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Creating Intrinsic Motivation To Read In Middle School Students

Steven Jeffery Schaeppi, Jr.

CREATING INTRINSIC MOTIVATION TO READ

IN MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

by

Steven Jeffery Schaeppi, Jr.

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Capstone Project Facilitator: Trish Harvey
Content Expert: Kendra Willaby
Peer Reviewer: Angela Lauer-Schaeppi

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The following chapter is designed to help one understand why I have chosen to create a project that tries to answer my research question: *What are effective strategies for building middle school students' intrinsic desire to read?* This chapter will cover my personal experience with reading for pleasure, and the professional difficulties I have experienced when attempting to build the love of reading in my middle school students. It also explains the rationale I have used to reach my conclusions about my experiences.

Experience as a Student

When I was a kid in school, I remember loving to read. The memories of the monthly book orders are especially strong. Getting those four-page packets always signaled to me I was about to persuade my parents to buy me something new with little hesitation. That was completely different than if I asked them to buy me a new action figure or video game. In those times, I could consistently bet the answer would be *no*, but in the case of wanting a book, the answer was almost always *yes*.

The books would come in what was probably a short time after ordering, but what felt like, in the universe of being a child, an eternity. There are specific books that stick out in my mind I received through these orders in Scholastic. One was a novel about the X-Men. I was amazed there was a novel-long story I could read about my favorite cartoon characters, and I read that book more than once. The other books that stand above

the rest were a set of four *Goosebumps* (Stine, 1994-1997) books. These spooky tales were still new at that time, and it felt good to be on the cutting edge of pop culture, especially when the TV show came out and I could say, "I already read this one." In fact, I was so obsessed with the books, my dad once took me to the store to buy all the ones I did not already have as a birthday present. It was a dream come true.

What I do not remember a lot about my reading habits is exactly where they started or what nurtured them. I know my mom would often read me stories before bed, however, this was early enough in my life where she was still reading me picture books. I do not recall that we ever graduated to chapter books.

Another approach my parents took in supporting my reading habits was taking my sisters and me to the library often to check out books. This, again, was at the age of picture books, but it was thrilling nonetheless to walk out of a building with a stack of books to read.

I can remember all the way back to Kindergarten. My teacher would make her own audiobooks for students on cassette to take home and with which to read along. One of my favorites was *Harold and the Purple Crayon* (Johnson, 2015). Even at home, I got to follow along with Ms. Vezina as she read about his adventures.

I do not remember any specific reading assignments in school, whether it be elementary, junior, or high school. Of course, there were the assignments such as reading *Great Expectations*, or whatever the grade-level novel was that year, but I have no recollection of teachers assigning anything intended to simply make us read for leisure. The closest memory I can recall is with a third-grade me sitting next to a stack of books

while my teacher took my picture. The stack represented how many books I read that year. I do not know what the rewards system was, if any, or if there was a grade tied to this. I do know my stack was larger than most, and I was proud of this.

Somewhere along the way my love of reading ceased, most likely in junior high, and was replaced by new hobbies such as playing video games or learning to play the guitar. I would still read the occasional book, but nowhere near the amount I used to read. My love of reading didn't return until I was in college getting my bachelor's degree in English. I was then exposed to different types of literature, and I could also begin to analyze the text with friends in a way I never had before. Being able to discuss deeply a novel and recognize specifically what it was I found so interesting gave me more motivation to read. Even still, when a novel was assigned to me in class, I would find it more difficult to read than if I had picked it up on my own. More than once I struggled through an assigned reading only to pick it back up over the summer, wondering why I had such a tough time with it in the first place. Looking back at this today, it is clear my intrinsic motivation outweighed external assignments, but *why*, exactly, is still unclear.

Reminiscing on my reading life as a kid and young adult, there are a few takeaways I find interesting. First are my memories of my parents encouraging reading in different ways, whether it was my mom reading to me at night, or both of my parents not putting up much of a fight when it came to getting me books, whether it was from the library or Scholastic book orders. I do not believe giving me access to books was a conscious priority to them, but I do know they valued reading and recognized it as an

important life skill. In a sense, reading was *normalized* for me, something that was turned into an everyday part of life.

Secondly, I have no recollection of my grade ever being tied to how much I read or the diversity of what I chose to read. As described earlier, the closest thing that could relate to this idea was when I was in third grade and there seemed to be some sort of reward tied to how much I read, but not necessarily a grade. As I also mentioned before, I felt a strong sense of pride in how many books were in my stack. I had read more than many other students in my class, and reading became a strength for me. One can only wonder, though, how other students felt about how many books they had read, especially those students whose stacks were much smaller. While I was now motivated to demonstrate my new-found strength, it is entirely possible these students became unmotivated, and began to recognize reading as difficult, and therefore boring.

I also know that somewhere along the line my love of reading was halted. As stated before, it is unclear what caused this halt, but it does fit in what I might consider the stereotype of when most students decide reading is 'boring', during middle and high school. I also can't state with certainty what reignited my love of reading during college, but it was most likely an engaging book; one in which I somehow made a personal connection.

Experience as a Teacher

I began my teaching career bouncing around long-term substitute positions. This allowed me to see how a few different schools went about engaging students in reading. There were a few newer strategies designed to offer students a little choice in what they

read, and there were more classic strategies that appeared to have no extra emphasis on

choice. One strategy based on choice was called *Reading Bingo*, in which the numbers of

a bingo card were replaced by reading choices: historical fiction, realistic fiction,

magazine article, how-to manual, etc. The goal behind this strategy was to force students

to try new things to be able to complete a *bingo*. More classic strategies included having

a minute or page requirement students had to meet by certain times during the school

year. More classic still was when students were all assigned a novel to read, and they

were required to fill out the corresponding packet of comprehension questions.

      Because of my temporary status, I was never too involved in the development of

the curriculum at these schools. I was also not too emotionally involved as I would only

be working with these students for a relatively short period of time. If I had to sum up my

experiences with reading at these schools, it would be that the students read what they

were told because it was assigned. It was not my observation that many students had their

love of reading ignited through these practices.

      My first and current permanent position is at a middle school in Farmington,

Minnesota. Currently, this school district is pushing towards teachers using a

personalized approach to teaching. While it is still currently up to each teacher's

discretion, many teachers in my building are taking tentative steps towards students'

choice and voice. In my department, most of the students' choice and voice is around

what students choose to read, and how they show their reading progress.

      For my first three years in this school my grade level implemented *Reading*

Requirements, which was designed by veteran teachers trying to invoke the spirit of

personalization. *Reading Requirements* (see APPENDIX A) involve students having to achieve 150 points each quarter in a variety of fashions. This included completing minute logs, books reports, conferencing with their teacher about their reading, weekly reading questions, and a quarterly reading project. Students could choose to read whatever they wanted and complete whichever assignments they wished as long as the point goal was accomplished each quarter.

As a nervous and relatively new teacher in a new position, I did not question a system developed by veteran teachers whose experience far surpassed my own. I trusted in their curriculum designing abilities and knew they had the students' best interests in mind. The goal of *Reading Requirements*, I knew, was to have students build a reading life at home.

The weaknesses of this system, though, soon became apparent. Earning 150 reading points appeared to many students as an insurmountable goal. It was hard for them to grasp that the points would be earned slowly over a quarter's worth of time. Middle school students are not usually experts at mindfulness, and planning for something two months in the future is not commonly practiced. Understandably, 150 points was intimidating and unmotivating.

Conferencing individually with students soon devolved from discussing their reading in a meaningful way to devising a way for them to get back on track to achieving the point goal by the end of the quarter. Most of the time the goals in the conferences were soon forgotten as it was up to the student to remember to implement them.

Many students were behind what would be considered 'on pace' by the last few weeks of the quarter. Again, I would meet with them to find ways they could catch up so their overall grade would not suffer disproportionately because of the *Reading Requirements*. Typically, students would then earn points by reading books that did not challenge their reading level in order to complete book reports as quickly as possible, and usually complete them below expectations.

Overall, in my experience, it was clear most students were not motivated by the *Reading Requirements* to build a reading life at home as intended. When some students heard that assignments were optional, they interpreted it as they did not have to do any of them, forgetting that they had to reach the 150 point goal. Others filled in minute logs, having never read at home closely to what they wrote down. The *Reading Requirements* soon became one of the most stressful things for me to deal with as a teacher as I tried to develop ways for students to meet the goal at the end of each quarter, with most of them, on average, somewhere behind where they should be. Compounded with this were angry parent phone calls and emails asking me to explain how the whole system worked and make even more accommodations for their students. I found myself simply giving in to demands and giving up on what was best for the students. This new approach to build students' love of reading was not only failing to achieve that goal, it was also causing me new levels of stress as a teacher.

When discussing this topic with other teaching professionals, two more ideas arose. First, perhaps labeling this curriculum as *Reading Requirements* immediately made some students unmotivated to complete them because the word *requirement* can have a

negative connotation. Placing this wording in combination with *reading* might inherently defeat the process of build students' desire to read for fun.

The second point made in my discussion with other professionals is that have the same requirements for every student is inherently unfair. This curriculum does not contain scaffolding or much differentiation based on skill level. If the requirements could be customized to meet the specific reading needs of each student they might be more fair and effective, but to do this will be incredibly time-consuming.

