"JUST DON'T CALL IT A BOOK CLUB:" BOYS' READING EXPERIENCES AND

MOTIVATION IN SCHOOL AND IN AN AFTER SCHOOL BOOK CLUB

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ABSTRACT

Much has been written about the "boy crisis" in the last two decades in regards to achievement in school and the struggles boys face in literacy learning. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data demonstrate that girls consistently outperform boys in reading and writing (Educational Alliance, 2006). Therefore, the importance of reading engagement and wide reading cannot be undervalued. It is commonly accepted that frequent and wide reading leads to increases in student achievement (Guthrie & Alvermann, 1999).

The purpose of this study was to capture and understand how an informal book club for boys might lead to insights about their reading motivation and engagement in order to inform literacy instruction, to obtain the perspectives of middle school boys in what may motivate them to read widely outside of school-based assignments, and to understand how social interactions influence their desire to read.

A purposeful sample of seven middle school boys who demonstrated a range of resistance to reading was the basis for selection. Book club meetings were based on three novels of the boys' choosing which were read and discussed. Observations were used to note changes in attitudes and spontaneous comments about reading and school. Three focus group interviews were conducted to provide data on boys' perspectives on reading experience in school and the book club. Additional data was obtained through individual interviews reflecting on the book club experience approximately a month after the book club stopped meeting.

The data suggest that the boys in the study may reject reading because of the pressure they feel as a result of the various tasks, in particular writing tasks, which are attached to their personal choice reading. The boys found it difficult to get lost in books even of their own choosing because of these tasks. They were also unable to share their reading in school and felt disconnected from their teachers. The book club model allowed the boys to forge relationships, build competence, and find enjoyment in reading through the autonomy of free flowing deep discussions and humor about a shared text.

Acknowledgements

I have always felt that the best types of acceptance speeches or acknowledgements of achievements are those that do not list the names of people who may hold little meaning to most of the listeners of the speech. I find the best types of acknowledgements for readers or listeners are the ones that are more general and relatable, but just as heartfelt. So my intention here is not to list everyone that has an impact on this process and me, but to attempt to thank those who have been involved in one way or another, knowingly or not.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

It has been well established that boys are underachieving in literacy in relation to girls (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). As a result of the widening achievement gap in literacy between boys and girls, there have been many attempts to explain why boys are not performing as well as girls in literacy and how best to accommodate boys' needs. While researchers attempt to offer explanations, alarmed commentators have fueled interest in the literacy lives of boys. However, many of these commentators make broad assumptions about the causes of the achievement gap as well as their solutions to reduce the gap. Often these assumptions are based in binary traditional constructions of masculinity and femininity or read as a backlash in response to feminist gains made in the second half of the 20th century. These assumptions are then promoted in the media as truth despite the lack of evidentiary warrant. Since Christina Hoff-Sommers' (2000) book *The War Against Boys: How Misguided Feminism Is Harming Our Young Men* was released, the media has promulgated a literacy achievement crisis facing boys in American schools. Hoff-Sommers (2000) claims, "It's a bad time to be a boy in America" and charges that feminists invented the problems girls faced in schools and ignored boys' academic achievement. While many have held that her arguments were flawed and venomous, they have reignited researcher interest in boys' achievement in school.   Additionally, commentators and pundits in news media have joined and perpetuated Hoff-Sommers' alarmist notions about boys' achievement in school.   Pundits have cherry-picked bits of research to make broad declarations about the proper methods to raise boys. For example, in the *Wall Street Journal*, an opinion piece written by journalist Thomas Spence (2010) asserts that video games are too much of a distraction for young boys, taking time away from reading; therefore parents must remove video games from the home and thereby raise more literate boys. Though popular media may be

extreme in its alarmist notions, boys are lagging behind girls in literacy achievement.

Nonetheless, there has been a surge of research on boys and reading achievement.

Opinion differs on the magnitude of the 'boy crisis' in literacy achievement and the types

of interventions that may decrease their lag behind girls. However, it is difficult to ignore the

numbers which provide a great deal of evidence at both the national and state level highlighting a

significant gap in reading and writing achievement between boys and girls. A 2004 study by the

National Center for Education Statistics revealed that since the 1992 National Assessment of

Educational Progress (NAEP), girls outperformed boys in reading and writing in grades 4, 8, and

12 (Educational Alliance, 2006). As of 2010, in grade eight, 28% of boys scored proficient or

above in reading compared to 37% of the girls while the gap for writing achievement is even

more pronounced (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Additionally, girls are less likely to get

lower grades, drop out, be retained, and become involved in drugs and alcohol (Educational

Alliance, 2007). The Educational Testing Service (ETS) reveals that the gap between boys and

girls in 8th grade reading is six times greater than the mathematical reasoning gap between boys

and girls, where boys perform slightly better than girls. In fact, the mathematical reasoning gap

has been shrinking since the late 1980's (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). A summary of achievement

data on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) reveals that the most

predominant gender differences are in high school where girls hold a significant performance

advantage over boys in literacy achievement *and* mathematics achievement (Rennie Center,

2006). More recently, among 53 school districts in the United States, 47 showed significant

differences in reading achievement, and on average fourth grade females outperformed males by

10 points on the Progress in International Reading Study (PIRLS) assessment (Institute of

Educational Sciences, 2012).

The literacy achievement gender gap goes beyond the US; it is global. The Progress in International Reading Study in 2001 showed boys scored about 18 points lower (a grade and a half behind) than girls in all G8 countries (Educational Alliance, 2007). Similarly, Canadian 13 and 16-year-old boys consistently fall behind their female counterparts in reading and writing (Gambell & Hunter, 2000). Although many current studies acknowledge the difficulties boys face with school literacy, the problem is not new. The International Association for Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) found gender to be the most powerful predictor for reading and writing achievement in 1985, and a 1988 IEA study found girls in 32 countries achieved higher reading scores in all literacy areas (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). Chiu and McBride-Chang (2006) analyzed the results of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's Program for International Student Assessment (OECD-PISA) and responses to a questionnaire completed by almost 200,000 15 year-old students in 43 countries and determined that while controlling for all other variables such as socio-economic status and gross domestic product, girls still outscored boys by 13 points. Chiu and McBride-Chang (2006) further explain that in every country boys were more likely than girls to be poor readers, and in the majority of the countries where the study was conducted, there were double the number of male poor than female poor readers. They suggest that while the difference in achievement is "likely to be attributable to behavioral problems or school culture, there remains the possibility that boys, even as they advance into adolescence, are more vulnerable to language- and literacy-related problems for neuropsychological reasons as well" (p.29).

However, as Connolly (2004) points out, it is dangerous to draw causal links between sex-based physiology of the brain and boys' literacy achievement since reading is composed of a complex and interdependent web of skills using multiple parts of the brain about which we still

know very little. Like Connolly, other researchers suggest that reading is greatly influenced by

social contexts that have an influence well beyond brain physiology (Ivey, 2010; Moss, 2007;

Newkirk, 2002, Simpson, 2005; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). Since reading achievement is heavily

influenced by social context these quantitative findings on literacy achievement among boys and

girls described above imply that boys are underachieving in literacy without regard to race or

social class. Though girls do outperform boys in general, there is significant variance in the

literacy achievement *within* both genders (Connolly, 2004). This suggests the importance in

understanding the contexts in which boys are learning to read since the fact remains that

beginning in pre-adolescence and continuing throughout high school, many boys who were once

enthusiastic readers become disengaged and spend little or no time reading for pleasure (Smith &

Wilhelm, 2002). Often, they become disengaged from literacy instruction as well. At least as

probable as differences in brain physiology contributing to the achievement gap, contextual

factors need to be considered as well.

As mentioned earlier, though time spent reading decreases for both genders during

adolescence, boys are more likely to be low frequency readers than girls (OECD, 2002). It is

important to note that research suggests the reading frequency of boys has declined over the

years. Research has shown that among students who are confident about their reading skills,

declining reading enjoyment in adolescence is more pronounced for boys (Sainsbury & Schagen,

2004; McKenna et al., 1995). For example, among seventh grade boys in the UK, the number of

those who said they enjoy reading has declined from 70% in 1998 to 55% in 2003 compared to

the number of girls who say that they enjoy reading, which has declined from 85% in 1998 to

75% in 2003. While there is a decline in reading frequency in both sexes, there is a widening

gap between boys and girls in regards to reading frequency. In the United States, a survey of 100

boys and 100 girls revealed that while reading was a moderately popular activity (51%) among

both genders, only scoring higher than writing, walking or running, and cooking, boys were

much more likely than girls to respond that they spent no leisure time reading (Nippon et al.,

2005).

 These studies suggest that boys enjoy reading less and less as they become adolescents.

However, we do not know how these boys define reading. For instance, Smith and Wilhelm

(2002) argue that boys are literate, but in ways that may not be school-like or book based. Boys

that may appear to resist school-based reading were shown to be literate in other ways such as

reading how-to books to work on their cars, video game manuals, and online (Smith & Wilhelm,

2006). Surveys, then, documenting the decline of boys' leisure reading may be somewhat

skewed depending on how researchers and participants define reading.

 Given that boys are still underachieving, however, many researchers argue that even if they

are reading more than research indicates, literacy teachers must find ways to align the literate

lives of boys with school in order to increase reading achievement (Smith & Wilhelm, 2006;

Newkirk, 2002; Brozo; 2010). In other words, if adolescent boys are reading less than girls,

perhaps it is important to provide time in school for sustained reading of texts that are of

personal interest that is more like the reading they do outside of school as opposed to completing

worksheets or reading short excerpts and answering comprehension questions as is typical in

many middle and high school classrooms. It is now commonly accepted that the more time

students read, the more proficient they will become (Allington, 1977; Chambliss & McKillop,

2000, Krashen, 2004). Cognitive theories of learning assert that in order to become better at a

particular activity one must practice frequently and widely (Anderson, 1995). Researchers have

long argued that contextual reading allows students to effectively combine the processes of

reading such phonics, vocabulary, reading comprehension (Allington, 1980: Fielding et al., 1984). Contextual reading is defined as the reading of complete texts in their original format, in contrast to decontextualized reading which involves short texts removed from their original context and selected to emphasize a particular skill, usually in the form of worksheets or basal readers (Allington, 1980). Fielding et al. (1984) explains that, "reading books, in addition to being just plain fun, is probably a source of topical knowledge; knowledge of syntax; text structures, and literary forms; and vocabulary growth" (p.153). Stanovich (1986) theorized that a high volume of reading helps develop vocabulary and raise achievement. Moreover, frequent and sustained book reading can contribute to improved word identification (Fielding et al., 1984). Allington (1977) found that the poorest readers often had the least opportunity to read widely because those students receiving reading remediation were often subjected to isolated skill mastery rather than the opportunity to read in context. Therefore, perhaps current reading instruction needs to change to allow more time for sustained independent reading where students are allowed some choice to read texts that align with the literate lives of young people while broadening the breadth of their reading experiences.

Many researchers suggest that sustained, contextual, independent reading is one appropriate use of class time that can contribute to higher proficiency and engagement (Allington, 1980; Stanovich, 1986; Fielding et al., 1984; Chambliss & McKillop, 2000; Krashen, 2004). Independent reading in this sense is reading that is recreational and dictated by a student's personal choice in literature. This may be one solution to engage more boys in school-based reading thereby improving literacy achievement. In recent decades, independent reading has been referred to by several names, including Sustained Silent Reading (SSR), Drop Everything and Read (DEAR), or Providing Opportunities with Everyday Reading (POWER) (Krashen,

2004). During these periods, schools and teachers often provide access to a wide range of multi-level, high interest texts and teachers may model reading behavior by reading a text of their own at the same time as their students (Pilgreen, 2000). Krashen (2004) argues that time in school to independently read for pleasure without having to be accountable in terms of grades or book reports, improves student outcomes more than traditional direct instruction.

Research on contextual reading and sustained independent reading is relevant in today's classrooms in spite of an emphasis on standardized testing that has forced sustained independent reading to take a secondary position to skill instruction (Lawler & Wedwick, 2012). Yet, despite the positive effects independent reading has shown in reading research (Krashen, 2004), time spent reading independently in school is increasingly viewed as a luxury and is often cut when accountability pressure mounts (Lawler & Wedwick, 2012). It is easy to see the influence of this pressure. In 1930 students spent 37% of the reading period on reading tasks and the remainder of the time on word related tasks (Hiebert & Martin, as cited in Gates, 1930). Conversely, in 2007, students in classrooms with 90-minute literacy blocks, spend an average of 18 minutes reading (Brenner, Hiebert, & Tompkins, 2009). This amounts to 20% of the reading period, a 17% drop since the 1930's. The significant decrease in independent reading in school has an impact on not only reading frequency of our students but limits opportunities for reading engagement.

The importance of reading engagement and frequent reading cannot be undervalued for all students but especially for those who are low achievers. Frequent and wide reading leads to increases in student achievement (Allington, 1980: Fielding et al., 1984; Guthrie & Alvermann, 1999). Students in the top third of their class in relation to the amount of reading they do score 10-15 percentage points higher on standardized testing than those who do not read frequently

(Cipielewski & Stanovich, 1992). Frequent reading also correlates to levels of practical and

general knowledge. Stanovich & Cunningham (1993) found that frequent readers possess 200-

400% higher general knowledge levels compared to their peers that read less frequently. Active

and frequent reading is also crucial to vocabulary development, fluency, and improved writing

(Allington, 2002). In addition to comprehension improvement and vocabulary development,

avid readers are more likely to participate in society through voting and joining civic and

religious groups (Guthrie & Alvermann, 1999). It is clear then that creating and maintaining

engaged readers not only creates better students but also contributes to society at large.

While time spent reading independently in school continues to be pushed aside for skill

development in order to meet standardized testing requirements, developing motivation to read is

equally important because it influences reading breadth and depth, achievement and engagement

(Wigfield, 2000). Motivation can be defined as the desire that produces the decision to engage in

a particular activity (Deci & Ryan, 2008). However, teachers who value understanding student

motivation often struggle to motivate students, and more specifically boys, to read (Gambrell,

Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni, 1996). In fact, a national survey of teachers conducted by the

International Reading Association found that learning more about building interest in reading

was the most essential area of future research (O'Flahavan, Gambrell, Guthrie, Stahl, Baumann,

& Alvermann1992). More recently, Quirk et al. (2010) found that a chief concern of teachers

continues to be motivating their students to read and that an intrinsic motivation to read can and

should be developed in their students, suggesting that this is an enduring challenge.

The relationship between academic achievement and an intrinsic motivation to read

necessitates developing instructional inventions that develop and maintain motivation.

Frustratingly, research indicates that self-perception of success and motivation in several

domains decreases as students progress through their school careers. The decline is more rapid

for boys than girls and significantly so in a subjective domain such as language arts in middle

school (Wigfield et al., 1997). For example, in surveys of elementary and middle school

students, older students report valuing reading less and have lower self-efficacy beliefs in

reading than younger students (Eccles, Wigfield, Harold & Blumenfield, 1993). It should be

noted also, that boys are less likely to value reading and be efficacious in their reading ability

than girls. Girls tend to display greater interest and are more motivated to read than boys, as they

get older (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). For this reason, it seems important to find ways to engage

and motivate boys to read while providing opportunities for increased independent reading.

Though reading engagement is, in part, correlated to socio-economic status (Connolly,

2004), even boys in the upper strata of socio-economic status often become more disengaged

than their female peers in reading for pleasure. Beers (1996) states the number of young people

who possess sufficient reading skills to decode and comprehend text but continue to be reluctant

to read is large and growing. Beers (1996) categorized reluctant readers into three subgroups:

dormant, uncommitted, and unmotivated. Dormant readers enjoy reading and see it as

entertaining but make little time for it. Both the uncommitted and unmotivated readers do not

enjoy reading, see reading as serving functional purposes only, and take a more efferent stance

(Rosenblatt, 1994) to reading to only find and absorb information rather than for enjoyment.

However, while the uncommitted reader has a positive attitude toward reading and remains open

to the possibility of reading more in the future, the unmotivated reader holds negative opinion of

reading and never plans to read by choice in the future. Beers (1996) believes it is important to

realize that there is not just one type of reluctant reader and that lumping all reluctant readers

into a single group limits our ability to understand why some students choose not to read and how to intervene to engage them.

The suggested responses to boys' underachievement and lack of reading motivation are varied and include broadening classroom reading choices, hiring more male teachers, or single-sex schooling. Many researchers suggest broadening the scope of what is considered appropriate reading and providing choices about what texts are required (Brozo, 2010; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Newkirk, 2002; Farris et al., 2010). This typically includes more access to non-fiction informational texts, graphic novels, comics, magazines, and joke books. More specifically, researchers such as Brozo (2010) and Farris et al. (2012) suggest that teachers could provide entry points to literacy and develop a boy's love of reading by incorporating literature with positive male archetypes in alternative formats. Newkirk (2002) suggests that parents and teachers often misread boys' interests in violence and off-color humor in video games, comics, joke books, and other venues of popular culture as either damaging or a distraction, and they certainly do not fit within the current canon of school-based literature. Many view boys' interest in violence, in particular, as cause for alarm in light of the media attention on school shootings, bullying and other violent acts perpetrated by boys and young men. While there is no proof that reading these texts is destructive, there is positive evidence that boys often use their interests in video games, movies, and music as vehicles for pursuing their writing and reading interests (Newkirk, 2002).

Another response to boys' underachievement in reading is promoting an increase of male influence within the school and in particular in literacy classes. This includes efforts to recruit more male teachers and inviting male role models such as sports figures to the classroom to help promote literacy to boys. Recruiting more male teachers is based on the notion that schools are

viewed as becoming more feminized as a result of the sheer number of female teachers and the increased emphasis on literacy in the lower elementary grades (Sax, 2009; Gurain, 2005; Farris et al, 2009). In fact, Farris et al. (2009) insinuates that because 75% percent of all teachers are female, and the numbers are greater in the elementary grades, boys are at a disadvantage because these teachers may relate better to the girls in their classrooms and that "boy-lit is often foreign to them" (p. 181).

In response to the perception that schools are becoming too feminized and that this leads to misreading or neglecting the needs of boys, interest and experimentation with single-sex schooling and classes has also emerged as a strategy to better meet their needs. A popular proponent of single-sex education, Sax (2005) has created the National Association for Single-Sex Education to advance single-sex-education in the United States. The association argues that single-sex schools actually erode gender stereotypes (Sax, 2013). Other researchers, however, believe that single-sex schooling has the potential to reinforce gender stereotypes, creating more aggressive and misogynist attitudes (Greig, 2011; Martino, 2005). While there are few, comprehensive reviews of the literature on single-sex schools offer varying degrees of support for the practice and cite methodological issues including the lack of randomized sampling for the opposing conclusions (Mael, 1998; Riordan, 2002; Smyth, 2010). More detail about single-sex schooling will be discussed in the next chapter.

It is clear that boys' literacy achievement is lagging behind girls and there are multiple research based explanations for boys' lower achievement rates. While there are several solutions offered to increase male literacy achievement, we must remember that there is wide disparity in literacy achievement for both boys and girls. Though girls may seem to be performing well in

relation to boys on standardized tests and in regards to reading motivation, it does not necessarily mean that literacy instruction maximizes their potential or capitalizes on their motivation.

Problem of Practice

In my school context, which is an upper-middle class, white-collar New Jersey school district, students score well on the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJASK), but boys' achievement lags behind the girls at the middle school level. Approximately 22% of middle school boys are below proficient levels compared to 13.8% of the girls; 52% of the boys are proficient compared to 56% of the girls; 30% of boys and 38.7% of girls are advanced proficient. District wide trends reflect an equivalent lag in boys' literacy achievement compared to their female counterparts.

In addition to the lagging test scores, a major concern among many literacy teachers in the intermediate and the middle schools is the lack of interest in reading that many boys demonstrate, including those with proficient reading skills. This lagging engagement could point to a growing achievement gap between boys and girls as they progress through high school. While literacy teachers at the intermediate and middle schools may employ various strategies to engage all readers, including collaborative learning, literature circles, and explicit instruction in reading and vocabulary strategies, teachers observe that there are a significant number of boys who resist reading for pleasure. For example, the middle school offers a Battle of the Books club, which is advertised as being for students who "like to read and look forward to putting their knowledge of books to use." The focus is not simply reading for enjoyment but competing as readers. However, membership in this club is predominantly female. During the 2011-2012 school year seven males participated in the club compared to 28 females.

My own personal observations, parent requests for help, and conversations with other teachers demonstrate difficulty engaging boys who have proficient skills in reading for pleasure. Even when given the opportunity to choose their reading material, as most research suggests is important to increase engagement (Ivey, 2010; Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006; Pitcher et al., 2010; Smith & Moore, 2012), many boys would rather do absolutely nothing than spend time reading. This is evident during standardized test days, when the only activity permitted after completing a test is reading. Many boys who are capable readers choose to do nothing rather than read a book.

Also, despite the fact that the time students spend in literacy classes, which is an eighty minute period that combines reading and writing, at the intermediate and middle schools is double that of all other subject areas, students spend very little time reading independently in class. Although, they are asked to keep a personal choice book to read with them throughout the day, students are not given scheduled time to read silently for a sustained period in school. There is no official district wide policy, but personal choice independent reading is generally not to be done during class time; it is expected that students will do this reading at home. Students are permitted, however, to read once they have completed class assignments.

Very little time in literacy classes is actually spent reading extended prose in authentic formats. For many students, much of their literacy class is spent completing questions on worksheets about assigned texts, making entries in vocabulary or summary logs about their personal reading, working on projects, or writing assignments in conjunction with a novel or story read in class. Students may discuss their reading, but it is typically done in a teacher directed question-answer format to check for comprehension of the text. The push to complete worksheets and answer literal level questions has recently intensified because of a standards-

based push for more non-fiction reading in the language arts classes. This may be because, according to literacy teachers, non-fiction reading was not fully integrated within the current curriculum and teachers received little professional development incorporating non-fiction and meeting state standards. Copied articles, worksheets from various sources, and selections from basal readers make up the course materials. Popular non-fiction trade books are not used. As the movement for standardization of instruction, content, and assessment surges forward, opportunities for students to pursue their own reading interests are limited.

While time for independent reading in school is limited, many parents in the distinct do understand the value of time spent reading. They often report feeling frustrated with their boys who are strong students and capable readers but who rarely read without substantial prompting. Parents often seek teacher help and guidance in trying to encourage their sons to spend more time reading. This is especially frustrating for the parents of boys who meet achievement standards and earn high marks in their literacy classes. These boys mainly see reading as instrumental to later success rather than something to do for immediate pleasure (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). This is a problem because it limits the frequency in which boys choose to read because they see reading only as a task to be completed in school for a grade rather than reading for enjoyment. Teachers, too, feel this frustration when boys resist reading texts that many consider highly engaging. Many of these boys read what is assigned when it is tied to a grade but nothing more. This may be true for some girls as well, but given the cries for help from parents and teachers, it appears that disengagement from reading occurs more often for boys entering their adolescent years than for girls (Gambell & Hunter, 2000). The lack of motivation to read thereby contributes to the widening achievement gap among girls and boys.

A Promising Practice

The following vignette illustrates some of the issues parents and teachers face when boys begin to disengage from reading and school. It also highlights the formation of the promising practice of an after school book club intervention, similar to what is described in this study, designed to increase boys' interest in nonacademic reading, as well as some of the outcomes that emerged through participation in the club. To provide some contrast, I begin with a general description of literacy classes at the middle school level.

Literacy classes from sixth grade to eighth grade follow the same general format. These classes are 80 minutes long and are designed to incorporate both reading and writing instruction. Literacy teachers are expected to use the district selected literature basal reader and read one short story or novel excerpt from the reader per week. During a typical week, one grammar skill, and one spelling list is also learned. Assigning worksheet pages from consumable workbooks throughout the week is the typical instruction format for teaching the reading, grammar, and spelling skill addressed in the text. The reading selection is read aloud by the teacher, students, or silently, or can be listened to through an audio recording produced by the textbook company on the first day of the week. The story may be reread throughout the week and students complete comprehension and vocabulary worksheets in their workbooks in conjunction with this selection. At the end of the week, students take a comprehension test on the text and quizzes on the week's focus grammar skill and spelling list.

Sixth grade teachers are also expected to supplement the reading program with one class novel per marking period. There is more teacher discretion in activities that coincide with the reading of the novel. Usually, students complete reading logs and practice writing responses to open-end questions (OEQs), an important component of the NJASK reading test. Significant

time is spent writing responses to OEQs and the writing format is highly structured. The OEQ is very similar to the reader response questions on the NJASK that begin with a short statement about the reading selection and then two bulleted questions. The first bullet is a comprehension question that must be supported by referencing the text and the second is usually asks for a personal opinion or statement by the student connecting to a specific reference in the text.

While all the middle school students visit the school library once or twice in the marking period, students in seventh and eighth grade are sometimes expected to use the library time to find one novel written in the same genre as the book they are studying during the marking period. How much help they are given for finding a book varies from teacher to teacher but students usually have thirty minutes to find a book. If a student wishes to change books, he must do so early in the marking period in order to have time to complete the varied requirements related to reading of the novel. These tasks often include completing reading logs, locating examples of figurative language, writing weekly summaries, drawing story maps and characterization webs, and essays that describe setting, plot, conflict, and other narrative components. This reading is done as homework during the student's free time and there is little or no discussion about their reading of the text.

The literacy block also incorporates writing instruction. Therefore teachers spend a significant amount of time teaching how to compose a single significant piece of writing per marking period that typically falls within a genre or purpose. For example, students might be required to complete a persuasive piece during one marking period and a compare and contrast essay during another. In addition to this writing assignment, students complete one timed writing assignment during the marking period which is graded, noted on their report cards, and used for placement data for the following year. The timed writings are to be completed in forty-

five minutes and are an attempt to prepare students for the timed writing tasks on the NJASK.

Students also begin each period diagramming the same single sentence for a different

grammatical feature each day and are quizzed on all the grammatical features of that sentence at

the close of each week. It is not difficult to see that there are many tasks to be completed

throughout the eighty-minute period, leaving very little time for substantive discussion about a

common text, much less a book length one.

It is in this context that I describe how a former student inspired an after school book

club. Alek is a typical example of the many boys I have encountered who resist reading. Shortly

after entering sixth grade, Alek's parents became worried that he was becoming increasingly

disengaged from school and even more so from reading, a drop in grades was an indication of

this. However, Alek's parents reported that they were less concerned about his grades than his

resistance to reading and felt this reluctance was rooted in difficulties they believed he was

having with comprehending text. They were led to this belief because of his scores on ten-

question reading comprehension benchmark tests for each basal reading selection and their

perceptions of his overall unhappiness with school. They felt his current resistance to reading

was a problem since they believed if it could not be overcome, it could have long-term

consequences for Alek's school performance. Though Alek was earning B's, they felt he was

not performing up to the potential he had demonstrated in his earlier years in school, especially

considering he loved to read prior to sixth grade.

Alek's parents felt he may need a tutor to help him improve his comprehension of the

novels he was required to read in school but also to simply talk with him about the reading in the

hopes that he would perform better in school and feel motivated to read more. I agreed to tutor

Alek and read with him. Alek was always agreeable when we met, yet he did not always read

the assigned text for that week. He also did not always use the reading strategies that we discussed such as questioning the author, writing predictions or wondering questions, and creating flow maps to note important events in the story. Alek did seem to enjoy the discussions we had about the books we read. He was able to describe the ways he visualized the text as he read and he was able to make connections to other texts and media and to his personal experience.

When Alek discovered I was tutoring a friend of his who was reading the same book, he requested that we all meet together to discuss the book. A book club was born out of Alek's desire to be more social in his reading. Our book club met at a local pizzeria and grew in size from three to eight members in the course of the year. It grew through word of mouth among the teachers and guidance counselors at the school as well as the boys asking friends to join. The boys reading engagement, curiosity about the texts we read, and commitment to the group astounded me. We read and discussed books well beyond the typical sixth grade curriculum. We tackled literature from H.G. Wells to Oscar Wilde. We also read a range of contemporary fiction from Michael Crichton to Mitch Albom. Even more astounding than the breadth of what we read, was the boys' (including Alek's) desire to keep the book club running. We continued to meet every week during the summer and into the next school year. In fact, the book club met for the next four years. Some boys would leave because of new sports commitments in the seventh grade and others would continue. New members might join because of recommendations by friends or the teachers and guidance counselors at school. However, I tried to keep the group limited to ten people since I felt more than that would hinder everyone participating in our discussions.

The format of the book club was purposefully democratic and 'nonschool-like.' To select what we would read, either I would offer a list of titles and give a brief synopsis of each book or the boys would offer their own suggestions. Books were chosen by consensus. Once we started a book, if the boys decided they were not enjoying it, we would discuss why and then would abandon it. This only happened on two occasions, however. During our meetings, we would discuss the portion of the book we had agreed to read for that week, eat some pizza, read aloud ahead into the next chuck of reading, and agree on how much to read for the following meeting. Discussions were free flowing; usually they started by someone describing what happened in that week's portion of the book. Members might ask questions about parts they did not understand, and I might ask questions connected to the text which might provoke debate, or I would wonder aloud what potential symbols referred to in the text might mean. For example, I asked about the importance of beauty as we read *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and the members would debate the issue and we would try to guess the author's opinion as a result the reading. My purpose in each of these conversation starters was to engage the boys with the text and tap in on their desire to share their opinions. As time went on, however, the members began to rely less on me to ask those questions and began contributing their own when we met. After our discussion, a member of the group who volunteered or I would read aloud from where our reading for the week had left off. Our meetings ended with us reaching consensus on how much we could read for the next week based on school workloads or sports obligations. We read for the sake of reading and to be able to participate in the discussions about the books. There were no consequences for not reading the selection that week other than a feeling of missing out because of not being able to participate fully in the discussion.

To these boys, book discussions were nothing new. At school they frequently participated in literature circles to discuss assigned books. However, the literature circles required them to participate according to specific particular assigned roles. For example, they were assigned to be the Connector, connecting the text to personal experience or other texts; Illustrator, creating a visual representation of a scene or character; Director, responsible for maintaining the conversation; or Word Finder, pointing out and defining new and interesting words (Davies, 2002). The roles were very structured and did not seem to capitalize on natural conversations and students seemed to be completing a task rather than having deep discussion. Since the literacy class seemed to be so task oriented and did not seem to truly capitalize on the social aspect of literature circles, not that of drama, and reader's theater, I began to wonder whether the context of the classroom and the structured nature of these methods had a significant impact on the joy the boys seemed to get from the social interaction and unstructured discussions that occurred in our book club.

The boys' parents and their teachers with whom I had contact felt the boys seemed more engaged in the reading that we did in the book club than they had evidenced in other aspects of their home and school lives and also began to develop and explore their own interests through reading. For example, after reading a memoir they particularly liked, several of the boys sought out other books by the same author. One of the boys had an interest in Dante's *Inferno*, and brought the book in to explain the story and read excerpts. Mystery books were shared after reading *The DiVinci Code,* and video game cheat books were brought in to show others as well as to discuss the story behind the game.

Not only did the parents and teachers observe that the boys seemed to be more motivated to read and began to develop their own reading interests, but the boys acted on this motivation by

urging me to continue our meetings during the summer after school ended. During this time

some of the boys had other time commitments as they left the intermediate school and entered

middle school, but many of the same boys kept returning. Through parent requests, invites by

members, requests by the school's guidance counselor and my own interaction with students,

other sixth grade boys were referred or asked to join and were welcomed into the book club. As

the years went by older members who left would return to participate for a book or two. This

produced a mix of boys ranging in age from 12 to 15 years old. The older boys would talk to the

younger boys about how much the book club helped them in school because they read books in

the book club that were required reading in school. Or, they would ask if the newer members had

read some of the same books they had read when they began the book club, similar to how

students might talk about movies they have seen.

The boys' parents expressed high praise for the club and teacher colleagues mentioned

differences in reading confidence and effort among several of the boys. A colleague would

frequently note that class participation among the book club boys improved and that they began

to be more insightful about their reading, looking for symbolism to analyze and broad themes to

connect to the text they were reading in class. In one particular case, a special education student

seemed to develop greater confidence in his reading and parlayed that into a love for words. He

demonstrated this by writing more expressively and becoming very interested in poetry as an

outlet for his adolescent struggles. Within the course of a school year that he participated in the

book club, he was declassified as a special education student. The following year he advanced

from a lower tracked literacy class to an on-level literacy class.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

Given the success of the book club with regard to engaging boys in reading, I believed it was important to understand more about why it did so because this knowledge can contribute both to improving classroom practice or the development of literacy experiences for students outside of the classroom to more successfully engage them in reading. The purpose of this study was to try to replicate the success of the book club experience with another group of boys and in order to gain their perspectives on how it makes reading appealing to boys, and to use this knowledge to inform literacy practices in my school and district. The study may offer insight to reading teachers as they attempt to foster a love for reading in their classrooms.

Though part of the intent of this research was to inform practice, I acknowledge that there may be challenges to applying knowledge gained from a voluntary, after school book club to the classroom. The school district administration may be reluctant to make sweeping changes for fear of losing gains they have made on state testing, while teachers may resist changes that might call for them to give up some control over the ways they conduct their classes. Greater challenges such as time, access to materials, and class size will certainly impact the potential to implement the findings of this study   However, it is hoped that implications of this study can help teachers and administrator begin to think about how elements of book clubs that effectively engage participants with reading can be used to engage students in classrooms and increase motivation to read.

