

WHAT DO MIDDLE SCHOOL BOYS READ?
AN OBSERVATION OF MIDDLE SCHOOL BOYS' READING CHOICES

by Sheilah Cooper Barnett

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

Sheilah Cooper Barnett. WHAT DO MIDDLE SCHOOL BOYS READ? AN OBSERVATION OF MIDDLE SCHOOL BOYS' READING CHOICES. (Under the direction of Dr. Deanna Keith, Coordinator for Special Education), School of Education, April 2011.

This qualitative study investigated what current middle school boys are reading. The purpose of this study was to gain information that would aid educators in providing those reading materials and communicating with male students concerning their reading habits. Six middle school males were chosen for this study, which utilized a phenomenological approach to capture individual experiences. Results showed that boys do read, but they often read materials which educators do not generally accept as valid reading material, such as magazines. Boys often do not view themselves as readers. Males enjoy books with a lot of action and prefer to observe other males' choices of books instead of explicitly receiving or making recommendations. Boys also like to choose their own reading materials. Males learn differently from females and may need to be taught in different environments or taught reading at a later age. Boys usually require more action and movement than girls, and this must be incorporated when educators teach males. Future studies could focus on how the male brain works and how males learn. Future researchers could also study the effectiveness of a reading teacher who works with male students who have reading deficiencies and/or who state that they dislike reading.

Dedication

First, I would like to dedicate this work to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He is my strength and my defense (Exodus 15:2), and I can do nothing without Him (John 15:5).

I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my wonderful mother, Shelby Jean Cooper:

She is clothed with strength and dignity. She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue. She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children arise and call her blessed. Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all. (Proverbs 31: 25-29)

Throughout my education, Mom, you have been my most staunch supporter, both emotionally and financially. All of my education, both formal and informal, has come about because of you. I have witnessed your grace and the strength of your faith through much heartache and misery, and through it all, you never failed our family. You have patted me on the back when I needed it (and kicked me in the derriere just as often, but it was always well deserved). I am what I have become because of you, and I am eternally grateful. I love you, but most of all I look up to you and hold you as the ultimate role model.

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During the many years that I attended school and worked, my four sons were very accommodating and longsuffering. They have grown into fine young men. Shannon, I admire the talents that God has given you and pray that you continue to use them for His glory. Ashley, I am grateful for your love and faith in me and your huge heart and willingness to help everyone. Jared, I am proud of your perseverance in obtaining your degree in aeronautics and becoming a pilot. Sam, I speak of you with honor for serving your country in the military. I love my boys and thank God for you every day of my life.

My grandchildren have been very generous to allow me the time on my computer to work when they really wanted to play games. Thanks, Kathryn Shelby and Colton and Gavin Faulkner. Bryce Barnett, you are too little to play games yet, but you do enjoy beating on the keys while I am trying to work, so thank you for letting me have my computer in one piece.

My entire family has been magnificent and supportive during this long and difficult process, and I wish to thank them all. My sister, Rhonda Page, always inquires about my progress and encourages me. Most importantly, she prays for me. Thanks to my brother, Ronnie, for lending us the plane. I could do nothing without the strong love and encouraging words from my family. The Lord has truly blessed us beyond measure!

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Research has shown that boys today are not as interested in reading as girls are (Sax, 2009; Thorndike, 1941). Whitmire (2010) postulated that boys might be more competent at reading if educators could find better methods of interesting the male student. Whitmore (2010) and Sax (2009) found that when schools began to push sophisticated literacy skills into early grades, boys were not ready to learn these skills and became frustrated. Girls learned these methods early and became successful. Since boys had trouble picking up these difficult skills, they may have decided that school was intended more for girls than for them.

This qualitative study used a phenomenological approach, through direct observation and interview, to determine what middle school boys are reading. These findings can be used by educators to persuade boys to become more involved in reading. Media specialists may use these findings to acquire reading materials which will interest the male reader.

Background of the Study

There is vast research on how boys and girls perform in school (National Assessment of Educational Progress [NAEP], 2005; NAEP, 2009). There is not vast research on why these differences exist or how important they are. Sax (2009) wrote that males have higher test scores on visual-spatial ability, which is the ability to think in terms of nonverbal, symbolic information. These visual-spatial abilities emerge in adolescence. These types of learners (usually males) need to see the whole picture before they can comprehend the parts. Drill and rote memorization are not effective teaching

methods for visual-spatial learners (Gallagher, 2009). As schools and the public focus more on boys' achievement, research will help teachers to improve boys' academic success. Educators can use the growing body of boy-centric research to make schools more boy-friendly.

In a study by Chudowsky and Chudowsky (2011), 76% of 8th grade girls scored at or above proficiency in reading while only 65% of boys scored at or above proficiency in reading. In no state did boys outperform girls in reading at any level. The middle school reading median was 78% proficient for girls and 70% for boys (Chudowsky & Chudowsky, 2011). The study specifically stated that this gap is cause for concern and must be narrowed for males at all grade levels. Boys are not catching up with girls on reading performance according to state tests, which has resulted in this becoming a pressing issue in education. According to Smith and Wilhelm (2002) the concern for boys' having lower scores on reading tests is now being called "The New Boys Movement." Brozo (2002) used the term *imperative education challenge* to refer to the need for a focus on boys and their learning styles. He also found that

- by fourth grade the average boy is two years behind the average girl in reading,
- 70% of special education classes are comprised of boys,
- boys are four times more likely to have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) than girls,
- boys are 50% more likely to be retained than girls,
- boys are three times more likely to be placed in reading/learning disabilities settings,

- boys score less well than girls in reading and writing, and
- boys are less motivated to read and write than their girl counterparts. (Brozo, 2002, p. 12)

Former First Lady Laura Bush spoke on National Public Radio, stating that “we’ve sort of shifted our gaze away from boys for the last several decades” (Norris, 2005, para. 2). This focus was called “The Boy Crisis” by Peg Tyre (2008), who later wrote a layman’s guide based on her boy crisis article. Tyre found that boys often get to middle school and do not like to admit that they are overwhelmed by academics and social behavior and tend to struggle with learning. She also stated that one of the most influential aspects of boys’ academic success is a positive male role model in their lives. Boys will not typically participate in activities which make them look weak; they are therefore especially attracted to video games because they can set the levels of the games and experience success. Viadero (2006) agreed with Bush about the concerns over gender gaps which are beginning to turn back to males being the lower achievers.

This boy crisis is a concern not only in the United States, but in Canada and the United Kingdom as well. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (2009) showed that in all countries tested, girls outperformed boys in reading. Over the past three decades, boys’ test scores are mostly up, but girls are still doing better (Mead, 2006). Educators must discern ways to support males in the area of literacy in order to raise their test scores as well as to contribute to their healthy outlook on life.

The widest current gender gap for learning achievement recorded by standardized measure is in the area of literacy (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). Rowe and Rowe (2000) found that boys are significantly more disengaged with school and more likely to be at

risk of academic underachievement, especially in literature. Boys learn to read later than girls, and many never catch up. Since research fortifies the view that boys lag behind girls in the area of reading, more attention should be given to this problem. The U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics reported in 2009 that boys were outscored by girls in reading performance; this trend has actually been in existence over the past thirty years. Evan St. Lifer (2004) stated that "the challenge to raise literacy rates in America is too steep for us not to engage boys with materials that genuinely excite them, regardless of the genre or medium" (p. 11).

Boys have unique imaginations and curiosities. Thorndike (1941) and Sax (2009) found that gender accounts for greater differences in interest than age or intelligence. These characteristics and curiosities must be developed and capitalized upon to assist young men with their reading interests. Getting males interested in reading leads to academic success in other areas as well. While this is true, they must first be assisted in discovering an interest in reading.

Boys also consider reading more meaningful when it is linked to their lives outside of school. Brown (2007) identified three key components in the development of critical literacy: valuing a diverse range of community texts, valuing texts that are familiar and reflect the interests of the reader, and drawing on a wide range of text types and presentations. Literacy levels may improve with incorporation of these components into the school learning environment.

Educators are also concerned that boys are only interested in reading within the context of the classroom. Heath and McLaughlin (1993), Mahiri (1998), and Moje (2000) claimed that young people employ the same powerful literacy practices outside of

school that they do inside of school, but these practices often go unrecognized. Teachers must discover what males are interested in and take advantage of this knowledge to motivate them to read. Educators must discover ways to get a closer look at individual students' interests both inside and outside of school. Teachers need to have students complete personality profiles in order to get to know each student as a person. If students can be successful outside of school, they have the potential to be successful inside of school. Connecting school lives with personal lives can create success and add meaning to the student. Students who know that their teachers value their opinions are much more likely to become involved in their education. According to Heath (1983), if teachers are sensitive to the needs of their students, they will be better prepared to meet those students' academic needs.

Maloney (2000) found that teachers tend to value certain types of literacy, which often differ from the literacy opportunities available to boys. Blair and Sanford (2003) found that boys are morphing literacy, which means that boys are taking reading and writing skills and adapting them to meet their own needs. Their study found five themes around which boys' literacy practices were constructed: personal interest, action, success, fun, and purpose. These themes need to be incorporated into the school environment in order to help boys improve their literacy skills. Males are very interested in action and adventure, so reading materials which offer this type of activity should be made available. Boys need to know that reading can be fun.

Studies have been conducted to show a relationship between reading interest and reading achievement (Baker & Wigfield, 1999) . As boys' curiosities change as they mature, so do their reading interests. As boys get older, they become less interested in

reading what educators deem as acceptable literature (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). Since reading affects every academic subject, techniques must be researched, developed, and utilized to become aware of what boys prefer to read and to make those materials available. Reading difficulties cause students to struggle in all academic areas, which could lead to those students dropping out of school (Hernandez, 2011). According to the Alliance for Education (2006), each year 1.2 million young people drop out of high school, and the most commonly cited reason is a lack of literacy skills.

Students partially cultivate healthy psychological development, self-understanding, and understanding of others through literature (Bettelheim, 1976; Inglis, 1981, Goldthwaite, 1996). These are qualities that students need as they go through school. Parents as well as educators are accountable for facilitating students in this maturity process and must help males to come across pleasurable reading materials that will further this development. This cultivation must begin at the elementary level and continue throughout the education of all students.

Boys also need to be exposed to books with positive male characters (Brozo, 2002). Emotionally healthy boys are playful and active. These qualities should be exemplified by characters in the books which are a part of today's curriculum. This is possibly one of the reasons for the extreme popularity of the *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling. The main character, Harry Potter, is a very creative and exciting character that boys find tremendously electrifying.

Educators should incorporate more male-oriented literacies into the learning environment. Voss (1996) argued for multiple or alternate literacies, which include computer, information, in visual, and mechanical literacies. These are used to read video

game manuals, cheat sheets, lyrics, instruction manuals, and newspapers. Traditionally, they have been regarded as skills that boys utilize instead of actual literacies. As educators incorporate these literacies into education, boys will become more interested in reading and will start viewing themselves as readers.

Bourdieu (1990,1995) used the term *habitus* to explain what boys learn through upbringing, which may explain the resistance of masculine attitudes towards reading. Boys are more likely to see mothers as readers, which conveys the message that males do not value reading as much as females. When parents and teachers pinpoint material that is immediately gratifying for males to read, boys will be encouraged to seek out those resources and read more. The teaching of reading is associated with the development of young people through language. Since most teachers are female, boys may not have the opportunity to hear and/or view literature through the eyes of a male. This may put boys at a disadvantage in the literature classroom. The belief that reading is a female characteristic may need to be changed in order to assist boys with developing reading skills and improving literacy. Young men need to see more and more male educators, media specialists, and all around male readers.

Research suggests that providing various opportunities for boys to choose their reading material may increase motivation to read (Ley, Schaer, & Dimukes, 1994). Incorporating boys' interests outside of school, such as skating, cars, motorcycles, and video games, can also increase reading motivation inside school. Reading interests outside of school are often more valued because they provide immediate answers and feedback (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). For example, boys can read a gaming magazine to reveal cheat codes for video games or read a car magazine to find out how much

horsepower an engine has. Boys do not like to examine feelings and often feel as if this is a feminine activity. Magazines do not require any such examination. Also, unlike reading a book, reading a magazine does not require any deciphering of plot. For these reasons, boys prefer to read magazines over books.

William G. Brozo (2002) of George Mason University asserted that boys are the hardest students to motivate. Brozo believed that one of the solutions for motivating boys to read is to bridge competencies that boys have outside of school with skills used in school that are necessary to handle academic tasks. Similarly, Barrs and Pidgeon (1993) wondered if boys are excelling in areas that schools are not emphasizing as much or are not testing for, such as the reading of information texts. Millard (1997) found that changes in reading habits occur not only in school, but also because of influences in the home and media. She claimed that “boys are disadvantaged in academic literacy as a result of current curricular emphases, teacher texts and topic choices, and lack of availability of texts that match their interests and needs” (Millard, 1997, p. 34).

Smith and Wilhelm (2002) expressed their concern about the accuracy of research looking exclusively at gender because it may cause a loss of sight of the individuals. Reading skills should be taught to both males and females with an emphasis on individual learning styles. Smith and Wilhelm agreed with Telford (1999) who believed that teachers use research conclusions to aggregate boys into a single group, which loses sight of the individuals and reduces the possibility of teachers introducing boys to different types of reading material. Students should be exposed to various types of texts and be allowed to make choices concerning those texts.

The best way to become a better reader is to read more (Allington, 2001). If the

goal is to get boys to read more, an understanding of what they read is necessary. As educators and media specialists discover what boys like to read, they can provide these materials in their classrooms and media centers. Having the types of materials that boys deem interesting will encourage them to read more, which in turn will increase reading comprehension skills (Gurian, 2002).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study mainly drew from three schools of thought: Bandura's (1977) theory of self efficacy, Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development, and Stanovich's (2008) Matthew Theory. The psychological construct of reader self-efficacy is very important to the school climate. Bandura (1977) defined *self-efficacy* as "a person's judgments of her or his ability to perform an activity, and the effect this perception has on the on-going and future conduct of the activity" (p. 586). The researcher operated with the understanding that boys who perceive themselves to be capable readers enjoy reading and read more. Conversely, boys who do not have a high sense of self efficacy in regards to reading do not read as much or as often and do not typically enjoy reading.

Vygotsky (1978) discussed the zone of proximal development (ZPD), or the difference between what a child can do with help and what he or she can do without guidance. One of the researcher's goals was to assist educators in finding the right balance of support and encouragement for struggling male readers. This idea builds upon Bandura's (1977) theory, for once boys begin to achieve with the aid of the teacher, they should feel a desire to progress further in their reading endeavors on their own.

Keith Stanovich's (2008) Matthew Effect theory was also a key lens through

which this research was conducted. Stanovich described the Matthew Effect as being analogous to the old adage that “the rich get richer,” saying,

The effect of reading volume on vocabulary growth, combined with the large skill differences in reading volume, could mean that a "rich-get-richer" or cumulative advantage phenomenon is almost inextricably embedded within the developmental course of reading progress. The very children who are reading well and who have good vocabularies will read more, learn more word meanings, and hence read even better. Children with inadequate vocabularies — who read slowly and without enjoyment — read less, and as a result have slower development of vocabulary knowledge, which inhibits further growth in reading ability. (pp. 35-36)

The researcher was seeing the Matthew Effect phenomenon in her classroom and conducted this study to determine what educators could do to find more balance in the realm of literacy. The goal was to scaffold students’ reading progress so that the “poor” readers could become “richer.” As teachers encourage boys’ reading progress through the ZPD, those boys will become better readers. As they become better readers, they will build better vocabularies and enhance their feelings of self-efficacy. As those feelings and their vocabularies increase, they will become better at reading and will also desire to read more often and more challenging texts.

Problem Statement

Due to the increasing and steady gap between male and female literacy scores on standardized tests and more male students being placed in special education and remedial classrooms (NAEP, 2005, 2009), this study focused on six male middle school general

education students' reading experiences. Data was gathered and analyzed regarding how and why these six young men chose reading materials.

Purpose of the Study

This phenomenological study focused on investigating what type of materials middle school boys are interested in reading and what they are actually reading. The purpose of this study was to discover what middle school boys actually choose to read and to make this information available to schools in order to assist boys in becoming more interested in reading. This study gave a voice to male students concerning their reading preferences. This study also provided information for the researcher to use in the remedial reading classroom setting to support and entice male students to read.

Significance of the Study

The results of this study will be meaningful to middle school teachers, administrators, and media specialists. When boys see that educators are interested in what they like to read, they may show more willingness to read. Having more male-oriented reading material available to boys will also encourage them to read. As boys come across more interesting materials, they are more likely to become engaged in reading and seek further texts on topics of interest. As boys become more involved in reading and their literacy skills improve, other academic proficiencies should also advance (Gurian, 2002).

Researchers advocate including opportunities in the curriculum for all students to be able to self-select reading materials that interest them (Appleby, 1989). Ascertaining what reading materials middle school boys read is a step toward helping these boys become better readers. This research is designed to help educators think about enhanced

ways to meet the literacy needs of boys. It will also assist in a better understanding of the choices that boys make in the educational setting. This study is not an attempt to pit one gender against the other. Both genders should be encouraged to read and to have choices in their reading matter.

Teachers and media specialists can help middle school boys select reading material that is entertaining, that features their interests, and that provides information about their interests if they know what those interests are beforehand. As educators learn more about what boys like to read, they can also incorporate these ideas into classroom activities that interest boys. When teachers take the time to discover what middle school boys like to read, those boys will feel like the educators actually care about what they think.

This research will contribute to the already existing body of knowledge about middle school boys and what they read as well as help teachers ascertain better methods to meet the literacy needs of boys. This research will produce positive and identifiable benefits for aiding boys in increasing their interest in reading. Feedback will be given to participants to allow them to understand that educators are concerned with what some may see as a lack of interest in reading. The participants of this study may be encouraged to continue in self-reflection of their literacy practices, which can only increase their literacy aptitudes. This feedback will also show the boys that steps are being taken to make more reading materials in which they may be interested available. Middle school boys' voices will be heard through this research. The goal of educators is to make sure that *all* students learn, but when one group lags behind another, educators must focus additional time and resources toward that faction. This research could be the beginning

of a new movement for educators of male readers.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are middle school boys interested in reading?
2. What are middle school boys not interested in reading?
3. Why do middle school boys read?
4. Why do middle school boys not read?
5. Why do middle school boys choose the types of reading materials that they do?
6. How many books do the middle school boys in this study own?
7. Do the middle school boys in this study see their parents read often?
8. Why do middle school boys think reading is important?

Research Plan

This researcher is a middle school remedial reading teacher. Since there are approximately 400 males in this middle school, a reading inventory was administered to 40 male students in order to find out which students liked reading and which students did not. Based on answers from the survey and teacher recommendations, two males from each middle school grade level were purposefully chosen. The boys were interviewed periodically about what reading materials they had chosen. These interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher.

Participants for this study were six, male, middle school students. Two males were chosen from the sixth grade, two from the seventh grade, and two from the eighth grade. One male student from each grade level indicated that he enjoys reading and reads

often. The other male participant from each grade level indicated that he does not enjoy reading and does not read very often.

Participants were interviewed using a digital audio recorder and were asked questions pertaining to their reading habits and choices. Recordings were then transcribed and analyzed using procedures from Moustakas (1994). Various types of data was utilized in order to cross-validate and to ensure validity. Quotations were also employed throughout to further make certain of validity. Horizontalization was used to filter the meaningful statements from each participant. These statements were then used to establish themes. Textural descriptions were designed from statements and themes to showcase individual participants. The essence of the experience of reading of the six male participants is showcased in this study.

Summary

Boys like to choose their reading materials. Research shows that students, regardless of gender, need to feel empowered in their choice of reading material. When students are allowed to decide what they would like to read, they are more likely to complete the material and to enjoy reading. This research is designed to look at what boys choose to read when choice is the only criterion.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter provides an overview of the literature concerning males and reading. Various theories regarding how to capture and hold the attention of male students are debated in this chapter.

Introduction

When teachers know their students and what those students' hobbies and interests are, they can assist the students in choosing reading materials that align with those hobbies and interests. Educators need to uncover what boys value in their lives so that boys will see that their opinions are respected and become much more inclined to participate in reading.

Review of the Literature

Overview of Boys and Reading

Research from the University of Warwick (Carroll, 2004) found that boys have more reading difficulties than girls. According to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (2006), girls scored significantly higher than boys in reading in each country studied, including Asian countries. Boys may struggle in reading if they are not fully focused. Society also sends messages that certain behaviors, including reading, are more acceptable for girls than boys. William S. Pollack (1999), an assistant clinical professor in the department of psychology at Harvard University's medical school, stated that the school environment is not boy-friendly. Pollack thought that boys are more disruptive because they have a difficult time adjusting to the classroom

environment. Boys are naturally active, and this characteristic must be incorporated into male learning modes.

Many reluctant male readers in middle school enjoy reading adventure books such as the *Harry Potter* and *Percy Jackson* series, which have strong, male lead characters. According to Levsky (2007), when boys do not have a protagonist with whom they can identify, they often do not see a point to reading. Discerning material that will appeal to middle school boys may encourage them to read more often and show them that there is a point to this vital activity.

Boys often develop a negative attitude about reading. Material that appeals to middle school boys may change this pessimistic attitude. Having a voice in the choice of reading materials may encourage middle school boys to read. Smith and Wilhelm (2002) found that boys in their study felt that school gave them very little choice and that school felt much like a prison. A curriculum that actively incorporates students' personal interests can encourage intrinsic motivation to read. Schools may be failing to make reading personally relevant to boys. Educators need to get boys involved in reading so that they can identify themselves as readers. This could ultimately lead to increased reading achievement scores which could also lead to increased achievement in other areas.

As stated in the previous chapter, this study was largely built upon Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy. Self-perceptions can motivate or inhibit learning (Zimmerman & Ringle, 1981). Students who believe that they are good readers probably read more. Children who perceive themselves as poor readers probably have not had success in this area (Anderson, Fielding, & Wilson, 1988; Foertsch, 1992). Therefore,

these children do not read for pleasure or entertainment and tend to read less than students who have a more positive attitude toward reading. As boys experience success in reading, they will be more likely to believe in their own self-efficacy and, consequently, will read more.

Tharp and Gallimore (1998) believed that teachers need to provide students with strategies for approaching and completing particular tasks. These strategies should assist students in getting better at tasks and moving from a beginner level to an expert level. Students need to know *how* to handle tasks and not just that they must perform them well. Many boys feel that they do not get this type of assistance. Boys need to know what good readers do in order to apply an understanding which allows them to form their own ideas and interpretations. Readers need to be taught such strategies as sequencing, using context clues, identifying main ideas and details, drawing conclusions and making inferences, interpreting figurative language, distinguishing between fact and fiction, determining author's purpose, and identifying problems and solutions (Tharpe & Gallimore, 1998).

Boys need immediate feedback on their successes or failures (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). Reading novels may not provide this type of feedback. Short, informational texts (such as an article from a gaming magazine or the manual for an electronic device) often address an immediate interest or problem. Therefore, they may be more appealing to boys. This efferent reading provides immediate feedback, while the aesthetic reading that most schools utilize does not.

Boys need to read material that has a great deal of action, gets to the point, and is not too old-fashioned, descriptive, or long. Texts should encourage visualization,

promote emotions, and jump start ideas in their minds. This is one reason that magazines and books such as *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* are so appealing to males. The ability to visualize is an important concept for understanding what one is reading. Thus teachers should have frontloading activities or activities that introduce the reading materials. Boys value edginess and subversive context along with action. Most novels that are used in the educational setting do not provide this edge or action.

Kelly Gallagher (2009) believed that American schools are killing students' interest in reading. Gallagher used the term *readicide* to refer to this phenomenon. Teachers are now teaching to tests, such as the Georgia Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) (a test all Georgia students must pass to demonstrate academic achievement) and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), so that students will have higher scores, especially in the areas of reading and math. Incorporating such high stakes testing into education leaves little time for pleasures such as reading. Gallagher maintained that teaching rote and drill in order to pass these tests is killing kids' love of reading. He upheld the belief that students who have a love of reading and read for fun will naturally perform better on the tests. Gallagher also felt that where the love of reading is being exterminated, creative thinking is also being eradicated. Teachers who do not have enough time to get through a tough curriculum also do not have enough time to encourage and teach creative thinking.

Gallagher (2009) was of the opinion that this lack of creative thinking is facilitating the American economy in lagging behind some other countries such as China, Singapore, Japan, and South Korea. These countries are implementing a curriculum which focuses on creativity and innovative thinking, while educational systems in the

United States are focused on test results. Repetitive drills often lose boys' interest, so they tune out this type of teaching and place their interest elsewhere, which often leads to behavior problems and low grades. This frequently begins a cycle which results in males being placed in the special education or remedial setting. Often students just like to read without constant interruptions. They need more time for pleasure reading and encouragement to do this. Interesting and fun reading materials must be made available to all students, not just males. Educators must also encourage creative thinking in order for students to be successful in the fast paced technological world.

Gender Differences

Educators should also be very aware of the different ways in which male and female students approach learning in general and reading in particular. Dr. Leonard Sax (2005) found that boys and girls learn, see, and hear differently. The male eye has a thicker retina containing M cells while the female eye has thinner P ganglion cells (Sax, 2005). Sax found that girls prefer colors such as red, orange, green, and beige while boys prefer black, grey, silver, and blue, which they use to draw pictures to simulate motion. From birth, boys are more interested in motion than girls are. This is the beginning of gender differences in the male and female. Males use different areas of the brain than females do for functions such as navigation.

Girls are more able to express emotions than boys, which is another reason why boys do not like to read or discuss books that lean heavily into the emotional realm. Males prefer to read for factual information and to read about fantasy and action because they do not have to discuss their feelings. As females get older, they are much more able to converse about feelings due to brain activity moving from the amygdala to the cerebral

cortex. In males, however, emotional activity stays in the amygdala. When males are asked to discuss their feelings about a book or a character, they have a hard time doing so, which in turn diminishes their interest in reading. This devalued interest leads to a lack of appeal in other areas of school. As males feel that they are not successful in school, they begin to withdraw and even hate going to school. Male and female brains are organized differently, which leads to tasks being performed differently and to dissimilar learning styles. Further study on gender learning styles is needed in order to facilitate the instructive progression.

Sax (2005) cited a study which found that boys around five years of age would rather hear a violent fairy tale than the caring and nice fairy tales that girls preferred. This was found to be a normal male behavior. Since most educators are female, having males prefer violent stories may raise red flags when in all actuality these males are just normal boys. Boys are more likely to prefer rough and tumble play than girls. Boys prefer action, and reading should accommodate this preference. Educators must find a way to incorporate what boys like and how they learn, see, and hear into the classroom environment.

Many more boys than girls are diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Sax (2005) wrote that this could be due to the fact that girls' hearing is substantially more sensitive than boys'. If a teacher is soft spoken, the male cannot hear and finds distractions, which may lead the teacher to think the boy is hyperactive and needs medication. This difference in hearing between the male and female gets sizeable as children age. Males may be missing out on phonics and sight words due to differences in hearing and seeing. These differences must be taken into account when

teaching reading as well as other subject matter.