After my first year, I was more proactive about making parents aware of how the *Reading Requirements* operated, being more intentional when making sure students understood the expectations, and tried to come up with new ways for students to earn points. I expected fully that this approach would yield better results, but my second year with the requirements was rougher than the first, and the third year was the nail in the coffin. I decided to put the *Reading Requirements* to rest in my classroom this year, and break away from what the veteran teachers decided to continue to do.

I decided that not only were the *Reading Requirements* not achieving their original goal of building students' reading lives at home, but that they also offered no other academic value as far as standards were concerned. I saw no benefit in keeping them in place, so I decided to remove them from my curriculum with no suitable replacement. I still wanted to build a love for reading in my students as my personal and professional experience has proven to me the importance of building and maintaining reading skills, and their role in finding success in whatever one chooses to do.

Reading in Schools Today

      In many schools today there is a reading epidemic. Students often foster a love of reading in elementary school, where reading is mostly about reading what one loves. The purpose reading, though, usually changes in middle and high school, where suddenly students are worrying about their Lexile level or performing for a standardized test (Beers & Probst, 2017). This move from reading for pleasure to reading to perform can result in students who once loved to read becoming reluctant or non-readers.

      The evidence for this reading epidemic is more than anecdotal. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress many secondary school students are reading far below their expected levels (as cited in Gallagher, 2009). Other statistics include high school literacy scores dropping from 1992 to 2003, one-in-four high school students being unable to comprehend their textbooks, and only 13 percent of American adults being able to complete complex literacy tasks (Gallagher, 2009). It seems the move from reading for pleasure to reading to perform in the transition from elementary school to middle school is detrimental to building students' reading ability.

      Other studies have shown that students who read something of their own choosing for approximately 20 minutes a day were in the 90th percentile for reading skills while students who read approximately 10 minutes a day were in the 70th (Beers & Probst, 2017). This shows the potential benefit of giving students just 10 minutes of independent reading in the classroom. The benefits of reading more also include building knowledge, increased motivation, increased vocabulary, improved writing, developing empathy, and even developing personal identity (Beers & Probst, 2017).

This led me to my thesis question: *What are effective strategies for building middle school students' intrinsic desire to read?* Further questions to consider within this thesis are: What role does public education play in building students' reading lives?, What role do parents or guardians play in building students' reading lives?, and What can determine whether or not a student finds success in reading*?* I hope by searching for answers for these questions, and others that arise as I continue my research, will help me build a successful curriculum to deepen my students' understanding of the importance of building a reading life, and to give them the skills they need to build that life for themselves.

Summary

In recounting my experience with reading as a child and student, I discovered that my intrinsic desire to read may have been the outcome of parental reinforcement and from experiencing success with reading at a young age. I also concluded that somewhere in my middle school year my intrinsic desire to read was derailed until after high school.

As a teacher I experienced this issue from the other side, having great difficulty building the love of reading in my middle school students. I concluded that giving students choice in what they read and how they engage academically with their reading was not effective in building their intrinsic desire to read. I feel there is a missing component to creating in my students the intrinsic desire to read.

In Chapter Two, I will conduct a literature review focused on what experts say on creating in middle school students the intrinsic desire to read. This will include looking at intrinsic motivation, the roles adults play in helping students build reading habits, the

benefits of strong reading habits, and assessing students' reading. Chapter Three will consist of a detailed description of my project, and Chapter Four will reflect on what I have learned through this process.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

A familiar struggle for many middle school Language Arts teachers is getting

their students to not only read on a regular basis, but to also become intrinsically

motivated to read. This struggle with students' intrinsic motivation to read is not unique

to middle school, but the consistency with which is it present may be. The question this

literature review is attempting to answer is: *What are effective strategies for building*

middle school students' intrinsic desire to read? This literature review will analyze

intrinsic motivation, specifically what causes the decline in motivation to read in middle

school students, the habits of students who read for pleasure, the habits of those who do

not, this disconnect between the two, and possible solutions to resolve the disconnect.

This literature review will also identify the roles both parents and teachers play in

creating and developing the intrinsic desire to read in students, the benefits of reading for

pleasure, both for children and adults, and ways assessments can be used to foster the

love of reading for pleasure.

Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation can be defined as an act or activity being its own reward, as

opposed to extrinsic motivation where there is some outside factor compelling one to

accomplish something (Kohn, 1999). This section will explore how students' intrinsic

motivation to read for pleasure declines when transitioning from elementary school to middle and high school, the experiences of students who find success with reading for pleasure, the experiences of students who struggle with reading for pleasure, students' possible misconceptions around reading, and basic ideas for educators to consider when trying to build students' intrinsic motivation to read for pleasure.

Decline of intrinsic motivation. Beginning as soon as elementary school, some students' motivation for reading declines as they progress through their early schooling career (Unrau & Schlackman, 2006), and children's love of reading can evolve into indifference by the end of elementary school (Strommen & Mates, 2004). This trend continues into the middle school years, where students can develop a negative feeling towards reading as they read less and less (Baker, 2002). Some professionals even observe a 50 percent decline in reading for pleasure by eighth grade (Gander, 2013). One possible reason for this decline in students' motivation to read is that students' reason for reading changes during this transition. They go "from reading for pure enjoyment to reading to reach a certain Lexile level or to pass a test" (Beers & Probst, 2017, p. 16). In other words, reading changes from a form of entertainment to a skill to be performed.

There are many other theories as to this decline in middle school students' intrinsic motivation to read for pleasure. Some speculate many students struggle with the transition from elementary school to middle school, a time when they outgrow their old interests and fail to find reading materials that align with their new interests (Strommen & Mates, 2004). Another struggle in the transition from elementary school reading to middle school is the complexity in texts (Brinda, 2011). Students transition from reading

relatively simple texts, with easy to follow storylines and characters, to far more intricate texts with complex plots and character development that can be difficult to track. There is also the possibility that in many middle and high schools students are not allowed to choose what they want to read, whereas younger and older people have the freedom of choice (Lenters, 2006).

Intrinsic motivation to read is not as simple as liking to read. Each student has specific and individual motivations which can include a student's belief they are competent at reading, the perception of interest, importance, and usefulness of the material, or their desire to achieve learning rather than performance goals (McCombs, 1997). Each student is an individual made up of different experiences and goals, and it is a combination of these variables which creates an intrinsic desire to read in a student. Students' individual differences can have a major effect on their reading motivation (McCombs, 1997). This may explain why students are able to engage in other areas of school while struggling to engage with reading. The ability to engage with material is not universal, as what motivates reading engagement is different than what motivates engagement in other learning domains (McCombs, 1997).

Understanding a student's individual motivations is imperative to building their intrinsic motivation. Building a student's intrinsic motivation is essential for them to find success in reading because "motivation to read . . . influences readers' choices of reading material, their willingness to engage in reading, and this their ultimate competencies in reading" (Pitcher et al., 2007, p. 379). Without intrinsic motivation to read, "resistant readers may become struggling readers" (Lenters, 2006, p. 142).

Knowing that intrinsic motivation is unique for each student, one must then identify the differences of those students who find success with reading for pleasure and those who struggle with making reading a consistent part of their life. Students who find success with reading for pleasure have had many labels, but for the sake of consistency in this literature review, those students will be consistently referred to as *readers* (Strommen & Mates, 2004). The identifier for students who struggle with reading will be *reluctant readers* (Brinda, 2011). This term is for students who have the ability to read, but struggle with motivation.

Readers. Readers usually come from a background where reading is a family activity. As Pitcher et al. (2007) noted, "Family members . . . are influential forces" (p. 392). In many cases, positive home reading experiences were linked to children's value and positive feelings about reading (McCombs, 1997). This positive experience can extend to other social circles as children learn that reading can be an entertaining activity (Strommen & Mates, 2004). Although peers' approval is not necessary for a reader to find success, readers identify strongly with being part of a reading community (Strommen & Mates, 2004).

Family and social circles are not the only influences on readers finding success and maintaining an intrinsic desire to read. Studies have shown that readers also need a connection to the topic (Pitcher et al., 2007). Readers must find some sort of personal connection with the text, whether they are reading about something they are interested in or they can relate to something in the text on a personal level.

Readers also need a chance for their voice to be heard about what they are reading. "Recounting stories, or talking about characters and plot with another enthusiastic reader [is] an important [element] of readers' experiences" (Strommen & Mates, 2004, p. 193). Talking about what they have read gives readers a chance to make a personal connection to the text, and puts more value on the reading. Readers sharing their thinking gives them ownership over what they've read.

It is also possible that some readers may be mislabeled as reluctant readers because of what is considered an acceptable form of reading. Phelps argued, "An expanded concept of 'text' must transcend print-based texts to also include various electronic media and adolescents' own culture and social understanding" (as cited in Pitcher et al., 2007). While it is generally understood that readers have easy access to reading materials (Strommen & Mates, 2004), it is possible that those students considered as reluctant readers have equal access to reading materials, if only those materials would be considered valid reading. These texts can include, but are not limited to, materials like instruction manuals, cookbooks, magazines, blogs, reviews, and any other form of entertainment reading.

