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BOYS AND LITERACY:
DISENGAGING FROM READING

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Education:
Reading/Language Arts

by
Barbara Ann Ell
June 2006

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A Project
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Approved by:


Diane K. Brantley, First Reader


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June 7/06
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ABSTRACT

Boys are disengaging from reading in the classroom and for leisure. To disengage from something is to release yourself from that which is holding or connecting you or to free or detach yourself from it. This project will explore why boys disconnect from reading. The quantitative study investigates what disparity exists between girls and boys and how changes can be implemented to equalize reading choices for boys.

I will clarify how reading disengagement in boys is in part responsible for the higher dropout rates in California schools. I will describe what reading materials are available to increase boys' interest in literacy and how teachers can develop programs and increase selections of male reading materials in the classroom. I will explain how parents, especially fathers, can involve themselves in their children's reading education and reverse the effects of disengaged reading habits at a very early age.

This project employs several teacher questionnaires and two surveys from sixth-grade boys in local middle schools in California. The questionnaire allows us to see opinions that boys, have on their reading habits, behaviors, and reading choices, from the teachers' point of view. The boys' survey provides data which reveals the opinions of boys' interest

in reading and in their preferred choice in extra curricular activities.

By investigating the reasons boys disconnect from reading I hoped to discover ways to increase the significance and importance of reading for boys, by finding the causes of disengagement in boys and then use this knowledge to reverse the disinterest boys have in reading.

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I would also like to thank Laura Dean and Casie James for your precious and valuable time in collecting all the surveys and providing me with the data to complete this project.

DEDICATION

Thank you to my family and friends for helping me to achieve this goal.

I dedicate this project, first and foremost, to my daughter, Tara and my son-in-law, Bryan. Thank you for providing me with a place to live and study while I pursued this higher educational degree. Thank you for the love, support and understanding when times got tough.

I also dedicate this project to my son Toby whose reading habits in elementary school inspired me to pursue an education as a reading specialist. To Hope my daughter-in-law thank you for all you give to my life and for the time you spent helping with the formatting of this project. To my wonderful grandson Tristan I dedicate this project to you, in hope that one day you will develop a greater understanding and a passion for reading.

Last but not least, to Marjean. Thank you for lending me your ear and listening attentively while I threw around ideas during the development of this project. Thank you for your expertise and guidance during the long hours of tallying survey responses at Starbucks.

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND

Introduction

Imagine walking into an elementary classroom and observing all the students, boys and girls, engaged in reading and writing activities. Every child is excited and confident about the book they are reading. They cannot wait to relate the details of their current book to anyone who shows an interest. Does this sound like an ideal classroom? Would we find boys confidently reading aloud or silently, or find them engaged in the activities that lead them to fluency in reading? Boys in our current classrooms are not developing the confidence to become lifetime readers. Are boys disengaging from reading and activities aimed at teaching them the habits of a life long reader? Will gender specific reading materials, different choice in books, male role models, and interest building instruction reverse the effects of disengaged reading habits in boys?

Literature is often centered on choices of books and reading activities specifically designed for girls. Boys are afforded very little choice in reading materials. The disparity in the choice of books, the limited genre of books for boys, the lack of materials specifically designed for

boys, and the lack of male role models creates the disengagement seen in boys. This disconnected behavior leads to the assumption that boys are uninterested in reading.

This project takes a look at the reasons why boys disconnect from reading. I will investigate what disparity exists between girls and boys and what can be done to equalize the choice for boys. Disparity is the condition or fact of being unequal, as in age, rank, or degree; difference: unlikeness: or incongruity. I will explore how to choose books and materials that will engage boys in reading and insure they become fluent life long readers. I will take a look at what type of teacher and parental support will be needed to assist boys in actively learning to read and continuing to read for enjoyment and information.

Background

An avid reader is someone who picks up a book of interest to them and then sits for hours devouring the content. In today's American society and culture, it is automatic to envision a female as the avid and enthusiastic reader. Why is our first impression of a female reader? Why do we not envision boys reading and devouring books? Does our culture encourage boys to read? Do we, as a

society provide images to boys, with the purpose of encouraging reading?

My interest in boys and their choices in literature emerged while working for four years at Waldenbook store. I began to notice parents and children had no idea what books or series of books identified with boys and actively sparked their interest to read. Most of the choices in books for early and intermediate readers are written for girls. When girls shop in the store they have no problem picking out several books or series of books, that boys call the "girly books." These books are mainly written by female authors and deal exclusively in things affecting girls. Most of the books written for intermediate readers have book covers that appeal to girls and not boys. According to Emily Bazelon (2006), "The conventional educational wisdom holds that boys don't like to read about girls. If a book has a girl on the cover, it's toast, no matter how adventure filled or well written" (p. 1).

I began to notice boys flocking to the comic book area, magazine aisle, biography section, science fiction area, sports section, graphic novels, and Manga books. I wanted to know what attracted boys to these book areas. Are some of these choices of reading genres considered appropriate reading materials for boys learning to read? Why are boys

rejecting books in the intermediate book area? Are parents aware of the lack in choices of appropriate materials available for their male children? Do parents know what type of materials their children are reading? My specific concern with choice in reading materials for boys lies in their continued choice of Graphic novels and Manga books. I know what type of information is contained in Manga books and know the books are read backward. I often wonder if parents are aware of the explicit materials contained in these books. I also wonder if they realize the harm these books create for a child learning to read, as the books are teaching children to read backward.

Manga is the Japanese word for comics and/or cartoons (not necessarily animated, this includes print cartoons); Manga developed from a mixture of ukiyo-e and Western styles of drawing. While Graphic novels is a term for a long-form comic book, usually with lengthy and complex storylines, and often aimed at more mature audiences.

Next, I began to take a look at literature which talks about why boys do not read what we expect them to read. Boys read magazines, comic books, graphic novels, Anime and Manga books, non-fiction books, sports books, and informational texts.

These are some of the questions I hope my research will reveal. Are boys disengaging from reading because they are bored with the limited choice in reading materials? Does the literature support what I observed in the book store? Do boys only read what interest them or can we increase their interest in different genres by providing fascinating ways to introduce books? Is intermediate reading materials limited for boys and does this limitation create a disparity which leads to boys disconnecting from reading? Are boys also disengaging from reading in the classroom? Are the available reading choices, in the classroom, not interesting or is it just their choice of reading materials is not available?

Last, I began to research the solutions of equalizing the disparity between girls and boys selection in reading materials and reading instruction. I will take a look at the ways research supports boys in reading instruction and how teachers can make different choices for their classroom libraries, with the purpose of sparking interest in boys.

Statement of Problem

Boys are disengaging from reading in the classroom and for leisure. There is a lack of reading materials and books designed to attract and increase the interest of boys.

There is also a lack of male role models seen engaging in reading. These are major problems that must be solved to reverse the effects of why boys are disconnecting from reading. Reversing the disengagement in reading may ultimately lower the dropout rates of boys leaving high-school and possibly increase the choice boys make on whether to attend college.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to find out why boys disengage from reading and how we can spark their interest in reading. I want to discover if research supports my observations of inequality between girls and boys choices in literature. How can we reverse the effects that poor literature choices and instruction have made on boys? With the installation of new instructional programs, providing male role models, implementing materials designed for boys, and providing interesting reading materials, will there be a marked improvement seen in reading interest among boys? What can teachers do to spark their interest in reading? It is important to learn techniques that spark interest in boys so they will achieve higher levels in reading. When educators create an environment conducive to learning reading and subject matter materials the disengagement seen in boys will

diminish which in turn will lead to fewer boys dropping out of school and more males attending college. This research will take a look at how teachers perceive their reading instruction and the choice teachers make in selecting reading materials. Do teachers choose reading materials that are gender neutral or gender biased? The boys' survey will allow a glimpse at male opinions on reading and the activities they are interested in.

Rationale for this Study

By investigating the reasons boys disconnect from reading, we discover ways to increase the significance and importance of reading and therefore, reverse the disinterest that was created. Creating programs and providing materials designed to boost the interest of boys will enhance their learning experience in reading, writing, and other subject areas. Specific programs, such as workshops which involve positive male role models will allow boys to see men do read and they do enjoy reading. Choosing books and materials created for boys will give males a choice to read things that hold their interest. This choice will spark an interest in reading and improve their reading abilities and skills and ultimately increase reading scores, as well as increase enjoyment in school and higher education. It has

been found that the more a child engages in real-life text reading, the higher they perform on reading tests (Brantley, 2006).

Hypothesis

Gender specific reading materials, more choice in books, male role models, and interest building instruction may reverse the effects of disengaged reading habits in boys who need to learn life long reading skills.

Importance of the Study

The study is important to learn how to reverse the effect of years of disengagement in reading. It is important to learn reading strategies which are used to spark interest in boys so they will achieve higher levels in reading. It is necessary to study the differences in gender specific reading materials to realize what effect these materials have on why boys do not read. Relying on one new technique will not undo the effects that are causing boys to disconnect with reading. Therefore, it has become evident, from this research, there are multiple levels of reinforcement required to reverse the learned behaviors apparent in boys.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined as they apply to the project.

- Archetypes - An original model of which all other similar persons, objects, or concepts are merely derivative, copied, patterned, or emulated.
(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archetypes>)
- Disengage - 1. To release from something that holds fast, connects, or entangles.
2. To release (oneself) from an engagement, pledge, or obligation.
To free or detach oneself; withdraw.
(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disengage>)
- Disparity - 1. The condition or fact of being unequal, as in age, rank, or degree; difference:
2. Unlikeness; incongruity.
(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disparity>)
- Flow - A sense of control and competence.
(Smith, Wilhelm, 2003, p. 280)
- Graphic Novels - A term for a long-form comic book, usually with lengthy and complex storylines, and often aimed at more mature audiences.

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Graphic Novels](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Graphic_Novels))

- Manga - The Japanese word for comics and/or cartoons (not necessarily animated, this includes print cartoons); Manga developed from a mixture of ukiyo-e and Western styles of drawing.
(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manga>)

Assumptions

The following assumptions were made regarding the project:

1. Materials and books for boys to read can be acquired.
2. Materials and books chosen will be interesting to boys.
3. Boys are given a choice on what they would like to read.
4. Teachers can make different choices in reading books and activities to create an environment that stimulates reading interest.
5. Books in the classroom may be gender neutral, male oriented or females oriented.
6. It is feasible to accommodate books and materials in the classroom for both genders.
7. The number of year's teachers have been employed.

8. All teachers in study are credentialed.
9. Some of the teachers in study may be reading specialists.
10. There may be a lack of male role models or father figures involved in the classroom or boy's life.

Organization of the Project

The organization of the project was divided into five chapters. Chapter one provides an introduction, background, and statement of the problem. Next, the chapter includes the purpose of the study, the rationale of the study, and the hypothesis. Lastly, the importance of the study is provided, then the definitions of terms in the project are listed, and the assumptions of the project are provided.