Since boys are more likely than girls to be diagnosed with ADHD, they are also more likely to be treated with drugs. In 2007, boys were thirty times more likely to be taking medication for ADHD than they were in 1987 (Sax, 2009). Children in the United States are three times more likely to be taking psychiatric medications than children in Europe (Sax, 2009). These drugs could be potentially harmful to the area of the male brain which controls motivation. Studies on lab animals that were given these types of drugs showed that as they got older the interest for learning and motivation was diminished. Sax (2005) believed that students should not be changed to fit the way schools are operated, but that schools should be operated under the conditions through which children learn. Sax advocated a developmentally appropriate curriculum and teachers who understand how differently boys and girls learn. Sax also felt that video games and medications adversely affect the balance between the nucleus accumbens and the dorsal prefrontal cortex (DLPFC), which results in boys who do not see the point of working hard. The effect of video games and medications tend to become evident in the adolescent years.

Females are much more likely to be concerned with pleasing the teacher than boys are, which may add to the dislike of reading often found in males. Girls may read a book just to please the teacher, while males may be more apt to rebel against the reading material that the teacher chooses. Girls often have two or three close friends while boys have from two to twelve close friends. While girls gain comfort from each other and their friendships focus on each other, males' friendships focus on a shared activity such as sports. Girls talk a lot and easily to one another while boys may play a video game for

an hour without having a conversation. While hierarchies destroy friendships among females, they create camaraderie among males. Girls may think that being a friend with the teacher is acceptable while males think that this is nerdy and very unacceptable. These qualities suggest varying learning styles between males and females. While girls may work well in groups and feel comfortable asking the teacher questions, males sometimes would rather not ask the teacher for help and would rather disrupt the environment, which often raises their status to other males.

Sax (2009) affirmed that a study from Harvard, Princeton, and Rockefeller University found that stress improves learning in males while it impairs learning in females. Stress enhances the growth of neural connections in the male hippocampus. Boys are usually very competitive, and this should be utilized in education. Academic competitions are often very effective for male students.

Sax (2009) stated that the language area of the brain of a five-year-old boy is about the same as the language area of the brain of a three-and-a-half-year-old girl. Boys also lag behind girls in the area of brain development for fine motor skills. These two areas are a major part of reading and writing. Sax postulated that boys are possibly being forced to try to learn subjects that they are not physiologically ready to learn and wondered whether males ought to start school at a later age.

Sax (2009) also acknowledged that the disengagement of boys and school is widespread and affects every community and ethnic group. Students form opinions about school and teachers early in life. If a girl is ready to learn to read and to please the teacher and the boy is not, the teacher may inadvertently send a message to the boy that he is not among the smart kids. He may then form the opinion that he hates school.

Students are expected to sit still in class, but this is often difficult for boys. The kindergarten curriculum of today is what the first grade curriculum was thirty years ago. Kindergarten was formerly a place to run, play, and experience hands-on learning. Now students are learning to read and write in kindergarten. Children are being taught to focus on learning at a younger age, and play is not valued as much in the early years as it once was. Sax advocated males starting school at age seven instead of beginning at a younger age. Students in Finland do not begin school until they are seven, yet they outscore American students on achievement tests as teens (Sax, 2009).

Sax (2009) also felt that the acceleration of early elementary curriculum has created a gender gap or even a crisis in education. Sax advocated *wissenschaft* and *kenntnis* education. *Wissenschaft* is a German word which means “to know about something,” while *kenntnis* is a German word which means “to know by experience” (Sax, 2009, p.29). Researchers are finding that students today are gaining knowledge from the computer (*wissenschaft*) but are not gaining the experience of learning firsthand about topics (*kenntnis*). An example of this would be to learn about gardening on the computer but not actually learn to garden first hand by planting seeds, tending to the plants, watching them grow, and reaping a harvest. This may affect boys more than girls. Boys who are denied a balance between *wissenschaft* and *kenntnis* may simply disengage from school. Hands-on learning should be valued as much as academic learning.

Sax (2009) stated that “one in four white boys with college educated parents cannot read at a basic level of proficiency, compared to one in six white girls” (p. 37). There is also growing evidence that the intense reading drills practiced in most elementary schools may disengage boys. Neurologist Judy Willis (2007) believed that in

order for students to become better readers, they need to develop a love of reading which is more important than being drilled in the mechanics of reading. Kids need to read for fun, but girls are more likely than boys to do so. This fact has become a marker of gender identity.

Roughly nine out of ten boys stop reading because they would rather play video games or engage in other activities than read (Smith, Wilhelm, 2002). Boys have developed a negative attitude about reading and education in general. A recent Metlife (Markow & Pieters, 2009) survey of 1,018 students in grades 3 through 12 found that 85% of girls ($n = 454.75$) versus 73% of boys ($n = 352.59$) aspired to go to a four year college, and 59% ($n = 315.65$) of the girls believed that they would succeed while only 50% ($n = 241.5$) of the boys believed that they would. This same survey found that boys (41%) ($n = 198.93$) are more likely than girls (31%) ($n = 164.85$) to do just enough work to get by (Markow & Pieters, 2009).

Evans and Kelley (2005) found that having books in the home is vital to a child's education. In a twenty-year study, owning books was found to be as important as a parent's education. A student who grew up in a home with 500 books would obtain two to three more years of schooling than a student who grew up in a similar home with no books or very few books (Evans & Kelley, 2005). One of the main points of the study was that parents should begin giving children books early in their lives and continue to have books in the home and to read to children throughout their educational years.

Smith and Wilhelm (2002) found that many middle school boys thought that reading their textbooks was difficult due to them being less storied. In elementary schools, these boys had textbooks which featured texts written in a story fashion, but as

they got older they felt less enabled to read texts which were beyond their experiences. Information in a story form allows for more emotion and action to be involved. Text books could become more entertaining and interesting to all students by adding life experiences in a story form.

Nystrand (1997) found that boys often go through the motions to get work done with minimal effort rather than engaging deeply with ideas. Boys who did not receive the appropriate level of challenge with school reading found their own challenges, such as irritating the teacher or getting into other trouble. Boys may be less willing to conform to the rules and disciplines of an environment where they are allowed little choice or appropriate challenges. Incorporating more male interests into the curriculum may enhance their desire to read and become more involved in their learning. Educators must find techniques to challenge all students.

Characteristics of Boys

Boys need to feel challenged in their activities. Just as a video game offers various levels of challenge for players, reading must offer challenges equal to boys' capabilities. Smith and Wilhelm (2002) found that boys gravitate toward activities which provide the appropriate level of challenge and in which they feel confident of improvement. Bandura (1993) found that challenge "was difficult to achieve while fighting self-doubt" (p. 118). As boys become more successful in their reading skills, they will also obtain an increase in confidence which will spill over into other academic areas. Boys are also very competitive, which can be used to the teacher's advantage. Reading competitions may encourage boys to read further as well.

Boys need to understand the value of what they are doing and why they need to

read and learn. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) found that “reading cannot be enjoyable unless the student can imagine, at least in principle, that the symbol system is worth mastering for its own sake” (p. 133). Educators must unearth methods to assist boys in this understanding. The work must be seen as valuable and not just as busywork.

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) also found that ambiguous texts do not offer immediate rewards like figuring out problems. Males are drawn to simpler, problem-solving texts because they appreciate that reward. Squires (1964) agreed with Csikszentmihalyi concerning adolescents’ intolerance for ambiguity. Physical education in former years was more competitive, but in recent times competition has become taboo and is now discouraged because some feel that this alienates students and lowers self esteem. However many boys not only need competition, but thrive on it. Studies have found that there is very little correlation between a boy’s self esteem in a subject and how well he does in that subject. Competition needs to become a part of the learning environment for young men.

Boys like to be in control, which means having power and choices. Playing video games gives them this power and control. If they lose, they just restart the game and try again, unlike real life where many choices are made for them. Boys who play violent video games for many hours each week are more likely to disengage from the real world, which includes school. Giving males more control and choice in reading and other areas of school will encourage them to become active participants in learning.

Most schools also have a zero tolerance policy for violence, which means sometimes boys get into trouble for writing about war and killing. At the same time, schools have books with violence which sends a different message to boys. Writing

about war and certain types of violence should not be discouraged, nor should reading about these topics. Adolescent boys are interested in the topic of war and should be encouraged to read and write about it. War and killing are natural elements of history. Reading and writing about these topics does not have to encourage the idea that war and killing are right or wrong. They are just a part of history and learning.

Adolescent boys are often viewed as not being interested in reading or not being motivated to read, but studies are now showing that adolescent boys do read. They just read material that is usually not accepted as school reading. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) used the term *flow* to describe optimal human activity which is fully pleasurable. Students involved in flow get lost in an activity. Boys experience flow in such activities as computer and video games, skating, and working on cars, but not often in the school setting. School activities are often seen as a necessary means to an end. Smith and Wilhelm (2002) condensed Csikszentmihalyi's flow characteristics into four principles:

- a sense of control and competence,
- challenge with the appropriate level of skill,
- clear goals and feedback, and
- a focus on the immediate experience.

Students need to feel this flow while reading in order for them to develop a love of reading. As boys perceive that their teachers are curious about what appeals to them and bring these types of resources into the classroom, this flow will begin to take place. Boys need to feel that they are competent at whatever task they are attempting. When boys get frustrated at a task, they are likely to give up. They consider these activities a waste of time. Competence motivates boys to delve further into subjects and

encourages them to have fun with texts and characters. Bloom (1985) found that talent is developed when one is having fun in the introductory stages of learning. Young students, especially males, need to have fun as they learn to read. The fun needs to continue throughout elementary, middle, and high school. Allowing boys to exercise control over what they read is one way to let them have fun with this vital endeavor. This also gives them a sense of buy-in pertaining to their reading and learning.

Importance of Choice in Literature

Pressley, Schuder, and Bergman (1992) also found that control was one of the biggest issues in reading for boys. Teachers may have to let go of conventional instructional methods and control in order to support the growth of self-regulated, autonomous readers. Educators should also learn more about young adult literature and texts that are popular in the adolescent culture and should allow boys more choice over their reading materials. For example, many remedial readers in middle school like to read the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series. Teachers may not consider this good literature, but because these books are very appealing to young men, educators should take the time to read through them and have them available for students to read.

Teachers also find the *Captain Underpants* series to be lacking, but elementary and remedial middle school boys enjoy it very much. Some teachers might think the *Geronimo Stilton* series is too young or not challenging enough for middle school boys, but it might be very appealing to their remedial students. Males enjoy *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, *Geronimo Stilton*, and *Captain Underpants*, in part, because there are not a lot of words on each page. Many of the pages have varied fonts or cartoons of the main characters and their exploits. This breaks up the reading and is very entertaining to this

age of student. Some teachers may frown upon these books or say that they are not quality literature, but as long as a boy is developing a love of reading, the actual books that he is reading should not be a matter of contention. As boys read more and become more confident in their abilities, they will naturally branch out to other, more complex texts.

Boys value physical activity and dread having nothing to do. Reading should provide opportunities for movement and physical activity. Boys value participatory and hands-on responses. Acting out parts of a book is a beneficial activity for boys in particular, but activities need to offer variety for all students. Boys need to perform activities that avoid routine. As they learn to see school and reading as diverse, more and more of them will grow to enjoy reading or, at the very least, it will become more tolerable to them.

Students enjoy irony because it causes them to see things in a new way. This eliminates the boredom aspect of some reading. When words are used with a different and humorous meaning in a text, students are amused. The *Captain Underpants* series is famous for this type of humor. Muecke (1969) claimed that irony makes the reader a knowing insider, which can get him involved in the book. Adolescents enjoy being in on the joke.

A collaborative study at The University of Maine and Rutgers (Wilhelm and Smith, 2002) found that adolescent boys were more interested in life reading, which was freely chosen, than school reading, which was required. Smith and Wilhelm (2002) stated that there is a need to look beyond the conventional methods of measuring what and how boys read. Through these new and unconventional methods, a pattern should

emerge to discover more about boys and their reading habits and interests. This study is one look at what adolescent boys read. This topic needs much more research in order for school systems to utilize the findings.

A survey taken by The Knowsley Reading Project (A-B-Cs, 2007) asked the question, “If you had a choice, which one of these things would you do? Play a new computer game, read a really good book, or watch television? (p. 3).” Only 16.78 % of the boys responded that they would like to read a book. Most (80.8% of boys ages 11-12 and 89.7% of the 15-16 year olds) preferred to watch TV. When boys did read, they chose to read about sports or hobbies and enjoyed adventure books and non-fiction books.

Bauerlein and Stotsky (2005) found that boys are not likely to select books with female characters. Boys also read more non-fiction than girls (Carter, 1988; Childress, 1985). Males tend to prefer historical nonfiction, adventure, and war stories. Smith and Wilhelm (2002) found that boys tend to be more adept at retrieving information, which may explain their interest in non-fiction materials.

A survey conducted on SmartGirl.com (2002) established that boys found reading boring or hard and that they mostly read for study purposes instead of for fun. Of the 2,809 boys surveyed, 47% stated that they liked to read magazines about video games. Boys also read more sports/hunting or automotive magazines than books. Smith and Wilhelm (2002) stated that boys

- are less interested in leisure reading than girls,
- read less than girls;
- do not value reading as much as girls do;

- learn to read later than girls do;
- require more teacher time in coed education settings;
- like to have active responses to reading and less talk;
- do not comprehend narrative as well as girls do;
- are better than girls at information retrieval;
- are more inclined to read magazine and newspaper articles;
- are more inclined to read comic books and graphic novels;
- enjoy reading humorous texts, texts about hobbies or sports, and science fiction and fantasy;
- like to collect things, including series of books;
- pay more attention to the cover of the book; and
- view reading as feminized. (pp. 10-11)

Stacey M. Yusko (2003) at the University of North Carolina conducted a study on the reading interests of 1400 boys, ages seven to thirteen, and found that boys like to read about animals, science, sports, computers, and non-fiction. Anna Quindlen (1998) stated that boys are disinterested in reading because there are so few books with male characters portrayed as readers. Boys value independent reading less than girls and see reading merely as a way to get information. Boys prefer texts that are short, highly visual, challenging to their notions about the world, edgy, closely connected to real life, current, and humorous (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002).

Boys need an extra jolt of sound, color, motion, or physical stimulation to get their brains to speed up (Gurian, 2002). Research suggests that a literacy curriculum sensitive to students' reading interests can be motivating. According to Wendy Schwartz

(2002), in an article titled “Helping Underachieving Boys Read Well and Often,” the male perspective needs to be considered in the selection of reading material. Schwartz and Michael Sullivan (2004) in “Why Johnny Won’t Read” concurred that since most educators and media specialists are female, they do not respect boys’ reading predilections.

The 1996 National Assessments of Education Progress showed that females ($n = 7396$) outperformed males ($n = 7785$) on literacy measures by 25 points. The gap between boys’ and girls’ literacy achievement continues to widen. Smith and Wilhelm (2002) asserted that “schools seem to be failing boys in literacy education” (p. 3).

Motivation

Studies have found that interest in reading is declining as students get older (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). Research in affective domain has shown that children who have positive associations with reading tend to read more often, for longer periods of time, and with greater intensity. This leads to greater reading achievement (Anderson, Fielding, & Wilson, 1988; Foertsch, 1992). If students enjoy reading, they will read more frequently.

Reading ability is essential to students’ educational progress. When students have a negative attitude about reading, achievement in other subject areas suffers as well. Teachers feel that motivating students to read is a top priority (O’Flavahan, Gambrell, Guthrie, Stahl, Baumann, & Alvermann, 1992). As more research is completed on what influences students’ motivation to read and their choice of reading materials, teachers can adjust the learning climate to foster maximum literacy growth. If middle school boys enjoy reading certain types of material and the teacher knows what this material consists

of, the teacher can have these materials available for them to read.

Boys may sometimes view reading as a feminine activity, but often boys' value and employ literacy in a variety of meaningful ways. Author Jon Scieszka (2010) has even started a website called Guys Read to facilitate in motivating boys to read. He rates books by how he believes that they appeal to boys. Scieszka feels that newspapers, magazines, and comic books offer worthwhile reading for boys and are more appealing than traditional literature. Scieszka also believes that when boys are given a choice about their reading materials they are more likely to become captivated by reading. Males swap favorite titles and discuss their reading on his site. Scieszka has noticed that boys are attracted to silly humor such as *Captain Underpants* by Dav Pilkey. Boys also like nonfiction and fantasy and loathe books that are considered feminine (Scieszka, 2010). Author James Patterson (2010) has also instituted a website to encourage young people to read. Patterson's website has a link to reading materials which may stimulate boys' interests.

Scieszka (2010) believed that many boys avoid reading for fear of being called a nerd or a sissy. Martino (2001) made the same observation in an Australian study, "Boys and Reading: Investigating the Impact of Masculinities on Boys' Reading Preferences and Involvement in Literacy." He found that boys define their maleness in terms of the opposite of femininity, and therefore reject literacy which they associate with femininity. Martino was building on the research of Walkerdine (1990) who was one of the first to assert that boys are pushed by culture toward their definition of masculinity which runs counter to literacy. Cherland (1994) studied images of reading presented in media and found that most images were of females reading by themselves or with other females.

Boys are not often portrayed in the media as readers.

Maleness

Barrs and Pidgeon (1993) stated that boys do not arrive at school with a clear sense of gender, which makes them more susceptible to peer pressure. Voss (1996) suggested that schools deny boys the chance to be male and literate which leads to poorer attitudes and less interest in reading. This leads to less time spent reading and lower reading achievement. Martino (2001) and Scieszka (2010) both supported more male role models for boys, particularly media specialists and educators. However, female teachers are still the majority in most schools, and they must try to appeal to boys' curiosity and carry that over into the reading materials they choose for their classrooms and libraries. Boys do not naturally grow up to be gentlemen. They need a community of male role models to show them how to behave and that reading and learning are important. If boys do not find male role models at school and at home, they will look to other, often undesirable, males as role models.

Modern psychology has been shifting back toward the idea of gender differences. In recent generations, parents were told to let their sons play with dolls and other toys formerly considered for daughters. Many now feel that the neglect of the gendered needs of adolescents could be dangerous. If these needs are not addressed by family and educators, young people will seek to learn about their gender and sexuality elsewhere and will receive negative and unrealistic information. Sax (2009) felt that the devaluation and disintegration of the masculine ideal is a factor in the growing epidemic of unmotivated boys. He, among others, feels that single-sex education could be more beneficial to students than coed classrooms. This way, gender differences would be emphasized, and

boys would see other boys reading, which would prevent them from seeing it as a feminine activity.

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) maintained that efferent reading (reading for the purpose of obtaining information) provides an opportunity for clear and immediate feedback which may be a reason for middle school boys to prefer nonfiction reading. As they search for information and detect it on their own, they feel successful at that reading task. This concept is very similar to Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development (ZPD). When educators learn what reading materials are enjoyable to middle school boys, they can work with the boys to locate challenging texts that are within the boys' ZPD. As teachers lead students into challenging areas and show them how to progress to higher levels of proficiency, those students will flourish.

Educators can change boys' attitudes about reading. Newkirk (2001) stated that boys may see the context of the classroom and what is valued there and judge that they have no voice in the curriculum. Instructors must let boys know that their choices are valued. Teachers must also sequence texts so that students can make connections to their own lives and to other readings. This helps them to develop a sense of competence. Boys in their middle school years should be engaged through connectedness to the world and intellectual stimulation (Carrington, 2002). Literature must be personally relevant to male students because they use situations from their own lives to understand characters. Similarly, Rogoff and Lave (1984) found that there is little comprehension without activating prior knowledge. For example, boys have been found to enjoy reading about geographical places that they have visited because it activates prior knowledge.

To increase their competence, boys need teachers to clearly state the purposes for

reading. They need opportunities to read in order to compare and contrast and make their own decisions. When boys show interest in a subject, reading can help them to better understand that topic. Boys want to read books that connect to their interests outside of school. More work is needed to help boys develop interests in school and what is learned there. Whitehead (1961) explained that knowledge begins with interest. Boys are interested in making and designing activities which help them to make meaning. This provides immediate feedback because they can see if their ideas work or not. This type of activity encourages critical thinking, which is an important component of literacy.

Boys also value community and need time to be with friends. Educators can incorporate this love of socialization with reading to involve boys in reading as a group activity. Vygotsky (1978) found that learning is social and how learning is understood is dependent on relationships with others. Bakhtin (1984) argued that we are most alive when we are engaged in dialogue. John-Steiner (1985) found that highly creative individuals were introduced to activities and texts through relationships with significant others. For example, boys will often read material if it is given to them by a family member or a friend, but they may reject the teacher's suggestions because they think that teachers care more about particular types of texts rather than what the student enjoys.

Smith and Wilhelm (2002) found that exportability, which is the ability to carry reading over to conversation, was very important to boys. Schools need to incorporate more dialogue for enhanced learning opportunities. This may encourage boys to read further. Boys often view reading as a solitary task and reject this as nonsocial. They are more likely to read more difficult material if they can do so in a group with help from others within this unit. A recent study by Cheung, Groff, Lake, and Slavin (2008) found

that reading programs with good evidence of effectiveness had the cooperative learning model at the core, which further assists boys with their reading abilities. One participant stated that he understood books better when he read them with a group since he had to pay attention and keep up with the reading.

Boys tend to choose reading material that presents multiple opportunities for learning and growth. Book series in particular contribute to this ability to scaffold. Reading books in a series allows boys to understand the characters more fully and to become more actively involved in the reading. Boys often like to reread texts. Carlsen (1967) believed that first readings are for plot and pleasure while second readings are for understanding structure. Boys also like texts which offer multiple perspectives. They want to be able to see all sides of a situation or dilemma. This allows them to identify with a character or characters.

Summary

There is considerable research showing that boys lag behind girls in the area of reading. There are various reasons for this. Boys need to move around and have freedom to be active. The concept that reading is a feminine or “girly” activity must be transformed. Boys may perceive school as not being “boy-friendly.” Boys like books with adventure and strong, male characters and they want to be able to choose which books they read. Educators must teach boys strategies to become better readers and find ways for them to receive immediate feedback. Rote and drill methods must be curtailed, and time for fun reading must be incorporated into the curriculum.

There are many gender differences involved with the teaching of reading. Boys and girls learn differently and this must be incorporated into the early years of a child's

learning. Boys are more likely to be diagnosed with ADHD and prescribed medications than girls. Boys learn early that school may not be boy-friendly, so they develop a hatred of school, which can last for years. They may need to begin school at a later age or at least learn to read at a later age.

Boys need to be challenged in school as they are learning. They thrive on competition, so teachers should take advantage of this craving and utilize it in the learning environment. Boys need to understand why a particular reading is important to them and that it is not just an assignment to keep them busy. They like to have control, and giving them the choice of reading material would be a step in encouraging this autonomy. Boys are reading but educators must accept the materials that they enjoy (i.e. magazines, lower-level books) as legitimate reading. Reading can be fun, but boys need to experience this firsthand. Even though teachers may not consider boys' choices of reading materials as premier literature, it must become a part of the classroom setting or the teachers risk losing their male students' interest in the subject altogether.

Educators must find additional approaches to motivating boys to read. More and more authors are taking a closer look at the types of materials that boys like to read. More books are being written with males as the lead characters, and websites are being developed with the male point of view in mind. More male role models also are needed in the educational world. Boys need to see that real men do read. Boys need to be allowed to be boys. If they want to read and write about war, that is natural. Educators must learn to value the opinions of male students and let them know that their opinions are important. Reading materials must be connected to boys' lives. Reading is much more valuable when readers have prior knowledge of the subject about which they are

reading. This is why boys often choose books about guns or motorcycles or other boys. Teachers need to validate these choices.

Boys need to see that reading is valued outside of school. Smith and Wilhelm (2002) found that boys do not reject literacy; they just often struggle in that area. They need to learn to see literacy as relevant to their lives, and they need to learn how to use the strategies that work best for them to progress through the different levels of reading. Students must encounter new and complex perspectives when reading. They must also be taught the strategies to deal with this type of reading.

As more and more research asserts that students are reading below grade level, educators must determine ways to improve students' reading abilities. A focus on reading is emphasized in elementary schools but drops off in middle and high school. Many schools today combine language arts and reading into one subject area, which often leads to less emphasis on reading. Knowing that there is a huge problem in this area, educators must use current data and research to improve reading outcomes for these students in their important middle and high school years.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to discover what middle school boys actually choose to read and to make this information available to schools in order to assist boys in becoming more interested in reading. The design of the study will be presented in this chapter. This chapter will state the methods used to obtain information and the context of the study as well as discuss how the boys were chosen and interview methods. Data collection, analysis, and validity are discussed. The role of the researcher is stated in this chapter as well. Also included is a description of the participants in the study and the area in North Georgia where the participating middle school is located.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to discern what middle school boys are interested in reading so that these materials can be made available in classrooms and libraries. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are middle school boys interested in reading?
2. What are middle school boys not interested in reading?
3. Why do middle school boys read?
4. Why do middle school boys not read?
5. Why do middle school boys choose the types of reading materials that they do?
6. How many books do the middle school boys in this study own?
7. Do the middle school boys in this study see their parents read often?

8. Why do middle school boys think reading is important?

Design of the Study

Qualitative research emphasizes the importance of conducting research in the natural setting, of examining the participant's perspective, and for the researcher to know the perspective of the participant (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1980). Themes emerge as data is collected and analyzed. These qualities make this method appropriate for this research project.

Qualitative research methods are very important in the field of social sciences. The phenomenological approach was chosen for this research due to matching the criteria to the method. Moustakas (1994) stated that

phenomenology is rooted in questions that give a direction and focus to meaning and in themes that sustain an inquiry, awaken further interest and concern, and account for our passionate involvement with whatever is being experienced. In a phenomenological investigation the researcher has a personal interest in whatever she or he seeks to know; the researcher is intimately connected with the phenomenon. (p. 58)

As a remedial reading teacher and a researcher, direction and focus to meaning is sought after regarding middle school boys and their choices of reading materials. The researcher is passionately involved in this topic every school day with students and with male children and grandchildren. This topic is so valued. Questions are asked daily by this researcher and others concerning this focus. Answers are needed for the researcher's classroom as well as other classrooms.

Data analysis with this method identifies domains of cultural knowledge and

how these domains are organized. The interviewer obtained firsthand knowledge from the male participants. The data collection occurred during the academic school year. This approach was chosen to create a vivid and detailed picture of six middle school boys and their reading habits. One of the functions of qualitative analysis is to find patterns and produce explanations. Horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994) was used to generalize statements made by boys concerning their reading habits. The research questions guided this study as did the statements made by the participants.

The following steps within this transcendental phenomenological method guided the process. These were the epoche, data collection, phenomenological reduction, individual textural and structural descriptions, composite textural and structural descriptions and the synthesis of texture and structure (Moustakas, 1994).

Phase One: The Epoche

This stage requires that preconceptions, biases, theories, or beliefs of the researcher be suspended or bracketed (Moustakas, 1994). This contributes to the accuracy of the research and allows for observing the phenomena without introducing our bias. This process must begin before the research and be maintained throughout the process. This researcher made every attempt to bracket preconceived notions before interviewing participants in order to properly encounter the phenomena of middle school boys and their reading choices. This process was maintained throughout the study in order to avoid such biases.

Phase Two: Data Collection

Moustakas (1994) stated that the typical method of data collection for phenomenological research is long interviews with open ended questions. The goal of

the researchers' specific questions and interviews was to obtain a detailed description of the views of middle school boys and their reading choices. The boys were interviewed in a relaxed environment in the school setting where they felt safe and comfortable. The interviews were guided by the research questions. All interviews were conducted by the researcher.