Overall, because of the success they find with reading, and the value they place on that success, readers find time for reading as a leisure activity and find it pleasurable (Strommen & Mates, 2004). Once that intrinsic desire is present in a student, it must be maintained through encouragement and interaction with social circles, by having access to varied reading materials, and broadening the definition of what is considered appropriate reading material.

Reluctant readers. Strommen and Mates (2004) found that reluctant readers have much more varied experiences with reading in the home setting, and these sometimes limited experiences usually do not continue beyond early childhood. Possibly because of these experiences, reluctant readers do not identify reading for pleasure as an activity of any importance in their family lives. Within this, parents have been described by reluctant readers as too busy, and reading is not a priority for their parents or themselves. Children that do not have a positive storybook reading experience are less likely to develop positive attitudes about reading because many have personal experiences that make it difficult to see the importance, value, or enjoyment in reading (McCombs, 1997; Brinda, 2011).

Reluctant readers' reading experiences at home are not uniform. There are instances where reluctant readers exist despite a positive and continuing home reading experience (Baker, 2002). For example, children with dyslexia may become frustrated with reading because of the disorder, not their home reading experience. In fact, it is important to not place blame on the parents of a reluctant reader, regardless of the cause for a student's struggle with reading. A student's home reading habits must simply inform what their needs may be in the classroom.

Many reluctant readers identify lack of choice as the reason they find reading boring (Baker, 2002). This lack of choice can lead reluctant readers to classify reading as boring, tedious, a waste of time, and slow (Stromman & Mates, 2004). Although they can often say they do not have time to read, surveys have shown that most of their time is occupied by leisure activities, which means reluctant readers do not consider reading as a

leisure activity (Strommen & Mates, 2004). This aligns with others' findings that there is a lack of interest in reading for reluctant readers (Lenters, 2006). Mackey and Johnson argued reluctant readers typically "have not learned how to establish a sustained connection longer than a page or two" (as cited in Brinda, 2011, p. 9). This could be because they are hesitant to read anything they do not connect with immediately (Brinda, 2011). "Motivation to read [can be] minimal because complicated words - along with characters, situations, and setting - seem far removed from students' lives" (Brinda, 2011, p. 9).

According to Torani, "Reading has lost its purpose and pleasure" for reluctant readers (as cited in Brinda, 2011, p. 9). They see reading as a way to improve vocabulary and access information, but not as a source for entertainment (Strommen & Mates, 2004). Reluctant readers need an authentic purpose for reading, something that can be lost amidst teachers' needs to cover standards. In fact, some reluctant readers go to elaborate lengths to avoid assigned reading and could pass tests without having read the required text (Lenters, 2006). Reluctant readers, even those with exceptional reading skills, avoid reading whenever possible (Strommen & Mates, 2004). "The closer that literacy activities and tasks match [students'] values, needs, and goals the greater the likelihood that students will expend effort and sustain interest in them" (Pitcher et al., 2007, pp. 378-379). When these goals are not met, readers run the risk of turning into reluctant readers (Pitcher et al., 2007).

Often, reluctant readers have misconceptions about readers' abilities. Reluctant readers believe it takes less time for readers to read because they are faster, although

research shows this to not be true (Strommen & Mates, 2004). With this misconception, along with the lack of connection to texts, and possible lack of supported reading habits at home, it is no wonder reluctant readers lack intrinsic motivation to read.

  Disconnect. There seems to be a strong disconnect for many students regarding reading, whether or not individual students are identified as readers or reluctant readers. When self-identifying their reading habits, students may misidentify as reluctant readers.

> Students may be defining reading and readers only in an academic context, and this context is often not inclusive of the types of reading and writing they are engaged with outside the classroom; therefore, they may not be viewing their out-of-school literacies as valid reading and writing. (Pitcher et al., 2007)

When students labeled their reading habits there was a discrepancy between how they viewed themselves and what their daily habits actually were because they considered only academic reading as valid; This shows there is a strong disconnect between academic reading and reading for pleasure (Pitcher et al., 2007). Students often identify reading as "a set of skills to be . . . acquired through worksheets and performed on high-stakes tests" (Schaefer, 2017, p. 247). This shows that some students do not believe reading to be used for anything but for academic purposes, despite how they actually use reading in their daily lives.

  From these perspectives, one can come to the conclusion that some students have limited concepts of what counts as reading. Students' definition of reading may not include things like magazines, emails, games, or other types of reading for pleasure or interest (Pitcher et al., 2007), but rather may be limited to assigned texts or novels in

general. In today's culture, texting, memes, and other small forms of reading for entertainment may not be included in what students consider to be reading as well. In one study, it was noted that students' reading interests did not include any academic reading (Pitcher et al., 2007). Even students identified as readers rarely enjoy texts assigned in class because they see it as impeding their ability to choose what they read (Strommen & Mates, 2004).

Possible solutions. There are many takeaways from researching the habits of readers and reluctant readers, and these takeaways inform one how to build the intrinsic desire to read for pleasure in middle school students.

An increase in student interest shows an increase in attention, use of effective learning skills, and comprehension (McCombs, 1997). This means that to have students interact with reading in a way that includes their interests is essential for many students to find success with reading for pleasure. This does not mean, however, that students are universally motivated by the same things. "Understanding what aspects of reading are motivating for different groups of children is important in applying practices that accommodate differences between and within groups" (McComb, 1997, p.126) This shows one of the best ways to build student intrinsic desire to read for pleasure is to include students' interests in what they are reading for class. As stated by Pitcher et al. (2007), "Because we know that young people reject literacy tasks that are lacking in purpose and interest, we need to become more aware of students' personal uses of literacy and what is important to them" (p. 395).

Students not only need to feel interested in what they read, but they also need a sense of competency and agency (McCombs, 1997). Students have identified in surveys the importance of choice, both in what they are reading and how they show their understanding (Pitcher, et al., 2007). McCombs (1997) agreed that

> Practices that honor student voice, respect different student perspectives, and 'share ownership of knowing' contribute to students' intrinsic and continuing motivation to read and engage in literacy activities. This is particularly true in the area of assessment practices (p. 129)

If students are denied the ability to make personal connection with a text, whether it's for identity construction, interests, or enjoyment, they can interpret this action as personal rejection (Lenters, 2006).

Giving students voice and choice is just one step in creating readers. If student are expected to read for pleasure, they also need to experience success and enjoyment when reading (Gander, 2013). When students begin to understand that reading can be a source of entertainment, intrinsic motivation is more likely to develop (McCombs, 1997). Part of this development could be connected to what students consider valid reading. As seen with the reluctant readers, students can sometimes misidentify as not likely to read because they do not consider what they do read as acceptable forms of reading. As Sanacore (2000) explained, "For [students] to consider reading as a serious part of their [lives], they need exposure to a variety of reading materials, including short story anthologies, novels, plays, poetry collections, biographies, 'how-to' manuals, illustrated books, pamphlets, magazines, newspapers, comics, audio-books" (pp. 157-158) and any

other types of text that may connect to student interests and may not be classically categorized as acceptable reading.

Roles of Adults in Building Students' Intrinsic Desire to Read

The question of not only how to build students' intrinsic desire to read, but also where that desire is built must be addressed. On who this responsibility falls may depend on who is asked, but most would agree that it is a shared responsibility of parents or guardians and teachers. "Our students . . . need opportunities in school and at home to enjoy 'real' reading as a valued and worthwhile activity" (Sanacore, 2000, p. 157) The following section will look at how and where students' intrinsic desire is inspired, and what role specific adults fulfill for this acquisition of enjoying reading for pleasure.

Parents or guardians and family. According to Pitcher et al. (2007), "Families are influential forces" (p. 392) when considering building an intrinsic desire to read in students. "The affective tone and socioeconomic support surrounding early reading experiences are reported to influence the development of motivation to read" (McCombs, 1997, p. 126). This means that how parents or guardians interact with reading, and the ability to provide books for their children are two of the greatest factors in determining whether or not a child may enjoy reading.

One of the most important factors for children to become readers is the support of a parent or other adult (Strommen & Mates, 2004). "What parents visibly do at home, how they engage with their children in reading and what attitudes they project about reading impact on their children's motivation in learning to read" (Fletcher, Greenwood & Parkhill, 2010, p. 441). How parents' interact with reading and their beliefs about

reading not only affects their children's motivation to learn to read, but also the purpose

of reading (Baker, Scher & Mackler, 1997). This is incredibly important to consider,

because studies have shown that enjoying reading is one of the best indicators for reading

achievement (Hodapp, 2016).

It has been discovered that children are more likely to build strong reading habits

when their early experiences are enjoyable (Baker et al., 1997). Positive home and

parental experiences help children develop positive views on reading and are more likely

to engage in reading activities. (McCombs, 1997). This includes many different routines

that parents both participate in and build for their children. Readers have been shown by

their parents that reading can be used for entertainment (Baker et al., 1997) or is

prioritized as a recreational activity (Strommen & Mates, 2004), while reluctant readers

have been taught reading is a skill set to be learned (McCombs, 1997) or reading more

will make them smarter (Strommer & Mates, 2004). Reading being taught as a skill set to

be learned is especially true for low-income families (McCombs, 1997).

