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**INDEPENDENT READING: THE POWER OF SELF-SELECTION AND CAFÉ
DISCUSSIONS IN A SEVENTH GRADE CLASSROOM**

by

Ashley L. Merkler

A Thesis

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

In partial fulfillment of the requirement

For the degree of
Master of Arts in Reading Education

at

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Thesis Chair: Dr. Susan Browne

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this manuscript to my amazing husband, Billy. Your love and support has given me the strength over and over again to know that I can do anything. I truly do not know what I would do without you. I love you.

Acknowledgements

I would like to start by thanking the students at the study site for showing enthusiasm and interest in taking part of this study. In addition, I would like to thank my colleagues at work and in the MA in Reading Program, especially Dana Nelson, for constantly being my sounding board and allowing me to bounce ideas around. The support of all has created a team atmosphere that has enabled me to know I am not alone in this process. Thank you to my parents, Richard and Lori, my in-laws, Robert and Doreen and to my siblings: Jennifer and Matthew. You all provided me with the confidence I needed these two years.

Abstract

Ashley L. Merkler

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DISCUSSIONS IN A SEVENTH GRADE CLASSROOM
2016-2017

Dr. Susan Browne

Master of Arts in Reading Education

The purpose of the study was to examine middle school students' motivation to read. The goal was to see what happens to seventh grade students' motivation to read independently when given the opportunity to self-select and discuss books in a classroom setting that mimics a real-world café. Motivation profiles, interest surveys, reflections, and student work were all analyzed. The focus group of students demonstrated changes in how students viewed themselves as readers and their desire to read independently for leisure. The implications for teaching in a seventh grade classroom are discussed. A complete data analysis provided the major assertions and implications about the research topic.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

“Welcome class! My name is Mrs. Merkler and I will be your seventh grade English teacher.” My voice rang through the classroom as students chose their seats seemingly as far away from the front of the room as possible. The first day of school is a time consumed with different emotions. Excitement rings true for many. It is the start of a new year, new faces, and new things to learn. As a teacher I look forward to my first interactions with students and enjoy spending time getting to know them.

“How many of you look forward to English class?” The amount of hands raised was disheartening, I must admit. While a few raised their hands with such confidence and pride, others seemed unsure and brought their hand down quickly. The majority who did not raise their hand, looked at each other with half smiles, rolling their eyes.

“How many of you enjoy reading?” The response was even more disappointing. Students admitted that they did not like reading and would often not read, even for pleasure. In reflecting in myself as a young reader, I can wholeheartedly admit to loathing reading. Especially as a middle school student, I did not like English class due to the fact that I did not enjoy reading. I was not a strong reader and would often mispronounce words, which affected my comprehension. Teachers assigned books I was not interested in and required me to complete assignments that I did not want to do. It was not until college that I developed a love for reading. I found it as an escape from reality. The characters were my friends as I became engrossed in the stories I read. There were many sleepless nights in college, not from pulling all-nighters to study, but so that I could finish a chapter or a whole book. This love of reading inspired me my

junior year to minor in reading, which ultimately lead me to my first job as a middle school English teacher.

Now, in my sixth year teaching, I look at the faces of my seventh graders who seem all too familiar to my own seventh grade self. I realize that changes need to occur within reading class. How can someone go from hating reading to loving it so much they consume themselves in it and turn it into a career? Drastic changes need to happen in these students' lives so they can find a love of reading.

I realize the impact reading has had on my life. Not only is reading an essential skill, but it also opens an array of doors and possibilities. As a reading teacher, my hope is to inspire students with my story and show them that things can change. In order for this change I am led to think about what changed in my world that guided me to become the avid reader I am today: choice. Being able to choose what I read allowed me to enter a world of reading I had never experienced before: enjoyment. In reflecting on my own teaching practices and observing my students' resistance to read, even for enjoyment, I am led to the research topic: What happens to seventh grade students' motivation to read independently when given the opportunity to self-select and discuss books in a classroom setting that mimics a real-world café? What happens when students are instructed on ways to find books that are "just right" for them? How can self-selecting texts empower students in their reading and help them develop a love of reading? How can conversations and group discussions build motivation and encourage students to read on their own for enjoyment?

Purpose and Problem Statement

The purpose of the study was to investigate middle school students' motivation to read. The goal was to see what happens to seventh grade students' motivation to read independently when given the opportunity to self-select and discuss books in a classroom setting that mimics a real-world café. In order for students to be motivated to read, the idea of choice and discussion is critical. The goal was to make independent reading both meaningful and enjoyable. This was similar to the goal of the authors of *Book Bistro* who wanted to provide students with an opportunity to discuss their self-selected reading books through the transformation of the classroom into a real-world setting. "Book Bistro capitalizes on using student discussion to encourage reading" (Kasten & Wilfong, 2005, p. 658). During the Book Bistro event, students brought their books to class, along with a snack or drink. Small-groups met around the room as soft music played, students remained on-task as they smiled and laughed while discussing their books. In order to successfully conduct independent reading within a classroom, one must allow as well as encourage students to: choose where they read, what they read, where they read and engage in reading activities that are explicitly taught and modeled by the teacher (Sanden, 2012). The idea of Book Bistro assisted me in designing an independent reading program that allowed my students opportunity to be in control of their learning.

In order for a similar event to take place a major component of the independent reading program was to give students time to read. Stahl (2004) recommends that students spend 15 to 30 minutes reading books of their choice each day. With this time spent on reading something they choose, they have more to gauge their likelihood to

continue reading. I observed this during cafe discussions and note changes in their motivation through reading their monthly reflections.

Along with time spent reading, I personally needed to get to know students and discover their interests. Being aware of what students enjoy allowed me to assist them in finding books that they like to read. Cecilia Rodriguez and Juan Lira's (1998) study found that with 30-minutes of reading self-selected books, five days a week, students' attitudes toward reading improved. Many students read beyond the required amount, suggesting their enjoyment for reading. Comments from students demonstrated students can learn to love reading. "We just have to: 1) remind them of the joys of reading; and 2) let them find out that they really do like it by providing them with the opportunity and material with which to rediscover the pleasure of reading" (Rodriguez & Lira, 1998, p. 48). Through getting to know students, I made appropriate materials available, which allowed self-selecting text to have a positive effect on students.

In order to acquire appropriate materials that are of interests to students and on their reading level, I needed to evaluate my resources. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2013) state that, "collaboration among and across participants is a key feature" (p. 41). To gather appropriate materials I required the assistance of the high school and middle school librarian. Kelley (1992) wrote in his dissertation that factors needed to implement an effective reading program include adequate budgets for media resources, new and authentic literature that is readily available for students, and enthusiastic professionals to support students within their reading. Working with the not only the librarian, but also the Language Arts department, exposed me to additional resources that provided students with an array of choices to read different genres of text.

Another component that was essential to my research was to support students within their reading and show them how to keep track of their reading in their reading logs. Their reading logs offered assistance when preparing for their cafe discussions. Active reading strategies employed while reading assisted students in remaining on task and engaged. Goodman's (2003) article *Get A.C.T.I.V.E.: Engaging Middle School Readers with Text* provides strategies for teachers to guide students in their reading and comprehending of text. "It is important that they understand what active reading is and what it isn't" (Goodman, 2003, p. 17). A list emerged that clearly defined how students can remain active in their reading: asking questions, creating connections, tracking down/determining important information, making inferences, visualizing, E= Eureka! (synthesis). Proficient readers do not simply use just one strategy, but move from one to another simultaneously. By giving students explicit instruction in strategies that keep them engaged in their reading, I was able to hold individual students accountable while reading and track their motivation to do so.

Story of the Question

Independent Reading and School Achievement by Bernice E. Cullinan mentioned the idea of people discovering a love for reading later in life by citing Moffett and Wartella (1992) who "found that after a decline in mid-adolescence, reading increases again during eleventh and twelfth grades" (Cullinan, 2000, p. 8). Why is this? What happens at the end of high school that results in students reading more? I believe the answer can be found in the idea that students who are given more freedom in their reading selections, are more inclined to read what they like during time of leisure.

My research question came to me in a natural and organic way, in that it pertains directly to my position as a 7th grade language arts teacher. Currently, working towards my Reading Specialist certification, I have taken courses and read numerous works of literature that instill the importance of reading amongst all ages. When it came time to conduct my own research study using my current class, I reflected on my teaching as well as what I knew about my students and how they learn best.

I have several students reading below a seventh grade level and it became clear through my observations and casual conversations with them that recreational reading ranks lowest among their preferences for independent activities. In becoming increasingly aware of the lack of motivation my students have to read independently, I thought about the amount of time I give them to read in my classroom. Unfortunately, students are not given opportunities to read for long periods of time and certainly not what they choose. “Questions are often born of frustration” (Shagoury & Power, 2012, p. 22). Through reflecting I was able to pinpoint a problem within my own teaching I wanted to explore.

My goal is to be the best teacher to my students and am not blind to the tensions that arise due to the fact that each student is different. “We sometimes walk a tightrope between who we are as teachers and learners and who we want to be” (p. 23). Even in knowing that I want to promote of a love of reading amongst all students, my current way of teaching them has not offered students the opportunities to truly do so. I realized that something was missing within my curriculum to promote a love of reading and this was my chance to do something about it. I am mindful of the importance in providing students with opportunities to read in my classroom. There is a need for students to read

more. If students are not reading in my classroom independently, then they are most likely not reading at home; therefore they are not reading as much as they should. Reflecting on my own experience of finding a love of reading assisted in designing an independent reading program that would allow choice.

Independent reading is reading students choose to do on their own. It reflects the reader's personal choice of the material to be read as well as the time and place to read it. Studies have shown that students who read independently become better readers, score higher on achievement tests in all areas, and have greater content knowledge than those who do not (Krashen 1993; Cunningham and Stanovich 1991; Stanovich and Cunningham 1993). Among these benefits, independent reading also builds fluency, increases vocabulary, and builds background knowledge or schema. Through supporting students' reading independence, focusing on students' reading growth, and gearing activities that are student-centered, my question is geared towards inspiring students to want to read within my classroom and outside of it.