Phase Three: The Phenomenological Reduction

In the phenomenological reduction stage, the phenomena are described in textural language. A textural description of the meanings and the essences of the phenomena, along with the elements of the experience in consciousness, are derived (Moustakas, 1994). After the interviews were transcribed, they were read repeatedly to grasp the essence of the data. From this natural meaning units were identified, which Moustakas (1994) refers to as horizontalization. Each statement during the interview should have equal value. Once these were identified, they were put into a matrix to assist the researcher with developing the story. These statements were then clustered into themes. Textural descriptions were created from these themes in order to portray the experience of each male participant.

Phase Four: Individual Textural and Structural Descriptions

When the researcher reflected on the horizons and they had been grouped into themes, an individual textural description was assembled. In vivo codes were used from the transcribed interviews. Each textural description was reflected upon in order to piece together an individual structural description through imaginative variation, reflection, and analysis. This process allowed the researcher to get to the essences of the experiences. Imaginative variation aided the researcher in discerning structural themes from the

individual textural descriptions.

Phase Five: Composite Textural and Structural Descriptions

From the individual textural descriptions, the composite texture description was developed. Each participant's horizons and themes were studied and analyzed to portray the experience of the group as a whole (Moustakas, 1994). From this, a composite textural description was composed.

Phase Six: The Synthesis of Texture and Structure

This stage involved the researcher integrating information from the horizons into a reliable description of the structure of the phenomena. This provided a synthesis of the essences of the reading experiences of these six middle school boys.

Participants

This study was conducted at a rural middle school in North Georgia. There are 12,624 students in the school system. This county is one of the smallest in Georgia. The middle school is located in a low socioeconomic area with one of the county's largest government housing units on the same street. The middle school was originally built in 1955 and was the elementary, junior, and high school for African-American students. After integration, the school was remodeled in 1988. There are 781 students in this middle school with 419 being male and 362 being female. There are 145 sixth-grade males, 158 seventh-grade males, and 116 eighth-grade males in the school. Table 3.1 presents the ethnicity statistics for the school.

Table 3.1*Student Ethnicity Breakdown by Percentage*

Ethnicity	Number of Students	Percentage of Student Body
African-American	124	15.9%
Asian	33	4.2%
Caucasian	489	62.9%
Hispanic	93	11.9%
Multi-Racial	40	5.1%
Native American	2	.002%

Participants were chosen from the researcher's remedial reading classroom and from the general education reading classes. Students are selected for the remedial reading class based on Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) scores. Students pass the CRCT with an 800 in reading but are placed in the remedial reading class if their scores fall between 780 and 810. These are known as the "bubble kids," which means they are close to the borderline between passing and failing the CRCT. The purpose for the remedial reading classes is to give these students some additional assistance in order to increase their chances of passing the CRCT in the area of reading.

The participants for this study were comprised of six male students. The researcher chose a pair of boys from sixth grade, a pair from seventh grade, and a pair from eighth grade. Each of these pairs was comprised of one boy who claimed that he enjoyed reading and one boy who claimed that he did not enjoy reading. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants. Ben is an eighth-grader who claimed that he likes to read. James is also in eighth grade, but he said he does not enjoy reading. Aaron is a seventh-grade student who stated that he enjoys reading very much. Phillip, on the other hand, is a seventh-grade student who claims to dislike reading. Dalton is in

sixth grade and said that he loves to read. Andy is also in sixth grade, but he said that he does not like reading at all.

These various participants and their points of view gave this researcher information about what some males this age like to read and why they chose specific reading materials and genres. Data was also obtained in relation to why boys this age do not like to read. Along with the six students, there were four teachers involved in this study: the remedial reading teacher (the researcher); Mrs. Edwards, the eighth grade language arts teacher; Ms. Roberts, the seventh-grade language arts teacher; Mrs. Davis, a sixth-grade language arts teacher; and Mrs. Thomas, another sixth-grade language arts teacher. To protect the teachers' identities, pseudonyms were used for them as well.

Setting

Barrow County

Barrow County, Georgia lies about 55 miles northeast of Atlanta. Sports are a common pastime in North Georgia. Friday night football games are as important to the locals as Atlanta Falcons games or Georgia Bulldogs games. This community has a small town feel, and many teachers taught the parents of their current students. Many teachers are also friends with their students' parents and have a special bond with both students and parents. Running into families at the grocery store or at a game is a routine occurrence. Sundays still find some families going to church together and then heading to grandmother's house for a good, home-cooked meal. The town in this study is close enough to the much larger cities of Athens and Atlanta to find specialized shopping and medical care, but it is also more laid back and friendly than these larger cities.

Barrow County is one of ten counties considered part of Metro Atlanta. Atlanta is

the capital of Georgia as well as the county seat of Fulton County. The population of Fulton County as of 2009 was 1,033,756 with a median household income of \$62,682. On a scale of 1 to 10, violent crime in Fulton County is a 7. On this same scale, property crime is an 8. The violent crime rate in Barrow County is a 6, while the property crime rate is a 5. There were 373 violent crimes in 2008, which means the county has a .74% violent crime rate (Georgia Family Connection Partnership, 2009). While crime in Barrow is lower than the Fulton average, the ranking is still higher than the national average of 4. The population of this county from the 2010 census was 72,116.

Barrow County was formed in 1914 from the corners of three other counties, Gwinnett, Jackson, and Walton. There are 103,788 acres of land in this county with 33,862 being farm land. Most (95%) of those farms are run by families. Farming is a very old tradition in Barrow County and farms have been handed down from generation to generation. The county is fairly small at 162.17 square miles. The unemployment rate in July, 2010 was 10 percent for the county and 10.2 percent for the state of Georgia. Most of the residents (66%) work outside the county. While the cost of living index in the United States is 100, in Barrow County the cost of living index is below average at 85.4. The population density is 445 people per square mile. The average household size is 2.8 people which is just slightly larger than the state average of 2.6 people. The median household income for Barrow in 2008 was \$51,318. The percentage of people living in poverty in 2008 was 14.9, which was only slightly higher than the state percentage (14.7). The rate of Georgians with a bachelor's degree or higher is 24.3% while the county's rate is much lower at 10.9%.

The Barrow County rate of student absenteeism (15 or more days per school year)

is 11.6%. There are 159 counties in Georgia, and Barrow is the 20th fastest growing county in the state. Barrow County schools spend \$5,159 per student per year, while the national average is \$5,678. Atlanta City Schools spend an average of \$6,746 per student per year. Statistics show that there are 15.3 students per teacher in Barrow County, but this middle school has 32 students in some academic classes.

The 2008 election count showed that 73% of the population votes Republican. While the school sits on the same street as a large housing project, the city and county have neighborhoods ranging from very poor to very affluent, as does the zoning for this particular middle school. The student body includes residents of the housing projects and residents from subdivisions with homes in the \$500,000 range. For a rural county, the school's population is quite diverse. The town in which the study takes place has built a police station in the midst of the housing project, which has vastly diminished drug activity in the community.

Wimberley Middle School

Wimberley Middle School (pseudonym) is one of four in Barrow County, Georgia. The free and reduced lunch rate is 59.61%, which qualifies the school as a Title I school. Wimberley is a one story brick building with four wings of classrooms and a cafeteria which also houses the stage. The sixth grade hallway runs the length of the school with two classes being held in mobile units. The seventh and eighth grade hallway is considered another wing of the school. The remedial reading classes, also called *Connections classes*, are on a separate wing, and the physical education, chorus, and band classes have a wing as well. The back of the school houses a football field with a large hillside set of stands and a parking lot for visitors. Football is highly revered by

the community, and the team here is usually on a winning streak.

Several special education classes are held in mobile units. In School Suspension is also held in a mobile unit. The school's data center and meeting room for team leaders and the Positive Behavior Intervention System is held in a double wide mobile unit. There is a white picket fence surrounding the property in the front. The bus and car driveways have chain link fences with gates, which are locked on nights and weekends. Even though there have been some break-ins from time to time in the mobile units, there has been no serious damage to the property. The school is still considered a vital element of this community and is thus revered. The school is well maintained and cleaned with an excellent custodial staff.

Procedures

Liberty University requires that permission for research be obtained from their Institutional Review Board (IRB) before any participants can be questioned. A proposal was submitted to the Review Board. The proposal had to be changed to include additional participants since a reading inventory needed to be administered to forty male participants in order to choose six male participants. A list of all of the male students in the middle school was entered into an Excel document, and based on a series of complex equations, 40 males were randomly chosen for screening.

Based on observations, test scores, and teacher recommendations, six of those forty male students were chosen for the study. The researcher needed one male participant from each grade level who had indicated that he did not like to read and one male participant from each grade level who had indicated that he did like to read. The researcher divided the reading interest surveys (see Appendix C) into two groups: *likes*

to read and *does not like to read*. This survey was compiled from various sources and with suggestions from the language arts teachers in the school. After the survey was compiled, all language arts teachers administered it to the males in their classes. These teachers then gave the researcher feedback concerning some of the questions that the boys did not understand, and some mentioned that the survey was too long. As the survey was revamped, these same teachers administered it again with more feedback from the male students. This process produced the survey located in Appendix C, which was then administered to the forty male students. Then the researcher looked at CRCT scores to cross reference low scores in reading with males who did not like to read and higher scores with males who did like to read, which could be a further indicator of reading abilities. After narrowing down this list, the researcher discussed the males with their language arts teachers to narrow the field down to six participants. Language Arts teachers were interviewed concerning males in their classes who loved to read and males in their classes who really did not like to read. The researcher asked each teacher to recommend a male that he or she thought would be a good candidate to interview regarding his thoughts on reading. Given that these teachers spend a great deal of time observing the boys and have in-depth knowledge pertaining to their reading habits and thoughts, the researcher placed significant emphasis on their opinions. Ultimately, largely based on these teacher's recommendations, the researcher chose two males from each grade level: one who enjoyed reading and one who did not. Five of the six boys were Caucasian, and one was African-American.

Prior to interviews and observations, participants were given a consent form (see Appendix A) to take home to their parents to sign to allow them to participate in the

study. This form was sent home from school by the researcher. Parents were also called on the telephone in order to inform them of the types of questions that would be asked. Participants represented various levels of reading interest. Students had the opportunity to decline to participate in the study, but none chose this option. Another male student would have been chosen should the need have occurred.

Researcher's Biography

Since the researcher is the main instrument, this section will contain biographical information. At this time, the researcher is a graduate student in the Educational Leadership program at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia. After graduating from the University of Georgia, the researcher began her teaching career at a small elementary school in rural Georgia teaching fourth grade. After teaching elementary school for two years, the researcher went into public relations for a National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) racing team owned by her family. Then, in 1994, she went back to teaching at her son's middle school. After teaching sixth, seventh, and eighth grade and self-contained special education, the researcher went on to earn a Master's of Teaching degree from Piedmont College while continuing to teach. Next, the researcher earned a Specialist Degree in Educational Leadership from the University of Georgia.

The researcher then began teaching remedial reading in the Exploratory Department of Wimberley Middle School and was made a department head accountable for a group of eleven teachers. In this new position, the researcher noticed that boys often score lower than girls on reading assessments. As she saw more and more male students being placed in the remedial reading class, the researcher developed a deeper interest in boys and their reading materials and habits. The researcher also raised three

boys of her own, which contributed to her interest in why boys are often not viewed as readers.

Due to the researcher's participant status in the classroom and school where data was collected, the researcher had a preexisting relationship with the students and the teachers. The researcher was not viewed as an outsider who was seeking information because she is constantly inquiring into students' reading habits. Along with a group of students, the researcher operates a very extensive and popular school store which makes the researcher well known among the student body.

The researcher's goal as a reading teacher is to get students, both male and female, involved in reading. The researcher believes that if students can find entertaining reading materials on topics in which they already have an interest, they will begin to read and will develop into readers. The goal of the remedial classes is to give students the extra boost that they may need in order to pass the Criterion Reference Competency Test (CRCT). Since the researcher has been a figure in this building for many years, the researcher and study were readily accepted.

Data Collection

The participants were interviewed three times over a period of twelve weeks using a digital recorder. Many questions were asked about the boys' reading likes and dislikes, but the boys were also encouraged to just talk about reading or about a book that they had enjoyed. This often led to other questions and other areas of investigation. As these interviews were transcribed and the reflexive journal was utilized, patterns and ideas emerged.

The boys were observed at various times during their reading and in their reading

classrooms. These were recorded as hand written notes. Observation notes were taken concerning what the researcher witnessed boys reading or carrying around with them (see Appendix B for a sample Observation Form). These notes were also used to support the other types of data collection. Each boy's reading teacher was interviewed, and answers were recorded on the digital recorder and were later transcribed.

Data was also recorded in a journal and was coded to find trends in the reading habits of males. Theories were developed in tandem with data collection in order to produce and justify new generalizations. The nomothetic approach was used. Behavior of boys at one middle school may be the same as that of boys in other schools and regions. A key factor of qualitative research is to see ideas through the eyes of respondents; therefore, this researcher examined reading interest through the eyes of middle school boys.

Boys were told by the researcher that this study is worthy because it will demonstrate what types of reading materials should be placed in middle school libraries and classrooms for males to read. The researcher also informed the male participants that this study would assist educators with finding methods of getting boys involved in reading.

Student Interviews

The male participants were interviewed during language arts or reading classes over the course of several weeks. Questions were composed from various interviews used by language arts teachers at the researcher's middle school as well as interest surveys obtained from numerous sources. Interview questions were then given to the language arts teachers in the researcher's middle school, and feedback was received.

From this feedback, one set of interview questions was developed (see Appendix D). Questions were asked, and follow up interviews were conducted. The audio digital recorder was very small, and once the questioning began, the boys ignored it and several times had to be asked to either speak up or answer verbally instead of just nodding or shaking their heads. The six boys were interviewed concerning the book that each of them was reading or had just completed. Questions included,

1. Why did you choose this particular book?
2. How much have you read of it?
3. What is happening in the book that you like?
4. What part of the book do you not like?
5. What made you chose this book over other books?
6. What do you like about the main character?
7. How is the main character like you?
8. How is the main character different?
9. Did your parents read to you when you were little?
10. Do you read books in a series?
11. What is your favorite genre?
12. Are there certain types of books that you do not like to read?
13. How do you choose a book?
14. Do you reread books?
15. Do you read a book before seeing the movie, or does seeing the movie make you want to read the book?
16. When do you read?

17. Do you read magazines?
18. Is there a series that you really like?
19. Do you have a favorite author?
20. Do you read comic books?
21. Do you recommend books to others?
22. Do others recommend books to you?

A history of the boys' reading habits was also discussed. This included asking the boys to remember if they liked to read in elementary school. If the participant stated that he did not like to read, he was asked when this distaste for reading began. Questions included: Did your parents read to you when you were little? What was your favorite book when you were small? How old were you when you learned how to read? Have you faced any difficulties in reading? Do your family members like to read? Did your parents buy books for you when you were younger? The boys were encouraged to talk about anything that would let the researcher know about their reading habits. The researcher asked the males how they choose reading material. Boys were encouraged to talk about their hobbies and activities that they liked. They were asked if they liked to read about the topics that were interesting to them such as football, trucks, cars, etc. Audiotapes were transcribed into a journal, and trends were observed. There was no videotaping used during this study.

Teacher Interviews

In addition to interviewing the boys, the researcher also interviewed the male participants' language arts teachers (see Appendix E) to find out about reading habits and choices in their classrooms. Teachers were interviewed, and answers were recorded on

the same digital audio recorder. Teachers were also encouraged to give any information they felt pertinent to the study concerning the boys and their reading habits. Questions asked of the language arts teachers included,

1. Do you view the male participant as a good reader?
2. Does he often read books of his choosing?
3. What types of books do you see him reading most often?
4. Do you recommend books to him?
5. Does he read these books?
6. Does he recommend books to you?
7. Does he struggle in any area of reading? If so, what?
8. Tell me about this student.

These interviews were taped and transcribed. All interviews were conducted in the teachers' classrooms, so they felt comfortable and at ease. The language arts teachers and the researcher have been co-workers for several years and are very relaxed with each other. The researcher's findings were compared with the classroom observations of the boys' teachers to ensure validity.

Observation Notes

Using many methods of collecting data along with member checks facilitated credibility. The researcher observed the male participants as they were reading during silent reading time and during reading aloud time. This researcher made observation notes as boys were reading in the remedial classroom as well as in their regular classrooms. A suitable observation protocol could not be attained so the researcher designed one. Immediately following observations, the researcher wrote in her journal so

as to be fresh and in order to capture all thoughts. These observation notes were used to triangulate the data collected through audio taping and teacher interviewing. Notes were taken as observations were made, and then these observation notes were then put into the reflexive journal where they could be used to support other data collection procedures.

Reflexive Journal

A reflexive journal was kept from the beginning of this process to record notes and ongoing thought processes regarding data collection. Maxwell (2005) called the notes and reflections made during qualitative study *memos*. These notes were used to guide the design process during the study and for serious reflection, self-critique, and analysis. The researcher utilized two memo journals, and each was written in daily. One reflexive journal contained the thoughts and reflections of the researcher. Another reflexive journal was used for observations and thoughts concerning the six male participants. Writing encourages the thinking process (Gurian, 2002). As notes and reflections were written down, patterns and ideas emerged which assisted in the final interpretation of data.

Data Analysis

Data was collected by observation, student interviews and teacher interviews. In order to analyze data, complete transcripts were made by the researcher, and notes and data were transcribed and coded for analysis by the researcher. Tapes were listened to three times to ensure accuracy. Bracketing was utilized to make certain that any bias from the researcher was contained outside of the research. Horizontalization was used to make the researcher aware of the conditions of the phenomenon of the males and their reading experiences. Every statement had equal value and was examined to filter out

irrelevant and repetitive accounts. This left only the textural meanings of the phenomena. From the horizons, themes were developed and analyzed. Textural qualities were interpreted which facilitated the researcher in understanding the phenomenon of middle school boys and their choices of reading materials. Imaginative Variation was employed to find possible meanings through the use of the imagination (Moustakas, 1994) and to arrive at structural descriptions of the experiences. The researcher sought to tell the *how* and the *what* of the boy's experiences.

Statements such as "I like to read" or "I just tolerate reading" were used as part of the coding process. The boys who did not like to read made statements about reading being boring and that they had started to have difficulties in elementary school. This revealed a pattern. *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* was referred to by all six participants. This showed that boys like this type of silly humor regardless of their reading abilities which coincides with research by Smith and Wilhelm (2002). The boys who did like to read and had good reading skills, stated that they had read *Harry Potter* in elementary school. This gave evidence that boys who possess good reading skills are not daunted by such a large book but at the same time this also demonstrated that boys who have reading difficulties do not even attempt to read such a long book. The Matthew Effect (Stanvich, 2008) is very obvious in this theme. Transcripts were analyzed by looking at the words of the participants and finding these common threads.

As the horizons were examined, categories began to emerge. The researcher noted that some participants liked to read magazines but others preferred books. Smith and Wilhelm (2002) also found that boys like to read magazines. It was also noted that the participants did not view magazine reading as real reading. The books and other

reading materials mentioned demonstrated a desire by all participants to read books with a male lead character which again concurs with research by Smith and Wilhelm (2002). The theme also emerged concerning movies and books. The researcher was pleasantly surprised to find that no matter the participant's view of reading, he favored the book over the movie due to the book having many more details than the movie. Repeatedly the participants brought up trading magazine articles with another male. This became another theme. The influence of a significant male presence was important to these participants, as was found in Steiner's (1985) Bauerlein and Stotsky (2005) research. While some boys liked to read and would whisk out a book during any down time, all of the participants preferred sports if they had choice in which activity to be involved. Perseverance became a theme after all participants discussed the *Harry Potter* series and told whether or not they had completed the book.

Salient themes and patterns were observed and identified from all information given by participants and their teachers in order to display the current trend in reading materials for males of this age group. Various reasons for choice of reading material and types of reading material chosen were coded. Observations were documented and transcribed into a journal. This researcher interpreted and provided shape to data gathered in this middle school setting. Details concerning data analysis can be seen in Table 3.2. Chapter Four offers narrative explanations of how the data was interpreted.

Table 3.2

Data Analysis Chart

Data Collection Technique	Process & Timeline	Analysis
Audio taping Transcriptions	2-3 times per boy	Charts
	Every interview	Critical incidents
Teacher Interviews	Six times throughout the study	Summarized

Observation Notes	Weekly, as needed	Compared with observation notes Teacher feedback about boys Provided description of boys' actions, routines, and other details
Reflexive Journal	Daily	Created categories from all data Made connections to published research and existing theories Separated opinions from actual data

Trustworthiness

The goal of credibility in qualitative research is to ensure that the inquiry is accurately identified and described (Jacobs, 1988). The researcher used various methods of collection to gather data and analyzed and identified themes or domains that occurred. All analysis was described to the best of the researcher's ability. An in-depth description showing the complexities of variables and the interactions from data will ensure validity in qualitative research (Patton, 1980). Adequately and accurately stating the parameters of setting, population, and theoretical framework will also ensure validity (Patton, 1980).

The researcher was a trusted, participant observer in the study. The reflexive journal was used to control bias in the data collection and analysis process. Reflections and personal impressions were recorded in the reflexive journal. This process enabled the researcher to stay aware of personal thoughts and prevent them from becoming a component of the interpretations. Explanations should be accurate and should have correctly captured what was happening in this middle school setting concerning boys and their choice of reading materials. The researcher also looked for negative cases that did

not fit with other data gathered.

Evidence was used to demonstrate reflexive research. Such evidence included quotations obtained during research, and references are made to specific cases and examples. Memos were written during coding to ensure reliability. Generalizations were made concerning analysis of data, and data was analyzed immediately after collection.

Reliability

Reliability is demonstrated when research conducted by others presents the same results. The males in the study were asked the same questions throughout the interviews which supports reliability. Reliability during this research was also shown when the boys all gave similar reasons for choosing their reading materials.

The researcher listened to the interviews many times and reread the transcriptions of interviews often which assured reliability. The language arts teachers of the boys were interviewed which added another dimension as well as promoted reliability. The data collection techniques have been adequately described and were adhered to during compilation. The physical location of the school is well documented and the process of selection of the male participants has been described. Quotes from the male participants have been interspersed throughout to ensure reliability.

As more researchers look into this notion of a “Boy Crisis” (Tyre, 2008), reliability will be further proven. The concept of a boy crisis is becoming a much more prevalent topic among educators and researchers. Jeff Wilhelm is currently working on a book concerning adolescents and non-traditional texts which should shed light on boys and their choice of reading materials.

Validity

Triangulation was also used to ensure validity. Boys were asked about their choice of reading materials by the researcher and by their language arts teachers. Collection of data by multiple people helped to ensure validity. The collected data was also examined by other teachers and discussed. The views of the participants were represented as accurately as possible.

A foremost threat to validity in qualitative research is bias. The reflexive journal was a vital element in the assurance of validity and in the management of bias. As thoughts and ideas were recorded in the journal, possible bias were made known the researcher and controlled to the best of the researcher's ability. Respondent validation is periodically getting feedback about your data and conclusions from your participants. This was performed throughout the research process to ensure validity. Validity was also ensured by re-interviewing the boys periodically to make sure that their answers were still the same. Interviews were conducted in the natural setting – the school – to make the boys feel comfortable and at ease. Data from this research converges with data from other research which confirms validity.

Ethical Considerations

There was no harm done during the research. Complete names were not used, nor were respondents videotaped. All interviews were recorded on a digital audio recorder and remained on the machine until they were transcribed. At that time, the interviews were deleted from the machine. The machine was locked in a filing cabinet, and the researcher had the key stored in a safe place. All transcriptions were on the researcher's personal computer which cannot be accessed without a password. Pseudonyms were

used in place of the boys' real names. All interviews conducted concerned reading, and nothing was discussed about the boys' lives that would be considered secret or too personal. Nevertheless, all information was only read by the researcher.

Summary

This research sought to explain middle school boys' choices of reading materials. Forty male students from Wimberley Middle School were randomly selected for screening, and of those forty, six were actually chosen to participate in the study. Participants were interviewed about their current and past reading habits. The researcher also interviewed the boys' language arts teachers and utilized observation notes and a reflexive journal to triangulate data. Data was analyzed in an attempt to show what middle school boys like to read. The following chapter will present the analyzed data and results of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to discern what middle school boys are interested in reading so that these materials can be made available in classrooms and libraries. This chapter will provide a detailed summary of the data analysis and results of the study.

Data Analysis

Analysis of Audiotapes

Transcripts were made of all audio taped interviews. From these transcriptions important dialogue was acquired and categorized. Categories were obtained directly from interviews to alleviate bias. The data was classified by placing responses from male participants into the following categories:

1. Action
2. Humor
3. Fantasy
4. Mystery
5. Series
6. Sports
7. Animals
8. Manuals
9. Magazines
10. Biographies

Interviews

The following sections detail the information gained from the interviews conducted for this study. Information provided has been pulled from transcribed interviews with the students themselves, interviews with the students' language arts teachers, notes from direct observation, and the researcher's reflexive journal.

Individual Textural Descriptions. The textural description usually involves trying to capture how the experience looks, what one thinks and feels concerning a phenomena. The experiential texture can be described in terms of qualities such as dark or light, rough or smooth, sharp or flowing, colorful or plain (Moustakas,1994).

Ben. Ben's attitude toward reading could be summed up with this quote: "I like to read ok, but I don't read that much." In spite of this, Ben does feel that reading often helps one to become a better reader and a better student. He enjoys reading magazines, often reads short biographies on celebrities, and enjoys humorous texts.

James. James has a much different outlook concerning reading. He stated, "I just tolerate reading sometimes." He also indicated that "reading is boring." James prefers to read magazines but does not consider this as real reading. He does swap articles with his dad and neighbor. James enjoys humor and action.

Aaron. Aaron stated that "I like to read, and I am a good reader." He likes to read fantasy and action books and has always been a good reader. Funny books are just "ok," and he does not often choose them to read. His favorite genre is fantasy because "you see dragons, elves, and dwarfs and the constant fighting and sense of adventure with the characters." Aaron reads many books in a series and likes to stick with characters because "it's fun to see what happens to them." Aaron also enjoys reading magazines and

shares articles with his father.

Phillip. When asked about his views on reading, Phillip proclaimed, “I don’t like to read at all!” He seems to be very moody and started the interview process with a strong aversion to reading. His attitude changed somewhat as the year progressed, but he still declared that “reading is boring.” Phillip reads about war and likes humor when he has to read a book.

Dalton. Dalton has a very different attitude on reading. He said, “I love to read because I like to follow characters to see what will happen to them.” He also stated that he has “always been a good reader.” Dalton asserted that reading “sort of distracts me from school, and I sort of get in my own world when I read a book.” He enjoys fantasy and likes lots of adventure in books.

Andy. “I don’t care much about reading,” elucidates Andy’s standpoint. When asked why, Andy stated that he struggles with reading, and “it’s hard to find very good books. That’s the thing.” He enjoys humor and reads books when he has to for an assignment.

Composite Textural Description. The composite textural description is developed from the individual textural descriptions and depicts the experience of the group as a whole (Moustakas, 1994). The composite textural description of these middle school boys and what they read involves many elements. Reading is the foundation upon which all other subjects are built. If there is not a good foundation, other subjects suffer and are weak. Learning to read should begin early. Babies should learn colors, letters, and sounds. Children of all ages should be read to on a regular basis – preferably every day. Parents and other adults should listen to children of all ages read, but many children

do not have these advantages. Some parents are busy, some do not understand the importance of early intervention, and some do not care. Whatever the reason, these children suffer.