Readers are often supported by parents who make a routine out of reading for

pleasure, and also make sure to provide their children with books connected to their

interests, especially as the reader grows and their interests change (Strommen & Mates,

2004; Pitcher et. al., 2007). This constant supply of books included frequent trips to the

library or bookstore (McCombs 1997; Strommen & Mates, 2004). Not only are readers

supplied with books, but also varied reading materials (Strommen & Mates, 2004) and

toys that supported reading (McCombs, 1997).

Exposing children to books at an early age is essential for them to maintain the desire to read (Bertelsen, 2011). Readers are usually read to from birth until the age of seven or eight, and at different times of the day, including bedtime, and reading multiple times throughout the week (Hodapp, 2016). Studies have shown that children who experienced success with reading were usually supported by parents who read to them at a young age, and continued in adolescence (Fletcher et al., 2010). It was important that parents continue to encourage their children to read as they reached adolescence, as this encouragement helped their children become lifelong readers (Hodapp, 2016).

Parents not only model the value of reading when engaging in reading with their children, but they also increase their children's educational instruction by 50 percent (Bertelsen, 2011). This positive interaction with reading can be extended to their peers, but it is always established within their families (Strommen & Mates, 2004). In a study conducted by Klauda and Wigfield (2012), it was discovered that when students perceived support for their reading from parents and friends there was a positive correlation with reading motivations and habits. Bertelsen (2011) also found similar results from different studies that showed parents' involvement in their students reading habits increased the students' motivation to read. Other habits implemented by parents of readers included encouraging solitary reading and low amounts of watching television (McCombs, 1997). In a survey conducted by Strommen and Mates (2004), readers "clearly connected a love of reading with experiences provided outside of school" (p. 197). While teachers recognize the need to motivate students in their reading, it is also

clear the importance a student's family has in helping create their intrinsic desire to read for pleasure (Strommen & Mates, 2004).

Unlike parents of readers, parents of reluctant readers stop reading to their children as they get older, which causes both reading for pleasure and library visits to decrease (Bertelsen, 2011). These reading habits can discontinue as soon as the children enter school (Strommen & Mates, 2004). Because of the lack of emphasis for reading from parents, reluctant readers often do not see reading as a priority (Strommen & Mates, 2004). Children of parents who have little interest in reading usually watch more television as well (Hodapp, 2016). Reluctant readers often only have vague memories of interacting with reading for enjoyment (Strommen & Mates, 2004). It is not always as simple as parents having a habit of reading, though, as a "high divorce rate, an increase in homes with two working parents, and a rise in the number of single parents who must work have resulted in households with minimal adult supervision" (Sanacore, 2000, p. 158). This means that there may be outside circumstances that interfere with parents interacting with their children through reading, and these circumstances need to be taken into consideration when trying to help a reluctant reader become a reader.

Parents interest, habits, and abilities with reading are important when encouraging their children to read (Fletcher et al., 2010). If parents are interested in helping their children become avid readers, they can encourage their children by modeling positive reading habits, like reading aloud and talking about their reading (Bertelsen, 2011). Studies have shown that children enjoy reading and sharing books with their parents (Bertelsen, 2011). Children also need to see reading as more play than work, have

interesting things to read, and be encouraged in reading and writing activities that are linked to fun (McCombs, 1997). For those children who come from homes of less adult supervision, it has been shown that older siblings can help encourage younger siblings by talking about books, sharing books, modeling reading, and reading aloud (Hodapp, 2016).

Teachers. The role of parents in building their children's reading habits is undeniable, but that is just one side of the support students need. As shown earlier in this literature review, even students designated as readers can become disengaged in school reading. The other side of support students require must come from teachers. "Because middle grades are such an important turning point in a young reader's life, all middle grades educators have a responsibility to go beyond mere reading comprehension and address engagement in literacy across the curriculum" (Brinda, 2011, p. 9)

The problem that must be addressed is how teachers go about supporting students in their reading. Some teachers may find the necessity of covering standards and preparing for tests too restricting to change students' attitudes about reading (Brinda, 2011). Teachers, though, must find a way to go beyond basic literacy skills and engage students in deeper and more rewarding reading experiences (Brinda, 2011). High expectations must be set as challenge is needed for students to make this move (Ripp, 2016). Sanacore (2000) suggested teachers who find success with getting their students excited about reading understand how diverse and dynamic their students are, and provide choice that reflects their students.

The first things to consider are any possible misconceptions teachers or students may have about the value of reading. For example, when considering assessments,

teachers may be sending the wrong message. If a teacher decides to assign reading logs of any type, students may interpret this as the teacher not trusting them with their reading (Ripp, 2016). This can be demotivating and take the enjoyment out of reading for pleasure.

A common misconception from readers of all ages is that hobby-related reading does not count as real reading (Hoffman, Brooks & Bauer, 2000). Examples of this type of reading would be how-to manuals, cookbooks, craft books, or video game strategy guides. Hobby-related reading has been found to be the most meaningful type of reading and promotes a positive view of reading (Hoffman et al., 2000). This type of reading may be useful to teachers when teaching a specific skill-related task, but it is not the best type of reading to grow in students the love of fiction (Hoffman et al., 2000).

Along with hobby-related reading, students develop their intrinsic desire to read for pleasure when they find what they are reading to be relevant to who they are (Lenters, 2006). Teachers need to learn about their students, their interests, and their reading habits at home to use this concept as a tool to get students motivated about reading (Hoffman et al., 2000). Things teachers need to find out about their students are what they read, how they read, and what they talk about after they read (Brinda, 2011).

Allowing students choice is essential for them to engage successfully in reading (Baker, 2002; Brinda, 2011; Lenters, 2006). Part of this choice includes students' reading choices outside of school (Lenters, 2006). This choice can also include letting students abandon books they chose to read for pleasure when they know those books are not right for them (Ripp, 2016). Giving students voice is important because teachers need to listen

to what students say about reading to learn why they turn away from reading, and how to turn them back around (Brinda, 2011). In a survey, students identified literature circles, independent reading time, and choice as the ways they enjoy engaging with reading the most (Pitcher et al., 2007).

Not all students have adults in their lives to share the love of reading with them, so teachers must become that adult presence (Ripp, 2016). Teachers who speak passionately about reading can inspire students to read (Strommen & Mates, 2004), and can affect their attitudes and habits (Pitcher et al., 2007). "By demonstrating a passionate love of reading as often as possible, the teacher increases the changes that early adolescents will emulate this behavior" (Sanacore, 2000, p. 158).

Many students identified in a study that they found out about their favorite book from a teacher (Pitcher et al., 2007). Students also identified in a separate study having a classroom library and book suggestions as positively influencing their reading (Strommen & Mates, 2004). These findings make clear that teachers need to be a source of recommendations for their students (Pitcher et al., 2007). For those times when students do not get to choose what they are reading, teachers need to make sure they are assigning texts that are accessible to students, otherwise the assigned reading could contribute to students disengaging with reading (Ripp, 2016).

Other ways teachers can help students create positive attitude towards reading are creating classrooms that are culturally inclusive and inviting place that are safe areas for discussion (Baker, 2002). Within this safe space, teachers need to become those models students may not have, which includes modeling strategies for comprehension and

finding information (Pitcher et al., 2007). Modeling also includes reading aloud, from which students get exposed to different type of literature, get entertainment or information, awaken curiosity, and overall, have positives experiences with reading that help create positive attitudes (Sanacore, 2000).

Combined effort. It is clear for students to be successful in building their intrinsic desire to read it will take the combined efforts of their guardians and teachers. Teachers can help build the love of reading for pleasure, but it needs to start and be maintained at home.

Modeling the love of reading is important. Students need to see the adults in their lives be passionate about their reading. It should be the goal of the adults to pass on this passion, but this can only be achieved for students in reading if they are given voice, choice, and authentic activities that give them a chance to share their reading with others.

The guiding question *What are effective strategies for building middle school students' intrinsic desire to read?* can be partly answered with this information. It is clear how important teachers modeling positive reading habits for students is for them to build the intrinsic desire to read. Teachers also need to consider the type of support each student receives at home in order to better support them in the classroom. These considerations will inform the curriculum designed to answer the guiding question.

Now that the role of adults in students' reading lives is identified, the benefits of reading need to be examined. Knowing the benefits could give both students and adults more motivation to build the intrinsic desire to read. It is also possible to use the benefits of reading to set long-term goals.

Benefits of Reading

The purpose for building a student's intrinsic desire to read is based in the belief that there are benefits to being a strong reader. Exactly what those benefits are, though, must be explored to determine if the effort is worth the result.

According to Krashen (1993), children who read for pleasure increase their vocabulary, their ability to understand and use complex grammatical constructions, and become better writers spellers (as cited in Strommen & Mates, 2004). Krashen also found reluctant readers may not develop the reading and writing skill necessary to navigate today's world (as cited in Strommen & Mates, 2004). Baker (2002) agreed that there is a growing gap between readers and reluctant readers, and this could lead in an increase in a "lack of understanding complex syntactic structures, conceptual development and knowledge, and vocabulary growth" (p. 365). Cunningham and Stanovich (1997) also found that reading helps students build vocabulary and master rare words that are necessary for their success in academics and their careers (as cited in Klauda, 2009).

