<u>Social Skills</u>	<u>Etiquette</u>	<u>Showing Interest</u>
Question to start conversation: "So what's your book about?" -Ethan	Manners: "Should I tell you about my book?" "Alright, go ahead." -Ethan & Mason	Curiosity: "Why did he drill holes in it?" -Mason
Questions to continue conversation: "Do you think they're ever gonna [sic] get rescued?" -Ethan	Affirmation of listening and valuing conversation: "Seems like a nice book to read."-Mason	Expressing interest in recommendation: "Seems like a nice book to read."-Mason
Questions to continue conversation: "Are you at the end or the middle?" - Ethan	Affirm understanding and listening: Jacob nods his head and says, "Uh huh."	Inference: "It must have been hard because they had a bond and he would play at his house." -Mason

Table 2 (continued)

Comment in response: “Uh, that’s strange because in most books, it’s slower in the beginning and then it starts getting good.” -Jacob	Comment in response to Jacob to express what he said was valuable and worthy of further explanation: “Well in the beginning of this book they start making friends in the beginning...”	Asks clarifying questions: “Called someone? With a cell phone?” “Why were two kids and a marine on a boat in the first place?” -Ethan
Good conversational volume from two quiet-spoken girls, Alexa and Madison.	Reminder to rate the book from Alexa to Madison: “Rate your book.”	Jacob had emotional reaction in body language of recoiling in response to Abby explaining, “this girl had a bone pop out of her knee.”
Making connections: “Mine was slow, also.” -Abby	Alexa and Madison taking turns to speak and share their books one at a time.	Reaction from Madison in response to Alexa mentioning a “crush” in the plot: “Ooh!”
Alexa expanded on her ideas with Abby when it seemed that she had gotten more comfortable and relaxed with her partner.	Savannah to Annie: “Your turn.”	Asks clarifying question: “Oh, so it’s like explaining his day?” -Mason Excitement in response: “Yeah, it’s cool!” -Jacob
	Manners in a group of three: “Alright, Ethan, do you want to go?” “Alright.” “How about you, Mason?” -Jacob, Mason, Ethan	Asks personal opinion question out of curiosity: “Do you like the poetry book, Jacob?” -Ethan
	Manners: “Do you want to go first?” -Emma	Curiosity: “Is that a real story? It sounds like it could be real.” -Ethan
		Reaction from Emma in response to Madison mentioning a character was “in critical condition”: “Ooh!” Curiosity: “So that’s the dog on the cover?” -Emma

Social skills. One of the things observed in the audio recordings of the book talks was the use of social skills to generate a meaningful discussion. As with any conversation, it must begin with someone initiating it. This is a social skill that revealed itself in the form of a question. Ethan and others over the course of the study used questions such as, “What is your book about?” to begin the conversation. This type of

questioning engages both participants by showing a desire to hear about the book from one student and a desire to share the book by the other student.

Questions were also used in a different ways during peer book talks. By design, questions require an answer. Ethan employed questions to continue the conversation when he felt that he needed more detail, or that his partner needed a new avenue to talk about to be able to continue talking. His one question, “Do you ever think they’re gonna [sic] get rescued?” encouraged his partner, Mason, to first think and then respond with his prediction about what was going to happen in *The Killing Seas*. His other question, “Are you at the end or the middle?” requires less thought for Mason, but showed he was engaged in the conversation and suggests he may have wanted to know how much time was left to calculate the probability of rescue in Mason’s book.

Another social skill, the comfort level of talking with peers, was developed through book talks. As shown in Table 2, two girls, Alexa and Madison, expressed their comfort through their voice volume. Normally quiet in class, both girls felt more comfortable in the smaller setting of pairs as evidenced by their volume, suggesting a confidence in what they had to say. In a different book talk when Alexa was paired with Abby, it was observed that Alexa expanded on her ideas more once she had established a level of comfort towards the end of the conversation with Abby. Building a rapport with peers is an important social skill that evolved through the use of book talks, but the comfort shown in these situations also indicates engagement in reading and talking about books.

Etiquette. The peer book talks not only helped to refine the social skills of some students, but it also allowed them to apply etiquette to their conversations. The manners

used by students suggests that they were engaged in the activity and helped to keep the back-and-forth element of book talks going. For example, Mason replied to Ethan's review of *The Red Kayak* with, "Seems like a nice book to read." This was an affirmation that Mason was listening to what Ethan had to say about his book and that he valued the conversation and review that was given. In another conversation, Jacob used body language to show his engagement. As Abby spoke about her book *Unfriended*, Jacob nodded his head in affirmation and showed he was listening with small comments like, "Uh huh." In other instances, manners like Emma asking Madison, "Do you want to go first?" showed she was engaged and invested in the peer book talk by starting the conversation.