Some of the boys who participated in this study did not get a good foundation in elementary school. The Matthew Effect (Stanovich, 2008) took over, and their reading has suffered. The boys who had a strong foundation in reading are excelling in this area as well as other academic areas. They also show signs of more confidence in their scholastic abilities. When a boy is a good reader, he is unafraid to choose various types of reading materials. There is nothing too difficult or too thick. If a text is of interest, it can be read. Poor readers, on the other hand, see thick books as too difficult. These readers also have the problem of low self-esteem concerning their reading abilities and do not even attempt more difficult books for fear of failure.

The boys in this study who have strong reading skills stated that they either like to read or love to read. They are not fearful of any genre and enjoy reading a variety of books, except for “girly” ones, which was a term they used to refer to books with romance or love stories. These “well-read boys” began reading thick books in early elementary school and have continued to read series that are very long, such as *Harry Potter* and *Eragon*.

The “less well-read boys” stated that they do not like to read and that reading is boring. They observe their friends reading these books and would like to read them, but they are daunted by the size. Instead, they choose to stick with books such as *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, which involves cartoons interposed with the reading. This makes them feel as if they are not really reading a whole book. As James stated, “Well, with the *Diary of*

a Wimpy Kid, it was like short paragraphs but not like a long book, so I was just flipping through the pages.” Even though he was reading, he did not *feel* as if he were reading. This book is popular with the “less well-read” boys because it is funny and easy to read but also because it is considered acceptable reading material for a middle school boy. As Andy stated earlier about having a difficult time finding books, boys this age with reading impediments are often challenged to find books on their level that are not considered too juvenile for their age group.

Individual Structural Descriptions. The individual structural description provides a vivid account of how feelings and thoughts connected with reading are provoked (Moustakas, 1994). The real meaning of reading, or essences of the experiences of reading, are brought into the researcher’s awareness through imaginative variation, reflection, and analysis (Moustakas, 1994).

Ben. Ben is a paradox to the researcher. He stated early in the study that he likes to read, but upon further investigation, Ben stated that even though he does like to read he does not read as much as he should because he has reading difficulties. He has been in the remedial reading class throughout middle school. Ben has made much improvement over his three years in this class. This year he passed the CRCT in reading with an 824. That is amazing progress for Ben who has failed this portion of the CRCT in the past.

Ben has mixed emotions concerning reading due to his lack of proficient reading skills. He loved to read early in elementary school but began to face challenges in this area in the third grade. The Matthew Effect (Stanovich, 2008) began to take hold in Ben’s life and still has a grasp on his reading ability and confidence in this area. Ben wants to be a good reader and to be perceived as such, and Ms. Edwards stated that Ben

has worked really hard this year to boost his reading skills. Ben observed that his friend Emily was reading *Twilight*, and he wanted to read it to share his thoughts with her. Ben started the book but did not get very far before he thought that the book was too complicated for him. He stated that “it was just too long and too hard,” so he stopped reading it. Ben lacks the necessary comprehension skills to stay with a character throughout an extended book.

Ben feels comfortable discussing books with Emily because she is his friend and has been for many years. However, he does not feel comfortable discussing books with other males. He stated that other boys “might think it’s stupid or something.” Ben also feels that other guys may view him as “a nerd” if he is often seen reading. Perception is very important to adolescent boys. They do not wish for other males to see them as effeminate in any way, and reading is often viewed as an activity that is for girls (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). Ben feels that carrying a book around is fine, but he does not like to talk about the book or be seen reading it often.

Students in the adolescent years have a lower perception of their worth and abilities (Peterson, 1986). Throughout the elementary and middle school years, as boys experience difficulties in a subject, they are more prone to brag about accomplishments as a way to cover their failures and lack of confidence (Bushweller, 1994). Ben does not want to be perceived as lacking in any area. He is a successful athlete and wishes to be regarded highly in all areas. He often goes out of his way to get others to notice him by talking and/or laughing loudly. However, people think highly of Ben, and he could impress his peers by simply being himself and not trying so hard. Better reading skills would help Ben to improve in scholastic areas, which would improve his sense of self-

worth.

Research has shown that competition helps boys to succeed in academics (Gneezy & Rustichini, 2004). When the remedial reading class holds the annual AR points competition, Ben reads often to ensure that his name is on the Top 15 AR Points List. These 15 students get to go on a field trip and miss a day of school. Ben takes pleasure in seeing his name in the top half of the list and often reads it out loud to his classmates. Hearing his name read aloud in front of others helps him to know that he has accomplished the goal of being at the top of the list.

Ben has a very supportive family. His mom, dad, sisters, brother, and grandmother are all readers. He observes them reading, and they encourage him to read. His older sister tells him about books that she reads, but if they involve love stories and too much drama, he will not read them. Ben remarked, “She reads like a type of love story, and it doesn’t seem like my kind of book, so I wouldn’t read it.”

James. James stated often that he “just tolerate[s] reading” and thinks “reading is boring.” When asked, “If someone says, ‘Let’s read,’ what is your very first thought?” James replied, “Oh no!” In spite of his claims, the researcher observed him with a book in his hand throughout the school year. Ms. Edwards required her students to find a book and read it to completion, and this was most likely the main reason for his continuation with reading. When James talked to the researcher, he would say the title of the book and what he had just read. He stated that the book was “ok,” which was a complement coming from James. He likes to appear manly, and reading does not fit well with this perception, so for James to finish a book, he has to like reading it.

James was in the remedial reading class for the sixth and seventh grades but tested

out for the eighth grade. His reading skills have improved in class, according to Ms. Edwards. She stated that “he might not enjoy the idea of reading, but he understands what he reads better, so he’s able to finish books.” Having James in the sixth and eighth grade has been beneficial to both James and Ms. Edwards. James declared, “When I had Mrs. Evan I started getting back into reading.” James scored an 841 on the CRCT this year, which is a high score for someone who had previously been in the remedial reading class.

James does not feel comfortable discussing books with other males. He observed other males reading *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* and checked it out from the media center, but he did not ask anyone about the book, nor did he tell anyone else about it. James prefers to choose books on his own without recommendations from anyone. He is very independent.

James loves motorcycles, tractor trailers, and the University of Georgia Bulldogs. He shares this fondness with his father and godfather. They often trade articles concerning these subjects. James and his father have a subscription to a motorcycle magazine which they share with his godfather, and his godfather has a subscription to a tractor trailer magazine, which he shares with James and his father. His godfather also gives James books on the Bulldogs and on military life. Significant males play an important role in James’ life.

Family members are important to James. He observes his dad reading magazine articles about big rigs and motorcycles. James also stated that his grandmother is a reader, and he thinks that she reads about romance. James said, “That’s what it looks like to me. We’ll be watching TV, and I’ll look over, and it looks like romance on the front

of it.” James considers his grandmother a reader because she reads romance novels, but he does not consider his dad a reader because he mainly reads magazines.

Aaron. Aaron is an avid reader. He is in the gifted class and thrives on competition with other males to see who can complete books the quickest. He began reading *Harry Potter* in the second grade and has read several series of books. Aaron enjoys reading about fantasy and action. He likes fantasy because he enjoys “dragons, elves, and dwarfs and the constant fighting and sense of adventure with the characters.” He does not like to wait for the media center to get the books that he wants, so he purchases most of them. Aaron stated, “A lot of books, I buy them, like, when they are a continuation of a series I’ve been reading. I try to buy them so I’ll have them for later. Because, like, with the library here, it’s kind of hard to keep reading a book when it’s really long, and I like to get into those longer books.”

Aaron is a very gifted reader. He has been reading substantial books since early elementary school. He stated that reading a book takes him “a couple of weeks, maybe three.” Aaron scored an 854 on the reading portion of the CRCT this year.

Aaron feels comfortable discussing books with his friends. He admitted, “I tell them about books that I think are exciting, but a lot of my friends aren’t really into the same stuff that I am.” He also noted that his friends will suggest books to him: “Sometimes like they will say, ‘Hey. This book just came out, and I think you should read it, so I will check it out and see what other people think about it, and then I’ll pick it up maybe.’” Aaron has a great deal of self-confidence, and discussing books with other males does not vex him.

Aaron is a fervent soccer player and fan; he plays on a soccer team and follows

professional teams along with his dad. They often exchange magazine or web articles concerning this sport. When discussing his love of soccer, he was very animated. He enthusiastically declared, “I would like to get a scholarship out of soccer because I have been doing that since I was five and have a love for the game and could probably tell you a lot of stuff you probably didn’t know.” Aaron then went into great detail teaching the researcher about the history of soccer.

Family members have been an inspiration for Aaron concerning his reading as well as his other academics. His parents expect Aaron to keep his grades high. He stated that “I have always had good grades in everything. My parents expect nothing less than that. My mom even makes jokes about how I have a 95 or 94.” Aaron told the researcher that his mom expected him to have grades that were higher than a 95. He also acknowledged that he demands nothing less from himself as well. He observes his mom reading as well as his grandmother. They like to read “Those [Mary Kay Andrews] kinds of books. A little feminine, kind of sassy books. She and my grandpa like the murder mystery genre as well,” Aaron affirmed. Aaron stated that his dad is not much of a reader, even though they often exchange magazine articles about soccer and football players because they are in a fantasy football league together.

Phillip. Phillip is a very quiet, shy boy who said that he wanted to be a part of this research but did not like to talk when the interview began. He stated on several occasions that he did not like to read at all and that reading is boring. Phillip often seems disgruntled. He is very private. He is in the band at school but does not tell his mother when he is in a concert. She attends his band concerts; therefore she must discover this information via other methods. However, Phillip’s father does not attend his concerts.

Phillip seems to suffer from a very low self-image. He often hides behind his hair. His social skills suffer; he wants to make friends but is not exactly certain about how to achieve this goal. Ms. Roberts, his language arts teacher, stated that he talks to one or two other males but is not very outgoing. She said, “He’s a little shy. He’s also scared to displease. He doesn’t want you to think badly of him.”

Phillip’s low sense of self may be due in part to his lack of substantial reading skills. He scored an 800 on the reading portion of the CRCT, which is just passing. Ms. Roberts stated that he struggles with comprehension and fluency. She said,

He doesn’t want me to think there’s anything wrong with him or that he can’t understand something, but as far as reading comprehension, he’s low. I don’t mean that mean, but he has a tough time reading something and understanding it. So he is so concerned with how people think of him. He doesn’t want me to think he’s not smart. He doesn’t want the other kids to think that. He thinks, “Oh my gosh! I don’t want anyone to think I can’t do this.”

Ms. Roberts also alleged that Phillip “pronounces ok. I think he struggles with vocabulary. He doesn’t have a lot of vocabulary in his mind. He probably will use the same words over and over because he doesn’t want to venture out and learn new ones.”

Phillip’s mother told the researcher that “reading has not been a main focus in our family.” She also stated, “When he was little I read him a book about a kid that his dad was not around, and he liked that.” Phillip could not remember his favorite book from childhood; although he recalled that he had read *Charlotte’s Web* and some of the *Magic School Bus* books. He has observed his mom reading *Twilight*, and his brother and sister like to read. He stated that “they like to read a lot of books. They try to read a book, and

the next day they know how to read a book that is on their level.” Phillip seems to admire their ability to read well but does not want to acknowledge that they are better readers than he is. Phillip also observes his grandmother reading mystery books and declared that she likes to read, but the lack of a substantial male influence in his life seems to have had detrimental consequences on Phillip’s academic achievements as well as his socialization abilities. While Phillip does have at least two female role models, research substantiates the notion that boys need a significant male influence in their lives (Kindlon & Thompson, 1999; West, 2002).

Dalton. Dalton is a very pleasant young man who always seems to be cheerful and cooperative. He spoke about reading as if it were one of his favorite activities. Dalton said that he loved to read and that reading, “for me, it sort of distracts me from school, and I sort of get in my own world when I read a book.” He has read several series of books including *Harry Potter*, *Eragon*, *Mysterious Benedict Society*, and the *Percy Jackson* series. Dalton is even rereading the *Mysterious Benedict Society* series for the third time “because it’s a good book, and . . . I’ve gotten into reading it, and I’m memorizing so if a movie comes out I want to be able to criticize it.” This is a testimony to Dalton’s love of reading. Like Aaron, he began reading the *Harry Potter* books in the second grade. He stated, “I thought I wouldn’t be able to read it. I thought it was way too big and it would be boring.” In spite of his preconceptions, he began reading the book and has continued to read substantial books.

Dalton’s reading skills are the most outstanding of this group of boys. He scored an 878 on the reading portion of the CRCT, which positions him in the *exceeds* category (850 and above). Dalton only missed two questions under the *vocabulary* category. He

clearly has no problem reading whatever material he chooses.

Dalton stated that he feels comfortable recommending books to his friends and getting recommendations from them but is more at ease with boys because “girls are too hard to understand.” He stated that his parents “try to” make suggestions about reading materials, but he prefers to go on his “instincts” when choosing a book. He will not read books he considers “girly.” Dalton declared, “I tried to read a book in 5th grade. It was called *Bad, Badder, Baddest*. It was about these three mean girls, and I could only read the first chapter, and then I had to return it.” This demonstrates that Dalton tried to look at the female point of view but had trouble understanding how they think and act, so he decided to return to reading books with solid male characters as the protagonist.

Dalton is very active in sports and plays football and baseball. His father coaches him in both sports. Dalton excels in these sports, as did his father when he played in his early career. They often share articles concerning these sports and their favorite players.

Dalton has solid support from his family. Dalton’s dad is very involved with him in his activities. Both parents come to school functions. Dalton has a little brother and sister. The sister loves to read, but the brother was only 2 years old at the time of the research. Dalton stated that his parents are both readers, but his mother does not have much time to read because she is “always looking after my little brother and sister.” He also witnesses his grandmother reading. Dalton alleged that she reads “soap opera stuff.” Having such strong reinforcement from his family members and having a significant male in his life has been very beneficial to Dalton in his academic endeavors and with his socialization. He has many friends and is very well liked by his peers.

Andy. Andy is an only child who is quite immature for his age. He likes to act

silly in class and is easily upset. He stated that “I don’t care much about reading. It’s not really been my thing, but since we are kind of getting to reading more, I am kind of getting to like it more now.” He liked reading early in elementary school but began to struggle in the fourth grade, and this initiated a negative attitude toward reading. Andy felt that he began to struggle because of “harder books and, like, not knowing how to pronounce words and all that.” He was in Mrs. Thomas’ class for Language Arts, and she pushes her students to read, which, along with the remedial class, was helpful for Andy.

Andy scored 811 on the reading portion of the CRCT. He was in the remedial reading class where he struggled with comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary. While 811 is a passing score, Andy would benefit from being placed in the remedial reading class for another year to shore up these skills in which he lacks proficiency.

Andy is also very involved in sports. He is a large, beefy male and loves to play football. He and his peers often discuss the latest football game that they have played during the week, debating who was on the better team and why one lost or won. Andy gets so involved in playing football that he completely focuses on this and forgets his academics. Mrs. Thomas stated that he often does not complete homework during the football season and that she had a difficult time getting him to sit still and read. Sitting still seems to be grueling for Andy. He likes to move and talk.

Andy stated that his parents read to him when he was younger and that they have purchased many books for him over the years. They continue to buy books for him at the school book fairs. Andy seems very interested in them at first and wants to read them but often either begins a book and does not complete it or just does not begin the book. He

seems to want to accomplish much but does not work to complete what he would like to do. He believes that reading more helps one to become a better reader, but he does not want to take the time to read more. He purchased the book *Football Hero* and was very interested in it. He began reading it but did not complete it. His cousin recommended that he read *Blindside* because “it is better than the movie.” He gave Andy the book, but Andy has not read it yet. However, Andy has stated that he intends to read both books.

Composite Structural Descriptions. What are the essential features that constitute reading for these six boys? Reading seems to be an activity that is predominantly performed at school and is executed because their teacher has assigned it. When asked about their preferences, all of the boys stated that they would rather play sports or video games, work with their hobbies, or watch television than read. The “well-read boys” fit reading in between assignments at school and activities such as waiting on their mothers to drop off siblings. Aaron declared that he reads “mainly whenever I am waiting for another assignment in class or on a long car ride.” The “less well-read boys” will occasionally read after class work is completed if the class is quiet, but they most often read when silent reading is the class assignment. They may read a book at home if they are required by their teachers to have a certain number of pages or minutes read.

All of these boys read magazines but do not consider this as reading. When asked if parents were readers, James, Aaron, and Andy stated that their dads were not readers but that they often traded magazine articles with their dads concerning sports, motorcycles, or trucks. Adult males are an important influence on these young, male readers. Ben and Dalton stated that they often observed their dads reading. Phillip stated that he did not have a male role model for reading.

Teachers were a major influence on these boys. Josh and Ben began their middle school years with Ms. Edwards and then had her again for eighth grade. She was able to take what she had discovered about their reading abilities in the sixth grade and further develop this in the eighth grade. The boys spoke about seeing Ms. Edwards reading herself, which inspired them to read. James explained how Ms. Edwards got the class involved with books: “It’s just like she has us reading books and everything. We read a book a class. I want to say it was *Sing Down the Moon*. We read that book, and I was kind of getting interested in reading.” All six boys stated that having the teacher model a love of reading was important to them. They also felt that a teacher showing evidence of caring about students was important to the educational environment and motivated them to want to be involved in the learning process. James said that he can tell if a teacher cares “by the way they act, like, if they really pay attention and try to help us out.”

Research has found that teacher support is important to student engagement. Students who perceive their teachers as caring are more likely to be engaged in learning (Klem & Connell, 2004). The effective teachers saw strengths in the boys with good reading skills and encouraged them to read difficult books such as *Harry Potter*. Less adequate teachers failed to look for strengths in boys with lesser reading skills, and these boys continue to struggle. Teachers invested time and listened to what these boys cared about and what they were interested in outside of the school environment. Phillip did not find a book that he enjoyed until Ms. Roberts gave him *Code Orange* to read because he and the main character shared traits. He then discovered that books could be interesting. James thought that reading was boring until Ms. Edwards insisted that he find a book and stick to it and took time often to discuss the book with him. She assisted him in finding

adventure books about rugged, masculine characters such as himself. He then began to find books that he could get pleasure from and complete.

The people who influenced these boys shared many qualities. They took time to listen to the boys to discover what interests they had. They found out what was happening in the boys' home lives. When a book or story of interest came to mind, they took the time to bring it to the student. The male role models were also important for these boys in that they read sports or vehicle articles and knew that the boys would be interested in those topics and shared the articles with the boys. Due to a significant adult male giving them the article, they were inclined to read it. All of the boys had an important male in their life except for Phillip.

Parents have been very influential to these boys. Dalton stated, "my mom introduced me to the first *Harry Potter* book when I was in the second grade." Dalton's parents began to teach him to read before he entered kindergarten. They purchase books for him, especially book series that he favors, such as *The Mysterious Benedict Society*. He and his dad share a love of sports and often trade magazine articles. His grandmother and he often trade mystery books. Dalton is part of a family of readers that provide a good foundation and model good reading behaviors for him. Ben also spoke about observing his parents and siblings reading. Dalton, Ben, Andy, and Aaron have parents who encourage them to read. Phillip and James do not seem to have parents who place a great emphasis on reading.

Verbal and non-verbal clues were powerful in forming and developing these boys' attitudes about reading. James stated that he liked reading in the second grade. His teacher "was, like, getting into it and trying to go deeper about how the stories go and

stuff. And she let us read fun books.” When he got into the third grade this all changed. He felt that his teacher did not like him. Speaking of this teacher, he said, “She would always make me last to choose the book. She would, like, have a variety of books and have, like, 30 or however many people in the class, and she would let them pick, and she would come to me last, and I would pretty much have to read what was left.”

Dalton and Aaron were given thicker, more difficult books to read in elementary school, and the assumption was that they could and would read them. This showed confidence in their abilities, and they read the books – one being *Harry Potter*, which is a very long book for an early elementary student to read. These boys consciously and unconsciously continue to practice what they learned years ago.

All of the boys in this study began elementary school taking pleasure in reading. Something happened to three of them early in their education to change this attitude. Those three then began to have impediments with their reading skills. Parents and teachers could have had a more positive influence at this early age but failed to do so. Early intervention is key to developing more successful male and female readers. Boys seem to have a more difficult time due to hearing sensitivity, immaturity, and slower brain development. These traits must be addressed in the early learning environment for boys. They learn differently and must be taught via the most effective methods for their learning types. Educators must take the initiative to bring these boys, and others, back to the love of reading they had when they were young children.

What do these “less well-read boys” see on a daily basis as far as reading is concerned? They see the “well-read boys” reading books such as *Eragon* and *Harry Potter* and want to emulate them, but due to a lack of reading skills, they cannot do so.

They see and hear others who read aloud with no difficulty and who can answer in-depth comprehension questions with no problems. They see others read a book very quickly and move on to the next one when it takes them a long time to complete one book. They hear their friends discuss the latest books, which they would like to read also, but these books are out of their ZPD. They try to find books in the media center that are of interest to them but are also on their reading level. They see others with much self-assurance when it comes to their academic skills. The “less well-read boys” face many obstacles.

Essence. The essence of these six middle school boys and their reading experiences seems to boil down to one word – *perception*. The boys who read well perceive themselves as good readers and enjoy reading. The boys who do not perceive themselves as good readers do not like reading, think reading is boring, and do not read. Therefore they do not view themselves as readers. However, after questioning these boys, the researcher found that all of the boys are readers. They even enjoy reading more than they want to admit.

Boys who principally read magazines do not consider themselves as readers. Magazines are more up to date and colorful, according to James and Ben, which make them more appealing and entertaining to the boys. Other reasons that boys may find magazines more alluring is that research shows that boys are better at recalling facts than girls (Evans, Schweingruber, Stevenson, 2002), and magazines offer quick resources and information. Boys also prefer reading material that is about real events (Murphy, 2001). Magazines additionally offer noncontinuous text, which is more appealing to males (Brozo, Shield, & Topping, 2005). Noncontinuous text is also one of the incentives for the popularity of the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series. However, the interruptions in *Diary of*

a Wimpy Kid are silly cartoons about the trouble that the main character faces in school, with which many boys can empathize.

Perception does not only involve how the boys see themselves, but also involves how others view these boys. The boys who read well do not seem to care what other boys think about them when they are reading. As a matter of fact, Dalton and Aaron seemed surprised by the question, as if they had never even considered the idea that they might be perceived a certain way for being readers. In contrast, the boys who do not read well are afraid that other boys will think less of them or think that they are effeminate if they are seen as readers. Ben even stated, “They might think it’s stupid or something. ‘He’s a nerd.’” Clearly the boys who read well have enough self-confidence that they are not unsettled at all by such a notion while the less well-read boys worry about what others think because they lack a good sense of self-worth.

The boys who stated that they do not like to read seemed to think that reading is what one does at school or in an academic setting, while the things that one does at home are fun. Dr. Abigail Norfleet James (2007) felt that boys are not successful in school; therefore they do not respect what takes place inside school but hold much more esteem for what they can do outside of school. Educators must find ways to make all students feel that what they learn in school is of value to them personally in order to get them to buy in to their education. If boys were more personally invested in their academics, they might be more inclined to read outside of school or to place as high a value on reading as they do on their leisure activities.

The boys in this study who liked to read and have excellent reading skills were not afraid to tackle any book, as opposed to the other boys who were put off by the size

of a book. Aaron and Dalton began reading difficult books early and continue to do so. James has no desire to read these types of books. Phillip and Ben had the desire to read the books but not the nerve to try to read them. The boys who read the longer books like to stay with a character to see what happens to him. Dalton's reason for liking to stay with a character was, "because I like to know how things will end. And I have to read them in a series because my curiosity will just kill me because I have to know what will happen, like, when the author leaves us on edge, like a cliffhanger." Aaron also likes to stick with a character. He stated, "It's fun to see what happens to them." The other boys want to read a quick book and move on to the next character. Due to their poor reading skills, they may lack the proficiency to delve deeper into a character when the character is involved in a longer book and/or a series of books.

The boys with excellent reading skills are not uncomfortable discussing books and their thoughts on what they have read. The boys without proficient reading skills seemed mortified to even be asked if they recommended or discussed books with other boys. When the researcher asked James if he gave or received recommendations, his voice got louder and his eyes opened wider while he emphatically stated, "No!" Boys do not like to talk about their feelings. James, Ben, and Phillip seem to think that talking about a book is the same as talking about feelings, and that is not something that boys do.

Only Dalton viewed reading as a means of escape. The other boys in this study stated that they do not consider reading as a way to get away from everything. When asked what their choice of activity would be, they all, even Dalton, responded that they would rather be involved in some type of sports than reading. These boys would all rather be engaged in an activity which involves movement instead of sitting still. Boys

are energetic and lively, and reading does not come at the top of the list of their favorite things to do. While the essence of the reading experience of boys appears to be perception, the essence of the boys themselves seems to be action.

Reading must receive more emphasis in middle school. Reading classes are taught as a separate subject in the elementary schools but not in the middle or high schools. Students continue to struggle and need assistance with reading attack skills, but language arts teachers have little time to cover the variety of topics demanded by the requisite standardized testing. There is simply not enough time for sustained reading in secondary schools (Brozo & Simpson, 2007). The majority of reading in schools is textbook-based. Students need to read material that is linked to their personal interests and will have a more lasting effect (Lonsdale, 2003). Boys need to be engaged in the learning process. Teachers need to have an accounting system to ensure that students are reading personal material (Brozo, Shield, & Topping, 2005). Students also need to begin reading projects inside the school which will continue outside in order to provide a link between both worlds (Guthrie & Davis, 2003).

Ben. Ben is an effervescent eighth grade young man who gets along well with peers as well as teachers. He is involved in track and cross country with the school. Teachers often ask him to run errands because he is a trusted student. Ben always has a smile on his face and is in a pleasant mood. He lives with his parents, his four sisters, and one little brother. His family is very supportive and encourages him in his endeavors. Ben's mother and one of his sisters work at the local grocery store and ask about him when the researcher is shopping because the community is small enough for teachers and students' families to interact often. Ben works hard to make good grades

and please his teachers and parents, and he is proud of his accomplishments. He is a people-pleaser and likes to make others happy.

Reading Preferences. Ben's favorite genre is humor. He has read the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series by Jeff Kinney and has since gone on to read more substantial books. He also enjoys reading magazines, especially *People*, *In Touch*, and *Disney*, because he likes to "keep up with the stars and read about their interactions." He does not have a subscription to any of these magazines but reads them at the store, or sometimes his mom will purchase one for him.

Ben has completed several shorter books on entertainers such as Beyoncé, Hulk Hogan, Stone Cold Steve Austin, and The Rock. These books were very short and were below Ben's reading level, which was part of why he chose them. Ben stated that he likes to keep his books at around 100 pages. Comic books were not on Ben's list of reading materials and never have been.

Ben's reading choices exemplify Vygotsky's (1978) theory of Zones of Proximal Development (ZPD). As Ben has become comfortable reading books and magazines below his reading level, he has branched out into books that are more closely related to his ZPD, such as the *Bluford High* series. This also follows Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy because Ben is increasing his self-efficacy with each book that he reads on a higher ZPD.

Reading Orientation. When asked what type of book he would not read, Ben stated that he would not read certain types of love stories that have a lot of drama. His sister reads those, and he thinks that he would not like them. Ben prefers a male main character in the books he reads, such as Greg in *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*. Even though Ben

stated that he would read a book with a female main character, all of the books that he has been reading have males as their chief character.