Students' vocabulary increases through their public school years due in part to exposure to written language (Nippold, Duthie & Larsen, 2005). Written language contains greater variety of complex and low-frequency words when compared to spoken language, and the written word is also a great place to learn new meanings of words (Nippold et al., 2005). Students never stop becoming better readers as they learn more language because students who identify as readers acquire a larger vocabulary than reluctant readers (Nippold et al., 2005). Overall, reading is an incredibly important factor in students' development of language (Nippold et al., 2005).

Beyond building literacy and vocabulary, readers also "have opportunities to apply skills to meaningful contexts, build general and content-specific knowledge, [and] experience fluency with connected text" (Sanacore, 2000, p. 157). Reading is a necessity to academic success (Klauda, 2009). In a study by Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding (1988), it was discovered that students scoring in the higher percentiles read more than those in the lower (as cited in Hodapp, 2016). By the fifth grade, reading has become a tool for gaining new knowledge due to decoding and fluency skills being developed (Nippold et al., 2005). An increase in reading for pleasure has also been linked to an increased performance in math (Wilhelm & Smith, 2016) and standardized writing tests (Gallagher, 2009).

When students engage in reading for pleasure about their interests, effort, motivation, and attitudes about reading improve (Nippold et al., 2005). In cases of students who are frustrated with complex texts, allowing them to read simpler ones, like comic books, improves basic reading skills confidence (Nippold et al., 2005).

According to ACT, Inc. (2006), it has been found that 70 percent of students in college taking remedial classes fail to earn a degree within eight years, and 11 percent of students entering college must enroll in remedial reading classes (as cited in Gallagher, 2004). Related to this, due to lack of reading skills, 25-40 percent of children will have a shortened schooling career (The Literacy Company, 2013). There is even a connection between lack of reading skills and juvenile offenders, as 85 percent cannot read well enough to participate in their own case (Kirsch, Jungeblat, Jenkins & Kolstad, 2002).

According to Elkins and Luke (1999), reluctant readers can miss out on the role reading and literature play in identity development (as cited in Lenters, 2006). Zibulsky (2014) believed students also gain an understanding of others' perspectives from reading, and this is key in developing empathy (as cited in Klauda, 2009).

The benefits of reading for pleasure extend into adulthood. Reading makes one smart, and it studies suggest it also keeps one smart (Gallagher, 2003). A study conducted in 2000 by the Alzheimer's Association found that people who suffered from all forms of dementia were less educated and read less as adults than their healthy counterparts (as cited in Gallagher, 2003). Other health benefits include reduced stress levels of up to 68 percent from reading for pleasure for six minutes (Klauda, 2009).

Biancarosa and Snow (2004) found the 25 fastest growing professions, including engineering, network analysis, software programming, and physical therapy, had higher than average literacy demands. The National Endowment for the Arts (2007) found that in the business world in general, a person can spend two hours of their workday reading on average (as cited in Gallagher, 2004).

On the other side, there appears to be a relationship between choosing to not read for pleasure and negative consequences. Almost 50 percent of people with the lowest literacy skills live in poverty, 14.5 percent of Americans with poor reading skills were underemployed, and 60 percent of prison inmates were functionally illiterate (Kirsh, Jungeblat, Jenkins, & Kolstad, 2002).

Rewarded reading. The benefits of reading are clear, and how critical reading can be to one's success. The most comforting notion may be that reading in general, no

matter what the material, improves one's reading abilities. Understanding this benefit may help teachers move away from completely prescribed reading material to a curriculum which supports students' interests and choice.

When considering all the benefits of reading, outside of building one's literacy, it is clear how important reading can be to one's life in general, beyond building a successful career. As stated earlier, reading has multiple mental health benefits. There seems to be little to no negative consequences of building a love of reading, and this conclusion should bring great motivation and meaning to teachers' efforts to build students' intrinsic desire to read.

When promoting reading in classrooms some teachers may make common mistakes which can actually be detrimental to buildings students' love of reading. It is still important that reading skills be assessed in the classroom, but how those skills are assessed must be analyzed.

Reading Assessments

Teachers have often included some type of reading assignments or assessments in their curriculum designed to make students read more throughout the year as well as force students to try different type of texts and genres. Some systems even include rewarding students based on the amount they read. Different aspects of these assignments and assessments will be analyzed in this section to see if creating intrinsic motivation to read can be successfully supported with assessments.

The goal of this capstone is to determine the best way to develop in middle school students the intrinsic desire to read, but it is also important to understand extrinsic

motivation, and if that is an option to access intrinsic motivation. Rewarding in some way the amount students' read is a common practice for some teachers. At least one study has found that extrinsically reinforcing reading, whether with money or pizza, may increase the enjoyment of reading and may also increase fluency (Flora & Flora, 1999). This study also argues against the commonly held beliefs that extrinsic motivation harms intrinsic motivation (Flora & Flora, 1999). While the study found there was no effect on intrinsic motivation when motivating reading with extrinsic rewards, this system may have set the stage for intrinsic motivation to grow (Flora & Flora, 1999). To summarize, this study made a less-than convincing argument for extrinsic motivators. The argument was since there was no link to harming intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation could be a useful tool. What this study failed to recognize was that there was also no link to improved reading-for-pleasure habits when using extrinsic motivators.

On the contrary, many studies have shown that extrinsic rewards tended to make people, regardless of age, less interested in what they were being motivated to accomplish (Kohn, 2014). In another study on extrinsic motivation, it was found that "tangible rewards tend to have a substantially negative effect on intrinsic motivation" (Deci, Koenster & Ryan, 1999, pp. 658-659). Although it is true that extrinsic motivators can be used to "control people's behaviors . . . the primary negative effect of rewards is that they tend to forestall self-regulation" (Deci et al., 1999, p. 659). If reading becoming an enjoyable habit is the goal, then self-regulation is essential because extrinsic rewards will not always be available. The enjoyment of reading must be the reward, which is why creating intrinsic desire in students is so important.

Other mistakes that many teachers seem to make is quantifying students' reading by measuring time spent reading or the amount of reading completed (Kohn, 2014). Research has shown that even avid readers begin to set alarms to signal the end of their reading when given time requirements (Kohn, 2014). Limiting the type of texts that are counted as legitimate, such as class texts, is not only restrictive to students, but to teachers as well (Pitcher et al., 2007). Both readers and reluctant readers have identified in surveys that when given comprehension questions for class texts, they simply scan the text for answers rather than engage with it (Strommen & Mates, 2004). Most importantly, it is important that reading time be set aside not just for completing class work, but also for recreational reading (Schaefer, 2017).

One of the most important factors in creating intrinsic motivation to read through assessments is allowing students choice and agency (McCombs, 1997). "When students choose the book they read, motivation and engagement increases" (Stevens, 2016, p. 65). Students not only need choice in what they read, but also how they show their understanding of what was read (Pitcher et al., 2007). Choice can even extend into class curriculum, such as students getting to choose the class text by voting (Pitcher et al., 2007). Surveys could also be used to decide what books are included in the classroom library (Benning & Zucker, 2014). When giving students choice of what they read, it is important to make it as easy as possible for them to find the book they need (Benning & Zucker, 2014). This could be made possible in the classroom by creating book bins based on genre and lexile (Benning & Zucker, 2014). Both interests and skill level are included in this organizational technique.

Another way to support the growth of intrinsic motivation to read while assessing is to give students the opportunity for their voice to be heard about what they are reading. When students have opportunities for self-expression as part of their literacy activities, they were more intrinsically engaged in learning (Oldfather, 1995). Giving students these opportunities can take many different forms. One way is to conduct frequent conferences with students about what they are reading (Benning & Zucker, 2014). In this way, teachers can help "learners own the process of constructing meaning [while] honoring and respecting student voice" (McCombs, 1997, p. 129).

Students can also make their voice heard in workshops. Steven (2016) found that "workshops can add to students' interest in reading" (p. 65). Being in workshops with other students reading the same texts also gives students the opportunity to collaborate and develop more in depth explanations of the text (Stevens, 2016). Workshops allow students to read at their own independent level, which helps them find success and builds their confidence and motivation (Stevens, 2016).

When sharing their voice, students also have the opportunity to relate personally to the text, regardless of reading fiction or nonfiction (McCombs, 1997). In order to help students become lifelong readers, teachers must honor students' diverse backgrounds and individual experiences (McCombs, 1997)

An effective motivational tool is to let students set their own reading goals (Baker, 2002). Assessments still need to challenge students, but letting them set goals gives students autonomy and personal meaning to their reading (McCombs, 1997). Making meaning of texts is one way children grow to love reading (Kohn, 2014). Not

only that, but also "knowledge-seeking activities can positively influence [students'] goal orientations, interests and a sense of personal agency during reading activities" (McCombs, 1997, p. 127). It had been found that what influences reading engagement is a change to seek knowledge that relates to personal goals, interests, and self development in what might otherwise be thought of as uninteresting information and expository texts (McCombs, 1997). Practices like these have not only been shown to increase student engagement and intrinsic motivation, but also an increase in students' Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) scores by the end of the school year (Benning & Zucker, 2014).

Applying assessments to the classroom. Assessing students' reading is a lot like helping them build the love of reading in general. Students need voice, choice, and agency in assessing their reading. They need to be a part of the process to give them ownership over their reading, and to help them see their progress.