In order to achieve this, working with students and supporting them is critical and can only happen by getting to know them. An important component of the independent reading program will be to provide students with books that are of interest. In truly getting to know students, I can work to support them in finding stories they may enjoy reading. In addition, keeping close records of their behaviors, student talk and work will provide insight to their progress within their reading by tracking their motivation. Through building a rapport with students I can dive deeper into my question through casual conversations about their interests and the books they are reading.

“Middle school is a pivotal point in reading development of adolescent learners. It is at this time that students transform from the learning-to-read stage into the reading-to-learn stage” (Goodman, 2003, p. 22). As a middle school teacher I am very much an advocate for student exploration, student choice, and ways in which I can motivate students in their reading and writing. I believe that through studying such a topic as independent reading, I will not only improve my knowledge of best teaching practices, but I will become more in tune to ways to motivate and support students in their individual literacy development.

The following components of this paper are a qualitative examination of my research question. The literature review included in Chapter Two reviews and analyzes recent and historical research of the decline in adolescent readers, independent reading programs, motivation through engagement: making reading relevant, importance in student choice, and holding students accountable. Chapter Three includes an understanding of the context of the study site, the research design and methodology, and information on the students who will be the focal point of the study. In Chapter Four the data sources will be reviewed and analyzed. To conclude, Chapter Five will summarize conclusions, limitations, and implications for best teaching practice.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Gambrell (2015) puts it simply, as educators “It is important that we recognize we have two equally important reading goals: to teach our students to read and to teach our students to want to read” (p. 259). The more students read, the better readers they become and those who love to read will choose to do so more often. Davis (2010) found the least-proficient readers demonstrated work-avoidant tactics in completing independent reading. “These students were observed looking onto other’s papers, fidgeting or playing with objects in their desks, and asking to use the bathroom or get drinks at a greater frequency than more-proficient reader” (p. 67). “Smith and Wilhelm (2004) and Alvermann (2001) used the notion of reading identities to explain adolescents’ ability and desire to read. In other words, to create lifelong readers, individuals must see themselves as competent readers and understand that reading identity must reach beyond the classroom” (Kasten & Wilfong, 2005, p. 657). Classrooms must extend reading and create authentic experiences that allow students to engage in reading as they would in the real world. There is a need for students to read more, but in order to accomplish this; the value in reading needs to be evident.

Decline of Reading in Adolescent Readers

Many research studies indicate that students are choosing not to read, even though they can, stating that reading is an unpleasant activity. The amount of reading completed independently by adolescence significantly drops as they get older. The National Endowment for the Arts (2007) titled *To Read or Not to Read: A Question of National*

Consequence stated that trends show Americans are reading less and, in particular, that early adolescents and young adults “read less often for shorter amounts of time when compared with other age groups and with Americans of the past” (Iyengar & Ball, 2007, p. 7). Elissa Gootman wrote in the *New York Times* that, in New York State, grade-by-grade testing conducted for the first time in 2007 showed that, “in rich and poor districts alike, reading scores plunge from the fifth to sixth grade, when most students move to middle school, and continue to decline through eighth grade” (Humphrey & Preddy, 2008, p. 30). In Cullinan’s (2000) article, McCoy et al. (1991) was cited with finding a decrease in recreational reading during middle school years. “In a second survey, a majority of 159 seventh- and eighth-grade students reported reading independently up to seventh grade but practically ceasing to read anything not required or assigned after that. Recreational reading ranked lowest among their preferences for independent activities” (Cullinan, 2000, p. 8). What is cause of this decline? What changes as students advance in grade levels that discourages reading for their own enjoyment? There are many factors that lead to students’ struggles in reading: physiological, genetic, environmental, or socio-economic issues (Spear-Swerling, 2004). Middle school students credit their lack of motivation to read and the amount of time they spend reading for leisure to some of the following factors:

- Lack of time allotted to reading for pleasure in school
- Assigned selections which are not at their level or of their interest
- Extracurricular and social activities
- Lack of teacher and school motivation to read for pleasure
- Inappropriate pacing

- Environments which inhibit reading for pleasure
- Lack of time to discuss books with others
- Lack of parental support
- Increased testing experiences
- Increased concentration on skills and drills (Silha, 1992; Dobson, 1994; Ley, Schaer, & Dismuskes, 1994).

Reading demands increase at middle level and even good elementary readers may have difficulty. Many middle schools have less time in the day to teach literacy than most elementary schools.

The Matthew Effect

As students move up in grades, text complexity increases. Those who struggle in their reading continue to fall further and further behind. This makes reading a trying and frustrating task for many. Stanovich's seminal piece, *Matthew Effects in Reading: Some Consequences of Individual Differences in Acquisition of Literacy*, argued that research shows children's deficits in phonemic awareness result in delays within reading that pertain to decoding. "The exposure to less text in school leads to fewer opportunities for vocabulary and syntactic development, fewer opportunities to practice reading, and less exposure to content knowledge in general" (Tracey & Morrow, 2006, p. 156). His concept of The Matthew Effect has significant implications in the area of why adolescents are not choosing to read. "The rich get richer, and the poor get poorer" works to explain the idea that students need a strong foundation of reading in order to succeed or to continue to succeed. Those who do not have this foundation continue to fall further and further behind, resulting in resistance and pure refusal to read.

According to the Matthew Effect, the rate in which children progress is related to their ability and the skills mastered. Scarborough and Parker (2003) completed a longitudinal sample of 57 children from grade 2 to 8 in order to assess reading achievement, IQ, and behavior problems. Their findings stated that children who were behind in second grade continued to be behind in their literacy acquisition in eighth grade. “Rates of progress should be slower for children with initially low achievement and more rapid for children who succeed well at the outset, such that the differences between these groups successively widen over time, increasing the overall degree of variability” (p. 48). The gap between students’ current reading level and their grade level continues to widen when instruction is not focused on a strong foundation of reading.

Independent Reading

Students who read for fun almost every day performed better than those who read less frequently (Krashen, 2004). One classroom practice that promotes independent reading is sustained, free-choice reading (Manning & Manning, 1984). Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) is uninterrupted silent reading. It is time allotted for students, teachers, and school members to read. SSR and programs like DEAR (Drop Everything and Read) and SQUIRT (Super Quiet Independent Reading Time), appeared in the education world in 1971. Hunt (1971) developed the program and later within the same year McCracken (1971) perfected it for the purpose of having students participate in such reading during leisure time in school (Grubaugh, 1986, p. 169). Practices in reading as well as research began to involve independent reading in classrooms during the 1990’s. The requirements of the program included that everyone reads. By teachers joining in on the reading, they were presented as a model for students as they exhibited good reading habits. SSR was

meant to take place the same time every day. Similar, to DEAR, students and teachers stopped doing what they were doing in order to silently read a book that they selected and wanted to read. With the uninterrupted time, the goal of such programs was to build upon students' literacy skills and work to promote positive attitudes and feelings toward reading. However, one notable feature of these early programs is that students did not participate in follow-up discussions or accountability requirements (Sanden, 2012).

There are many misconceptions about SSR and the role it should play in classrooms. This confusion stems from the Report of the National Reading Panel (2000) report that stated there was not enough evidence to support that increased reading affects students' reading ability. To educators, this was shocking. How could reading more not impact students in a positive way? Stahl and Samuels (2004), both NRP contributors, disproved interpretations of research that discouraged independent reading. Stahl (2004) recommends that students spend 15 to 30 minutes reading books of their choice each day. Wu and Samuels (2004) presented research in response to the NRP report, sharing, "Data analysis found that more time spent reading had a significant effect on achievement compared to a control condition where less time was allocated for independent reading" (Garan & DeVogd, 2008, p. 340). In order for gains in fluency and overall reading achievement, students need to be given opportunities to read something of their choice every day.

With the NRP causing teachers to question the effectiveness of independent reading in the classrooms, Sherry Sanden (2014) conducted a yearlong study that looked closely at how highly effective teachers understood and implemented independent reading in their classroom. Like the programs set in 1971, these teachers provided

regularly scheduled amount of reading each day, allowed students to choose their own reading material; however, the major differences were seen in the teachers supporting the students during independent reading. Through the implementation of student centered activities with highly effective practices these teachers were focused on students' reading growth by keeping them motivated and accountable. Teacher-modeled reading provided rich opportunities for students to emulate particular reading habits, which worked to enhance their time spent reading independently. Students were required to keep reading logs, write reading responses, and summaries. Other activities included using sticky notes to record elements within a story and note unfamiliar words. Teachers conferenced with students and provided time for students to discuss their books with peers. Sanden found that highly effective teachers conduct independent reading in ways that differ significantly from traditional Sustained Silent Reading programs: focusing on student growth, student-centered activities, and social interaction. These findings support the use of independent reading within the classroom as it benefits students when implemented effectively.

Motivation Through Engagement: Making Reading Relevant

Motivation needs to be central consideration in the reading curriculum because it often makes the difference between learning that is superficial or shallow and learning that is deep and internalized. Students internalize learning when they are motivated and interested. "Engaged readers actively interact with text, seeking to understand what they have read. They avoid distractions and socially interact with others reading text" (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2009, p. 313). Readers' level of engagement can range from completely disengaged to obsessively engaged. A question often pondered: Does reading

motivation increase proficiency in reading, or does reading proficiency increase reading motivation? Research suggests that it is crucial to motivate students to read in order to improve their reading proficiency. Campbell, Voelkl, and Donahue (1997) found that highly engaged readers demonstrated higher levels of reading achievement than students who were less engaged. The Engagement Theory set out to highlight the difference between engaged and disengaged readers. “Engaged readers are those who are intrinsically motivated to read and who therefore read frequently” (Tracey & Morrow, 2006, p. 64). Guthrie (2004) presented the Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI). The approach includes five components: the use of themes in reading, student choice in reading and how to respond, hands-on activities, access to a wide variety of text that include different genres and are of students’ interests, and opportunities to socially collaborate in reading. Developing this further, Cambria and Guthrie (2010) offer six motivation practices teachers can incorporate into daily lessons that work to motivate learners: interest, dedication, value, success, choice, and relevance.