Story Preference: Written vs. Digital Media. When asked if he liked the book or the movie version of *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* better, Ben responded, “I liked the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* books better than the movie because the book had more details.” In the remedial reading class, the researcher has been reading *The Lightning Thief* by Rick Riordan aloud to the students, and Ben seems to really enjoy the book. Vocabulary words are heavily emphasized during the reading aloud of books, and this emphasis will help to minimize Stanovich’s (2008) Matthew Effect on Ben.

One practice that has increased Ben’s comprehension is watching the corresponding scenes from the movie after reading parts of the book. Visualizing what has been read is a tactic that good readers use. Ben may not be able to do this very well on his own; thus, watching the movie can aid him with this critical skill. Watching the movies and reading the books together as a class has also been instrumental in increasing Ben’s vocabulary because of the aforementioned emphasis on vocabulary words during read-aloud time.

Influences on Reading Choices. Ben stated that he felt more comfortable talking about books to his friends who were girls than he did to boys because “boys might think that it [reading] was stupid.” Ben’s language arts teacher, Ms. Edwards, stated that he socializes with more females than males and that he often tries to read what his friend Emily is reading. Emily reads on a higher level and with much more concentration than Ben though, so Ben has a hard time reading those books.

Ben stated that his whole family likes to read, from his grandmother down to his

little brother. His sister reads what he calls “love stories.” His mother and father read T. D. Jakes books, and his little brother reads elementary books. The family formerly went to the public library often but have not been much lately due to his parents and sister working often. He mostly gets his books from the media center at school but will sometimes purchase a book from the book fair. Between his family and Emily, Ben has many role models for reading.

In spite of the positive reading role models in his life, Ben still feels that some boys may view guys who read as nerds. However, when Ben was asked if he would let being thought of as a nerd stop him from recommending a good book to another boy, he emphatically stated that he would recommend it anyway because he knows he is “not a nerd!” In spite of this claim, Ben tries very hard to fit in with the other boys instead of just being himself.

Ben stated that his mother and grandmother read to him often as a child and he really enjoyed this. He still likes for teachers to read aloud, especially if the book is a good one. He does not like it, though, when the book is getting really good and the teacher has to stop reading.

Attitudes towards Reading: Work vs. Pleasure. When asked about his attitude toward reading, Ben replied, “I like to read ok, but I don't read that much.” This could be an example of the Matthew Effect (Stanovich, 2008) at work in Ben’s reading life. He feels so overwhelmed by certain books that he does not even bother to try them. In spite of this claim, Ben often has a book with him in class. Over the course of sixth, seventh, and eighth grade, Ben has grown in his reading as well as his maturity. This has been witnessed and observed by Ben’s teachers at the middle school.

Ben feels that the more a person reads, the better a reader that person becomes. He has heard this expression for the past three years in his remedial reading classes. Ben stated that people who read a lot are viewed as smart. This could be one reason why he sometimes attempts to read books that are way above his reading level (or ZPD) and are too long for him to complete.

Perseverance. When asked about reading longer books, Ben replied, “Thick books are too long and too hard to understand.” These books may be above Ben’s ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978), and he lacks the self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977) needed to tackle them. For example, in the first interview, Ben indicated that he was reading *Twilight* by Stephenie Meyer. At that time, he stated that he found the book very interesting and that he liked the fantasy genre. However, two weeks later, Ben stated that he just could not finish *Twilight* because it was too hard and too long, so he had given up. Ben also stated that he liked humor and that he had completed *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*. Ben had started a *Heartland* series book by Lauren Brooke because he was interested in horses, but he had not finished it either. Another book which Ben began but did not complete was *Dear John* by Nicholas Sparks. He thought it would be very interesting because the main character was a man in WWII, but he lost interest when the book became more of a love story, got more complicated, and ended up being quite long.

During the interview, when asked what books he would buy if money was no object, Ben said he would probably purchase the *Twilight* series because it was popular, many people were reading it at that time, and it was on his mind. However, he did not actually complete the first book, so he probably would not really buy this series if he had a choice. He also stated that he would like to buy the *Heartland* series, but he probably

would not buy it either. The researcher gave Ben a *Heartland* book because he showed interest in it and she had several copies. He started it but did not finish it. The main character was a female, and Ben probably was not as interested in the book as he first thought or indicated he would be. He also might have only said that he wanted to read it because he thought that was what the researcher wanted to hear. Ben always tries hard to please teachers and to say what he thinks they want him to say.

Ms. Edwards feels that Ben has trouble with fluency and comprehension. While he uses literary terms correctly in writing, the depth of his writing is very shallow. She also has observed that he does not often complete a book, probably due to a lack of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). She feels that Ben enjoys starting a book, but as the plot develops and becomes more intricate, he cannot keep up with it and gives up. He is not willing to stay with a book to break through the plot and try to understand it; giving up on the book is much easier.

Ben had Ms. Edwards in the sixth grade and now has her again in the eighth grade, so she has seen his growth in maturity and reading abilities. Even though he still reads below grade level, he passed the CRCT this year in reading. This was a huge gain for Ben. Being assigned to Ms. Edwards for the second time in middle school is very beneficial for Ben because she requires students to choose a book and stick with it. She has mini conferences each week with students to discuss what is happening in their books and to ensure that they are reading the same books that they originally chose. Ms. Edwards also requires that her students read four to five books every nine weeks and to read for thirty minutes each night. Reading practice could only be advantageous for Ben.

Summary. Even though Ben often has a difficult time reading, he is not afraid to

read aloud. He attempts this in the remedial reading class and in his language arts class. According to his language arts teacher, Ms. Edwards, Ben has difficulty comprehending what he has read aloud, but he still enjoys the reading. Ms. Edwards feels that Ben is focusing so much on saying the words correctly that he loses the comprehension piece of reading aloud. He seems afraid that he will mispronounce words and others will laugh at him. This is a difficult age for boys who are trying to assert their masculinity, and Ben is much more comfortable with girls than boys.

Ben stated that he was a good reader but had trouble with comprehension. He seemed to overrate his abilities and his love of books. When first asked about reading, Ben stated that he really liked to read. During subsequent interviews, when pressed, he admitted that he sort of likes to read but does not often finish books. Ben wants to appear to be a reader but has so much trouble with comprehension that he gives up on books that he considers too hard to understand. Then he goes back to much easier reading, such as *People*, *In Touch*, *Disney* and *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*. Ben needs to find a book that is closer to his reading level that he enjoys and can complete. Then, he needs to add a book that is slightly more difficult to read. If he could gain confidence in his reading aptitude, he would also gain confidence in himself, which he really seems to lack. This is often a problem with students, male or female, of Ben's age. Ben has made great strides in his reading since sixth grade, but he will continue to grow in high school. Passing the CRCT in reading was an enormous victory for him and a step toward his new found self-confidence.

Ben is very competitive and desperately wants to be one of the fifteen top AR readers in the remedial reading class. The top fifteen go on a field trip to the mall twice a

year to shop, have lunch, and see a movie based on a book. This is a much anticipated trip at Wimberley Middle School, and Ben is really reading now to stay on the top fifteen chart. This spirited thrust into the world of reading will be very beneficial to Ben.

James. James is an eighth grade male who stated that he merely tolerates reading. He is a tall, outspoken young man who calls himself a “redneck.” James is a very masculine young man; he is interested in the military and comes from a family line of military men. James is also in the band at school and is very involved in activities. James lives with his parents but has older brothers who are in the military whom he rarely sees. He has a deep respect and love for his mom but is very involved with his dad, grandfather, and godfather. They all share a love of vehicles, especially tractor trailers and motorcycles. They often trade magazine articles concerning these topics. They also share a love of the Georgia Bulldogs and trade books about their favorite football team.

Reading Preferences. James said that his favorite genre was probably humor. Like Ben, he also had read the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series and enjoyed it. This was below James’ ZPD, but he felt comfortable reading the series and then went on to read books closer to and within his ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978). James also stated that he liked to read military and car books. James likes to read military books because he considers them “full of action.” His favorite military book is *Marine! The Life of Chesty Puller* by Burke Davis.

James also likes to read magazines because “magazines are more up to date and in color.” He stated that “you can read a book about a motorcycle and it will be out of date, but you can read a magazine, and it tells you new stuff that hasn’t even come out yet.” Sports books are also full of action, and one of his favorite books is *Then Vince Said to*

Herschel: The Best Georgia Bulldog Stories Ever Told by Patrick Garbin, which was given to him by his godfather. Reading these books has assisted in increasing James' self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977), which, in turn, will help him with other reading skills.

While researching literature for this study, comic books often came up as a genre that boys like to read. However, James stated that while he reads the *MAD* comic books sometimes because they are funny and make fun of the President, he is not a comic book fan and does not purchase them. Many boys who like to read enjoy fantasy, but James does not like fantasy at all. He asserted that he primarily only likes books that are full of action. He said that a book has to hook him right away and continue with the action, and the main character must be a male. Even though James prefers action books, he does not like Gary Paulsen books.

Reading Orientation. James' grandfather, father, and brother were all in the Marines, and James also plans to join after high school. He often wears Marines t-shirts to school. Ms. Edwards stated that James chose books about the Marines even in the sixth grade and did his book project on a Marines book. She felt that James is a very masculine young man, and he naturally gravitates toward more manly topics in his reading selections.

Girly books were on James' list of books he would not read. When asked what he considered a "girly book," he mentioned the *Bluford High* series, which deal with minority teenagers and the problems they face, and they often involve a dating relationship. James considers anything with romance to be a girly book, and the protagonists of the *Bluford High* books are often female characters. When the protagonist of one of these books is male, he usually has a lot of problems and does not

seem like a person with whom James would identify. The book James was reading during this study was *Jason's Gold* by Will Hobbs, which is an action adventure book with a male protagonist.

Story Preference: Written vs. Digital Media. James liked the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series. However, he was not interested in the movie based on the books. He stated that books often have more details than movies, and he is more interested in war movies and movies with motorcycles.

Influences on Reading Choices. When asked why he does not like to read, James told a story about his third grade teacher. According to James, his third grade teacher told him that he was “blind as a bat” and had ADHD. James also stated that this teacher did not care if he read or not and that he did not often observe her reading. This teacher always chose the books that James had to read, and this was very upsetting to him. Even if she had a variety for the class, she would make James choose last, which amounted to her having total control over James’ reading selections. After this experience he did not care about reading. The Matthew Effect (Stanovich, 2008) seems to have roots early in James’ education.

James did say that he had liked reading in the first and second grade. When asked what he liked about his second grade teacher and reading, James declared that she let them choose fun books to read. James said that he found reading fun when the reading material was his choice but not fun when the teacher chose. James felt that his fourth grade teacher cared about her students, and he began to have somewhat of a different attitude about school. She told him that she became a teacher because her son had a bad experience with a teacher, and she wanted to be one who would show students that she

actually cared about them. James still remembers this and thinks it is important.

However, the bad feelings are still there from his third grade experience, and overcoming those feelings will take some time.

When asked why he thought that middle school teachers sometimes gave students a variety of books to choose from instead of giving them complete freedom to choose a book, James stated that the teacher probably thought that the student would choose a book that he/she had already read. James stated that reading became more fun when he had a teacher who would let him choose to read whatever he liked. He originally said that he only reads at school, but further investigation found that he also reads at home.

James stated that he does not recommend books to other males his age and that other male adolescents do not recommend books to him. Boys this age often observe other boys reading books, such as *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, and then check those books out from the media center, but they consider actually discussing the book outside of class or school as non-masculine.

James stated that his mother and grandmother read to him often when he was little. He does not remember which books they read, but he does remember them reading to him. He said that his grandmother still reads often, but his mother is too busy. His father often reads magazines. Having role models, especially male ones who read, is very important to middle school boys. James said he would read something if it was recommended by a male whom he respected.

When James came to middle school, he was placed in Ms. Edwards' language arts class. Ms. Edwards is a very conscientious teacher who truly cares about her students. She models good reading habits and taught James some proficient reading skills. Ms.

Edwards read *Sing Down the Moon*, by Scott O'Dell, to her sixth graders and made it very interesting for James and the other students. James also said that he thinks Mr. Edwards loves reading and enjoys teaching. He does not remember seeing his elementary school teachers just picking up a book and reading it, but his middle school teachers did that, and this practice made an impression on him. James' attitude about reading began to change because of a teacher who demonstrated to him that she did care about him and his reading abilities.

In several interviews, James stated that he did not like to read, but when he was asked what he was reading, he always had a title ready. He often reads material given to him by males in his life, such as his father, godfather, or next-door neighbor. One of the books that he read was *Then Vince Said to Herschel: The Best Georgia Bulldog Stories Ever Told*, which was given to him by his godfather. James, his dad, and his godfather are huge Georgia Bulldog fans and often share reading material. The researcher noted that when she sees James every day in the hallway, he always has a book with him. Clearly James does not hate reading as much as he would like others to believe.

James reads magazines that are mostly related to cars and motorcycles. This again is due to the male influence in his life. James is a tall, muscular boy who does not seem to care much what others think of him at school. However, the male influence in James' home is very important to him. His neighbor has a motorcycle, and James often helps him work on it. James will read a magazine article about Harley Davidson motorcycles and then pass it on to his neighbor or vice versa. His father often does the same thing.

When questioned about his favorite book during the first interview, James stated

that he did not have one, but during the second interview he stated that his favorite book was *Marine! The Life of Chesty Puller*. James declared that he only rereads magazine articles and that he does not reread books. Magazine articles are shorter and more entertaining than books, according to James. James also loves motorcycles and big trucks and asserted that there are many more magazines than books about these topics. He also noted that magazines are more current than books in this area. James' dad drives a tractor trailer, and he and James share a love of big trucks and often read magazine articles about them. James' dad subscribes to several magazines about semi-trucks. James' godfather has several semi-trucks and also shares reading material (mainly magazine articles about said trucks) with James. James drives Bobcats and small tractors and likes to read the manuals about how to work on these types of equipment. He also shares these with his dad and godfather.

Attitudes towards Reading: Work vs. Pleasure. James indicated that he does not like to read but feels that reading is important because it makes writing and public speaking easier. When asked what books or series of books would he buy if he could, he stated that he really did not know since he did not care much about books, but he would purchase motorcycle magazines about street bikes. James also stated that if the book is a good one, he enjoys the teacher reading it aloud to the class. According to Ms. Edwards, James seems to comprehend more when the teacher reads aloud, as opposed to when he tries reading a higher level book on his own.

Perseverance. James had some trouble at the beginning of the year with starting a book and not completing it, but Ms. Edwards requires her students to find a book and complete it. She has mini conferences with her students about the book they choose and

what is happening as they are reading. James is forced to stay with the book that he chooses. He has completed *Jason's Gold* and has started to read a new book. Now that James sees that completing a book can be rewarding, he seems to be more likely to persevere and finish the books that he starts.

Summary. During the seventh grade, James was with another excellent language arts teacher and gained further reading skills. Then, Ms. Edwards was moved from sixth grade to eighth grade, and James once again was placed in her class. As aforementioned, she is very diligent about students finding a book and sticking with it. James participated in the same stringent reading program as Ben, and he was able to keep up with the rest of the class as far as using literary terms, such as *protagonist*, *characterization*, *theme*, and *conflict*, in his writings. However, his writing did not have the depth that some of the other students' had.

Since James was placed in the researcher's remedial reading class in the sixth and seventh grades, she was also able to see growth in his reading skillfulness. James continued to improve on the CRCT in reading and was not placed in the remedial reading class in the eighth grade. The materials that he really enjoys are not the books that he checks out in the media center at school, but he *is* reading, and he *is* enjoying it. However, he has somehow developed or been given the impression that his reading choices outside of school (i.e. magazines) are not academic reading materials and therefore are not actually considered reading. A compassionate teacher was vital to James because she showed him that she did care about him as well as his scholastic abilities. Male role models who read and caring teachers have been critical in James' change of attitude about reading.

While James insisted that he did not read and did not care about reading, the researcher always observed him with a book. Admittedly, he was required to read by Ms. Edwards, but he still stated that the book was “okay.” James has a very comfortable relationship with the researcher, and if he had not liked the book, he would have had no trouble telling her. James’ struggles with reading seem to have had a negative effect on his attitude concerning this subject, but as he continues to read and benefits from successes, he will have a more positive attitude about reading.

Ms. Edwards allows James to choose his reading materials, which permits him to pick books with a strong male protagonist. This also helps him commit to the reading requirements. James did not seem to read a lot for fun in elementary school, but he has done more of this in middle school since he has been assigned to read for class and had to find something that he was actually interested in reading. Being forced to read has helped James discover that reading is really not as bad as he thought. He still would rather be working on a motorcycle or a tractor-trailer, but if he has to read for an assignment, he does not do it as grudgingly as he once did.

Aaron. Aaron is a very intelligent young man in the seventh grade. He lives with his parents and younger sister. He is very involved in sports, especially soccer. His dad is his soccer coach, and they often exchange articles about this topic. Aaron is consistently on the Honor Roll, and this is an expectation shared by his parents and himself. Aaron might best be described as an amiable individual. He has many friends and is well liked by his peers and teachers alike.

Reading Preferences. Aaron’s favorite genres are fantasy and action/adventure, and he found both of those in *The Inheritance Cycle* by Christopher Paolini, which is why

he really enjoyed that series. At the time of this study, he had just finished reading *Football Hero* by Tim Green, which falls into the realistic fiction genre. Aaron purchased this book at the book fair and thought it would be interesting because it was about a boy whose older brother is drafted into the NFL. Together they help the FBI gather evidence against their uncle, who is involved in organized crime and gambling. Aaron also enjoyed reading the *Harry Potter* and *Eragon* series. When questioned about why he enjoys these genres, Aaron replied, “You see dragons, elves, and dwarfs and the constant fighting and sense of adventure with the characters.”

Aaron’s language arts teacher, Mrs. Davis, requires her students to read 120 minutes per week, and the class studies 8 genres per year. She stated that Aaron is an avid reader and does well on all assignments. Aaron recommended *The Hunger Games* series by Suzanne Collins to Mrs. Davis, and she could not put it down. After that, the class began reading the series for a book study. Clearly, Aaron feels comfortable recommending books to teachers. He even purchased one of the books for Mrs. Davis to read. Like the other participants in this study, Aaron does not read comic books. He stated that he has “never been a comic book reader” and that they simply do not hold his interest.

Reading Orientation. Mrs. Davis and Aaron both stated that he does not like to read books with romance involved. A book needs to have a strong male character and a lot of action for Aaron to enjoy it. This is evidenced by Aaron’s choice of books such as *Harry Potter*, *Eragon*, and *Football Hero*. Aaron’s reaction to both adventure and romance novels is in line with the other participants’ opinions.

Story Preference: Written vs. Digital Media. Aaron shared the other

participants' views on books that are made into movies. He said that the movies often leave out a lot of details that are fascinating in the books. He likes to use his imagination to create vivid pictures in his mind about the characters, and the movies usually do not do the characters justice. He said, "Oh, that's the biggest thing that I don't like about movies being made out of books [. . .] they leave some of the biggest parts out. Like, me and my dad went to see the *Harry Potter 6* movie and it left out some of the biggest parts in the book that I think were important."

Influences on Reading Choices. When asked about his reading role models, Aaron stated,

I like to check out stories my dad tells me about. I'm really into the International Soccer, professional soccer, so my dad tells me there's an interesting article, about someone like Landon Donvon for example; I'll go in and read it. He tells me something, like, about a football story that he found interesting that he thinks I might want to check out because we just started doing fantasy leagues with some of our friends, so if there's anything interesting or something that's going to affect our team, he's going to tell me about it.

Aaron's mom and grandmother both like to read, and he has been exposed to books from a very early age. Both his mother and father read to him when he was younger. While he witnesses his mother and grandmother reading, he stated that his dad was never very interested in reading. However, when asked if he reads magazines, Aaron stated that his dad often tells him about interesting sports stories in magazines and recommends that he read them.

Aaron does recommend books to other male students sometimes, but he stated

that most of his friends are not as interested in books as he is. Sometimes classmates will recommend books to Aaron, and if they sound interesting, he will try to read them.

Aaron has a unique method of choosing a book. He looks at the title, and if that piques his interest, he will flip to a random page in the book and begin reading to find out if it has anything that hooks him. If he gets hooked, he will read the entire book. He said that “reading the first page does not give a fair description of a book because the exposition of any book is going to be slow.”

Attitudes towards Reading: Work vs. Pleasure. Aaron indicated that he really enjoys reading. Mrs. Davis also specified that Aaron is an avid reader. She declared that as soon as Aaron completes his work, he brings out a book to read. Aaron uses reading to fill his down time. He stated, “Well I usually spend about 20 minutes waiting for my mom to get my sister so I find some good reading time there, and I read on the way to school.”

Perseverance. Aaron remembers beginning the *Harry Potter* series in the second grade, but he had to give it up because of his school assignments. He picked up the first book again in the fourth grade and read the complete series. He unmistakably has no problems with the Matthew Effect (Stanovich, 2008). He began reading longer and more difficult books at an early age and continues to do so.

Aaron said he likes to stick with a series because the end of one book foreshadows what may happen in the next, and he cannot wait to see what materializes. The *Harry Potter* series still remains at the top of his list of favorite books. Other series that he has completed include *Inheritance Cycle*, *A Series of Unfortunate Events* by Lemony Snicket, and *The Hunger Games*. Aaron is currently reading the final book in

the *Hunger Games* series, *Mockingjay*. He is in a competition with a friend to see who can complete the book first. Aaron clearly has no trouble reading books below, within, or even above his ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978).

Even though he completes books often, he feels that he does not read that much. He is very active in sports, and between that and school, he does not have much time to read at home. However, he does read on the way to school, while he is waiting on his mother to pick up his sister, and after he completes his assignments at school. Mrs. Davis stated in the interview that Aaron is very good about getting out his book the minute he completes an assignment. He does not believe in wasting time and keeps a book with him for this purpose.

When asked why he likes to stick with a character, Aaron replied, "It's fun to see what happens to them." He also said, when asked how many books he buys, "A lot of books, I buy them, like, when they are continuation of a series I've been reading. I try to buy them so I'll have them for later. Because, like, with the library here, it's kind of hard to keep reading a book when it's really long, and I like to get into those longer books."

Summary. Aaron feels very comfortable being a reader and has no self-efficacy issues in regards to reading (Bandura, 1977). He recommends books to others and to his teacher. Even though he is very involved in sports, he still finds time to read and very often has a book with him to read in his spare time, especially at school. Like the other participants in this study, Aaron does not view reading a magazine as actual reading. For example, Aaron stated that his dad was not into reading, but his dad often recommends magazine articles to him about sports figures or teams, so he is obviously reading, just not books.

Since Aaron has no reading difficulties and has not faced any during his school years, he feels free to read whatever he likes. Often he can be found reading two books at a time. The researcher observed him every day in the hallway and often visited him in his language arts classroom; he always had a book with him. Unlike other boys who stated that reading is boring, Aaron finds *not* reading to be boring. He cannot sit still and do nothing after an assignment is complete; he must read. Aaron really enjoys reading and is very comfortable being a reader.

Phillip. Phillip is an adolescent who is going through the typical quandaries of his age and time. He wants to be perceived as athletic and involved in sports, but he is not. He wants to be perceived as a rough and tumble boy, but he has a gentle side. Phillip desperately wants to fit in with the other students, but he often does not. He is going through difficult teen years and is trying on different looks. Phillip seems to have self-efficacy issues in several areas of his life (Bandura, 1977).

Phillip lives with his mom and sees his dad on alternating weekends. He has a younger brother and sister, both of whom, he stated, read really well. Phillip's mom stated that reading has not been a priority in their family. This seems to have had a detrimental effect on Phillip's attitude toward reading.

Reading Preferences. Phillip declared that his favorite genre is action and adventure. He enjoys reading nonfiction war and history books. He also read the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series and enjoyed it. Just as with the other boys, these books are below Phillip's ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978), but many boys love to read them. After being forced to read Caroline B. Cooney's *Code Orange*, an action/adventure book with a touch of mystery, he realized that he enjoyed it, possibly because it was actually within his ZPD.

Beginning with an easier book facilitated Phillip with the transition to a more difficult one within his ZPD. This also improved his self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977) because it increased his confidence in his reading ability and proved to Phillip that he could enjoy reading a book.

Reading Orientation. Phillip only reads books with males as the main character. This is evidenced by his choice of books such as *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* and *Code Orange*. He does not like, nor has he ever liked, to read comic books. Phillip stated that after the third grade he switched from reading books to reading magazines because he found reading boring. He began to read magazines such as *Sports Illustrated*. Phillip also stated, “Sometimes I like to read about war.”

Story Preference: Written vs. Digital Media. When asked if seeing a movie makes him want to read the book, Phillip stated that he saw the *Harry Potter* movies and wanted to read the books but never even started them because they were too long. He did read the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series and then saw the movie, but he felt that the books were much better due to the added detail. He stated that the series was okay, but since he read the complete series, one could infer that he thought the books were more than just “okay.” He declared that he often finds books to be better than movies because the movies omit details from the books.

Influences on Reading Choices. Phillip does remember his mother and father reading to him when he was a small child, and he liked reading in the first and second grades. However, he stopped liking the subject in third grade. Phillip believes that reading was not important to his third grade teacher because he did not observe her reading, nor did the class spend much time reading. While in the first and second grades,

he read books such as *Charlotte's Web* by E. B. White and the *Magic Tree House* books by Mary Pop Osborne and Sal Murdocca, but he switched to sports books in the third grade. He stated that he also switched from books to magazines in the third grade. His favorite magazine is *Sports Illustrated*.

According to Phillip, his little brother and sister like to read and are good at it. He stated that they can pick up a book and read it with no difficulty at all. When asked if he believes himself to be a good reader, he stated that he does and that he is probably a better reader than his siblings, depending on the book. He has observed his mom reading *Twilight*, but he says that he does not see his dad reading. Phillip also stated that his grandmother likes to read mystery books. When Phillip's mother was questioned about his reading, she stated that the family had not placed much emphasis on reading and she thought that had probably played a big part in Phillip's lack of interest in the subject. This may have contributed to the Matthew Effect (Stanovich, 2008) for Phillip, as he seems to have given up on reading at an early age. When questioned about how many books are owned by his family, he stated that they only owned a very few books, perhaps four or five. In regards to his classmates, Phillip said that he definitely would not recommend a book to anyone, and other people do not recommend books to him. When questioned about why he began reading *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, he said that he often saw others reading it and decided to try it.

Phillip is required by his language arts teacher, Ms. Roberts, to find a book and stick to it, so she recommended *Code Orange* by Caroline B. Cooney. The first time the researcher questioned Phillip about reading this book, he grumbled that he had to read it. The next time she asked him about what he was reading, he stated, "*Code Orange*." The

third time the researcher saw him she told him that she forgot to write down the title, and he said, “Oh. I am reading *Code Orange* by Caroline B. Cooney.” The researcher observed from the tone of his voice that he was beginning to like the book and was becoming more enthusiastic about it.