Interest. Showing interest in what someone else has to say is evidence of engagement in that conversation. Students expressed interest in various ways during peer book talks. Showing genuine curiosity, making an inference, asking clarifying questions, reactions in response to something said, and asking the reader's personal opinion are all ways that the participants of this study exhibited interest.

Curiosity indicates engagement because if a student was not interested in listening to or learning more about the book being discussed, they would not exert the energy to probe for more information. Mason was engaged when he questioned, "Why did he drill holes in it?" after listening to what *The Red Kayak* was about; he was thinking about the motivations of the antagonist. Another type of question is to ask for the reader's opinion. Ethan did this when he asked Jacob, "Do you like the poetry book?" His curiosity about the personal opinion of *Hate That Cat* shows Ethan was engaged in Jacob's answer, possibly since it is a less common genre read in the class. In a different book talk with

Madison, Emma asked out of curiosity, “So that’s the dog on the cover?” after learning that the protagonist really wants a dog and tried to convince her grandmother to get one. This shows Emma was thinking about the plot that Madison shared and was trying to visualize what was being discussed. Curiosity came in the form of questions for these students. While the types of questions varied, all inquiries indicated engagement among peers.

Another form of engagement is processing information. Not only did Emma do that when trying to visualize, but Mason made an inference about the main character in Ethan’s book. He said, “It must have been hard because they had a bond and he would play at his house,” after learning that the little boy the main character had babysat had died in *The Red Kayak*. Mason is inferring the emotions of the main character in reaction to death based on what he understood about friendships which required him to process all pieces of the information.

Perhaps the most obvious form of engagement through questioning is asking for clarification since it shows an interest in understanding something fully. In a book talk between Ethan and Mason, Ethan asked, “Called someone? With a cell phone?” He wanted clarification because in Mason’s book *The Killing Seas*, the characters are stranded on a pallet at sea after their boat capsized. They went on to discuss the possibility of a satellite phone and its functionality without any nearby cell towers. Ethan then questioned, “Why were two kids and a marine on a boat in the first place?” after he realized the character dynamic did not quite make sense. This showed that he was engaged and thinking about the logistics of the book’s plot and characters. In a separate book talk that included these same two boys with the addition of Jacob, Mason asked of

Hate That Cat, “Oh, so it’s like explaining his day?” This showed engagement since Mason was trying to make sense of the structure of this book, since it was a series of poems, rather than a narrative to tell the story.

Emotional reactions were expressed by some students and are the closest form of engagement to match my original definition. This behavior was observed in three separate book talks from three different students. First, Jacob recoiled when Abby explained that in *Unfriended*, “this girl had a bone pop out of her knee.” Jacob’s reaction signified that he was engaged in listening to Abby and interested in what she was saying. Second, Madison exclaimed, “Ooh!” at the mention of a crush in *The Cat Ate My Gymsuit*; her interest in the topic was evidence of her engagement and excitement in hearing about the book’s content. Lastly, Madison told Emma that a character in *A Million Ways Home* was in critical condition, to which Emma responded with, “Ooh!” The expression of shock signals her engagement in the conversation.

Synthesis. The repeated behaviors that appear in Table 2, such as asking questions to continue the conversation under social skills, manners under etiquette, and demonstrating curiosity about their peer’s book content under showing interest all indicate patterns of engagement. The repeat behaviors were displayed by different students and during different peer pairings over the course of three weeks. The behaviors in each area are all evidence that the students were engaged during the peer book talks and the items discussed showed engagement during the daily independent reading time with their choice books.

Table 3

Independent Reading Book Choices

<u>Student</u>	<u>Book Title & Author</u>	<u>Genre</u>
Jacob	<i>The Wave</i> by Todd Strasser <i>Hate That Cat</i> by Sharon Creech	Fiction Poetry
Alexa	<i>The Cat Ate My Gymsuit</i> by Paula Danziger	Fiction
Madison	<i>A Million Ways Home</i> by Dianna Dorisi Winget	Fiction
Mason	<i>Into the Killing Seas</i> by Michael Spradlin	Fiction
Annie	<i>Distorted</i> by Lorri Antosz & Taryn Leigh Benson	Autobiography
Abby	<i>Unfriended</i> Rachel Vail	Fiction
Emma	<i>The Unwanteds: Island of Graves</i> by Lisa McMann	Fantasy
Savannah	<i>The Bazaar of Bad Dreams</i> by Stephen King	Horror Fiction
Ethan	<i>The Red Kayak</i> by Priscilla Cummings	Mystery