The goal of educators is to support students in becoming proficient, persistent, and passionate readers (Gambrell, 2011). Gambrell, well known for her work on student motivation, agrees with Guthrie, claiming that classroom practices need to encourage internal motivation. Ways to instill intrinsic motivation include: demonstrating the value of reading and celebrating it, providing opportunities to be successful at challenging reading tasks as ways to develop competence, and giving students control within their learning through authentic and relevant activities. By making reading relevant to the real world, teachers work to engage students in their reading through meaningful and authentic literacy activities. Authentic reading, writing, and discussions were explored in

Gambrell, Hughes, Calvert, Malloy, and Igo's (2011) yearlong study, in which students were observed in third, fourth, and fifth grade classrooms. Both student and adult pen pals read high-quality literature and wrote each other, posing higher order questions. Teachers supported their students in reading the books and writing the pen pals letters. Their discussions were purposeful, focusing on issues and questions raised by the adults, but relevant to their lives. The findings revealed that motivation increased from the beginning of the study to the end because students were engaged in activities that were relevant, interesting, and provided opportunities for social collaboration. Not only were students engaged in higher level discussions with adults, but resulted in them being intrinsically motivated to complete the task of reading in order to collaborate.

The Sociocultural Theory

Along with the Engagement Theory, the Sociocultural Theory emphasizes the idea that a child's culture is critical in affecting children's literacy development. In order for them to be engaged, they need to make relevant connections to text and have opportunities to use their own experiences to construct knowledge. Matthew Knoester's (2009) study explored connections between interest and engagement with reading among adolescents in an urban setting by interviewing ten former students, their parents, and current teachers. Knoester predicted that students would benefit if teachers viewed reading as a public act and used strategies that acknowledged reading as a social task. Interviews were analyzed into themes using the theoretical framework surrounding issues of identity, which Gee called acquisition of secondary Discourses. Students and parents discussed access to books in the home, where they acquire books to read, how much reading they do on a weekly basis and the reasons behind their lack of reading. In

addition, those interviewed discussed numerous examples of reading that was tied to social interactions. Examples of data showed that students loved to talk about what they were reading when they found a connection or enjoyed the book. Parents reported adolescents sharing their books with siblings. Findings suggest that identity development may have impacted these adolescents' independent reading habits and interests. Many of them shared that they did not like to read because they did not see themselves as good readers and could not find books they wanted to read. Independent reading needs to be made a social practice. Students choose to read or not to read based on ability and also on identity and interest. Overall, this study suggested that in order to motivate students and engage them in their reading, teachers and parents need to be sensitive and supportive of those who struggle to read. In addition, students must be welcomed into dominant Discourses valued in schools in order to succeed. Students need to see themselves in books and topics in school so that reading is interesting and relevant to them. Having a wide variety of text available to students and being sure to provide students with multicultural literature allows for more opportunities to socialize and collaborate within their reading.

Love and Hamston (2003) used questionnaires and interview data from teenage boys and their parents in a highly educated middle-class school community to examine boys reading reluctance. Research suggests that as boys move into their teenage years, they are less likely to engage in recreational and academic reading than girls (p. 161). The interest of their study was to observe how the role of parents in the context of reading as a cultural practice at home impacted teenage boys. The researchers worked to fill the gaps of other research by examining family practices that may have worked to

maintain teenage boys' interest in certain forms of leisure reading and those that were ineffective. Data analysis found that "Many of the boys' parents too fail to recognize that reading electronic text, either for information or communication purposes, requires often complex decoding, semantic, pragmatic, and critical engagement" (p.163). Often parents tried forcing their sons to engage in reading that was of interest to them and not their child. The difference in the value of reading amongst parents and their teenage boys added to the resistance some of the boys had towards reading. Overall, the study's implications highlight the dangers in a limited range of traditional print-based text. "By ignoring the important role that the multi-modal and semiotically complex forms of reading typically preferred by 'screenage' boys have on their identity formation in the contemporary digital context, educators run the risk of alienating many young men from schooling" (p. 173). Educators need to be aware of students' interests and be open to a variety of text to engage individual readers. It is important that curriculum is designed around forms of leisure reading valued by a range of adolescent males in the twenty first century.

Likewise, Davis (2010) conducted practitioner research within her own classroom in order to examine how different instructional approaches influences 19 second-grade students' attitudes and engagement in reading. Through the use of surveys, interviews, and observations, Davis assessed self-concept as readers, perceived value of reading, attitudes about reading, and time spent actively engaged in literacy activities. Two instructional models were implemented sequentially within the second grade classroom over a four week period. Each framework was implemented to the whole class for a ten day period. The student-centered and skills-based curricula were taught consecutively

without intervening instruction. The goal of the study was to extend understanding about young learners experiences in literacy classrooms. The findings supported that students perceptions were generally more favorable when instruction and individual tasks provided opportunities for students to make choices, collaborate, and share control in their learning processes. “Engagement and persistence were two examples of the ways in which student participation varied throughout the study. Both qualitative and quantitative data sources suggested more-consistent evidence of learner engagement during student-centered tasks than skills-based tasks” (p. 75).

Importance of Student Choice

A desire among many teachers is to empower students’ choices while also monitoring their decision-making. Classroom practices need to reflect opportunities for students to exercise control over reading and as a result, motivation and engagement is most likely to build. As a way to motivate students in their reading and offer them control, providing students with opportunities to read self-selected materials is crucial. In order to do this the environment created within a classroom setting needs to be “autonomy supportive” (Gambrell, 2015). Teachers need to know their students in order to support them in becoming independent. The first step is learning what their interests are. By getting to know one’s students, teachers are able to relate to them and encourage internal motivation to want to read.

From October 1996 to May 1997 Cecilia Rodriguez and Juan Lira (1998) set out to study 41 eighth graders from a middle school in south Texas. The purpose of the study was to determine if 30-minutes of reading self-selected books, five days a week, improved reading achievement and students’ attitudes toward reading. While reading

students kept reading logs to track their reading and the books they read. The results indicated that there were no significant gains in reading achievement as determined by analyzing the pre and post assessments of the TAAS and the Gates-MacGinitie Reading tests. However, research suggests that if students were to continue reading daily for 30-minutes, their overall reading performance on reading assessments should improve. Although it appeared students did not improve their reading performance on reading tests, results reported that majority of student participants enjoyed the required reading and believed they improved their literacy skills in vocabulary and fluency. In addition, the study indicated that students' attitude toward reading improved after reading self-selected text. Many students read beyond the required amount, suggesting their enjoyment for reading. Comments from students demonstrated students can learn to love reading. "We just have to: 1) remind them of the joys of reading; and 2) let them find out that they really do like it by providing them with the opportunity and material with which to rediscover the pleasure of reading" (Rodriguez & Lira, 1998, p. 48). Through getting to know students, appropriate materials were made available allowing self-selecting text to have a positive effect on students.

"Encourage reading in school becomes especially critical in middle grades and above because reports show students in these age groups read less on their own than their elementary peers (Kasten & Wilfong, 2005, p. 657). *Book Bistro* is an example of an independent reading program that provides students with ample opportunities to have choice and control in their learning. An important aspect of the program is that it views reading as a social practice while making it relevant to the outside world. In observing that her students hated independent reading, Kim recruited the help of her faculty advisor

and friend, Wendy Kasten to come up with a better way to implement independent reading in a seventh grade classroom. The goal was to make independent reading both meaningful and enjoyable. The idea of *Book Bistro* was created to provide students with an opportunity to discuss their self-selected reading books through the transformation of the classroom into a real-world setting. “Book Bistro capitalizes on using student discussion to encourage reading” (Kasten & Wilfong, 2005, p. 658). During the Book Bistro event, students brought their books to class, along with a snack or drink. They began by choosing two open-ended questions to answer that would assist them in starting meaningful discussions within their groups. Small-groups met around the room as soft music played, students remained on-task as they smiled and laughed while discussing their books. In order to successfully conduct independent reading within a classroom, one must allow as well as encourage students to: choose where they read, what they read, where they read and engage in reading activities that are explicitly taught and modeled by the teacher (Sanden, 2012). Book Bistro provided students with an opportunity to have control in their learning. The study concluded noting that students attitudes toward independent reading drastically changed from before to after Book Bistro and conclusions suggested the reason was due to students being able to choose throughout the event. This program was also implemented in a ninth grade classroom where similar results were observed.

Relinquishing control and accommodate the divergent goals of supporting students’ choices can be challenging for teachers especially during a time when schools have been required to raise standards for students to meet “adequate yearly progress”. The authors of *The Power of Independent, Self-Selected Reading in the*

Middle Grades confirm that independent reading is widely supported in empirical and practitioner research that has been published in past years. “In recent review of literature, Morrow (2003) concluded that the amount of time children spend leisure reading is correlated with reading achievement” (Stairs & Stairs Burgos, 2010, p.41-42). Allowing student choice within a classroom does not mean a teacher cannot cover required curriculum and meet state standards. In fact, Stairs and Stairs Burgos 2006-2007 study of eighth grade students found that student outcomes in a reading workshop where student choice was valued revealed three fourths of students met or exceeded state standards. Throughout the study 26 boys and 27 girls were asked to write in their reading journals about a book that changed or influenced their lives. Journal entries were read several times and researchers found that by reading self-selected books three themes emerged. The first theme revealed that students’ favorite books led to changing how they viewed themselves and the decisions they make. The second theme related to students evaluating interpersonal relationships and had them look more closely at how they develop and sustain these relationships in their lives. The final theme supported that having choice in what they read encourages students to shift their views about reading. Many of the students were quoted saying that their favorite book made them see the value in reading and showed them that reading can be enjoyable. “If teachers are given the professional authority ... and implement independent, self-selected reading in the context of reading workshop, the result may be students who are lifelong readers and highly literate human beings” (Stairs & Stairs Burgos, 2010, p. 48).