Chapter two begins with a review of the literature provided in the project with a detailed focus on literacy. Second, are details of literacy statistics, dropout rates, literacy rates and scores. Third, are several reports from Waldenbook sales, the section providing the reasons boys read less, and the obstacles boys must overcome to reading. Lastly, is an in-depth discussion of the choice boys make in reading materials, the strategies to help boys read, and the solutions to aid reluctant readers.

Chapter three documents the methodology used in this project, the objective of the study, and how the project was developed. A description of the quantitative study, the description of the research groups, and how the data was collected are related in this chapter.

Chapter four presents the discussion of the findings from the project. First, is a discussion about the results of the teacher's questionnaire, and second is about the results of the two boy's surveys. Third, is a summary of the findings relating to reading and literacy as provided by the teachers involved in the study and from the boys participating, in the project. Lastly, four figures are provided, in graph form, to enhance the data collected.

In chapter five the conclusions of this project and the recommendations for change in reading instruction for boys is provided. The recommendations include a revised survey, reading interactions among boys, inclusion of male role models in the classroom are discussed. The next discussion is about how community programs, more books and materials, and increased participation in literacy development will assist boys in reading achievement.

Following Chapter Five is the Appendices are provided for the project consisting of: Appendix A is the Teacher Questionnaire; Appendix B is the Boys Survey #1; and

Appendix C is the Boys Survey #2. Finally, the Project references are listed in detail.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

In this chapter the pertinent research information, will be reviewed about boys disengaging from reading. Dropout rates, statistics and sales reports will reveal statistical data which show a decline in boys' reading and the types of books they purchase. Next, this chapter will look at the reasons boys read less than girls and the obstacles standing in their way of reading. The next thing to look at in this chapter will be a listing of choices in reading materials preferred by boys and strategies to facilitate engagement in reading. Lastly, an in-depth discussion about the solutions research has found to help boys engage in reading is provided.

Focus on Literacy

Janet Towell (2004) quotes R. Anderson, "Research has shown that reading to children from the time they are born is the key to success in school and beyond" (p.54). "When children are read to in a parent's lap, they associate love with reading. Children learn to recognize the sounds of language and how a book works, which are beginning steps in

learning how to read" (p.54). According to Loven (2003), First Lady Laura Bush is quoted as saying, "When you read with your child, you show them that reading is important, but you also show them that they're important" (p.54). Lilley and Green's (2004), research explains when children are actively engaged with interesting and meaningful reading experiences they will develop literacy knowledge early in their lives (p.56). Kay Hyatt (2002) quotes Jeffery Wilhelm as saying, "You can't teach kids unless you know them, care about them and address them at their point of need and interest" (p. 2). Teachers' must get to know their students, especially boys and then consider their interest when developing reading programs for them.

G. Kylee Beers (1996) identifies three distinct categories of students who can read but don't:

- The dormant reader: "I'm too busy right now!"
- The uncommitted reader: "I might be a reader someday."
- The unmotivated reader: "I'm never gonna like it!"

(p.5).

Are these students the exception or are they the children who do not have reading and literacy support at school or at home?

The National Education Association (nd) has listed some interesting facts about children and reading on their website.

- Children who are read to at home have a higher success rate in school.
- Children who are read to at home enjoy a substantial advantage over children who are not.
- Twenty-six percent of children who were read to three or four times in the last week by a family member recognized all letters of the alphabet.
- Only fifty-three percent of children age's three to five were read to daily by a family member.
- The more types of reading materials there are in the home, the higher students are in reading proficiency.
- Students who do more reading at home are better readers.
- Children who read frequently develop stronger reading skills.
- Where parent involvement is low, the classroom mean average (reading score) is 46 points below the national average. Where involvement is high, classrooms score 28 points above the national average (p. 1).

Reading at home with children and having lots of reading materials indicates children will attain higher reading proficiency and develop stronger reading skills according to this study.

Neuman (1999) states, "Studies have found that simply the number of books available in the home stimulates literacy skills in children" (p.55). With this said how do educators address the needs of boys and get books into the homes of children who are impoverished and cannot afford them or may not have parents around to buy books for them?

Literacy Statistics

According to literacy statistics from data presented on The Literacy Company's (nd) web site, "Sixty percent of America's prison inmates are illiterate and eighty-five percent of all juvenile offenders have reading problems". "More than three out of four of those on welfare, eighty-five percent of unwed mothers and sixty-eight percent of those arrested are illiterate, About three in five of America's prison inmates are illiterate" (p.1).

"In the United States, one in 32 people are in or have been in the criminal justice system. One in 32 people in the United States according to the Justice Department is currently in jail, in prison, on

probation, on parole, or has been one of these things.

The majority of these people are male. The majority of the male prison population has limited education and many are high school dropouts. They are limited by their education and these limits are almost always related to reading problems" (Jones, 2003, p. 4).

Every child begins school wanting to learn to read. We have 100 percent enthusiasm and desire when they start school (Trelease, 2001, p. 1). If Trelease's statement is true, then how or when did we lose the enthusiasm and interest of boys? We need to regain their enthusiasm and desire for learning and reading so they will not be the next inmates or dropout of school before earning a high school diploma. The next section details the statistics surrounding the dropout problem as well as noting the reasons why students do not finish high school.

Dropout Rates

Why do students, especially boys, drop out of school? There is no single reason why students drop out of school. "The single strongest predictor of whether students will drop out of school is whether they have been retained in grade" (Heubert, 2000, p.22). Happel (2006), "About one million students drop out every year, and nearly half of all

African Americans, Hispanics and Native Americans fail to graduate" (p. 1). Happel also reports, "Drop outs are more likely than high schools graduates to be unemployed, in poor health, living in poverty, in prison or on public assistance, and to have children who also drop out of high school. On average, a high school dropout earns \$9,200 less per year than a high school graduate, and about \$1 million less over a lifetime than a college graduate (p.1).

First Lady Laura Bush was a guest on Larry King Live, March 24, 2006. Mrs. Bush is quoted as saying, "Boys are having a hard time. We know that more young men go to jail, that boys are much more likely to join a gang, they are more likely to drop out of school" (p.5). Further supporting this notion, a 2004 federal study of gender equity shows that boys are less likely to graduate from high school or college. Fifth-seven percent of all bachelor's degrees awarded in 2002 went to women (Flannery, 2006, p. 32).

Bridgeland (2006) addresses the report published by Hart research Associates, The respondents report different reasons for dropping out of school: "A lack of connection to the school environment: a perception that school is boring: feeling unmotivated: academic challenges: and the weight of real world events" (P. iii). A survey of 467 high school dropouts was commissioned by the Bill and Melinda Gates

Foundation and was released in March 2006, by Peter D. Hart Research Associates. Their findings provide us with a window into the reason students' dropout of school. According to Hart (2006), "Nearly two-thirds of the students surveyed say they would have worked harder if expectations had been higher. About three-fourths say they would have stayed in school if they had to do it over again. Thirty-eight percent of the students polled say they had "too much freedom" and not enough rules in school and sixty-eight percent say their parents became more involved in their education only when they were on the verge of dropping out" (p. 1). Hart goes on to tell us the survey revealed, "Sixty-nine percent of the dropouts say they weren't motivated, and another forty-seven percent say classes were not interesting" (p.1). Although these are some of the reasons students leave school there are many other reasons: some had to get jobs: many became parents: some had to care for family members: and some were faced with significant academic challenges, such as illiteracy (Bridgeland, p.1).

The state of California has a significantly high dropout rate for students. During the school year 2003-2004, 34,829 males grade 9 through 12 dropped out of school in the state of California. In comparison 26,307 females left school. The total number of dropouts in the state of

California for year 2003-2004 is 61,136 students according to the California Department of Education (2006). These numbers are increasing yearly for males while for girls the drop out rate seems to be decreasing. The California Department of Education (2006) in a data report, states during the school year 2004-2005, 35,039 boys left school for various reasons. 25,576 girls dropped out of school. The total number of students who dropped out of school for the school year 2004-2005 is 60,615. This is an astounding number pf students leaving school.

During the school year 2004-2005, from the California Department of Education report (2006), 18,622 Hispanic males in grades 9 through 12 left school. This number is followed by 8,016 White males, 5,122 African American males, 1,393 Asian males, 527 Filipino males, 404 American Indian males, and 268 Pacific Islander males.

Comparing two local counties in California, Riverside and San Bernardino counties, for the year 2003-2004, Riverside County had a total of 2,338 students dropout of school. San Bernardino County faired much worse with a total student dropout number of 5,369. During the year 2004-2005, Riverside County increased their dropout number to 3,491 students. San Bernardino County also saw a marked increase

in the number of dropouts 6,600 students for the year 2004-2005 (California Department of Education, access 2006).

With this being said, what might help students, in particularly boys, stay in school? John Bridgeland (2006) gives a few suggestions.

- Support within the academic environment and at home.
- Improve teaching and curricula to make school more relevant and engaging.
- Improve instruction and access to supports, for struggling students.
- Build a school climate that fosters academics.
- Ensure students have a strong relationship with at least one adult in the school.
- Improve the communication between parents and schools.

Literacy Rates and Scores

Most statistics are consistent, according to McFann (2004), in her article "Boys and Books". She states, "Young male readers lag behind their female counterparts". This is supported by the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) in 2001, fourth-grade girls in all of the 30 plus participating countries scored higher in reading literacy than fourth-grade boys by a statistically

significant amount (p.20). In the 1996 National Assessments of Education Progress (NAEP), females outperformed males on literacy measures by 25 points on a 500-point scale (Campbell, Voelkl, and Donohue, 1998, p. 1). Smith and Wilhelm (2002), state "The evidence of boys' relative lack of literacy skills and their continuing loss of ground is consistent across studies" (p. 3). Related in Smith and Wilhelm (2002), book *Reading Don't Fix No Chevy's*, the available quantitative data establish boys' underachievement in literacy. Schools seem to be failing boys in literacy education.

The United States Department of Education (2002) states, "According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), nearly 40 percent of students cannot read at basic level". The numbers show 70 percent of fourth grade students and 50 percent of the students overall cannot read at basic level (NAEP, 2002 p.18). That is when reading grade appropriate text these students cannot extract the general meaning or make obvious connections between the text and their own experiences or make simple inferences from the text. In other words, they cannot understand what they have read (The Literacy Company, 1996-2006, P.2). The Reading, Literacy and Educational Statistics reported by The Literacy Company (1996-2006) reports, "21 million Americans can't

read at all, 45 million are marginally illiterate and one-fifth of high-school graduates can't read their diplomas (p.1).

Taking a look at the reading scores from the National Center for Education Statistics (1996-2002) for students in fourth grade, reading at or above basic we do not see a significant difference. In 1992, male scores were reported as 41 percent and in 2002 the scores were 45 percent. Female scores were on average the same for both years, 1996 reported as 52 percent and 2002 as 53 percent (P.1). When we take a closer look at the scores reported by NCES, for boys on the 2002 report, 52 percent of the boys are reading below basic, 18 percent reading at or above proficient, and 3 percent reading at an advanced level. In comparison, girls have a lower percentage 47 percent reading below basic, a higher percentage 24 percent at or above proficient, and 5 percent at an advanced level (p.1.) This report indicates boys are below basic and not attaining the proficient or advanced levels of reading that girls are obtaining at this age.