Code Orange is about a boy who is a bit on the lazy side and does not do a lot in school but works to save the world from terrorists. Phillip can probably identify with the character from the book because they have many of the same qualities. Phillip does not like to put forth extra effort for his work at school. Ms. Roberts recommended this book to him because Phillip and the main character share some qualities, and the protagonist turns out to be the unexpected hero. Even though Phillip was not happy at first about having to read a book at all, he became intrigued by this character and is completing the book because he actually wants to finish it and discover how the main character solves the conflict. While Phillip vehemently declares that he hates reading, Ms. Roberts has found a book in which he could identify with the main character, and now he is acquiring pleasure from the book, albeit very surprisingly to himself. Phillip probably thought this would never happen to him because he thought that all reading was boring. However, finding a book that has captured his attention may begin to change his attitude about reading in general.

Ms. Roberts also stated that Phillip’s reading comprehension is low. This may be a significant deterrent in his attempts to read, so he often gives up on a book and then proclaims that he hates reading. Ms. Roberts also stated that Phillip is very concerned about others’ thoughts about him. He does not like for Ms. Roberts to think there is anything bothering him or that he has difficulties with reading. He also exhibits this

attitude towards other students. Phillip is going through adolescence and is very worried about how his peers perceive him. He also struggles with a very limited vocabulary and tends to use the same words over and over in his writing and speaking.

Attitudes towards Reading: Work vs. Pleasure. Phillip stated in his interview that he does “not like to read at all.” Phillip stated that he reads at school because his teacher makes him, but he does not read at home except for *Sports Illustrated*. Phillip stated that he did not read any more than that because reading is boring. When asked how he chooses a book during Accelerated Reading (AR) time, Phillip responded that he tries to find one that has to do with history or war because he is interested in those subjects. He also said he would read a book if it was about sports, such as football, or about a sports player that he liked, such as LeBron James.

Phillip stated that he would rather play sports than read. He also stated that he did not like to read aloud because if he messed up, he would be embarrassed. Phillip did, however, say that he would try to read more during the school year. When asked what book or series of books he would buy if he could, he stated that he would probably buy *Sports Illustrated* instead of books because he reads it often and likes sports.

Perseverance. Before Ms. Roberts forced Phillip to read *Code Orange*, he did not have very much success with completing books except for the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series. Those books are short and have cartoon illustrations which interrupt the reading and make them immensely popular with adolescent boys. Phillip may have felt that he could not complete a long book, so he did not see the point in even beginning one. This is clearly an example of Stanovich’s (2008) Matthew Effect Theory in action. Now that he is required to complete *Code Orange*, he may begin to feel successful and go on to

read more difficult books.

Summary. Even though Phillip was adamant about not being a reader, he actually seems to be a reluctant reader. There are many factors that contribute to this. Phillip was brought up in a home where reading and books were not valued. He does not see his parents reading often or reading difficult material. His family does not own many books. Phillip's mother even stated that reading was not important in their family; therefore he has not had reading role models at home.

Phillip stated that he does enjoy reading sports magazines, but he does not seem to consider this as reading because it is not considered a part of reading at school. Reluctant readers often think that reading a magazine is not classified as "real" reading; therefore when asked about their reading habits, they say that they are not readers when in fact they are readers. Phillip was shocked when he discovered that he could enjoy a book when it had a relatable and engaging male character with whom he could become involved in the action and adventure. The tone of his voice changed as he talked about the book over time. As he became involved with the characters, the tone of his voice became less hostile, and he even showed a small amount of excitement, which was a huge improvement for him because he always has such a negative attitude when asked about his reading.

Phillip seems to be making this progress because his teacher showed that she cared enough about him to find a book with a character whom he would like, engage with, and want to find out what happens to him. After Phillip completes *Code Orange*, he may opt to read another Caroline B. Cooney book and venture out into other genres from there. Often, changing reluctant readers into readers begins with finding a single

book that entertains and intrigues them.

Dalton. Dalton is a very genial young man who lives with his parents, little brother, and little sister. He refers to his mother as “a stay-at-home mom,” and his father is a teacher and a coach. Dalton is very involved in athletics and has been since he was small. He and his dad share a love of sports.

Dalton has a convivial personality. He is friendly towards everyone and is a pleasure to be around. A smile is constantly on his face, and he is full of zest. All of his teachers declare him to be a pleasure to teach. Dalton makes good grades and has been on the Honor Roll or merit list throughout his middle school years.

Reading Preferences. Dalton’s favorite genre is fantasy, with one of his favorite books being *Harry Potter*. He has completed multiple series, including the *Mysterious Benedict Society* by Trenton Lee Stewart, *Harry Potter*, and *Eragon*. Dalton also likes to read *Sports Illustrated for Kids*. Because of their shared love of sports, Dalton and his father often trade sports-related magazine articles. He does like to read mysteries and war stories, both fiction and nonfiction. Books that hold no interest at all for Dalton are biographies and books about girls. Like the other participants, Dalton does not read comic books.

Reading Orientation. Like the other participants, Dalton likes action and adventure in books and books with strong male characters. Dalton’s favorite book series all have male protagonists. He usually reads books with strong male characters and does not read books with female protagonists. He tried to read *Bad, Badder, Baddest* by Cynthia Voigt, a book about three mean girls, in the fifth grade, but he turned it back in after the first chapter. He said he just did not find it appealing at all because “girls are too

hard to understand.”

Boys like to be able to identify with the characters that they read about. The books that Dalton chooses have this type of character; therefore, he can form attachments to them and carry this over to the rest of the books in the series that he tends to read. Even though he tried to read a book with compelling female characters to investigate what was appealing about them, he could not “get into it” and went back to books with male characters. As evidenced in the previous section, Dalton favors many different genres of books, as long as they are not about girls.

Story Preference: Written vs. Digital Media. Dalton plans to begin Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s *Sherlock Holmes* series next because he saw the new movie and enjoyed it. He thought since the movie was good the books should be better. Like Aaron, Dalton likes to picture the characters in his mind and thinks that the movies do not do the books justice. Reading *The Inheritance Cycle* left him with the same thoughts. He thinks that the characters in his imagination are far better than the characters in the movies. Dalton has decided to reread the *Mysterious Benedict Society* series for a third time in case the books are turned into movies. He said he would like to become an expert on the books so that he will be able to critique the eventual films.

Influences on Reading Choices. Dalton chooses book by looking at the cover and then reading a few pages to see if the author has written the book well. He also listens to recommendations from his male friends, but he prefers to choose books for himself. When asked why he does not take advice on books from females, he again stated that “girls are too hard to understand.” Dalton remarked that his parents try to recommend books, but he does not always listen since he likes to choose his own books.

He does recommend books to his friends, though.

Dalton witnesses his father and grandmother reading quite often. He even borrows mystery books from his grandmother. He stated that his mom is very busy with his little brother and sister and does not have much time to read. However, she did read to him a lot when he was little. Dalton's parents often buy books for him, and he said that his family owns many books. His favorite books that he owns are *The Mysterious Benedict Society* series and the *Harry Potter* series.

Dalton is being raised in a home where great emphasis is placed on reading. His parents taught him to read early, and he has been reading ever since. Reading is important to his grandmother also, and they share a love of books, especially mysteries. Dalton's parents and grandmother own many books, and he is accustomed to having them around.

Attitudes Towards Reading: Work vs. Pleasure. Dalton indicated that he loves to read. His language arts teacher, Mrs. Davis, also revealed during the interview that Dalton loves to read. Dalton learned to read at age four due to his mom and dad devoting a lot of time to him and reading to him. Learning to read at an early age and having parents who spent a lot of time helping him has contributed greatly to Dalton not experiencing the Matthew Effect (Stanovich, 2008). Dalton is a very good reader and has no trouble with comprehension or vocabulary. The book that he most remembered reading as a young child was *The Little Engine That Could*. His mom and dad would read, and he would read the parts that he could. "For me, it [reading] sort of distracts me from school and I sort of get in my own world when I read a book," Dalton stated. "Reading helps me to relax."

Perseverance. Like Aaron, Dalton began the *Harry Potter* series in the second grade. Unlike Aaron, Dalton completed the first book in the second grade and then read the consecutive books as they were published. He finished the last book in the fourth grade. Dalton's mother recommended *Harry Potter* to him, and he began reading it and liked it. He was daunted by the size of it at first, but his mom urged him to at least try it. Having great support from his mother has enhanced self-efficacy in Dalton (Bandura, 1977). Regardless of a book's size or ZPD, he is willing to give it a try. Dalton thought *Harry Potter* would be boring but was pleasantly surprised to find it full of action and adventure. Because fantasy is his favorite genre, he really liked the entire series.

As previously mentioned, at the time of this study, Dalton was in the process of rereading *The Mysterious Benedict Society* for the third time in case a movie is made from them. They are full of action and adventure, and he is very keen on reading them. Dalton stated that when he rereads books he finds that he "notices stuff that [he] didn't notice the first time." He likes to read books in a series because they give him a chance to stick with a character and find out what will happen to him in later books. When asked why he likes to stick with a character, Dalton stated, "Because I like to know how things will end. And I have to read them in a series because my curiosity will just kill me because I have to know what will happen, like, when the author leaves us on edge like a cliffhanger."

Summary. Dalton is very comfortable recommending books to other males and taking recommendations from them. He prefers to choose books himself, but he does listen to positive feedback from others concerning reading material. Like Aaron, Dalton has no problem reading books below, within, and/or above his ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978).

He seems to enjoy reading various genres as long as he does not consider them “girly books”. Coming from a very supportive family who is involved in what is going on in Dalton’s life helps him to have a good sense of himself. This sense has also been fine-tuned through his love of literature.

Andy. Andy is a sixth grade student who wants to be a reader but does not want to work hard to get better at reading. Andy is an only child who lives with his parents. He is somewhat less mature than many of his classmates. He seems to enjoy taunting some of his peers (for example, if a student is being spiteful to another classmate, Andy will join in), but he can also have a charming side. Andy is involved in sports but seems to lack the natural instincts that some athletes have. He loves to talk about his sports victories and does not like to discuss losing.

Andy often has to be redirected in class due to being so easily distracted. He is often off task and disinterested in his class work. Andy is frequently heard complaining that class is “boring.” He likes to make good grades but does not want to put forth the effort to earn them.

Reading Preferences. Andy declared, “I don’t care much about reading.” However, he did state that he likes funny books and books that are full of action. He told the researcher that his favorite genre is humor. Andy really enjoyed reading the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series, which is below his ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978), but he feels safe reading these types of books. He especially enjoyed the cartoons that broke up the reading in that series. At the time of this study, he had read several of the books and was waiting to get more of them from the media center. Andy stated that he did not care for magazines or comic books.

Reading Orientation. Andy prefers books with male characters and books with a lot of humor. He enjoyed reading the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series because it was not long, and the cartoons broke up the reading, which made it less boring for him. He also liked the main character, Greg, because he saw some of his own personality traits in the character.

Story Preference: Written vs. Digital Media. Andy is enjoying the remedial class read-aloud of Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*. He stated that he probably would have a hard time reading it on his own, but he liked hearing the researcher read it to the class and watching the movie so that he could see what happened. Andy is interested in the *Percy Jackson* books, but due to the Matthew Effect (Stanovich, 2008) and the fact that *Percy Jackson* is above Andy's ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978), he does not feel comfortable attempting to read them on his own. He also liked reading *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* in the Academics and Enrichment (A & E) class and watching the movie. This made him want to finish all of the books in the series. His cousin also recommended that he read Michael Lewis' book *The Blindside* because "it was better than the movie," and Andy had really liked the movie. Andy purchased the book but has not read it yet.

Influences on Reading Choices. Andy's mom and dad read to him when he was younger. He remembers them reading the *Home Alone* books to him, and he really enjoyed hearing them. Andy is an only child, and his mom spent a lot of time reading to him. He also remembered her buying him "a bunch" of books when he was little. Andy also mentioned that his dad and his mom own books too. He sometimes sees his dad reading the newspaper and magazines. His mom also reads magazines. Andy has a

library card, and his mom often takes him to the library to check out books.

Just like Aaron, Andy purchased *Football Hero* last year at the book fair because it looked like it had a lot of action and adventure in it. Unlike Aaron, though, Andy has not read it yet. The researcher told Andy that Aaron had read the book and thought it was very good and that he should give it a try. He stated that he would. The researcher also pointed out that since he already had to read sixty minutes per week at home, he could read *Football Hero* with his mom or his dad and that they could take turns reading it to each other. He seemed to like this idea, especially when he discovered that both times (the portions he read and the portions his parents read) would count toward his reading minutes for class.

Andy stated that he does not really read magazines, but when he was asked if his dad sometimes recommended sports articles from his magazines for him, he said he did. He has recommended books to others by writing comments on cards, but he does not talk to other guys about books that he likes. He feels comfortable writing about books that he likes but does not feel at ease discussing them with his male peers.

Like the other male participants who stated that they did not like to read, Andy's troubles began in elementary school. The Matthew Effect (Stanovich, 2008) began influencing Andy in the fourth grade when the books and words got harder for him. This trouble led to low self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977), which has followed Andy to middle school and continues to plague him. Elementary teachers sometimes have thirty students in a class, and this makes focusing individual attention on students with reading impediments difficult. Like the other male participants who do not consider themselves readers, Andy actually is a reader. He is now being forced to read, and his attitude is

slowly changing.

Attitudes towards Reading: Work vs. Pleasure. When asked about reading and when he reads, Andy replied, “At school during language arts. Sometimes at home if I have to.” Andy signified that he did not really enjoy reading. Andy thinks that he began to dislike reading when he was in the fourth grade because that is when his reading difficulties began. He liked to read before the fourth grade because he thought that he did not struggle in that area. Again, this is an example of the Matthew Effect’s (Stanovich, 2008) detrimental influence on Andy’s reading abilities. He stated that he did well in school in reading in kindergarten through third grade, but books became harder to read and words became much more difficult to pronounce in the fourth grade.

Andy stated that since he has been in middle school and required to read more, he is starting to like it more. He said, “It’s not really been my thing, but since we are kind of getting to reading more, I am kind of getting to like it more now.” This can only increase his self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). However, he also stated that he has a hard time finding books that he likes. This is a problem for boys who struggle with reading. They often have difficulty finding interesting books on their reading levels. The books on their reading levels are often more interesting to elementary students than to adolescent boys.

Andy feels that people who read a lot are smarter than people who do not. He also believes that reading helps students to do well in other subjects in school. Andy said that he is going to try to get better at reading so that he can have a good year in all of his middle school classes.

Perseverance. Andy read two of the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* books and is waiting to check out the other two. Because these books are very popular at this middle school,

they are often checked out, so Andy is on the waiting list. He is currently trying to read *Travel Team* by Mike Lupica, which is about a boy who tried out for a basketball team but did not make it, so his dad took a bunch of boys who did not make the team and made them into a traveling basketball team. This is a good book, which several of the male remedial reading students have read, but it is a long book for a sixth-grade student who struggles with comprehension, and it is above Andy's ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978), so he may not stick with it. However, he has been assured that it is a very good book and that he would enjoy it if he completed it.

Mrs. Thomas, his language arts teacher, has her students read AR books, and he has to have a book with him every day for class because they spend ten minutes each day in silent reading. He also has to read in the A & E class on Fridays for the complete period of forty minutes; therefore he gets ample opportunities for reading at school. Andy is in the researcher's remedial reading class and is required to read sixty minutes per week at home, which gives him more occasions to practice his reading skills.

Summary. Mrs. Thomas felt that Andy would read more if he could find something that he was interested in enough to be stationary. Andy is quite active and has difficulty sitting still, but teachers have trouble trying to find time and space for students to move around when there are thirty-two students in a classroom. Andy also tends to aggravate others when he is moving around. Since he is rather juvenile for his age, he does enjoy arguing with others in the classroom as well.

Mrs. Thomas and the researcher agree that Andy chooses books below his reading level, or ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978), partly because he finds reading boring. Another reason is that he does not like to put forth much effort in the language arts and reading classes.

Mrs. Thomas and the researcher hope to work together to find material that interests Andy so that he will become a better reader.

Andy indicated that he does not like reading, but he does read. He often asks the researcher if she has the other two books in the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series. Middle school students often experience a shock when they come from the elementary school environment. Middle school is quite different from an elementary school where the students mainly stay with one academic teacher during the day. Having to change classrooms for every class and be responsible for books and work for six classes is new to these students, and students like Andy have a challenging time with these changes. Andy is an only child and is rather juvenile for his age, but this also allows him to have his parents' full attention. They are very supportive of him and are very involved with him.

Teacher interviews. Interviews with teachers showed that boys who stated that they did not like to read did have reading difficulties, mainly with comprehension and fluency. Teachers who had taught students more than one year found that these problems had existed throughout the middle school years and probably began in elementary school. Boys who indicated that they did not like to read had the most difficulty with reading, but all teachers stated that the boys did try to overcome problems and actively read each day. Teachers also stated that boys this age are trying to find their identities, and literature contributes in this endeavor.

Ms. Roberts is a seventh grade language arts teacher who is very involved with her student's learning and really goes the extra mile to ensure that they are reading and learning. She has taught seventh grade language arts for ten years. Ms. Roberts is young and feels very connected to her students. She is involved in many activities at school in

order to further reach her students. The students have a deep respect for her and for her opinion. Her classroom is involved in fun activities often, and the students are very engaged. Ms. Roberts was so excited that Phillip liked the book *Code Orange* that she immediately began making a list of books for him to read with other strong male protagonists. As teachers become more successful in finding reading material that excites or motivates their male students, they will be just as encouraged as the students. Educators do become excited when they are instrumental in helping to turn the proverbial light bulb on for a student.

Ms. Roberts also stated that boys have a difficult time getting into the classics because they cannot relate to those characters anymore. Boys spend more time playing video games now than playing outside, so reading *Ole Yeller* is just not appealing to them. They can possibly relate to the love of a pet, but they have never had to shoot one. She feels that there needs for emerging Southern Literature in which boys can get involved. The new literature needs to show how boys from the South live now. They do not have to shoot their dog if he is wounded, but they do face other challenges every day, such as a parent being arrested for drug possession or facing the dilemma of turning in a friend who brought a gun to school. This is the type of literature that boys can relate to in the current classroom. The protagonist needs to be modern, and the plot should deal with contemporary problems. Ms. Roberts also stated that there are still some books, such as William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, that are timeless and can be read and related to by many.

Ms. Roberts stated that Phillip began to trust her judgment after her recommendation of *Code Orange*. Just as teachers need to trust students to make their

own choices, students often have to trust their teachers to make recommendations about books, especially if the students in question will not make choices themselves. Phillip would not stick with a book, and Ms. Roberts took what she knew about him and his interests and chose a book for him. He saw that she could be trusted and was more open to her suggestions about books after that.

Ms. Roberts noted that Phillip did not have the voice inflection that one learns from listening to people read aloud often. Phillip's parents did not read to him often when he was young, and his speech is very monotone when he is reading aloud. Boys who have reading problems need to realize that they have these difficulties and work to overcome them with the help of good teachers who care about them and their successes. These boys may enjoy the idea of reading but do not enjoy the actual task because it is very hard work for them.

Since these teachers want to emphasize that reading is important, they give students time to read in class. Students are given silent reading time, read-aloud time, and time to read at home. There are ample opportunities for students to get in reading time. Not only are the students reading, but they are also applying elements of literature to their reading, which assists with comprehension. These boys are also reading aloud in class and mostly feel comfortable doing so, even with their reading difficulties. Ms. Edwards stated that students with reading difficulties need to reread material as often as needed to boost their comprehension.

Ms. Edwards is an eighth grade language arts teacher who began teaching this subject at the sixth grade level. While she has only been teaching for four years, she is so professional and excellent at her job she has been named the department chair for

language arts. Beginning her teaching career with the sixth grade and moving up to the eighth has allowed Ms. Edwards to teach former students and witness their growth and maturity. Ms. Edwards was able to teach two of the male participants from this study in both sixth and eighth grade and could track improvement in their reading skills. Test scores in the areas of reading and writing have improved under her tutelage. Ms. Edwards runs a very efficient classroom and has very high expectations for her students, regardless of their reading level. These expectations are uniform with the research findings which found that nearly nine in ten teachers believe in setting high expectations for their students (Markow & Pieters, 2009).

The teachers who were interviewed stated that since boys like to choose their own reading material, they try to let them do so as long as the books are within the genre being studied. Choice is very important to boys. The teachers stated that boys like books with strong male protagonists and do not like to read books with females as the main characters. Teachers also agreed with what the participants said about genres; boys like to read action/adventure and comedy.

The interview with the gifted teacher, Mrs. Davis, revealed that her students feel very comfortable suggesting books for her to read, while the boys who did not like to read very much did not suggest books to their teachers. Mrs. Davis has been teaching for twenty-two years. She has taught an array of subjects including language arts and science. She is now the language arts gifted teacher for the middle school. Her students are from all three grades: sixth, seventh, and eighth. Mrs. Davis's husband is a principal, and her family is very involved in education. Mrs. Davis's classroom is covered with projects prepared by her students as she does not seem to be able to part with any.

Mrs. Thomas is a sixth grade language arts teacher. She has been a teacher for sixteen years. All sixteen years have involved in teaching language arts. Mrs. Thomas' room is full of books for students to choose. She has silent reading time every week, and students must participate. Both she and her husband teach at the middle school. She is well loved by her students. Mrs. Thomas runs a very organized, well-maintained classroom while being very soft spoken. The interview with Mrs. Thomas confirmed that boys are very active and have difficulty sitting still in class and reading. She has several boys in her class who cannot read for more than a few minutes due to having to remain mobile. Andy was one of the boys in her class who would much rather run around the room than read. Mrs. Thomas stated that Andy is also inclined to choose easy selections with illustrations which tend to keep him interested. She feels that easy books appeal to Andy because he can read them more quickly.

Observation Notes

The researcher has spent a lot of time with the eighth grade male students as Ben has been in the remedial reading class for three years and James was in the class for sixth and seventh grade. The researcher has a close relationship with both boys, especially Ben. They feel comfortable in conversation with the researcher. Having observed these boys throughout middle school has allowed the researcher to watch their growth in reading. The researcher sees Ben every day in class and James every day in the hallway. Ben usually keeps a book with him but often has to be provoked to actually read it. He is very social and would rather talk than read, but once he gets started, if he enjoys the book, he gets very involved in it. Ben was observed in his language arts class on several occasions reading silently. At those times, Ben was absorbed in his reading, just like the

rest of his classmates. He is determined to be accepted and fit in with everyone else, which is how many adolescents feel.

The researcher also observed Ben reading aloud on several occasions. He seems confident most of the time when he reads aloud, but he stumbles sometimes. He often answers questions correctly in class and is not afraid to attempt a guess. Ben feels more confident and eager to answer questions in the smaller setting of the remedial reading classroom than the larger language arts classroom. Ben comprehends the reading better when the teacher reads aloud than when he reads aloud himself. Just as Ms. Edwards stated, Ben expends his energy making sure that he pronounces words correctly, thus leaving little brainpower for comprehension.

James always has a book with him, even though he stated that he does not like to read. He is required to read often in Ms. Edwards' class, and he wants to do well in school. Ben and James are in their last year of middle school, and high school is in their near future. They know that they have to be successful here to make it in high school. James reads on a higher level than Ben and does a better job of reading aloud in class than Ben. James also has an easier time with comprehension. Therefore, James does not have to put forth as much effort as Ben. Even though James would rather be doing something else instead of reading, he does read in class in order to get his assignments completed. James also finds himself getting into his books despite the attitude that he does not like them. The researcher came to the conclusion that James likes reading much more than he indicated in the interviews.

The researcher also observed Phillip in his language arts class. He is very quiet and seems shy. When he reads aloud, he also reads with a very monotone voice; his

inflection does not change. The researcher noticed that Phillip used the same tone of voice during the interviews. He seems to want to remain quiet so as not to be noticed. His language arts teacher affirmed that he has friends, but he is not the most social one in the group.

The researcher has followed Phillip's reading through the sixth and seventh grades, and he is making progress. In the sixth grade he thought that he hated reading. However, Ms. Roberts has put forth much effort to find books which may interest Phillip now that he is a seventh grader, and he is becoming slightly more interested in reading. Recently, the researcher asked him if he was still reading *Code Orange*, and he stated that he had completed it and had picked out a new book for himself – a nonfiction book of stories about teenagers. He was neither grumpy nor sullen when he showed it to the researcher. He was not happy either, but he was not as reluctant to discuss his reading as he previously had been. Phillip has seen that a teacher cares about what he thinks and what his interests are, and he has been forced to trust her instincts on a book. Through that experience, he has found that he can have confidence in his teacher.

The researcher also observed Aaron in his language arts class. He is enthusiastic about reading and was not troubled about showing it in class. During his language arts class, he was often the one to raise his hand to answer questions about the book the class was reading. He was very involved with the characters and really got into the action in the book. His explanations were so high level that the researcher was sometimes astonished because she has grown accustomed to the remedial reading setting after teaching it for so many years. Aaron is an amazing student and very intellectual. He really gets involved with the characters and goes into great depth when analyzing

character and plot development.

The researcher observed Andy every day because he was in two of her classes. He was in her Academics & Enrichment (A & E) class and remedial reading class. Andy is large for his age, but he does not use his size to intimidate others. Often, he is unsettled by much smaller boys. He also often acts much younger than his ten years of age. Andy loves to read funny books such as *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*. In the A & E class, this book has been read aloud and the movie has been viewed. Andy really enjoyed this and is looking for the other books in the series. Andy would like to be a better reader but does not seem to want to put forth a lot of effort to become one. He frequently failed to study for vocabulary tests because he claimed that he was busy with football or that he forgot.

On silent reading days, the researcher frequently had to remind Andy to read. In those moments, Andy would often claim that he *was* reading, but when the teacher pointed out that he was not looking at his book, he was quick to submit. He usually handles reprimands well, and the researcher enjoyed teaching him because he is usually smiling and laughing. Andy is just a typical sixth grade boy who would much rather be running around outside than having to sit in a classroom. His attention span is quite short. He will read for a few minutes and then look around to see what the other boys are doing. The researcher is working with him to gradually acquire tastes for more difficult reading material.

The researcher's six classes have a competition with Accelerated Reader (AR) points. The fifteen students with the highest points get to go to a movie, eat lunch, and go shopping at a local mall. This contest gets very competitive, and every Monday a new

listing is posted of the top fifteen. Andy wants to be on the list, but thus far he has not made it. He has completed two AR books but has not taken the tests yet. The researcher had to remind him to stay involved and take the tests. With some gentle and not-so-gentle prompting from the researcher and Mrs. Thomas (Andy's language arts teacher), Andy will get on the right path to reading.

Dalton was also observed in his language arts class. He was very involved in reading and in the activities in his class. He was eager to answer questions and often was the first to have his hand raised. Dalton is one of the gifted students in Mrs. Davis's class. He really gets involved with the characters in the books that he reads. Not only has the researcher observed Dalton in class, but she also observed him every day in the hallway. He always told her whenever he got a new book, which was quite often. For this reason, the researcher was surprised when he told her that he was reading *The Mysterious Benedict Society* for the third time. Dalton always has a book with him. When he passed the researcher in the hallway, he would say, "Mrs. Barnett, I am reading a new book." He would then show her the book and have a brief conversation about it. The researcher is very pleased to see a young man so enthralled by reading.

Reflexive Journal

A reflexive journal was used throughout the study. The researcher wrote about thoughts and feelings throughout the process. This practice brought any biases to the researcher's attention so that they could be dealt with as they occurred. Patterns were created and recreated in the journal as they emerged. Data was analyzed almost immediately by using the reflexive journal.

Results

In analyzing the data from the interviews, the researcher noticed nine distinct themes. The following sections discuss the data pertaining to each of the themes that emerged from the interviews. This study also utilized eight research questions to develop an understanding of boys' reading habits. The subsequent sections depict the results of the study as they pertain to each of the research questions.