Holding Students Accountable

Missing from the early Sustained Silent Reading programs were opportunities for students to collaborate and discuss their reading as a way of encouraging and motivating themselves and others to read their books. Follow up activities are crucial to promote both engaging and effective independent reading. Topping, Samuels, and Paul's (2008) study explored whether different balances of literature, fiction and nonfiction, reading and text complexity explains differences in reading achievement between genders. Data was collected and analyzed on 45,670 students in Grades 1-6, who read over 3 million books during independent reading. *STAR Reading* and *Accelerated Reader* measured students' comprehension after reading a book. Findings showed that boys read nonfiction more than girls; however, reading achievement amongst girls was higher than boys. Girls also read more books than boys over a period of time. Researchers proposed implications from their study, placing great emphasis on monitoring students during independent reading. They state, "Effective reading comprehension of individually self-selected books should be monitored in terms of both quantity and quality, especially for at-risk readers, including many boys" (Topping, Samuels, & Paul, 2008, p. 521). Implications from the study also suggest that as teachers monitor students, they should provide feedback and interventions when necessary.

Duke and Pearson (2002) agree that in order to provide students with effective practices to develop reading comprehension, teachers need to monitor strategies. "Teachers should monitor students' use of comprehension strategies and their success at understanding what they read" (Duke & Pearson, 2002, p. 212). Students can work to monitor their own understanding through keeping reading logs in which they

make predictions, record think-alouds, identify and evaluate text structures, create visual representations, write summaries, and ask questions.

Goodman's (2003) article *Get A.C.T.I.V.E.: Engaging Middle School Readers with Text* provides strategies for teachers to guide students in their reading and comprehending of text. "It is important that they understand what active reading is and what it isn't" (Goodman, 2003, p. 17). A list emerged that clearly defined how students can remain active in their reading: A= ask (asking questions), C= connect (creating connections), T= track down (tracking down/determining important information), I= infer (making inferences), V= visualize (visualizing), E= Eureka! (synthesis). Proficient readers do not simply use just one strategy, but move from one to another simultaneously. "Middle school is a pivotal point in reading development of adolescent learners. It is at this time that students transform from the learning-to-read stage into the reading-to-learn stage" (Goodman, 2003, p. 22). By giving students explicit instruction in strategies that keep them engaged in their reading, students and teachers alike can hold individuals accountable while reading.

Several articles presented authentic activity suggestions to assist students while reading as well as engage them. Chehayl (2008) sympathized with teachers who find it challenging to incorporate reading activities, especially in content area classrooms, that engage learners, while also holding them accountable. *Books in Action!* is an independent reading project that provides students with choice in completing projects that highlight the books they are reading. Project options have varying point values (10, 20, 25, 60, and 90 points) that increase with the time commitment needed to complete the project and challenge. In her class, students selected projects to complete and presented

them to the class. Time was allotted in class to work on the projects, and conferencing was utilized to check in with students and make sure they were on the right track. With reading being required across curriculum, meeting these demands can be confusing and frustrating for teachers who are not English/Language Arts teachers. Chehayl works to support content area teachers as they incorporate independent reading in their classrooms as well. “*Books in Action!* is one way to rise this new challenge and also put students in action while engaging them with subject matter” (Chehayl, 2008, p. 32).

A 2015 study conducted by Katie Dickerson, a teacher at Olney Charter High School in Philadelphia, provided strategies for teachers who want to create a classroom culture that embraces independent reading. Dickerson found that many of her students did not like reading, whether independently or as a whole group. Over a two year span she incorporated more independent reading with choice into her classroom. Through the implementation of a reader’s notebook, Dickerson was able to challenge students with sentence starters and thinking stems to keep journal entries weekly.

“We write about our books. We have readers’ notebooks where we write about the books we read. Students are sometimes given specific prompts, but usually they can pick from a variety of thinking stems to use for their entries. Most of them are Reader Response theory-based, and this allows us to reflect, verbalize ideas and opinions, and connect our independent texts to our curriculum”

(Dickerson, 2015, p. 7).

Continuing with the idea of verbalizing ideas, another strategy given for implementation of effective reading was to, “encourage students to talk together about what they are

reading” (Dickerson, 2015, p. 8). Students were held accountable for their reading, which lead to overall growth in their literacy development.

Conclusion

Middle school students are often unmotivated to read. Without foundation they fall further and further behind and reading becomes a tiring and frustrating task. Independent reading has shown to support students in becoming more proficient readers. By providing relevant, engaging tasks, that offer choice, students are motivated to read and find value in reading. Authentic activities support monitoring comprehension and work to show overall growth in students’ reading achievement.

Overall, motivation to read needs to be nurtured through reading development. Teachers must work to create classroom environments where learning to read for its own sake is emphasized over performance and competition. Students need to have opportunities to develop competence with challenging tasks where they can be successful. In addition, teachers need to communicate as often as possible the value of reading for pleasure and for information as well as find out how students perceive classroom reading activities, tasks, and materials by asking the students themselves. By doing so teachers open-doors for students and are better able to meet the needs of their learners by offering them control over their reading and learning.

Chapter 3

Context

Community

The study site, Washington Middle School, is the only middle school in the public school district. It was an addition added onto the high school building eleven years ago in order to meet the needs of the increasing student body. Located in Central New Jersey, the school is situated in a small one-square mile town. According to past years' United States Census report, there was an estimated 7,346 people who make up 1,763 families. Within the town there were approximately 2,683 housing units with an average density of 2,559.7 people per square mile. The racial makeup of those living in the town consisted of 73.46% (5,309) white, 8.62% (623) black, 0.26% (19) Native American, 4.51% (326) Asian, 0.06% (4) Pacific Islander, 9.67% (699) from other races, and 3.42% (247) were two or more races. Hispanic or Latinos made up 26.75% (1,933) of the population. Out of 2,566 households, 33% had children under the age of eighteen. Only 49.4% of couples were married and living together. Female householders with no husband made up 13.3% and 31.3% were non-families living together. The average household size was 2.81 and the average family size was 3.36.

The town is a working class community where in most instances more than one parent/guardian works. The median household income from 2006-2010 was \$73,375 and the median family income was \$88,527. About 5.6% of families and 8.3% of the population were below the poverty line.

School

The mission of the school district is to prepare students to meet the academic, emotional, and social challenges of the future. In order to do this the middle school works to provide students with essential skills necessary to acquire knowledge and understanding that was in accordance with the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards. School faculty strives to provide a safe, caring and stimulating learning environment where students respect themselves and others. Opportunities are provided to have students share their talents with the wider community and recognize the need to pursue excellence in their lives.

The school district serves students in pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade. As of the 2015-16 school year the district's three schools had an enrollment of 1,159 students and 102 classroom teachers making the students-teacher ratio 13:1. Within the district there were 94 white teachers, one black, three Hispanic, and four Asian teachers. At Washington Middle School there was a total of eighteen full-time teachers, sixteen white teachers and two Asian teachers. The middle school was the smallest-employed school because teachers were shared with the elementary school and high school. Each grade level had one teacher for each subject with two additional literacy teachers and four special education teachers. Experience amongst teachers ranged from one teacher entering her third year of teaching to a teacher who had been teaching for 38 years, 35 of them in the school district. Turnover was not significantly high in this school district with nearly one to two teachers leaving each year. Within the middle school, teachers all held a certification in their teaching discipline. Five teachers held elementary and special education certifications as well as middle school certifications. Only one teacher

obtained a master's degree in administration and at the time of the study there was one teacher working towards a master's as a reading specialist.

In middle school, students spoke English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Georgian, Greek, Thai, and others. Of all the students enrolled in the middle school, ten students were considered having limited English proficiency, 3.7%. The language diversity within the middle school included; 63.9% of students speak English, 30% speak Spanish, 1.4% speak Vietnamese, 1.1% speak Georgian, 0.7% speak Greek/Modern, 0.7% speak Greek, and 2.1% speak another language than mentioned.

The middle school faculty offered great results when it came to meeting the needs of students who were in the special education system and those who are ESL. All core teachers met each day to share information regarding student academics, as well as behavioral issues. The school's Intervention & Referral Services (I&RS) team consisted of teachers, nurse, child study team members and guidance personnel as well as the school's administrator. The school's guidance counselor worked closely with the administrator, faculty, and special services staff in order to address concerns that may fall outside of the academic realm. Parents were invited to attend these meetings to encourage parent involvement in the education process. Students with disabilities consisted of a total of 25 students in the middle school, making up 9% of the school population. Five students were in a contained classroom and joined their peers for lunch, gym, and cycle classes such as music, art, and computers. Four students were enrolled in the behavioral program where they were mainstreamed during periods of science, social studies, gym, and cycle classes, but go to a resource room for math, language arts, and writing lab. There were six students who are divided amongst two teachers based on grade level

for half the day and joined their peers for science and social studies. The rest were mainstreamed for their classes, but received a paraprofessional who accompanied them and assisted within the general education classes.

Student achievement as per the 2016 PARCC scores expressed that the middle school was comparable to the state average in language arts. Desegregating the scores further, out of 264 students who took PARCC, there was a 49% pass rate in 6th grade, 52% in 7th grade, and 52% in 8th grade. Analyzing these scores, students who exceeded expectations for Language Arts consisted of 9% in 6th grade, 18% in 7th grade, and 13% of the students in 8th grade. Students who met expectations for Language Arts consisted of 40% in 6th grade, 34% in 7th grade, and 39% of the students in 8th grade. Students who approached expectations for Language Arts consisted of 28% in 6th grade, 23% in 7th grade, and 22% of the students in 8th grade. Those who partially met expectations included 16% in 6th grade, 15% in 7th grade, and 15% in 8th grade. Finally, students who did not meet expectations included 8% in 6th grade, 11% in 7th grade, and 12% in 8th grade. Passing students included 128 white students (86%), 89 Hispanic students (64.1%), 31 students passed who were labeled with a disability (38.7%), and there were 99 students who passed that were considered economically disadvantaged (61.6%).

Classroom

The classroom, in which the study was conducted, was one of two seventh grade English/language arts and writing lab classrooms. In past years, two separate teachers taught English, each class period totaling 44 minutes. Last year, the Language Arts Department pushed for changes to be made to the class schedule to provide students with the opportunity to have the same teacher for English/language arts and writing lab. The

argument was that students often viewed the two subjects as completely separate; however, reading and writing go hand-in-hand and students needed to read and write about the similar topics, using textual evidence for support. The 2015-2016 school year was the first year when the same teacher taught English and writing lab classes. Going to a block schedule, two teachers split the students within a grade and had double periods with them that totaled 88 minutes.