Investigating the Nation's Report Card from NCES (2005) in Reading for the state of California for fourth graders, Black students had an average score that was lower than that of White students by 30 points. Hispanic students had an

average score that was lower than that of White students by 33 points. Male students in California had an average score that was lower than that of female students by 6 points. Comparing California to that of the Nation's public schools, California's average score for reading was 207 for 2005, where as the Nation's public schools was 217 (p.1).

Hyatt (2002) cites, a year long study supported by the Spencer Foundation as finding these facts out about boys. "Boys are goal oriented. They enjoy popular culture texts, including comics and cartoons. They know and talk about music. They like video games, movies, and TV shows. Many boys read sections of daily newspapers to keep up on their areas of interests, subscribe to specialty magazines, search the internet and communicate electronically with friends" (p. 2). Do boys have a chance to pick books and materials that are interesting to them?

Waldenbook Sales

What kind of books are children purchasing to read? Taking a look at a merchandising control report from Waldenbooks for the month of February, 2005, sales show a significant increase in the purchase of comic books and graphic novels, and Manga books or Japanese comic books, as opposed to the purchase of children and young adult books.

The purchase of Anime is .71% of the total monthly sales, comic books consist of .22% of the sales and Manga tops out at 8.35% of the total monthly sales for the store.

Children's biographies are .08% of sales, children's reference are .06%, children's science books are .25%, and Non-fiction books are .46% of sales. Young adult books are .74 % of total monthly sales and books in series are .43% of sales for the month of February (Waldenbook, 2005).

Waldenbooks merchandising control report for the month of July, 2005, indicates children's books in series are 1.26% of the total children's book sales for the year. The total children's year to date book sales are 9.75%, science fiction books is 4.17%, young adult books is 1.47%, anime is .77%, comic books are .18%, and Manga books are 9.22% of the year to date sales (p. 1,3,5). As these two reports indicate Manga is increasing in sales as well as young adult books, anime, Science books, and books in series. There is an indication of a slight decrease in comic book sales.

In comparison the Waldenbook report for January 2006, shows Manga sales at 10.68% are increasing, children's books in series are 4.75% of the sales, and young adult books is 2.18% of the year to date sales (p. 1-3).

Looking at these sales it is easy to see what type of books children spend their money on. From my observations

at Waldenbook store, I have seen an increase in the purchase of Manga books by boys of all ages. Manga consistently tops out at the top of the list each month followed by books in series and young adult books.

Children and parents are buying and spending a significant amount of money on Manga books. The price for Manga books range from \$7.95 to \$14.95 per book. One advantage of Manga books for boys is the stories are interesting to them. Another advantage of this type of book is they are all written in series which attracts boys. Boys like books that run in series, so they become familiar with the story line and the characters. Disadvantages of these types of books are how they are written, how they are read, and the content of the books.

True or False, The way Manga is merchandized in bookstores in United States is different than how it is handled in Japan? This statement is true. Stores in the United States merchandise Manga differently than it is handled in Japan. In Japan, all manner of subjects are published as Manga, including things like business books and other non-fiction categories. Japanese Manga sections tend to be organized by publisher or intended consumer, and that system works well for their market. However, our customers at Waldenbooks are most often browsing by series title, so

we shelve alphabetically by series title (Waldenbooks Book report Feb, 2005). This is why boys like these type of books and why they buy so many of them, because they run in series.

Japanese comics or Manga books are meant to be read from right-to-left word order, right page-to-left page, and back-to-front. This means the action, sound-effects, and word-balloon order are completely reversed in Japanese comics. However, manufactures in the United States have flipped the word order to read from left to right so children will not be confused (Narita, 1999, p.169). The books are still read back to front and right page to left page. Are these types of books confusing children who are learning to read? Or are they motivating boys to read? If this type of book is the main interest for boys will they learn to read using the conventions established in the United States? Typical instructions for reading a book consist of reading front-to-back, left page- to-right page, and top-to-bottom.

An article in the Washington Post by Ylan Q. Mui (2004), talks about a pilot program in Maryland, where children are reading comic books. Mui state, "The reputation of comics has improved so much in recent decades that their use in public schools will help engage reluctant

readers" (p.1). "A "reluctant reader" is usually someone with little access to books of any kind", according to Stephen Krashen (2005) in an article he wrote about the decline of reading in America (p.3). Maryland educational officials are betting that comic books can help combat the trend by meeting children on their own turf (p.2).

Stephen D. Krashen (1993) has completed extensive research on the advantages of comic book reading for reluctant readers. Krashen suggests "Comic book reading was strongly associated with more pleasure reading in general, greater reading enjoyment, and tend to do more book reading" (P.1). Krashen's results from his research show Comic book reading does not inhibit other kinds of reading, and this is consistent with the hypothesis that comic book reading facilitates heavier reading (p.7).

Krashen states, "Several eminent writers and thinkers give comics the credit for helping them develop the competence for interest in "Heavier" reading. Among them is South Africa's Bishop Desmond Tutu:

"One of the things that my father did was to let me read comics. I devoured all kinds of comics. People used to say, "That's bad because it spoils your English," but in fact, letting me read comics fed my love for English and my love for reading. I suppose if

he had been firm I might now have developed this deep love for reading and for English" (Tutu, 2004) (p. 4)

Leonard Rifas (2005) gives his thoughts about comic book use in the classroom. He says teachers could use comic books in their classrooms to "aid children in learning to discriminate among the comics as among other forms of reading". He goes on to say, Comic books can help "children who need remedial reading" to gain feelings of success in reading and with patience he believes the comic book reader can move to a "higher literacy level" of reading (p. 1).

Rifas explains, "Maryland's "Comic Book Initiative" does not propose to replace books with comic books, nor does it require any teacher to use them. The aim is to use the attractiveness of carefully-selected comics to interest students who do not like to read (especially boys); to help students find pleasure in reading; and to give them a foundation to move up to reading novels and other materials" (p.2).

Graphic novels can also aid reluctant readers.

Jennifer Fay (2004) gives a good definition of a graphic novel. It is an extra-long comic book with carefully inked cartoon characters with speech bubbles. She explains, "Graphic novels may be the best thing to happen for kids who resist the written word" (P.1). One of the big attractions

of graphic novels is that they appeal to all kinds of learning styles, claims Fay. She explains further about Graphic novels having a plot structure, characters, structure, setting, and rising action (p.2). However, Fay tells us graphic novels and comic books must be selected carefully if they are to be used in the classroom. Fay understands the limited use of graphic novels in the classroom and explains why careful selection of graphic novels is so important. Graphic novel stories tend to feature dark "superhero" themes and some images may be explicitly violent. There is also the concern of heavily endowed women drawn in skimpy attire, and some of the books include nudity (p. 2). This is why I am concerned with the Graphic novels and Manga books parents are allowing boys to purchase. I see this daily at Waldenbook store. The next section will explore the reasons boys read less than girls and what kinds of leisure activities interest them more than reading.

Reasons Boys Read Less

A study conducted by the National Foundation for Educational Research found there is a substantial decrease in children reading for pleasure (TES, 2005 p.1). Dr. Regis, the unit's research manager, said "Many leisure

interests were competing for children's time" (p.1). Regis also gives a list from boys listing their favorite leisure activities as watching television, playing computer games, meeting with friends and playing sports (P. 1).

Frank Smith (1997), tells us there are two basic requirements for learning to read; first, the availability of interesting material that makes sense to the individual learners and second, is having a more experienced reader as a guide (p.4).

Valerie Strauss, writer for the Washington Post, explains Michael Gurian's (2005), author and co-founder of the Spokane, Washington based Gurian Institute, theory about why boys fall behind in reading. Gurian theory is, if we don't teach reading and writing to boys in a boy friendly way, they will continue to fall behind. The notion of confidence in reading is central to the issue (p.3). He believes people like to do what they are good at and when boys stumble early in learning to read, it is often a skill they never warm to (p.3).

Sean Cavszos-Kottke (n.d.), a Doctoral student at Michigan State University, conducted a study in his classroom about disengagement of reading in boys. He indicates boys have been turned off to reading. In middle school he feels they begin to perceive reading solely as an

instrumental activity to be applied to high stakes tests and other informational management tasks, rather than as an avenue of pleasure (p.7). The first thing he noticed in his research was a difference in motivation to read between boys and girls. He also says despite having the skills, not all of his students were eager readers (p.6). One interesting fact from his research was "Few if any of the boys would identify themselves as readers, even in private conversation, despite the fact their backpacks were often overflowing with magazines, newspapers, and text-heavy printouts from the Internet" (p.5). Most of his male students would proudly assert that they didn't really like to read, according to Cavszos-Kotte. His students had developed a paradoxical aversion to reading that didn't stop them from reading certain print media but somehow did lead them to actively reject the label of reader (p. 6). Cavszos-Kottke increased students' freedom of choice in reading materials during SSR time in his classroom. He claims this motivated kids to read what they were interested in. He explains further, he now has a better understanding of the value of choice as a powerful motivator in adolescent literacy development.

In Reading Research Quarterly, (2003) there are different opinions about what causes boys disengagement in

reading. Brozo is primarily concerned about how to get boys to become readers and about boys becoming real men (p. 285). On the other hand, Smith and Wilhelm (2002) believe the data essentializes boys, thus concealing the great diversity among boys. Maynard (2003) however, does not find boys to be worse readers and writers: rather, she finds they are more likely to do literacy work for themselves, as opposed to their evaluators. Maynard explains further, "Boys' lower test scores do not represent their ability, or inability, to read or write: rather, lower scores represent the boys' disinterest in evaluators as an audience" (p.285). Maynard is correct in her assumption because lower test scores do not represent boys' abilities or inability in reading, and she is right in her assumption because these scores represent disinterest in reading, possibly in the selection of reading materials.

Wendy Schwartz (2003), in her article titled "Helping Underachieving Boys Read Well and Often", gives many reasons why some children do not read well and do not like to read. Some reasons are related to biological and cognitive factors. Some other impediments to reading achievement include the use of ineffective teaching strategies and materials; the lack of sufficient and enticing reading

resources in schools, communities, and homes; and family habits that do not include reading (p.1).

Smith and Wilhelm (2002), provide a definitive and compelling list of research findings about the differences between boys and girls on literacy tasks.

ACHIEVEMENT

- Boys take longer to learn to read than girls do.
- Boys read less than girls read.
- Girls tend to comprehend narrative texts and most expository texts significantly better than boys do.
- Boys tend to be better at information retrieval and work-related literacy tasks than girls are.

ATTITUDE

- Boys generally provide lower estimations of their reading abilities than girls do.
- Boys value reading as an activity less than girls do.
- Boys have much less interest in leisure reading and are far more likely to read for utilitarian purposes than girls are.
- Significantly more boys than girls declare themselves "nonreaders."
- Boys spend less time reading and express less enthusiasm for reading than girls do.

- Boys increasingly consider themselves to be: "nonreaders" as they get older: very few designate themselves as such early in their schooling, but nearly 50 percent make that designation by high school.