This study may also illuminate the benefits of creating contexts that give students the opportunity to read and discuss books outside of the literacy classroom. Seemingly, part of the success of the book club was that the boys were able to read for the sake of reading without having to demonstrate any skill acquisition through related performance tasks. Since curricular

demands seem to have limited the amount of emphasis on substantive discussions through shared

reading in the classroom, it might be helpful to create situations outside of the classroom context

that encourage reading with the sole purpose of pleasure and sharing. This study may help

describe elements of that context that are important to boys in regards to their reading

engagement and participation. As a result of my desire to investigate the problem of boys and

reading engagement, the following questions will guide my research:

Research Questions:

    (1) What are boys' perceptions of participating in an after school book club and how do they
        change over time?

    (2) What contributes to those perceptions?
        a.   What role might gender play?
        b.   How do they compare their experiences in an after school book club to their
            reading experiences in school?

    (3) From the boys' perspectives, what are the outcomes of participating in an afterschool
        book club?
        a.   How does participating in a book club change boys' attitudes about reading?
        b.   In what ways does participation in an after school book club motivate and engage
            boys to read?

There is a significant amount of quantitative data that demonstrate that boys are

underachieving in literacy in comparison to girls (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). There is also

evidence that many boys who are competent readers are reluctant readers (Sainsbury & Schagen,

2004; McKenna et al., 1995). It is important to assist boys to develop a sense of engagement to

increase their chances of intellectual success and fulfillment beyond adolescence. It is also

important to provide opportunities for students (boys and girls) to read independently and share

their reading with others to develop reading skills and construct knowledge.   Elements of the

book club model may provide this assistance and inform our thinking of current classroom

practice. Findings from this research may also suggest the importance of putting structures in place outside of the classroom that can effectively promote the love of reading.

The second chapter of this study presents a review of the literature with regard to boys and literacy. It explores the various perspectives that attempt to explain why boys are underachieving in literacy. The literature review in Chapter 2 also explains the types of responses researchers and educators have suggested encouraging boys to read, along with a detailed overview of the research on single-sex education. It also discusses a self-deterministic theory of motivation as a theoretical framework from which to analyze data. Chapter 3 describes the methodology of the study including the context in which the study is situated as well as the methods for data collection and analysis that were used. Chapter 4 presents the major findings of the study based on the analysis of the data collected, while Chapter 5 reports implications for parents and educators based on the findings.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

To set the stage for this study with what we know about boys and literacy, this literature review first explains the different perspectives of boys and reading as well as a popular response to boys' underachievement, single-sex schooling. Then I explain a theory for motivation that provides a framework for analysis as well as describes elements that motivate readers. Finally, I begin to elaborate on what we know about book clubs in relation to how they motivate students to read.

While there is evidence that girls outperform boys in reading achievement, explanations of why this occurs vary. Theories of boys and literacy achievement, or lack thereof, fall into three general categories: biological differences, reading interests and engagement differences, and the interaction of reading with various constructions of masculinity. Most popular media that document a "boy crisis" in overall literacy achievement attribute it to biological differences in the brain. Many believe these physiological differences in the brain are the primary causes for the differing literacy achievement between the genders. Other research tends to assume there is a feminization of schooling and boys' reading interests or learning styles (the need for movement, for instance) are not addressed, or worse, dismissed. Finally, research on constructions of masculinity and its interaction with literary practices attempts to shed light on why we do not find all boys rejecting literacy.

Biological Differences

In best selling books such as *Why Gender Matters* (Sax, 2005), *The Minds of Boys* (Gurian, 2005), and *Teaching the Male Brain* (James, 2007) are references to brain research that link sex differences found in brain as the primary cause for differences in literacy achievement among boys and girls. For example, in a study cited by Sax (2005), of 829 brain scans from 387

participants ranging from 3 to 27 years of age, researchers found gender based differences in the size of the brain and varying rates of growth of the amount of white matter of the brain (Lenroot & Rhoshel, 2007). The study also found that brain differences are more extreme at younger ages but begin to diminish in later adolescence (Lenroot & Rhoshel, 2007). These popular books attempt to link physiological findings to differences in achievement, yet it is interesting to note that higher deficiencies in reading achievement and increased lack of interest in reading seem to occur around the same time (pre-adolescence) in which brain differences diminish. Therefore, it is difficult to make direct connections between brain differences and differences in reading achievement. However, brain research is still extremely new and it is a complex endeavor. While brain organization theory speculates that prenatal hormones cause physiological and behavioral changes, the field is riddled with "inconsistencies, alternative explanations, and outright contradictions" that still must be addressed (Valla & Ceci, 2011). No research has been found which explores the affects of earlier brain differences or prenatal hormonal differences on apparent gender based preferences in reading. Researchers and commentators use studies like these to emphasize the consideration of brain-based differences when educating pre-adolescents and often advocate for single-sex schooling (Sax, 2005). However, the authors of one particular study state, "Differences in brain size between males and females should not be interpreted as implying any sort of functional advantage or disadvantage" (Lenroot & Rhoshel, 2007, pg 1073). This is because while there is a small correlation between brain structures in regards to white matter and grey matter and cognitive ability, more research needs to investigate the genetic and *environmental* conditions in relation to each other (Wallace et al., 2010). Lenroot & Rhoshel (2007) argue that the 'bigger is better' conceptualization of the brain is oversimplified because structural changes particularly during childhood and adolescence are linear in white matter but

nonlinear in grey matter making it difficult to identify genetic and environmental correlations between brain structure and cognitive ability.

Biological determinist also argue that varying development of the brain, the density of the neural-network in the corpus callosum (the network of neurons connecting the hemispheres of the brain), the levels of sex hormones, and even hearing differences are important biological factors that may account for gender differences in learning and have a significant impact in literacy learning and communication (Sax, 2009; Gurian, 2005; Biddulph, 1997).   Biddulph (1997) explains that boys' greater success in mathematics and the sciences is largely due to the internal connections to the right side of the brain while the increased connections between the hemispheres of the female brain give more capacity to develop skills in reading, empathy, and problem solving through introspection.

However, these kinds of explanations are too simplistic to explain the complex functions and learning involved in reading and literacy development (Connolly, 2004). Research on the gender differences involving the corpus callosum and the density of connections between brain hemispheres is inconclusive and offers no proof about their relationship to the development of complex reading skills (Connolly, 2004). While there is evidence that these features of the brain have an impact on differences in simple motor functions, the argument has not been shown to be equally applicable for more complex functions that involve learning (Connolly, 2004). For example, brain imaging done while recalling memories (a complex brain function as compared to identifying a word or a figure) shows that they are often stored in connected sets of neurons in multiple areas across the whole brain for both genders (Head, 1999).

Though it would be irresponsible to deny that biological factors may influence learning differences among boys and girls, it is also irresponsible to make direct connections between

these biological differences (often minor) and achievement. Focusing on biological differences

implies that we need to treat boys and girls as different kinds of learners. One response to

differences in the brain, its development, and hormonal levels is to create single sex schools or

classrooms as well as alter curriculum and instruction. Some researchers suggest that the danger

in basing these approaches simply on biological factors is that alterations in curriculum and the

reorganization of schools has the potential to alienate girls, or worse, to disadvantage girls, and is

especially problematic after the great strides they have recently made in mathematics and science

achievement (Simpson, 2005; Young & Brozo, 2001). It also neglects the social contexts of

reading and learning.

Differently Literate: Interest and Engagement

There is significant quantitative research that reveals reading interests vary between the

genders. The research is consistent in finding that boys tend to prefer to read informational texts,

science fiction, fantasy, horror, and humor (Gambrell & Hunter, 2000). Approximately half of

what boys read is informational texts, joke books, comics, and hobby books (Dutro, 2003;

Gambrell & Hunter, 2000; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). Additionally, this research has reported

that girls are much more eclectic in their reading while boys tend to read from a narrow selection

of genres (Gambrell & Hunter, 2000). It also reports that as boys move through adolescence

their levels of interest decreases across the variety of genres, while interest in science fiction and

current events increases as the boys mature. Girls' interest in multiple genres tends to increase.

(Dutro, 2003; Gambrell & Hunter, 2000). Often, classroom libraries and the literature canon in

schools do not reflect the interests of boys (Newkirk, 2002).

Limitations in the genres of classroom libraries and texts chosen by teachers for

instruction as well as a lack of texts that match the individual reading abilities and interests of

students may contribute to the disparity in willingness to read between genders (Brozo, 2010;

Millard, 2007, Newkirk, 2002). As a result of her comprehensive study, Millard (1997) suggests

that boys' underachievement in reading may be a result of disparities between boys' personal

reading practices and school-based reading practices. In a study of 255 students (121 girls and

134 boys) from nine schools, Millard (1997) observed, interviewed, and surveyed students

concerning their experiences and attitudes in reading at home and school. The sample was a

wide cross–section of the population by ethnicity and social class in South Yorkshire, England.

Millard (1997) found that most texts presented in early reading instruction are narratives and

fiction giving the message that these are "real books" in which story telling is emphasized. Non-

fiction is rarely presented during reading instruction and was often discouraged as suitable

classroom reading, especially when it was hobby magazines.

Millard (1997) believes the mismatch between school texts and boys' interests as well as

the reading environments of the home may provoke boys to reject the texts that are offered and

studied in most English/Language Arts classrooms. She also notes that boys often cite mothers

and sisters as the readers in the family, even though the men of the household are sometimes

seen reading newspapers, magazines, or texts for a set purpose rather than pleasure.   She warns,

however, that choosing books based on stereotyped views of boys' interests has the potential to

reinforce those stereotypes and limit access to a broad range of texts and the potential to interest

boys in books they might not otherwise seek out or encounter.

Other research supports these findings by exploring and analyzing the ways in which

adolescent boys are literate outside of school. Smith and Wilhelm (2002) interviewed, surveyed,

and collected reading logs of forty-eight young men in grades seven through twelve of varying

ethnicity and school performance in reading. They used a variety of written profiles to allow the

boys in their study to develop responses and stories to elicit data. To avoid asking the boys

directly about their feelings about school and the different ways of being literate because they

worried that the boys would provide responses that would appease the researchers, Smith and

Wilhelm (2002) designed eight profiles (i.e. fix-it man, rapper, techie, reader, basketball player,

class clown, African American, financial hardship) that put forward various ways of being

literate and demonstrated diverse interactions with texts. This was done to determine how the

boys in their study reacted to these fictional profiles in terms of their literacy practices (Smith &

Wilhelm, 2002). The boys read each profile and were asked what they admire and do not admire

about the character in the profile as well as whether or not they see themselves in the profile.

From their findings, Smith and Wilhelm (2002) concluded that boys do not necessarily see

reading as feminized, but that they do reject school-like forms of literacy. They do not reject

school in general, but rather only "see it as a means to an end" (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002).

Therefore, they believe that most of the boys in their study see literacy as instrumental to future

success but do not necessarily feel an immediacy of the experience or, in other words, the joy of

reading. Smith and Wilhelm (2002) also support Millard's (1997) findings about the importance

of reading interests in that they found that boys saw reading to gain knowledge to contribute to

social interactions and adding to conversations. Smith and Wilhelm (2002) highlight many

examples of boys who read informational texts such as sports pages, game manuals, and hobby

magazines, at least in part, as a way to relate to their friends, families, and teachers.

Much of this kind of research looks at school literacy practice and questions the

narrowness and presumed appropriateness for boys' success of specific forms of literature in

schools often negates many boys' personal literary experiences (Brozo, 2010; Millard, 1997;

Newkirk, 2002; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). For example, this body of research questions whether

the literary canon that is typically the source of texts used in English/Language Arts classrooms

is appropriate and necessary and whether or not it can be expanded to include more non-

traditional texts that might appeal to boys. This research also questions an implied hierarchy of

literature, suggesting for example, that rap lyrics are a lesser form of poetry compared to

Shakespeare's sonnets. Based on interviews of over one hundred boys from five New Hampshire

schools, Newkirk (2002) argues that popular culture and visual media can be used as resources

for discussions of plot and characterization just as effectively as traditional literature and can

help engage boys in more traditional, school-like texts.

Many of these researchers make efforts to dispel the idea that there is a boy 'crisis' that is

based on essentialist claims that the ways boys learn is biologically different than girls and

instead offer various strategies to engage boys in school literacy because they see the problem as

less to do with boys and more to do with methods of instruction. Many researchers make the

claim that schools need to broaden what counts as appropriate school reading to include texts

such as graphic novels, non-fiction, and books with positive male archetypes to engage more

boys in reading (Brozo, 2010; Millard, 1997; Newkirk, 2002; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002).

Newkirk (2002) proposes integrating more popular culture in instruction; for example he

suggests using *Batman* and *Superman* comics while drawing connections to the heroes of Greek

mythology. Smith and Wilhelm (2006) also suggest using similar texts to "frontload" difficult

reading. Frontloading is a term used to describe activities done prior to reading the assigned text

to engage students and help them begin to construct meaning and background knowledge. This

can include reading and discussing primary historical sources to enlighten the reader about time

and place when reading a novel where the historical context is important to understand themes

and symbolism. They also suggest using drama to make reading visible and group inquiry to set

a purpose for reading to improve instruction and engage *all* students in the reading.

While Smith and Wilhelm (2002) propose instructional methods to engage students of

both genders, the primary response of schools is to directly address the complex issues of literacy

and masculinity by implementing various strategies to improve the literacy achievement of boys.

The underlying logic of many of these strategies is aimed at "re-masculinizing" schools by

hiring more male teachers, adding "masculine" literature to libraries and classrooms, inviting

male athletes and role models into classrooms to promote reading, and developing more active

ways to engage boys in reading (Connolly, 2004). This logic, however, does not address

conventional dominant constructions of masculinity and often reinforces these singular

constructions while marginalizing others (Kehler & Greig, 2005).

Constructions of Masculinity and Literacy

Social constructivists explain the differences in literacy achievement between the genders

by illuminating the relationship among various constructions of masculinity and literacy. Many

researchers have argued that the increased moral panic about boys as the 'new disadvantaged' is

a result of feminist backlash and the perception of the "feminization of schools" (Alloway &

Gilbert, 1997; Connolly, 2004; Dutro, 2003; Kehler & Greig, 2005; Martino, 2003; Smith &

Wilhelm, 2002). Many believe boys' dominant constructions of masculinity are in tension with

perceptions of the "feminine" nature of literacy (Alloway & Gilbert, 1997; Dutro, 2003; Martino,

2008). Research has shown that school-based literacy is often perceived in a way that runs

counter to dominant or hegemonic concepts of masculinity and that many of the practices within

the literacy classroom conflicts with a boy's understanding of acceptable masculine behavior

(Alloway & Gilbert, 1997). However, research has also shown that feminist influenced ideas

and curriculum do not have a negative impact on boys, but rather boys must endure definitions of

masculinity that are hegemonic and harmful to both genders (Alloway & Gilbert, 1997). Much

of the research that explores constructions of masculinity in relation to literacy utilizes Connell's

(1995) framework of hierarchical masculinities. Different forms of masculinities that emerge

can be grouped into four major categories: hegemonic, subordinate, marginalized, and complicit

(Connell, 1995). For example, gay masculinities fall into the subordinate category while ethnic

masculinities often fall into the marginalized category. Subordinate masculinities are in direct

conflict with hegemonic masculinities and therefore males who display them often suffer

indignity, humiliation, and repression. Males who display characteristics of complicit

masculinities, as described by Connell (1995), distance themselves from the dominant

hegemonic masculinities but still benefit from them. Hegemonic masculinities often value

physical prowess and aggression. Understanding this framework of masculinity construction

begins to elucidate the spectrum of responses boys have towards reading.

As most school literacy practices expect students to self-disclose feelings and emotions

and emphasize morality, Alloway and Gilbert (1997) believe this is in contrast to the morality

constructed in video games or the outward-looking focus of hegemonic masculinity where

morality is less regulated. Additionally, some boys may reject literacy as a feminized practice as

it causes friction with a boy's construction of masculinity and what it means to be a man

(Martino, 1995). Some boys even equate other boys who like reading and English with

homosexuality and by rejecting reading position themselves as a dominant masculine being

(Martino, 1995). Class, ethnicity, and sexuality greatly influence constructions of masculinity in

which privileged boys are encouraged to accept literacy tasks for future career or educational

opportunities while less privileged boys may use school to define themselves as clearly

masculine by rejecting its values including engagement with reading which begins to explain the

greater disparity of achievement among social and ethnic classes (Alloway & Gilbert, 1997;

Martino, 1995; Connolly, 2004). The construction of masculinity of many of these less

privileged boys is hegemonic.   However, boys who accept literacy tasks for future career and

educational opportunities often see literacy as instrumental to success rather than for the sake of

learning or personal enjoyment (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). These boys fall into complicit

constructions of masculinity and are often successful at balancing their manhood with literacy

learning for future success (Martino, 1995).

Response to Underachievement: Single-Sex Schooling

Since the intervention of this study is to explore how reading in an all-boy book club

contrasts with reading experiences in school as well as the possible motivational components of

the book club, it is important to understand the research on single-sex schooling. There are

several responses to boys' underachievement in literacy, such as actively seeking to employ

more male teachers or altering curriculum to be more "boy-friendly" as mentioned earlier. Yet,

the response to underachievement for boys that is obtaining the greatest traction and expanded

interest is single-sex schooling as a way to improve achievement (Glasser, 2011). Though

Ireland and Australia have had long histories with public single-sex schooling and still maintain

a sizable number of single-sex schools (Greig, 2011; Wong et al., 2002; Smith, 2010), other

English speaking nations are beginning to embrace single-sex schools as a way to address the

educational needs of boys (Martino, 2005). For example, in 2011 Canada's largest school board

announced plans to open all-male kindergarten to grade 3 schools to address male

underachievement (Greig, 2011). In the United States, attention to gender in the late 1990's and

the early 2000s influenced American education policy and provisions in the No Child Left

Behind Act (NCLB) which enabled funds to be used for single-sex schools and classrooms,

making it easier for public schools to provide single-sex instruction (U.S. Department of

Education, 2005).

Historically, single-sex schooling was common in the United States but only up to the

late 1800s (Tyack & Hansot, 1990; Riordan, 2002; Glasser, 2011). However, co-education did

not begin because of demands for equity between the sexes or because research supported mixed

gender schooling, rather co-education emerged because of economic constraints and mixed

schools were simply more efficient (Riordan, 2002; Warrington and Younger, 2001). By the

time state-sponsored mass public schooling was established in the United States, single-sex

schooling was extremely rare and typically only found in private or religious schooling

institutions (Tyack & Hansot, 1990; Riordan, 2002). However, while mixed schooling has been

commonplace for some time, there was significant inequity in the educational opportunities for

girls. For example, girls were often discouraged in mathematics and science and were expected

to enroll in courses that prepared them for homemaking rather than careers (Tyack & Hansot,

1990).

Later as a result of the social movements of the 1960's and 1970's, several policies were

established in an attempt to create equity between the sexes in American public schools through

Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 that prohibited discrimination based on sex,

significantly limiting opportunities for public single-sex schooling. Today, however, as a result

of NCLB, public single-sex schools exist in most of the country's large urban areas, including

New York City, Philadelphia, Boston, Baltimore, Seattle, San Diego, and Houston among others.

These single-sex schools only differ in the fact that a single gender attends but little has been

done to the learning environment to address the dominant constructions of masculinity (Glasser,

2011). The increased number of single-sex public schools is based more on a reaction to boys'

underachievement than to a firm research base suggesting this would be a good way to address

the problem. In fact, much of the research on single-sex schooling is conflicting and

inconclusive.

 Comprehensive reviews of the literature of single-sex schooling reveal varying degrees of

support towards the various claims of benefits in academic achievement for both sexes (Mael,

1998; Riordan, 2002; Smyth, 2010). For example, Smyth (2010) cites several studies from

England that found that academic achievement levels for males do not differ significantly

between co-educational and single-sex contexts. Yet, other studies in Smyth's (2010) review

found that girls were more likely to receive high marks in science and mathematics classes and

boys received higher marks in language classes in single-sex schools. An early comprehensive

review of the research on single-sex schools by Mael (1998) reveals that there are positive

benefits in academic achievement for both sexes. However, achievement is much more apparent

for girls and more ambiguous for boys possibly due to the overwhelming amount of research that

focuses on concerns about equity for females. Though Mael's (1998) review was

comprehensive, there was no large-scale systemic review of the research similar to the standards

of the Campbell Collaboration or the What Works Clearinghouse until the U.S. Department of

Education released a systematic review of the literature comparing single-sex and co-educational

schools in 2005 (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). The U.S Department of Education review

(2005) corroborated Mael's (1998) findings and found positive quantifiable academic outcomes

among both boys and girls in all subject achievement test scores with no adverse affects as a

result of single-sex schooling. The review also notes males are significantly underrepresented in

single-sex schooling research.

Riordan (2002) argues more strongly that the research on single-sex schooling is "*exceedingly persuasive*" (emphasis his) in affording greater achievement and equality. Specifically, Riordan (2002) argues that single-sex schooling works to promote academic achievement for low-income or working class boys *and* girls. Drawing on his own research and that of Lee (1997), Riordan (2002) lists theoretical rationales that explain why single-sex schools are more effective than co-educational schools for economically disadvantaged students. These include diminished strength of youth culture values, a greater degree of control and order, reduction in the sex differences in the curriculum, activities, and teacher-student interaction, and single gender schools require parent or student choice suggesting that students and parents are more motivated (Riordan, 2002). It is important to note, however, that the sample schools in these studies draw almost exclusively from Catholic single-sex schools. Therefore, it is possible that the rationales explaining the advantages of single-sex schools are influenced by the ethos of Catholic schooling and not entirely due to the single-sex context.

Both the Mael (1998) review and the U.S. Department of Education (2005) review acknowledge the difficulty in single-sex schooling research. First, randomized experiments are impossible because students assigned to either a treatment or control group will automatically know the group in which they are participating merely by the context of their schooling (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). Moreover, students who attend single-sex schools did so out of personal choice insinuating that they and their parents believed them to be equal or better than mixed schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2005; Mael, 1998; Riordan, 2002; Smyth, 2010). Further complicating the research on single-sex schools, staff and administration are not randomly assigned to single-sex schools and may have actively sought those positions because they believe in the concept (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). Riordan (2002) argues a

more historically entrenched issue complicating single-sex education research is that co-education as a mode of school organization was never subjected to systematic research prior to it being widely embraced and that co-education is protected as an institution because of its historical entrenchment in the culture. Therefore, current research often assumes the superiority of co-education and the burden of proof lies on the single-sex education to display significantly greater effectiveness (Riordan, 2002).

Though there are inherent problems studying single-sex education, there continues to be research that focuses on sex-role attitude, self-esteem, and teach/student/parent perceptions. Warrington & Younger (2001) found that the perspectives of the students, teachers, and parents of single-sex classes provided advantages for both sexes due to less distraction or disruption and a more protective learning environment where confidence can be built up and students participate more productively in lessons. However, while both boys and girls performed well on standardized examinations from 1988 to 1999, this achievement data was not compared to similar students in mixed-sex schooling situations. In a quantitative survey study of over 6000 high school students in both single-sex and co-educational settings in Denmark, Brutsaert & Van Houtte (2002) found that the presence of girls does not have a significant effect on boys' sense of belongingness in school, however, girls feel better integrated in single-sex schools. They also found that girls show considerably less stress and more social connectedness and solidarity while boys' sense of connectedness between co-educational and single-sex schools is shows little difference between single-sex and co-educational schools. It is unclear from the sample of this study whether or not the respondents had experiences in the opposite context to be able to compare experiences. The research only addressed a general sense of belongingness *within* each mode of education not necessarily *between* each mode.

Though the conception of self-image is complex in the research, there continues to be support for single-sex schooling. Popular authors Leonard Sax and Michael Gurain support shifts to provide public single-sex early education experiences for boys. Sax (2007) claims that kindergarten is much more focused on teaching literacy than it was thirty years ago and that this puts boys at an early disadvantage because girls' and boys' brains develop differently. Gurain (2010) maintains this biological difference view and asserts that both boys and girls need help in different areas and different instructional strategies must be used to address these gender based needs. Sax and Gurain are frequently cited in articles in popular teacher-research journals, news articles, and magazines. They have created a small cottage industry as proponents of single-sex schools, selling books, giving lectures, and leading professional development programs. In fact, Sax formed the National Association for Single-Sex Education (NASSPE), and while its website cites several reputable sources purporting the value of single-sex education, significant assumptions are made. For example, the website claims that when teaching number theory to boys, the instructor can focus on the property of the numbers but for girls the instructor should tie the theory to the real world (NASSPE, 2013).

It is these kinds of assertions and limited understanding of the complexity of gender issues that worry other researchers in relation to reinforcement of dominant constructions of masculinity. In a case study of a single school, Martino (2005) found that the motivation for creating single-sex classes was to control the poor behavior of the boys. Martino (2005) found that while the male teachers were able to connect with the boys from their points of view, those classes were less intellectually demanding. Perhaps Martino's (2005) strongest warning against single-sex schooling is the possibility of reinforcing narrow, socially constructed gender identities and relations. Because of teachers with limited knowledge of gender construction,

pedagogical choices were made based on common social constructions of gender that have an impact on social and educational development (Martino, 2005). This is echoed in research done on a single-sex educational experiment in Canada from 1966 to 1972 at Flintridge Elementary. Drawing on popular media articles, school board artifacts, and interviews with former teachers of Flintridge, Gleig (2011) found that the reasons the experiment ended was due to perceptions that the boys were becoming too aggressive and developing misogynist attitudes. Greig (2011) concludes that because schools tend to reinforce the association between masculinity and aggression, contemporary proponents of single-sex education must be wary of the possibility that all-boy contexts could enhance dominant and more aggressive constructions of masculinity.

While teachers' and administrators' limited understanding of gender construction and relations can position boys in dominant roles in relation to girls, limited, partial, and biased information about the nature of boys and their biology can also be used to make pedagogical decisions that position girls as being more equipped and adept to learn. In a study of one team of seventh-grade teachers who were allowed to separate their students into all-boy or all-girl classes in a co-educational middle school, Glasser (2011) found that single-sex offerings amplifies the differences between the sexes and positions them relative to each other. In this case, teachers' assumptions about gender differences and literacy learning position girls as superior. Teachers claimed that boys had less developed hearing, slower developed frontal lobes, and lower verbal ability. In interviews, the students reproduced these beliefs perhaps because of teachers verbalizing their assumptions. Additionally, course objectives for boys encouraged them to change their behavior, while objectives for girls were to capitalize on their talents. Glasser (2011) believes that these differences construct essentialized identities and can have negative

outcomes that include less confidence, willingness to accept challenging tasks, or lower academic expectations for boys.

However, Young (2000) shows us that thoughtful application of critical literacy pedagogy can be utilized in a space where boys begin to challenge conventional notions of masculinity. By homeschooling three boys and choosing texts to promote discussion to analyze and challenge representations of gender, Young (2000) discovered that moving gender outside of one's self to a focus on the text was a way to talk about hegemonic versions of masculinity without confronting the boys' individual behaviors and attitudes. This helped the boys to destabilize hegemonic masculine behaviors. Through the discussions, the boys had opportunities to attend to how others experience masculinity, possibly leading them to transform their attentiveness to gender identities to begin to disrupt hegemonic constructions of masculinity (Young, 2000). This important study illustrates the importance of understanding gender construction as well as the importance of creating safe places for boys to begin to deconstruct hegemonic versions of masculine identity.

Motivation

Because this study attempts to investigate the ways an after school book club might motivate and engage boys in reading outside of school based assignments, it is appropriate to review current understandings of reading and motivation. Traditionally learning to read has been characterized as the acquisition of skills such as understanding story structure, recognizing and decoding words, and comprehending text (Guthrie & Alvermann, 1999). However, in recent decades this achievement–oriented view has been expanded to include the importance of reading engagement in which readers have not only to acquire skills to make meaning out of text but to use these skills for their own purposes (Guthrie & Alvermann, 1999; Guthrie, 2008; Fink &

Samuels, 2008).   From this reading engagement view, learners' beliefs and interests influence literacy learning. Consequently, student motivations, perspectives, and social interactions are equally important to skill development in reading (Guthrie & Alvermann, 1999).

This makes both extrinsic and intrinsic sources of motivation important to understand. Extrinsic sources of motivation in regards to reading can drive students to perform certain tasks in and out of school. Extrinsic sources of motivation might include recognition, competition, and grades (Guthrie & Alvermann, 1999). Recognition refers to the desire to be known as a good reader by parents, teachers, and peers. Competition to be the best can also motivate students who want to be better than their peers. Meanwhile, grades are a strong extrinsic motivator for students who want positive evaluations by their teachers (Guthrie & Alvermann, 1999). Though extrinsic motivators can play an important role in reading engagement, their effect is limited because it is intrinsic motivation that has been correlated with reading achievement and breadth of reading (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997).

Intrinsic motivation is developed by having choice, clear and immediate feedback, an appropriate challenge, feelings of control, and self-efficacy in relation to the task at hand (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, and Ryan, 1991; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). In relation to reading, Guthrie & Alvermann (1999) present several motivators that align with goal-oriented theories of motivation. Goal oriented theories of motivation focus on the role that "purpose" plays in motivation and behavior (Wigfield & Eccles, 1992). One source of intrinsic motivation for reading is involvement that occurs when readers seek out books with the purpose or the internalized goal of "getting lost" in them. Guthrie & Alvermann (1999) identify several other internalized goals for reading such as curiosity, a sense of challenge, understanding the importance of the skill of reading, and the need to be social. These internalized goals lead to the

intrinsic motivation to read. Though Wigfield and Guthrie (1997) partially use goal-oriented

motivation theory to frame reading motivation, many of these goals or purposes for reading are

reflected in the constructs of self-determination theory.

Self-determination theory

Self-determination theory (SDT) assumes that people have certain innate needs that are

sources of motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2008). SDT is an effective way to explain the range of

student motivation in the classroom since its constructs not only include the innate desire for

competence but also emphasizes the need for control and includes the social component of

relatedness that other theories of motivation do not. Self-determination theory assumes that

"people are by nature active and self-motivated, curious and interested, vital and eager to

succeed because success itself is personally satisfying and rewarding" (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

Ryan and Deci (2000) propose that all humans have three basic innate needs that need to be met

before they will feel motivated: relatedness, competence, and autonomy. When met, these needs

are intrinsic sources of motivation that keep students engaged in learning tasks (Deci, Vallerand,

Pelletier, and Ryan, 1991).   Social contexts can facilitate or thwart satisfaction of these three

basic needs to support or hinder a person's optimal motivation.

Relatedness. The first basic tenet of SDT is relatedness. Students need to develop and

maintain relationships with other students and adults who demonstrate respect and caring (Ryan

& Deci, 2000). Social interactions in the classroom have been shown to affect student

motivation (Guthrie & Alvermann, 1999). When students in small groups believe other

members respect who they are and that they can trust the other students to listen to their

contributions, they become more invested in the activity. A social place for reading is

motivating and a classroom setting that encourages collaboration is more likely to generate

interest and effort (Morrow, Sharkey, & Firestone, 1993). Creating positive social settings can help students feel related to the teacher and to others students and can begin to fortify a student's commitment to reading.

Along with student social goals (i.e. acceptance, respect, interaction, etc.), discussion-based approaches with and around text are important to student achievement and learning comprehension strategies. When students can discuss, exchange views, and test interpretations with each other and their teacher, their literacy achievement increases. Applebee et al. (2003) found that discussion-based approaches were effective across various contexts (school, grade, ethnicity, etc.) and among students of different ethnicities and levels of academic ability. Students in this study increased literacy achievement, gained personal insight, and improved their use of comprehension strategies. Similarly, Guthrie (2008) found that cooperative learning structures in the classroom are highly beneficial for reading improvement, which can lead to students' increased feelings of competence and efficacy when encountering future reading tasks.

Competence. Ryan & Deci (2000) describe the second basic need as competence. In this section, I tie Deci & Ryan's construct of competence to the literature on self-efficacy. I do this because students who are given clear and immediate feedback within individual or group contexts and are able to accomplish a task successfully develop a sense of competence (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). Bandura (1997) states that masterly experience is the most significant source of efficacy where success builds personal efficacy to undertake challenging tasks while failure undermines it. When students are presented texts that they can understand and read fluently they are able to build confidence in their reading ability and feel more efficacious in their reading (Guthrie, 2008). Therefore, there is a cyclical relationship between competence and self-efficacy in that one can facilitate the other.

With respect to reading, many researchers focus on students' sense of self-efficacy and students' beliefs concerning their ability and performance (Bandura, 1977; Eccles et al., 1983, Nicholls, 1984; Weiner, 1985). Bandura (1995) defined self-efficacy as "the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (1995, p. 2). In this view, students self-evaluate by making judgments about their ability to accomplish a task based on their perceptions of prior experience and support. Setbacks for struggling readers may erode their self-efficacy towards reading, thereby decreasing their motivation and persistence to read (Fink & Samuels, 2008). According to Bandura (1994) there are four ways to develop self-efficacy in a specific domain: mastery experiences or successful completion of a task (similar to Deci & Ryan's competence construct), social modeling where similar persons are observed successfully completing a task, social persuasion through positive verbal encouragement, and psychological or emotional responses such as moods and physical responses to stress. Schunk & Zimmerman (2007) found that modeling and explicit teaching of reading strategies could influence children's sense of efficacy. They demonstrate that modeling is an effective means to build the self-regulatory skills necessary for reading and writing to build students' academic skills, thereby raising self-efficacy (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007). Since self-efficacy is thought to affect individual task choice, effort, perseverance, and achievement (Schunk, 2003), an important implication for reading motivation is that when children believe they are competent readers, they will read more (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997).