Assessments need to be authentic and purposeful. They need to give students a chance to share what they are reading in a meaningful way. Making students engage in assessments or activities that do not appear related or useful can risk reducing the amount students enjoy reading for fun.

Having students assess their reading with the guidance of a teacher can be an effective way to make assessments appear useful and authentic. Students can also engage in formative assessments that track their goals, and finals assessments to gauge how far they have come.

Summary

This literature review shows the importance that both parents and teachers have in the development of their students' intrinsic desire to read for pleasure. Students have a more developed intrinsic desire to read when reading for pleasure is demonstrated at home on a consistent basis, not just during infancy. Parents need to take part in their children's reading lives by actively making many different types of literature available, whether it be from trips to the library or from bookstores. Parents also need to demonstrate their love of reading in front of their children. These practices are best served when they continue during the child's entire schooling career.

Teachers need to give students voice and choice with their reading, and perhaps most importantly, give their students time to read what they want to read. Part of this process includes expanding the definition of what is accepted as legitimate reading. Students need to be able to make personal connections with texts, and feel that their interests are represented in those texts. This is also a crucial part of identity building in the Language Arts classroom.

If these standards are not met by parents and teachers, then there is a strong chance that students' already developed love of reading may diminish in secondary school. Students need to be introduced to new and challenging texts as their interests change as they grow. The love of reading can also be extinguished when students begin to think of reading as a set of skills to be learned rather than another opportunity for entertainment.

The benefits of reading begin in childhood and extend all the way throughout adulthood. People become better readers as long as they keep reading challenging texts, regardless of what type of text it is. Children with strong reading-for-pleasure habits have higher standardized test scores, a stronger vocabulary, a stronger sense of sympathy and empathy, a strong grasp of diction and syntax, and stronger literacy skills in general. Adults with consistent reading habit are more likely to have higher paying jobs (Kirsh, Jungeblat, Jenkins, & Kolstad, 2002), work in a growing field (Biancarosa & Snow, 2007), and reduce the risks of all form of dementia, including Alzheimer's (Gallagher, 2003).

When teachers assess students' reading-related skills, they must do it in a way that does not interfere with a students' reading for pleasure habits. One of the most frequently identified ways to assess students is to give them the opportunity to have voice and choice in how they are assessed. Most students identified workshops as a way of assessment. This gives students a chance to talk about their reading with other students and teachers.

Letting students set their own reading goals is another strong way to assess their literacy skills. Having students set their own goals gives them an opportunity to self-assess their abilities and to get realistic goals they feel they can achieve with an acceptable amount of effort. Teachers can be part of this process by conferencing individually with students about what they want to achieve throughout the year. This also gives students a sense of ownership.

Chapter Three will introduce the curriculum I have designed. The intended purpose of this curriculum is to help middle school students build the intrinsic desire to read. The curriculum will be informed by the literature I have covered in this review, as well as other areas or frameworks from which I have pulled ideas and inspiration. Those sources will be cited in Chapter Three when appropriate. Chapter Three will also cover the intended setting and context for this curriculum.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

Getting middle school students to enjoy reading can be a struggle for some teachers. Those same teachers understand the importance reading has in a student's success, regardless of the subject area. The guiding question, *What are effective strategies for building middle school students' intrinsic desire to read?* led to the development of a reading curriculum to be used at the middle school level. This curriculum was designed to build a classroom routine around reading in which students will actively choose what they read, their reading goals, and their self-assessments.

The idea for this curriculum first came to me when I was introduced to the *Reading Requirements* in my school. I was a new teacher and was eager to go with whatever was already set in place to make my transition to this position as easy as possible.

After struggling to find success with the *Reading Requirement* (see APPENDIX A) curriculum, I decided I need to replace it with something that would both help students enjoy reading more and also help build their reading skills. I started to do initial research before beginning my capstone as a way to come prepared to meetings in my building about changing the reading requirements. I soon found that there was no way to change them that would make me excited to have them a part of my curriculum, or in a way I knew my students would benefit.

The first step in this process was to determine what does not work for helping students build their love of reading. This was identified early in the literature review process. Simply, anything that requires students to track the amount of time or pages they read does not work. Assigning grades to the amount or difficulty students reading material was also not acceptable (Kohn, 2014).

The next step was to design activities and project from which students choose to interact with their reading and build their reading skills. This included showing students that any kind of reading counts as legitimate reading. Also, giving students the skills they need to find things to read that interest them.

Developing a system for students to self-identify reading goals was necessary to give students a sense of ownership over their reading improvement. This part of the curriculum is also designed to help students notice that their reading improves by simply reading more consistently, and also that finding something they are interested in reading makes it easier to want to read more consistently.

Finally, a system of self-evaluation was developed for students to reflect on their reading. This way students will not only spend more time thinking about the effort they put into their reading, but also grade themselves on their improvement. Students will then not associate success or failure as part of their grade or a skill learned, but rather an opportunity to reflect, grow, and improve.

Research

To support the development of the curriculum, *The Understanding by Design: Guide to Creating High-Quality Units* by Wiggins and McTighe (2011) was used at the

foundational model. The focus of this development process is to start with intended

outcomes for students, and work backwards from there. This helps teachers constantly

focus on the *why* for all of their curriculum development. If the activity or assessment

does not somehow lead to the intended outcome, then it should not be used.

Teachers sometimes focus on engagement through making sure students are

having fun. This, in the long run, does not equal students learning skills that are

transferable, ie. usable in another setting. Engagement can be brought about creating

meaningful lessons, not just making sure students are having fun.

While creating this curriculum, I focused on using *Module D* of *Understanding by*

Design. This module focused on setting up the simple stages for creating the curriculum.

This began by identifying my desired results of the curriculum, or what I wanted the

students to be able to achieve by the end of the year. Then, the module focuses on

creating a way to gather evidence of this result. This included creating different

assessments to both measure how much students are reading by choice and also measure

students' mastery of certain reading-related skills. Finally, *Module D* focused on the

learning plan. This included all the lessons and learning activities in the curriculum. By

creating the curriculum with this module of *Understanding by Design*, I was able to stay

focused on the intended outcome of the curriculum, and make sure there was a reason for

each part of the curriculum to exist.

Project Description

The intention of this curriculum was to create a year-long routine teachers could

begin at the start of the school year. This routine includes reading independently every

day, frequent book talks by teachers, conferencing with students about their reading, and also end-of-the-quarter projects designed to help students build stronger reading skills with what they choose to read.

The first week of the curriculum is designed to take place at the beginning of the school year. These lessons include introducing students to the benefits of reading, how to help themselves find something they enjoy reading, how to rethink their habits around reading, and to also introduce the routine that will take place every week for the rest of the school year. This routine includes visiting the media center once a week, reading independently every day in class, and also conferencing with the teacher and classmates every Friday about their reading.

There are also four end-of-the-quarter projects, once for each quarter. These projects are designed to take a week to complete, and they each focus on one of the following reading-specific skills: character development, personal connection, compare and contrast, and theme analysis. Students will complete the projects using the texts the chose to read throughout the respective quarter. Each project will be graded on the rubric provided for each assessment. Students will have access to the rubrics as well so they will have a clear understanding of what skills on which they will be measured.

Surveys will be used to monitor students progress with their effort in making reading more enjoyable for themselves and also their current feelings towards reading. One of the surveys is given at the beginning of the school year to create baseline data. This survey is also used to help the teacher each student's individual situation at home in the following categories: their ability to concentrate on reading outside of school, their

access to reading materials outside of school, and any reading social circles they may be a part of including family and friends.

The other surveys will be given at the end of each quarter. These surveys contain the same questions concerning students' efforts towards building stronger reading habits and their feelings towards reading for fun. The results of the quarterly surveys can be compared to the data collected at the beginning of the school year.

The final piece to the curriculum is rationales. The rationales cover the subjects of independent reading time, conferencing, classroom libraries, surveys, quarterly projects, media center visits, book talks, and conferencing with students about their reading. These rationales are intended to give teachers a research-based argument for the inclusion of each part of the curriculum.

Setting

This curriculum was developed at a suburban middle school located south of the Twin Cities. This middle school includes grades seven through eight, but the curriculum was created solely within a seventh grade setting. There are three seventh grade Language Arts teachers at this building, and the average class size of this grade level approximately 30 students. This is a smaller average than either sixth or eighth grade.

Students in this school operate on a block schedule, with each block running between 88-91 minutes. Students spend three of the four blocks during the day in their core classes: math, language arts, history, and science. Their elective courses are half a block, and referred to as *skinnies*. All grade-level students take their electives at the same time (6th grade during first, 7th grade during fourth, and 8th grade during second). The

daily schedule also operates on *A* and *B* days, with students only having each of their classes on one of those days, and the only exception to the rule being language arts, which students have every day.

There are currently 770 students enrolled in this school, and the demographic breakdown is as follows: 81% White, 7% Latino or Hispanic, 4% two or more races, 3% Asian, 3% Black or African American, and 1% Native American or Alaska Native. Three percent of students are identified as English Learners, 10.9 % qualify for special education assistance, and 13.9% qualify for free or reduced lunch. According to the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA), 65.3% of students rate proficient at reading, 59.9% at math, and 48% at science (Minnesota Report Card, n.d.).