RESPONSE

- The appearance of a book and its cover is important to boys.
- Boys are less likely to talk about or overtly respond to their reading than girls are.
- Boys prefer active responses to reading in which they physically act out responses, do, or make something.
- Boys tend to receive more open and direct criticism for weaknesses in their reading and writing performances.
- Boys require more teacher time in coed settings.

McFann (2004) adds a few more reasons to this list of why she thinks boys do not read. First, boys value reading as a chore and not an activity. Boys are biologically slower to develop. The male way of learning is action oriented and competitive. She feels there is a shortage of male reader role models. Males see reading as a feminine activity and they tend to steer away from it (p. 20-21).

Obstacles to Reading

Why don't boys like to read? What obstacles are preventing boys from becoming efficient and enthusiastic readers? Thomas Newkirk, a professor of English at the University of New Hampshire, and author of *Misreading Masculinity: Boys, Literacy, and Popular Culture*, participated in a live question and answer session presented by Education Week, on March 15, 2006. Newkirk, answered questions about boys and literacy and how to keep them interested in reading. Newkirk subscribes to the piggy-back theory of literacy. He supports this by saying "Reading and writing "piggy-back" on the interests and passions of students. None of us reads just to read, or writes just to write. We do these things to engage with topics we are passionate about" (p.4). Another question submitted was about, How can boys be prevented from "falling through the cracks" in reading and what clues should teachers look for when they are losing boys in reading? Newkirk explains, "Boys who experience early difficulty often take on the identity and behaviors of resistant or non-readers. These include delaying tactics and "fake reading." "Reading is boring." "What this often means is that they find reading to be embarrassing to them, even shameful. These students need success - material that they can read successfully that

builds on interests they have. I think they also need strategies for dealing with difficulty" (p.5). Newkirk also supports technology as being important in engaging boys with literacy. He particularly likes digital storytelling and literacy which integrates music, text, visuals, and animation (p.4).

A national survey conducted as part of YALSA's 2001 Teen Read Week celebration netted more evidence about what boys see as obstacles to reading. These are the responses from the male survey respondents (Jones, 2003).

- Boring/not fun 39.3%
- No time/too busy 29.8%
- Like other activities better 11.1%
- Can't get into the stories 7.7%
- I'm not good at it 4.3%
- Makes me tired/causes headaches 2.5%
- Video games/TV more interesting 2.3%
- Too much school work 1.4%
- Books are too long 0.09%
- Friends make fun of me 0.01% (p.10-11).

A study of boys found when boys were read to by their fathers they scored significantly higher in reading achievement and when fathers read recreationally, their sons

read more and scored higher than boys whose fathers did little or no recreational reading (Trelease, 2001, p. xxiv).

A father's role in his child's academic achievement and early literacy may directly affect reading engagement. The earlier a father becomes involved with his child's learning and socializations, the better. A father's participation in literacy activities, the barriers parents face as a result of low literacy and their perceptions of the role that they can play in their children's literacy development may affect children's preparedness for school, according to Gadsden and Ray (2003). These factors may influence the direct and subtle messages fathers send to their children about the value, achievability, and power associated with literacy, schooling, and knowledge. Studies suggest a father's ability to support his child's learning affects the child's engagement with books (p.2). According to Gadsden and Ray, "Even when father's have limited schooling, their involvement in children's schools and school lives is a powerful factor in children's academic achievement" (p.2).

Thomas Newkirk suggests the lack of male role models in elementary schools may contribute to the disengagement of boys in reading. But he thinks female teachers can be effective if they are in tune with the interests boys bring

to school. Are female teachers failing boys in literacy if we do not pursue masculine literacy interests?

Stated in the No Child Left Behind legislation, George Bush (2002), is quoted as saying, "When it comes to the education of our children, failure is not an option." I understand this quote to mean we cannot fail any child so we must investigate all possibilities to achieve higher literacy skills for all our students. This suggests female teachers must venture out of their comfort or normal zone of interests to locate reading materials for boys. Some suggestions might consist of, professional wrestling, sports, video games, comics, graphic novels, and TV cartoons.

President Bush also says, "Every Child will read by third grade." Can this possibly happen? Will the programs, such as Open Court and Houghton Mifflin, chosen by individual states and mandated by NCLB and the National Reading Panel Report, allow all boys to read by third grade? Several researchers related in this literature have proven boys learn reading in small groups, guided reading, one on one, and by watching someone model reading. How will NCLB's mandated programs affect boys reading achievement? These "One size fits all" scripted programs installed by the individual states and "No Child Left Behind" legislation,

will leave many students behind, which is an oxymoron in it self. Rawley (2004) explains, "In order to establish a system in which not one child is left behind, every state has been expected to create standards for children to meet in the areas of reading and math in grades 3-8" (p.19). Are the state standards and new curriculum advancing all children in reading achievement? The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) does not believe the Reading First Initiative is helping children learn to read. These reasons were given in their report:

- Individually unique children suffer when they are subjected to a national, single, uniform model of reading instruction.
- Children are deprived of sensitive, responsive precision in teaching when rigid methodology is imposed on teachers.
- Teaching that is based upon a limited, inadequate research base, risks mis-educating children about reading.
- NCLB mandates are necessitating the elimination of many reading activities that teachers know to be instrumental in promoting literacy.

- Teachers are losing time to read aloud, provide independent reading, writing, and engaging in literacy discussions (p.35).

President George Bush (2006) stated that, "Reading is the gateway to educational excellence" (p.5). If we want boys to have their hands clutching a graduation diploma, then it is time to start overcoming the obstacles we've created and set up in school, in order to assure that boys read. Our first priority is to put into the hands of each boy reading materials which interest them.

Choice of Reading Materials

Boys like different types of reading materials. McFann (2004) explains, "Materials chosen for boys should feature people of different ethnicities, races, and backgrounds who live in a variety of types of homes and communities". McFann explains further, the male perspective needs to be considered in the selection of reading materials (p.21).

The educators in Ontario Canada, schools conducted a survey to determine reading practices of boys. The results conveyed boys read a wide variety of materials outside of school, including newspapers (50%), comics (35%), manuals or instructions (25%), and magazines (64%). In addition, 82%

of boys reported they write e-mail messages and participate in chat-room conversations (p.7).

Newkirk (2003) suggests, "The bias toward literacy realism and social significance causes teachers to dismiss the powerful attraction of popular culture in reading - cartoons, TV shows, rap, video games, action movies, and humor" (p.1). The genres preferred by boys should be considered the key resources in their education. Smith and Wilhelm's (2003) explanation in "Reading Research Quarterly" relates, boys reported working better when they understood the purpose of their work and the ways in which their work related to their identity (p. 281).

Boys chose reading selections which help inform their personal interests. Some of their common reading choices include "How-to books, information books, fantasy, newspapers, sports books, and graphic novels" as suggested by Blair and Sanford (2003, p. 2).

David Booth (2002) identifies several factors which enhance boys' literacy development.

- Boys need to be given choice in and take ownership of their reading.
- Book selection for boys should reflect their interests, backgrounds, and abilities.

- Boys need occasions to talk to others in meaningful ways about what they have read.
- Boys who are reluctant readers need to have successful reading experiences (p.28).

"Engaging adolescent boys in literacy should be the highest priority", according to Brozo (2003 p. 278). Brozo advocates for matching boys' interests with books that help them identify with being a male. He also advocates for discovering boys' outside-of-school interests and then finding a wide variety of literature that incorporates this interest and is written just for boys (p. 279).

Boys are more inclined to read informational texts, magazines, and newspaper articles. Boys are more inclined to read graphic novels and comic books. Boys tend to resist reading stories about girls. Boys like to read things they may be interested in doing, such as sports, hobbies, electronic texts and things they may collect. Boys read less fiction than girls and prefer to read books about escapism, humor, science fiction, and fantasy (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002, p.11).

Strategies to Help Boys Read

Smith and Wilhelm advocate for understanding what students like in order to create the conditions of the flow

experience. Flow: A sense of control and competence. It is a challenge that requires an appropriate skill level, clear goals, and feedback. The focus must be on the immediate experience (Smith & Wilhelm, 2003, p. 280). Wilhelm (2001) suggests a "two-sided learning-centered model" of teaching reading. This approach involves students and teachers reading texts together. This model is best done in contexts where the teacher and students are working together to answer a compelling inquiry question or explore a thematic issue of importance (p.27). First the teacher models the strategy and the student observes. Then, the teacher models the strategy and the student helps implement it. Next, the student takes over the use of the strategy and the teacher helps as needed. Finally, the student independently uses the strategy (p.27). This model of instruction was inspired by the work of Vygotsky and is used in many classrooms (p.27).

Reading for boys must be visible using an active technique called "Symbolic Story Representation". Boys are drawn to musical text, highly visual or visually stimulating texts, texts they could talk about, and texts that offered multiple perspectives. They like texts to surprise them, change their thinking, and humor them. They wanted more action and less description (Smith, Wilhelm, 2003, p. 281).

Boys must be motivated to read. They need clear, structured instruction, short bursts of intense work, set specific goals, praise, hands on learning, and use of humor (McFann, 2004. p. 20). Use boys' hobbies, interests, and lifestyles as catalysts for reading. Tie reading materials to boys' interests and honor their interests when selecting texts. Books with positive male archetypes are important. It is also important for boys to see adult role models engaged in reading. Young boys need to see older boys reading to and with younger boys (Brozo, 2003, p. 279).

According to Smith and Wilhelm (2003), "Boys need choice and adequate support as they learn. Teachers need to engage boys in texts shorter than novels. The social aspect of activities is very important to boys". Michelle Porche, a research scientist relates, "Boys are rejecting reading as a passive feminine activity and these rejections may improve his status with his social group but ultimately exacerbates disparities in reading engagement between boys and girls" (p.2). Smith and Wilhelm (2003) give a different perspective, "Males value activities that offer escapism and are usually physical in nature and activities in reading must benefit them immediately" (p.280). What are some of the strategies teachers can use in the classroom to benefit boys?

Strategies for the classroom include, reading aloud by teachers, guest readers, and students, is a valuable classroom activity to which substantial amounts of time should be allotted. Rotating reading materials of different genres allow boys to see the many types of reading materials available (Schwartz, 2003, p. 2). How can teachers and parents facilitate reading for children when they can read very little or not at all, or do not want to read?

Dr. Peter West, Head of the Research Group on Men and Families, at the University of Western Sydney, Australia, reports what teachers and schools should do to motivate boys in reading.

- Abandon teacher talk as the main mode of instruction and provide as much variety in instruction as possible.
- Maximize opportunities for success.
- Keep a check on who gets praised.
- Active and practical learning.
- Highlight relevance and application knowledge.
- Teach through real objects, excursions, and artifacts.
- Teach how to organize thoughts when writing.
- Make room for diverse ways of learning among boys is important.
- Teachers must raise their expectations of boys.