Since even children who are efficacious and possess the skills to read may not do so (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997), it is important to understand other factors that drive children to perform one task over another. A motivational framework in relation to reading that only takes into account self-efficacy is not enough. Feelings of competence will not always enhance

intrinsic motivation unless they are supported by an individual's strong sense of autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000). People must not only feel they are competent and efficacious at doing a particular task, but also they must, "experience their behavior as self-determined for intrinsic motivation to be in evidence" (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

 Autonomy. As a result of an individual's need to experience their behavior as self-determined, autonomy is another motivational construct that fosters intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Studies have shown that motivation increases when students have opportunities to make choices about what they read and how they read (Hyungshim, Reeve & Deci, 2010; Gambrell, 2011). In observations of teachers' instructional styles and student engagement in 133 high school classrooms, Hyungshim et al. (2010) found teacher styles that structured and supported autonomy predicted observed and student-reported engagement. Similarly, Guthrie (2008) argued that when students believe they are in charge and have at least some control in certain aspects of their learning, they tend to be more motivated and engaged in learning activities. In another study surveying 1800 students and many interviews examining the factors that motivate middle school boys to read, Ivey and Broaddus (2001) found that students valued a sense of purpose and significant choice in the types of texts and even physical space to read. The importance of choice and control as a factor underpinning motivation cannot be overstated. In a study that surveyed 1600 students in an urban high school who participated in a Literacy Day event and received free books as part of a voluntary reading program, McGaha and Igo (2012) support the findings of Ivey and Broaddus (2001) in that they found students responded positively to a program that offered a choice of high interest reading materials. They report that they were "struck" by how positive students felt about the autonomy the program gave them including having personal choice in their selection of the reading material.

In a study that documented the importance of autonomy in which three hundred third and fifth graders were surveyed using the Motivation to Read Profile (MRP) and forty-eight students were interviewed about their motivation to read, Gambrell (1996) reported that students experienced high levels of enjoyment when they chose reading partners, proximity in the room, and how they would precede with the reading task. They found that even "reluctant" readers were more likely to read when they could select books that were of interest to them. They believe their findings suggest that the motivation to read is associated with four features of literacy learning; choice, familiarity, and social interaction and are similar to the three key constructs of self-determination theory described here: relatedness, competence, and autonomy (Gambrell, 1996).

Book Clubs

Reading groups have a long history dating back to the 12th century where communities of educated women began to challenge the authority and control of the meaning and interpretation of texts by those of higher status and power, typically white men, thereby challenging the traditions of the masculine Western world (Long, 2003). In fact, women's reading groups became the impetus for the American library system we have today (Fister, 2005). Reading groups offered camaraderie with other women and time away from the rigors and intellectual loneliness of domestic life. (Long, 2003). Additionally, reading groups of women from various ethnic groups and backgrounds have used literature and the common construction of knowledge through discussion of the literature to become vocal, knowing participants in political and social life (Twomey, 2007).

While reading groups began to give groups of women a voice, reading is often considered a solitary and quiet activity. Yet, the popularity of book clubs implies that reading is indeed a

social experience (Fister, 2005). This is evidenced in the recent popularity of Oprah's Book

Club. Oprah's Book Club combined the television talk show format with letters, emails, and

face-to-face conversations with viewers about a common printed book (Striphas, 2003). Striphas

(2003), who believed in the important feminist possibilities of the book club, wrote that the

Oprah's Book Club broadcasts went beyond discussing what happened in the novels and author

interviews but highlighted characters, events, and themes that were important to the viewers and

provoked women "to question the normative powers of a patriarchal society." The Oprah Book

Club certainly had a far-reaching impact on the reading practices of Oprah followers; however,

reading clubs were also prevalent with women in the 1950s and 1960s as a result of the Book-of-

the-Month Club. The Book-of-the-Month Club and reading groups allowed many women to

explore, destabilize, and rebuild gender and ethnic identities and authority by interacting with

each other and having direct power over the text in how they chose to read and interpret the text

(Twomey, 2007). In addition to the rise of the numbers of face-to-face book clubs in bookshops,

universities, and even workplaces, the Internet has become a space for a sizeable number of

discussion groups and forums around books. In a study of an online "4 Mystery Addicts" forum,

Fister (2005) found that members often commented on the warmth, friendliness, and support of

the group beyond the text in spite of it being a virtual community. Also, members, who were

careful to minimize the possibility of offending others, worked through controversial and ethical

issues that surfaced. Often the discussion threads generated from the mystery novels the group

read would concentrate on learning about new technologies and science or geopolitical events.

One thread was for parents who were concerned about how reading was modeled in the home

(Fister, 2005). Whether face-to-face, online, or through television, it is clear that reading groups

not only provide entertainment, but they can become catalysts for social interaction, support,

destabilization of social norms, and progress.

Some researchers suggest that the reading practices and social benefits of reading groups may have implications for the classroom. Smith (1996) found that when adults talked about why they valued their book club conversations, common responses concentrated on the social aspect of learning more about their colleagues, the equality between members, the spirit of cooperation, and the freedom of expression. Hall (2003) asserts that classroom study of literature can spoil the joy of reading and that academics, teachers, and administrators should take the reading practices buoyed by *The Oprah Winfrey Show* seriously which allow democratic free flowing discussion for participants to use the text to relate to personal experience and question societal norms. During classroom discussions teachers are far more likely to keep their feelings about the text hidden and limit moral discussions (Smith, 1996). Addington (2001) adds that while traditional literacy instruction may supply readers with more facts and details about the text they are reading, book club conversation can do more to engage the reader and promote a love for reading by understanding one's self and the relation of the book or to a larger global context. Book club discussions are also more democratic and collaborative and less teacher-driven than classroom discussions about books (Beach & Yussen, 2011). When teachers use book clubs in their classrooms, they are encouraged to challenge the typical patterns teacher/student of discourse to make the students' personal experiences important sources of knowledge in the discussion of the literature as well as allow students to select and recommend books that appeal to the class and result in engaging conversation (Smith, 1996). Positive changes in attitude toward reading can occur as students begin to see themselves as part of the world they live in and come to appreciate that they can learn simply by reading (James, 2003). When students talk about quality literature together they can begin to make sense of the text by using context clues

and guidance from other members as well as learn to support and defend assertions with

evidence from the text and personal knowledge (Kong & Fitch, 2003). Complementary evidence

from high school librarian sponsored book club interventions also find that book clubs motivate

reluctant readers, motivate students to attend school, and that students who participate in book

clubs check out more books (Miskinis, Freyberger, & Vetter, 2010). However, it is not clear yet

how and if these instructional suggestions translate into improved test scores and literacy levels.

Book Clubs in Educational Contexts

While there is limited research on the effects of book clubs on the reading practices,

attitudes, and achievement of adolescent students, and in particular, male students, the research

that does exist reports several positive effects and often mirrors the SDT motivational constructs.

Book clubs have been found to promote student choice and interests, become social outlets for

students to try out new social positions, challenge ideas, and improve attitudes toward reading

(Appleman, 2006; Brozo, 2005; Alvermann, Young, Green, & Wisenbaker, 1999).

Choice and Interest. As an electronic member of a book club for seven, seventh grade

boys who held negative attitudes toward reading and were one or two grade levels below average

in reading, Brozo (2005) found the out-of-school book club model to be a favorable alternative to

traditional remedial reading practices. He believes that because the book club allows the

students to select the texts they will read based solely on their interests and permits student self-

expression and humor, the model serves to promote entry points to reading (Brozo, 2005). The

book club differentiates itself from classroom practice not only in setting but also because the

selection of the book is purely for pleasure (Appleman, 2006). This freedom of choice in the

selection of the text fulfills the innate need for the motivation construct of autonomy in self-

determinist theory. In addition, in a book club for kids, in contrast to the classroom, the reason

for participating and reading is voluntary with no agenda or evaluation. This creates autonomy and can enhance the motivation to read (Appleman, 2006).

Discussion. After years of studying classroom literacy practices in urban and suburban school districts, Appleman (2006) launched the Breakfast Book Club project with several teachers and librarians. The purpose of the book club was multifaceted. It was designed to help students navigate the terrain between adult and adolescent literacy practice, school selected and student selected literature, and the variety of adolescent identities. Studying the eighty students that participated in the book clubs, Appleman (2006) found that successful book clubs can help increase the likelihood of out-of-school pleasure reading, counteract literacy pedagogy that might cause students to resist reading, and expand our understanding of the gendered nature of literacy practice because of deep, self-reflective discussion. Also, because teachers were not familiar with the text prior to reading, students were able to observe their teachers struggle with meaning making and interpretive reading strategies (Appleman, 2006). Therefore, students also co-constructed meaning with their teachers who emerged as fellow members.

Alvermann, Young, Green, and Wisenbaker (1999) also noted that "real" discussion, often a hallmark of book clubs, promoted students' feelings of competence and control. In a study to understand adolescent perceptions and negotiations of literacy practices in four after-school book clubs, one of which was composed of all males, Alvermann et al. (1999) found that students valued deep conversation about the books in their book clubs as opposed to discussing books in school to "get what they need to know for the test." In these book clubs, awareness grew that the discussion was for the sake of gaining a deeper appreciation of the text and its meanings rather than evaluation, increasing the motivation to read and participate (Alvermann et al., 1999).

Discussion is a key factor in high quality book clubs (Beach & Yussen, 2011).   In a study of a men's book club and a women's book club, Beach and Yussen (2011) examined the practices of adult book clubs. They note that adult book club members developed dynamic and valuable discussions because members drew on their own experiences related to the novel, valued the different expertise and orientations members brought to the group, and developed topics in extended stretches with consistent contributions from members (Beach & Yussen, 2011).

High quality discussions are different than recitation. They have their own look and sound. First, high quality discussions should closely resemble natural conversation driven by an authentic question that requires new information, and it occurs at a slower, more extended pace than discourse driven by recitation questions (Nystand & Gamoran, 1990). This means students need appropriate time to organize thoughts as well as time to discuss fewer topics over longer stretches if time. Second, it is essential to foster a positive social-emotional context where students are respected, encouraged, and treated as equals (Smith, 1996). Students may need guidance and modeling in how productive conversations work, and all students should be encouraged to participate. Lastly, quality discussions are more democratic in nature; the climate the teacher creates is essential to student participation (Wilen, 2004, Smith, 1996).

In the classroom, however, teachers use high quality discussions sparingly (Wilen, 2004). Plus, low-ability students are often subjected to watered down curriculum and tasks where the emphasis is on repetition and recitation rather than extended discussions that encourage them to apply higher- level thinking skills (Nystand & Gamoran, 1990). Classroom discussions are rarely egalitarian but are predominantly quasi-discussions in the form of teacher directed question and answers or recitation of knowledge of the text or subject matter (Wilen, 2004).

Teachers unintentionally tend to control discussions by reacting to each student response instead of interjecting with a comment or a question at significant points during the conversation (Wilen, 2004).   Teachers may feel uncomfortable relinquishing control of the discourse in their classrooms. Yet, discussions can be assessed using rubrics (Wilen, 2004) and are an important and engaging instructional method that promotes critical thinking, decision-making, and community.

   Social Outlets. In addition to the opportunities for choice, control, competence building, and productive discussions, book clubs are social outlets where adolescents can try out new social positions and new friendships form (Alvermann et al., 1999). Interviews with adolescents who participated in book clubs revealed that they value the social nature of participating in them. Alvermann et al. (1999) believe this is significant and has implications for thinking about different modes of instruction that promote and support the development of a community of readers. Furthermore, Whittingham and Huffman (2009) found that the attitudes of book club participants, even those who spent little time participating, developed and increased self-efficacy in reading and demonstrated an over-all increased interest in reading and learning. They believe this is due to the fact that struggling and resistant readers connected with other students who served as models and created opportunities to realign their initial attitudes toward reading. In somewhat the same vein, Dias-Mitchell and Harris (2001) explain that because book clubs emphasize reading as an "experience" rather than an academic task in which one is then evaluated, they can attract even reluctant readers because the reading is viewed as a social event minus the typical demands of academic work. The social component of book clubs seems key to the motivation and engagement in reading.

Conclusion

Since this study explores boys' reading experiences in an after school book club in relation to their reading experiences in school, it is important to understand how book clubs have shown promise in engaging students to read more widely outside of school, and how the practice might inform literacy learning within schools. It is also important to understand the motivation to read as well as our current understanding of boys and their literacy learning as this understanding will provide a basis for which to analyze what happens and what is said during our book club sessions. Much has been written about the complexity of gender and literacy learning, but there is a gap in the research on how specific methods may enhance boys reading engagement, in particular how boys' experiences in book clubs might motivate them to read more. Even less research exists about the promise of specific methods from the perspectives of the boys themselves, therefore, this study puts the boys' perspectives and experiences about the book club intervention at the forefront in an attempt to understand how this intervention might be useful for schools to engage more boys in reading while broadening their reading experiences.

The literature suggests that book clubs are potential ways to engage boys in reading and provide opportunities for text-based choice and the development of competence and efficacy through the social interaction and support of the group. This has informed the design approach of this study through observation and facilitation of an after school book club in action. It also attempted to obtain data by capitalizing on the social connections of the group in focus group interviews. Additionally, the boys were given a voice and a sense of control in the research through their positions as co-researchers who shared the process and their perspectives of book clubs as a way to motivate and engage boys in reading.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This research study used an instrumental case study design (Stake, 2005) to provide a rich context and description of an afterschool book club for middle school boys as an intervention to motivate and engage boys to read. The case in this study is a group of seventh and eighth grade boys who display a range of reading interests and abilities.   The purpose of an instrumental case study is to provide insight into the general issue (Stake, 2005) of the lack of motivation to read by studying how boys' literacy experiences in a book club differ from their experiences in their literacy classes and how a book club model might motivate boys to read more outside of school.   Similarly, Denizen and Lincoln (2000) define an instrumental case study as a way to provide insight and to facilitate our understanding of a particular issue. While examining the context in depth, it also allows the researcher to pursue an external interest, in this case possible supplemental programming to engage male readers. The case itself plays a supportive role to aid understanding of a particular issue (Stake, 2005). This design was also useful to explore the themes that may emerge in the book club as it relates to reading motivation and engagement as well as the possible role gender played. This case is meant to inform educators and policy makers concerning reading instruction and supplementary programming to encourage wide reading.

A case study is defined as the exploration and description of a 'bounded system' of a particular case over a period of time (Creswell, 1998). Inherent in the case study design is the expectation and the opportunity to access multiple sources of information (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 2009; Gall, Gall & Borg, 2010). These multiple sources of data provide a detailed description of the case and allow for themes to emerge (Creswell, 1998).   Information regarding the boys' interests in reading, their perceptions of book clubs, their participation in their literacy

classes, and the benefits and challenges of the book club intervention were collected through the use of field observations and focus group interviews to develop a complete description of the boys' experience in the book club. Short individual interviews were used as member checks to determine each boy's individual perception of preliminary findings. Initially, the boys were asked to keep co-researcher journals to provide any additional details about their experience. However, after the first focus group interview it became clear that this was unnecessary and could potentially have a negative impact on the book club experience. This was due to the fact that the boys reported that the tasks that were associated with reading in school, and especially the writing tasks, prevented them from enjoying the reading. Also, the completion of a journal mirrored school-like tasks they were expected to complete weekly. This was antithetical to the context I was trying to create in the book club. Therefore, the co-researcher journal was discarded as a data collection method.

District Setting

Paramount to case study design is situating the case within its setting (Creswell, 1998). This study was conducted in the Central Jersey School District where I teach, in a largely middle to upper-middle class township in New Jersey. The community has approximately 37,000 residents and covers almost 55 square miles (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). This suburban district houses six elementary schools (K-4), an intermediate school (5-6), a middle school (7-8), and one high school (9-12) that services over six thousand students. The district is designated as being in the "I" District Factor Group. The District Factor Grouping is a ranking of the districts in the state of New Jersey to represent an approximation of the district's socioeconomic status. The lettered ranking from lowest socioeconomic status, A, to the highest, J, is a useful tool used to examine student achievement (New Jersey Department of Education, 2010). The district's I

factor group rating is a reflection of the upper middle socioeconomic status of many of the township's residents.

Demographically, most residents (86%) are white, but 3% are African American, 4% Hispanic, and 7% Asian. The district enjoys a reputation for excellence and has consistently achieved or exceeded NCLB standards. The 2009 and 2010 NCLB reports reveals that between 89% and 91% of the students scored proficient or above for reading on the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJASK), the state's standardized test measure used for meeting NCLB accountability requirements (New Jersey Department of Education, 2010).

Sample

The participants in this study were seventh and eighth grade boys who were selected using purposeful sampling (Creswell, 1998, Merriam, 2009). The sampling strategy allowed me to select dependable informants to who could engage in depth in the book club process. This made it possible to compare and contrast the experiences of the participants in relation to the central issues and themes that emerged through analysis (Patton, 2008).

In addition to identifying participants who could fully engage in the process, it was essential to have selection criteria to choose research participants to represent differing characteristics that are of interest and relevant to the research questions. In other words, I wanted to develop a purposeful sample that would provide insight into the varying experiences boys have in school and with reading (Merriam, 2009; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2010; Patton, 2008). Therefore, I made a concerted effort to select boys that demonstrated a range of reading interests and motivation. This included boys who report a lack of interest in reading in general, boys who rarely read on their own outside of school-assigned tasks, and boys that demonstrated a range of reading proficiencies. Discussions with the boys' literacy teachers and their parents, as well as

my own observations and interactions with the boys in relation to their motivation and desire to

read outside of school-based assigned reading, helped inform selection. Specifically, these boys

were selected because they seemed to be on the threshold of becoming unmotivated readers and

perhaps lower achieving readers. These boys were approached based on comments from their

literacy teachers that often were in relation to the fact that the boys performed sufficiently on

assessments but resisted reading outside of assigned tasked or interactions I had with parents

who inquired about getting their sons more motivated to read. Additionally, I personally

observed the boys' reading resistance in either conversations we had when they were students of

mine or when I recommended a certain book that I thought they might enjoy.

Having boys with a range of reported and observed motivation to read, rather than simply

struggling readers, was important because research has demonstrated that even boys who start

out as engaged and skilled readers may lose their desire to read widely on their own and time

spent reading drops significantly despite ability beginning in late elementary school and into

middle school (Gambrell & Hunter, 2000). Typically, declining interest in reading happens after

the third grade when learning to read is gradually replaced by reading to learn (Ivey, 2010).

Therefore, because the sample of participants represents a range of engagement and

achievement, their diversity makes them relevant informants; they are all potentially on the cusp

of decreased engagement and therefore potentially decreased achievement.

The boys were selected from a pool of students I have previously had as math students

during the 2010-2011 and the 2011-2012 school years. I personally asked approximately 15-18

boys to participate in the study. Though I intended to limit the book club to eight to ten boys, I

purposefully sought more participants than were needed for the group. I anticipated that many of

the boys that I asked would be too busy to attend meetings because they were involved in several

other extra-curricular activities. This made it difficult to schedule a time to meet for the book

club even if boys were interested. Parents of the boys' who were willing and able to participate

were notified via email about the study and were asked for consent in regards to their children's

participation.

The Boys

   As stated earlier, all of the boys had been math students of mine when they were in sixth

grade. They are all proficient or advanced proficient readers according to their NJASK scores.

It was important to have this range of reading ability because it has been demonstrated that even

boys with significant reading skill loose the motivation to read as they enter adolescence,

potentially causing them to fall behind (Gambrell & Hunter, 2000). Each boy that participated

selected a pseudonym for himself that is used throughout this report. Many of the pseudonyms

are the names they have chosen in their Spanish class. Other pseudonyms were simply chosen

because the boy liked the name. The pseudonyms do not reflect the demographics of the group.

While I made efforts to create a group that reflected the demographics of the district, I was only

somewhat successful. There are no Latino and African American boys in the group. Out of the

seven students, five identified themselves as Caucasian, and two are of Indian heritage, their

parents being first generation immigrants to the United States. The boys' identities were kept

confidential and pseudonyms were used at all times during analysis and in the report of findings.

   The following section gives a brief description of each boy to demonstrate the different

personalities and interests of the boys in the book club. Each thumbnail briefly describes the

boy's grade level, interests, school life, and relationship with reading. This information was

gathered through my own observations and relationship with each boy and their own reports

gathered through interviews, book club conversations, and focus group interviews.

Enrique. Enrique is currently a seventh grade student in an on-level literacy class, but he excels in math. He strongly dislikes writing and struggles with spelling. Enrique often talked about the ways he minimized reading for school, frequently reading just enough to understand the gist of the story or to answer comprehension questions. He has a quick wit, and he often describes things that appear illogical to him in his reading or assignments he is given in school. Enrique is well liked by most of his teachers for his quick sense of humor, but this can sometimes get him in trouble because he will speak out of turn. He plays hockey and baseball and enjoys skiing with his family. He is one of five children in the family and the youngest boy.

Roger. Roger is in eighth grade and was once a classified student who received special education services. He has been tutored for much of his elementary years, but has made significant academic progress throughout his middle school years. He now no longer needs special education services and was even placed in an advanced math class. Roger appreciates order and is particular about following rules, wanting others to follow the rules. Roger is a reluctant reader on his own, but will read what he is assigned to read for school. He reports that he focuses on comprehending the story and being able to restate what he has read. Roger still has some difficulty making inferences, discerning implicit meanings, and understanding symbolism. He is an avid train enthusiast and is on the cross-country team for the middle school. He is also active on the high school stage crew.

Xavier. Xavier is a seventh grader who is the older of two boys; his parents are both educators. Both of his parents worked in the district at one time, and his mother currently is a math teacher at the middle school he attends. Xavier shares a love of Disney with his family and visits the Disney theme parks often. Like Enrique, Xavier is in an advanced math class and a proficient literacy class. He dislikes any reading he considers dark and dramatic or "far-

fetched." Although Xavier says he does not enjoy what he calls "far-fetched" books, he did

enjoy the *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* series of books (which are far fetched by almost any

definition), perhaps because they have happy endings and are uplifting. He is outgoing, polite,

and involved in many activities including cross-country, student council, and a youth group at his

church. He is bright and sensitive and works hard to do well in school.

Jaylan. Jaylan is an eighth grader who is very outgoing, outspoken, and charming. He is

has a mature and sophisticated sense of humor. He is president of the student council and plays

on several teams, but particularly excels at basketball. He has a wide range of movie and video

game interests and refers to them often in his conversations. He is the younger of two brothers

and looks up to his older brother who is now earning a graduate degree. He often talks about

how his brother encourages him to work hard and do the right thing. Jaylan is in all advanced

classes, but frequently talks about hating reading. He can be critical of his teachers but enjoys

the attention he gets from them for his quick sense of humor. Jaylan often uses metaphors when

he speaks. Although he says he is proud of his Indian heritage, he often uses it to get a laugh and

confront Indian stereotypes.

Pablo. Pablo is in seventh grade. He is the younger of two children and the only son in

his family. He lost his father suddenly just last year. His extended family is large and tight-knit,

and he spends a lot of time with his uncle, cousins, and grandfather. In my observations of him

in our book club this year, I noted that he is soft-spoken, yet extremely articulate. This skill

might come from his recently developed love of reading. He attributed the *Percy Jackson and*

the Olympians series and other books like them to his change of heart. He rarely read until he

found the *Percy Jackson* series. He is in an on-level literacy class and reports that he will read

on his own. In our group, he often waits for everyone to finish talking before he states his own

views, and seems unafraid to bring the conversation back to his point if the conversation has

drifted in the meantime.   Like all the other boys in the group, he is very active in extra-curricular

activities such as soccer. He is also a guitar player.

 Lamar. Lamar is an extremely insightful and mature seventh grader. He has many of

the same interests as Jaylan and often talked about video games, movies, and television shows he

has enjoyed. His teachers and other adults appreciate him for his sophistication and

insightfulness. I have always seen Lamar as an avid reader, and he reports that he often checks

out adult books from the municipal library. A favorite author of his is Steven King, for example.

He reports that he appreciates looking for the deeper meaning in the text and loved to decode the

symbolism of the novels we read. Yet, he says he often convinces himself to do other things

rather than read, and sometimes tries to cover up how much time he plays his video games from

his parents. Lately, he says he has lost a lot of his interest in reading. He enjoys books about

conspiracy theories and World War II, but finds the reading levels of the books he has found on

this topic to be too high. He reports that the school libraries do not have the books he likes and

the levels are too low. Lamar is in all advanced classes and is very popular with the other

students. Like the other boys, he is also an athlete, playing football and baseball.

 Philippé. Philippé is a seventh grader who is the oldest child and has two siblings. He is

very observant of the behavior of others and listens intently. He is in all advanced classes, but

says he typically reads only what is assigned in school. He says that he sees school as a means to

an end and often describes the work he does in school as important for his future. He reported

that he does, however, like his current literacy class. He has been inspired by his teacher, who

loves Edgar Allen Poe, to read more of this author's works outside of class, and says he loves the

darkness and mystery in the writing. Philippé wants to learn new things, but believes he should

do so on his own terms. He says he should be able to choose what he wants to learn from a book and how to show that he is learning. He is compliant with his literacy teacher's expectations on the assignments he is given, but frequently he says he does not see the value in doing them beyond getting a good grade or doing well on an upcoming assessment.

Book Club Setting

The book club met once a week at a local pizzeria within walking distance of the middle school. The boys' parents dropped them off in the evening at 5:30. Book club sessions were originally scheduled to last approximately one hour. However, after our initial meeting, the boys felt the session should last an hour and a half. This gave them time to settle in, eat their pizza, and talk about school before getting around to discussing the book. We all crowded around a circular table in the back of the restaurant on Thursday nights beginning in the middle of November and met almost every week until mid-April, for a total of twenty meetings. The boys committed to reading two books with the book club, but as we reached this milestone, they decided they wanted to continue meeting in order to read one more book together.

The book club followed a format similar to the one I had used previously in the earlier book group. The boys chose the books we read together from a book list I developed (See Appendix A) or from among those they suggested to the group. Some of the books I had read prior to the book club, and for those I offered a brief synopsis and my opinions about them. Other books that I presented were books I knew were required reading for high school. I presented these books to the boys as options to help them get familiar with texts prior to having to read them in high school. This was similar to how had been books selected in previous book clubs that I facilitated for students.

Allowing the boys' input in selecting the text was important for the study because there is a significant body of research that correlates reading engagement and motivation with choice (Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006; Pitcher et al, 2010; Ivey, 2010). The boys chose the first book, *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*, by consensus. This book was part of a required summer reading list for middle school students at one time. None of the boys had read it previously. Prior to reading our second book, I brought in copies of books I suggested from which they could choose. I gave each boy one of the books to bring home to look through to see if it might be one that would be of interest. There was not consensus for the second book, *World War Z.* However, the boys who were not interested in *World War Z* agreed to read it if their choice, *Flowers for Algernon,* was our third selection. This was decided after some discussion. A couple of the boys were concerned with the length of the book and one other was not interested in the subject matter. There was no cajoling by the members that wanted to read the *World War Z.* All the boys were being polite and trying to be accommodating, until one boy made the suggestion to read *Flowers for Algernon* for the next book since all the boys wanted to read at least one more book before we ended our meetings even though the initial expectation of the study was to read two books. Although other options were discussed, all the books the boys ended up choosing were from the list I had created. Once the boys decided on the book they wanted to read, depending on their preference, I provided a hard copy or digital copy of the book for each of them.

In an attempt to break down possible barriers to participating as equals, the students were invited to call me by my first name. This also mirrors how I organized previous book clubs with students outside of school. It was important for me to do this in an attempt to build a report with the members that was not teacher-like to make the reading less school-like. Smith and Wilhelm

(2002) found that the boys in their study did not necessarily reject reading but rather rejected the school-like nature of the reading that was expected of them. I also felt from my past experience facilitating book clubs that reducing my teacher-like role helped the boys to develop more naturalistic conversation rather than relying on me to guide all discussion. As much as possible I wanted to prevent the participants seeing me as an authority figure rather than a fellow reader and collaborator in making meaning. Granted, this was not easy to overcome and it never fully was. However, the boys did eventually become used to calling me by my first name. In addition to my attempts at decreasing the authority of my teacher status, the boys were allowed to come to a consensus on how much they would read for a particular week and there were no consequences for neglecting to complete the agreed upon reading selection. While it was clear that I was the facilitator of the group, all attempts were made to give the boys a voice in any decisions that were made. For example, when we realized that we were struggling to finish *World War Z*, the decision of whether to continue reading the book or leave it to move on to the next selection was left to the boys to decide.

During each session, we discussed the reading selection for that week. Given that talking about texts can create shared meaning, improve comprehension, and increase engagement (Allington, 2002; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1995), I facilitated the discussion by asking open-ended questions about the texts. For example, I asked the boys what they thought the author meant in a particular passage. Discussion questions were designed to create conversation by encouraging participants to share opinions or debate an issue. The questions were often spontaneous but were selected with the intention of provoking debate. For example, one meeting while reading *Flowers for Algernon* when the boys were discussing what it would be like to be able to improve one's intelligence with surgery, I asked whether they think science goes too far. This was to

keep the conversation going but also to encourage the boys to think about the reading on a deeper level and use the reading to connect to larger issues. However, after three weeks it was unnecessary for me to instigate conversation; the boys would begin talking about the book as soon as (or often before) they sat down at the table. The boys were encouraged to speak freely during our conversations and the discussion wandered wherever they took it. They did not have to raise their hand to speak and they could respond to one another as they liked.

Initially, I planned time for reading aloud during most sessions. Reading aloud has been shown to engage readers in all grade levels while improving comprehension (Allington, 2002). The boys could choose to read aloud themselves or have me read to them. Again, this borrowed from my previous experiences with middle school students and book clubs. It was often a source for further discussion and I believed it helped students develop an inner voice as they read. However, the boys said they preferred to spend the whole time discussing the texts rather than read aloud during our sessions. Though this was the case, I would select very small passages, no more than two paragraphs, from the week's reading that I thought were interesting or could spark deep conversation or debate and I would read that particular selection aloud. I did this because I wanted to model this as a possibility for the boys to begin their own discussion or debate. The boys were free to do this as well and did on a few occasions. However, usually the boys simply enjoyed talking.

A typical session would usually begin with the boys describing their likes and dislikes of the reading for the week. This was often spontaneous after the second session. While we talked about what had happened in the story, the boys would often make connections to other aspects of their lives and the conversation could drift onto various topics. At times, I would attempt to refocus the conversation if it got to the point of having little to do with the text by asking

questions that could instill debate or discussion that was specific to it. Sometimes the boys would realize they had veered away from talking about the book and would bring themselves back. Other times I would find a passage I thought was meaningful or describe something I noticed that had to do with symbols in the text. For example, while reading *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*, I mentioned that I noticed that even though the story is about the death of the main character, each chapter starts with a birthday of his and with each new person he meets in heaven, the character seems to be reborn once he has learned a new lesson. A comment like this would redirect the conversation without admonishing the boys for getting completely off topic. In addition to talking about the readings, the discussions included talk about school and in particular the boys' literacy classes, the reading they were doing in those classes, and how they felt about it. It is possible that these spontaneous conversations the boys had about their literacy classes happened because of the first focus group interview where they were asked several questions about what they thought of reading and their experiences in literacy. It is also possible that the boys brought this up naturally as a way to connect with one another since they did not all have the same teachers.

Pizza was always served at our meetings and we immediately fell into a routine, sitting in the same seats, ordering one sausage and one plain pizza, and a pitcher of Coke and a pitcher of Sprite. The routine was so engrained that our waiter knew to bring garlic powder and extra lemon wedges and exactly who would want them.

The Books

The first book the boys chose to read for our book club was *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*, by Mitch Albom. Like the rest of the books, this was chosen from the list I provided. The boys seemed interested in the story because it starts with the death of the main character.

Several of the boys knew people who read and liked the book and wanted to read it for that reason.

The book was published in 2003 and is a popular best seller. The story begins on a fictional amusement park pier called Ruby Pier. Eddie, the main character, is the eighty-something maintenance man for the rides on the pier. The story opens with his death as he attempts to save a young girl from a malfunctioning ride. Upon arriving in heaven Eddie meets five different people who were touched by his life in some way. Each person Eddie meets in heaven waits in his or her own version of heaven to help Eddie learn the value of his life. The story is filled with flashbacks to Eddie's life, and each chapter begins with one of Eddie's birthdays. Each birthday and flashback is tied to the lesson Eddie ultimately learns from each of the five people in heaven.

The second book chosen was *World War Z*, by Max Brooks. While not all of the boys wanted to read this book as they had with *The Five People You Meet in Heaven,* the four boys that did, wanted to read it because they knew that a movie version was to be released in the summer. They wanted to read the book before seeing the movie to be able to compare them. In fact, the boys suggested that the whole club meet to see the movie together once it was released.

Brooks wrote the novel as a follow-up to his *Zombie Survival Guide.* While the guide is written like many how-to books, *World War Z*, is written as a government report supposedly based on a collection of oral histories from various survivors of a zombie apocalypse. The report is written years after zombies, who have reanimated because of a rare virus, have overrun the world. While the story sounds fantastical, it is written like an official government report of a catastrophic epidemic or event, such as an uncontrollable virus or mega-tsunami that has the potential to topple governments, destroy cities, and force people to make extremely difficult no-

win decisions. Rather than a narrative, the book is written as a collection of individual accounts

from people all over the world. These personal accounts hint at the political, social, religious

and environmental changes that occurred as the world almost ended as a result of the pandemic.

The situation is analogous to issues surrounding the possible affects of attitudes of American

isolationism in the world today and prior to World War II.

The book is not required reading for the school district and is not found in its libraries. It

has intense descriptions of war and graphic details about zombies. There are also instances of

strong language used by the various interviewees in the story.

The third book the boys chose to read was *Flowers for Algernon* by Daniel Keyes, and

was published in 1960. This book was chosen because the boys seemed to have a genuine

interest in the story. It was a runner up both times we decided on a book. In fact, two of the

boys who were not as interested in *World War Z* began reading *Flowers for Algernon* as we were

finishing up the latter. One boy had the copy I gave him to skim at a previous meeting and the

other checked the book out of the local library.