There are currently 63 licensed professionals working in the building. Most core-class teachers teach only one grade level, but a few teach across grade levels. All elective course teachers teach across all three grade levels. The administration includes a principal, assistant principal, two counselors, and school psychologist. The building also has many paraprofessionals working with students who qualify for their assistance.

The district the school operates in is a one-to-one district, meaning all students, K-12, have an iPad to supplement their education. The iPads were introduced into the district seven years ago. The district also makes use of Schoology and Infinite Campus to supplement learning. Schoology is used to give students a digital classroom experience and teachers make use of this explicitly as part of their teaching. Infinite Campus gives both students and guardians instant access to live gradebooks for each of their courses, and also helps parents keep track of student absences. With the idea of the digital or

online classroom in mind, this district implements *flex days* twice a year. These are days when students stay at home and receive their instruction and learning activities solely through Schoology and their iPads. Teachers are expected to communicate digitally with their students through the day.

Therefore, this curriculum is designed to function in a middle school setting. While it was designed in a suburban school, it could be adapted easily to any middle school setting, with the only requirement being students have access to books, whether through a school or classroom library.

This curriculum is also designed to work with students of all reading skills and interest levels. The overall goal is to build the love of reading, whether a student is an avid reader to begin with or a reluctant reader.

Middle school-aged students are the focus of this curriculum because part of it focuses on helping students find quality reading material that reflects their changing interests as they grow from grade schoolers to middle schoolers. This change is also represented in the difficulty of the reading material, as there can be a significant jump between these reading levels. While it would not be out of the question to adapt this to a high-school setting, the focus of the research this curriculum is based on was middle school level reading.

Participants

The intended audience for this curriculum is middle school students and any teachers who are struggling to motivate their classrooms to read. This curriculum is also for any teacher willing to rethink their teaching practices connected to getting their

students to read more. The guiding principle of the curriculum is that in order for students to make reading an authentic experience they willingly enjoy, they must interact with reading in an authentic way.

Timeline

By this time I had enrolled in the Capstone Practicum, and thus began my capstone project, deeper research into the conundrum that is the lack of reading enjoyment for middle schoolers, and ways to reignite the love of reading many students have when entering middle school, but lose along the way. Throughout the following first half of the school year, I applied different theories about developing in students intrinsic motivations. This included making it clear that there would be no reading requirements or points tied to how much each student read. Each student was also encouraged to read whatever they wanted, as long as it was school-appropriate. In the beginning, small assignments were given to students to encourage them to interact with their reading in a more authentic and meaningful way, but these ideas were soon abandoned as it was clear that they were falling into the path of the original reading requirements.

The completed curriculum was designed and modified over the course of approximately three months. The lessons intended for the first week of school were created first with the intention of guiding the rest of the curriculum. As the lesson were created, I also wrote the various rationales that are included. I felt these would help teachers understand my thinking for including each piece of the curriculum, and thereby bring validity to the project.

Next I created the surveys. These were adapted from surveys I had already been giving my students. The biggest change was including questions about students current reading lives home. I thought this would be a good way to gather data on students and learn about each of them as individual readers. This data could also help teachers troubleshoot with students who consistently struggle with reading for pleasure.

Finally, I created the quarterly projects and all the materials included in those projects. This was some of the most time consuming work because I wanted the projects to be as authentic as possible and not turn into assessments indented to force students to read more. A few ideas were borrowed from different resources for a couple of the projects, but most of the material was adapted from different assignments I have used in my classroom in the past. A lot of new ideas for the projects came from focusing on the intended outcome of each of them and trying to make the projects as authentic as possible.

Assessment

The success of this curriculum will be measured by student surveys I have created. In order to get an accurate reflection of how students feel about reading, one survey will be given at the beginning of the school year to determine students' current feelings about their reading habits and reading in general. Quarterly surveys will also be given to compare students' answers to the baseline data collected at the beginning of the school year. This will also help teachers identify students who may need higher levels of intervention to help them become more successful with building strong reading habits. If the curriculum is successful, one should see an increase in the amount of students that

respond positively towards both their reading habits and the feeling about reading in general.

Summary

This chapter covered the basic outline of the curriculum developed for this capstone. It covered the foundational theories the curriculum is built on, and also the rationale for the existence of the curriculum. The intended use for this curriculum is for middle school students and their teachers. It was developed mostly over the past year as the project portion of a capstone for a Master's Degree in teaching. Chapter four is a reflection on the whole capstone process and the development of the curriculum.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

Introduction

At the beginning of my journey through the capstone process, I started with a

complicated question: *What are effective strategies for building middle school students'*

intrinsic desire to read? This question was complicated because it is one that many

middle school teachers have struggled with throughout their career. Initially, it seemed

almost unsolvable. Surely if it were solvable the strategies would be common practice in

classrooms already. As I soon found out, there are answers available, and unfortunately,

best practice does not always make it into classrooms.

This chapter will cover my journey through the capstone process. First, it will

analyze what I learned as a researcher, writer, and learner. This may reveal any

limitations to my project or its scope. It will also reflect on the major learnings I have

taken away from this research and experience. Then, the chapter will revisit my literature

review, and review. This will summarize the main takeaways that informed my decision

making when constructing my project. Finally, the chapter will revisit my project, its

limitations, and how the project benefits the teaching profession. This will look at the

project from many different angles, and hopefully give any potential users of the project

room to adapt it as they see fit. It will also hopefully give more legitimacy to the project

my recognizing its limitations. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the main takeaways.

Review of the Process

After teaching in secondary schools for seven years, it was no mystery that most secondary students I worked with did not enjoy reading for pleasure. From what I observed, most students saw reading as a school-related activity only. I understood the role reading played in my life, and how it benefited me, but getting my students to understand that experience without having them read first was my first hurdle. I needed to show them the benefits of reading for pleasure, and how there as more to it than enjoying a good story.

Finding information specifically about the benefits of reading was surprisingly difficult. I thought there would be much more easy-to-find research specifically about this subject, but most of the information I found came from other sources where the benefits of reading were discussed briefly. From these various resources I was able to piece together both short-term and long-term benefits of reading. This information was necessary to research and analyze because if there were no major benefits to reading for pleasure then there would be no reason to continue this project, outside of letting teachers know to not force their students to read at all. Not surprisingly, the benefits of reading were great in both number and importance.

Finding research on all other aspects of reading in secondary schools was relatively easy. There was almost unanimous consensus in the literature I read about student voice and choice in reading, and also making sure the purpose of reading remains

as close as possible to an activity for enjoyment, and not just a school-related skill. There was also a great amount of consensus on not limiting students in what they can read. Modeling strong reading habits, such as talking about one's reading and reading every day, is also an important part of building intrinsic desire to read in students. One of the last major areas of consensus was not assigning a grade to the amount a student reads, whether it be pages or time spent reading.

Writing the literature review was surprisingly difficult as well. Synthesizing the information was pretty straight-forward, but blending what the material said with my own thinking proved troublesome at times. Feedback I received about the literature review made it clear it looked as though I was assembling a large puzzle rather than writing a cohesive literature review. The demand to try to make everything fit and connect throughout the entire writing process was also difficult. The longer the capstone became, the more time I needed to spend reviewing my own writing every time I can back to it.

Stepping back into the shoes of a learner was rather natural. I have really never stopped being a learner in my life, just like most teachers. The demand to constantly obtain continuing education units to renew my teaching license has forced me to stay a life-long learner. The ability to switch to being a student once again was very helpful when gathering information and completing my literature review.

Overall, the major learning I can take away from this research and experience is to simply let students enjoy reading by giving them time to read and helping them find something they actually want to read. If reading is meant to be enjoyable, let them enjoy it. Few people find new hobbies by being forced to in something in a very rigid and

prescribed way with no room for individuality. Reading is the same. If a student is meant to enjoy reading, they must make it their own through voice, choice, and authenticity.

Literature Review Revisited

After compiling my literature review, there were four main takeaways: the decline for students in intrinsic motivation to read in secondary school, the roles adults play in students' reading lives, the benefits of reading, and how to properly assess students in their reading. Each takeaway was valuable when designing my capstone project.

Students' intrinsic motivation to reading is developed in elementary school, but that motivation can be lost in their secondary schooling years. A possible reason for this is the purpose of reading changes. In elementary school, reading is mostly about choice. In secondary schools, reading becomes about perfecting a skill to be performed on a test. Choice can also be stripped away in a teacher's efforts to cover certain standards throughout the year. The research shows, though, that giving a student choice in what they read will not only increase their intrinsic motivation, but it will also increase their test scores. One of the most useful resources that demonstrated this was *Disrupting Thinking: Why How We Read Matters* by Beers and Probst (2017). While it might be slightly more difficult to give each students individual choice in what they read, choice is essential for a student's success.

The role of adults is also incredibly important for a student's success with reading for pleasure. Whether it is inside or outside school, each student needs to see adults interact with reading authentically. Some students can observe this at home because they come from a home of avid readers. Some students, however, do not have a situation like

this. Therefore, it is important that teachers model how to interact with reading in positive and energetic ways. This includes, but is not limited to, independently reading with students, talking about what you are reading, making book recommendations, and also talking about when you are struggling to find something to read. Any way an adult interacts positively with reading needs to be modeled for students to help them understand what reading can look like outside a classroom.