- Make sure boys feel valued and liked.
- Give boys responsibility for learning.
- Show you care by listening to boys' voices and correctly analyzing needs.
- Help parents to support effective pedagogy, emphasize the role of fathers.
- Support literacy at all levels.
- Model reading and keep persisting with it (p.2-3).

According to Smith, "Make learning to read easy, this simply means to make reading a meaningful, enjoyable, useful, and frequent experience for children". Teachers can ensure there is some material available which every individual child will find of interest and that there is someone, who could be another child, to help read this interesting material when children can't read it for themselves (p. 123).

What can parents do to assure their child is an avid reader? According to Maree Hedemann (2006), parents can be a model reader. Children copy the behavior and attitudes of their parents. Parents can use every opportunity to change a boy's perception that books are not only for girls. Encourage children to read aloud in their early years and read aloud to them. Don't correct every reading error.

Praise even the smallest reading achievement. Let children choose the books they read and provide easy access to reading materials (p.19).

Solutions for Increasing Boys Literacy

Some proponents feel young boys should be encouraged to talk more so they will develop their language skills. With larger vocabularies and more developed language skills, boys will increase their advantage in learning to read. Boys must see men at home and in the community reading aloud. This teaches boys that reading is an activity of value (McFann, 2004, p.22).

Boys will benefit from splitting classes into single-sex groups for language lessons. Leonard Sax (2006), founder of the National Association for Single-Sex Public Education says, "Too many boys are falling behind" (p.32). Research on single-sex education, conducted by Phi Delta Kappa, reveals single-sex classrooms might be a particularly good fit for minority, low-income students, who often lack academic and social supports at home. Especially in secondary school, they may prevent kids from dropping out (p.32). According to Rowan (2003), students who were placed in a single-sex class taught by same-sex instructors, using

traditional masculine texts, showed an improvement in reading scores and behavior problems decreased (p.284).

Woodcrest Elementary school (2006) in Riverside, California, hope a temporary change to single-sex classroom will help their sixth-graders focus better and reduce distractions in preparation for upcoming state exams. Principal Hayley Calhoun states, "They are very satisfied with the results they've had so far" (p. 1). Two weeks into the change Woodcrest teachers have noticed an improvement in students' behavior and focus. The separation has freed up both sexes to participate openly in class discussion and boys are much more willing to ask questions in class (p.2). One thing to consider is Title IX, written in 1972 to eliminate discrimination based on sex in public schools, does not mention single-sex education, but the regulations that accompany it, written in 1975, prohibits single-sex classrooms (p.2).

William Brozo (2003), article in Reading Research Quarterly, advocates matching boy's interests with books that have positive archetypal male characters. This type of book will get boys to read, keep them reading, and improve their academic performance (p. 278).

"These archetypes are the pilgrim, who is a wanderer; the patriarch, who is firm, consistent,

dependable, and fair; the king, who is 'trustworthy and wise'; the warrior, who is brave and honorable rather than violent; the magician, who is intuitive and clever; the Wildman, who desires freedom and change; the healer, who is mystical and spiritual; the prophet, who values truth and tends to be provocative and controversial; the trickster, who is 'irreverent, funny, and satirical'; and the lover, who is 'giving, caring, and intimate'" (Brozo, 2003, p. 278).

Brozo proposes several ways of engaging boys in reading activities. First, discovering their outside of school interest will offer concrete ways of including their interests inside of school. Some activities he suggests are: my bag, in which each student brings and shares a bag of items that represent him in some meaningful way; companion introductions, where students introduce themselves to a partner and then each student introduces his partner to the whole class; interests journals, in which students write in a journal about what interests them; and interest inventories, which ask students to identify their interests in accessible formats (p. 279). Immerse students in challenges, questions, problems, situations, or stories that require the student's wits, will pique their interest in reading and activities (Wiggins, 1998, p. 121).

Teachers can include Book Talks in their classroom. Book shelves should include a wide variety of literature that is "just for boys". Teachers can also invite male readers into the classroom to talk and read to students. Teachers need to encourage parental read alouds, especially fathers reading to boys.

The most important daily activity parents and teachers can do with students is to read aloud as supported by Jim Trelease (2006). How do we make reading aloud work? Trelease tells us to enrich the curriculum with books that are read for comprehension. Repeated reading not only helps children learn to read but also has an impact on school success. Lifelong enjoyment of reading is directly related to daily reading (p.1). Sharon Taberski (1998) suggests three reading comprehension strategies for class read-alouds. Strategy one: Think about the story. Strategy two: Map the characters. Strategy three: Map the story (p.2). Janet Towell (2004) says there are many benefits of reading aloud to children from an early age. To name a few, reading to children:

- Promotes a love of reading.
- Develops phonemic awareness and concepts of print.
- Enhances a child's imagination, vocabulary and background knowledge.

- Encourages children to become readers for life (p.56).

Librarians can plan programs which are aimed just for boys. Librarians can also perform book talks and encourage males from within the school and community to perform read alouds for boys. Librarians can increase the number of periodicals, magazines, comic books, and newspapers in the library. A Librarian can actively recruit boys to work in the library (McFann, 2004, p.22).

The school site can develop family literacy day which would include fathers, brothers, stepfathers, grandfathers, and uncles, who would share their time and reading skills to demonstrate reading role models (McFann. 2004, p.22).

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of the study is to find out why boys disengage from reading and how we can spark their interest in reading. Several methods can be used to encourage boys to read more materials. Implementing various reading strategies and programs will increase the interest of boys in reading. A study of the teacher questionnaire, the surveys conducted by the boys and the quantitative data collected will reveal what boys read and how to interest them in more reading materials.

Objective

The objective of this project is to increase interest in reading, among men and boys. This project will show what is required to provide an enriched literature based environment where boys will interact together with teachers, male role models, and other students to increase reading interest and achievement. The teacher questionnaire will be used to obtain information pertaining to boys and reading in the classroom and how to implement new materials to increase reading achievement in boys. The surveys from the boys'

perspective will be used to find the pertinent information which relates their desired types of reading materials. The surveys containing their preferred activities will be used to find common factors that may lead to creating and developing reading activities that incorporate these activities.

Development

The teacher questionnaire was developed to elicit responses from teachers about choices they make pertaining to male reading materials, how they choose reading materials, and how they teach boys in their classroom. Thirty-two questions were developed from research findings and readings. A scale using the choices of strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree were provided to allow the researcher to graph the results. Five open-ended questions or short responses were developed to allow teacher to voice their opinion or views about reading and how they structure reading in their classroom (See Appendix A).

Smith and Wilhelm (2002), *Reading Don't Fix No Chevys*, look at what characterizes the activities boys in their study value and they see how that relates to the boys feeling about school in general and reading in particular

(p. 17). Smith and Wilhelm developed an activity ranking sheet which the boys then used to rank the activities they most enjoyed (p.19). The first survey is borrowed from Smith and Wilhelm's activity ranking sheet. The boys in the study ranked the activities from one, being the activity they liked most to number fourteen, being the activity they liked least (See Appendix B). I then tallied their numbers and created a graph to represent their choices. The second survey was developed to compare and contrast the boy's favorite activities with whether they like to read or don't like to read (See Appendix C). I tallied their numbers and created a graph to represent their choices.

To further investigate the results of the surveys I broke the data into two categories, the first being boys who like reading and the activities they enjoy, the second being boys who do not like to read and the activities they enjoy.

Quantitative Study

This research consists of a teacher questionnaire and two surveys given to boys. The questionnaire is a random sample consisting of responses from teachers about how they perceive male reading instruction and how they choose reading materials. It also has five short response

questions about obstacles to reading and how they motivate students.

Two surveys were given randomly to boys in several language arts classes. All boys were of reading age and they were able to rank choices pertaining to reading and activities. The first survey is ratings the boys made responding to various statements about their reading habits.

The second survey is ratings the boys made while responding to various activities that interest them.

Description of Research Groups

The first group for this research is a random sampling of ten teachers. Nine of the teachers hold multiple subject credentials and the tenth teacher holds a single subject credential in English. Two of the teachers have taught for five years and two more have taught for two years. Six of the teachers are first year instructors. One teacher is teaching at a junior high school, grade six, and two teachers are instructing grades seven through twelve at a high school level. The last seven teachers are instructing at the elementary level in grades first, third, fourth, and fifth.

The second group in this research is sixty-one boys from various classrooms at three middle schools in San

Bernardino, California. Thirty-three boys liked or loved reading while twenty-eight boys did not like to read. All the boys are in language arts and completed two surveys. The first survey is their opinions on how they feel about reading and the types of reading materials they prefer. The second survey is about the extra curricular activities they prefer to participate in. Each survey was ranked from one to fourteen with one, being their top choice and fourteen, being their lowest choice.

Data Collection

The questionnaires were passed out to various teachers, collected and then tallied for responses. Next, I looked at who strongly agreed and agreed to statements in comparison to who disagreed and strongly disagreed to statements. I looked for questions that disputed each other or created a contradiction. Last I tallied the common factors in the five open-ended questions.

The surveys were given to several teachers who volunteered to give the surveys to their sixth-grade male students. I then collected the surveys and separated them into two categories. The first category is, I like or love reading, and second, I do not like to read. Next, I tallied the top five choices for each boy on the reading statement

survey and the top five choices on the activities survey. Lastly, I created a graph showing the top five choices for the group who like or love to read and compared this data to a graph of the top five activities they chose. I next created the same type of graph to show the comparisons of the students who do not like to read and the activities they like to do. These graphs can be used to compare and contrast the two different groups of boys, their favorite reading genres, and their favorite extra curricular activities.

I used the data from the first survey to discover what types of books boys who like to read are spending their time reading. My concern was what the first survey would reveal about the reading habits and type of books the non-readers prefer if they read at all. The second survey was to find out what the boys do in their spare time if they are not reading. Then I compared this data to see if there was an obvious contrast to the two types of boys and if so how this information could be used to link their favorite activities to reading and literacy.

CHAPTER FOUR
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

Included in Chapter Four is a presentation of the results from the teacher questionnaire, and the open ended questions answered by the teachers. The results from the two surveys administered to sixty-one middle school sixth-grade boys, is evaluated. Sixth-grade boys were used in this study to determine if they disengage from reading at an earlier age than previously thought by other researchers.

Presentation and Discussion of the Findings

Teacher Questionnaire

The teacher questionnaire reveals the majority of the teachers agree boys are disengaging from reading. Most of the teachers agree the reading materials in their classrooms are gender neutral. However, they agree there should be more reading materials in the classroom which are specifically oriented toward males. Several of the teachers agreed their classroom libraries are lacking books written by male authors, for boys.

The teachers were undecided about whether sports books or comic books would be choices boys made in reading

materials. However, on the boy's survey the boy's indicate they would choose sports books and comic books if given the choice. The teachers indicated the boys in their classroom prefer to read about their hobbies, escapism, humor, science fiction, and fantasy.

The next part of the teacher questionnaire is how the teachers believe boys perceive themselves as readers. The teachers agree that boys think they are non-readers and bad readers. However, not one of them gave a reason as to why boys think this way or what they believe should be done about it.