Engagement in Interviews

Evidence of engagement was not just observed through the anecdotal notes and book talk recordings, but also triangulated in the answers given during student interviews. For one, even though the majority of participants said that their friends “think reading is no fun at all” on their *Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile* (Pitcher, et al., 2007) at the beginning of the study, which demonstrated a low value of reading at this age, 100% of students who participated believed that I should continue to give daily reading time, allow a choice of book, and book talks every Friday. For instance, Ethan said, “[choice, time, and talks are] pretty good to get kids engaged in reading and to help them find a

genre or book series that they really like, like me with *Harry Potter*” (personal communication, October 31, 2017). What’s more, 100% of participants believed that independent reading and book talks increased the amount of time they read and discussed books. Not only were the students engaged, but the engagement lead to an appreciation of reading and motivation to read.

Social skills. One of the most common reasons students attributed to enjoying the peer book talks was that they were able to gather recommendations for their next book and were exposed to the content of more books than just what they were currently reading, shown in Table 3. Students liked that they would have an idea of what they could read next, based on what a peer had told them about it and how they rated it. Annie thought book talks with peers were nice because “you get to listen to other people’s books and maybe when you’re done with that book you can read the next one from their recommendations.” Even Ethan, who expressed the anxiety of possibly embarrassing himself in front a peer, said, “it’s fun, you know, to get to see what the other person is reading, and, you know, sort of gauge if you want to read the book or not read the book.” Alexa said, “I like doing [book talks] because, umm, I get to, I get to [sic] talk to someone about my book and see what I like and don’t like about it and to hear what their opinions is.” Savannah’s answer to the same question shows how interaction between peers can show engagement when they “kind of figure out the book together.”

Interest. What students had to say about choice in the interviews is also noteworthy. When asked how they felt about getting a chance to choose their own books to read every day, students were overwhelmingly positive. Out of the 9 participants, 8 said they thought it was a good thing. One student said that it is good sometimes, as long

as she picks a good book and doesn't have trouble finding a new book by herself. Emma said, "see, I like that because a lot of teachers, if they do pick out a book, it's usually a book that a lot of people aren't interested in...the books teachers pick aren't usually the best to read" and even went on to give an example of the required summer reading selection she disliked. Savannah likes to choose her own book because she wisely said, "if you read a book and you don't like it, then you might, like, struggle with it, but if you pick your own book, you get to pick a book that you like." What she is indicating is that motivation to read is a factor when it comes to comprehension. Annie also expressed this sentiment when she said, "if you get an assigned book you don't like and when you have to read it, it won't be as interesting as if you were actually interested in it." It seems to suggest that motivation and engagement are linked and letting students choose their books fosters that. Even more explicitly, Ethan explained very matter-of-factly that "if your teacher makes you read something you won't be as engaged as someone who gets to choose their book." All of these answers suggest the connection between choice, motivation, and engagement.

Most students were motivated by the chance to choose a book to read during the allotted time. Having a choice in their book also enabled engagement since they were interested in the reading material, rather than forced to read something they did not like. This option also motivated the students to share recommendations with one another which suggests a continued cycle of engagement in reading and motivation to read more. Independent reading with a choice book paired with peer book talks helped my students to experience and discover the value in reading and talking about books with others.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

I conclude that the addition of peer book talks to daily independent reading with a choice of book had a positive impact on the students who participated. Whether through informal observations of students excitedly getting with a peer on Friday or getting right into their reading when entering the class, through listening to student book talks where they asked unprompted questions out of pure curiosity, or through their honest answers in one on one interviews, it was clear that while the students began the school year with mixed feelings about reading and mixed reactions to the notion of independently reading every day for twenty minutes, participants ended the study expressing the value they placed on it. This data suggests that giving students the time to read, a choice of book, and time to discuss books with peers engages them and motivates them to read.

The data also seems to suggest that allowing students to pick a book they are interested in motivates them to read for an extended period of time with no or limited prompting. It became a welcomed routine that students looked forward to, whether it was because they enjoyed their book or because it was a quiet time to settle in for the day. In addition, a choice in what peers to talk with about their books motivated them to discuss what they were reading and hear about their partner's books. Not only did they discuss the basic points of a good book talk, but the data showed them asking additional clarifying questions, engaging in natural conversations, and emotionally reacting to what was shared when they were shocked or disgusted. Even though students didn't always show excitement in their tone of voice, their other behaviors indicated that they were

enjoying the books they chose for themselves and the time to share theirs and hear about others.