The story is told through progress reports written by the main character, Charlie Gordon,

as he goes through changes in his intelligence as a result of an experimental brain surgery.

Charlie has a below average IQ but a passion to learn and be independent. He cleans and makes

deliveries for a bakery while attending a school for special adults. Two doctors and his teacher

believe Charlie is the best human candidate for the surgery after seeing the successful outcome it

had on a lab mouse named Algernon.

The surgery was a success on Charlie and his progress reports indicate to the reader that

Charlie's intelligence noticeably increases. Charlie becomes so smart that he has difficulty

relating to others and becomes suspicious of their motives since he has begun to realize that prior

to becoming more intelligent various people in his life were either taking advantage of him or mocking him. He begins to resent being treated like a lab rat and leaves the experiment, taking Algernon with him. As Algernon begins to show odd behavior, Charlie discovers a flaw in the surgery. The flaw causes Charlie to gradually loose his intelligence and revert back to his original self. Given Algernon's death and the fact that Charlie is told he must eventually move to a facility that cares for adults because he was no longer able to care for himself, the end of the book is ambiguous. The reader must make a decision about whether Charlie has died because of the regression from the surgery or is simply incapacitated and living in the adult care facility.

This book is now required reading for high school students in the district. However, it has had a long history of censorship and there have been challenges over the years requesting that it be removed from libraries. It is listed as one of the most protested or censored books in American classrooms because of Charlie's struggles to understand his sexual desires.

While we met for twenty sessions, three of those sessions where used to conduct focus group interviews. During the remaining seventeen sessions we simply discussed the reading of the three novels. However, the pace in which we read the novels varied. This seemed due to the length and difficulty of each book. *World War Z*, in particular was a difficult read for the boys. They were unfamiliar with the text structure and needed significantly more background knowledge to understand much of the context and situations in the novel. The following table provides additional context of out reading.

Table 3.1

Title	Pages	Weeks to Complete
The Five People You Meet in Heaven	208	4
World War Z	352	8
Flowers for Algernon	324	5

Data Collection Procedures

The primary instrument in qualitative research is the researcher himself (Creswell, 1998). This reflects the importance of meaning making and the inductive process of building concepts and hypotheses (Merriam, 2009). However, when the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection there are advantages and disadvantages. A primary advantage to the researcher is the opportunity to enhance his or her understanding through immediate verbal and nonverbal communication between the researcher and participant as well as among participants such as in this case. This affords the researcher the ability to clarify, explore, summarize, and check the accuracy of participant responses (Merriam, 2009). A drawback, however, to this approach is that the researcher's biases or subjectivities may impact the modes and design of data collection as well as the interpretation of data (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2008). Therefore, case study research employs several methods of data collection with the purpose of triangulation in order to confirm and validate findings (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2010). This study employed observations, focus group interviews, and individual interviews in an attempt to develop and provide rich description of the boys' perceptions and interactions in the book club, motivation to read, and attitudes towards reading in school and non-school contexts.

Book Club Observations

Observations can be distinguished from interviews in that they occur in the setting where the phenomenon of the study occurs (Merriam, 2009). Though critics of participant-observation see it as a subjective and unreliable type of data, it can be used to document behavior as it is happening, substantiate emergent themes and findings from interviews, and when an activity such as an intervention requires understanding of the interaction and contributions of the participants (Merriam, 2009). Participant observation is appropriate for studying relationships among people and events, continuities over time, and patterns as they unfold (Jorgensen, 1989). It is for these reasons that observation is a crucial method of data collection for this research study.

As a participant observer, I facilitated twenty book club discussions over five months as well as observed the discussion and interaction of the members of the group. Since I was busy initiating and facilitating conversation about the text chosen by the book club members throughout the sessions, it was necessary to audio record each session as way to capture complete conversations among the group members. When events of interest occurred, field notes were used to note the event. I was then able to use the audio recording to obtain more detail and check my initial observations of those events. Also, field notes were written as quickly as possible after meetings and again when listening to recordings of the meetings to highlight any physical observations that would not be evident in audio recordings. This included gestures, facial expressions, and seating arrangements as well as my thoughts and reflections on interesting occurrences related to the research questions. The focus of the observations included what the boys said about the book club in relation to their school experiences, the reading selections, learning through interaction with the group, and motivation to read. Additionally, the

ways the boys encouraged and supported each other within the group were noted. At the completion of each session I immediately wrote a detailed description of the session. Audio recordings were then used to help deepen the description where recall failed, as well as to transcribe select discourse among the members of the group. Selected clips of audio recordings were chosen if the boys mentioned how the book club may have motivated them to read or what they thought of reading in the book club as opposed to reading in school. Other audio clips were transcribed if the boys spontaneously began talking about school.

Focus Groups

Three focus group interviews were conducted to provide more depth to the boys' perspectives on reading in relation to the book club and how these compare to their reading experiences in school. The focus group approach was useful because it drew on the dynamic of the group interaction to gather data and gain insight that might not otherwise have been accessible (Merriam, 2009). I believed that because the participants could talk to one another about this shared experience, they were more likely to express feelings, beliefs, and opinions that might not become apparent in individual interviews (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2010). This seemed to be the case since the boys would often use another boy's comment to compare and contrast their experiences with one another. For example, while one boy described his experience finding a book with a teacher as a positive experience, other boys in the group described the opposite. Another example of this was when the boys helped each other remember various tasks they were required to complete during the school year. This was useful because, as the interviewer, I often did not have detailed knowledge of the structure and tasks of their literacy classes. The focus group discussion helped paint a detailed picture of their classes, differences in the instruction

among the classes the boys were in, and differences between their reading experiences in literacy classes and in the book club.

The focus group sessions were audio recorded and lasted approximately an hour to an hour and a half. They were held at the same time and place as the book club sessions for convenience and consistency to the participants. I used a semi-structured protocol (see Appendix C) to facilitate the discussion. Use of the semi-structured protocol allowed me to probe and obtain a depth of responses that a strictly structured protocol may not allow. The semi-structured protocol also allowed more of a natural flow to the conversation, hopefully putting the participants at ease and allowing them to expand on the responses of others. Some of the questions developed for the second and third focus group sessions reflect themes that emerged during book club discussions and the first focus group interview. For example, during a book club session one of the boys said that he thinks reading class should be completely discussion based. This led me to add questions about the importance of discussion and how discussion occurs in their classrooms.

Similar to the book club sessions, field notes were used to document any physical observations, including gestures and facial expressions that would not be evident in the audio recordings. At the completion of each session I immediately wrote a formal, detailed description of the focus group session and audio recordings were transcribed at a later time.

The first focus group was conducted prior to the actual book club sessions. The primary themes that were investigated in the first focus group included the participants' feelings about their literacy instruction in school and what they know about and what expectations they had about the book club. The second focus group interview was conducted after reading the first book, *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*. The primary objectives here were to develop as

sense of how the boys feel about participating in the club, how it could be improved, how it

compared to their literacy learning experiences, and in what ways (if any) they feel it motivated

them to read outside of school. I also asked them to imagine being in a co-ed book club and how

that might change their experience. The final focus group interview occurred after completion of

the third book and asked similar questions as the previous interview but included questions that

encouraged students to think about how the book club might be used in school, what they

thought about the book club discussions in relation to their classroom discussions, how they

perceive the roles of mentors and teachers, and their feelings about joining a book club in the

future.

Student Researcher Journals

The boys were asked to keep a journal about their experience in the club. Hatch (2002)

states that participant journaling can be used to supplement data collection where participants

keep a written record of their experiences and feelings throughout the research process. Also

according to Hatch (2002), the very act of writing encourages the participant to process and

reflect on their experiences differently than they might in interview discussions. However,

Smith & Wilhelm (2002) suggest that written exchanges between the researcher (teacher) and the

students be presented carefully. They say, "students must interpret this task as one in which the

teacher honestly wants to get to know them, not as a way of perpetuating school values" (p.20).

Despite the potential difficulty in getting the boys to write them, these participant-generated

documents were thought to be useful because they could provide more detail about the situation

and the person involved in the event (Merriam, 2009).

In asking the boys to keep a journal, every effort was made to shift the purpose from a

familiar school-like task to something that would make them collaborators in the research. For

example, the boys were asked to write about their experiences in the club rather than to write responses to the books. The boys were told that the purpose of them writing in the journal is to be "co-researchers" to help me learn about whether the book club motivates to read more outside of school and how this experience could help schools encourage boys to read more. They were also told that there was no penalty or repercussion for failing to complete weekly journal entries. In addition, they were encouraged to write in whatever formats were comfortable for them. They were also encouraged to audio record their thoughts if they preferred that to writing. This meant no structured writing tasks were assigned; the boys could report on their experience participating in the club in whatever way they saw fit. They were not asked to share their journal entries with the others unless they volunteered to do so. All of this was done to help the boys understand this as a method to collect data rather than a school-like assignment.

It was thought that though resistant readers might also resist writing in a journal, the data collection strategy could still be a means to provide insight or triangulate data obtained from interviews and observations. Boys who were unwilling to express their feelings, beliefs, and opinions verbally about reading, school, and even book club sessions might feel more inclined to do so through writing since it avoids face-to-face interactions and possible embarrassment. At the beginning of the first session the boys were given a notebook with a semi-structured response protocol attached (see Appendix B). They were asked to complete a minimum of one journal entry per week to describe what they thought about the book club conversation or the reading selection for the week or simply write about how they're feeling about being in the book club. They could also share their observations about how reading in the book club differs from school reading.

After the first focus group interview and the first three sessions of our book club meetings, it became clear that the boys saw the journal as an assignment-like task. It was an added burden for them along with the extra reading they were doing for the club. The journal was similar to what their teachers were asking them to do with their reading and one of the reasons they said they dislike reading or their literacy class. Because I was investigating how the nature of book clubs might motivate boys to read, the journal became counter productive as a data collection tool because it did not fall into the realm of most book club models and discouraged the boys from their natural participation in the group.

Individual Interviews

In most, if not all, qualitative research studies data are collected through interviews (Merriam, 2009). One-to-one meetings between the researcher and the participant are designed as a "conversation with a purpose" to explore and gather rich descriptive data regarding the research questions (Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 1998). A semi-structured interview allows the researcher to delve into specific responses that may be of interest to the researcher to probe for deeper understanding. The seven interviews conducted for this study were used for dual purposes: to validate the responses from the focus group interviews and to obtain detailed information from each individual boy to gain a deeper understanding of their experience in the book club as compared to the reading experiences in school.

Member checking is a common strategy to ensure internal validity and credibility (Merriam, 2009). The member checks were used to provide feedback to the emergent findings of the study in an attempt to avoid, as much as possible, misinterpretation (Merriam, 2009) of what I heard during focus group interviews as well as patterns that seemed to emerge during book club discussions. Member checking through the semi- structured interview allowed me to

identify my own biases and misunderstandings. For example, since several of the boys mentioned they had difficulty finding books in their school library, I initially made the assumption that their teachers were unavailable to help the boys find books. I made this assumption due to my own observations of teachers and their students in the library and because of comments from a couple of boys in the group. However, I found through the interview that this is the case for only some of the boys and could not be generalized to all of them since some had teachers who spent some time with the boys helping them find books. Additionally, these interviews helped me gather more detailed information about what was happening in the school library than what was mentioned during the focus group interview.

In addition to member checking, the interviews where designed to probe deeper into the boys' personal reading habits and how they thought about reading after their experience in the book club. The interview questions were designed to get a sense of the types of readers the boys may have been prior to the book club and as younger boys in elementary school. Since research shows that boys tend to loose interest in reading after the third or fourth grade (Ivey, 2010), I thought it was important to ask them to describe themselves as readers when they were that age. These interviews allowed the boys to speak without interruptions from the others and provided privacy that they would not have had within the focus group interview. Furthermore, since the interviews were conducted four weeks after the conclusion of our book club meetings, I was able to get a sense of what the boys remembered from the book club and what was important to them. For example, while the list of books I provided to them as possible choices to read was simply meant to be a tool to find books that may be of interest to the group, several of the boys mentioned that they still had the list and intended to use it to find other books for themselves.

While the semi-structured interview allowed the flexibility to discover the information

mentioned above concerning the book list, a protocol of several questions (see Appendix D)

guided the interview. The interview questions were developed in response to some of the

emergent findings developed through preliminary analysis. Questions about the importance of

discussion and humor as well as differences in their reading experiences in literacy classes and

the book club drove the interview. Other questions in regards to gender and the tasks associated

with reading not only provided means for member checking but also allowed me to obtain more

detail about the boys' individual experiences.   Interviews were conducted at the municipal

library at a time that was convenient to both the parents and students. Each of the seven boys of

the sample participated in the individual interview. All interviews lasted between 25 and 35

minutes and were audio-recorded, then transcribed.

Data Analysis

Data analysis requires a systematic search for meaning and qualitative research is

distinguished by inductive or a combination of inductive and deductive processing of data as

opposed to a purely deductive approach (Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 1998). Analysis necessitates

consolidating and reducing data collected from what participants say and do in tandem with what

the researcher sees (Merriam, 2009). I used interpretational analysis to make meaning of the

data. Interpretational analysis closely examines and groups chunks of data to describe and

explain the phenomenon studied while beginning to identify specific constructs and patterns that

build meaning from the data (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2010).

Audio-recorded data from the focus group interviews was transcribed. Field notes were

also typed and saved as Microsoft Word files. Selected audio excerpts of book club sessions that

further document the boys' experiences in the book club in relation to reading engagement,

motivation, and classroom literacy experiences were transcribed as well. All data was converted into word-processed files to upload into an online data analysis software package.

Using analysis software, data was organized by interview question, participant, and methodology. Data was read and reread to gain a general sense of what was collected and as a way to begin to sort and develop codes. Transcriptions and field notes were broken into separate numbered line segments and coded. Descriptions of what went on during book club sessions in relation to what we know about motivation and reading and patterns about boys' perceptions and attitudes about reading involved hierarchical coding to convert categories to theoretical constructs. For example, the codes such as *answering comprehension questions for text*, *written responses to text*, and *completing packets for text* became sub-codes for *tasks attached to reading*. Transcriptions coded using the analytical software, however, were also printed to allow me to read and reread them and to add written notes and thoughts about what the boys said to each other in context. The notes were added to analytic memos that were created on the software. Transcriptions were also read with cohort colleagues to validate the coding scheme.

Analytical memos were written to begin to understand these categories in relation to the constructs of self-deterministic motivation theory. Coded excerpts were then attached to these analytical memos. Many codes emerged inductively; however, several deductive codes were created to compare the participants' responses and experiences with constructs associated with reading motivation. These deductive codes were based on Deci's (1991) framework for self-determination. Motivation theorists make the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The premise behind self-determination theory is that inherent needs must be met to activate intrinsic motivation. These needs are feelings of competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Deci et al, 1991). Competence refers to a person's feelings of ability to complete a

task. Relatedness is the development of relationships in which the activity occurs. Finally, autonomy is the ability to regulate or instigate actions as part of completing the reading task. This framework provided useful codes to begin to analyze the boys' reading motivation in relation to the book club and in comparison to their experience in their literacy classes. Codes were categorized and defined to be mutually exclusive until all the data was exhausted. As data analysis proceeded, codes that were not useful were either eliminated or revised and data were recoded as a result. An initial codebook was created in anticipation of the possible responses to focus group questions, however one code, *teacher traits,* was eliminated because the boys never mentioned the characteristics of the teachers. Several codes were added to the codebook as data analysis proceeded.

Codes were grouped to help write additional analytic memos to identify and develop themes and findings. These analytic memos included coded excerpts of data to support themes and establish patterns. Themes developed from analytic memos informed the development of research findings. Themes and patterns written from analytic memos were used to develop naturalistic generalizations from which others may learn from the case (Creswell, 1998). Added to these naturalistic generalizations, were written detailed descriptions of aspects of the case including the setting and its participants as well as comparisons with published literature about boys and literacy, motivation to read, and book clubs.

Once initial themes were developed, excerpts were chosen that supported those themes and written drafts of the findings were created. Individual interviews were then conducted with each of the boys asking them to comment on those themes. This form of member checking was done to increase to the reliability of the findings. It also provided further detail that was specific to each boy, separate from the focus group discussions. The individual interviews were also

transcribed, coded, and became part of the data set. Coded excerpts from individual interviews were also attached to analytical memos to support the findings.

Researcher Role

My role as a sixth grade math teacher in the district provided me the opportunity to be in contact with many teachers and students. However, it also may have shaped my opportunities to address the research questions in particular ways. Because many of the boys in the sample have had me as their math teacher, participants may have seen me as an authority figure and a teacher first, rather than a fellow club member. They also may have wanted to please me because of our past teacher-student relationship causing them to edit their input in our group discussions or cause them to make statements or concessions which they didn't necessarily believe. My former role as their teacher may have made it difficult for them, at first, to separate the book club from school-based work. They were also aware that their participation in the study was vital to my dissertation work and they seemed to want to help me. This may have kept them participating when they would not have otherwise. However, I believe that after a few meetings, they demonstrated that my role was not a significant influence on how they participated. For example, they often initiated the book discussions. When I asked them how they viewed me, they used the word friend often or they described me as someone older who started the group. They purposely did not label me as a teacher in the group though they acknowledged that is was my job.

Because I do not currently teach any of these boys, I felt it was realistic to depend on their honesty and thoughtfulness in respect to questions about their experience in these classes. In regard to how they felt about the book club, I made many efforts to remind them that even negative comments were helpful and would not jeopardize my impressions of them. However,

because they knew my beliefs about the importance of reading and that a book club has the potential to improve motivation to read, they might have felt the need to edit their responses.

There were several power differentials at play in this research, adult and adolescent, researcher and participant, and teacher and student that might also have had an impact. Though true equality may not have been achieved, I continually reminded the boys that our membership in the club was as equals. In an attempt to demonstrate this point, I asked them to call me by my first name. I also trusted the boys with my personal phone number and the boys were free to call or text me for any reason. This was another attempt to establish trust and to begin to erode some of the strict traditional teacher-student delineated roles. Handing over my phone number to the boys was important because it is something friends do, not something a teacher does. Teachers purposefully wall themselves off from their students to protect their privacy; this also enhances their authority since teachers have access to most or all of their students' personal information. However, a real power differential most likely still existed because of my role as a teacher and as the only adult in the group; therefore continual reminders of my desire to be treated as an equal in relation to group decisions was necessary. Even this, my offering to give up much of my authority, demonstrates the implicit authority I had over the boys due to my position in their lives as teacher and adult.

Over time, however, the boys seemed able to speak more freely, using language they would not use in school, and may have seen me more as something like a family friend than a teacher. This became evident as time went by because the boys would frequently text me links or pictures they thought were funny or thoughts they had about a book they were reading in school. Also parents would often stay and chat with me after our meeting about the goings on in the school district, ask me about the process of the study, or update me on their other children I

may have had as students. In fact, when parents found it difficult to pick up their sons from our meeting they would ask me to bring the boys home. At one point a parent orchestrated a dinner with her son, who was in the book club, and his older brother who was home from graduate school and me to catch up since I had not seen him since he left the sixth grade. I believe this is evidence of the erosion of my role as a teacher in the group, though I was still the only adult in the group and the researcher.

I also made conscious attempts to avoid talking to the boys as a teacher. This means that I did not discipline them for using language or cracking jokes that might not be permitted in school. I encouraged the boys to initiate group discussion by requesting that they think about ways we could get discussions started during our initial meetings in an attempt to avoid me becoming the initiator of all of our discussions. They were already comfortable enough with each other that they said that they would prefer just to start talking about whatever came to mind, rather than have some sort of structured dialogue. I did not come prepared with a set of questions to ask or expect the boys to come with anything prepared either. I did, however, dog-ear and underline passages I wanted to remember and discuss. Additionally, since my position is at the intermediate school and the boys were at the middle school, my interaction with them was limited to our club meetings only. I also had no interaction with their current teachers since we are in two different buildings. Therefore, I was not a stakeholder in their academic success.

I also hoped to equalize the relationship between researcher and participant by asking them to keep student researcher journals. I hoped that the journals could be a means of expressing their views and observations of the book club in their own voices, as research field workers. However, this seemed only to reinforce the teacher-student relationship and was quickly discarded. My role of researcher, and therefore authority figure, was also evident in

other acts. For example, I insisted on paying for all of our meals and for the books the boys read, though the boys and their parents often offered to pay. These actions on my part were purely motivated by my appreciation of their participation in this study. Yet, it is possible that these acts also reinforced the power differential between researcher and participant or adult and child, simply because the choice was removed for the boys to contribute in the way they might be expected to in a book club not constituted for research purposes.

Assumptions. This research was born out of observations I have made during my prior experiences facilitating book clubs for boys in past years. The boys that came to these book clubs were often boisterous and teased one another, but they also talked about the books and shared their insights freely. At times they would not read every single reading or book but they kept coming back, sometimes for over a year, well beyond the school year and into their summers. Because of this past experience, I came to this book club with the expectations that these boys would participate equally enthusiastically. I believed the power of the group, the relationships that would be forged, and the freedom the boys would be able to sense would be powerful motivators for them to consider reading as a pleasurable activity and one that does not have to be strictly associated with school. Based on my past experiences with a number of boys in several book clubs, I also have come to believe that schools do not always provide opportunities for students to speak and read freely, to develop relationships that help build reading motivation that the book club allows, and that a hyper-focus on skill development in reading in the later grades diminishes the purpose and joy of reading in real-life.

I maintain additional assumptions of teachers shaped by own experience as a teacher of reading as well as other content areas in middle school. While I see that almost all the teachers I come in contact with work hard and want the best for their students, I also see the pressure they

face in the current era of accountability and high-stakes testing. This pressure can push teachers to teach to the test or get on the treadmill of just "covering" the curriculum. This has eliminated much of the autonomy teachers once had to delve deeper into topics of interest to them and their students and at the same time removed much of the joy and passion of learning and exploring those topics. I believe that the pressure for students to do well on the test has had an impact on a teacher's ability to find ways to motivate her students, and students are not able to explore their interests or be exposed to new ones because of the narrow focus on the mandated and tested curriculum.

Limitations

Because this study was conducted in the context of a particular school district within a relatively short time frame, and with a purposeful sample, there are several limitations. First the district is in a predominately white, upper-middle class community, thus limiting the diversity of the sample. The participants in the sample are also students who generally do well in school and have reading skills that a sufficient to be successful in their literacy classes. This might prevent generalization of the findings to other contexts, particularly urban ones or to students who reject reading and/or have struggled to acquire proficient reading skills. The students in the sample are also aware of this research as dissertation work and may feel a vested interest in its success. This may have been added motivation for them to continue to be part of our group thus artificially amplifying their engagement.

Second, the duration of the book club was limited to twenty weeks. Therefore, I could only get a sense of how the boys perceive the book club within a relatively short period of time making it impossible to document important and significant changes over time. Also due to time constraints, this research does not help us understand the sustainability of any positive effects of

participation in the book club. The book club was conducted during the winter months when most of the boys were not participating in sports. This could also lead to generalization issues for those who attempt to establish book clubs during the months when boys are highly active in other extra-curricular activities.

Finally, the design of the book club was intended to be as democratic as possible. As mentioned earlier, my role as a teacher and adult in the group creates some complexity with regard to power positioning and may detract from the democracy of the club which I intended. Also, this after school book club does not reflect the reality of most school and classroom contexts; therefore, it will be difficult to transfer this model directly into classrooms or afterschool clubs. However, this research can provide a starting point for thinking about alternative ways to engage boys in wide reading.

Trustworthiness

Similar to quantitative research, qualitative case study research requires considerable verification (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 2009; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2010). Therefore, I utilized five verification procedures: prolonged engagement and observation, triangulation, rich and thick description, member checking, and collaboration to foster the integrity of this study (Creswell, 1998).

I believe that prolonged and persistent observation as an ideal for qualitative research is satisfied through twenty weeks of weekly book club session observation. The book club observations along with three focus group interviews, and individual interviews provided a significant amount of data from which to develop rich description and yielded ample direct quotations to develop, highlight, and support themes and findings. Furthermore, triangulation using the various modes of data collection allowed for corroboration to elucidate themes and

findings. Additionally, member checks on individual and focus group interview transcripts were conducted as well as attempts to verify each participant's meaning by asking for clarification and repeating responses back to each individual. This was done in a variety of ways. Participants were asked to clarify their responses within the interviews themselves or through email and texts as data analysis proceeded.

Lastly, Creswell (2000) explains that credibility is built through collaboration with participants throughout the research. Collaboration with participants builds validity by "building the participant's view into the study" (Creswell, 2000). Throughout the study, the students were asked to be co-researchers to help me understand their experiences in the book club as it compares to their experiences in their literacy classes. Collaboration with participants and member checking included meetings with the members of the book club to review and discuss preliminary findings. This was done after the second and third focus group interviews at the beginning of the subsequent book club meaning. I shared the transcripts with the boys and told them my interpretations of their words and then asked them for feedback. There were times when the boys disagreed with my interpretations. For example, I mentioned that I heard reading is a taxing activity. However, they disagreed with this interpretation and clarified that reading was not hard for them but the time spent on activities associated with reading for school was daunting.   In individual interviews, they were asked what they thought about the findings and whether they seem to represent their experiences in the book club. Though this is a case study on the group experience in the book club, it was important to meet with each participant individually to get their personal opinions about the findings of the study without the influence of the other members of the group. This is because as mentioned in the individual interview section above, more detailed information was provided as well as clarification.

The next chapter discusses the findings of this book club intervention study as a result of the data collections and analysis procedures outlined above. In the sections that follow, I will describe the boys' perceptions about book clubs and who participates in them. In this section I will also illustrate changes in attitudes towards reading and book clubs as a result of the boys' participation. Later in the chapter, a detailed description of the how the boys' reading experiences in the book club are different than their reading experiences in school is offered. Lastly, the findings presented portray the importance and the desire for deep discussion as a significant motivator to read.

Chapter 4: Findings

In this study, I began with the assumption that a single-gender book club model could be a motivator to get boys to appreciate and enjoy reading outside of school assignments. This assumption was based on several years of personal observations of book clubs I facilitated with middle school boys who displayed a variety of reading interests and abilities. This research grew out of a desire to understand more about how to engage boys with reading. To better understand how a book club might help engage boys with reading, this research also attempts to discover how boys initially perceive book clubs, how their attitudes towards book clubs and reading might change, and the role gender plays in participating in book clubs. This research also seeks to understand how middle school boys describe the differences between their reading experiences in an after school book club and their reading experiences in their literacy classes and how those differences can impact the motivation to read for pleasure.

My own informal observations of past book clubs seemed to demonstrate that book clubs could be a context to motivate students to read more. Book club reading is different than school-based reading because the reading is perhaps solely done for pleasure, allowing authentic choice and control of the reading based on the interests of the group (Appleman, 2006). Though the classroom can be a context for deep and engaging discussions, book clubs have been found to help students become more efficacious in their reading as a result of deep, self-reflective discussions that often ensue in this context (Appleman, 2006; Alvermann, Young, Green, & Wisenbaker, 1999). Finally, research has documented that students value the social nature of participating in book clubs. This is significant because this social context promotes and supports the development of a community of readers (Appleman, 2006; Alverman, Young, Green, & Wisenbaker, 1999; Whittingham & Huffman, 2009). This study affirms the social context in the

development of a community of readers but demonstrates the importance of autonomy within the

discussion and how the boys chose to talk about the books they read.   The factors taken together

of control, competence, and social relationships are key to developing motivation for any task

including reading and are the central constructs of self-determination theory (Deci, Vallerand,

Pelletier, and Ryan, 1991).

 Therefore, this study is framed by Deci and Ryan's (1985, 1991) self–determination theory

and intrinsic motivation where the constructs of autonomy, relationships, and competence are

seen to drive and enhance intrinsic motivation. In the realm of education, when self-

determination theory is applied, it is primarily concerned with developing students' interest in

learning, belief in the value of education, and confidence in their own ability to learn (Deci,

Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991).   Furthermore, according to self-determination theory, these

outcomes are a result of being intrinsically motivated to internalize the value of a particular task

and the ability to self-regulate. Unlike other theories of motivation that focus strictly on

outcomes, self-determination theory also incorporates basic human needs: autonomy,

relationships, and competence (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991). The concept of

human needs is useful because it allows for the identification of contextual conditions that could

improve motivation, performance, and development (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991).

Since I had observed significant changes in reading attitudes and motivation in earlier versions of

book clubs I facilitated, I anticipated that self-determination theory would fit well as an analytic

framework for this study because the context of a book club seemed to be the reason for the

positive changes I witnessed in the past.

Because contextual conditions are so important in developing intrinsic motivation, this study

also sought to expand on Smith and Wilhelm's (2002) findings that although many boys reject

reading, it was not necessarily on the grounds that they view reading as a feminine activity as other researchers have theorized (Alloway & Gilbert, 1997; Dutro, 2003; Martino, 2008). Rather, boys may be readers (albeit not always traditional book readers), but they mostly reject reading that is school-like. However, perhaps because it was beyond the scope of their research, we do not know what the specific contextual conditions of school were that caused boys in their study also to reject reading books for pleasure. The findings described later in this chapter highlight the specific school and instructional practices the boys felt had a negative impact on the self-deterministic basic human needs for autonomy, relationships, and competence. Yet, several aspects of the book club seemed to capitalize on and enhance them.

In the sections that follow I first describe the boys' perceptions of book clubs prior to it starting. I then describe how the boys perceived our book club and reading after completing the second and third books we read together, which encapsulates approximately five months of weekly meetings. In this first section, I also illustrate how gender plays a role in the boys' participation in the book club. I do this because I feel it is important to situate the findings concerning the differences in reading experiences in school and in the book club within the context of how the boys first perceived book clubs and then how their perceptions did or did not change as a result of participation in the group. I then explain how the boys' experiences reading in school may hinder autonomy and relationships; basic human needs as described in self-determination theory. Next I explain how the boys' experiences reading in the book club and the power of our discussions had the potential to provides supports to develop the motivation to read more. Finally, I discuss how the boys would change their literacy class, specifically their desire for their teachers to act more like mentors.

From "Book Clubs are for Southern Women and Soccer Moms" to "The Book Club

Brought Me Back To Reading"

I begin here by describing the boys' initial reasons for joining the club as well as their first

impressions and expectations of book clubs to highlight the changes in the boys' perceptions

about reading, how gender played a role in facilitating relationships and participation in the

group, and the evidence that indicates they came to value our time together despite initial

skepticism. During our first focus group interview, after eating pizza, sitting at a circular table in

pizza shop, I asked the boys why they agreed to join the book club. Many of the boys did not join

because of their love of reading. All of these boys had previously had me as their math teacher,

and most of them spoke about joining because they wanted to help me with my study, knowing

that it was being conducted to earn my doctoral degree. However, each boy mentioned that

knowing a couple of friends, who had joined, made it more attractive for them to join as well.

This emphasized, from the beginning, the importance of prior relationships as a motivator to join

the club. In fact, later, when discussing how to get other boys to join book clubs after school, the

boys made it clear that knowing friends who were in the group was extremely important. Xavier

summarizes the feelings of most of the boys in the group.

> I don't really like reading, but I saw that a bunch of my friends were doing it, so I wanted
> to do it because of that, and also, I liked you as a teacher, so I wanted to help you out.

Though several of the boys said they disliked reading but joined because they wanted to

help me and because friends had joined, two of the boys did mention that they enjoyed reading.

They also said they were curious about what would happen in the book club and were interested

in talking about books with their friends. However, Philippé indicated that my invitation to join

was also meaningful to him.

> I did it because I know that if you asked me to join a book club, that means that you think
> that I'm, in some way … like, you probably think, you know, I'm pretty good at literacy.
> So I thought, in some ways, I don't want to let you down, first. Also, being in a book club
> feels, like, just interacting with other people just makes it so much easier.

After Philippé said this, the other boys agreed that they felt somewhat privileged and special for

having been asked to join and that the reading would be easier because they would have

opportunities to talk about it and "understand it all better." Feelings of competence and

connection through relationships are crucial components of self-determination theory (Deci &

Ryan, 1985). During this initial focus group interview, when asked about how to get other boys

to join book clubs, the boys seemed to become comfortable enough to reveal their feelings about

their potential participation in a book club outside of the study. They felt that the teacher who

started the club would have to know them well and that many of their friends would have to be a

part of the group, though none were confident that their friends would join. Apparently a

personal invitation to join the book club in which they knew friends would be participating were

helpful in engaging these feelings among the boys.

However, because the boys had no prior experience with book clubs, they felt that even

with a good teacher-student and student-student relationships, it would be a hard sell for most

kids to join one because they would associate it with school reading.

> Jaylan: I just feel like there's no reason for me to do more schoolwork than I already am,
> because I don't know … and reading doesn't interest me at all. So that's why I just feel I
> wouldn't want to do it. And other kids definitely wouldn't even blink an eye. They
> would not do it.
>
> Jim: But why do you think they wouldn't join?
>
> Jaylan: Because they don't like literacy class in the first place, and it's like … if you
> don't like eating your brussels sprouts, you wouldn't eat a brussels sprout dessert, so …

Before the book club got underway, none of the boys saw book club reading and participation as

a potentially positive experience and assumed that kids who are recruited by teachers in the

future would have a similar response. In fact, before ours started, Roger believed that book clubs

were just a more intense version of literacy class.

> What I think of is, I feel like when people say a book club, I feel like it's intense reading, like finish the book in like two days, and you have to write, an entire essay on it in a day, so in some ways, you can feel kind of tensed up, trying to finish the book.