The teachers agreed boys are disengaging from reading because they are bored with the limited choice in male reading materials. However, they contradict themselves by saying they are choosing reading materials for their classrooms to facilitate interest in boys. If the reading materials in the classroom are limited for boys, then the teachers are not making choices in reading materials which interest boys. They also agree limiting reading materials for boys leads to boys disconnecting from reading.

A majority of the teachers agreed boys need a male role model, who encourages reading and leads by example. However, they did not feel it was necessary to include male figures or male readers in the classroom. The classroom may be the

only time or place, some boys and girls, ever see a man read a book. Why then do most of the teachers not want a male coming into their classroom to read? Could it be they are not willing to admit the reading materials they choose are not interesting to boys and they are not reaching some of these boys?

According to the open ended questions answered by the teachers the questionnaire revealed:

1) The obstacles preventing boys from becoming efficient and enthusiastic readers are:

- Boredom
- No hands on activities
- Materials provided
- School funding
- No Supplies
- Peer pressure
- No male influence - Role models
- Reading not socially expectable
- Influence at home

2) Specific reading materials, choices in books, male role models, and interest building instruction will reverse the effects of disengaged reading habits in boys by:

- Building their interests
- They will learn by example
- Increase Motivation
- Male Role Models
- Male Issues

3) How do teachers choose reading materials for their classroom:

- Interest of the students
- Interesting reading materials
- Choosing various genres
- Building classroom library
- Contents and topics
- Popular books
- Classic books
- Curriculum based

4) What do you think motivates boys:

- Engagement of students in story
- Interest to boys
- Role models
- Choices in books
- Eye catching
- Interesting subject matter

5) What do teachers do to motivate boys to read:

- Talk to them about their interest
- Provide them with materials of interest
- Read Alouds
- SSR - Sustained Silent Reading
- Writing about what they read
- Share books of interest
- Book Talks

Boy's Survey

The survey completed by the boys consisted of thirty-three boys who liked or loved reading and twenty-eight boys who did not like to read. The second survey included the activities they like most to do. A comparison of their reading choices and activities was evaluated for each group of boys, the ones who like or love to read and the activities they prefer most and the ones who do not like to read and the activities they like most. Lastly, a comparison was done to see if the two groups have similarities or differences.

The boys who like or love to read decided choosing the books they want to read is high on their list of priorities. Their first choice of reading materials is comic books,

followed by manga books, science fiction books, fiction books, and last is literature books. This group of boys read outside of school as well as in school and read for enjoyment (See figure 1).

The boys who like or love to read, rate playing sports as their favorite activity. Their activities consisted of playing video games, hanging out with friends, and listening to music. They like drawing, painting and cartooning, using their hands to work on something mechanical, and watching TV especially sports. (See figure 2).

The boys, who do not like to read, would choose comic books, fiction books, science fiction books, manga books and then literature books. They also indicated they prefer to choose their own books. Few of these boys read outside of school for leisure and they do not read for enjoyment especially if the book is required by the teacher. (See figure 3).

The activities they like to engage in are playing video games, listening to music, playing sports, and hanging out with friends. There is an indication of a higher percentage of boys surfing the net in this group. They like to use their hands to work on something mechanical but not necessarily painting, drawing or cartooning. They watch TV preferably sports. (See figure 4).

The common factors among both group of boys is their desire to choose their own books to read. They enjoy reading comic books, science fiction books, manga books, and fiction books. Both groups of boys' rate literature low on their list. However, this may be due to their age and grade level. Two differences that showed up in the survey were whether the boys read outside of school. The group that likes to read does read outside of school and the group that does not like to read does not read much outside of school. The boys who like to read usually read for enjoyment where as the boys who do not like to read do not find enjoyment in reading.

The boys also have common factors in activities, such as playing video games, listening to music, playing sports, watching sports on TV, and hanging out with friends. Both group of boys like hands on activities such as doing something mechanical. It is interesting to note the boys who like to read also like to draw, paint, and cartooning where as the boys who do not like to read do not draw, paint or cartoon.

One factor which may have been flawed in this survey was the question about fathers reading and the boys seeing their father read. In the group of boys who like to read only eight boys out of thirty-three boys indicated their

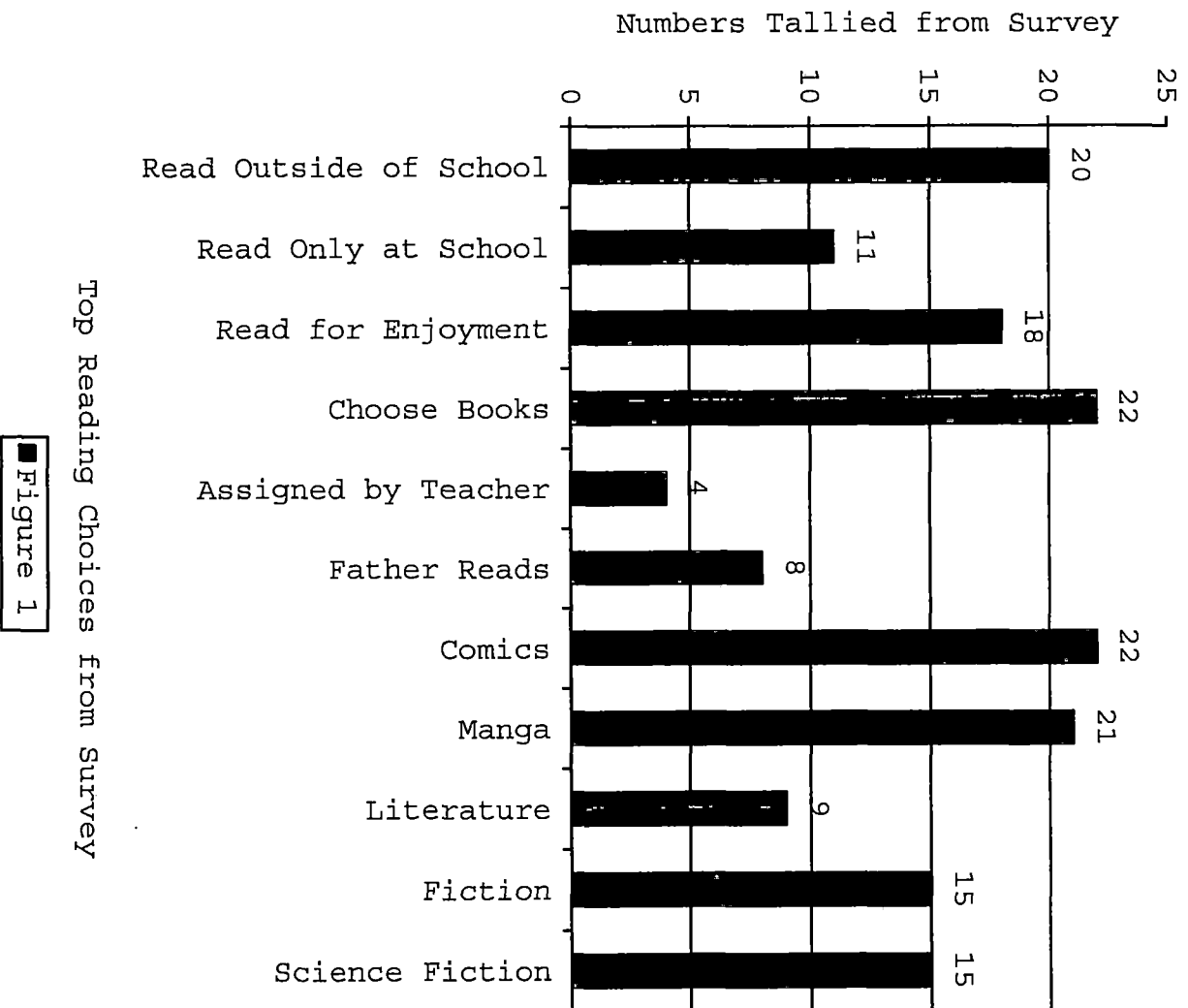
father reads and they have seen him read. Out of the group of boys who do not like to read only ten boys out of twenty-eight indicated their father reads and they have seen him read. This question may be flawed as I do not know how many of the boys in either group actually have a father at home or in fact even have a male role model to observe reading. Another change I would make in this survey is the first item on the survey is whether the boy likes to read or not. This item was listed as one of the choices for the ranking scale of one to fourteen. I would revise this to exclude this question from the ranking scale and have the boys make a choice at the top of the survey on whether they like to read or not. Next, they would then rank the rest of the reading choices one to thirteen. This would make it easier to divide the like reading from the do not like reading and it would be easier to tally the results.

The last change I would make to the reading survey is adding an interview for each boy to question him on the choices he made. This would allow the researcher to determine if the child understood the ranking system and if logical choices were made or if he was just making decisions based on peer influences.

Summary

Overall the surveys did not work as well as expected. Some of the boys did not follow the directions nor understand how to rank their choices. This was the major reason why I decided to only use their top five choices in determining the results. Smith and Wilhelm's (2002) research, survey, and interviews were conducted with high school age boys. I decided to survey sixth-grade boys as I wanted to determine if boys are disengaging from reading at an earlier age than previous research has shown. My research and survey clearly indicates boys are not reading as much as they should and are spending a majority of their time playing video games, watching sports, and listening to music. However, some new research is investigating reading achievement by adopting areas such as music, video games, and sports materials in the classroom to spark the interest of boys.