Limitations

Due to the nature of this study, there are limitations to the results. Qualitative data was used to reach conclusions, therefore observational data and opinions rather than statistical was analyzed. This study also focused on nine eighth grade students in one classroom in one community, so the results cannot be generalized for all students in all schools and backgrounds at this age level. One of the limitations was student and parent permissions. Only nine out of seventeen students granted me permission to collect and analyze data related to them.

The aim was to observe how peer book talks were affected by daily independent reading with a choice book, but it cannot make conclusions about engagement and motivation beyond this setting. The study took place over three weeks, and more longitudinal data would need to be collected to monitor the continued effects of the study. Lastly, the student's backgrounds including the value they placed on reading, the value placed on reading at home, and the value placed on reading built in the school community over time had an effect on the performance and attitudes towards reading that students came to the study with.

Implications

The implications for this study related to my instruction are that I will continue providing daily independent reading time with a choice book and weekly book talks in my classroom routine. The positive results and student reactions suggest that students value this time and that it increases the amount of time they read and discuss books as

compared to on their own outside of my class. Within my school environment, an implication could also be that more teachers employ this practice. I could share my study and its conclusions, along with its materials, with my colleagues through a professional development or professional learning community so that they could implement it into their classrooms.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, more research was called upon to study the effects of independent reading in schools. Specifically, my study focused on teenagers and eighth graders, which is more limited in the current body of research on independent reading practices. Thus, this study adds to the field of knowledge and answers the call for more research in the “local context” (Sanden, 2014, p. 174) on engagement and choice. There was limited information about independent reading’s effects on peer book talks and more specifically what was discussed during that time; this study provides more insight to that area.

References

- Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. L. (2009). *Inquiry as stance: practitioner research for the next generation*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Daniels, E. & Steres, M. (2011). Examining the effects of a school-wide reading culture on the engagement of middle school students. *Research in Middle Level Education Online*, 35(2).
- Dickerson, K. (2015). Reimagining reading: Creating a classroom culture that embraces independent choice reading. *Penn GSE Perspectives on Urban Education*, 12(1).
- Garan, E. M., & DeVogd, G. (2008). *The benefits of sustained silent reading: Scientific research and common sense converge*. *Reading Teacher*, 62(4), 336-344.
- Gee, J.P. (1996). *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourses* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge Falmer.
- Hall, K. W., Hedrick, W. B., & Williams, L. M. (2014). Every day we're shufflin': Empowering students during in-school independent reading. *Childhood Education*, 90(2), 91-98.
- Kasten, W. C., & Wilfong, L. G. (2005). Encouraging independent reading with ambience: The book bistro in middle and secondary school classes. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 48(8), 656-664.
- Knoester, M. (2009). Inquiry into urban adolescent independent reading habits: Can Gee's theory of discourses provide insight? *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 52(8), 676-685.
- Lee, V. (2011). Becoming the reading mentors our adolescents deserve: Developing a successful sustained silent reading program. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 55(3), 209-218.
- Mathers, B. G. & Stern, A. J. (2012). Café culture: Promoting empowerment and pleasure in adolescent literacy learning. *Reading Horizons*, 51(4), 259-277.
- National Reading Panel. (2000). *Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction. reports of the subgroups*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.
- New Jersey Department of Education. (2015). *School performance reports*. <https://rc.doe.state.nj.us/>

- Pilgreen, J.L. (2000). *The SSR handbook: How to organize and manage a sustained silent reading program*. Portsmouth, NH: Boyton/Cook.
- Pitcher, S.M., Albright, L.K., DeLaney, C.J., Walker, N.T., Seunarinesingh, K., Mogge, S., Headly, K.N., Ridgeway, V.G., Peck, S., Hunt, R., Dunston, P. (2007). Assessing adolescents' motivation to read. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 50 (5), 378-396.
- Reutzel, D.R., Parker, C.F., & Smith, J.A. (2008). Reconsidering silent sustained reading: An exploratory study of scaffolded silent reading. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 102(1), 37-50.
- Ryan, R.M., Connell, J.P., & Grolnick, W.S. (1992). "When achievement is not intrinsically motivated: A theory of internalization and self-regulation in school." in A.K. Boggiano & T.S. Pittman (Eds.), *Achievement and motivation: A social developmental perspective* (pp. 167–188). Toronto, ONT, Canada: Cambridge University Press.
- Sanden, S. (2014). Out of the shadow of SSR: Real teachers' classroom independent reading practices. *Language Arts*, 91(3), 161-175.
- Stairs, A. J., & Burgos, S. S. (2010). The power of independent, self-selected reading in the middle grades. *Middle School Journal (J3)*, 41(3), 41-48.
- United States Census Bureau. (2010). *Community facts*. www.factfinder.census.gov
- Wozniak, C. L. (2011). Reading and talking about books: A critical foundation for intervention. *Voices from the Middle*, 19(2), 17-21.