Themes

Theme 1: Reading Preferences

Across the board, the boys in this study preferred books with action, adventure, and humor and books in a series. However, the boys interviewed stated that the action needed to begin right away – on the first page if possible. The boys who were stronger readers also favored fantasy books, but the boys who struggled with reading did not seem to care for the fantasy genre. For example, all of the boys who were successful readers had finished the *Harry Potter* series, but the boys who did not like to read had not gotten past the first book (if they had even started the series).

Every male who participated in the study had completed at least two books of the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series, whether they were strong readers or not and whether they liked to read or not. The boys all said they were drawn to the comedy of the books, and the weaker readers liked that the text was broken up with cartoons and illustrations.

Most of the boys interviewed enjoyed books in a series, although some seemed to enjoy them more than others. While all of the boys did read the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series, for several that was the only series they had read. Phillip specifically mentioned that the *Harry Potter* books looked interesting but were too daunting to even begin due to

their length. The weaker readers had read the first book in the *Percy Jackson* series for an assignment, but they had not finished all of the books. Dalton and Aaron, on the other hand, had read multiple complete series of books, including *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, *Harry Potter*, and *The Inheritance Cycle*, among others.

Theme 2: Male-Oriented Materials

Almost all of the boys interviewed preferred traditionally “male-oriented” reading materials. For example, the boys liked to read about cars, motorcycles, sports, and action-packed adventures. They all liked books with strong male characters as well. The majority of the interviewees preferred books with male narrators because they felt that they could relate more to a boy than a girl. Most of the boys also had no interest in romance, and some (i.e. James) said that romance would keep them from reading a book.

Ben was one of the exceptions within this theme. He had tried reading *Twilight* (a romance novel with a female narrator), was often seen reading celebrity gossip magazines and the *Heartland* series (both typically targeted at females), and even tried reading a Nicholas Sparks novel (also a traditionally targeted at the female demographic). These turned out to be too long for Ben to complete or too difficult for him to comprehend. He turned to the *Bluford High* series, which has both male and female characters. He enjoys reading these because “they are about 100 pages, and the characters are not all white.” To a lesser extent, Aaron also overcame this stereotype by choosing to read *The Hunger Games* novels, which are narrated by Katniss Everdeen, a girl. Aaron reread the *Harry Potter* and *Eragon* series which have male lead characters. He also stated that the *Harry Potter* series were his favorite books.

James will only read books with females as the lead character if the teacher makes

the class read the book together. These books are acceptable if the teacher reads the book aloud or if they take turns reading, but if James is given a choice, he reads books such as *The Life of Chesty Puller* or *What Vince Said to Hershel*. James asserted that he would not be interested in “girly books” or “anything that had a love story.” Phillip also chooses books about war or military history books which are more often than not male-oriented. He sometimes will read a *Sports Illustrated* magazine.

Dalton also stated that he has no interest in books with females as the main characters. Like Aaron, Dalton enjoys the *Harry Potter*, *Eragon* and *Percy Jackson* series. All titles given by Andy were male-oriented books such as *Travel Team*, *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, and *Football Hero*.

The boys, especially the struggling readers, enjoyed reading magazines, and some enjoyed reading them more than they enjoyed reading books. This may be due to the fact that males often read in order to gain information, and a magazine is a shorter and faster way to procure that information. Also, the boys who were not as good at reading enjoyed magazines presumably because they contain a large number of pictures, and the boys do not really think of them as “reading” in the traditional sense. Even the boy who claims to hate reading can enjoy it if he does not realize he is doing it.

Theme 3: Written vs. Digital

The boys interviewed all expressed that when a book is turned into a movie, they typically prefer the book version over the movie version. Even the “non-readers” expressed this sentiment. The boys said they preferred the books because they felt their imaginations were more vivid and true to the book than the set designs or actors might have been. They also pointed out that movies often omit important details from the

books, and even the struggling readers preferred to read for those details rather than just watch the movie. Just as all of the participants in the study affirmed, Ben stated that while he did enjoy watching the movies that are made from books “the books give you more details.” James stated that he did not watch movies that often and felt that books “probably told you more about what happened.”

Aaron went into great detail about why he likes books better than movies, saying that his biggest issue is the amount of content that is omitted from the film versions. He specifically cited the sixth *Harry Potter* movie, saying, “It left out some of the biggest parts in the book that I think were important.” Phillip also watched the *Harry Potter* movie and wanted to read the book but “it was too long.” In spite of this, he stated that he likes books better than movies because the books are more detailed. Dalton also said, “I like books better because I like the way I picture the characters.”

Andy differed from the other five participants in that he likes to watch the movie and then read the book. He stated that “watching movies sometimes makes me want to read about it.” *Blindside* was a movie that he watched that made him want to read the book; although he has yet to begin reading. Andy stated that books “give you more details” than movies. These statements about details were shared by all six participants.

Theme 4: Influences on Reading Choices

All of the boys who were interviewed expressed the influence that their families, teachers, and peers have had on their reading experiences. Each boy interviewed remembered his parents reading to him as a child, and the boys who were stronger readers often had more books in their homes and saw their parents reading more often. Interestingly, all of the boys noted that their grandmothers were readers as well. Aside

from family, peers were another great influence on the boys' reading.

Ben was the only boy who chose to read what his female friends were reading; all of the other boys preferred to either observe what their male peers were reading or trade books with their male friends. Ben saw his friend Emily reading *Twilight* and thought that he would like to read it but gave up when he realized that it would take him a long time to complete it.

James is very influenced by other males in his family. His godfather gave him the Hershel Walker book, and he says that this is a special book for him. He and his dad and godfather trade magazines about motorcycles and tractor trailers. Aaron is very influenced by his father. They share a love of soccer. Aaron declared, "I like to check out stories my dad tells me about." Phillip does not seem to be close to his father, but he watches what other males are reading. He chose *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* because "a lot of guys were reading it." Dalton's father coaches him in baseball and football, and they like to trade magazine articles about both sports. Andy watches what other males are reading. He also takes recommendations from male friends and relatives. He stated that "my cousin told me to read *Blindside* because it is better than the movie."

Each of the boys who stated that they did not like reading noted that they did like it at one time, but they could pinpoint a specific occurrence that changed their views on reading. For example, James remembered his third grade teacher's criticism being a turning point in his literacy journey. Phillip also identified third grade as a turning point in his reading experience. Because his teacher did not seem to value reading, Phillip also lost his fondness for the subject. Several of the boys noted that when their teachers seem interested in reading, then they are more likely to be interested in it themselves.

Theme 5: Attitudes towards Reading: Work vs. Pleasure

Boys' attitudes towards reading also seemed to determine whether they view reading as a fun activity or a chore. Boys who perceived themselves to be good readers were more likely to find reading to be an enjoyable activity or even a hobby. However, the boys who did not perceive themselves to be good readers saw reading as boring or something that simply had to be done for school. The reader should also note that many of these boys who allegedly found reading to be boring or a chore also could often be found reading magazines (because they did not consider them to be legitimate reading material).

Ben acknowledged "I like to read but I don't read that much." He reads at school because he has to earn AR points and will finish a book at home if he needs to, but he would much rather be running track. James claimed that he just "tolerates [reading] sometimes. I've just really never enjoyed reading through my life." He reads for school when he has to and reads sports books sometimes. He trades magazines stories about motorcycles with his dad and godfather, but he would rather actually be working on the trucks and motorcycles.

Aaron reads "whenever I can. Mainly whenever I am waiting for another assignment in class or on a long car ride. I find it weird that I'm one of the few members of my family who can't get car sick reading." Regardless, he would much rather "play soccer, play basketball, ride my bike, play video games, and watch TV" than read. Phillip proclaimed, "I don't like to read at all. It's boring." He said he would rather be playing football or video games. Dalton declared this about reading: "For me, it sort of distracts me from school and I sort of get in my own world when I read a book."

However, when asked what his favorite activity was, he stated, “playing sports.” Andy said, “I don’t care much about reading.” He plays football and baseball and would much rather be outside involved in sports.

Theme 6: Perseverance

The final theme noted by the researcher was that of perseverance. Boys who enjoyed reading and perceived themselves to be good readers were much more likely to stick with a book than those who did not enjoy reading or who were not very strong readers. For example, Ben, who enjoyed reading but who also lacked comprehension skills, gave up on both *Twilight* and *Dear John*, saying they were “kinda hard and long.” Phillip also jumped from book to book before his teacher found *Code Orange* for him. He also noted that he would not even try reading the *Harry Potter* books because they were “too long.” James did not even desire to begin them because “those books are just too long for me.” Andy wanted to read Mike Lupica books such as *Travel Team* and *Heat* but was deterred by the size of the books.

Conversely, all of the boys who were strong readers and who enjoyed reading had finished the entire *Harry Potter* series, and most of them had completed other series as well. One could conclude that the more a boy loves reading, the more likely he is to continue reading longer and more complex narratives. Both Aaron and Dalton began reading the *Harry Potter* series in elementary school and completed each book as it was published. They went on to read such series as *Eragon*, *Percy Jackson*, and *The Hunger Games*.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: What Are Middle School Boys Interested in Reading?

Many of the abovementioned themes described the boys' choices of reading material. For example, boys like to read books with a lot of action and adventure. Boys prefer for the action to begin almost immediately and to last throughout the entire book. Boys like to move around and are full of action themselves, and they need to see this activity in their reading materials.

Boys also like to read about sports, especially in magazines. *Sports Illustrated* was mentioned by several male participants on more than one occasion. Several of the participants mentioned in the interviews that their dads or other significant males in their lives shared articles from this magazine with them. Males also discussed their enjoyment of reading books about sports figures and teams. Sports-related books are usually relatively short, and this is also appealing to male readers.

The participants also mentioned on more than one occasion that they read magazines. Magazine topics included sports, motorcycles, cars, hunting, trucks, and celebrities. Males are not uncomfortable recommending a magazine article to another male. This is considered more masculine than suggesting a book to another guy. Family members often suggested magazine articles to the boys as well, and this was very well accepted. Sharing articles among male family members and friends is quite common.

Boys also like to read books with humor. Two of the most popular series among boys today are the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series and the *Captain Underpants* series. The pages of these books are split between cartoons and words. Boys love this breaking up of text with illustrations. They may feel like they are not actually reading a whole book,

which could possibly hold much appeal. While both of the abovementioned series and other similar comedy books are enjoyed by both genders, males are predominately attracted to this silly type of humor. Boys this age like books with butt jokes. They still think they are reading about a subject that is considered taboo.

Research Question 2: What Are Middle School Boys Not Interested in Reading?

Contrary to what the literature might suggest, boys in middle school (at least those at Wimberley) do not seem to be reading comic books. The researcher asked all of the male participants in the study if they read comic books, and all of them stated that comics held no appeal for them. The researcher has observed males in her remedial reading class for ten years and has not observed any fascination with comic books, even though she has sometimes made them available for silent reading. The boys seemed to think that comic books were not for boys of their age and were not exciting.

Boys also do not care to read books with female protagonists. Speaking about books with girls as the main characters, Dalton said he had tried to read one once, but “I could only read the first chapter, and then I had to return it. Girls are too hard to understand.” This seems to be one of the reasons for the colossal popularity of the *Harry Potter* series. Harry is a very active main character who is male. The *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* and *Captain Underpants* books are popular for this same reason. None of the boys interviewed had read the *Twilight* books. One boy said that he had started it but could not “get into it,” so he gave it up. Boys like to see themselves in the characters, and they have a hard time doing so when the main characters are female.

Research Question 3: Why Do Middle School Boys Read?

The boys had a variety of answers to this question. Some of them felt that they

had to read for in-class or homework assignments. Others (such as Dalton and Aaron) actually read books for pleasure. Ben tried to read more because he thought that practice would please his teachers and his friend Emily.

All of the boys read magazines because they were interested in the information within them. However, while the boys stated that they do not read, that they also stated that they do read magazines. They did not consider reading magazines as actual reading and therefore did not consider themselves readers. The boys pointed out that magazines have more current information concerning vehicles, while books on this topic are often out of date. As James stated, “You can read about a motorcycle, and four months later they have a new one out, and magazines will have an article about it and everything.” When a person of influence in the boys’ lives suggested a book or a magazine article to them, they would often read it.

Research Question 4: Why Do Middle School Boys Not Read?

Most boys would much rather be doing something that involves action than reading for fun. Boys like to play sports, play video games, ride bikes, work on vehicles, and engage in various other physical activities. Even the males who stated that they liked to read said that if given a choice, they would rather go outside for some type of activity instead of reading for pleasure. Boys are active and even consider video games to be action because they become so involved in them. Boys who reported that they did not like reading said that reading is boring.

Early influences also have an enormous effect on boys. Several of the boys in this study stated that they did not like to read because their elementary teachers were influential on their early reading attitudes. Boys who had teachers who were interpreted

to be poor reading models did not have a favorable opinion about reading and read less than the boys who stated that their teachers thought reading was important and read to them often. These teachers also were witnessed reading for themselves. Educators must practice what is preached. If students are expected to hold reading in high esteem, then teachers must do so as well.

Research Question 5: Why Do Middle School Boys Choose the Types of Reading Materials That They Do?

Boys do not prefer to make book recommendations to each other. They would much rather observe what other guys are reading and then check the same book out of the media center. Guys seem to be comfortable talking to one another about an article in a magazine, but discussing a good book seems to be taboo. Book discussions seem to be much more common among female groups of friends than among groups of males.

Many of the male students in the remedial reading classes read the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series but did not recommend it to others. Instead, boys scrutinize what other guys are carrying around to read. When they see that several boys are reading *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, they in turn want to check it out to see if it really is a good book. Another series like this is the *Captain Underpants* series. Some of these books have flip pages so that the characters appear to be in action. As one boy is flipping the pages of his book over and over, others begin to notice and want to investigate to see what all the commotion is about. Then they go to the media center to check out the *Captain Underpants* books for themselves.

In general, boys like to choose what they are going to read. The male participants all stated that they prefer to pick out their own books. They did not like for the teacher to

choose their books for them. One male who liked reading even stated that his parents try to choose books for him, but he does not always listen. Boys seem more likely to read if the choice is theirs. Phillip did have a book chosen for him because he kept giving up on others. However, instead of blindly picking something, his teacher chose a book for him based on Phillip's actual traits and interests. Phillip found the book to be appealing, so he completed it and then began to choose books for himself. Ultimately, boys like to make their own decisions.

Research Question 6: How Many Books Do Middle School Boys Own?

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the students who were more interested in reading owned more books, and the students who were less interested in reading owned fewer books. For example, Phillip, who declared that he hates reading, also mentioned that his family probably only owns "four or five" books. Dalton, on the other hand, who loves to read, said that he owns many books. Aaron, also a self-described reader, owns a lot of books as well. Ben and James, who did not particularly care for reading, stated that their families do not own a lot of books either.

Research Question 7: Do Middle School Boys See Their Parents Read Often?

Boys are definitely influenced by parents and other adults who are close to them. The boys who grew up with parents who read to them and continued to read in front of them became readers themselves. All of the boys in the study stated that their parents read to them when they were small. Boys who were active readers in middle school also had at least one parent or grandparent who still was a good reading role model. Most of the boys said that their fathers were not readers but then went on to say that their dads read newspapers and magazines. This is another example of how boys do not think that

reading magazines is really reading.

Research Question 8: Do Middle School Boys Think Reading Is Important?

Even if the males in the study did not like reading, they all stated that it is important. The males also stated that they considered people who read a lot to be smarter than those who do not. One would think that if the boys thought that reading more made people smarter they would subsequently want to read more, but this belief did not seem to have much effect on some of the boys. Even though they felt that reading would improve their intelligence, they did not seem to be willing to put forth the extra effort to read more.

Structural Description

Through interviews and observations of the six participants, the researcher found firsthand evidence of boys reading. The participants were experiencing reading at home and at school; although they did not often view the reading they did at home as actually reading. These boys exchanged magazine articles with their fathers regarding sports or sports figures. Apparently these boys do not consider reading a magazine as actual reading, which is probably due to certain circumstances in the educational setting. Because many teachers think magazines are a distraction, and they often confiscate magazines that boys bring into school. Educators would also rather have students reading literature, which is more readily accepted at school, than have them reading a magazine. Magazines have not been viewed as valid reading material in the school setting, but because many boys seem to enjoy reading them, this idea may need to be reexamined.

The boys in this study who read often at home possessed good reading skills. They do read at home but this is not their preferred activity. The participants who had

less acute reading skills did not read at home very often unless it was required by the teacher for a grade. Boys who really get into a book read wherever they can: in the halls, after an assignment, on the way to school, while waiting for other family members, and before bedtime. All participants stated that they would much rather be involved in some type of sports activity than reading. Boys like to be active and move around. Reading is seen as a stationary endeavor by most boys, which does not place it high on the list of preferred pursuits.

All participants in this study indicated that they read at school and even enjoy what they are reading. Phillip was reading *Code Orange*, which was selected by his teacher. He did not want to begin this book because he had such a pessimistic attitude about reading and he thought that “all books are boring.” However, after getting involved with the book and finding out that his teacher had chosen a book with a main character who shared many traits with him, Phillip became enthusiastic and completed the book. When Phillip first told the researcher about the book, he grumbled about having to read it. As he got further into the book, he spoke quite animatedly about it and was eager to tell about what was happening. Another participant, James, stated that “I just tolerate reading sometimes.” In spite of this, James always had a book with him when the researcher observed him in the hallways. As he completed a book, he would go to the media center and exchange it for another.

James stated, “I like to choose my own books.” He did not want his teacher to make recommendations. Choice was very important to all participants. They did not want parents, teachers, or even peers to choose books for them. Dalton declared, “My parents like to try to choose books for me but I usually don’t listen.” The participants

preferred to observe what other males were reading and then check it out for themselves. The boys who declared that they did not like to read were adamant about not recommending books or getting recommendations from others. This seemed to be a taboo that just was not done. When asked if he recommends books to others or receives recommendations, James strongly declared, “Oh no, no!” The boys who read well did not seem to mind if another male recommended a book. Andy acknowledged that “Sometimes, like, they [his friends] will say, ‘Hey. This book just came out, and I think you should read it,’ so I will check it out and see what other people think about it and then I’ll pick it up maybe.” The participants who had good reading skills were very confident in themselves and in their abilities, and recommendations from other males did not unsettle them. However boys who did not share this self-assurance definitely did not want suggestions from others, especially males.

Textural Description

The boys in this study are reading. They all are reading magazines and enjoy books that are full of action, but the action needs to begin immediately in order to hold their attention. The boys with excellent reading skills are not daunted by long books such as *Harry Potter* or *Eragon*. They began reading these books in elementary school and have continued to read substantial books in middle school. Series are very appealing to these same participants. As Dalton avowed, “I thought I wouldn’t be able to read it [*Harry Potter*]. I thought it was way too big and it would be boring. But my mom said to just try it. The introduction, the exposition was actually – got me hooked and then it really started getting good when he went off to Hogwarts.” Dalton declared, “I couldn’t wait for the next one to come out. It has action and adventure in it. It intrigues my

curiosity and creativity.”

Aaron said this about staying with a character in a series: “It’s fun to like see what happens to them. Because the end of the book always foreshadows what will happen next and it kind of varied like what the big conquest was. And three out of the seven books [*Harry Potter*], it was actually defeating the evil character known as Lord Voldemort.” Dalton, Aaron, Austin, Phillip, Ben, and James all affirmed that they enjoy reading action and adventure books. The participants who possessed accomplished reading skills declared that they enjoy reading fantasy books, but the participants who did not have such finely honed skills stated that they did not read fantasy. Boys in this study who did not like to read liked humor more than boys who stated that they liked to read.

The more skilled readers in this study chose books differently from the less skilled readers. The more advanced reader either read the first few pages of the book or selected random pages to find out if the book captivated their attention. The boys who vowed that they did not like to read chose books by looking at the front cover and reading the back cover.

The participants who stated that they liked to read also said that they own many books. Books are important to their parents, siblings, and grandmothers. They purchase books at the book fair, at school, from the Scholastic order forms from their teachers, and from book stores. Aaron stated, “A lot of books, I buy them, like, when they are continuation of a series I’ve been reading. I try to buy them so I’ll have them for later. Because like with the library here, it’s kind of hard to keep reading a book when it’s really long, and I like to get into those longer books.” The boys who vowed that they did not like to read stated that there are very few books in their homes; books and reading

have not been a priority in these boys' homes.

Boys in this study who declared that they did not like to read also stated that the influence of a teacher in elementary school had an immense effect on their attitudes about reading. They felt that observing a teacher reading and having the teacher convey a love of reading to them was very important in their development of attitudes concerning this subject. These boys liked reading before having a teacher who, probably unintentionally, imparted to them a negative outlook regarding the subject. These boys also stated that they began to experience difficulties in reading around this same time. James alleged, "I've just really never enjoyed reading through my life because all of my language arts teachers ,they were not really forcing us to read, so I just didn't." James said that seeing his teacher read inspires him to read. As James encountered a more caring teacher, he said, "When I got to 4th grade, I had a teacher who really cared because she told us the reason that she was teaching was because her son had a teacher who was all mean and everything, and she wanted to become a teacher so that she wouldn't be like that. She didn't like that teacher, and she didn't want us to have teachers like that, she said." When asked how he knows if his teachers care about him James stated, "By the way they act. Like if they really pay attention and try to help us out." Educators have considerable influence on students.

Essence of the Study

Boys in this study are reading and enjoying it more than they seem to realize. They are reading magazines, action books, and books in a series. These boys observe what other boys are reading and then proceed to get these same books. The more skilled readers both observe what others are reading and listen to recommendations from their

friends or classmates. These same boys also enjoy fantasy books and can get lost in the adventure, whereas boys who stated that they do not like to read seemed to lack the ability to become engrossed in books like *Harry Potter* and *Eragon*. The participants who liked to read were open to reading various types of books and books of any length while the other participants enjoyed books with cartoon breaks in the reading and shorter books. As Ben stated, “I like to keep my books at around 100 pages.” All participants stated that they did not and would not read “girly books,” which were books with romantic involvement. The boys all liked books with male lead characters.

These participants were influenced by members of their families, especially males. Aaron stated, “I like to check out stories my dad tells me about. I’m really into the International Soccer, professional soccer, so my dad tells me there’s an interesting article about someone like Landon Donvon for example, and I’ll go in and read it.” James stated that he was reading *Then Vince Said to Herschel* because his godfather gave it to him and they share a love of the University of Georgia Bulldogs. James also trades motorcycle and big rig magazine articles with his father and godfather.

Boys who declared that they liked to read started and finished books regardless of the length. Boys in this study who stated that they did not like to read often began books but did not complete them. Reasons included the length of book, the book being boring, the book not containing enough action, and expecting the book to get better but it did not.

Reading role models were important to these participants. Boys traded magazine articles with their fathers and other significant males in their lives. Even though the participants did not regard their fathers as readers, all stated that their fathers did read magazines often. A surprising result from interviewing these participants was that all had

grandmothers who were avid readers. The boys observed their grandmothers reading, and Dalton and Ben even borrowed some of their grandmother's books. Grandmothers and male family members had more influence over these participants than did mothers. The participants in this study all made the same declaration about reading – their activity of choice was sports. These boys, as do others, take pleasure in activities which involve action and movement.

Summary

These six participants' reading preferences were examined through an imaginative and reflexive study from the vantage point of the researcher. The nature of this phenomenon is that boys are reading, even though they often say that they do not read much or that they do not like to do so. At various times boys do not feel that they are readers because the reading that they do has been given a negative association by people in the field of education. One example is magazines. Boys feel that reading a magazine is not actual reading. The boys who stated that their dads did not read much still maintained that they often traded magazine articles with their fathers. Boys who bring magazines to school often have them taken away by teachers. This further adds to the boys' perception of the stigma surrounding the reading of magazines.

An unenthusiastic attitude concerning reading was conveyed to these participants early in their education and has lasted into middle school. The boys who felt that an elementary school teacher did not view reading as important seemed to value reading less than their classmates did. These particular boys also developed problems with reading around the same time period. Boys need to *feel* that they are readers in order to thrive in this area.

Boys are also influenced by members of their families. All participants were read to when they are very young, but as they grew older, family members seemed to find reading less and less valuable. As the adults placed less importance on reading, the boys seemed to adopt the same point of view. Adults shape young people by their thoughts and actions, often without meaning to do so. The boys who did not view their parents as readers or book owners did not view themselves as readers either. They also did not feel the necessity of owning books. The researcher was very interested in the fact that the boys who stated that they liked to read had grandmothers who were reading role models. Dalton even declared that he sometimes borrowed books from his grandmother.

Through the use of student and teacher interviews, direct observation, and reflexive journaling, analysis revealed that boys prefer to read action/adventure books and books about sports. The research also showed that boys do not enjoy comics or books with female protagonists. The researcher determined that boys primarily choose reading material because it seems interesting to them, and she discovered that choice is an important factor for boys concerning reading.

The results also showed that boys prefer to be active than to read for fun and that they would rather observe one another's reading habits than explicitly talk about them. The researcher also found that the boys preferred books over their movie counterparts. Obtaining actual numbers of books that the boys owned was difficult, but a general trend did seem to emerge. The more a boy liked to read, the more books he seemed to have at home. The results showed that most boys do have at least one good, adult, reading role model in their lives; although dads were more likely to be magazine readers than book readers. Finally, the researcher determined that all of the boys thought that reading is

important, but many of them were not willing to act upon that belief by increasing their reading practice. The following chapter will discuss how these findings can be applied in the reading classroom. Limitations of the study and suggestions for future research will also be discussed.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This study used a phenomenological approach to attempt to ascertain what middle school boys like and choose to read. This process was accomplished by directly observing the male participants' reading and interviewing the participants about their reading choices. These results will be beneficial to educators and media specialists as well as to young men. Educators will be able to utilize these findings to provide various reading materials for young men to read in the classroom, both for assignments and for pleasure. Media specialists can employ this information to purchase reading materials which young men find enjoyable and will check out often. The goal is for the educational setting to provide books, magazines, newspapers, and other reading materials to which males are drawn.

Study Conclusions

The researcher determined that boys are readers, even though they often do not think that they are. All of the boys studied read magazines, but they did not realize that magazines count as legitimate reading material, so several of them declared themselves to be non-readers, even though they read magazines all the time. The negative connotation that reading a magazine is not "real" reading must be eliminated. Reading, regardless of the medium or subject matter, is reading.

Along with magazines, the researcher found that boys prefer books about sports and books with a lot of action and adventure, humor, strong male protagonists, and characters to whom they can relate. Boys were found to dislike books with female protagonists because they felt that they could not relate to them. They also did not enjoy

comic books, even though multiple studies (Scieszka, 2010; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002) suggested that boys love comics.

Boys ultimately said that they read because they are interested in the subject matter of a particular book or article. However, even the boys who enjoyed reading admitted that no matter how interesting the material, they would rather be up and doing something than reading for fun. The researcher discovered that boys really value the opportunity to choose their own reading material. While they might occasionally take suggestions from close friends or family members, more often than not, boys prefer to quietly observe what their peers are reading and read those books as well. Oftentimes, they are resentful when teachers choose their reading material for them.