Figure 1. I Like or Love to Read

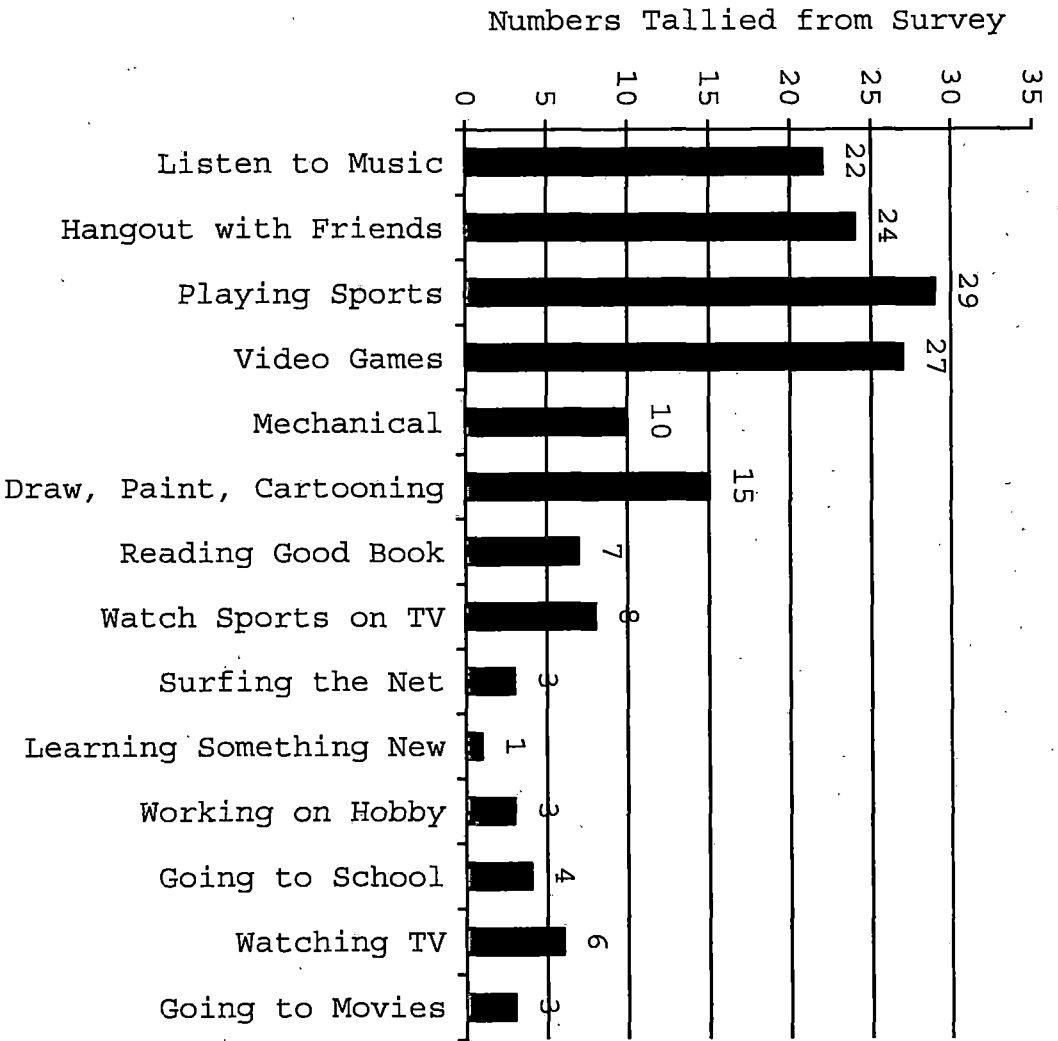


Top Reading Choices from Survey

■ Figure 1

I Like or Love To Read - 33 Boys

Figure 2. Activities I Like To Do



Top Choices from Survey

■ Figure 2

Activities I Like To Do - 33 Boys

Figure 3. I Do Not Like To Read

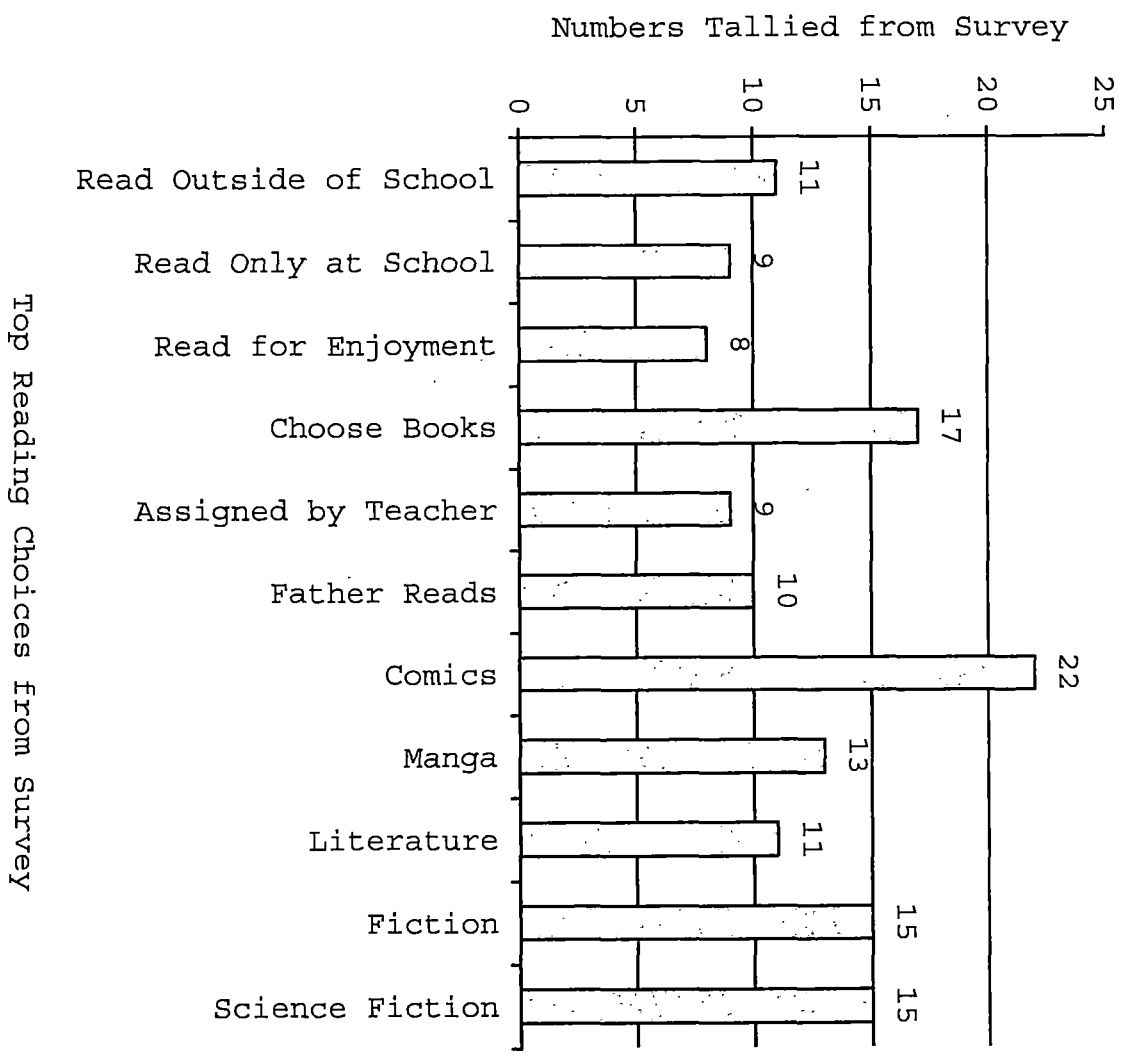
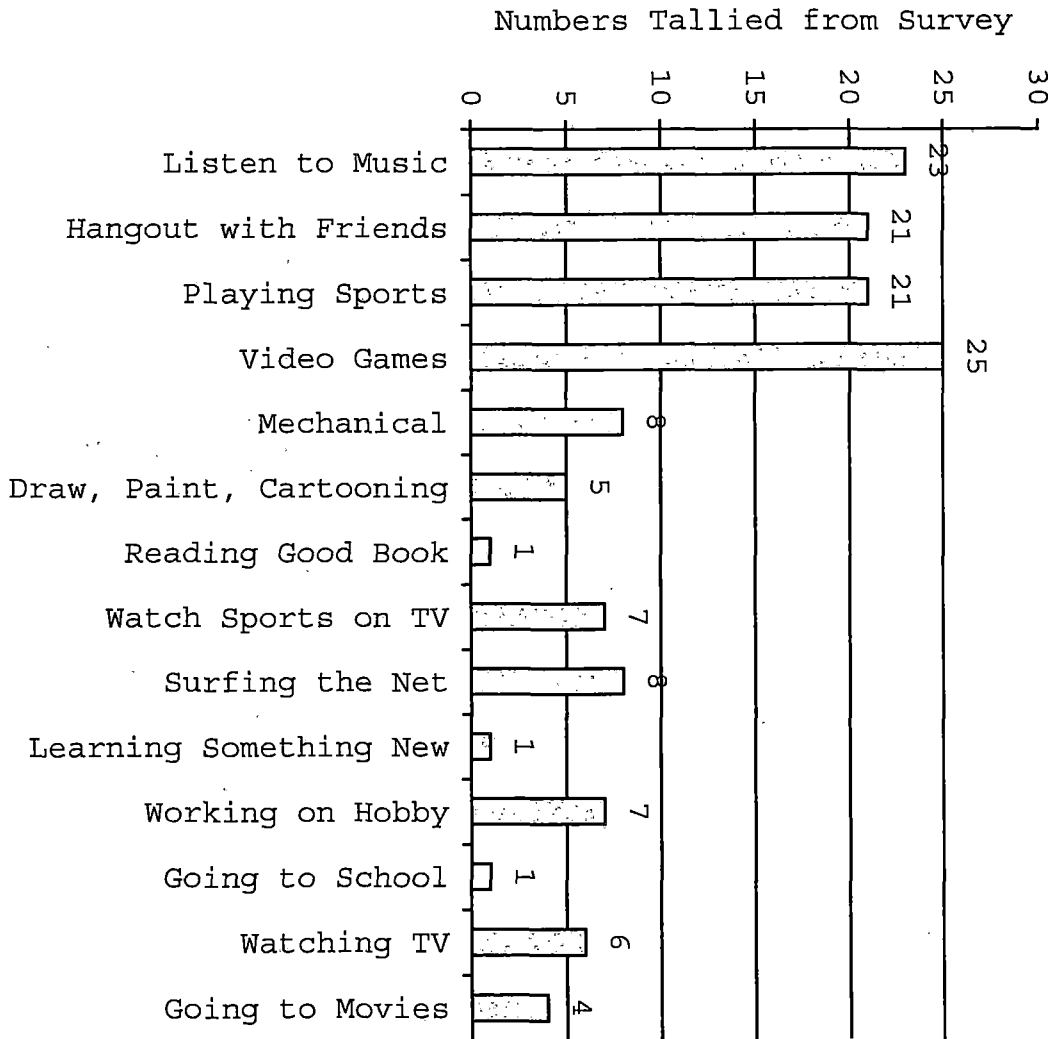


Figure 3

Top Reading Choices from Survey

I Do Not Like to Read - 28 Boys

Figure 4. Activities I Like To Do



Top Choices from Survey

Figure 4

Activities I Like To Do - 28 Boys

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Boys in our current classrooms are not developing the confidence to become lifetime readers. Boys are disengaging from reading and activities that will teach them the habits of a life long reader. Gender specific reading materials, different choice in books, male role models, and interest building instruction will reverse the effects of disengaged reading habits in boys.

This project looks at the reasons why boys disconnect from reading. I investigated what disparity existed between girls and boys and what can be done to equalize the choice for boys. I explored how to choose books and materials that engage boys in reading and insure they become fluent life long readers. I took a look at what type of teacher and parental support was needed to assist boys in actively learning to read and continuing to read for enjoyment and information.

Statement of Problem

Boys are disengaging from reading in the classroom and for leisure. There is a lack of reading materials and books

designed to attract and increase the interest of boys. There is also a lack of male role models seen engaging in reading. These are major problems that must be solved to reverse the effects of why boys are disconnecting from reading. Reversing the disengagement in reading will ultimately lower the dropout rates of boys leaving high-school and possibly increase the choice boys make on whether to attend college.

The theme of the literature review consisted of focusing on literacy, statistics of males who read. Next was an investigation of why males' dropout of school and what can reverse these trends. I then researched the literacy rates and scores of boys. From my background as an assistant manager at Waldenbooks I was able to review the sales data consisting of the types of books boys purchase. I then completed an in-depth study of the reasons boys read less, the obstacles they overcome in reading, and the choices they make in reading materials. Lastly, I reviewed the strategies to help boys read and some solutions to implement, with the purpose of assisting boys in engaging in reading.