The classroom in which the study took place was lively with color, which worked to welcome students into a windowless room. Bulletin boards displayed students' work and the walls were covered with motivational posters to inspire students to always strive to do their best. The desks were arranged on each side of the room with an aisle down the middle for students to face each other to promote discussion. Depending on group work; however, desks were frequently arranged to accommodate activities. The room was equipped with twenty-six desks, a teacher's desk, a large communal table, a Smartboard, and two large cabinets to house textbooks, and a classroom library.

During a typical lesson, students participated in a variety of group and independent instruction. Mini-lessons were used to engage students in the activity and teach strategies they would be utilizing within their small-group work. The curriculum often centered on independent study assignments required original, logical thinking and an inquiring mind. Students read challenging classical and contemporary pieces in an anthology, which included short stories, poetry, drama, and nonfiction. Novels that appeal to adolescent readers were also used as required whole-group reading. Specific literary terms were taught and vocabulary is addressed within context of their reading. The day began with the Word of the Day where students worked to identify the

part of speech and definition of a word they were to encounter in their daily reading and use within their writing.

Students engaged in the writing process and special emphasis was given to answering open response questions, analytical writing, and the personal essay. Spelling and grammar were taught in connection with student writing. Students maintained a writing portfolio in an effort to track their own growth and development in composition. Speaking skills were addressed through recitation of poetry, reading original writing pieces, and participating in literature circle discussions. A variety of assessments were employed to monitor student growth and development.

The year of the study, students were taking part in an independent reading program that promoted reading self-selected books. Students were given between 10 to 20 minutes a day to choose a book to read, a place to read it, and record the information in their reading logs. Students reviewed active reading strategies that assisted them in recording notes. Trips to the school library provided students with a wide variety of literature that pertained to their reading levels and interest. The classroom library had been replenished with books of students' interests. The goal was to help students become proficient to advanced readers and writers through motivating them with choice in their learning.

Students

The two classes that have been engaged in the independent reading program were those I teach for both English/language arts and writing. There is mixed level of student ability. In looking at their previous PARCC scores students either met, partially met, approached meeting, or did not meet expectations. The students who met with me for

periods 7 and 9 are considered to be in the honors class. Honors recommendations are made based on PARCC scores, students' report card grades, and teacher recommendations. Although, students' work ethic was considerably high in the honors class, the ability levels vary. Out of the 19 students only 9 students exceeded expectations and one only approached meeting expectations.

A focus group of students was selected based on the initial motivation survey administered during the first week of school. Based on the students who returned their consent form in the first few weeks of the study, students responses were coded and categorized to identify the students who seemed to be the least motivated to read. Out of the two classes, six students were selected from Periods 3 and 5 and one student from the honors class. The group consisted of two girls: Everly and Melissa, and five boys: Kane, Emit, Kevin, Michael, and Jonathan; pseudonyms were given to protect students' identity. In addition to the motivation survey, each student filled out an interest survey, which provided insight on the appropriate books to incorporate in our classroom library as well as projects to provide students' choice in activities that pertained to their interests in school.

Research Design/Methodology

Shagoury and Power (2012) explain that the primary purpose of teacher research is to assist teachers in understanding students and improving practice in specific and concrete ways. The research that has been conducted in this study is qualitative and naturalistic teacher research. This research was the process of discovering essential questions, gathering data, and analyzing to answer those questions leading to a natural extension of good teaching. I have worked to observe students, analyze their needs, and

ultimately make adjustments to my teaching and curriculum to best teach each of my students.

Teacher research begins with a question. Shagoury and Power (2012) explain that there is a number of strategies teachers can use to guide themselves through the process of figuring out a question. For many, questions are often constructed from a concern or problem they have encountered throughout their own teaching. Data collection is an important component when conducting teacher research and there are many ways in which to do so. Surveys, questionnaires, interviews, student work, and observations are a few types of data collection teacher researchers use when gaining insight into their question (Shagoury & Power, 2012). The analysis of data allows teachers to interrupt the data, which can lead to conclusions and implications for their work.

Although teacher research begins with a careful and clear-framed question, teachers are not necessarily looking to solve or prove something within the teaching. Instead, the purpose of many teacher researchers' questions is to build upon their overall knowledge by making meaning and understanding the knowledge gained. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) state:

The basis for this knowledge-practice conception is that teachers across the professional life span play a central role and critical role in generating knowledge of practice by making their classrooms and schools sites for inquiry, connection their work in schools to larger issues, and taking a critical perspective on the theory and research of others (p. 68).

Teachers are encouraged and become more aware of the environment of students in order to dive deeper into their inquiries. The collection of data opens their eyes to new possibilities and even more questions. There must be relevant and trustworthy data collection, and analysis to make interpretations of that data.

Throughout my study, I have worked with the librarian and my department members in order to gain resources and incorporate new ideas. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2013) state that, “collaboration among and across participants is a key feature” (p. 41). Teachers learn most in talking with colleagues and their eyes become open to things they had not realized before. This can spark new inquiries and new questions as well as provide opportunities to work alongside other teachers. In a way, teacher research provides teacher's with a sense of never settling or allowing others to simply give them an answer. Teachers are given a sense of wonder, which allows for teacher research to continue and thrive.

With the completion of this study, implications and claims are included in the conclusion to provide knowledge and understanding to those who read the research. This research has been conducted in order to learn more about my students, my classroom environment, and to investigate a problem I have come across within my teaching. My ultimate goal was to discover new and inventive ways to teach students through instilling a love of learning.

Procedure of Study

Framed by the philosophy and research paradigm of qualitative teacher research, this study analyzed what happens to seventh grade students' motivation to read independently when given the opportunity to self-select and discuss books in a classroom

setting that mimics a real-world café. Due to my students' lack of desire to read, this question came to me in an authentic and original way. Since the school year began at the same time as my study, I engaged students in casual conversations on the first few days of school to gauge how they viewed reading and how often they read. The qualitative inquiry strategies used to collect data for this study include motivation profiles, interest surveys, student talk, and student artifacts.

In order to insure the naturalistic approach of teacher research, I began collecting data through taking notes in my teacher research journal. I recorded my thoughts, observations, conversations with students, and student talk. I used the first few days of school to get to know students and engage them in talk that gave me an idea of how they felt towards our class and the activity of reading. Through our conversation students seemed to be honest about their feelings toward reading. They shared their strengths and weaknesses as well as the importance they placed on being a good reader. Students talked about their interests and the things they enjoyed doing in their spare time. Hardly any of the students within my two classes shared that they read for leisure on a regular basis.

Data Sources

I collected several different sources to obtain resourceful data to develop and later inform my research. "Motivation to read is a complex construct that influences readers' choices of reading material, their willingness to engage in reading, and thus their ultimate competence in reading, especially related to academic reading tasks" (Pitcher, 2007, p. 379). This logic led me to deploy an interest survey, in which students narratively responded to open-ended questions that collected data on their specific interests. In

knowing what students liked to do inside and outside of school, I would better be able to build a classroom library of books students would be eager to read during independent reading. Next, students were administered *The Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile*. Data collected from this provided insight into students' motivation, how they saw themselves as readers, and the value placed on reading in their eyes.

Another data source included a teacher journal in which observations have been recorded on a weekly basis. Students are observed while independent reading, noting their on-task and off-task behaviors. Personal reflections are made based on students' behaviors and talk, which enhance my decision making throughout the study. While reading independently, students have been asked to record the books, pages, and details in which they read. The independent reading logs provide insight to the information they are taking away from the books they read and provide them with a purpose for continued reading. Their reading logs further assist them in completing projects that are presented in small-groups, once a month, in a mock cafe setting. Participation in these discussions are recorded and also used to note student motivation to read and to inspire others to read as well.

Data Analysis

The data collected over the duration of this study was used to make conclusions about the impact reading self-selected text and talking about books with peers has on students' motivation to read. The interest survey and motivation profile provided me with a way to chart similarities and differences amongst students, as well as gauge their individual stance on reading. In obtaining this information I am better able to plan instruction that meets the needs and interests of my students. Through observing student

behavior and talk while independent reading as well as within their small-group discussions, I am able to gain additional insight to students' perceptions that they have not necessarily shared with me or written down in their reading logs. Noting the behavior within my classroom and outside of it gave me a better understanding of students' increased motivation to read on their own. Finally, student artifacts, such as their independent reading logs and projects presented in their cafe groups assisted in noting changes observed in students from the beginning of the study to the end in viewing how their opinions about reading evolve, as stated in monthly reflections during their cafe discussions.

Chapter 4

Introduction

“Remembering the joy of discovery is one of the hidden gifts of teacher research, a chance to delight in (and be inspired by) patterns as they emerge” (Shagoury & Power, 2012, p.135). My data analysis reflects a narrative and thematic discussion of what happened as I worked to answer: What happens to seventh grade students’ motivation to read independently when given the opportunity to self-select and discuss books in a classroom setting that mimics a real-world café? How can self-selecting texts empower students in their reading and help them develop a love of reading? How can conversations and group discussions build motivation and encourage students to read on their own for enjoyment? What happens when students are given choice in their learning? As I analyzed my data I found that patterns emerged within my study.

The first pattern being from the motivation and interest surveys that indicated that the seven students selected were among the least motivated readers within my class. After answering the questions, I coded each student’s response to provide an overall score for their self-concept and value of reading. Based on the percentages earned, the students who obtained the lowest scores in each category were chosen as the focus group.

Everly is a 7th grader who enjoys learning and reading about astronomy. Everly shared that her favorite class is World Geography. She finds English to be more fun when students are given opportunities to lead and have more discussions about the topics learned. Outside of school she enjoys watching TV and Netflix, and hanging out with her friends.

Melissa is in the 7th grade honors class; however, her recent PARCC scores reveal that she only approached meeting expectations. She enjoys reading both fiction and nonfiction novels that revolve around science because she “finds it very interesting”. If given three wishes, Melissa said she would wish for no more school. Melissa has been very vocal about not liking to read and admits that she thinks reading is a boring way to spend her time.