Though they initially assumed that book clubs would mirror their experiences of reading

in school, their impressions of who participated in book clubs were strikingly gender, age, and

class specific. After asking the boys why they joined the book club, they were asked what they

knew about book clubs. Six of the boys saw book clubs as an outlet for groups of women to

gossip. They described the women as typically white, older women or "soccer moms" which the

boys described as women of means who have extra time on their hands. The boys held

stereotypical views of how women interact with texts and often discounted these possible

interactions as gossip rather than substantive talk about the books. They also assumed that these

women read romance novels for their book groups, which the boys considered frivolous, and

clearly not intended for boys or men. Interestingly, however, their assessment of book groups

did not include a view of reading as primarily a female activity as some of the research suggests

they would. In fact when asked about whether reading as a hobby is for boys or girls, the boys

were unanimous in their belief that it could be a hobby for both genders. However, it appears that

the particular reading *activity* of book clubs is gender specific in their minds. Jaylan gives his

impression of book clubs.

> When you say book club, I just … I don't know why, I just kind of think of older women, just sitting in a room. I don't know. It's just like something that you would picture to be like a bunch of women, southern women, sitting around, drinking coffee and gossiping about this book. That's basically it.

Enrique adds,

> Well, what I think of is a bunch of soccer moms who don't have a job, you could say, and they meet with all their other soccer moms, and they all talk about their books… it's always a romantic book. They just always talk about what should have happened. I don't really see the point of it.

Committing to an activity about which most of them had negative assumptions that it would be school-like and which they perceived as a feminine activity, seems to demonstrate a significant level of trust they had in me. Even though the boys held these somewhat negative impressions of book clubs, when I asked them what they expected to happen in our book club, they echoed what I had told them they could expect when I recruited them to be part of the study. They reported that they expected the reading and the interaction would be more "relaxed" than it would be in their literacy classes. They also seemed to expect more freedom because they did not have to meet deadlines and there were no tasks assigned other than to do the agreed upon reading for the week. Additionally, they began to delineate their prospective book club experience as potentially more male-like than their image of book clubs because they expected to be talking about "useful things" as opposed to gossiping. When asked what "useful things" were, Lamar said that they "would learn how stuff works" and why it happens rather than, "what this guy should have said or how the story should go."

Despite Lamar's belief that we would talk about "useful" things, the boys shared mixed opinions about the possibility of the book club motivating them to read more beyond their school assignments. One boy saw being part of a group as a possible motivator because he believed it would allow for discussion about the book and deeper understanding and comprehension because of that discussion. Two other boys felt that they would not want to let the group down by not reading. However, the remainder of the boys did not see how any facet of the book club would

be a motivator to read if a person does not like to read. Pablo spoke for the remainder of the

boys who could not see how the book club would motivate boys to read.

> Honestly, I don't think there is any way to motivate kids to go into a book club because
> there's not much you can actually change to a book club. I mean, in the end, it's still
> reading and talking about it. And you can add food, you can add whatever you want, but
> that will only motivate kids to a certain extent. They will want to...it's either food or not
> doing anything, and I think they won't do anything.

A "Social Club of Books"

After completing our first book, despite their wariness about the potential of a book club

to motivate them, the boys indicated that these early assumptions and feelings were shifting.

They expressed a significant level of satisfaction and even joy in their participation. They

described it as fun, relaxing, and enjoyable. They clearly saw the difference between reading in

our book club and reading in their literacy classes, which will be described in the next section.

In addition to appreciating exposure to a different kind of book than what they would typically

read in school, Lamar spoke for most of the boys in the group when he spoke positively about his

experience so far.

> I like this idea. It's not school. It's not like you have to think certain things. You could
> just do whatever you want with it. I wouldn't normally just go to the store and pick out
> this book. Now that I'm seeing it, I'm realizing this is a good book. It's just fun not to
> be in that school environment with a book because usually a lot of people associate a
> book with school. It's good to get away from that.

Lamar's statement about his association of reading with school aligns with Smith and Wilhelm's

(2002) findings that boys do not necessarily resist reading because it is viewed as a feminine

practice but rather because it is school-like. Resistant male readers are unable to find "flow"

(Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) when doing reading tasks in school (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002).

Lamar's statement also reveals that the autonomy of participating in the book club began to help

alter his attitude toward reading and help him see that it does not always have to be an academic

task.

Although being in a book club was beginning to change their feelings about reading,

interestingly it had not changed their feelings about book clubs. Therefore, perhaps because of

their initial assumptions about them, the boys resisted calling our meetings a book club. Instead,

they were more comfortable calling it a social club. This is in line with their initial perceptions

of book clubs as a feminine activity. When asked how their perceptions of book clubs changed

after participating in one for two months, none of the boys would admit to changes in their

thinking about what a book club was and who participated.

> Enrique: Mine didn't change at all, I still think of old ladies sitting in a circle gossiping, knitting, doing all that crap because I don't really think of this as a book club. I just think of it as a bunch of guys hanging out, eating pizza, and reading, and talking about a book. I don't think it's really a book club. I think it's an extra, fun thing to do.
>
> Jim: What would you call this, then?
>
> Pablo: Social club.
>
> Roger: Social club.
>
> Philippé: Club where we talk about books.
>
> Xavier: Social club of books.
>
> Enrique: Pizza and books.
>
> Lamar: Just don't call it a book club.

Despite their initial belief that book clubs are a primarily feminine activity, this was not

so entrenched that it prevented them from returning for subsequent meetings and they did not

indicate that doing so would threaten their masculinity. Through their willing participation to

meet every week, they all came to see that book clubs could change their attitudes towards

reading. One specific change they identified was that they became interested in genres of

reading that had previously held no interest for them. For example, Xavier had previously had a strong dislike for science fiction and horror and felt that those books were too "far-fetched." While reading *Flowers for Algernon* with the group, he mentioned during one meeting that he could see how some science fiction is good because it "makes you think."   They also shared that reading in the book club allowed them to see that reading can be enjoyable and helped them understand why people choose to read for fun. Enrique explains,

> I think this book club is not exactly teaching to read, but it's helping me understand the true meaning of reading instead … people just read books because they like it.

Jaylan compares his experience in the book club to school.

> I did say this before, [but] I will say it again-- that it's exposed me to reading for fun and not reading for a project or for school. That's why I like it.

These two boys were the most reluctant readers of the group. Jaylan was very vocal about his dislike of reading and how he needs to be more active than reading allows. Enrique rarely did his assigned readings in school, but would find ways to complete the assignments attached to the readings to maintain his grades.

Most strikingly, however, several of the boys mentioned that the book club helped them "come back to reading." They talked about how they read a lot in elementary school because "reading was fun and you didn't have to do a lot of work." They described how their teachers would read to them and how they did not feel "pressured" when they read. They described reading for the book club in a similar way, saying it was unpressured reading during which they "could have a relaxed mind." Philippé captured his returning interest in reading when he said,

> It kind of just brought me back to reading from in third and fourth grade. [Then] I would read much more often. I would actually come to the library…but, you know, for the past couple of years we'd be reading so many books in school that I don't like and I guess it kind of just ruined my motivation in reading so…because I think every time I have to read a book now I have to write an essay.

Philippé is acutely aware of his motivation levels in regards to reading and how school reading

is comes with a price.

"If it was co-ed we wouldn't be laughing as much."

Though the boys were resistant to altering the gender stereotypes they held about book

clubs, they did not hold similar stereotypes about reading. When asked if reading is for boys or

girls, all the boys said it was an activity for both. In fact, when I asked the question, several of

the boys made facial expressions that seemed to indicate that they were caught off guard and that

it was an odd question to ask. They seemed to view reading as a gender-neutral activity that was

a completely acceptable use of time for both boys and girls. Pablo and Philippé mentioned that

they enjoyed reading during their free time and that they have even recommended books to

friends and relatives. Pablo recommended *The Five People You Meet in Heaven,* the first book

we read together, to several of his male peers. He explained that he recommended the book to

his male cousin because, "he really hates to read and it was such a good book that he would like

it if he reads it." Though Pablo was not confident that his cousin would read the book, his

recommendation indicated that he did not view reading as something only girls do.   Enrique,

who often avoids reading for school and rarely reads on his own, enjoyed the book so much that

he too recommended it to a few of his male friends.

Boys Only

Since the boys did not see reading as a gender-specific activity but felt that book clubs

were mainly for women, I was curious to know how their participation in our book club might

change if it were a mixed group. When asked how the book club might be different for them if it

were a mixed gendered group, all the boys were adamant about keeping it an all-boy group.

They all felt that their participation in the discussions at our meetings would change dramatically

if the group was mixed. They thought the book club would be more school-like and the bonds

they created through their participation would be weakened. They admitted that their

participation in the discussions would be limited because they assumed that the girls would not

"understand" them. They said they would be more cautious in volunteering their opinions and

sharing their feelings because they would be concerned about what the girls would think about

them. Wanting to avoid embarrassment, they believed, would have an impact on their ability to

interact freely and unselfconsciously with one another. Jaylan explained that if the book club

was coed,

> It would be more like school because you're trying to impress everyone or not embarrass
> yourself. That's why I feel like I wouldn't say as much because I don't want to sound
> like an idiot [in front of girls].

Though all the boys agreed that they did not want to "look stupid" in front of the girls, it was not

because they were concerned about what the girls would think of them if they showed that they

were enjoying books or displayed their competence in reading and discussing books. Rather, it

stemmed from how the boys expressed their humor. Enrique explained that

> My participation would definitely drop because you don't want to say something stupid
> and look bad. I think definitely if it was coed we wouldn't be laughing as much because
> we wouldn't be [telling] some of those jokes that we have. I also think if something
> spills, like it always did, then we would be laughing and it would be funny like how
> Lamar did. But then ...[the girls] would be like, "Oh, right. That just happened." He'd
> be kind of embarrassed … like, "Why did I do that?" It would just be so different.

Lamar adds

> I just feel like it's a lot more close-knit when it's boys or single gender. I feel like some
> of us would be really restricted [if it were a mixed group].

It is important to note that out of all the silliness and joking during the five months we

met, and there was a lot, only one joke was verbalized that the boys assumed might offend girls.

In a conversation about which actress played the best Catwoman in the *Batman* movies, Jaylan

made a joke about how attracted he was to Anne Hathway's portrayal. Though the boys were

aware that the joke might make girls uncomfortable, their concern was more about how the girls

perceived their silliness and the randomness of their humor in general and whether they would

even feel free to express it. It seems the single-gender environment created a safe place for the

boys to interact naturally without being self-conscious.

However, their presumed changes in behavior in a mixed gender group were based on

their stereotypes of girls. Not only did they assume that girls would not understand their senses

of humor, but they also felt that girls would not appreciate the topics the boys talked about. They

often made connections to superheroes or video game characters, and they believed that girls

would think those connections and topics were "weird." They also assumed that they would

want to talk about different issues than the girls and seemed to believe that girls' talk about the

books would have a more emotional component than theirs. For example, Lamar mentioned that

he felt the girls would feel "all bad and stuff for Eddie," in *The Five People You Meet in Heaven,*

when he would rather talk about how Eddie died and what is going to happen next. They also

assumed that girls were more studious and would want to stay "on topic" and that in a mixed

group they would have to be more polite in regards to turn-taking. Jaylan's comment was typical

for the group:

> I think with girls we might only talk about the book instead of getting side tracked,
> because we get side tracked a lot. But with girls, when we get side tracked, we might
> think, "Alright should I be saying this or should I not be saying this?" We would think to
> stay on the book or I must stay talking about the book.   I guess what I am trying to get
> out is, I think every one of us was cutting off everybody and nobody was insulted and the
> more we thought of things to say the more we interrupted when the conversation would
> lead off to something else… It might be an awkward conversation with girls, no offense.

The boys seemed to have a very clear assumption that boys talk differently than girls. While their

assumptions about how girls talk seem rooted in their stereotypes about women and girls, their

wanting to keep it an all boy group seemed more about wanting to continue to be able to talk in

certain ways than being against the presence of girls simply because they were girls. It should

also be noted that when the boys were initially asked about mixing the genders in the group, they

were clearly uncomfortable with the question. At first they struggled for what they may have

thought was expected of them, stating half-heartedly, "It wouldn't be so different," or "It would

be ok, just like school." It was only after the boys had some experience in an all-boy book club

that they began to express how and why they thought the dynamics of the group would change if

girls were added.

Reading in School – "You can't really get lost in a book."

Research has demonstrated that adolescents, and especially boys, read markedly less for

pleasure and recreation as they mature (Millard, 2007; Alloway & Gilbert, 1997; Connolly,

2004; Dutro, 2003; Kehler & Greig, 2005; Martino, 2003) since reading becomes more high-risk

and task oriented (Brozo, 2010; Newkirk, 2002; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). It seems that in the

case of the participants in our book club, the resistance to reading had less to do with a

perception that reading is what girls do and more to do with how reading is instructed in school.

In the early elementary grades in the school district these boys attend, while there is significant

reading instruction and a focus on decoding and other skills, there is also time for more

recreational reading that is often more social. As students move into middle school, almost all of

the assessment of reading is written, whether by answering worksheet or workbook questions or

writing essays after reading an assigned book, a task similar to traditional book reports. Tasks

and reading strategies that interrupt the flow of reading and replace the purpose of reading books

for enjoyment seem to have the potential to limit autonomy, hinder relationship building, and

weaken feelings of competence, all self-deterministic components needed to motivate (Deci,

Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991).

The shift from more reading for pleasure to reading to complete tasks to demonstrate

learning was described vividly by the boys. They often talked about the tasks they were required

to complete that controlled how they interacted with texts. The grades they received for these

tasks were external regulators and did not seem to contribute to their intrinsic motivation to read.

In regards to motivation, external regulation refers to actions that take place in the external

environment; the presence of rewards or punishment are examples. (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier,

and Ryan, 1991). Therefore, a student who is required to read in order to complete an

assignment for a grade is externally regulated to do so. External regulation is the least self-

determined variety of extrinsic motivation (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, and Ryan, 1991). An

essential premise of self-determination theory is that situations that support competence,

relationships, and autonomy will facilitate self- determination; control through external

regulation does not (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, and Ryan, 1991). To the extent that the context

of school neglects to support and enhance these basic human needs, motivation diminishes,

natural development is hindered, and alienation and poor attitudes develop (Deci, Vallerand,

Pelletier, and Ryan, 1991). Their description of many of the instructional methods used in

relation to reading in the boys' classrooms indicate that they did little to support the basic human

needs necessary to develop self-determination to read outside of assigned texts.

The boys often used the word "pressure" to describe their reading experiences in school.

They reported that the pressure stemmed from deadlines for getting reading related assignments

done. The boys also said they felt pressure *as* they read because they always had to be doing

something beyond reading. Finally, they talked about the pressure they felt knowing that an

assignment was looming after they completed the reading. At no point did the boys mention,

however, that reading itself caused pressure or was taxing. In other words, the actual act of

reading was no problem; it was everything that went along with it. Jaylan describes some of the

expectations associated with school reading that loom when he reads:

> Okay, well when you read a book for school, you often have to think of metaphors and similes. You have to take down a page of the character description. I have to know what the major conflict was. You have to take notes on everything, or mental notes. That gets really stressful that you have to pay attention a lot more. When you read for school, you can't really get lost in a book. You are thinking of your project or how you are going to input this and that into your project. Just feeling pressure. Yeah, huge amount of pressure to use your vocabulary in your essay and all.

The amount of pressure Jaylan feels because of either the tasks that he must complete during or

after reading the book as well as all of the skills he needs to prove he understands while reading

the book take away from the enjoyment of simply reading a novel. It particular he can not get

lost in the story because of these tasks.

Required Personal Choice Reading – "It's just awful."

While they read many short stories and nonfiction selections in class, in most cases, when

the boys describe their school reading experiences they are referring to reading a novel that they

must choose for their literacy class to be completed and reported upon in some structured format,

usually in a written essay response. This assignment is called, somewhat erroneously, "personal

choice."

For this task, every student is required to read a self-selected novel at least once per

marking period. They are held accountable for this task and expected to demonstrate their

knowledge of the book by completing a written assignment related to the text. The tasks

associated with the boys' personal choice reading depend on the teacher ranging from

completing reading logs, noting the number of pages read at a sitting with a corresponding

summary of the selection, to nine paragraph essays. These nine paragraph essays require the students to discuss the setting, characterization, plot, conflict, and other novel-based characteristics.

These assignments are in lieu of reading a common novel and discussing it in class and the presumed purpose of the writing assignments is to show proof the students read the novels and practice responding to their reading through writing. Writing in response to reading a particular text is an important skill to be successful on the state's standardized test in literacy. The original intention of self-selection may be to enable the students to select what was of most interest to them, however, it seems this good intention had negative consequences. Typically, students choose their text from the school library. The boys reported that this is usually expected to be a novel; graphic novels, books of poetry, and how-to books are not considered by teachers to be appropriate choices to complete the reading tasks assigned to personal choice reading selections. The only non-fiction genre that seemed to be acceptable to teachers was biographical texts. Often the students are required to select a book written in the particular genre they are studying during that marking period such as science fiction or historical fiction. Sometimes students must choose a book in a sub-group of a genre. In the case of science fiction, for example, students might be required to choose a book that falls within the post-apocalyptic or dystopian science fiction category. In other words, while called personal choice reading, the students are significantly limited in the types of texts that will meet the assignment. Students are given approximately six to eight weeks to complete the novel and are expected to read it during their free time at home.   Enrique represented the feelings of all of the boys in the group when he explained why he dislikes the personal choice assignment.

> Well, we have to choose one book. Now you have the whole marking period. We have to read during our free time. At the end of the marking period, we have to do a nine-

> paragraph essay on it and explain it. I really don't like it because, like nine paragraphs is a lot. It's just awful. Right now, we're doing biographies, and I really don't care about these people who are dead. I'm sorry. It has to be historical biography so it has to be from 1912 to before that so, yeah…we go to the library and get a book, but it has to be in the same genre, which I really don't like, because we're reading historical fiction. Maybe I don't like historical fiction.

Enrique clearly resents not having complete autonomy to choose his *personal choice* text. For this reason, when he has to choose historical fiction, he dreads reading it before he has even chosen a book. We know that having the choice to read books that follow one's own interest is a significant motivator in getting students to read more because the purpose then of reading is to fulfill some sort of internal desire for pleasure or to learn more about a particular topic of interest. (Morrow, Sharkey, & Firestone, 1993; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992; Guthrie & Alvermann, 1999). While students are given some autonomy in the books they can choose for this assignment, it is significantly limited and there is a large assignment looming at the end. The focus, or purpose for reading then becomes getting it done to complete an assignment to get a grade. Therefore, the act of the reading to get lost in a book is itself lost.

As the boys discussed their personal choice reading assignments, they agreed that this work consistently impedes their enjoyment of the texts they have to read. They often did not see the purpose of various assignments given in conjunction with reading the text, and therefore felt that they were performing tasks just to complete them or to prove that they had read something. Philippé knows that reading can be enjoyable, but he reports that the tasks associated with his personal choice reading assignment impede the flow of reading and prevent him from losing himself in a book, significantly reducing the chances of him enjoying reading it.

> [Reading for school] is also kind of like almost a lose-lose situation. Either you do a project while you are reading the book and you can't enjoy it properly, or you do the reading and then you are like just hit up with the project at the end and you're like, "Whoa, why does this come up now?"

During the same conversation Jaylan and Rodger blame school for hiding or obstructing the fact that reading can be pleasurable.

> Jaylan: I feel school blinds you by the fact that you can read for entertainment.
>
> Rodger: I do agree with that. I feel like school has a force field around [it], and it's blocking everything we love and desire from us, which is keeping us from liking school and reading, except all the extracurricular activities like sports and stuff. There seems to be a barrier between school and life. It's just blocking us.

The boys' frustration is clear especially since they have previously experienced joy in reading. They appear to realize that the requirements that are attached to their personal choice reading is some sort of cruel joke because *personal choice* insinuates reading that is done for pleasure but the tasks that are assigned impede the pleasure of getting lost in the book.

Writing as Accountability for Reading

The boys indicated that they understood there was sometimes a purpose in attaching a writing assignment to reading, but that this should be done in class, in conjunction with reading selections from their reading anthologies. It was clear to the boys that these reading selections were given for the sole purpose of skill development. They knew that there was a direct connection between the readings done in class and preparation for standardized testing. For example, Philippé said that his teacher often stops them in the middle of a story to check for comprehension. When asked what he thought about that, his response was that it interrupts the flow of the reading but that maybe it was a good strategy to help him, "write a better OEQ that had to be done once we were done with reading."

The "OEQ" Philippé was referring to stands for "open-ended question." This is the terminology that the students have adopted from testing-speak to refer to a specific task they will encounter on the state standardized test. The OEQ is written in a standard format to match the state's standardized test format, typically, a brief synopsis or introduction to the situation in the

text followed by two questions. The first is usually a literal comprehension question about the

text and the second asks the student to make some sort of personal or real-world connection to

the reading. The students are taught to write a standardized response to OEQs. The format is two

paragraphs, one for each question, with an introduction sentence that begins with, "In the

story_____by,_____." This type of writing mirrors the expectations for the state's

yearly standardized test. Significant weight is given to the scores on this test in regards to

students' literacy class placement. A drop in the score from one year to the next could mean a

drop in their placement among the three levels. Therefore, doing well on their OEQ's was never

far from their minds. This was indicated when Xavier connected our discussions in the book

club to preparation for their OEQ responses as well as their performance on other tests and

quizzes.

> Well I think [book club can be] a boost for literacy [class]. I have done a lot more
> science fiction in school. Now because of this, it is really helping me on tests or quizzes
> and especially OEQs. Also, just knowing more about the genre, what varieties, post-
> apocalyptic, genetic engineering and stuff like that. When we talk about it, it gives me
> ideas to write my stuff. It's also just helping me out a lot.

In contrast to their acceptance of writing associated with reading in class, they repeatedly

and passionately described their disdain for other writing assignments, specifically essays about

setting, characterization, and plot of their personal choice reading novels. They felt that the

required length for some personal reading assignments, nine paragraphs describing features of

the book they read, was too long. Thinking about what they needed to write interrupted the flow

of the reading and added pressure because the boys felt they spent more time and energy

worrying about whether or not they would have enough to write or remember enough of the story

to write the essay than they did just enjoying the book. Some boys resorted to taking notes as

they read their novels to ensure they had enough material for their essays, further interrupting the

flow and their enjoyment. Philippé was very clear about how he would fix the problem of

interrupted reading taking away from his enjoyment.

> I think [the] literacy class itself, should be split into reading and writing. I think writing
> should stay out of this. I think that's alright, but reading, it's called reading for a reason.
> I don't think you should even have to pick up a pencil in reading. Either pick up a book
> and read or discuss it, talking with the teacher and other kids. I don't think a pencil or a
> binder should be involved in this. I only say pick up a book and read a book and discuss.
> I don't think there's any need for a piece of paper, a binder, or a pencil.

For these boys the amount of writing related to reading they were doing significantly limited

their enjoyment of their personal choice books. They not only felt the pressure of the writing

assignment, they also felt the pressure of the deadlines to finish reading the book so they could

complete the corresponding assignment. Although most boys found the writing assignment

associated with personal choice reading to be burdensome, Lamar's experience was different.

Lamar explained that his teacher allows them significant class time to read, "which is really

cool." Students in this class have to keep a reading log and write one-paragraph responses to

their personal choice reading once a week. According to Lamar, this "isn't that bad because it's

only a paragraph and it's usually about a lesson we learned that week." For Lamar, the writing

"isn't that bad" because he sees the purpose of the assignment and it is not so overbearing that it

significantly impedes the flow of reading. Additionally, the teacher provides time in class to

simply read silently.

Responses to Pressure to Complete Assignments

In response to lack of engagement and the pressure the boys felt to complete reading

assignments for their literacy classes, they all reacted in similar ways. In part these reactions

were based on not being interested in the books they chose at the library. They would look for

the thinnest book with the largest font so that they could get through the book quickly. Most

read half-heartedly, and some did not bother to read the entire book. Much of the time, they read

only enough to complete the assignment. For example, Enrique would often skim through the

text to find something he could say in his essay, knowing that it was unlikely that his teacher had

read the book he had chosen from the library. Others would go through their texts just enough to

find the answers to questions in packets. Roger mentioned how much he hates 'Word Wizard

Logs.' These logs are an attempt to help develop vocabulary.   When the students notice a new

word, they are instructed to make a guess about its meaning, and then find the dictionary

definition. Students are expected to log and define a specific number of vocabulary words for

each chapter they read. However, the boys reported that they would often fill in the logs without

reading the text by just looking for unfamiliar words they could log. While all the boys talked

about ways they minimized the actual reading they had to do to complete their assignments,

Enrique was perhaps most specific and systematic in his description of how he does so:

> In literacy, I only read for the question that's asked. We just had to read a biography and
> I chose my favorite hockey player. And [for the assignment] there are subheadings like
> early life and stuff [that we have to fill in]. It's early life, later life, major achievements
> and contribution to the world, and that's all I read the book for. I just Googled the
> answers. I barely even read the book, and he's a cool guy too, and I didn't even read it. I
> just Googled.
>
> Jim: Why?
>
> Enrique: Why? Because it's easier. [Laughs] Many kids, we actually try to read without
> looking for [facts, answers to questions], and then it is harder to go back and look for it.
> Then the second time when you do it, you're looking for figurative language and then
> you don't read anything. It's either one or the other and that's why it's not the best, I
> don't like it so I'm just going to answer the questions so I get a good grade.

Here, even when Enrique is given the choice to pursue his interests and a topic he loves, he

chooses not to actually read the book because he knows he will be required to complete a large

and uninteresting assignment once he is finished. Enrique's enjoyment of the book and the topic

are drained simply because he knows he has to read for the purpose of completing the

assignment. He also says that he cannot simply read the book for enjoyment because then he

will have go back through it to find the answers to required questions that may be unrelated to

what he has learned on his own about the topic of the book, his favorite hockey player. This

would increase the amount of time he has to spend on an assignment and reading he is forced to

do.   To avoid this, Enrique copes by refusing to read the book, instead using Google to find the

answers to the questions he has to answer.

Personal Relationships in School

Self-determination theory suggests a sense of autonomy develops most successfully in

conditions where children and teenagers feel related and close to significant adults in their lives.

Strong interpersonal relationships can facilitate intrinsic motivation only to the degree that they

are autonomy-supportive as opposed to controlling (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, and Ryan, 1991).

During our book club meetings, focus group interviews, and individual interviews, the boys had

many opportunities to discuss what they enjoyed about reading in their literacy classes. While

there were mostly complaints, Lamar and Philippé were the only two boys to mention anything

they enjoyed about their literacy classes and these comments related to the relationships they had

with their teachers.

Robotic Teachers. Most of the boys suggested that their teachers were more like robots

than relatable adults who follow scripted lessons without veering off course to discuss anything

of interest to them. This robot metaphor was frequently invoked when the boys talked about

interactions with their teachers and is a powerful descriptor illustrating how the boys view their

relationships with their teachers. In Jaylan's description of literacy teachers as robots he

suggests his teachers care neither about the content of the lesson, nor the students' reaction or

thinking about the content, only that it was covered.

> I think the teacher is like a robot. I just think that they will teach you just to teach you.
> They don't think of any significance behind what they are teaching. They always have

their lessons planned so you can always tell they are trying to get back on track. Teachers will not let you curve on at all. They will just keep you going straight on the highway.

Jaylan originated the metaphor, but all the other boys agreed with its appropriateness, even Lamar and Philippé. They were the only boys who mentioned positive experiences in their literacy classes; this was mainly due to their teachers' willingness to allow the boys to make their own decisions as well as their teachers' attempts to connect with their students. Lamar, for example, liked that his teacher read aloud to his classes on Fridays while the students were allowed to just listen or play simple games on their iPads. When I asked whether playing games while his teacher read was a distraction, Lamar explained that he was actually able to get deeply into the story by listening and that playing games on his iPad was just something to do as he listened because they were simple games that did not require much attention. Lamar also liked that his teacher often recommended books that he had just finished reading and appreciated the fact that his teacher often recommended books before they became hugely popular. Lamar said of his teacher, "It's just cool that he shows us what he likes to read, and it's not a school book."

Philippé, like Lamar, also praised his teacher because he read lots of Edgar Allen Poe stories and tapped into Philippé's love of mystery and the macabre. Philippé also mentioned that he could tell that his teacher loved those stories too, which seemed to enhance Philippé's interest in them. Philippé told me that he also read mysteries by other authors in which Poe was a character in the story. When asked why he liked these stories Philippé responded, "I don't know. I just love mystery like this and my teacher recommended more books." Philippé is pointing to the importance of his teacher recognizing his interests and making recommendations for further reading. For Philippé and Lamar these positive experiences in their literacy classes occurred because the teacher took time to personally recommend books based either on what they knew about the boys' interests or simply sharing their own personal interests. Recommending books

that were not part of the curriculum also seemed to be a way that Lamar and Philippé felt

connected to their teachers and got to know them on a more personal level. It was also important

to Philippé that his teacher is interested in and enthusiastic about reading.

> My teacher is a big fan of poems. He actually started his own club so I could tell
> that…he really likes literacy, and he reads a lot of poems, and he really likes Edger Allen
> Poe.

> In addition to his teacher reading aloud to his students, Lamar also reported that his

teacher provided lots of time in class to read their personal choice books. He said there were

weeks during which the students would get two to three forty- minute class periods to do this.

He appreciated the freedom of being able to read for a sustained period of time as well as the

trust his teacher placed in him to listen to the story while playing a game. This should not be

seen as a teacher who is unwilling to plan learning activities or engage his class. Research has

shown that sustained silent reading is a valuable use of time to improve students' literacy skills

(Allington, 2002; Krashen, 2004). Yet, despite the research suggesting they should do otherwise,

the schools and teachers in this district seemed often to fill class time with skill oriented

worksheets linked to short reading passages from basal readers. Lamar's experience with

sustained silent reading or read-alouds in the literacy class seemed to be the exception rather than

the rule, however.

> Jim: Does this happen in all your classes?

> Xavier: No way.

> Enrique: Nope. We have to read during our free time.

> Roger: My teacher is strict on following the curriculum. We ask her, like, could we just
> skip Reader's Workshop today and just read a good book? She was like, "no, you have
> to read this book." It's just really annoying. I don't blame them, [but] some teachers are
> like that.

Additionally, even though Philippé appreciates his teacher's love of poetry and Poe and the fact

that he shares his opinions and personal interests with his students, Philippé does not believe that

this is the norm. Philippé, in fact, believes most teachers follow a script and are more concerned

with the content than connecting with their students.

> They just get a book on [teaching]. Just do whatever the book says. Kids want to know what is going on with you. Which is actually the reason why I guess that kids keep asking about personal questions about what teachers like to do. Teachers are like, "I have to teach about the class," and have to stay on topic.

The feeling that teachers do not relate to their students on a personal level was pervasive

among all the members of the group. They felt that their teachers really had no time and little

interest in getting to know each student on a personal level. Jaylan had several ideas about how

to change this. One of his ideas was that teachers should spend at least two hours with each

student just talking and getting to know one another so that the teacher could personalize

education and make book recommendations based on the students' interests. When asked how

he would change his literacy class to make it better, he suggested an evaluation plan to help

teachers learn more about what students like and dislike about the class and what would make it

a better learning experience:

> I think there should be an evaluation, but for the teacher at the end of the month, made by the students. I feel it should be anonymous. It should be, "Do you enjoy this class? Are you learning anything from this class? How could you learn more in this class?" You could be learning something and not enjoying the class and vice versa. You have to enjoy the class to learn anything anyway. I think teachers should strive for having it 50/50 where you are enjoying the class and you are also learning a lot from it because you are not really accomplishing anything if it's one over the other.

The boys did not necessarily blame their teachers for the lack of personal interaction

because they understood that they were limited by the amount of time they have in class. It is

important to mention that none of the boys mentioned actually disliking their teachers as people.

Nevertheless, they feel their teachers were robotic. The boys were all clear that they did not like

or see the reason for the tasks they were expected to complete. All the boys saw the instruction in their literacy classes as separate from the teachers who were expected to implement the instruction. For example, about his teacher assigning reading logs and vocabulary logs or running Reader's Workshop, Roger said, "I don't blame them. They have to do it."   In fact, the boys assumed that the instruction in their literacy classes was a result of curricular pressures beyond the teachers' control as well as the limited amount of time teachers have in the day to cover all the content they were expected to cover. They believed it was the nature of schooling that was the cause of the problem, and that it was unavoidable. Jaylan imagined me in the role of a literacy teacher,

> I want to say something. If you were a literacy teacher, it would be so different. If you were a literacy teacher, you would probably stay with what you do in school. You won't get off-topic and everything. You'd just be different [than you are in the book club].

Jaylan makes it clear that it's not the teacher but rather the job, that's the problem, when he assumed that I would become just as robotic as other teachers.

Reading Relationships with Classmates. In addition to feeling generally disconnected from their teachers, the boys described their interactions with their classmates in their literacy classes as unsatisfactory. They did not seem to see their classmates as sources of learning or willing participants in deep discussion. They described class interactions as primarily between teacher and student and rarely student to student. They did, however, see the potential of literature circles to foster interaction among students. In literature circles, students are assigned various roles to facilitate conversation about a particular text (Daniels, 2002). For example, the *Connector*, searches the reading selection for text-to-world, text-to-text, or text-to-self connections and shares them with the group. The *Word Finder* highlights new vocabulary words to discuss and define. However, when they worked in literacy circles, the boys reported that

their interaction was a result only of the assigned roles they were expected to fulfill. The literacy

circles were primarily conducted to discuss a short story or non-fiction selection from a basal

reader. None of the boys participated in literature circles in which the discussion was in relation

to a shared novel or nonfiction book, only short selections from basal readers. The boys said

they participated because they had to and to get a good grade, but doing so did little to kindle a

real interest in the text or desire to interact with classmates about it.