In order to help legitimize this project, it was essential to study the benefits of reading. It was not surprising the benefits of reading for pleasure were numerous and wide-reaching. The research showed that not only does reading for pleasure raise test scores, but it also helps students build a stronger vocabulary, help them develop empathy, and also a personal identity (Beers & Probst, 2017). Some of the long-term benefits included stronger work-related skills (Gallagher, 2004; Klauda, 2009) and possibly reducing the risk of later-life mental health issues (Gallagher, 2003). All of these benefits, and more, make it clear that strong reading habits must help be developed in secondary classrooms.

Throughout my research, there was little doubt in my mind that most teachers understand the benefits and importance of strong reading habits. This, unfortunately, sometimes led to counter-productive curriculum, such as assignments created around forcing students to read a variety of texts, or monitoring how many pages or books a student reads, or how much time is spent on reading outside of school. These practices, while designed with good intentions, actually add to the problem of students losing motivation to read for pleasure. These practices often take away choice and authenticity

of reading. It is rare that when one is reading for pleasure outside a school setting there a list of genres to complete or a certain amount of time one must spend reading every day.

In order for students to willingly build a love of reading for pleasure they must be given authentic tasks. These must include student voice and choice. If a teacher decides to grade a student's reading, it must be based on how that student performs or understands certain skills, not what they read or how much. These skills can be standards-based, but some examples include noticing character changes over time, identifying themes, supporting thinking with evidence from the text, and many others. Whatever the assessment is, it must not take away student choice and voice.

My research started with trying to find the benefits of reading, and although it proved somewhat difficult, when I expanded my scope to encompass more aspects of my guiding question it became much easier to find studies on the information for which I was looking. The research almost conclusively shows that to build a students' love for reading they must be given voice, choice, and authentic ways to interact with their reading. This research helped inform greatly the decisions I made when creating my capstone project.

Project Review and Limitations

It was difficult to design a curriculum with the new constructed guiding principles: students must have voice, choice, and an authentic reading experience. The first focus of designing the curriculum was to help teachers build a reading routine in their classroom. The documents contained in this part of the curriculum hopefully guide teachers in this process and also validate the purpose of each lesson and piece of the routine. The part of the project can be limited by a teacher's access to resources and the

amount of time they have in the classroom with students. I designed this routine to function in a school that operates on a block schedule, where classes are 88 minutes long. Significant changes would need to be made to the curriculum to make it function in a school with a traditional schedule. I believe this to be relatively simply to achieve, and suggestions on how to do this are made throughout the curriculum.

The overall goal of the project is to help students develop a positive relationship with reading. A simple way to collect data on this could have been to monitor how much students are reading throughout the year, but that would have violated one of the guiding principles of giving students an authentic reading experience. It was for this reason I chose to have students self-identify their relationship and success with reading for pleasure at the end of each quarter. I felt this way to be less intrusive, and also a lot less work to monitor. Through this routine, students can have a much more authentic experience with reading throughout the quarter while still reflecting on how much effort they are placing into making reading a positive part of their lives. One shortcoming of the surveys may be the particular questions posed, though this can be modified to each teacher's preferences for their particular classroom. The curriculum was designed so that the same survey is given each quarter for ease of comparing responses, but if one is to find this approach unsatisfactory, the survey could be modified in multiple variations.

The last major part of the curriculum was creating the end-of-the-quarter projects. I vacillated on whether or not to complete this idea because at first it felt it went against the guiding principle of giving students an authentic way to interact with their reading. Writing a thematic essay is not usually part of one's reading habits. After considering this

conundrum for a while, I decided as long as the grading of the assessment focused on the reading-related skills, and not the reading itself, the projects would remain appropriate.

Part of my reasoning behind this connected to the way I feel careful readers interact with what they read. Being able to identify the changes in characters over time and analyzing a theme are important factors for one to get the most out of their reading. These skills, along with others, are ways avid readers interact authentically with their reading. While they may not write a paper to think about theme, I believe this to be an important step for students to practice this skill and receive valuable feedback.

There is a shortcoming to using the projects. The problem is that each student needs to finish a book of their choosing by the end of each quarter. This goes against not monitoring the amount a student reads. Despite this, I feel if a teacher is helping each student find something they genuinely want to read, asking the students to finish one book of their choice a quarter is not an unreasonable request. Also, this can help teachers identify students who struggle with reading more than their peers. Any student who does not finish a book in a quarter may be struggling with more than lack of motivation, such as an unidentified disability like dyslexia, for example.

Overall, I feel the curriculum to be a successful place to start. I foresee this being the starting point for developing something even more successful for students. Once it is put into practice there will undoubtedly be areas for improvement, as there always are with new curriculum. I plan to share this capstone project with my colleagues in my district by uploading it to Schoology, our district's educational platform, and look forward to their feedback about modifications they might make. I believe this capstone

project to be important in my profession because it makes a very strong argument against many current practices in the classroom. Not only that, but it also gives teachers a fully formed curriculum to put in place of what they might currently be doing. Each part of this curriculum is backed by specific research, which adds validity to the project as a whole. The activities and assignments are based in authentic, real-life experiences, which is something I feel is often missing from reading curriculums. In this project, students are asked to engage with their reading in a meaningful way which includes voice, choice, and authenticity.

Future research may focus more on what affect students' socioeconomic status has on their reading habits. Also, a deeper study of how students' home life affects them as lifelong readers, even when having a positive in-school reading experience, could prove to be useful. While providing strong reading experiences in school, this curriculum is limited. It does not have a plan to help students reinforce these habits at home. I believe some current reading practices done in some classrooms are meant to encourage students to read more at home, but these are they types of practices this capstone argues against due to the research showing the negative effects of trying to force students to read a certain amount of time or pages.

Summary

In order to build an intrinsic desire to read students must be given an authentic reading experience that includes voice and choice. They must be shown how consistent reading habits will not only benefits them now, but also in their adult lives. Part of this authentic experience needs to be modeled by the adults in the students' lives, which

includes their teachers. This includes modeling reading independently, talking about one's reading, and also struggles with reading that sometimes occur. Grades cannot be assigned to the amount of time a student spends reading, or the amount of pages or books completed. Instead, if grading must occur, it should be more skill-based and include those skills essential for getting the most out of one's reading. Students must take ownership of their reading by identifying how much they enjoy reading and if that might match how much effort they put into finding something they actually want to read. Overall, it is still the teacher's job to help build that positive relationship with reading for pleasure by helping students see that reading is more than a school-related skill.

My hope is that the curriculum project I have created makes a strong argument for these philosophies. I hope this argument, combined with the provided curriculum, will help teachers reverse the current trend of students losing their love for reading in middle schools and beyond.

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APPENDIX A

Reading Requirement Outline Document for Parents and Students

Reading Requirements Outline

Greetings Parents and Guardians,

Last week in Language Arts, your student learned about the Reading Requirements portion of their grade. The Reading Requirements make up 30% of their grade, and is designed to spark their love of reading through choice. This choice includes what your student reads and which assignments they will complete.

This document is meant to be a conversation piece between you and your student to help you understand what is required of them each quarter.

<u>Grading</u>

Each quarter, students are required to earn 150 Reading Requirement points. These points are accumulated gradually throughout the quarter, and are earned by students completing different reading-related assignments of their choice.

This category of the gradebook is inactive until the last two weeks of each quarter. Students may see how many points they are earning throughout the quarter, but those points will not affect the students' grades until the category is activated.

There are two reasons for this: first, because students get to choose which assignment they complete, each student will have a unique combination of completed assignments, and therefore, each assignment cannot be entered into the gradebook individually for

each student; second, if the category was active all quarter, it would negatively impact the students' grades until they achieved 150 points, and this would not be an accurate representation of the students' success in class.

Assignment Options

Students may choose a combination of the following assignments to complete the 150 Reading Requirement points each quarter. Please discuss each option with your student.

Minute Logs (20 pts each – bi-weekly): Students keep track of the minutes they read outside of school in two week increments. To get full credit for the assignment, students must read 100 minutes each week and keep track of the minutes on a paper copy of the Minute Log. Copies of the Minute Log can be located in the classroom and on Schoology. These are submitted in class only, not online.

Whatcha' Reading? (5 pts each – weekly): Students answer the weekly *Whatcha' Reading?* question provided to them on Schoology. Their response must be written in complete sentences, answer all parts of the question, and be submitted on Schoology by the end of the day Friday.

Conferences (10 pts each – Bi-weekly): Students conference with me once every two weeks about what they are reading and their current reading goal. Students sign up for conferences in class.

Book Reports (20 pts each): Students may complete a book report for any book they complete within the quarter. Students must complete the relevant report, fiction or non-fiction, and submit it in class, not online. Book reports can be located on Schoology or in class.

End of the Quarter Project (20 Pts): This is the only assignment that it NOT optional for students. At the end of each quarter, students will complete a project based around their reading of choice. Ample time will be provided to students to complete the project in class, but some work may need to be completed at home.

After discussing the requirements with your student, please contact me with any further questions.

_____   _____

Student (Please Print)   Parent or Guardian