The number of books the boys owned depended on their love for or aversion to reading. Phillip, who despises reading, said his family only owns a handful of books. Dalton, on the other hand, said he loves read and owns many books. Part of the reason for boys' interest, or lack thereof, in reading stems from their parents. All of the boys remembered their parents reading to them as small children, but not all of them had parents who currently strongly valued reading. All of the boys had at least one relative who was a good reading role model, but the boys who had more of those role models seemed to value reading more than those who only had one.

All of the boys seemed to enjoy books more than the films that were made from them. They determined that they liked the characters they had created in their heads better than the characters on the screen, and they enjoyed all of the details that were in the books but had to be omitted from the movies. Finally, all of the boys determined that reading is important because people who read more are smarter than those who do not

read much. In spite of this, some of the boys remained unconvinced of their own need to improve their literacy skills and develop a lifelong reading habit.

Findings in Relation to the Theoretical Framework

This study related very closely to three theories in particular: Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy, Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development, and Stanovich's (2008) Matthew Effect theory. Bandura asserted that as students become more adept at a practice, they will grow to enjoy it more. As boys read more, they will become more confident in their reading abilities. Zimmerman and Ringle (1981) reinforced this idea when they talked about students' self-perceived abilities affecting their academic performance. As Ben became comfortable reading the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series, he felt the confidence to advance to the *Bluford High* series. When Phillip discovered that a book could be interesting and enjoyable, he grew excited about it, and his self-efficacy began to expand. The boys who enjoyed reading and read well, developed a strong sense of self-efficacy early in elementary school which has remained with them.

Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD theory posited that students have a zone of tasks that are within their ability and a zone of tasks that are just beyond their ability level. Through scaffolding, educators can assist students in progressing from one zone to the next, increasing their skills and (according to Bandura [1977]) their enjoyment of the challenges. Tharp and Gallimore (1998) reinforced Vygotsky's ideas when they talked about students progressing from one level of ability to the next with the aid of their teachers. Phillip was forced to read *Code Orange*, which was within his ZPD, because his teacher took the time to locate a book which she felt would interest him. He had to

progress from books below his ZPD, such as *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, to book like *Code Orange*, which was within his ZPD. The same results came about for Ben. The *Bluford High* books were within his ZPD, while the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* books were below it. Ben's skills increased as he moved from one level of text to the next. The boys who were good readers were comfortable reading books at any level.

Stanovich's (2008) Matthew Effect is based on the adage that "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer." Stanovich's theory, in regards to education, is that students who enjoy reading and have rich vocabularies and comprehension skills will go on to read more and more and therefore become better and better readers. On the other hand, students with smaller vocabularies and less honed comprehension skills find the task of reading to be too difficult, so they avoid it, which leads their vocabularies and other reading skills to deteriorate further. Both of these situations create a self-perpetuating cycle. Smith and Wilhelm (2002) touched on this concept as well, pointing out that boys lose more interest in reading as they grow older. Some might postulate (and some of the participants in this study confirmed) that males are losing interest because they lack the necessary skills to read well, so they are stopping reading altogether. Educators need to try to move the "poor" reading students to the "rich" category. Ben, Phillip, and James all experienced the Matthew Effect. They began to face reading difficulties in elementary school and developed a negative attitude concerning reading. A lackadaisical indifference seemed to dominate their thoughts regarding the subject of reading. They seemed to feel overwhelmed in this area until they found helpful teachers at the middle school level who showed them that they could improve their reading skills.

Another idea from the literature review that was strongly reinforced throughout

this study was the importance of choice to boys, especially in regards to reading. All of this study's participants expressed their desire to choose their own reading materials. Smith and Wilhelm (2002) also discussed the importance of choice for boys, even going so far as to say that some boys felt like prisoners at school because they were not allowed to choose anything for themselves. Pressley, Schuder, and Bergman (1992) also discussed the value that boys place on choice in school. This study reiterated the fact that when boys are free to choose their own materials, they feel better about school in general and the task of reading in particular.

Implications for Classroom Practice

Middle school boys often see the reading required at school as boring. This leads to a negative attitude about books and reading in general. Inquiring into the nature of middle school boys' reading material will help boys to gain a more positive attitude about reading. Making these materials available will offer opportunities for middle school boys to read for pleasure, which will also foster reading proficiency and a more positive attitude towards reading. Educators need to encourage good reading habits and reinforce them in the classroom. Knowing what middle school boys read can help educators advance these habits. Instructors can work with parents to find out about students and their interests.

As teachers discover what materials boys read, they can use those materials for scaffolding activities and sequencing assignments to engage learning and hopefully have boys effecting higher order thinking skills and activities. If middle school boys do not like reading long fiction books, they can begin with short stories and build from there. Hopefully as middle school boys read materials of their own interests and choosing, they

will venture out into other areas of reading.

Students need to practice scaffolding, which means they need to begin with easy material and move on to more difficult texts as they are ready. They cannot read a more difficult text if they are not first fluent in easier material. When boys express the feeling that they are poor readers, their teachers must help them to cultivate the feeling that they can improve their reading skills. Two of the boys in this study felt that they were poor readers in elementary school, but at the time of the study, they felt as though their skills were improving. This was a boost to their self-confidence and can only increase their learning abilities.

Educators must also uncover ways for boys to enter the story and identify with the characters. This encourages them to understand the meanings of these stories. Young people need to be engaged in what matters to them. For example, solving a problem motivates boys to learn, but teachers have to present genuine inquiries to boys to motivate them to want to solve these problems.

Educators must discover methods to merge what boys like outside of the walls of the school with what they like inside the school. Beach and Myers (2001) believed that students engage more deeply with literature when it is used to inquire into issues that are connected to their lives. Smagorinsky (2002) believed that “people learn by making and reflecting on things they feel are useful and important” (p. VI). Reading should be an area of importance to boys. Ultimately, boys (and girls) are not going to read if they are not interested in the topic or the reading material. The following sections offer practical solutions for educators who are seeking to improve the reading habits of their male students.

Discover Students' Interests

Students are more apt to become involved in their education and be more successful when the teacher shows that he/she truly cares about them and what they think. Phillip became more interested in reading when Ms. Roberts took time to find a book that she thought matched his character. James was beginning to take more interest in reading because Mrs. Edwards showed that she liked to read and that she cared about what he read. Teachers need to keep lines of communication open. Students should feel comfortable talking to teachers about literature or anything else that is on their minds. Sometimes, the teacher is the only caring adult that a child deals with on any given day.

Nurturing a child leads to positive outcomes for all involved. Discovering what a student finds entertaining so that he can read about that topic will encourage that student to read. Based on the findings of this study, educators of middle school boys should find books that feature more action and incorporate them into the educational setting in order to capture the interest of their male students.

Keep Boys from Becoming Overwhelmed

Middle school is a very new and different experience for students. Boys are often overwhelmed with changing classes, added curriculum, tougher assignments, and a new social life. Papers written for middle school are expected to be much more complex than the papers these students wrote in elementary school. Boys in middle school are also paying more attention to girls because puberty is setting in. Life as they know it is so much different. Programs need to be available to assist boys with this onslaught of change. Ben and James were profoundly impacted by Mrs. Edwards taking the time to counsel them one-on-one about their reading choices. Andy felt that Mrs. Thomas took

time to help him select an AR book and to help him after school when he needed help. Sometimes Phillip and Ms. Roberts just talked about friends or games or everyday life. This put him more at ease in the learning environment.

Find Male Role Models

Since more teachers are women than men, male students seem to be lacking reading, male role models. To fill this gap, these role models must be found outside of the classroom. Every community must have a group of strong, intelligent men who are willing to mentor these middle school boys. Boys need to see men reading. Male role models need to show boys that reading is worthwhile and that reading books can be fun. This happened with James, Andy, and Dalton as they traded magazine articles with their fathers. As more young males begin to read for pleasure, the current stigma surrounding male readers will be diminished.

Give Boys More Choice

Educators need to let boys choose whatever books they wish to read and learn to value a variety of texts. Boys will not read a book if they cannot relate to it. For this reason, many boys do not get involved with more conventional literature, such as *The Watson's Go to Birmingham*. They are much more likely to associate with Greg Heffley from *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* because many of them have been in the same situations that he has. Educators must be more accepting of what boys desire to read.

In-school reading must be related to outside of school experiences. Boys are reading outside of school but often do not consider themselves to be readers because of the materials that have been chosen as literature for them in school. Boys read magazines, newspapers, vehicle manuals, and other materials that are not typically read at

school. However, this reading material is significant to their lives and consuming it still counts as reading. Educators must find ways to incorporate what boys are doing outside of school to their reading interests inside of school. Boys need to be familiar with the topics and reading materials provided in the classroom. This may mean that educators need to utilize what some might consider an unorthodox definition of the term *literature*. Teachers must value boys' choices of reading material. All six participants stated that they prefer to choose their reading materials.

Structure More Time for Pleasure Reading

Every student needs time to read just because it is enjoyable. The middle school curriculum must include time for pleasure reading. This time period should not include questions, writing prompts to complete, or discussions about feelings. This time should only be for students to read something entertaining, something that they actually enjoy. Partly because of the emphasis on high-stakes testing, modern educational settings have done away with this activity, and they ought to bring it back. The boys stated that they liked to read magazines, but boys do not feel comfortable bring magazines to school for fear of having them confiscated. If time was structured within the academic day for pleasure reading, carrying around a magazine would become an accepted practice.

Incorporate Movement

Mrs. Thomas noted that Andy always does better in class when he is permitted to move around a bit. Boys are active and need movement in their lives. Teachers can call on boys to act out parts of a book or story. They could specify a time when students may leave their desks and move around for a minute or two. They could incorporate hands-on learning that involves movement. Boys are often restless, and a small amount of physical

activity during the class period could relieve many of the behavior problems that stem from this need for physical activity. Play time has lost its value in education and needs to be rediscovered.

The educational setting has an obligation to male students to become more boy-friendly. Boys do not like to sit still for long periods of time. Many times they do not like to sit at all. Some classrooms have purchased desks that adjust to a height that accommodates how boys wish to stand or sit. Boys have difficulty being still and quiet, so the classroom should adapt to this at certain times.

Consider Gender-Segregated Education

Because the male and female brains process information in different ways, they may both benefit from being taught separately. Research supports gender separation in the learning environment. The education setting needs to adapt to current brain research and studies on how students learn. Schools should teach students in the way that they learn.

One of the ways in which male and female brains are different is that girls' brains are ready to learn to read earlier than boys' brains are. Boys could begin school at the same age as girls but have a different curriculum. Girls may be ready at age four or five to begin reading, but boys may need to defer the acquisition of reading skills until age six or seven. Again, schools need to teach using the same methods by which children learn.

Challenge Boys

Boys thrive on competition. Educators should use this to their advantage whenever possible. Boys can compete with Accelerate Reader points, scores on projects, games, and numerous other incentives to get them involved in reading. This healthy

competition may spark boys' interest in reading and set them on a track toward lifelong learning. Ben often asks his reading teacher the total number of AR points that he has accumulated to make sure that he is in the top fifteen readers in the reading class. Aaron mentioned that he and a friend often race to see who can complete books in a series the fastest.

Emphasize Critical Thinking

Boys do not just appreciate challenges between classmates. They also enjoy challenging themselves. In order to compete in the global marketplace, American boys need to learn critical thinking skills. Educators need to utilize Bloom's taxonomy every day with their students, beginning at an early age, in order for them to become accustomed to using these aptitudes on a habitual basis. Boys must feel that they are being challenged and that they can improve their skills in all areas of school. This testing of themselves builds self-confidence, and a robust self-assurance goes a long way in assisting a child to be engaged in learning. A positive outlook can help to improve reading skills.

Reading must also provide opportunities for boys to make decisions about life and what matters to them. They must be presented with literature that challenges them to form their own opinions about things. Phillip stated that reading was boring and that he did not enjoy it, but when Ms. Roberts found *Code Orange* and he began to enjoy it, he found that reading had a purpose. He was challenged by the book. Ms. Roberts often asked him "what if" questions about the book, which forced Phillip to use critical thinking skills. She also asked him to put himself in the main character's place and decide if he would have made the same decisions. Boys must also be provided with

opportunities to vocalize and explore these opinions. Learning to voice an opinion and locate factual information to support it enhances critical thinking skills.

Use Varied and Intentional Teaching Methods

Boys need hands-on opportunities, charts, diagrams, plenty of room to work, computers, and various media for learning to remain exciting and useful to them. They need multiple opportunities for success, which can be provided with varied teaching methods. An effective teacher can change a boy's attitude about reading. All three of the boys in this study who stated that they did not like reading mentioned that they had a teacher in middle school that had a positive effect on their negative attitude about reading. These teachers showed that they thought reading was important by reading for themselves in the presence of students. Aaron stated that one teacher often gave mostly worksheets in class and that this made class very boring each day. Aaron and Dalton stated that their language arts teacher varies their assignments, which makes her class a challenge as well as very interesting.

Limitations of the Study

Because there were only six participants, this study has only offered a glimpse at what middle school boys actually read. Another limitation is that five of the boys were Caucasian and one was African-American. Other races were not represented. While the researcher has sixteen years of experience in teaching reading and language arts to middle school boys, she is still only one person observing one small section of the overall population. Much more observation (by larger groups of researchers on larger groups of students) is needed. This is truly a worthy subject as boys are still lagging behind girls in the area of reading. Educators must not focus on one gender to the exclusion of the other,

but as one group of students falls behind another, that struggling group needs extra attention and support. This study is one small step toward that service.

Recommendations for Future Research

Much more research is needed on the topic of middle school boys and what they like to read. A study with a larger group of participants and one more representative of various races would provide more information concerning this topic. Future research needs to explore programs that can catch reading problems much earlier. If cracks in the foundations of reading are found earlier, they can be cemented, and reading troubles can be lessened. All students may need further assistance early in their education with decoding skills. There should also be more programs to assist teachers with teaching these skills to older students. Middle school teachers are not trained to teach students the various skills used when learning *how* to read because they presume that students already know these skills. Tests should be given to students to determine if and how well they can read. Classes on teaching these early skills could then be taught.

Another study could pertain to boys who claim they hate reading. Researchers could examine their motives for making such claims. Do the boys say this because they have poor reading skills? Are there other reasons for their feelings? Researchers could also study the effect of one accomplished reading teacher staying with a group of male students throughout middle school. Mrs. Edwards had an immense effect on James and Ben because she taught them in both sixth and eighth grade. Having a group of boys who need extra reading assistance remain with the same teacher throughout middle school could change those students' minds about reading.

Another area which needs investigation is starting boys' literacy training later in

life. Researchers could try to determine if boys would perform better academically by merely learning social skills and playing in their early years and learning reading skills as they turn six or seven. They could also investigate whether single-gender classrooms are more effective for boys. Teachers and educational researchers must do something to make school in general and reading in particular more entertaining for young men.

Further research is needed in the area of visual-spatial abilities and how educators can use this knowledge about males to further academics, especially reading skills. These learners need to see the whole picture before they comprehend the parts of it. These visual-spatial proficiencies emerge in adolescence, and further expertise in this area would assist middle school teachers with educating various types of learners.

Summary

Looking at these six middle school boys has shown that these boys are reading but sometimes they do not consider themselves to be readers due to views impressed upon them early in their education. Teachers who are reading role models and convey this to their students are very valuable to young men. Students need to be introduced to these role models beginning in elementary school and continue to have them throughout their education. If a teacher shows a lack of interest in a subject, the student is not going to understand that the topic is significant. Teachers are much more valuable to students' success than many believe.

More attention needs to be given to students who have reading problems in elementary school. The problems need to be caught early and dealt with when they first begin. Often, by the time the students get to middle school, a lot of damage has been done, but educators must never give up on helping these students to become successful

and overcome their reading deficiencies.

Gender research is of vital importance in today's education. More and more research is becoming available about how the male and female brains learn. Schools must adapt to the findings of this research and teach children in the way that they learn instead of using the same teaching methods that they have for years.

Above all, educators must listen to their students. Sometimes students just need to voice an opinion; sometimes they are telling their teachers how they learn best. Keeping dialogue open and being willing to listen is vital to student success. Educators must both listen and ask questions. When teachers know what students care about and what is happening in their lives, they can make the difference in those students' accomplishments. Ultimately, educators are the bridge to the triumph or failure of their students. They must foster a positive attitude about reading and learning in order for their students to discover the joy of reading. This positive attitude about reading must begin early in a child's life. Parents are just as responsible for this as teachers are. Parents should begin to read to their babies in the womb and continue reading throughout their children's lives. When the caring adults in a young person's life demonstrate the importance of reading, that child quickly develops the lifelong habit of reading.

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APPENDIX A

Consent Form

Middle School Boys' Reading Habits
(Dissertation)
(Sheilah Cooper Barnett)
Liberty University
(Educational Leadership)

You are invited to be in a research study of the reading habits of middle school boys. You were selected as a possible participant because you are male and would give useful information concerning this research project. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Sheilah Cooper Barnett, doctoral candidate for Liberty University, Educational Leadership Department

Background Information

The purpose of this study is: To find out what middle school males like to read and why.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

Answer questions concerning your reading habits. Interviews may sometimes be audio taped. There will be no videotaping used during this process.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

The study has very low risks: Complete names will not be used, only first names. Risks are no more than a student would encounter in everyday life. The interviews will be conducted at school.

The benefits to participation are: Educators will find additional information about boys and their reading habits will lead to providing materials in which boys find an interest.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be

stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records.

Interviews will be recorded on audio tape and written in a journal. Only first names will be used. No other personal information will be gathered. Tapes will only be used by the researcher, Sheilah Cooper Barnett. Tapes will not be used or heard by others.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the Liberty University or [Wimberley] Middle School. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is: Sheilah Cooper Barnett. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact me at [Wimberley] Middle School, [Phone number redacted for confidentiality], [E-mail address redacted for confidentiality]. My home phone is [Phone number redacted for confidentiality] and my personal email is [E-mail address redacted for confidentiality]. My cell number is [Phone number redacted for confidentiality]. My advisor at Liberty University is Dr. Deanna Keith. Her email address is [E-mail address redacted for confidentiality]. Dr. Keith's office number is [Phone number redacted for confidentiality].

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 2400, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at [E-mail address redacted for confidentiality].

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of parent or guardian: _____ Date: _____
(If minors are involved)

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX B

Observation Form

Observation Protocol for Observing Male Participants Reading

Name of Participant_____

Teacher_____

Class_____

Time_____

Date_____

1. What is the participant doing when researcher walks into the classroom?
2. What is he reading? Book/magazine, etc. Title?
3. Does he seem to be engaged in the reading material or otherwise engaged?
4. Does the teacher have to redirect the male?
5. How many other students in the classroom?
6. What are the other students doing?
7. Does the teacher have reading material available?
8. Does the teacher offer choice in reading material?
9. Is there a variety of reading materials?
10. When silent reading is over did the student seem reluctant to stop reading?

APPENDIX C

Reading Interest Survey

I like to read...

5 5 strongly agree	4 4 agree	3 3 do not care either way	2 2 disagree	1 1 strongly disagree
-----------------------	--------------	-------------------------------	-----------------	--------------------------

History

5 5 strongly agree	4 4 agree	3 3 do not care either way	2 2 disagree	1 1 strongly disagree
-----------------------	--------------	-------------------------------	-----------------	--------------------------

Sports

5 5 strongly agree	4 4 agree	3 3 do not care either way	2 2 disagree	1 1 strongly disagree
-----------------------	--------------	-------------------------------	-----------------	--------------------------

Romance

5 5 strongly agree	4 4 agree	3 3 do not care either way	2 2 disagree	1 1 strongly disagree
-----------------------	--------------	-------------------------------	-----------------	--------------------------

Poetry

5 5 strongly agree	4 4 agree	3 3 do not care either way	2 2 disagree	1 1 strongly disagree
-----------------------	--------------	-------------------------------	-----------------	--------------------------

Biography

5 5 strongly agree	4 4 agree	3 3 do not care either way	2 2 disagree	1 1 strongly disagree
-----------------------	--------------	-------------------------------	-----------------	--------------------------

Travel

5 5 strongly agree	4 4 agree	3 3 do not care either way	2 2 disagree	1 1 strongly disagree
-----------------------	--------------	-------------------------------	-----------------	--------------------------

Science Fiction

5 5 strongly agree	4 4 agree	3 3 do not care either way	2 2 disagree	1 1 strongly disagree
-----------------------	--------------	-------------------------------	-----------------	--------------------------

Detective Stories

5 5 strongly agree	4 4 agree	3 3 do not care either way	2 2 disagree	1 1 strongly disagree
-----------------------	--------------	-------------------------------	-----------------	--------------------------

Supernatural Stories

5 5 strongly agree	4 4 agree	3 3 do not care either way	2 2 disagree	1 1 strongly disagree
-----------------------	--------------	-------------------------------	-----------------	--------------------------

Plays

5 5 strongly agree	4 4 agree	3 3 do not care either way	2 2 disagree	1 1 strongly disagree
-----------------------	--------------	-------------------------------	-----------------	--------------------------

Adventure

5 5 strongly agree	4 4 agree	3 3 do not care either way	2 2 disagree	1 1 strongly disagree
-----------------------	--------------	-------------------------------	-----------------	--------------------------

War Stories

5 5 strongly agree	4 4 agree	3 3 do not care either way	2 2 disagree	1 1 strongly disagree
-----------------------	--------------	-------------------------------	-----------------	--------------------------

Novels

5 5 strongly agree	4 4 agree	3 3 do not care either way	2 2 disagree	1 1 strongly disagree
-----------------------	--------------	-------------------------------	-----------------	--------------------------

Humor

5 5 strongly agree	4 4 agree	3 3 do not care either way	2 2 disagree	1 1 strongly disagree
-----------------------	--------------	-------------------------------	-----------------	--------------------------

Folktales

5 5 strongly agree	4 4 agree	3 3 do not care either way	2 2 disagree	1 1 strongly disagree
-----------------------	--------------	-------------------------------	-----------------	--------------------------

How-to-books

5 5 strongly agree	4 4 agree	3 3 do not care either way	2 2 disagree	1 1 strongly disagree
-----------------------	--------------	-------------------------------	-----------------	--------------------------

Mysteries

5 5 strongly agree	4 4 agree	3 3 do not care either way	2 2 disagree	1 1 strongly disagree
-----------------------	--------------	-------------------------------	-----------------	--------------------------

Art

5 5 strongly agree	4 4 agree	3 3 do not care either way	2 2 disagree	1 1 strongly disagree
-----------------------	--------------	-------------------------------	-----------------	--------------------------

Westerns

5 5 strongly agree	4 4 agree	3 3 do not care either way	2 2 disagree	1 1 strongly disagree
-----------------------	--------------	-------------------------------	-----------------	--------------------------

Realistic stories about people

5 5 strongly agree	4 4 agree	3 3 do not care either way	2 2 disagree	1 1 strongly disagree
-----------------------	--------------	-------------------------------	-----------------	--------------------------

How much do you like to read about?

Animals

1 not at all	2 not very often	3 do not care either way	4 often	5 a lot
-----------------	---------------------	-----------------------------	------------	------------

Hobbies

1 not at all	2 not very often	3 do not care either way	4 often	5 a lot
-----------------	---------------------	--------------------------------	------------	------------

Famous people

1 not at all	2 not very often	3 do not care either way	4 often	5 a lot
-----------------	---------------------	--------------------------------	------------	------------

People's lives

1 not at all	2 not very often	3 do not care either way	4 often	5 a lot
-----------------	---------------------	--------------------------------	------------	------------

Math

1 not at all	2 not very often	3 do not care either way	4 often	5 a lot
-----------------	---------------------	--------------------------------	------------	------------

Challenging situations

1 not at all	2 not very often	3 do not care either way	4 often	5 a lot
-----------------	---------------------	--------------------------------	------------	------------

Music

1 not at all	2 not very often	3 do not care either way	4 often	5 a lot
-----------------	---------------------	--------------------------------	------------	------------

Science

1 not at all	2 not very often	3 do not care either way	4 often	5 a lot
-----------------	---------------------	--------------------------------	------------	------------

Moral issues

1 not at all	2 not very often	3 do not care either way	4 often	5 a lot
-----------------	---------------------	--------------------------------	------------	------------

Political issues

1 not at all	2 not very often	3 do not care either way	4 often	5 a lot
-----------------	---------------------	--------------------------------	------------	------------

Teen problems

1 not at all	2 not very often	3 do not care either way	4 often	5 a lot
-----------------	---------------------	--------------------------------	------------	------------

Books based on movies

1 not at all	2 not very often	3 do not care either way	4 often	5 a lot
-----------------	---------------------	--------------------------------	------------	------------

Games

1 not at all	2 not very often	3 do not care either way	4 often	5 a lot
-----------------	---------------------	--------------------------------	------------	------------

Books in a series

1 not at all	2 not very often	3 do not care either way	4 often	5 a lot
-----------------	---------------------	--------------------------------	------------	------------

Drama

1
not at all

2
not very often

3
do not care either
way

4
often

5
a lot

Why do you enjoy reading?

APPENDIX D

Student Interview Questions

Do you like reading, love it or just tolerate it?

Is there a certain genre that you like to read such as fantasy, action, mystery?

What is your favorite book?

Is there a favorite character that you like?

What do you like about this character?

Is there a certain author that you like and read most of his/her books?

Why?

Do you read graphic novels?

Do you like comic books?

Do you like comedy or funny stories?

What are some titles that you have read?

Do you like to read magazines? Which ones?

What is the purpose of reading? Why do you read?

Do you read books recommended by a friend or family? Why or why not?

How do you think reading helps you at school?

If you could choose anything in the whole world to read, what would you choose? If you

had the money to buy any series or anything to read, what would it be?

What is your least favorite assignment in school? Why?

What is your favorite assignment in school? Why?

How do you know if you've done a good job at reading?

What was your most enjoyable reading experience as a child?

What did you read in elementary school?

How many books do you read in a month?

Did your parents read to you when you were younger?

Did your parents buy books for you when you were younger?

Do they still purchase books for you?

How many books do you own?

How many books do your parents own?

Do you see your dad reading often?

How about your mom?

If you have trouble reading, when did this begin?

How do you choose a book?

When do you read?

Do you like to read books in a series?

Do you read for AR points?

Do you like longer books or shorter ones?

Do you read to escape?

Do you like for the reading to be interrupted by cartoons or comics?

Do you share articles or books with other males?

What hooks you into a book?

Is it important to you that teachers exhibit a love of reading?

Why do you enjoy reading?

Do you struggle with reading? If so, please explain why.

Do you read for pleasure?

What do you read for pleasure?

What is your favorite book?

How many minutes do you spend reading in one week?

What is the title of the last book that you read?

About how many books do you own?

What books would you like to own?

Do you consider yourself a reader? Why or why not?

How do you decide what to read?

Do you like to read books in which the character is like you or different from you?

Do you read magazines? If you answer yes, please write the title(s) of the magazine(s) you like to read.

APPENDIX E

Teacher Interview Questions

1. Do you view the participant as a good reader? Why or why not?
2. What is he reading now?
3. What reading requirement do you have in your class?
4. How are his grades?
5. How do you think he views reading?
6. Does he stick with a book?
7. Will he read books with females as the main characters?
8. Does he take recommendations from males and females?
9. Does he take recommendations from you?
10. Does he choose books himself or do you choose books for him?
11. What types of books do you most often see him reading?
12. Do you require them to have AR points?
13. Does he recommend books to you?
14. Does he recommend books to other students?
15. If he struggles in reading, what areas?
16. Are his parents involved with him at school?
17. Have you seen growth in his reading over the year?
18. Is there anything else that you would like to add?