The boys did not feel the participation of the other members was useful and at times even

dampened their reading experience and their learning. While they acknowledged that being with

friends could get them off track, they also asserted that having some sort of relationship with

group members helped the conversation flow. Pablo echoed several of the boys when he

described his experience with literature circles:

> We did literature circles this year again and it was just a bunch of kids [thrown
> together]…which is really bad because I always get stuck with the kids who don't read or
> do their job, which is like half your grade. They just sit there and say, "Okay, blah, blah,
> blah," when the teacher comes around. [The rest of the time] you just talk about
> whatever; it doesn't help. I think [the book club] is different because this is actually
> enjoyable and there are no kids like I was talking about.

Roger feels the experience would be more useful if students were allowed to choose who is in

their groups.

> It would be better if the teachers let us choose our groups because some kids don't care
> [and] they think that they can do it all at the last second or skip it and not really get the
> whole experience. [Sometimes] they'll get a good grade but still don't get the story or
> whatever. [The attitude is] Who cares? Let's just get an "A", and call it a day.

Literature circles are meant to capitalize on the social nature of reading. However, they

do not automatically help to deepen meaning making, and they can end up being inauthentic

social interactions. In the literature circles in which the boys participated, there seemed to be

little investment in either reading or discussing the text. Rather, participating in the literature

circle seemed to become just another task to complete.   The boys also noted the possibility that

they may be in groups in which others do not take their roles seriously, therefore hindering any

possibility of learning or deep discussion.

        Being heard and "on-topic."   When describing interactions with their teachers and their

classmates within their literacy classes, a common theme emerged in regard to not being heard.

As mentioned above, even when a space was created for the boys to interact with their

classmates in relation to a reading, the boys did not feel that the conversations were useful or

authentic. In regards to their teachers, the boys invoked the robot metaphor again. The boys

seemed to believe that part of their teachers' roboticism was rooted in the pressure the teachers

feel to get every student to participate and respond to the text in classroom discussions.

However, the boys also felt that the teacher did not really care about what the students say or the

potential of comments to enhance or move the discussion in meaningful ways, only that a

response had been given. Philippé was very adamant about this point:

> But then, in school, sometimes you are like, "Oh, I really want to say this." Then [the
> teacher] is just like, "Oh yeah, yeah. We are going on to the next question now." And
> you're like, okay I was raising my hand and waiting so much to say this one comment
> and it really was of no use. It just makes me, I don't know. I feel sort of like, not sad, but
> I feel almost like that …not useful, I didn't have to raise my hand. It just makes me
> feel…disappointed.

It is clear that the discussion is important to Philippé and that he wants to participate but because

he is not able to share his thoughts he begins to have a "why bother?" attitude.

        In addition to the desire to be heard, the boys frequently mentioned that their teachers

required them to stay "on topic." Being on topic meant that they could not ask questions that

would steer the conversation away from answering the questions in packets that they were given,

or making connections to the reading that seemed far afield such as ones to video games or

movies. They felt restricted in their contributions to classroom talk and bristled at always having

to answer the teachers' questions in the "appropriate" way.

During the discussion of our first book, *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*, Jaylan

observed that a particular scene where a single event has several repercussions reminded him of

a story he recently read by Ray Bradbury in *The Sound of Thunder* in which a character stepped

on a butterfly and changed the course of history. Enrique interrupted him by saying this seemed

unrealistic. However, after he made this comment, he asserted that, "If I said that in class, I'd be

killed." When I asked him to explain this in a later interview, he explained that his teacher

would be annoyed because "she would think I was just trying to be funny and distract

everybody." Granted, Enrique did interrupt Jaylan and that may not be acceptable in the

classroom, regardless of what he had to say. However, Enrique realized that pointing out what

he saw as a flaw in the text might be stifled because it might take the teacher and the class "off

topic."   The boys felt not only a lack autonomy in any of the assignments that were attached to

the readings they were required to do in school, but also to what they were permitted to discuss.

Philippé gave another example of how his thinking and classroom talk is controlled by the

teacher.

> In school we are reading so you can learn this certain thing. You should be reading so
> you can find out for yourself instead of forcing you into learning. We just read the play,
> the screenplay, whatever, *The Miracle Worker,* and we have to answer questions about
> the three symbols in class. It's totally….I know what the three symbols are. I know how
> to describe them, but I don't want to anymore. It's because I have to.

Enrique notes that one of the reasons he hates his literacy class is because he feels he cannot

make specific kinds of connections to what they read for class.

> We don't have discussions like about movies off of [the reading]. The teacher would
> never let [us]… We [can't] talk about movies and stuff even though it is on topic,
> obviously, because we got that idea from probably talking about the book. They don't see
> the connection between the two and then that is why I hate it.

The freedom to be able to be able to make connections, explore what they wanted to explore meant something to these boys. They did not feel they could do this and there seemed to be little opportunity in the classroom for they boys to self-direct conversations. They felt that the teacher controlled the talk in the classroom and that they needed to fall in line.

Reengagement with Reading in the Book Club

The boys mentioned that the book club either brought them back to reading or showed them that reading could be pleasurable. This seems to be driven by, in part, the ways the book club model gave the boys a sense of autonomy not only in what they chose to read and how much of it, but a sense of relief from pressure to complete assignments attached to their reading. The boys could read for the sake of reading, instead of preparation for standardized tests, a writing assignment, or getting through curriculum that must be covered. However, it seems that the nature of the talk about the text that occurred at the book club meetings was a significant motivator to read and continue to participate in the group. This talk is significantly different than what seems to happen for them in school in that it is rooted in meaningful relationships established through humor, connectedness, and the autonomy to have unstructured but deep and meaningful conversations.

Relief from the Pressure

After reading the first book in our book club, the boys expressed that reading in the book club was more relaxed. They appreciated the fact that there were no writing assignments, logs, "packet" questions, or projects to complete. They reported that they felt relaxed because they did not have to meet deadlines and they could read at their own pace because they chose (as a group) how much they would read for the next week. In comparing his reading experiences in the book club and in school, Philippé noted stark differences:

> I understand that in school they make you write all about [the book in school]…I don't know how to say this, but I think it's like you don't mind reading the book because your mind is relaxed [in the book club]. You are not thinking of what you are going to do after.

Xavier added that participating in the group helped him understand the text in ways not

supported by classroom activities:

> I'm getting enjoyment [out] of just reading and not being pressured to finish or know, really what's happening all the time. If I don't know what is happening, I'll listen to the group, [and a] teacher won't yell at me.

For Xavier, he book club provides a safe place for him to gain understanding of the parts of the

text he finds difficult to comprehend because he knows the discussion will fill those gaps. He

also knows he could simply ask for clarification and the other boys would willingly offer their

interpretations and opinions. Therefore being in the book club helped Xavier develop a feeling

of competence whereas he feels the conditions in his literacy class do not. Jaylan went further in

affirming the value of the book club, by stating that the book club inspired him to read on his

own.

> I like [book club] because you are not feeling pressured to finish the book and this is also helping me to start reading on my own other than in school, outside of school…I feel like school keeps kids from wanting to read because they think it's always an assignment, but now [the book club is] helping me realize that you can read for fun too.

> Lamar, even with his decreased workload in regards to reading compared to the other

boys, still valued the reading in the book club as different from school reading not only because

he felt more engaged with the reading but also because there were no tasks assigned to the

reading.

> Yes, [book club] is definitely different because...you are…like, when school's associated, there's a deadline probably, a report or something and then that's it. You are just done with it and you don't want to think about it anymore. You don't even remember it because you don't want to remember it. It's just finally over. With [book club], it's like I remember reading about the first page of the book when they talked about Eddie dying in a few minutes. I remember the whole book, every person Eddie met. I know it's

weird. It's so much different though, because there's no assignment. It's not even like I have to read this. I want to read this.

The relief from the pressure of reading within a limited time frame and the lack of assignments helped the boys reengage with reading for pleasure. More importantly, perhaps, is that the talk in the book club about the readings allowed the boys to see just how much they were able to comprehend, understand, and remember.

The Nature of Talk in the Book Club

The boys indicated repeatedly that the tasks and writing assignments in school hindered the flow of and altered the purpose of reading, thus failing to support and enhance the basic human needs of autonomy, relationships, and competence. Deci et al. (1991) would argue that contexts that do little to support the basic human needs necessary to develop self-determination reduce motivation and natural development and can result in poor attitudes. In contrast to the types of talk they experienced in school, which was mainly teacher-student questions and answers from worksheets, the boys asserted that in the book club there was a much more natural and satisfying opportunity for deep discussion. They felt the key elements that contributed to this were the freewheeling nature of the conversation that could move from topic to topic and their freedom to use humor without consequence.

Autonomy through exploration and "getting off-topic." The boys felt the novels themselves played a key role in promoting deep discussion because they were springboards for talking about various interesting and challenging topics and raising stimulating and thought provoking questions. Additionally, the books resonated with other experiences the boys had with other media so that they could often draw connections to books or stories they read previously, to video games they played, and television shows or movies they watched. These connections were not superficial. They drew connections on a symbolic level, and they talked

about the struggle between good and evil, ethical issues in science, and the role of government in crisis situations. As the boys reflected on our book club discussions during the focus group and individual interviews, it became clear that a source of motivation for the boys to read was the desire to participate in the deep discussions that occurred when we met. Lamar said,

> Yeah, so over at the book club, we could keep this going for as long as we wanted or we could talk about anything…because discussion is actually what we came for. In school, there is no discussion like this.

While the boys did not report being overly enthusiastic about discussing their reading in their literacy classes, they were frequently enthusiastic about discussing it in book club. Typically, our conversations started with me asking the simple question, "What did you think?" Often the boys would respond by talking over one another excitedly, describing their favorite scenes from the reading for the week. After the first few weeks of meeting, I did not even pose the question anymore because the boys would start talking about the reading before they even sat down. Sometimes, I would have to ask them to wait to start talking about the book so the others who had not arrived would not miss too much. Rarely could the boys wait, however, so I would have them repeat their earlier comments when the rest of the boys had arrived.

The boys often made spontaneous and enthusiastic connections to popular media. Once a movie connection was made, the boys would talk about what they loved about the movie and how it connected to the book. In doing so, they would often bring up several different movies or television shows, some of which were based on comic books or science fiction novels, then ask if others knew them. Talking about movies or television shows and likes and dislikes in connection to the book would eat up some time at our meetings, yet it allowed the boys to connect with each other and the text while permitting them to control the conversation.

Our talk, however, was not always linear and did not always parallel the logical

progression of the stories. Instead, they often jumped from idea to idea because of the questions

the boys had as we discussed the reading. Not surprisingly then, it was not unusual for one of

the boys to ask a question he had about the text, sometimes sparked by something that was said,

but at other times unrelated. While the boys acknowledged that they jumped from topic to topic,

they always came back to the book and the questions always seemed related. For example,

during our reading of *World War Z,* there were many interruptions related to political references

in the story. During *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* there were often questions about

whether the setting and events were actual places and events. And, in *Flowers for Algernon*,

there were many questions about the characters' motivations. The conversations may have

sometimes been disjointed, and a teacher may have felt the conversation did not touch on every

literary point and device that he wanted to cover. Yet, the boys felt there was a richness to the

conversation that was quite different from what they experienced in their literacy classes. At the

same time, the boys reported that they were learning more and were more engaged in what they

were reading because of the natural, uncontrolled flow of conversation in the book club. Enrique

described the relationship between the free flowing discussion and their learning by saying:

> You are learning more [in book club] when you get off topic, but you are still connecting
> it back. Because anyone can just pick up a book and read it, but to go with that, into that
> depth with the conversation, that is when you actually learn a lot of stuff.

There were times when we completely lost sight of the book in our discussion, for

example when the boys would tell anecdotes about things that happened in school. However,

getting back to a discussion about the book was never difficult and was a responsibility that we

all shared. One of the boys would observe, "Wow we're completely off topic," or I would ask a

question about the book that would redirect them. When they were asked to describe how our

discussions were different from the discussions they had in their literacy classes, Xavier

identified the autonomy and the freedom to digress as key differences.

> They [book club discussions] get so off topic, which is still on topic, but it is off topic at the same time. We have got the topic, and we know we are going to get back to it. You are just making connections, actually connections inside connections, inside connections, inside of connections. If we were to do that in literacy, we would get killed from the teacher.

Though Xavier obviously exaggerated when he said that the teacher would kill him and his

classmates if they participated in discussions in the same way they do in the book club, he is

making clear that he understands and feels limited by what he is allowed to talk about in class,

and that he must be conscious about what he can contribute to the conversation. Jaylan used a

highway metaphor to make a similar point about discussions in the book club as compared to

those at school.

> I know I said this before but I'm going to say it again. Teachers will just keep you going on the highway, but here we can take exits if we want to, to talk about whatever, explore the town or something, you know. It goes back to the highway, I guess. I don't know, [it] feels different because we would literally talk about anything.

"Concentrationable" humor. While the free flow of conversation and the breadth and

depth of the topics we discussed were important to the boys, humor is another aspect of our

discussions that was important to the boys' enjoyment of the book club. When revisiting some

of our conversations in individual interviews, the boys would frequently reminisce about how

much fun they had and how funny one particular joke or situation was to them. While some of

the boys enjoyed being the comedians performing for one another, the others were happy to be

their audience. Their humor was often silly and might be considered somewhat inappropriate

for school; however, it rarely distracted the boys so much that they were not able to quickly

come back to talking about the book.

They expressed their humor in various ways. They would often crack jokes on each

other, themselves, and me. Or, they would tell funny stories about events that happened to them

in and out of school. Yet, their humor was never malicious, and seemed to foster deeper

relationships. For example, Enrique became known for making up words that sounded like real

words when he was talking about the reading. One example of this is "concentrationable."

Enrique was describing why he enjoyed reading *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* and said

that "the book was more concentrationable than others because we talk about it." I joked with

Enrique and said while I appreciated his comment, he did not need to make up words to prove a

point. Enrique laughed and said it should be a word because "it makes sense." The other boys

agreed that the word made sense and used it and Enrique's other made up words frequently in

conversation, each time getting a laugh for Enrique, but expressing themselves in a way they all

understood because of their shared experiences in the book club. This vignette is important for

two reasons. First it demonstrates the degree in which the boys felt secure enough to push back

even in the case of my joking and it shows how the boys began to bond to create a language of

their own. Moreover, while the boys may not have realized they were developing a common

language they did articulate that using humor created and strengthened those bonds.

Enrique and others often saw humor in the events of the stories and would imagine

extreme situations evoked by them. For example, we laughed at what we would do if we saw a

blue man like one of the characters in *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*. We imagined

ourselves confronted by zombies in *World War Z,* and laughed about the various bodily

responses that would occur as a result of our fear. When they were not cracking on each other or

commenting on how they would handle extreme situations, they sometimes made silly and

seemingly random comments. At one point during a serious conversation, Jaylan was struggling

to express something he wanted to say. When he could not get his point across, he gave up and said, "and then Jesus went to Mars," which resulted in much laughter. Subsequently, the phrase was frequently invoked during conversations.

Additionally, the boys often acted silly just to try to make one another laugh. For example, they attempted to make animals out of their napkins, but generally fell far short of them looking anything like an animal, but would exclaim, "see, a bird." A slice of lemon also became a popular prop, either eating it to make faces from the tartness or creating a large yellow smile by placing it fully inside of their mouths. They were often clumsy picking their pizza up from the platter. Sauce and hot cheese falling on the table or in their drinks would make them laugh heartily at the mess they created and at their clumsiness.

Although this kind of humor was unconnected to the books, it seemed to be essential to the success of the book club because it helped the boys get to know one another and as Jaylan said, "realize each other's interests." They felt that in school people wore a different persona than the one students wore in school but that the jesting and joking helped them get to know each other in a deeper way, especially those who were more serious or quiet in school. Jaylan felt that in the book club the other boys were more open than they would be in school. He noted that the kids he saw as shy and somewhat serious in school were actually pretty funny. The boys also reported that joking and silliness "relaxed" their minds so the books were more "concentrationable" and helped them gain control over the conversation during our meetings. They felt that school tries to stifle their senses of humor. While they acknowledge that some students use humor for attention and as a distraction from the topic at hand, they felt that their joking in the book club was a result of the natural flow of the conversation. They also reported that even if the joking diverted the discussion, they knew they could (and generally did) get right

back to the topic at hand. Jaylan summarizes for the group how humor and the freedom to be

silly was important.

> I think humor is the one thing that separates this the most from school. I think humor is
> actually what makes it more interesting and keeps me coming here. Enrique might say
> something stupid and funny in the beginning and I don't want to miss it. Now when you
> joke you get to enjoy the moment and like not really show off, but you feel like I did
> something fun. It makes a big impact, having fun and educationally talking. Because
> when you're silly, you could just…your mind gets set free, that your thoughts keep
> running and then you can find something you want to say to contribute to an actual
> conversation. Teachers always say that getting silly is being off-track, but being
> silly…your silliness started from something in the conversation, you're listening. It's
> going to come right back, but they just don't see that. Humor was a huge role in this
> book club because I would say without humor I would have left on the first day because I
> would think this is boring as hell. I thought it was like a really cool experience because it
> actually, I thought reading could be boring for me.

He is asserting the value of being able to express their humor and being silly because it is an

important way to relate to one another, and it can be an indicator that they were connecting to the

reading. As it did for Jaylan, the freedom to be funny seemed to motivate the boys to continue to

participate in book club meetings and discussions, read, and learn.

Feeling valued through discussion. Although the boys forged bonds through humor,

they also seemed to feel connected to one another simply because they had the opportunity to

express their opinions. The freewheeling nature of the discussions allowed the boys to share

what they know and to expand their knowledge through the discussion. They all appreciated the

turns conversations can take even when they veered away from a particular point someone

mentioned. The boys assumed the turns in the conversation were a result of their contributions

to the discussion and in turn felt a sense of pride in the fact that the conversation shifted because

of something they added. Pablo explained the value of making contribution to the conversation

even when they immediately turn in another direction.

> Okay, the thing is even when we say something [during a book club discussion], it is not
> like we are getting ignored because even though somebody brings up a different topic, at

least they have two or three questions [off] of what you mentioned and then they mentioned something that is totally off of what you said. You almost feel like, "Oh, I feel proud that I mentioned something." In [book club] at least whenever I say something, somebody else either brings up the same topic or even though they change the topic, at least got it from something I said. I feel kind of like proud that oh, wow I said this and now we are talking about another topic and we're having fun.

Philippé further observes that participants are much more engaged in book club discussions than they are at school:

[The discussions] made me feel very happy because I could tell that every time somebody is talking you could tell that they are listening when they are nodding their head, "Oh wow, yeah, I understand your point, I see that." It is kind of like while you are talking you can also feel like, oh, wow they are actually listening so I can go on with my conversation. Unlike in school, when I am saying something, I kind of die out … because I could see that they are not really interested in it. I start talking lower and lower and just abruptly end my conversation. It does make me happy that I get to see people looking at me interested… I could keep going on and on.

Strikingly, Philippé's comment indicates how acutely aware he is of his behavioral response when he feels disconnected from his audience. This feeling of uselessness and disconnection may have an impact on the motivation to read the text that is assigned in class, and has the potential to carry over into reading for pleasure. Where reading for these boys is still regarded as just another task to complete in school, reading in the book club becomes more meaningful because of the positive responses of the group. Without opportunities to share their responses to the text, the boys seem to be less likely to be motivated to read on their own. Roger explains:

I guess in a group, when you think of it, you feel like…when you're reading by yourself, you feel like oh, I found something that's really interesting, but you don't have anybody to share it to, other than yourself, because nobody would really care. In this group, if you find something interesting, other people would actually be interested. You don't really feel like reading when everybody around you doesn't care.

Jaylan was impressed by the members' capacity for important discussion and he values their perspectives. He said he believes the reason these deep discussions did not happen in school was due to his teachers' lack of trust in their students' ability to have these discussions.

As Jaylan recalled the various topics of our discussions, he expressed a sense of pride in the

ability of the book club group to discuss topics (even controversial ones) that emerge from the

reading.

> I want to say it just kind of amazes me that twelve, thirteen, fourteen-year-old kids can actually talk about things like gay parents, and what we would do in a war, and changing genes when [we] are out of school. Usually teachers don't really think kids are that smart. They don't go into that deep of the conversation, but we could do it and also just things that I could get different perspectives from what other people think – so [it's] really nice.

While Jaylan seems to just realize just how capable students his age are having meaningful

conversations, he also gives the impression that he believes his teachers would not feel the same.

In the book club he saw how valuable his input was to the conversations because of the positive

feedback of the others who were interested in his opinions while responding with their own.

Mentor/Advisor Relationships

As the boys shared their opinions about their literacy classes during book club meetings

and focus group interviews, I had the opportunity to ask them how they would change their

literacy classes. While the boys thought it was important for everyone to read the same book, a

key area for change that they identified was the teacher's role. For Xavier, this means making

the teacher more of an equal participant in the classroom:

> Let us choose the books we all agree on and read the same thing and we don't even need pizza. It's just more fun like that. I would say downgrade the teacher, not get rid of, but downgrade what you call them. I'd rather call them an advisor or a mentor than a teacher because it's a little better.

In his desire for a mentor rather than a teacher, Xavier, like many of the boys, seemed to be

looking for more personal interaction with their teachers. This led me to ask what they saw as

the difference between mentors and teachers. They explained that the primary difference was

that mentors care more about their mentees and know them on a deeper, more personal level.

They saw mentors as being more flexible and able to cater to individual needs where teachers are

more rigid and controlling. For Xavier, a mentor is more motivating because power differentials

are equalized. He also believes that if teachers acted more like mentors as defined by the boys,

their students would be more motivated to read. Jaylan made similar observations.

> A mentor isn't much more powerful than me. If [teachers] sort of disappear,[they would
> be] more like a guide or a mentor. It makes you more motivated to do better…it's
> different with a teacher where it is like, "do this and this." Where you're one guide or
> mentor, it levels it out and we're not like wood and water. They wouldn't just tell you to
> do it. [Mentors] will tell you on a personal level and they will get to know you and they
> would know exactly how you think because they know you better. Whereas teachers,
> they just tell everyone to do it.

Though the equalization of power was important to the boys, more important was their

sense of autonomy and relationship building that they felt a mentor would provide. To these

boys, the teacher is like a cog in a large school-machine that must do a very specific job.

Though some teachers may try, the boys do not feel that the teacher sees it as a priority to relate

to and inspire students. Instead their primary task is to produce students who can get good grade

and do well on standardized tests. No one in the group felt that their teachers acted as mentors.

The assumptions about how teachers act were so entrenched in their school reading

experiences, that in the book club it took some time for the boys to see my role as their teacher

"disappear." At first, they struggled to call me by my first name, forgetting or saying it felt

"weird." Additionally, during our meetings for the first book, the boys would wait quietly to

begin talking about the book until I initiated conversation. They expected a teacher question-

student response format when we talked about the book. There were a couple of awkwardly

silent periods during the first two or three weeks of our meetings because the boys were

expecting me to drive the conversation. They also edited their speech around me initially. They

cleaned up their language for my benefit as well as hesitated to talk negatively about teachers.

Yet, as we met more, they seemed to let go of some of the markers that traditionally separate teachers and students.

To facilitate this transition, I made a conscious effort throughout our meetings to shed the teacher role as much as possible. I never reprimanded them for any comments about the books we read or their teachers in school, and I shared my own stories of how I avoided reading assignments when I was a student. Also, the books selected seemed to help equalize our positions. The boys seemed to feel respected simply because the books had language or themes that were more in line with the television shows and movies they watched than what they read in school. Some of the books had strong language or violent scenes, breaking school taboos that help dissolve the initial school-like behavior and expectations. Just that I would suggest these books seemed to demonstrate to the boys that I trusted that they were mature enough to handle such themes, thereby deepening our relationship and reducing their feeling that I was in control of what they would read. Jaylan, for example, said that he felt more respected and free because the books we read had strong language and "inappropriate stuff." By "inappropriate stuff" he was referring to the level of violence and sexual innuendo in *World War Z* and *Flowers for Algernon* which are not typically acceptable in school.

As a result of constant effort to share control with the boys, they began to talk to me more like a friend than a teacher. I could tell this was happening because they began to recommend television shows and movies I should watch, and they began to use humor and language that would be considered inappropriate in school. Other times, I would be the butt of jokes as they poked fun at my age, my unwillingness to get a case for my cell phone, the length of my text messages, and my lack of understanding of their text-speak. Over time they seemed to stop feeling like they were students and I was their teacher. When I asked, specifically, whether they

saw me as a teacher, a mentor, or a friend, their answers made it clear that their view of me as a

teacher had begun to diminish and that this had an impact on how the boys felt about the book

club. Xavier and Jaylan explain that their sense of autonomy in the book club fostered our

relationship and was a motivating factor in their continued participation and reading.

> Xavier: To me, [our relationship] was either equal or a mentor/mentee relationship. It is
> important to me because I never felt like I was a student here. I wouldn't come [if I was]
> going to be a full time student. That would kill me. You didn't really say, "Okay, now
> we are going to read to page whatever." Instead you were more like, "What do you guys
> want to read up to?" It is just better than what you would do at school.

> Jaylan: But I thought this is like two things. I thought of it as mentor/mentee and also a
> friends kind of thing because, I mean, you're obviously the one facilitating this, so you
> are our mentor. You are keeping us on track sometimes and everything, and you are not
> bossing us around telling us what to do. You are just like, when we went too far off the
> topic, you would bring us back by saying something you noticed in the book.

> Jim: You noticed that?

> Jaylan: Of course I did, I'm not stupid. [Laughs]. But you didn't keep us in line. That is
> the thing I kind of like. It's like a highway and teachers don't let you curve at all. I don't
> know, but I also think of it as a friend thing. We talked about everything so that is why it
> is more like a friendly thing in a way.

Philippé discounted my role as teacher/authority even further by observing that everyone in the

group contributed to meaning making. His comment is evidence of the sense of autonomy,

competence, and relatedness so important to build intrinsic motivation to self-direct that he

experienced in the book club.

> If I really got to choose I would say [Jim's role] is kind of like none of the above only
> because … it doesn't really seem as if you were a mentor or a teacher and [I was] the
> mentee, which seems kind of weird. I would say all of us are each other's mentors and
> mentees. Everybody brings up their own ideas. Sometimes if Lamar might say
> something and I would say, "Oh wow, that is a good point." I could use it in my life or in
> school for me. All the people might bring topics that can actually help them in school or
> life. So we are all kind of guiding each other because you would first let us say what we
> thought, and then you would bring up your own point which would actually make me
> feel, "Oh, okay, so all of us have a point." Because if you were just to mention your
> point up front, we would think alright, that is the point. We don't have to say anything

else. We would listen to what each person had to say and it could help us in other ways, I guess we are all each other's mentors and mentees.

Philippé positioning everyone as equals demonstrates just how cohesive the group became, how valuable they saw each other's input, and how they worked together through discussion to create an understanding of the text. He also understands the power and the authority of the position of the teacher because if the teacher makes a point, it must be the right one and no further discussion needs to happen.

Learning Outcomes in Book Club

The boys created a sharp contrast to school when they talked about what they felt they learned in the book club. They were unanimous in asserting that not having assignments to complete for the reading they did in the book club encouraged them to read. Consequently they found they were able to lose themselves in the books we read This gave them a deeper connection to the texts which they felt helped them learned more because they were simply reading and sharing their responses and thoughts about it. Even those who had not done the reading for the week or chose not to read most of a book felt they were learning because of the conversations we had when we met. Enrique, who typically avoided reading for school and found other ways to complete his assignments, realized that the discussions in the book club led him to see books differently and said he enjoyed investigating the symbolism in the stories we read. For example, he described his amazement after a discussion we had about Charlie's sister Norma's name in *Flowers for Algernon*. Charlie frequently mentions how much he wants to be normal. At one point in our conversation, I said that if the "l" is removed from the word "normal" one gets the name Norma. This was a significant moment in our group.

> Lamar: Whoa! I just, I just need to get up and walk. My mind is blown. [Laughter from the group]

> Pablo: How do authors, I mean, how do they think of these things? How do they do this?
>
> Lamar: You mean to tell me that this was done on purpose because Charlie keeps saying he wants to be normal and his sister is?
>
> Jim: I don't know. I've read this book at least three times, and in book clubs, and this is the first time it dawned on me. I'm not saying the author did this on purpose, but it seems like it's possible.
>
> Xavier: He definitely did. What else could it be?
>
> Enrique: That is so cool.

During an individual interview with Enrique when he reflected on this moment and other

discussions about the symbolism we explored, he described seeing reading differently as a result

of participating in the book club because the text seemed to hold more meaning for him and he

was beginning to read with a more critical eye.

> Yeah [book club] made the book more important, and it really amazed me how stuff worked in the book like Norma was normal, which is really cool. I wouldn't have noticed that, but I look for it now. It's cool. The book club made me look out more. I'd be like, "Guys did you see that?" It was really cool.

Later in reference to the assignments he completes in class, Enrique elaborated on this when he

contrasted the way he reads a book in school with how he reads for the book club:

> [Class reading is] not the same [as book club] because you're not looking in depth for, "That's a cool thing the author did. That's really interesting." When you're reading it in school for an assignment, you're just looking for the facts you need. You're reading over the packet and you're answering the questions. You're not reading the story too much. You can't enjoy the story because sometimes the assignment seems so big, like the nine-paragraph essay at the end of a choice book. You're supposed to read for the enjoyment. If you ask the author, they'll be like, "Who cares about reading in school? Read for fun." That's what I think they would say at least.

Enrique clearly believes that the purpose of reading in school is simply to complete assignments

and receive a grade. This significantly impacts his motivation and willingness to read because

prior to his book club experience he connected reading only with school and its associated

assignments. For him and several of the other boys, the book club shifted the purpose of reading

from completing a task to enjoyment by giving the boys more control over the pace of the

reading and the conversations associated with the reading, and removing the pressure of the tasks

that are associated with reading in school.   For Enrique, when you read for fun you read more

deeply.

The other boys also admitted that they began to look at their school reading differently.

They were a little more open to the kind of text analysis that teachers encouraged them to engage

in. Xavier had declared that he hated when teachers asked what certain things meant or

symbolized. "Can't a purple curtain just be a purple curtain? Why does it always have to mean

something?" he asked. However, in an individual interview after reading the three books in the

book club, he seemed to have changed his opinion about analyzing symbols in the text.

> It's almost like I read…it's not like I enjoy school more, but I read it and look for stuff
> more. Look for symbolism more. [Like] when we were talking about *The Five People
> You Meet in Heaven*, how the key that cut the rope. All that. I look for that more and it's
> cool to think about stuff that I never caught on to without this.

Xavier is referring to one of our discussions about our first book. In the story, someone loses a

car key which gets jammed into an amusement park ride and ends up being the cause of Eddie's

death. The boys started discussing how something so seemingly innocuous could cause such a

catastrophic death. I then mentioned that it seemed like the key opened the door to heaven for

Eddie. This spawned several discussions throughout the book about what things might mean and

whether or not they were arbitrary or there because the author intended something in particular.

In fact, wondering about the author's intention often led to lively discussion and debate.

Not only did the boys claim they became more interested in and aware of symbolism, but

they also claimed that the book club helped them learn how to talk about their reading in more

substantive ways and this improved their participation in school. They maintained that the book

club conversations led to them to thinking and learning about a variety of topics to which they

had not before been exposed. An example of this occurred during a conversation about the

author of *World War Z*, Max Brooks. I mentioned to the boys that the author's father is Mel

Brooks who is famous for making many movie comedies. I explained that a frequent topic of his

movies, like *The Producers*, was to poke fun at Hitler and the Nazis.   This spawned a

conversation about what we knew about World War II, but it also allowed us to talk about how

the Holocaust relates to the book in regards to a policy of isolationism. That led to discussions

and questions about the current events in Syria as well as other sites of genocide such as

Rwanda. During our reading of *World War Z*, Jaylan affirmed the value of this kind of

discussion. Though he claims not to be a reader, he is intensely curious and was an active

participant in every discussion, even when he did not read the selection for the week. He

reported that he was learning a lot during our conversations and that he wished for more

discussion like we had in the book club in school because he felt like this was when he learned

the most and was able to explore his and others' ideas.

> We learned some stuff [in book club] but we also had fun while doing it. We joked
> around a lot, but we talked about various things and we really pretty much encompassed
> every single topic ever in this book club. I was learning a lot in book club. Not only was
> I learning, but my mind was opening up to a lot of stuff I didn't know. I could see
> people's opinions on other subjects and that helped me out to see the other side of things.
> That's why social studies is my favorite subject because we would talk about one
> question and then we'd explain it and it would become a huge debate and that's what I
> really like. I liked when we talked about whether or not we'd change things just to fit in
> when we were reading *Flowers for Algernon*. I wish we could do more [of that] in
> school.

Summary of Findings

Much of the research about low reading engagement and achievement and boys assumes

that there is a deficit in boys' brains and that they learn differently than girls because of those

deficits. Alternatively, an explanation for low achievement is assumed to stem from a mismatch

between the way things are done in school and how boys construct masculinity. Other research

focuses on boys' interests and suggests that school-reading assignments typically do not match them. The implication of this is that schools should add more "boy books" to the canon of literature and to school libraries. However, the findings here suggest that it is the school-like nature of reading and school contexts that hinder boys' motivation to read.