Kane is an athletic 7th grader who loves sports. His favorite sports are football and basketball. Coincidentally he shared that he enjoys learning and reading about new sports, which is why gym is his favorite subject. In class, Kane is very active and needs to constantly get out of his seat to walk around. He likes when English class incorporates games to go over content and videos to show a visual representation. He does not see himself as a good reader and admits to never reading or sharing books he has read with friends.

Emit is a 7th grader who enjoys riding his bike and playing video games. He believes the best thing about school is being able to talk to his friends. Emit’s favorite subject is gym and he likes to play soccer and football. When it comes to reading, Emit thinks he is an OK reader and shared he likes to read about technology. He admits to sometimes sharing his ideas within a group discussion as he is quiet and prefers to listen to others share.

Kevin is new to the school district as a 7th grader. He likes to hang out with friends and skate in his free time. He was excited to meet new people when he started school this year and has made friends quickly. His favorite subject is gym because he is active and likes to play soccer. Kevin likes when English class incorporates activities

such as electronics. He shared that reading is not something he does often and he views himself as an OK reader.

Michael is 7th grade student who enjoys playing soccer and Pokemon Go. He likes reading fiction books and working with partners in English class. His favorite subject is math because he, “is good at it”. He shared that he never tells his friends about books he reads and thinks of himself as an OK reader.

Jonathan is a 7th grader who enjoys soccer and said his favorite subject is gym because he gets to play. He finds English fun when the class takes part in various activities. He enjoys learning and reading about computer science although he admits to not reading very often. Jonathan shared that he is an OK reader and that when discussing books with his peers, he sometimes talks about his ideas. He admits that he would be unhappy to receive a book for a present.

The second pattern pertained to the level of engagement students exhibited while reading independently as I noted their off-task behaviors. An observation chart was used to note when students in the focus group were not engaged in their reading. Off-tasks behaviors included looking around the room, talking, constantly switching books, and fake reading. Students who engaged in more off-task behaviors were considered less engaged, while those who engaged in less off-task behaviors were viewed as highly engaged.

A third pattern included the number of books students completed throughout the 12 weeks of independent reading. Through interviewing, students shared with me the books they were reading and had read. Based on the number of books students were able

to complete, the most being four, students who read more were noted as highly engaged in their reading.

The final pattern that appeared was within the students' discussions, reflections, and work that provided insight to their overall change in the value of reading. Students explicitly shared how they felt about reading after taking part in independent reading and what caused the change within them.

Initial Desire to Read

Through initial observations and discussions with students, individually and whole group, I was given an idea of which students enjoyed reading and those who did not. I started thinking about which students to include in the focus group of this study. An eye opener was seeing which students completed their summer reading projects. Over the summer students were required to compose two summer reading projects after reading one nonfiction book and one fiction. Books were chosen from a list that was approved by the district and were grade appropriate. The fiction books included: *Tangerine* by Edward Bloor, *Chains* by Laurie Halse Anderson, *Wintergirls* by Laurie Halse Anderson, *Hope Was Here* by Joan Baur, *Ender's Game* by Orson Card, *Artemis Fowl* by Eoin Colfer, *I Though My Soul Would Rise and Fly: The Diary of Patsy, a Freed Girl* by Joyce Hansen, *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon* by Stephen King, *Savvy* by Ingrid Law, *Airborn* by Kenneth Oppel, *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* by John Boyne, and *Graceling* by Kristin Cashore. The nonfiction novels included: *Claudette Colvine: Twice Toward Justice* by Phillip Hoose, *Flesh & Blood So Cheap: The Triangle Fire and its Legacy* by Albert Marrin, *Candy Bomber* by Michael Tunnell, *Ideas that Changed the*

World by Julie Ferris, and *Surviving the Angel of Death: The True Story of a Mengele Twin in Auschwitz* by Eva Kor.

Many students chose to complete only one project; however the students who stood out were those who chose not to complete either the reading or project. When asked why, the common response was, “I did not like any of the books.” Everly and Melissa completed one summer reading project; however, it was clear that they did not read enough of the book to provide insightful information for their projects. Kane, Emit, Kevin, Michael, and Jonathan did not complete either reading or project.

During the second week of school, students were administered Gambrell and Palmer’s (2007) *Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile reading survey*. The survey enabled me to assess students’ motivation and the way in which they viewed themselves as readers. The results of this survey led me to select the seven students who became the focus group of this study being that they were the least motivated and did not seem to value reading. Through interpreting the results of the survey, certain themes emerged amongst the students, such as students not valuing reading as a result of their friends. In addition, students did not find reading to be a fun task, which led them to not see themselves reading in the future. Table 1 is a sample of students’ responses.

Table 1

Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile reading survey

Student	<i><u>Reading is something I like to do</u></i>	<i><u>My best friends think reading is</u></i>	<i><u>I am</u></i>	<i><u>I tell my friends about good books I read</u></i>	<i><u>People who read a lot are</u></i>	<i><u>I think libraries are</u></i>	<i><u>I think reading is</u></i>	<i><u>As an adult, I will spend</u></i>
Everly	not very often	OK to do	an OK reader	I never do this	interesting	an OK place to spend time	an OK way to spend time	none of my time reading

Table 1 (continued)

Student	<u>Reading is something I like to do</u>	<u>My best friends think reading is</u>	<u>I am</u>	<u>I tell my friends about good books I read</u>	<u>People who read a lot are</u>	<u>I think libraries are</u>	<u>I think reading is</u>	<u>As an adult, I will spend</u>
Melissa	not very often	OK to do	an OK reader	I never do this	interesting	a boring place to spend time	a boring way to spend time	none of my time reading
Kane	not very often	no fun at all	an OK reader	I never do this	not very interesting	a boring place to spend time	an OK way to spend time	none of my time reading
Emit	not very often	OK to do	an OK reader	I almost never do this	interesting	a boring place to spend time	an OK way to spend time	some of my time reading
Kevin	not very often	OK to do	an OK reader	I never do this	not very interesting	a boring place to spend time	a boring way to spend time	very little of my time reading
Michael	not very often	no fun at all	an OK reader	I never do this	interesting	an interesting place to spend time	an OK way to spend time	very little of my time reading
Jonathan	not very often	no fun at all	an OK reader	I do this some of the time	interesting	an OK place to spend time	an OK way to spend time	some of my time reading

Students admitted to not reading very often. This could stem from the idea that they feel their friends did not see reading as a fun task. As middle school students, social interaction is a primary concern for many and could easily influence their views. “Social interaction supports motivation to read in a variety of ways, according to Turner and Paris (1995)” (Gambrell, 2011, p. 175). Since their friends did not seem to value reading in their eyes, these students did not see it as a fun task and responded that reading was either an OK way to spend time or a boring way to spend time. Only one student said that they sometimes tell their friends about a good book they are reading, whereas the others said they never or almost never talk about books with their friends. In reflecting on this statement, it too is tied closely to believing that their friends did not value reading. These students did not share their books with peers because they did not believe their friends would be interested in hearing about the book, so they kept quiet.

All seven of the students answered that they were OK readers. When asked how they viewed people who read a lot, five students found these people to be interesting; however, later expressed that as adults they did not plan on spending a lot of time reading. Although there was some value seen in the knowledge gained by reading, these students were not sold that reading was an interesting task, which was why they had chosen to not do it and felt they would not in the future.

Along with the *Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile* reading survey students were given an interest survey that asked them to identify the type of reading students enjoy. Each student expressed enjoyment in reading about topics that they can relate to. Many of the male students shared they like to read about sports and the females enjoy romance and mysteries. In thinking about the content that is read in school, students are not given enough opportunity to read about the topics they enjoy, which has led to reading being a daunting task for these students. They do not enjoy reading because they have not been given a chance to see that reading is enjoyable when they are able to read text that are of interest to them. When asked when they have been given an opportunity to read about such topics in school, Kane responded bluntly with, “Never!” Melissa backed up Kane’s response sharing that in school, teachers are always telling students what to read. With the lack of choice given to students in their reading, they are not provided a chance to read what they enjoy because it does not fit the mold of true school curriculum. In speaking with the seventh grade team of teachers and noting the types of text they use within their teaching, I found that the core subjects of math, history, and science use a textbook. The science teacher was the only one who accessed NewsELA.com to provide students with articles on a topic they were learning about; however, she chose the articles

that the students would read. With the lack of choice within the reading students had limited if not zero chances to read something that was of interest to them throughout the school day.

Levels of Engagement

“Motivation to read can be defined as the likelihood of engaging in reading or choosing to read (Gambrell, 2009, 2011). The engagement perspective is linked to motivation and has strong implications for practice (Guthrie & Humenick, 2004; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Tracey & Morrow, 2006). This perspective articulates the differences between engaged and disengaged readers and focuses on the characteristics of the motivated or engaged reader” (Gambrell, 2011, p. 172).

The categories for students’ level of engagement developed during independent reading through observations and interviews. The levels of engagement identified were highly engaged, mildly engaged, and disengaged readers. As students read, I noted the off-tasks behaviors of being out of their seat, continually looking up or around the room, flipping through pages/not reading, talking, and constantly switching books. Each week their off task behaviors were tallied to determine their overall engagement. Interviewing students’ provided insight of their reading selections, the number of books they were reading and had finished. A final data source which reflected students’ level of engagement was the results of the motivation survey that was administered at the end of the study and was used to note changes in students’ self-concept and value of reading. A connection was made through students’ engagement during independent reading and their overall motivation at the end of the study. Based on the data gathered, students were identified as the following.