Appendix A

Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile



Figure 1
Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile reading survey

Name: _____ Date: _____

Sample 1: I am in _____.

- Sixth grade
- Seventh grade
- Eighth grade
- Ninth grade
- Tenth grade
- Eleventh grade
- Twelfth grade

Sample 2: I am a _____.

- Female
- Male

Sample 3: My race/ethnicity is _____.

- African-American
- Asian/Asian American
- Caucasian
- Hispanic
- Native American
- Multi-racial/Multi-ethnic
- Other: Please specify _____

1. My friends think I am _____.

- a very good reader
- a good reader
- an OK reader
- a poor reader

2. Reading a book is something I like to do.

- Never
- Not very often
- Sometimes
- Often

3. I read _____.

- not as well as my friends
- about the same as my friends
- a little better than my friends
- a lot better than my friends

4. My best friends think reading is _____.

- really fun
- fun
- OK to do
- no fun at all

5. When I come to a word I don't know, I can _____.

- almost always figure it out
- sometimes figure it out
- almost never figure it out
- never figure it out

6. I tell my friends about good books I read.

- I never do this
- I almost never do this
- I do this some of the time
- I do this a lot

7. When I am reading by myself, I understand _____.

- almost everything I read
- some of what I read
- almost none of what I read
- none of what I read

8. People who read a lot are _____.

- very interesting
- interesting
- not very interesting
- boring

9. I am _____.

- a poor reader
- an OK reader
- a good reader
- a very good reader

(continued)

Figure 1 (continued)
Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile reading survey

Name: _____ Date: _____

10. I think libraries are _____.
 a great place to spend time
 an interesting place to spend time
 an OK place to spend time
 a boring place to spend time
11. I worry about what other kids think about my reading _____.
 every day
 almost every day
 once in a while
 never
12. Knowing how to read well is _____.
 not very important
 sort of important
 important
 very important
13. When my teacher asks me a question about what I have read, I _____.
 can never think of an answer
 have trouble thinking of an answer
 sometimes think of an answer
 always think of an answer
14. I think reading is _____.
 a boring way to spend time
 an OK way to spend time
 an interesting way to spend time
 a great way to spend time
15. Reading is _____.
 very easy for me
 kind of easy for me
 kind of hard for me
 very hard for me
16. As an adult, I will spend _____.
 none of my time reading
 very little time reading
 some of my time reading
 a lot of my time reading
17. When I am in a group talking about what we are reading, I _____.
 almost never talk about my ideas
 sometimes talk about my ideas
 almost always talk about my ideas
 always talk about my ideas
18. I would like for my teachers to read out loud in my classes _____.
 every day
 almost every day
 once in a while
 never
19. When I read out loud I am a _____.
 poor reader
 OK reader
 good reader
 very good reader
20. When someone gives me a book for a present, I feel _____.
 very happy
 sort of happy
 sort of unhappy
 unhappy

Note. Adapted with permission from the Motivation to Read Profile (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni, 1996)

Appendix B

Student Interview Script

Title: How Choice in Daily Independent Reading Affects Book Talks with Peers
Principal Investigator: Dr. Stephanie Abraham



Interview Script:

Hi! I just wanted to ask you some questions to help me with my master's homework. I am going to take some notes and record our conversation so that I can use it to write my thesis later. I will not be able to take notes as fast as you speak, and I don't want to miss anything you say. Please just be honest in your responses, as I am not looking for any "right" answer. Are you ready?

At the beginning of the school year, how did you feel about reading and books?

When I first introduced that we would be independently reading every day for about 20 minutes, what did you think or what was your first reaction? Why do you think you felt that way?

In the past, were you ever given the time by a teacher to read books you chose during school?

In the past, were you ever given the time by a teacher to discuss books with your friends?

How do you feel or what do you think about having book talks with your classmates every Friday?

How do you feel about getting a chance to choose your own books to read every day?

Do you think getting to choose your book is good, bad, or does choice not matter to you?

Do you like to read the books you choose during independent reading or the ones we read in school better? Why do you think that is?

Would you like to be given independent reading time and chances to talk about books with classmates again in the future?

Do you think I should continue to have kids choose their books, allow reading time every day, and have book talks every Friday? Why do you feel that way?

Do you think independent reading and book talks has increased the amount that you read and discuss books?