For the boys in this case study, "school-like" seems to mean doing a combination of tasks and having attitudes that run counter to the constructs of self-deterministic motivation, in particular tasks and contexts for reading in school are described as negating autonomy and neglecting the potential for social learning. Our book club seemed to offer an antidote. In our book club, the boys did not choose books because they were more masculine (although, romance novels were out of the question). Two of the books they chose, *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* and *Flowers for Algernon* were more or less gender neutral, and half the boys disliked *World War Z* despite that many would assume it to be a very "boy friendly" book. What discouraged the boys from reading more outside of school-based assignments was they felt a loss of autonomy in school; they did not truly have the option to choose books of interest and to talk about books in ways that engaged them. Furthermore, the boys did not have relationships with peers or teachers that supported their interest in deep discussion. Their feelings were exacerbated by the tasks that they were required to complete. In the end, school reading depleted the joy of reading a novel or reading to learn something as well as set the purpose for the reading as to get a good grade or at least to complete an assignment. School-like reading to these boys meant looking for facts, finding parts of speech, learning new vocabulary words, answering questions, staying on topic, and proving that they have read the assigned text through the completion of logs and written responses, all for the purpose of getting a grade. For them, reading in school did not mean sharing thoughts and opinions, sharing personal stories and

connections, or laughing at an occasional joke as a way to engage with text. Most importantly, it did not mean collaboratively constructing meaning and taking pleasure in the act of reading. This is what they seemed to get from the book club.

Once the school tasks were stripped away and the reading was shared and discussed, while giving the boys a sense of control and the opportunity to share their humor, several of the boys reported that the book reintroduced them to reading for pleasure. The difference between reading in their literacy classes and reading in the book club was that the boys were able to create and thrive on the relationships built among the members of the group and with me. They were free to talk without constraint and without fear of judgment about what they said--whether it was because of a joke or because a new idea had struck which could change the topic in unexpected ways. The context of the book club provided supports for competence through positive feedback from peers during discussions and supports for relatedness through interpersonal involvement with humor and shared experiences. However, enhanced intrinsic motivation is only internalized if the others involved within the context support the autonomy of the individual (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, and Ryan, 1991). It seems the book club provided a context for the boys to feel autonomous enough that it motivated them to continue to participate, read, and discuss their reading.

While the boys held strong stereotypes of who participates in book clubs and resisted calling our group a book club, they clearly saw many benefits to participating. They valued the autonomy they were given and getting to know one another. They deeply appreciated the discussions we had and they felt strongly that they were learning. These became strong motivators to continue to participate, read, and make meaning from the text. They began to shift their thinking about reading from being something to avoid because it is tedious and out of their

control and for which there were no opportunities to share their thoughts and appreciations, to something that they would choose to do. In fact, in three of the final interviews, I discovered that the boys kept the original list of books I gave them at our first meeting because they planned to seek out other books we did not read. When I asked Xavier why he kept the list, he said because, "you said there were a lot of books you liked on this list, so I want to go through and read more." Jaylan, the most resistant reader, had this final comment about our book club and sent this picture via text message.

Long live book club. I'll never look at this table the same way again.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The inspiration for this study emerged as a result of past book club experiences I

facilitated with middle school boys outside of school. Through past book clubs, I have had the

opportunity to observe boys' positive interactions with each other and reading texts. These

informal observations led me to believe that book clubs could be a way to help boys become

more enthusiastic and motivated to read, however I did not fully understand what aspects of the

book club engaged the boys in reading nor to what degree were those aspects important to their

reading engagement. This study provided an opportunity to systematically uncover perceptions

of how the boys felt about reading and how they came to be more motivated to read as a result of

their participation in the book club. I also sought to explore how gender may have played a role

since middle school teachers are often concerned about the lack of motivation many boys have to

read (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni, 1996). I was curious about the impact of a single

gender book club because of the recent interest in single sex education for boys as a way to not

only address the supposed learning needs of boys but also the motivational factors that several

experts and commentators have advocated (Martino, 2005; Sax, 2007; Gurain, 2010). In

addition to gaining insight into the complex role that gender may have on reading and

motivation, I was also interested in examining how the boys' reading experiences in the book

club differed from the their reading experiences in their school literacy classes.

Discussion of Findings and Answers to Research Questions

The Role of Gender

After the first focus group interview and prior to any meeting or discussion about our

reading, the boys held somewhat negative and gendered perceptions of what book clubs are.

They only saw book clubs as groups in which privileged older women participate. Most also had

negative attitudes toward reading and associated a strong link between reading and school. One

boy went so far as to say, "reading is school and school is reading." However, after several

weeks of participating in discussions and completing one book, the boys' attitudes toward

reading became more positive and several of the boys felt they were reintroduced to the joy of

reading they had as younger students. Additionally, the social aspect and the relationships

forged as well as the intensity of deep discussions were strong motivators to read and participate.

However, despite actual participation in a book club, the boys resisted calling our group a book

club and held on to their initial impressions that book clubs are for older, privileged women. This

demonstrates that the stereotypes surrounding reading and femininity are present though they are

more complex than a simple claim that boys resist reading because it is viewed as a feminine

practice.

It seems that boys' perceptions of reading may be more nuanced in that boys may be

constructing masculine norms that reject *specific* reading practices and situations. Also, while

the boys would not change how they saw book clubs and attempted to define our group as

something other than a book club, they choose books that would not traditionally be considered

specifically "boy-friendly" but they did strongly voice disdain romantic books. Researchers such

as Brozo (2010) and Young (2001) have taken opposite stances on the importance of providing

boys with texts that promotes positive male archetypes. Brozo (2010) believes that guiding boys

to books with strong male archetypes such as an honorable warrior or brave explorer will provide

entry points for boys to read. On the other hand, others warn that guiding boys to "boy-friendly"

books only reinforces normalized constructions of masculinity (Young, 2001; Dutro, 2003;

Martino, 2005). In this study, the boys did not seem to choose books based on how they wanted

to be perceived as masculine beings, but rather out of other stronger influences such as family

and relating to others (Enrique chose *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* because his mother read it), or even more mundane reasons, such as reading *World War Z* because the movie version was coming out soon. It is also important to note that all of the boys, at one time or another resisted reading books that researchers have found to generally interest boys. These texts include graphic novels, horror, science fiction, and non-fiction (Brozo, 2010; Millard, 2007, Newkirk, 2002). All of these texts were presented to the boys in the club, but none of them were interested in reading graphic novels and nonfiction texts they were offered. Even horror and science fiction books were only of interest to half of the boys in the group and some resisted reading *World War Z* even though the desire to remain involved in the conversation about the book was strong.

Although the sample in this study is very small, the data pointed out that choosing books for boys because of generalized preconceived assumptions and normalized constructions of masculinity is not necessarily going to engage boys in reading. At best, guiding boys to books "for boys" limits the possibilities to engage them with books and at worst, it reinforces narrow constructions of what it means to be a boy. As mentioned in the literature review of this study, there is evidence that girls are more willing to read from a variety of genres as well as texts with male protagonists. In contrast, boys are less willing to read books with female protagonists and their interests in genre variety becomes narrower as they move in to adolescence (Gambrell & Hunter, 2000). This does not mean, however, that we should simply narrow the literature canon to meet boys' apparently narrow interests but we must keep reading options broad, expose boys to lots of ways in which people read, and empower them to make informed and personalized decisions.

While the boys' choices in books seemed to make problematic the response to decreased reading motivation and literacy scores of increasing the availability of boy-friendly books, they

did appreciate the single gender model of the club. This too, however, seem due to more complex reasons than the generally accepted perception of boys as striving to appear dominant for the sake of dominance (Connell, 1995). The boys of this group did not want to maintain a single gender group simply because they felt it would improve their status or be an outlet to demonstrate their dominance. In fact, it was quite the opposite in that the boys felt that the way they acted and related to each other in the single sex group would appear silly and immature to girls if the group were mixed. The boys admitted to censoring their participation in class and "acting cool" because they were afraid that the girls "would not understand" them if they acted otherwise. Instead of trying to hold sway over one another in ways that appear domineering, the boys tried to think of ways to make each other laugh. They often did this with silly behavior that seemed to be reserved mostly for when boys are among other boys. These boys felt strongly that in the presence of girls, they would not be able to relate to one another as easily or be as comfortable acting in ways that seemed more natural and expressive to them. This is in stark contrast to the only study found exploring belongingness in single sex schools where Brutsaert & Van Houtte (2002) surveyed 6000 students in both single sex and mixed schools about their feeling of connectedness.   They found boys' sense of connectedness between co-educational and single-sex schools was somewhat similar in each context. However, the study only surveyed students in who had been in one context and did not identify students who have had experience in both, nor is it clear from the study that students were asked to compare the contexts; it only asked how they felt about the context in which they were situated. Our book club and this study suggests that the boys' sense of connectedness was significantly more profound in the single gender context because the boys felt that they had a particular way of interacting and understanding one another that would be altered in a mixed gendered group. Unlike the

Brutsaert & Van Houtte (2002) study, these boys were asked specifically to compare the contexts

as a result of having experience in both a single gender group and the mixed grouping in the

classroom. The boys felt strongly that the single gendered group had an impact on their

participation and the building of relationships.

Therefore, more research is necessary to understand how a single gender context can

facilitate learning and motivation. Little research exists that explores boys' experiences in single

sex schools. Additionally, the research that does exist is contradictive or inconclusive because of

methodological reasons (U.S. Department of Education, 2005; Mael, 1998; Riordan, 2002;

Smyth, 2010). More qualitative research on single sex schooling and grouping needs to occur to

better understand the complexity of the relationships between gender and learning, as well as to

tease out what successful practice looks like in single sex schools. The boys' participation in this

study suggests there is value in single sex grouping because it seemed to enhance the freedom

they felt in expressing themselves without regard for what girls would think of them, without the

fear of "looking stupid." They also felt in the single-sex group that they had the autonomy to

take the discussion where they wanted it to go. This is because they felt constricted by their own

gender stereotyping of girls as being more studious and "on-topic" than boys and assumed they

Young (2000) discusses how gender stereotypes can begin to be explored and broken

down in a single gender group. While homeschooling her two sons and the two sons of a

colleague, Young, who argues against Brozo's (2001) stance on providing boys with literature

with male archetypes, found that with guidance her boys began to become aware of the

normalized construction of gender because the critical responses to the readings in her group

allowed the boys to move gender outside of one's self to focus hegemonic versions of

masculinity within the text without confronting the boys' individual behaviors and attitudes

Young (2000) believed this helped the boys to destabilize hegemonic masculine behaviors.

Though it was beyond the scope of this study to employ critical literacy techniques to

deconstruct gender stereotypes, it does seem that the boys' desire to have deep discussions in

response to the text opens the possibility for this to occur because the boys became highly

engaged in topics that could be debated. Employing critical literacy techniques in the context of

a single gender book club also seems possible because the boys felt a sense of connectedness and

security to discuss these topics. The context in which Young (2000) employed critical literacy

techniques is similar to our book club which could allow gender to be moved outside of one's

self through the reading to be discussed and analyzed. This appears to be fertile grounds in

which the use of a book club model can be used to not only engage boys in reading but to use

their willingness to have deep conversations about text to explore and deconstruct gender issues

and link those conversations to their own assumptions (such as the boys' assumptions that book

clubs are for older, privileged women).

The De-motivating Classroom

As reviewed in Chapter Two there is significant research attempting to explain the

reasons why boys are lagging in literacy scores. While brain-based explanations are tenuous,

they often play into a natural desire to see gender as binary and discount how social context can

explain the complex functions and learning involved in reading and literacy development

(Connolly, 2004). Other research focuses on how boys may be differently literate where they

maintain differing reading interests than girls and use literacy in ways that may not be valued or

addressed by schools, for example by reading video game manuals (Newkirk, 2002). However,

schools generally respond to differing interests and ways to be literate by adding more

"masculine" literature to libraries, hiring more male teachers, or inviting male athletes to

promote reading (Connolly, 2004) again neglecting the complexity of the impact of gender and responding in a binary fashion, seeing motivation and preferences as either masculine or feminine.

Smith and Wilhelm (2002) took a different approach in that they used Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) motivational theory of flow to shed more light on boys and reading. In an attempt to develop different explanations than what prior research has offered, they used this framework to discover that boys generally saw reading as instrumental for future success. They also found that some boys tended to resist reading because it felt school-like and did not serve an immediate purpose. The findings of this study build on specific school-like activities that hinder the motivation to read by interrupting "flow" and preventing the boys from building relationships or having the autonomy share, discuss, and debate a common text. The book club, however, facilitated the development of relationships, competence, and autonomy. These necessary components of self-deterministic motivation make the desire to read more intrinsic rather that relying on extrinsic motivators such as grades (Deci & Ryan 1985).

Though initially most of the boys in this study associated reading with school, work, and pressure, during and after book club meetings they reported that they "came back to reading" and the book club meetings "exposed them to reading for fun." In school, they often mentioned the amount of pressure they felt while they read. They described pressure from having to complete assignments and make deadlines to finish novels. Mostly, they felt pressure from the variety of writing assignments they needed to complete in response to the reading. Though there was some choice to read a novel of their own choosing, the assignments attached to this reading always seemed to overtake any motivation to read what interested them. As a result of the tasks associated with reading that they had to do, the boys seemed to see the purpose of the reading

they did in school as simply to complete assignments and improve language skills such as

identifying types of figurative language genres, and plot structure or reporting on conflicts and

setting. Therefore, any reading they did was less about what they got from the text as a reader,

and more about the tasks they had to do to demonstrate their learning of specific text-based skills

and simply to provide evidence that they had completed the assigned text. It generally became,

therefore, about getting assignments done, not about the pleasures of reading. While the boys all

heard about the value of reading from their teachers and they believed that some tried to inspire

their students to read, it seems they are receiving mixed messages about reading. Verbally

teachers may be praising the value of reading and encouraging their students to find a good book

to get lost in, but the tasks that are attached to school reading that should be for enjoyment or to

gain insight are creating a "force field" blocking the boys from those purposes. The message to

these boys is that with reading there always comes chores. Clearly, this is not much of

welcoming invitation to experience the joys of reading.

While it is possible that many schools do not have a personal choice reading policy as the

boys experience in this context, many schools tend to place more focus on reading skill

development than reading interest development, especially among those who are struggling

readers because of an emphasis on standardized testing that has forced sustained independent

reading to take a secondary position to skill instruction (Lawler & Wedwick, 2012). This may be

evidenced by research that finds even students in classrooms with 90-minute literacy blocks (the

boys in this study have 80-minute periods), spend an average of only 18 minutes reading in class

(Brenner, Hiebert, & Tompkins, 2009). All the boys in this study are either in on-level or

advanced literacy classes, yet they reported that generally most of their time in class is taken up

completing packets or writing responses to open ended questions about texts. Only one of the

participant's literacy teachers appears to be using class time to read aloud or allow his students to independently read during class. Traditionally, advanced or honors classes provide significant time to discuss and debate literature (Lawler & Wedwick, 2012). Yet, it does not seem to be the case for these boys, or at least to the extent that they remember it well enough to mention it during focus group and individual interviews.

Many researchers make the claim that schools need to broaden what counts as appropriate school reading to include texts such as graphic novels, non-fiction, humor books, horror, science fiction and fantasy (Brozo, 2010; Millard, 1997; Newkirk, 2002; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). Although the boys in this study were allowed to select personal choice texts to fulfill an important reading assignment each marking period, most of the reading they did for class was from anthologies (if they were reading short stories) or department approved packets of nonfiction articles created to teach to new state standards. Most of the boys were disinterested in these readings, except in the case of Philippe´, whose teacher inspired his interest in Edgar Allen Poe. Tasks associated with these readings were usually in the form of answering questions in worksheet packets except, again, in the case of Philippe´, who said that his teacher would sometimes let them act out scenes or make up new ones. It should be noted here that although Philippe´ had developed an interest in Poe, he felt even more engaged with the reading because his teacher employed drama activities that allowed for creativity, humor, and relationship building. This is in line with suggestions by Smith and Wilhelm (2006) and Newkirk (2002) who suggest using drama and group inquiry, activities that provide clear and immediate feedback to improve instruction. However, this type of instruction also provides a platform for students to be autonomous, build relationships, and build competency thereby more likely engaging *all* students in the reading.

Yet to these boys, in contrast, most of class time is spent reading with the purpose of completing tasks, therefore reading becomes just a step in some other process rather than valued as an end in and of itself. As a result, the boys responded in generally in the same way – they did not "lose themselves", attaining flow, in the stories. Rather, the boys would read the questions they had to answer and flip through the pages of the assigned or selected texts to find answers. Or, they would read the questions and just skim to find the answers. The intention of vocabulary logs, an activity designed to promote learning while reading, became useless because the boys would randomly look for words on a page to define rather than defining a difficult word as they came across it in their reading. In the classroom, the boys seemed to lose their autonomy to think freely and explore as a result of their reading and were obligated become answer-factories using the text as simply a raw material to build answers to earn a grade.

Relationships with teachers. While it seems the classroom encouraged the boys to become answer-factories rather than readers, the boys described their teachers as robotic. Yet, they desired to have some sort of personal relationship with their teachers and classmates. We know that the social interactions in the classroom are significant since it has been shown to affect student motivation (Guthrie & Alvermann, 1999). Creating a social place for common reading is motivating and creating a classroom setting that encourages collaboration is more likely to improve effort and generate interest and enthusiasm (Morrow, Sharkey, & Firestone, 1993). Students need to develop and maintain relationships with other students and adults who demonstrate respect and caring in order to build and maintain motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Labeling their teachers robots, the boys seemed to be providing evidence that they lack connectedness with their teachers. Robots follow programs and orders and do not have feelings

or opinions. Portraying their teachers as non-human is a powerful metaphor to how disconnected they feel from them.

The boys wanted to know their teachers' opinions about various topics or what their teachers truly thought of the reading. They wanted to know their teachers' personal preferences about movies and television shows. The boys felt that if they knew these things they would be able to connect to their teachers and learn better from them. However, they felt that their teachers were forced to follow a curriculum and keep the class moving through the required content leaving little time for discussion or being "off topic." This had a serious impact on how the boys perceived the reading they were doing in class. They felt that their teachers had no enthusiasm for the required literature further pointing to the lack purpose for reading other than completing it and its corresponding questions. They suggested that enthusiasm the teacher demonstrates for the reading has a direct impact on students. According to Philippe´ his deep interest in Poe was developed and encouraged because he knew his teacher loves the author, and his excitement has inspired and motivated Philippe´ to read more of Poe's work and works like it.

Furthermore, because there is limited common novel reading, the students do not develop relationships based on joint meaning making and shared understandings and interests related to text. Their personal choice reading requirement reading is done in complete isolation and only to complete an assignment. The boys mentioned that they may have a single opportunity to talk to the class about what they read but there is no *discussion* about the texts. They simply give a summary of the book in a few sentences so others have time to do the same. In addition, the boys had limited interaction with their classmates in class and virtually none around a common text. In fact, the very requirement of answering questions for worksheet packets hinders any sort

of discussion about reading. The boys signaled their understanding that this type of activity may

be driven by the pressure to raise literacy scores on standardized tests; they frequently referenced

doing well on the state's standardized test and even reported that the book club would help them

do better on various types of test based tasks such as responding to open ended questions or

genre identification.

Motivation Potential of the Book Club Model

The findings of this study highlight the potential of book clubs as motivational contexts that

can encourage students to read more. In the book club, the purpose of reading is shifted from a

means to completing an assignment to the immediate experience of enjoying the text and the

possibility of sharing one's insights with others. Reading for these reasons not only aligns with

the components of self-determination motivation theory but also with Csikszentmihalyi's (1990)

theory of flow where the focus is on the immediate experience of the action rather than some

instrumental implication. Additionally, the boys reported that the book club experience and the

humor with which they interacted about the books "freed their minds" and relieved pressure.

This is similar to how the boys in Smith & Wilhelm's (2002) study describe their favorite

hobbies, emphasizing the focus on the immediate experience for enjoyment, which in turn,

fosters motivation to pursue or complete a task.

While the focus on the immediate experience of enjoyment of reading they experienced

while reading book club texts was important to the boys, the discussion that resulted as a result

of the reading and our meeting was invaluable. Alvermann et al. (1999) found that book club

discussions developed a deeper appreciation of the text and its meanings rather than evaluation

of comprehension or other reading skills, increasing the motivation to read and participate. The

discussions in the book club were free flowing, allowing the boys to move from topic to topic

without fear of straying from a predetermined topic selected by the teacher. The norms of the book club allowed for significant autonomy to explore topics of interest to the boys, question the author's intentions and meanings, and make connections to their personal lives, concerns, interests, and hobbies.   The boys felt they learned more through this kind of discussion than when they were completing packets or answering teacher-generated questions. They felt they gained a deeper appreciation of the text as a result of the book club discussion. As part of this process, they understood and sought out symbolism and defended their interpretations. Even boys who did not read the text still participated in discussions and asked questions. As a result of the discussions the boys developed some perseverance and motivation to attempt to read the books they did not enjoy simply because they wanted to be more involved in the discussion.

Nystand & Gamoran (1990) say that quality book discussions should closely resemble natural conversation driven by an authentic question that requires new information to be analyzed at an extended duration as compared to discourse driven by recitation questions. Rather than asking the boys what happened in the story, this led me to interject questions that encouraged debate. As a result, the boys would often enthusiastically interrupt each other with their thoughts and would on one another's ideas and comments. They reported that they appreciated the natural flow of the conversation and the fact that they had the autonomy to take the conversation where they wanted to take it or where it ended up going without a pre-established end point. However, they understood that complete autonomy was not always productive and appreciated gentle reminders to return to the book or subtly introducing new ideas linked to the text. Additionally, Whittingham and Huffman (2009) found that the attitudes of book club participants, even those who spent little time participating, developed and increased self-worth in reading and an overall increased interest in life-long reading and learning. The

boys in the study also reported that the discussions built their competencies related to the specific

text in addition to their general knowledge about the world. They knew that they could improve

their comprehension of the story and the author's purpose simply through listening to others talk

about their favorite parts. The realization that they were learning without completing

assignments and taking tests seemed to motivate them to continue to read, as evident in their

desire to read more than what was asked for this study.

Additionally, it is essential to foster a positive social-emotional context where students

feel respected, encouraged, and treated as equals (Smith, 1996). The book club model facilitates

this positive social-emotional context because it can allow the teacher to act more as a mentor,

guide, or facilitator rather than an authority.   This was important to the boys as they described

their preference and opinions of mentors. They saw mentors as more capable of relating to them

than they saw their teachers and realized that their relationships with one another in the group

allowed them to be mentors of each other.

The social component of book clubs seems key to motivation and engagement in reading.

It seems that the desire to relate to one another and share experiences within and outside of the

reading trumped even the need for reading choice. The boys felt that if they read a common

novel in their class and simply discussed it as a group, they would be more motivated to read.

They also wanted their teachers to be part of the discussion, sharing personal knowledge and

opinions with the group. The relationships built in the book club also seemed to trump a need to

be the need to be completely versed in the text, or even to have read every word. Four of the

boys chose not to fully read *World War* Z for reasons which included the difficulty of the text,

not liking the uncommon text structure of the novel, or simply not enjoying the genre. Yet, some

of those same boys reported that they persevered with the reading at times knowing that their

comprehension would be cleared up through the discussion. The current school policy is to read a novel of one's choice, but this negates a key motivational component of social interaction focused on the text by creating a context for reading in isolation.

Implications

The findings of this study provide an opportunity to translate what I have learned from the book club and the boys who participated in it into recommendations for home and school contexts. My intention is not to make recommendations about book clubs but to take what I have learned from this positive example of a book club to think about improving reading motivation in general. The following implications are broken down into three areas: recommendations for parents, for teachers, and for school districts. Many of the implications for parents and teachers are simple changes that create the potential to build relationships and promote choice and autonomy to encourage and support the motivation to read more. Other implications, several of which are for school districts, might require more systemic change. The findings of this study give rise to several suggestions that might improve boys' (and girls') reading motivation outside of classroom requirements. The first set of recommendations for parents revolve around how to talk about books and the second suggests various types of books that may pique the interest of boys.

Parents

It is clear from this study that the tasks attached to reading (especially personal choice reading) seems to overshadow the fact that one can simply read for pleasure. Therefore, parents can model behaviors in regards to reading that are not school-like and that are more inline with how and why one truly reads for purposes that are not purely to complete academic assignments. First, parents should read books that are assigned in school or the books their sons choose

outside of school. Parents can read these books and simply engage in ordinary conversations

about them as one might after seeing a movie. Parents can approach talking about books similar

to the ways book club members talk about books. This type of talk does not focus on analyzing

literary devices, vocabulary, figurative language, plot construction, or how well one has

comprehended the text. Rather, the talk about books is more conversational. Like book club

members, parents could seek out their sons' opinions on what they read or what the author is

trying to convey to the reader. Parents can model making connections to the reading, or offering

their own thinking about what a passage might mean symbolically. The key to this kind of talk

about books, however, is that it should not resemble a teacher-question and student-answer

format by inquiring about vocabulary or checking comprehension but natural conversation. Not

only does this capitalize on relationship building but also it gives the student the autonomy to

speak freely without worrying about his competency to answer quiz-like questions. The boys in

this study craved this type of conversation and, in fact, chose books knowing that family

members had an interest in them. Simply suggesting that a student should read more,

recommending books, or even modeling pleasure reading in the home is not enough. It is

important to engage the boys in discussion about *common* reading to improve the motivation to

read.

     While many researchers and commentators have suggested recommending "boy-friendly"

books, this is not without its problems because this makes assumptions about the gendered nature

of book reading preferences for particular genres as well as limits the possibilities for boys to

find entry points to reading. The boys in this study were not eager to read books that many

would assume would pique their interests. Though this was a small sample, even among these

few boys there was significant variation in preferences. This suggests that there is little reason to

only recommend designated "boy-books" to boys. These boys became interested in books that

family members had read, had movie adaptations, and were somewhat taboo. The boys also felt

overwhelmed by the number of possibilities of finding a book on their own and appreciated

guidance and synopses of books. Therefore, in addition to parents modeling positive reading

experiences of their own personal interest, parents can explain to their sons why they enjoyed a

certain book and how they found the book. It is also important for parents to remember that any

reading is good reading and not limit choices to books generally or specific kinds of books, but

should find ways to value reading comic books, graphic novels, magazines, blogs and other

internet sites, or joke books. Also, the boys in this study were attracted to books that were

somewhat taboo and that used strong language or mild adult themes or books that were once

banned or censored. Newkirk (2002) echoes these findings and believes that in regard to

violence (often taboo in schools) that many adults do not give boys credit for the ability to

understand the difference between fantasy violence and actual violence and therefore

significantly curtail reading options for boys that have significant levels of violence. The boys

appreciated the autonomy of choosing books of this nature in the book club, such as *Flowers for*

Algernon or *World War Z* because they felt "respected" for being trusted with these themes.

Teachers

Although parents can do much to capitalize on their relationships with their sons by

sharing common reading and helping to identify and access books that match the needs and

interests of their sons, teachers could benefit by focusing on building relationships in the

classroom, reconsidering what they communicate about purpose of reading, and the assignments

attached to texts. There is a large body of research on reading motivation and many studies

focus on the importance of reading choice (Cordova & Lepper, 1996; Iyengar & Lepper, 1999;

Worthy & McKool, 1996; Guthrie, 2000; Morrow, L. M., Sharkey, E., Firestone, W. A., 1993).

The findings of this study suggest that while providing reading choice is important, perhaps more

important is capitalizing on the social aspect of reading through discussion. And, according to

Gambrell (1996), when students participate in small group discussions, they have more

opportunities to interact and exchange viewpoints than are presented through teacher-student

questions and responses. As a result, the use of literacy circles has become a common practice

(Daniels, 2002). Yet, this research suggest that the use of literacy circles can constrict the

autonomy students have in small group discussions by requiring them to fulfill particular roles

and speak a certain number of times. While the ideas of book clubs and small group discussions

are not new for classroom teachers, this research suggests the book club model capitalizes on the

need for autonomy and allows students more control within their conversations about books.

Although incorporating a book club model like ours in school would be ideal, the sheer

size of most classrooms would make it difficult to manage, not to mention the pressures on

teachers in regards to standards, evaluation, and accountability. However, teachers can provide

opportunities for shared reading experiences that are similar to aspects of small book clubs that

go beyond having students answer questions to check for comprehension or develop skills.

While whole class reading may be more manageable, it may be difficult to come to consensus on

selecting a single book. Because choice and autonomy are important, classes could be broken

into two or three collaborative groups where students could read and discuss a common text.

Teachers should allow significant time for open-ended discussion but also model and be explicit

about how to create meaningful and provocative discussions that are interesting and stimulating

to students. Teachers should model questioning that encourages debate, requires linkages

between the text and other texts and media, questions the author's intent, or seeks and analyzes

potential symbolism, and implicit messages and themes. Discussion that is less programmed and specifically purposeful removes the task-like nature of the roles frequently used in literature circle discussion. While all students should be encouraged to participate in the discussion, requiring students to speak a number of times might hinder the natural flow of the talk. Also, removing students from the discussion who did not read a selection could deter the motivation to read. Findings from this study suggest that even students who did not initially want to read were more likely to read simply because of wanting to participate in the discussion and were able to do so because there was a lack of consequence for their responses (right or wrong) and a level of control over where the discussion went. Although these kinds of freewheeling discussions seem very unschool-like, the study participants reported that these kinds of interactions around texts can not only create significant opportunities for learning, but are also motivated them to read more.

In addition to fostering relationships and capitalizing on the social aspects of reading, teachers need to rethink the assignments attached to reading if they want to create a more motivated an engaged environment for reading in their classrooms. In this case study the number of and the significance of tasks that were attached to the boys' school reading experiences altered the purpose of reading in their minds so much that the task oriented nature of reading for school spilled over into their feelings about personal reading. Therefore, it is important that the tasks associated with reading do not make the reading the text simply a means to the end of completing a task designed to teach and demonstrate accountability. Smith and Wilhelm (2004) offer several suggestions on how to building activities around reading that support motivation and enthusiasm at the same time that they build understanding and develop skills. For example, they suggest that drama and inquiry projects related to the reading can help enliven the reading

and extend knowledge while developing interests in related texts. Writing assignments and logs should not be used to prove that assigned reading was completed, but rather have a purpose and, like drama and inquiry, extend the reading experience. For example, students could use persuasive writing techniques to create a Critic's Corner and publish book reviews on a class blog, extend or alter readings by creating multimedia presentations or fan fiction, a popular pastime of fans of various books such as the *Harry Potter* series who write online sequels, rewrite scenes, or even write spinoff texts placing minor characters in the spotlight.

The findings also suggest that the assignments the boys had to complete for each text they read in school lacked purpose for them, other than for grades. Students realize they are developing skills for a future test and that becomes a purpose for reading rather than enjoyment or being able to participate in engaging discussion and deep thinking in a group. Though it is important to develop the reading and language skills of middle-school students, this does not have to be done only by completing packets or logs. The findings of this study suggest that students already dread the assignments attached to the reading even before beginning to read, preventing them from enjoying the flow of a good story and loosing themselves within a book.

If students do common reading, mini lessons could be delivered to meet curricular requirements such as understanding literary devices, figurative language, and plot structure. These mini lessons could be tailored and embedded in inquiry units and book reviews or fan fiction to support and develop the student's work such as their ability to be persuasive. For example, if a student were to create an effective piece of fan fiction or a sequel to a story, he would have to understand conflict and resolution and he would have to understand how descriptive and figurative language are used in the original story as a way to develop his own writing. Assignments such as these could be done in collaborative groups or individually. These

types of assignments would not only build skills but also make the reading more meaningful. In fact, the assignment itself serves a purpose because it can be published and shared to extend and convey knowledge rather than being a vehicle to prove to the teacher that reading was completed or a skill was learned in isolation.

Additionally, if there was shared reading, the teaching of literacy devices, symbolism, language usage and vocabulary emerge through skillful facilitation of a more natural whole class conversation or group discussion. Similar to individual word lists or logging of figurative language usage, these skills could be listed or logged as collaborative groups or the whole class, making the work less onerous on the individual and breaking the flow of reading. For example, groups could collect interesting and new words as they talk about their reading. These words can then be shared with the class and recorded and defined on a classroom wall. The intention of logging personal vocabulary is the same, but the task of logging as the student reads is removed allowing the student to get lost in the story. However, there still is control over the vocabulary choices to make them meaningful to students and they are recorded and displayed for use in future writing as well as repeated exposure.

School Districts

Although parents and teachers share the responsibility of motivating their students to read, school districts create the framework and context that can support teachers and parents in this endeavor. Several of the implications for schools require some systemic change and professional development. First, school districts can meet nonfiction reading standards by encouraging more nonfiction reading in the content areas instead of in literacy classes. Significant professional development must occur to help content area teachers teach nonfiction reading strategies as well as how to supplement textbook reading with nonfiction trade books and

articles. Supplemental reading of nonfiction trade books can even take the form of book clubs

within the content area class. For example, if students are studying the Civil War, various

groups could read different biographies on Abraham Lincoln. These groups could compare and

contrast the texts in relation to one another as well as the biases of the authors and the arguments

they attempt to make as a way to discuss validity. In-class book clubs could be a springboard for

deeper discussions of the content taught by providing perspectives other than those offered in

textbooks. Also, nonfiction reading in the content areas can provide real world context for the

content. For example, biology teachers might incorporate the ethics of human tissue, cell, and

gene experimentation by using *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks,* the true story of how

Lacks' cells became the basis for all human cell experimentation without her knowledge or that

of her family once she passed.   Using book clubs in this way may not only increase engagement

with the content but also encourages critical thinking and synthesizing the content delivered in

textbooks with other sources. Additionally, as the boys frequently mentioned, the sharing of

opinions and ideas facilitates building relationships thereby increasing the motivation to

participate in the class, learn more about the topic at hand, and read. Content area teachers could

be trained to embed vocabulary instruction, comprehension strategies, and purposeful writing to

diminish the emphasis on textbooks while reducing the burden on literacy teachers to teach these

skills, thus freeing up time to share and discuss a range of fiction and nonfiction texts.