Highly engaged. Students who were identified as highly engaged readers were those who exhibited the least amount of off-task behaviors during independent reading time, less than ten. Students were observed immediately getting their independent reading book out and choosing a quiet place to read where they were most productive. Students read for majority of the time and responded in their reading logs when told. Furthermore, these students were able to read a greater number of novels during the study, between four to three books. Lastly, each student showed improvement in their scores pertaining to how they viewed themselves as readers and the value seen in reading. Three students in the focus group of this study were categorized as highly engaged readers according to the data analysis. (See Table 2)

Table 2

Highly Engaged Readers

Student	Engaged in off-task behaviors while independently reading (10-1)	Books Read (4-3)	Self-Concept Before/After Study		Value of Reading Before/After Study	
			Before	After	Before	After
Everly	1 (talking)	4	63%	68%	50%	55%
Melissa	3 (talking)	3	58%	58%	55%	63%
Kevin	7 (talking)	3	60%	80%	48%	53%

Mildly engaged. Those who were identified as mildly engaged were readers who engaged in a total of eleven to twenty off-task behaviors during independent reading and exhibited off-task behaviors besides just talking to someone sitting near them. These students took some time to find an appropriate place to read that was least distracting to them as well as others and were often observed fake reading. At times they were seen staring at the pages or looking up from their books. Despite some off-task behaviors,

these students successfully read one to two books throughout the duration of the study. When it came to assessing how they viewed themselves as readers and their value placed on reading before and after the study, the students in this category showed some improvement; however, two students' views stayed the same. A total of three students were identified as mildly engaged. (See Table 3)

Table 3

Mildly Engaged Readers

Student	Engaged in off-task behaviors while independently reading (20-11)	Books Read (2-1)	Self-Concept Before/After Study		Value of Reading Before/After Study	
Kane	13 (out of seat, talking)	2	65%	68%	45%	45%
Jonathan	18 (talking, continually looking up)	1	58%	58%	50%	53%
Emit	19 (not reading, continually looking up)	1	60%	65%	60%	68%

Disengaged. The final level engagement included one reader who engaged in several off-task behaviors while independently reading, which limited the amount of reading accomplished each day. This student constantly talked to those around him and tried to engage others in off-task behaviors. Each day he was asked to choose a new place to read because he was distracting those around him. In addition, he began each independent reading session by asking to go to the bathroom or get a drink. Due to frequently switching his book, this student was unable to complete a novel during the study. Lastly, this student showed a decrease in how he viewed himself as a reader and the value he placed on reading after the study was complete. (See Table 4)

Table 4

Disengaged Readers

Student	Engaged in off-task behaviors while independently reading (21-30)	Books Read (1-0)	Self-Concept Before/After Study		Value of Reading Before/After Study	
Michael	27 (talking, continually looking up, constantly switching books)	0	65%	60%	60%	55%

Reading Becomes Relevant, Purposeful, and Meaningful

When my study first began I was looking to observe how self-selection of text could motivate students to read. Although this provided much insight to students' enjoyment of reading, as my study took shape, I found that it was not just about allowing students to choose their own reading material. There was more to it than students reading what they liked and more about them talking to each other about their reading selections. This in turn encouraged students to read the books their friends were reading. Seen in the motivation survey, in addition to the students in the focus group, several others did not acknowledge the value their friends saw in reading. I observed many students becoming motivated by their friends and often decided which book to read next once their friend had finished reading it. In his written reflection, Jonathan shared that he plans to read one of the books his friend read. "I feel like in the future I would like to read David's book because it seems different from the other books and he told me it is really good." Getting advice from his peers opened his eyes to a book he may not have considered before and encouraged him to read it. Students seemed to value the opinions of their classmates and once they heard that someone was reading a really good book, they wanted to know more about it. Melissa is a student who is motivated greatly by her friends. I observed her choosing the book *And Then There Were None* by Agatha

Christie because her best friend was reading it. The girls chose to sit together and read the novel, which allowed them to support one another. The social aspect and being able to read a challenging book with her friend ultimately motivated Melissa to finish the book. After I asked Melissa how she felt about reading with a buddy. “I love when I get to be with my friends and getting to read with my best friend made reading more fun.”

Making reading relevant. The cafe discussions provided an opportunity for students to meet in groups that were assigned based on the books read by each student. The week leading up to the cafe students shared with me the books they planned to present and worked to complete a chosen project for their book. The projects included a variety of ways for students to present parts of their book, without any spoilers, to encourage others to read it. The projects were labeled from levels 1-4; levels 1 and 2 were projects students could complete if they had not finished the book, whereas levels 3 and 4 included projects to do if the book was finished. Each project related to students’ lives and included topics that they engage in everyday such as: creating an Instagram post, making a Pinterest board, identifying and supporting actors and actresses to play each character, comparing and contrasting the book to its movie version, etc. Students helped in developing the projects, which lead to them taking ownership in our classroom and their overall work. “Studies indicate that motivation increases when students have opportunities to make choices about what they learn and when they believe they have some autonomy or control over their own learning (Jang, Reeve, & Deci, 2010; Skinner & Belmont, 1993)” (Gambrell, 2011, p. 175). An important piece of information to note is that the students within the focus group of this study rarely complete homework. In the first marking period four out of the seven students failed English class due to not

submitting major assignments and lack of homework completion. With that being said, when it came to completing a project for the cafe, all seven students had their project in on time and completed with much effort. The idea that they were able to choose their projects that were relevant to their everyday life, motivated students to do their work. Kane, a student who did not complete his summer reading project, shared with me that he enjoys independent reading because he is given choice. “I get to choose my book, where I read it, and the project I want to do to tell my group about it. This is the only time I got to pick how I do my work and it makes me want to do it.” Students placed great value on their projects because they were informative and helped students decide which books to read next. In Kevin’s reading log reflection stated that: “The projects tell me how interesting the book is. People help me figure out which book to read next based on their projects.” By seeing the importance in the projects and their value in assisting students in deciding which books to read next, Kevin, a student who never completes homework, always had a project to present in the cafes. Emit was another student who rarely completes homework and major assignments that need to be finished outside of class. When asked why he completed the cafe project he simply stated, “Because I liked the book and wanted to share it with others.” By seeing the value not only in the book he read, but also the way in which the project assisted him in sharing his book with his peers, Emit took it upon himself to complete his work.

Making reading purposeful. While students presented their projects in the cafe, they were encouraged to not only listen to one another, but also ask insightful questions that provided them with more information about the book. The idea was to assist students in having enough information about the books their peers were reading in order

to make informed decisions about which books they would like to read in the future. When asked how they felt presenting their books to their groups, Everly shared: “I felt good sharing my story to my group because I could tell they were listening to me and were interested in what I was saying. They asked me questions that helped me tell them more about my book. Stuff I wouldn’t say if they didn’t ask me.” Others shared that their discussions assisted them in knowing which books to read and which not to. Emit’s reflection stated: “I plan to read only one of the books presented in my group. The other books seem boring and I do not think I can connect to the characters.” Through the discussions, students were provided insight into the stories that appeal to their interests that they may not have considered before. They also became more aware of the types of books they enjoy reading.

Continuing with this idea, student choice was a major component in this study as I was looking to see how providing student choice motivated students in their reading. Before incorporating independent reading into the daily schedule, many of the students had little knowledge of what they truly enjoyed reading. They were also not open to reading books because they did not think they would like them. Students who did not like reading found a new appreciation for it. Melissa shared with me early on in the study: “I really like my book and I don’t like reading.” In addition, those who thought they knew what they enjoyed reading were exposed to various genres that they have grown to love reading. Kane shared, “My book just got really funny and I don’t usually read funny books.”

Students' reflections provided insight to how their views of reading changed when given an opportunity to select their own reading material and discuss their books with others. Students' responses included:

Everly - "Yes, my opinion about reading has changed because at first I didn't really admire reading because I thought it was boring. But now I thought to myself that reading can take me anywhere."

Kane - "My opinion on reading has changed now that I know that each person has their own type of book they like to read and as long as I know what mine is it will be easy to continue reading."

Jonathan - "My opinion has changed a little because before I thought I would like every book, but now I know more about what I like and what I don't like. Usually I don't start reading books that are interesting. I know now what to read because of suggestions."

Melissa - "My opinion has changed in reading in the way that I look forward to the time of day we get to read. I realized I just have to give books more of a chance."

Michael - "Like before I hated reading and would fake read, but now I just dislike reading. Before I thought all books were boring, but I have found some that aren't."

Student's reflections revealed that their overall opinions of reading changed because they were finally offered an opportunity to choose reading material that interested them. When students started reading a book that they did not like, they were encouraged to put it back and find a new one. With the opportunities to change their books, students became more aware of the kinds of books they enjoyed reading and became more inclined to read.

Making reading meaningful. Everly found that she enjoys reading fiction books, in particular those that include fantasy. She read a total of four books: *The Lightning Thief* by Rick Riordan, and all three books of The Divergent Series: *Divergent*, *Insurgent*, and *Allegiant* by Veronica Roth. She shared with me, “Reading these books let me go to a new world. I was able to escape.” Everly was able to read a lot because she began hooked on a series. After completing one book, she knew exactly which book she wanted to read next. “Because I liked *Divergent* as soon as I was done I started the next book.”

Melissa found that she enjoys reading mysteries and read a total of three books. The novels she read included: *And Then There Were None* by Agatha Christie, *The Face on the Milk Carton* by Caroline Cooney, and *The Haunting of Alaiabel Cray* by Chris Wooding. She said these stories engaged her and made her want to keep reading. “I couldn’t put [the book] down. I needed to know what happened next.” Since these books grab her attention with their suspense Melissa felt that it allowed her to finish them quickly.

Kevin selected books whose characters he could relate to. He read a total of three books and each had a main character who found himself in a certain kind of trouble they needed to overcome. The first book he read was *Cruisers* by Walter Dean Myers which followed eighth graders Zander and his friends, Kambui, LaShonda, and Bobbi as they start their own newspaper, The Cruiser, as a way for speaking out, keeping the peace, and expressing what they believe. Kevin shared that he was able to relate to these characters because they fought for what they believed in. The other novel Kevin read was *Monster* by Walter Dean Myer, which followed a troubled teen as he awaits trial in a juvenile

detention for a murder and burglary. Kevin shared, “I have never been allowed to read about things that I find interesting. I learned a lot from the characters in these books. It makes me think about what I do and say in my life.” Recently he finished reading *Travel Team* by Mike Lupica. Since this book included Kevin’s favorite sport basketball he said he was able to relate to the main character. “The main character Danny was small and needed to fight for a spot on the team. I am kind of small too, but that shouldn’t keep me from doing what I want to do.”

Kane read a total of two books: *Surviving the Angel of Death* by Eva Mozes Kor and *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* by John Boyne. Both books were written about the historical event, the Holocaust and grabbed Kane’s interest because he said he likes history. “It is crazy what happened when Hitler ruled. Once I read my first book, I knew my second book was going to be on the same topic.” While discussing his first book in the cafe discussion, Kane was given the suggestion of *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* by another classmate.