Methodology

A quantitative study of the questionnaire and surveys instituted and the quantitative data collected revealed what

boys read and how to interest them in more reading materials.

Quantitative Study

This research consisted of a teacher questionnaire and two surveys given to boys. The questionnaire is a random sample consisting of responses from teachers about how they perceive male reading instruction and how they choose reading materials. It also has five short response questions about obstacles to reading and how they motivate students.

Two surveys were given randomly to boys in several language arts classes. All boys were of reading age and they were able to rank choices pertaining to reading and activities. The first survey is ratings the boys made responding to various statements about their reading habits. The second survey is ratings the boys made while responding to various activities that interest them.

Conclusions

The conclusions extracted from the project follows.

1. Boys disengage from reading.
2. Teachers must find a way to attract boys' interests in reading.

3. Boys need role models to provide guidance in reading.
4. Statistics point to higher dropout rates for males.
5. Literacy rates are lower among boys.
6. Boys are reading less due to the lack of interesting reading materials provided for them in the classroom.
7. Boys prefer to read, comic books, graphic novels, Manga, Science fiction, non-fiction, sports magazines, and fix it type of materials.
8. Teachers and parents can reverse the effects of disengaged behaviors by providing reading materials more suited for males.

Recommendations

The recommendations resulting from the project follows.

1. Survey

The study will begin with collecting quantitative data from a survey. The survey will be distributed to boys in classrooms, male employees at school site, male employees of school district, prominent males in the community, fathers, grandfathers, uncles, and brothers. The survey

will ask various questions pertaining to likes and dislikes about reading, favorite types of books, favorite authors, favorite types of reading materials, and most influential reading program or person. The survey will also ask if the person has available time to participate in a program designed to bring male mentors and boys at risk for reading disengagement, together for reading interactions. Data will be collected detailing the interest of the participants, time available to participate in the programs, types of programs needed, books and reading materials desired. Quantitative data will be collected each month to compare increases in reading scores of the boys participating in the program.

2. Reading Interactions

Schools, libraries, and community groups can join together with families to improve boys' reading. Reading interactions will begin at the school site in the individual classrooms. Boys will be paired up with older boys from higher grade levels to read aloud and for interaction in reading activities, approximately 15-20 minutes each day. Male teachers, janitors, Principals, Librarians,

and school employees will be encouraged to participate one day each week, 15-20 minutes per day or reading. They will be asked to read aloud one book each week to a group of boys and participate in activities to encourage boys to read. Including role models in supplementary education programs can help compensate for families that do not read at home (Schwartz, 2003, p. 3). Principals will be encouraged to read aloud to children to show boys that reading is important to them. Basketball players and pop stars can promote reading as cool to boys and instill the importance of staying in school (Stone, 2006, p.3). The goal of the readers is to make books come alive for the children to whom they are reading.

The community level will consist of asking prominent males in the community to participate in classroom reading to children. These men may share reading experiences with the children and participate in activities with the aim of encouraging boys to read. Students will be encouraged to seek out peer opinions and advice. Students will have frequent opportunities to

respond to materials in a personally significant manner.

3. Programs

The next step will be to introduce programs designed for boys and their fathers or male mentors. The challenge of enticing boys into reading has led teachers into a variety of inventive and proactive experiments. (Parsons, 2004, p.1). These programs will bring boys and men together to interact in a setting designed to interest only males. Some programs might be called Dads and Lads, Boys "N" Books, Family Literacy Day or Night, Reading Companions, and Boys only reading clubs (Parsons, 2004, p. 1). Another club which can be instilled is Boys in Literacy, an all male after-school book club aimed at closing the literacy achievement gap between boys and girls. The club focuses on books specifically aimed at appealing to boys and includes read-aloud sessions, visits to elementary schools to promote reading and trips to see movies based on the books they read (Bahrapour 2005, p. 1).

Male staff members will be needed to help run the clubs and serve as role models. Programs will include flexibility to allow students to employ a variety of strategies to comprehend materials. Some strategies to investigate and discussed during programs: retelling of stories, predicting, relating to personal experiences, reflecting, discussing, dramatizing, expanding on the text, comparing, hypothesizing, and making inferences and judgments.

4. Books and Materials

The next step of reforming reading in the classroom and at home will be developing a list of gender specific books and materials for boys. Jim Trelease has three great resource books in his series of read-aloud handbooks, which list books for all children. Classroom libraries can be developed to include sections with titles and materials pertaining to boys. Librarians will set aside an area which contains periodicals, novels, magazines, and materials that are of specific interest to boys. Students will have opportunities to select their own materials. Children's attitudes toward reading seem to be

affected positively by allowing them to select their own reading materials (Jacobs & Tunnell, 2004, p. 254). Local Libraries can participate on a community level by providing areas that contain reading materials for boys, by having read alouds for boys, and by encouraging males in the community to read to boys.

To have enough items of interest for the men and boys to read, there will need to be a plan to acquire many different types of books, periodicals, and magazines. A letter writing campaign asking for donations from authors, publishers and bookstores will help build an enriched literature based library for the boys use.

5. Participation

The last idea for the project is getting males within the family, such as fathers, grandfathers, brothers, or uncles, to participate at home in family reading nights. The earlier fathers become involved with their children; learning and socialization the better (Gadsden & Ray, 2003, p.1). The challenge in this program will be to get fathers involved in helping their sons read.

A father's ability to support his child's learning affects the child's engagement with books and schools (p.1). One way a father can model activities for his son is to involve the child in household activities, such as describing what he is doing while engaging in tasks and asking the child to predict what he might do next. Fathers might also create games requiring reading, writing, and problem solving. When fathers and sons read, each reading session should be approximately 15-20 minutes per night. Data collected will be reading logs and graphs showing books and pages read or activities performed by participating members. Data will be used to show an increase in the number of books and pages read and an increase in shared activities.

APPENDIX A
Teacher Questionnaire

How many years of teaching _____

Grade Level _____

Highest Degree Level _____

Type of teaching Credential _____

Scale

Circle one response in each question.

Strongly Agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly Disagree

(SA) (A) (U) (D) (SD)

Boys in my classroom are disengaged (not reading or show no interest), from reading.

(SA) (A) (U) (D) (SD)

Most reading materials in my classroom are gender neutral.

(SA) (A) (U) (D) (SD)

Reading materials in my classroom are female oriented.

(SA) (A) (U) (D) (SD)

Reading materials in my classroom are male oriented.

(SA) (A) (U) (D) (SD)

Boys need reading materials that are specifically oriented toward males.

(SA) (A) (U) (D) (SD)

Most classrooms are lacking reading materials that are male oriented.

(SA) (A) (U) (D) (SD)

My classroom is lacking reading materials that is male oriented.

(SA) (A) (U) (D) (SD)

My classroom library is lacking books, written by male authors, for boys.

(SA) (A) (U) (D) (SD)

Boys in my classroom do not engage in reading.

(SA) (A) (U) (D) (SD)

Reading groups in my classroom allow boys to discuss issues of interest to them.

(SA) (A) (U) (D) (SD)

If given a choice, boys will only read sports books or comic books.

(SA) (A) (U) (D) (SD)

Sports books and comic books are appropriate reading materials.

(SA) (A) (U) (D) (SD)

Male role models, such as the Principal or fathers, visit my classroom on a regular basis, to read aloud to the children.

(SA) (A) (U) (D) (SD)

Boys in my classroom prefer to read gender neutral books.

(SA) (A) (U) (D) (SD)

Boys have less interest in leisure reading than girls.

(SA) (A) (U) (D) (SD)

I use several techniques to motivate boys to read.

(SA) (A) (U) (D) (SD)

Boys like to read about hobbies, sports, and things they want to do.

(SA) (A) (U) (D) (SD)

Boys enjoy escapism and humor.

(SA) (A) (U) (D) (SD)

Some boys enjoy Science fiction or fantasy.

(SA) (A) (U) (D) (SD)

Boys think of themselves as "non-readers".

(SA) (A) (U) (D) (SD)

Boys think they are bad readers.

(SA) (A) (U) (D) (SD)

I choose reading materials that will interest boys and girls.

(SA) (A) (U) (D) (SD)

Boys in our current classrooms are developing the confidence to become lifetime readers.

(SA) (A) (U) (D) (SD)

Boys are disengaging from reading because they are bored with the limited choice in male reading materials.

(SA) (A) (U) (D) (SD)

Boy's interest in books and different genres can be increased by providing fascinating ways of introducing books.

(SA) (A) (U) (D) (SD)

Limiting reading materials for boys creates a disparity that leads to boys disconnecting from reading.

(SA) (A) (U) (D) (SD)

Teachers can reverse the effects that poor literature choice and instruction have made on boys.

(SA) (A) (U) (D) (SD)

A father's role in a boy's academic achievement and early literacy may directly affect reading engagement.

(SA) (A) (U) (D) (SD)

Boys must be motivated to read.

(SA) (A) (U) (D) (SD)

Boys need clear, structured instruction.

(SA) (A) (U) (D) (SD)

I set specific goals and provide praise, to encourage boys to read.

(SA) (A) (U) (D) (SD)

I tie reading materials to boys' interests, such as hobbies, and lifestyles to encourage reading.

(SA) (A) (U) (D) (SD)

Open-ended Questions - Short Response

What obstacles are preventing boys from becoming efficient and enthusiastic readers?

Can gender specific reading materials, more choice in books, male role models, and interest building instruction reverse the effects of disengaged reading habits in boys? Why?

How do you choose reading materials for your classroom?

In your opinion, what do you think motivates boys to read?

What do you specifically do in your classroom, to motivate boys to read?

APPENDIX B
Survey Boys #1

Please rank the following activities in the order that you like them. Put a 1 next to the activity you like most, moving down to a 14 for the activity you like least.

- _____ Listening to music
- _____ Hanging out with friends
- _____ Playing sports
- _____ Playing video games
- _____ Doing something mechanical, like fixing an engine
- _____ Drawing, painting, or cartooning
- _____ Reading a good book
- _____ Watching a favorite sports team on TV or at the stadium
- _____ Surfing the net
- _____ Learning something new about a topic that interests me
- _____ Working on a hobby (Please specify your hobby)

- _____ Going to school
- _____ Watching television or going to the movies
- _____ Other (Please specify)

APPENDIX C
Survey Boys #2

Please rank the following statements in the order that you like them. Put a 1 next to the statement you like most, moving down to a 14 for the statement you like least.

- _____ I like to Read
 - _____ I do not like to read
 - _____ I love to read
 - _____ I read outside of school
 - _____ I read only at school
 - _____ I read for enjoyment
 - _____ I choose the books I want to read
 - _____ I only read books that are assigned by my teacher
 - _____ My father reads and I have seen him read
 - _____ I read comic books
 - _____ I read Manga books
 - _____ I read literature books
 - _____ I read fictions books
 - _____ I read Science fiction books
 - _____ The last book I read was
-

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