Encouraging content area teachers to use nonfiction in the classroom and reduce

dependence on textbooks might also provide time for sustained silent reading or time for read-

alouds in the literacy classes. The boys in this study appreciated and were motivated by the

teachers who did this. McGee & Richgels (2003) found that teacher read-alouds can be used to

not only promote deeper understanding and interpretation of reading and supports the use mental

activities important to independent reading but read-alouds also help students develop their interests in a variety of texts. In the current study, Philippé's reporting of his growing interest in Edgar Allen Poe because of his teacher's read-alouds supports this. In regard to sustained silent reading, Krashen (2004) argues that time in school to independently read for pleasure without having to be accountable in terms of grades or book reports, improves student outcomes and motivation more than traditional direct instruction. Therefore schools should encourage literacy teachers to find time to do this their classes. Research has shown that sustained reading in the classroom is considered a luxury by many schools (Krashen, 2004) and that it is being pushed aside or replaced by skill instruction to meet testing requirements (Lawler & Wedwick, 2012). This is despite the fact that researchers suggest that sustained, contextual, independent reading, is an appropriate use of class time that can contribute to higher proficiency and engagement (Allington, 1980; Stanovich, 1986; Fielding et al., 1984; Chambliss & McKillop, 2000; Krashen, 2004). The boys in this study did not reject reading as much as they rejected the number of skill-based tasks that were associated with the reading. In reading for the book club, however, the boys were not only inquisitive about the texts, but also noticed how the authors used language in spite of there being no assigned tasks to go along with them. Rather than completing worksheets, the boys were able to gain an understanding of vocabulary and build comprehension because it was embedded in the collaborative meaning making of discussion around sustained common reading.

While basal readers have their place as the basis of mini lessons to develop specific skills, reading common novels could provide opportunities for more breadth and depth in exploration of content, vocabulary, and skill development because it allows for extended discussion and context within some domain. Also, the boys in the study reported that they felt that the basal reading did

not help them understand what occurred before or after the selection. Whole book reading or

contextualized reading allows students to effectively combine the processes of reading such as

phonics, vocabulary, reading comprehension (Allington, 1980: Fielding et al., 1984). As

mentioned in chapter two, contextual reading is defined as the reading of complete texts in their

original format, in contrast to decontextualized reading which involves short texts removed from

their original context and selected to teach a particular skill or emphasize a particular rhetorical

strategy, usually in the form of worksheets or basal readers (Allington, 1980).   Therefore,

schools should encourage curriculum development that is driven by fiction and nonfiction trade

book reading.   For example, the book club provided the extended context to read *Flowers for

Algernon* and frequently discuss the idea of science and ethics as well as the author's use of

symbolism, writing style, and genre as means to comment on science and ethics.   The boys in

the study frequently rejected the short stories or nonfiction articles because no sustained context

was developed around the topics presented in the reading, nor were there opportunities to debate

and discuss these topics. However, it is important to acknowledge that this was not simply

because the boys read a common novel. The common novel allowed for a common reading

experience to be able to have discussions, but it also important are the types of activities

associated with the text. Completing worksheets, answering predetermined questions, writing

summaries, and keeping logs did not prove to be activities that extended the text nor engaged

students.

Finally, schools can implement book clubs of their own. This can be done in multiple

ways. Teachers can be encouraged to simply start after-school informal and unstructured book

clubs with current or former students that meet at the discretion of the group. Or, book clubs

could be more formalized, similar to after-school clubs with teacher-advisors such as chess clubs

or robotics clubs. Schools that have study or advisory periods built into the school day could use

this time for book clubs to meet and discuss shared reading. Many school counselors have

regular advisory group meetings with struggling students or arrange mentor/mentee relationships

between students and teachers. Book clubs might be one way to encourage reading (potentially

an important way to increase academic competence) and to build relationships to enhance the

success of these counseling situations. Whatever form or time the book clubs meet, this

research suggests that there are several key features that make the book club a successful model

to motivate students to read. Book club facilitators should consider single gender groups as a

way to build strong relationships quickly. They should also consider personally asking students

and their friends to join their book clubs since the very act of being asked made the boys in this

study feel competent enough and proud to join. Building the composition of groups around pre-

existing friendships was important to the boys in this study because it also created a safe place

where the boys were not developing relationship from scratch and would have a way to connect.

Facilitators should also be clear that the purpose of reading in the group is for pleasure and to

help create discussions that are open-ended, without a set instructional agenda, and organic in

their focus, without school-like tasks or questions and answers.

Further Research

Single-sex grouping

This study provided a context to begin to understand how a single gender group may impact

the motivation to read as well as participate in the group. The findings of this study suggest that

they may create a level of comfort as well as a safe space for early adolescent boys to begin to

develop important relationships and take more risks using humor, self-expression, and topic or

inquiry choice during discussion. The bulk of research on single gender schools seeks to defend

their value rather than promote understanding what happens in single sex school contexts that

makes them successful (Riordon, 2002). Also, the methodology of much of the research on

single sex schooling and grouping primarily employs surveys. Little, if any, qualitative

comparison studies of boys in single sex and mixed schools exist that utilize methods such as

observations of the boys in the classroom environment. While there have been studies which

interview students and teachers in regards to their experiences with and perceptions of single sex

schooling, none have been found which triangulate interviews with observations or other

methodology. Therefore, more comprehensive qualitative research should be done on the lived

experience of boys (and girls) in single sex schools. More research needs to occur to understand

how boys interact with one another within the classroom and within certain contexts in the

classroom and what affordances these interactions provide. For example, research that employs

observation could explore how boys in a single sex school or group talk about texts and how it

might be different than how girls talk about texts or how either gender does so in mixed gender

groups.

Additionally, more research can be done to better understand how critical literacy instruction

impacts the ways in which boys interact with texts as well as begin to disrupt hegemonic

masculine norms. While Young's (2001) research has demonstrated that boys can begin to

understand, examine, and disrupt normative gender stereotypes, this research was done with a

small sample of four boys, two of which were Young's sons. The bonds and the relationships

were strong to begin with among group members and the context was safe for these boys to

explore gender stereotypes in texts. Further research could analyze the nature of interactions and

the degree to which boys can disrupt hegemonic masculine norms within the larger context of

single sex book club groups or literacy classrooms with a critical literacy approach. The boys of

this study were eager to discuss controversial topics. Critical literacy instruction naturally

facilitates this type of discussion and more can be learned about how a critical literacy stance

could impact reading motivation in single sex contexts.

Standardized testing

As standardized testing becomes more prevalent and more important to accountability

policy and practice in education, it becomes more and more important to understand the impact

of standardized testing on the day-to-day activity of schools, teachers, students, and

administrators. The boys in this study talked often about preparation for the state's standardized

test and how their performance on this test impacted their placement in leveled classes. They

understood that their teachers were required to teach certain content in certain ways to prepare

them for the test. Further research could be conducted to better understand the impact of high-

stakes testing in multiple domains. These domains might include the impact on instruction and

how instruction has changed or narrowed as a result of testing, how the testing impacts the

motivation and enthusiasm of teachers to develop engaging classroom environments, and the

impact on motivation to read and learn. With the increased demand for high-stakes testing and

the importance of the intrinsic motivation to learn it seems crucial that the researchers focus their

efforts on how motivation is influenced by the reality of standardized testing.

There is little doubt that standardized testing has altered and possibly narrowed the

instruction in the district of which the boys in this study go to school. While it is important to

study the effects of standardized testing on student motivation and educational instruction, it is

also important to understand the impact of how various instructional practices impact reading

motivation. Because this study suggests that the modes of instruction influence opportunities for

deep conversations, relationship building, choice, and deep engagement with texts, further

research on the motivational impact of various instructional practices is important to understand

how specific practices shape the motivation to read for school as well as understandings about

the purposes and value of reading. Ivy (2010), for example, argues that a hyper focus on reading

strategies, such as reading and vocabulary logs and graphic organizers, to get students to

remember what they have read exacerbates reading reluctance. Research on which instructional

practices inhibit reading motivation is particularly important if it is linked to research on the

narrowing of curriculum, limiting of class time allotted for shared reading experiences, and

instructional changes as a result of high-stakes testing.

Boys' interactions with books

While there were only seven boys who participated in our book club, they did not always

choose books that aligned with the expected interests of most boys as would be suggested by

prior research. I was surprised to find the boys' enthusiasm for *The Five People You Meet in*

Heaven and their reluctance to read a graphic novel. This suggests that further research should

be done to understand boys', especially early adolescent boys' reading preferences. Also, more

research would be helpful to understand how middle school boys discover books. The boys in

this study seemed to find it difficult to identify engaging books in their school library. Several of

them used the municipal library to find books that they said were not available in school. For

example, Lamar found it difficult to find books that he felt were more appropriate for his age and

would check out books by Stephen King that he could find at the municipal library. The school

library did not seem to be a preferred place to browse for books but a place to use the thirty

minutes of allotted class time to quickly find a book to meet personal choice reading

requirements rather than books of real interest. Additionally, the boys in this study mentioned

being interested in reading the books their parents and siblings had read or those books with

soon-to-be released movies. Research on the ways boys access books could guide parents, teachers, and librarians towards helping them find appealing books.

In addition to understanding how boys access books, research on how boys talk about books could inform parents in ways that might help them engage their sons in conversations about the books they read, but more importantly could inform teachers' instructional practice in regards to classroom discussion. Understanding how boys talk about books might help teachers assess how much their male students comprehend the text. The boys in this study did not seem to talk often about a character's motivation yet frequently discussed how they would have acted in a certain situation. Their favorite scenes were often those where a character was innovative or rebellious. And, they excitedly reiterated unexpected twists, interrupting each other to describe the scene. Understanding how boys talk about books could be key in understanding how texts can motivate boys to read.

Book Clubs

Finally, more research could be conducted to expand on the current study by focusing on different study populations with distinct needs and challenges. The boys of this study were skilled readers in on-level or advanced literacy classes. Because research has shown that students in lower level classes often receive remediation in the form of skill development, typically through worksheets where little time is spent in sustained reading or discussion of readings (Krashen, 2004), more research could be done to understand whether and how the book club model could not only motivate but improve reading skills and fluency of struggling readers. Also researching book clubs with girls only and mixed groups is necessary to better understand the role that gender plays in book club reading. This additional research may illuminate how various grouping arrangements can encourage or hinder participation as well as the impact on the

nature of talk. Additionally, it was beyond this study to measure the sustainability of the positive impact of this book club experience. Further research designed to identify how long book clubs need to run in order to get positive outcomes and the possible challenges implementing a book clubs or something like them in the classroom will build on the findings of this study. Further expansion of this research is necessary to mitigate its limitations and broaden its scope. Research with larger and more diverse sample sizes and groupings, within school and classroom contexts, and longitudinal studies will help us better understand the contexts for success and sustainability of reading motivation as a result of participation in book clubs.

Limitations

Research on book clubs as a model to improve reading motivation is virtually nonexistent, particularly in regards to adolescent boys. The study described here begins to help us understand how a book club can be a tool to motivate boys to read by increasing their engagement with text, as well as understand how some reading instruction can potentially dampen reading motivation in boys. Yet, this research is not without its limitations. While the sample was purposeful in that I felt it was necessary to understand why skilled male readers resist reading and how a book club could alleviate resistance, this was a small sample of boys in an upper middle class school district. Most of the boys were white with the exception of two who come from Indian households. This makes it difficult to generalize the findings of the study to other ethnic and socio-economic groups. Also, it may be difficult to generalize these findings to struggling readers. While the boys in the study may not always be motivated to read outside of school assignments, they all reported that feeling like competent, able readers. Although two boys mentioned that they sometimes needed help comprehending what they read, they knew they had to ability to decode and eventually understand complex texts with effort and guidance. This

level of self-efficacy would certainly have a positive impact on their motivation to read and did

not need addressing in the book club. Therefore, it is difficult to know how readers might

interact and develop the motivation to read more outside of school if they still struggle with

decoding and fluency.   It is also important to remember that the boys *agreed* to participate and

there were a number of boys who did not. A few of the boys who were asked did not join

because they did not enjoy their literacy classes at all and felt the book club would be more of

the same. While the book club seemed to bring the boys back to reading, in regards to the boys

who chose not to participate in the study, it is difficult to know whether the book club would

have had a similar impact, given that their dislike of reading was so strong.

Additionally, I have had previous relationships with these students who chose to

participate in the study. As mentioned in the findings, it was important to the boys that they

knew me well and that they were invited by me to join our group. It was also important that the

boys had a number of friends join the group as well. While this encouraged the boys'

participation in discussions at our meetings, we do not know the value of book clubs when little

or no relationship has been previously established. If participation is voluntary, as it should be,

participants in groups without previous relationships might be difficult to establish.

I also acknowledge that the duration of the research study limits our understanding of the

longevity of the boys' motivation to read more outside of school, the positive change in attitudes

towards reading, and the lasting impact of the book club. While it was beyond the scope of this

research, we also do not know how the book club might have improved reading skills on

standardized tests over time. In addition to the duration of our book club, it is also important to

acknowledge that the timing of our meetings coincided with a lull in the boys' sports activities.

Because we met primarily during the winter months, most of the boys had the time to meet

regularly and spend the time reading more than they would have during the seasons when they

participated in sports. As a case in point, it became difficult to meet regularly once spring sports

began. Since the duration of this club only lasted twenty weeks, during which we read three

books, it is not possible to know if the boys would have maintained their motivation to

participate or come back to the book club once their sports commitments eased.

Summary

Given the success of my personal experiences with book clubs as a way to engage boys in

reading, I sought to understand why this happened with such regular and resounding success.

The purpose of this study was to try to replicate the success of the book club experience with

another group of boys in order to gain their perspectives on how it makes reading appealing to

boys. Additionally, this research explored how single sex grouping related to motivation to

participate in the group, as well as to understand how reading in the book club was different from

reading in the literacy classroom in regard motivation. It was also hoped that the study would

illuminate the benefits of creating contexts that give students the opportunity to read and discuss

books outside of the literacy classroom.

Several researchers have theorized that reading is perceived by many boys as a feminine

practice (Biddulph, 1997; Alloway & Gilbert, 1997; Gurain, 2001), yet Smith and Wilhelm

(2002) provide powerful evidence that boys do not necessarily reject reading because it is viewed

as feminine but rather because it is viewed as school-like. The findings of this study support and

elaborate on those that Smith and Wilhelm (2002) report. The task-oriented nature of reading in

schools alters the purpose of reading to complete those tasks as opposed to the purposes of

pleasure and learning. The boys in this study reported that the book club "brought them back" to

reading and reminded them that reading can be enjoyable, engaging, and stimulate learning.

Additionally, the boys found that they could develop strong relationships and bonds through discussions of texts. While the single sex grouping made them more comfortable to express themselves through their humor and freed them of some social constraints they reported experiencing in mixed groups, in large part, the success of the book club was that the boys were able to read for the sake of reading without have to demonstrate any skill acquisition through related performance tasks while building strong relationships. Yet, they reported that they developed reading skills and believed they were learning. They were also motivated to continue to participate in the book club even when they weren't interested in book that was being read.

Findings from this research suggest the importance of putting structures in place inside and outside of the classroom that can effectively promote the love of reading. Structures that capitalize on the relationships, discussion, and informality of the book club model have the potential to develop the motivation to read more, capture the interests of students, and increase the time spent reading. In the classroom, a book club model can be an engaging practice to encourage students to explore content and multiple perspectives or express their understanding without the constraints of skill development. Although the development of reading skills, fluency, and comprehension is important, hyper focusing on these alters the purpose of reading to read to complete a task rather than to read for enjoyment or to gain knowledge. The boys who participated in this study were clear in that they read school assigned readings to answer the questions and finish the packets. Even their personal choice reading required significant writing tasks. These tasks eroded the pleasure they may have derived from their choice reading, darkened their attitude towards any type of reading, and even hindered the development of relationships that are possible through discussion and a shared reading experience. The findings of this research suggest the book club model makes it possible for boys to develop strong

relationships and talk about their reading in ways that are natural to them. The book club model

also allows them to get lost in a book without the burden of numerous tasks to complete

preventing them from achieving flow. This can improve attitudes toward reading while engaging

them in deep discussion and deep thinking about their reading.

Impact

Although this study was not conducted to elicit specific policy or instructional changes in

my school district or any other context, it has caused an informal ripple effect and some impact

on those who have witnessed the study in action, spoken with me about the study, or read drafts

of this report as it was being written. Since the completion of this study two colleagues have

begun to facilitate book clubs with students. One teacher who is a mother of a fourth grade boy

has worked with other mothers of boys who are neighbors and friends to read and talk about

books with their sons as a way to ensure and encourage that the boys continue to read and

maintain the joy of reading and the ability to share their reading while capitalizing and building

relationships. A second colleague has decided to facilitate an after school book club with

interested parents and students. She hopes to engage her history students with interesting non-

fiction trade books as well as contemporary fiction outside of the school's prescribed curriculum.

In addition to interest from colleagues, my mentor and a professor at a New Jersey college has

altered his own teaching practice in regards to rethinking the types of assignments he attaches to

the required reading for his courses and has considered a book club approach to construct

meaning, reflect and react to the reading, and learn content.

Finally, the book club seemed to have a lasting impact on the boys who participated.

Subsequent to the completion of the study, I frequently receive texts and emails from them about

books they have read or guidance they are seeking for a writing assignment. I have been asked

to help with speeches to run for class president and I have been a sounding board for troubles

adjusting to high school life. There were many texts about the significant differences between

the movie version of *World War Z* and the novel. One text included a Venn diagram to show the

similarities and differences of the novel and the movie. There was only one overlap in the

middle the title, *World War Z.* To me this demonstrated the type of humor the boys appreciated.

Most extraordinarily, however, is a text I received the day this study was defended. Not being

aware of the defense date or the outcomes of the dissertation Pablo writes,

> I was wondering if you would like to start the book club up again. [We] are all willing to
> do it if we find a time that works for all of us. We have already discussed this a little and
> we will all pay for our own pizza and books.

As a result, the book club will live on and we will be sharing the same table at our local

pizzeria talking about books and being silly. Other next steps will include briefs to my school

district sharing the findings of the positive outcomes of the book club in the hopes of starting

conversations about improving reading engagement at school, submissions of articles to various

publications, and sharing my research with colleagues whether though informal conversations or

formal instruction in the form of presentations and professional development. I am encouraged

by the reception the research has had so far and hope that others consider expanding on what has

been found here.

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Appendix A

List of possible book club choices:

These books were chosen because they have been used in prior book clubs with boys and because of the potential for discussion about various themes, symbolism, and perspectives. Synopses of each book are taken from book descriptions on Amazon.com. This list is not exhaustive as the boys may suggest books they are interested in reading as well.

The Giver
by: Lois Lowry
Jonas's world is perfect. Everything is under control. There is no war or fear of pain. There are no choices. Every person is assigned a role in the community. Jonas lives in a seemingly ideal world.
When Jonas turns 12 he is singled out to receive special training from The Giver. The Giver alone holds the memories of the true pain and pleasure of life. Not until he is given his life assignment as the Receiver does Jonas begin to understand the dark secrets behind this fragile community. Now, it is time for Jonas to receive the truth. There is no turning back.

Five People You Meet In Heaven
by: Mitch Albom
Eddie is a wounded war veteran, an old man who has lived, in his mind, an uninspired life. His job is fixing rides at a seaside amusement park. On his 83rd birthday, a tragic accident kills him, as he tries to save a little girl from a falling cart. He awakes in the afterlife, where he learns that heaven is not a destination. It's a place where your life is explained to you by five people, some of whom you knew, others who may have been strangers. One by one, from childhood to soldier to old age, Eddie's five people revisit their connections to him on earth, illuminating the mysteries of his "meaningless" life, and revealing the haunting secret behind the eternal question: "Why was I here"

War of the Worlds
by: H.G. Wells
This is the granddaddy of all alien invasion stories, first published by H.G. Wells in 1898. The novel begins ominously, as the lone voice of a narrator tells readers that "No one would have believed in the last years of the nineteenth century that this world was being watched keenly and closely by intelligences greater than man's..."
Things then progress from a series of seemingly mundane reports about odd atmospheric disturbances taking place on Mars to the arrival of Martians just outside of London. At first the Martians seem laughable, hardly able to move in Earth's comparatively heavy gravity even enough to raise themselves out of the pit created when their spaceship landed. But soon the Martians reveal their true nature as death machines 100-feet tall rise up from the pit and begin laying waste to the surrounding land. Wells quickly moves the story from the countryside to the

evacuation of London itself and the loss of all hope as England's military suffers defeat after defeat. With horror his narrator describes how the Martians suck the blood from living humans for sustenance, and how it's clear that man is not being conquered so much a corralled.

Flowers for Algernon
by: David Keyes

       With more than five million copies sold, *Flowers for Algernon* is the beloved, classic story of a mentally disabled man whose experimental quest for intelligence mirrors that of Algernon, an extraordinary lab mouse. In poignant diary entries, Charlie tells how a brain operation increases his IQ and changes his life. As the experimental procedure takes effect, Charlie's intelligence expands until it surpasses that of the doctors who engineered his metamorphosis. The experiment seems to be a scientific breakthrough of paramount importance--until Algernon begins his sudden, unexpected deterioration. Will the same happen to Charlie?

Something Wicked This Way Comes
by: Ray Bradbury

       Few American novels written this century have endured in the heart and mind as has this one-Ray Bradbury's incomparable masterwork of the dark fantastic. A carnival rolls in sometime after the midnight hour on a chill Midwestern October eve, ushering in Halloween a week before its time. A calliope's shrill siren song beckons to all with a seductive promise of dreams and youth regained. In this season of dying, Cooger & Dark's Pandemonium Shadow Show has come to Green Town, Illinois, to destroy every life touched by its strange and sinister mystery. And two inquisitive boys standing precariously on the brink of adulthood will soon discover the secret of the satanic raree-show's smoke, mazes, and mirrors, as they learn all too well the heavy cost of wishes -- and the stuff of nightmare.

The Time Machine
by: H.G. Wells

       First novel by H.G. Wells, published in book form in 1895. The novel is considered one of the earliest works of science fiction and the progenitor of the "time travel" subgenre. Wells advanced his social and political ideas in this narrative of a nameless Time Traveler who is hurtled into the year 802,701 by his elaborate ivory, crystal, and brass contraption. The world he finds is peopled by two races: the decadent Eloi, fluttery and useless, are dependent for food, clothing, and shelter on the simian subterranean Morlocks, who prey on them. The two races--whose names are borrowed from the Biblical Eli and Moloch--symbolize Wells's vision of the eventual result of unchecked capitalism: a neurasthenic upper class that would eventually be devoured by a proletariat driven to the depths.

The Picture of Dorian Gray
by: Oscar Wilde

       Celebrated novel traces the moral degeneration of a handsome young Londoner from an innocent fop into a cruel and reckless pursuer of pleasure and, ultimately, a murderer. As Dorian Gray sinks into depravity, his body retains perfect youth and vigor while his recently painted portrait reflects the ravages of crime and sensuality.

Prey

by: Michael Crichton

In the Nevada desert, an experiment has gone horribly wrong. A cloud of nanoparticles -- micro-robots -- has escaped from the laboratory. This cloud is self-sustaining and self-reproducing. It is intelligent and learns from experience. For all practical purposes, it is alive. It has been programmed as a predator. It is evolving swiftly, becoming more deadly with each passing hour. Every attempt to destroy it has failed. And we are the prey.

The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks

by: Rebecca Skloot

Her name was Henrietta Lacks, but scientists know her as HeLa. She was a poor Southern tobacco farmer who worked the same land as her slave ancestors, yet her cells—taken without her knowledge—became one of the most important tools in medicine. The first "immortal" human cells grown in culture, they are still alive today, though she has been dead for more than sixty years. If you could pile all HeLa cells ever grown onto a scale, they'd weigh more than 50 million metric tons—as much as a hundred Empire State Buildings. HeLa cells were vital for developing the polio vaccine; uncovered secrets of cancer, viruses, and the atom bomb's effects; helped lead to important advances like in vitro fertilization, cloning, and gene mapping; and have been bought and sold by the billions. Yet Henrietta Lacks remains virtually unknown, buried in an unmarked grave.

Now Rebecca Skloot takes us on an extraordinary journey, from the "colored" ward of Johns Hopkins Hospital in the 1950s to stark white laboratories with freezers full of HeLa cells; from Henrietta's small, dying hometown of Clover, Virginia—a land of wooden slave quarters, faith healings, and voodoo—to East Baltimore today, where her children and grandchildren live and struggle with the legacy of her cells.

Henrietta's family did not learn of her "immortality" until more than twenty years after her death, when scientists investigating HeLa began using her husband and children in research without informed consent. And though the cells had launched a multimillion-dollar industry that sells human biological materials, her family never saw any of the profits. As Rebecca Skloot so brilliantly shows, the story of the Lacks family—past and present—is inextricably connected to the dark history of experimentation on African Americans, the birth of bioethics, and the legal battles over whether we control the stuff we are made of.

Over the decade it took to uncover this story, Rebecca became enmeshed in the lives of the Lacks family—especially Henrietta's daughter Deborah, who was devastated to learn about her mother's cells. She was consumed with questions: Had scientists cloned her mother? Did it hurt her when researchers infected her cells with viruses and shot them into space? What happened to her sister, Elsie, who died in a mental institution at the age of fifteen? And if her mother was so important to medicine, why couldn't her children afford health insurance?

The Lost City of Z: A Tale of Deadly Obsession in the Amazon

by: David Grann

In 1925, the legendary British explorer Percy Fawcett ventured into the Amazon jungle, in search of a fabled civilization. He never returned. Over the years countless perished trying to find evidence of his party and the place he called "The Lost City of Z." In this masterpiece of narrative nonfiction, journalist David Grann interweaves the spellbinding stories of Fawcett's

quest for "Z" and his own journey into the deadly jungle, as he unravels the greatest exploration mystery of the twentieth century.

Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mt. Everest Disaster
by: Jon Krakauer

    A bank of clouds was assembling on the not-so-distant horizon, but journalist-mountaineer Jon Krakauer, standing on the summit of Mt. Everest, saw nothing that "suggested that a murderous storm was bearing down." He was wrong. The storm, which claimed five lives and left countless more--including Krakauer's--in guilt-ridden disarray, would also provide the impetus for *Into Thin Air,* Krakauer's epic account of the May 1996 disaster.

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time
by: Mark Haddon

    Christopher John Francis Boone knows all the countries of the world and their capitals and every prime number up to 7,057. He relates well to animals but has no understanding of human emotions. He cannot stand to be touched. And he detests the color yellow.

    This improbable story of Christopher's quest to investigate the suspicious death of a neighborhood dog makes for one of the most captivating, unusual, and widely heralded novels in recent years.

Appendix B

Student Researcher Journal Protocol

The journal is to help me to better understand how the book club is working for you and how it might help other boys be more motivated readers. I am asking you to be "co-researchers" with me by writing what you think about our club, how it might help to motivate boys to read more outside of school, and recommendations to help schools help boys to read more. There is no penalty for not keeping up with the journal. I am hoping you would just keep track of what you're thinking as we go along. I'll collect them once every two weeks. You can physically write them or type them. You will not be asked to share your journal with anyone; however, you may choose to do so at our meetings if you like.

Here are some questions to get you started:

1. How is the book club working for you?

2. In what ways do you think the book club motivates you to read more (or not)?

3. In what ways is the book club helping you (or not) with your reading?

4. What do you think about our discussions?

5. What do you like about our meetings?

6. What don't you like about our meetings?

7. What are the advantages or disadvantages of reading for the book club compared to reading for literacy classes?

8. Is this a good way to motivate boys to read more outside of school? Why or why not?

Appendix C

Focus Group Protocols

Pre-Book Club Protocol

1. Tell me about your literacy classes in middle school.
    a. Describe some ways you would change your literacy class.
    b. Share some activities you enjoy in your literacy class.
2. In what ways do your literacy classes inspire you to read books outside of your assignments?
3. If you had to explain to someone how you feel about reading books which words would you use?
4. What do you think about the books you read in school?
5. Share with me what you know about book clubs.
    a. What does it look like?
    b. What do you do?
    c. Who joins book clubs?
6. If you were not asked to do this study, what would your feeling be about joining a book club?
7. What do you think about a book club that was designed just for boys?
8. What are you looking forward to in our book club meetings?
9. What might prevent you from continuing to join us?

After the first book

1. Tell me what you think about our book club meetings.
2. I have joined several book clubs as an adult. What I enjoy about them is that they get me to think differently about the reading by listening to others and I read books I might otherwise not read. In what ways do you think book clubs are a good way (or not) to motivate teens that don't like reading to read more?
3. Share with me some ideas that could make our book club better.
4. How can book clubs motivate boys to read more outside of school?
5. In what ways might book clubs be a good way to learn?
6. Tell me how this book club has made you more interested in reading.
7. In light of this experience for you what recommendations for you how might you change you literacy classes?
8. From this experience in a book club, in what ways are any of your experiences in your literacy class similar?
    a. Have you participated in Literature Circles?
    b. Tell me what you think about your participation in them.

After the end of the book club

1. Tell me what you think about our book club meetings now that we have completed two books.
2. Why might you continue to come to the sessions if we could continue the club?

3. What would you say to a friend of yours who is a struggling reader about our club?
4. What are some of the differences between your book club experience and your experience in your literacy classes?
5. Share with me what happened in the book club that might have made you a better reader?
6. Describe what happened in the book club that may have motivated you to read more on your own?
7. If we were to start a book club after school for boys, how would you advertize so that they would be interested?
8. How would the book club be different if girls were asked to participate?
    a. In what ways might your participation change?

Appendix D

Individual Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about your reading as a little kid.

2. What are your thoughts on your book club experience?

3. What would you change about our book club?

4. What motivated you to continue to come to the book club?

5. What motivated you to read for the book club?

6. How has your view of reading changed since you participated in the book club?

7. How would you compare your experience reading in the book club to reading in your literacy class?

8. How helpful are your teachers in finding books to read?

9. Is the book club a good way to motivate boys to read more outside of school? Why or why not?

10. I frequently heard how important it was to how good discussions from you all in the focus groups. Can you tell me why it was so important?

11. Within the discussions many of you appreciated the humor and the ability to joke around. Why was that so important?

12. What are you thoughts on the having only boys in the group versus having a mixed group?

13. How do you feel about the way your teacher runs your literacy class?

14. Many of you mentioned the pressure you feel when you read for school, where does the pressure come from?

Appendix E

Sample Brief of Findings

The study titled *"Just don't call it a book club:" Boys' reading experiences and motivation in school and an after school book club* was designed to not only understand how gender plays a role in reading motivation and middle school boys' reading experiences from their perspective, but also in an attempt inform classroom instruction in regards to reading. The book club model proved to be a motivating experience for boys for reasons outlined below this was often in contrast to how they described their reading experiences in school.

The Role of Gender
- According to the boys reading is not a gender specific practice and is a perfectly acceptable way to spend time for boys or girls.
- Romance reading is generally not a preferred genre for boys, though the boys expressed interest in a greater range of genres than accepted notions of "boy friendly" books. It is important not to limit the range of recommended books for boys simply because of societal constructions of masculinity and boyhood.
- Boys preferred single sex grouping in the book club because they feel girls and boys talk differently and express humor differently. They admit to editing participation out of fear of embarrassment for being misunderstood, yet are not embarrassed to appear to enjoy reading.

Reading Experiences in School
- Assignments that interrupt the flow of reading diminish the joy of reading. These were typically significant writing assignments the monitored whether the personal choice reading was done or proving understanding of specific skills or literary devices including, figurative language, plot structure, and vocabulary.
- There is very little time to engage in deep discussions about a common text where opinions are shared, connections are made, and topics are explored.
- There is little or no time for sustained reading in the classroom whether through read-alouds of interesting texts or silently reading personal choice texts.
- Personal choice reading is somewhat of a misnomer since often students are expected to choose books within a particular genre or subgenre and nonfiction reading other than biography is discouraged.

Reading Experiences in the Book Club
- Boys reconnect with the joy of reading once felt in younger elementary grades and come to understand that reading can be done for enjoyment rather than to complete and assignment.
- Boys are enthusiastic to talk about reading as a result of the autonomy to take conversations where they wanted to take them and express their humor without consequence.
- Conversation topics shift often with frequent interruptions and questions but the boys feel valued and heard because of this nature of talk. Boys note that they can

learn through these types of discussion and became interested in symbolism and author's point of view through the discussion.
- Important bonds and relationships form as a result of the autonomy of discussion and humor giving a sense of equality among the members and book club facilitator.
- Boys seek knowing their teachers/book club facilitator personally wanting to know their teachers' personal opinions about texts, current events, and life experience.
- Books become springboards for important topics in which boys demonstrate a level of maturity that they feel for which they are not always given credit.

The findings summarized above imply that there may be ways for parents, teachers, and schools to use the potential of book clubs in ways to motivate and engage boys (and girls) to read more.

- Engage in natural conversations about common reading allowing for autonomy through discussion similar to how people talk about other common media experiences and events.
- Find ways to build book club contexts within school. This could be done within content area classrooms reading nonfiction trade books, advisory periods, or after school.
- Build in reading experiences for students where the reading is the means to an end rather than to complete assignments.
- When creating assignments attached to reading, use assignments to enhance and extend the reading. These could be drama inspired activities, writing fan fiction, exploring relevant topics through inquiry projects, or creating video book trailers or writing book reviews to share with other potential readers.
- Encourage teachers to build relationships with students to capitalize on natural discussions about books and to recommend books based on students' interests.
- Create contexts and encourage sustained reading periods in school. There is a large research base that supports this for improving reading skills in all students and allows time for students to "get lost in a book" further developing reading motivation.