Both Jonathan and Emit read one book each. Jonathan read *The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton and Emit read *Holes* by Louis Sachar. Both boys shared that they enjoyed their books; however, they shared that they watched the movie first. In having background knowledge of the books both explained that it helped them stay engaged and point of differences the book and movie had. Emit shared with me, “Holes is one of my favorite movies so reading the book was easy to follow along. In my reading log I noted the similarities and differences and there weren’t that many differences.” The use of background knowledge and being able to use it to comprehend the book kept these two students engaged in their reading.

Michael started reading *The Cay* by Theodore Taylor. This was a book he tried to read in sixth grade, but said he just did not find it interesting. After reading an excerpt in our anthology books, Michael shared that the book sounded interesting and was one he wanted to try to read again. Even though he did not finish the book within the 12-week study, he is still working to complete the book and has not given up on it.

In reflecting back to my original question: What happens to seventh grade students' motivation to read independently when given the opportunity to self-select and discuss books in a classroom setting that mimics a real-world café, I have discovered the power in allowing students choice, which has led to students' improved motivation to read. Through self-selecting novels during independent reading and being given an opportunity to discuss their books with their peers, students became more knowledgeable about the kinds of books they truly enjoy reading. Students, who at first found reading to be a boring task, were able to see the value in it and find enjoyment when they read a book they found interesting. Even Michael, who was the only student in the focus group whose motivation to read decreased, changed his views of reading from hate to dislike.

Overall, the implementation of independent reading in my seventh grade classroom impacted students' motivation to read as they were led to find true enjoyment in reading books that interest them. When reading interesting books students were more inclined to share their books with their peers and encourage them to read it as well. Café discussions and projects were meaningful to students as they worked to complete the necessary assignments in order to have enough information about their book to share with their group members. Through reading books that students self-selected and having

opportunities to discuss, students' viewed themselves as better readers and ultimately saw the value in reading.

Chapter 5

Conclusions, Limitations, and Implications

Conclusions

“Teaching itself is humbling. A teacher who systematically and intentionally investigates her practice may develop a heightened sense of fallibility, which is at odds with the premium placed on certainty in the academy or ‘definitive findings’” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 338). Although there are limitations to this study, I have been humbled by the findings to my question: What happens to seventh grade students’ motivation to read independently when given the opportunity to self-select and discuss books in a classroom setting that mimics a real-world café? At the local level, I conclude that the participants in the study have grown as readers as they have found enjoyment in reading books they find interesting. This conclusion was made based on the multiple patterns that emerged during data analysis. The first pattern included students in the focus group being amongst the least motivated readers within my two classes. The second and third patterns were closely connected in that students’ level of engagement while reading seemed to impact the amount of reading they accomplished throughout the study. Students who were on-task during independent reading read more and those who exhibited off-task behaviors more frequently were unable to read as much. The final pattern was seen in students’ reflections where they indicated a change in their views of reading. Through self-selecting text and discussing books read during independent reading, students’ motivation increased, as they were more aware of the value in reading. Giving students choice in what they read, where they read, and how they present their reading to a group worked to motivate students to want to read more than they have

ever before. The students in the focus group read at least one book and one student read a total of four books during the 12 weeks. Students who rarely completed homework worked to compose a cafe project to present within their discussions of their book. They placed great value on their reading in order to make sure they had enough information to share with their cafe group. Students reflected that having a voice in the development of the projects and being able to choose which project to complete motivated them to want to do their reading and work.

Allowing students the opportunity to discuss their books led to new realizations of what types of books students enjoyed reading and worked to instill a value of reading as it was seen as an enjoyable task. Many of the participants in the beginning of this study believed that their friends did not find the value in reading, which seemed to influence their own impressions about reading. Reading together, discussing books, and getting recommendations from their peers opened students' eyes to how those around them truly viewed reading. As a result students were given a new appreciation for books and became more in tuned to what they enjoyed reading. The conclusions made from this study are consistent with those presented by Wendy Kasten who implemented an event called *Book Bistro* in a seventh grade classroom. *Book Bistro* provided students with an opportunity to have control in their learning. The study concluded noting that students' attitudes toward independent reading drastically changed from before to after *Book Bistro* and conclusions suggested the reason was due to students being able to choose throughout the event.

Within my study students who exhibited the least off-task behaviors were highly engaged in their reading and as a result read more. Those who displayed several off-task

behaviors during independent reading were found to be less engaged and did not complete as many books throughout the study. The café allowed students an opportunity to discuss their books within a group of students who read similar books as them. Groups consisted of three to four students and were rearranged each time. Students presented their café projects that helped guide their discussion and stay on task. Students found value in the discussions and projects as a means to discover the next book they wanted to read.

Limitations

As with any research study there are factors that may work to influence the results and findings of a study. With this study being that of qualitative teacher research no exact measurements were used to make conclusions about students' gains. Since this study was limited to a focus group of participants, the conclusions made about how self-selecting text and discussing independent reading books impacts motivation cannot be fully generalized and applied to a student population. In addition, this study took place within a 12-week duration and as a result limit conclusions to only the experiences that occurred during this brief time period. More could be concluded if the study spanned a longer period of time. Furthermore, students' reading abilities could be considered a limitation as one way to measure levels of engagement was the amount of books students read and their off-task behaviors. The Matthew Effect, researched by Stanovich (1986), supports that students with a strong reading foundation continue to grow in their literacy development while those who fall below the proficient level continue to struggle, widening the gap. Davis (2010) found the least-proficient readers demonstrated work-avoidant tactics in completing independent reading. "These students were observed

looking onto other's papers, fidgeting or playing with objects in their desks, and asking to use the bathroom or get drinks at a greater frequency than more-proficient reader" (p. 67). This study included students who were least motivated within their reading and also failed English in the past. Nevertheless, students who were considered mildly engaged and disengaged could become highly engaged if given more time to invest themselves in their reading.

Implications

"Some of the most powerful teacher research does not merely analyze classrooms and students. It also aims to change education for the better" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 339). Based on the findings of this study and the conclusion that self-selection of text and discussion works to motivate students in their reading, independent reading is a beneficial activity to incorporate in students' daily schedules. One implication from this study is for teachers and students to have opportunities to read text that is of interest to them in order to instill the value and love of reading. In observing my students reading and analyzing how the opportunity of choice has motivated them in finding a value in reading, I have been led to see the importance of providing students with appropriate material to enable these choices. Not only text that is on their reading level, but it is essential to understand students' interest and incorporate them in one's teaching as much as possible. Working with others within the school, especially the school librarian, opens doors to a world of resources teachers need to be aware of. Collaborating with other teachers encourages one to look at their classroom, students, and teaching in different ways and work to improve.

With that being said, another implication includes coming up with new ideas for teaching and providing students with more choice within the classroom. Before venturing into this research study I was unaware of how little choice I provided my students with on a daily basis. I often made the choices for them or gave them two options. Students need to have a sense of control over their learning in order to be motivated. Allowing students to have a say in learning activities and assist in developing projects that demonstrates their reading growth will provide them with a sense of ownership and a willingness to complete their work. At the completion of this study I am reminded of the importance of reflecting on my practices and working every day to improve my teaching.

In closing, teacher research works to encourage educators in digging deeper. Asking new questions for more exploration is another implication that derived from this study. As students worked to read text they selected and levels of engagement were assessed, I was led to wonder how students' academic achievement influences their motivation to read. A future study could be one that looks more closely at students' academic levels and work to assess their reading levels in comparison to their engagement while reading. Another question that appeared from this study came from the realization that most of my time was spent observing students as they read. I wonder how student motivation would have been impacted if I read along with them. Would acting as model encourage students within their own reading? A final thought includes another idea I came to ponder as I observed many students reading outside of the classroom and at lunch. Students shared that they continued their reading at home. Though my initial question focused on reading within the classroom, I am

intrigued by how reading at home can affect student readers. How does one's home life influence their likelihood to read for enjoyment? As I continue my journey as a teacher research I hope to be provided with insight to these questions and the many more that arise during my years as an educator.

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Appendix A

Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile Reading Survey

Assessing adolescents' motivation to read

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)

Appendix B

Interest Survey

Interest Inventory

Name:

Date:

1. What do you like to do on the weekends and after school?
2. What is your favorite TV show, video game, or app?
3. What are your favorite sports to play or watch?
4. What things do you like to do with your family?
5. What do you like to do with your friends?
6. What is your favorite thing about school?
7. What is your favorite class and why?
8. What are some topics you enjoy learning and/or reading about?
9. If you had three wishes, what would you wish for?
10. What is your dream job?
11. Name one way English class can be more fun.

Appendix D

Café Projects Sheet

INDEPENDENT READING PROJECTS

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Write a one-page obituary for a character.	Create a poster-sized advertisement of your book.	Create a PowerPoint casting actors and actresses in a movie version of your book. Explain your choices for each character.	Watch the movie version of your book; write a paper in which you compare and contrast the book with the movie.
Create a time-line of the major events in your book.	Create a text message thread from one character to another. Use details from the novel/chapter.	Draw your character. Using the STEAL Method characterize your character to describe what they are like.	Research the decade in which your book took place. Use visual aids, sharing significant events from the decade. Make connections with your book.

INDEPENDENT READING PROJECTS

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Find a song that could be a "theme song" for your book; bring in the lyrics to share with the class. Write an explanation supporting how this song would be appropriate.	Create an Instagram post that your character would post. Explain what the picture is of and why they would post it.	Design a scrapbook page of one character in your book. Include pictures, words, and drawings that the character might use.	Read another book by your author; compare and contrast the two books in your paper.
Draw a map of the settings in your book.	Create a Pinterest board for one of your characters. Choose a theme such as style, hobbies, career, travel, etc. Explain your board and the reason for its creation.	Create a picture book or PowerPoint telling the story of the novel. The book/PowerPoint should be at least twelve pages/slides. The book must have pictures that are hand drawn. The PowerPoint must have graphics and animation.	Write your own story. Use one element of the book you read and create the rest.