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Middle School Students' Perceptions of Their Interests in Reading As Defined By Engagement and Social Interaction When Using Sustained Silent Reading, SSR, and Peer Interests Reading Strategies, PIRS

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by

Regina J. Ware

A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

Doctor of Education

School of Education

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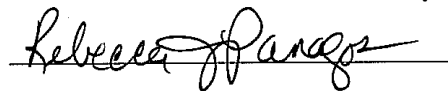
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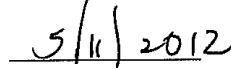
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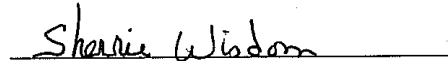
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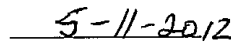
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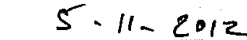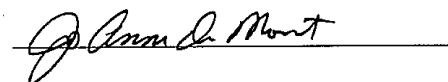
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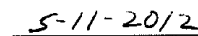
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Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

Full Legal Name: Regina Jane Ware

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Abstract

Alarming statistics report that middle school students are not reading as much as they should be reading. This study is an examination of two interventions that were incorporated into the regular curriculum to determine if these two reading interventions would encourage this researcher's students to read more. The "Nation's Report Card" (NAEP, 2010) showed that eighth graders were reading less on the 2009 exam than indicated by the score they received in 2007. This data intensifies the importance of encouraging reading in middle school students. To help the students in Blue Sky Middle School improve their reading habits, this researcher focused on how student interests, motivation, and engagement might change the reading habits of the students after the implementation of Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) and Peer Interests Reading Strategies (PIRS).

A qualitative study was conducted to gather data from student pre and post surveys, a daily reading log and writing prompt, and a student focus group interview session. The researcher used a triangulated data approach to validate the findings of the surveys, the daily reading log and writing prompt, and the interview session in regards to student motivation, student interest, and student engagement.

The results from this Midwest suburban school with 97% African-Americans students showed an improvement in the students' reading habits. Of the two interventions implemented, the SSR intervention had the greatest impact on student interest, and motivation. The students communicated that SSR was their intervention of choice because it provided them with a sense of empowerment and a will to want to read.

This researcher found SSR helped to improve the students' reading habits overall. The researcher found the PIRS intervention to show a minimal change in the students' reading habits.

The results of the data also revealed that students will read when provided with reading material they believe mirrors their life. Critical factors determining which books the students will read include the availability of books that interest them in their school library and in their classrooms. Recommendations were made to district administrators, teachers, and the librarian to help improve the reading habits for middle school students.

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Chapter One

Overview

"We don't hoard because we're greedy or wasteful, but because we want to be prepared," Kathleen Carpenter, Contributing Editor for Education News, quoted a teacher in her 2001 survey titled "Survey Says Teachers Feel Compelled to Hoard Supplies". Can teachers identify with this quote? Teachers' classrooms are packed with curriculum guides and a plethora of commercially published basal reader series, teacher resource books, and instructional manuals. In those guides and manuals, educators might find one or two stories that adolescent students can relate to, especially in a highly diverse setting with students of low socio-economic status. Cornwell (2010) found that middle school classrooms supported the curriculum, more than reading for pleasure. In classrooms all over the country there are a number of middle school students who can read but choose to shy away from reading because the stories in the curriculum and the teacher resource books are either too difficult, too boring, or have no connection to the adolescent students of today. One overwhelming reason that middle school students tend not to read is the lack of motivation. Bartholomew (2007), assistant professor of reading and literacy at California State University, shared that the need to motivate students first may be even more important than a teacher knowing the content of the curriculum. Educators know that being an expert of the content is important, but if students are not motivated by it, then it is very difficult to get and keep the students' attention. Despite teachers' best efforts, they continue to struggle to find a reading curriculum and books that will hold a middle school age students' attention over a long period of time.

Today's adolescents spend an average of just 8 ½ minutes a day, less than one hour a week, reading books, magazines, and newspapers for pleasure (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005). Reading for many adolescents is not a priority. They tend to place emphasis on the things they believe are important such as sports, meeting with friends, texting, and other after school activities rather than reading. This researcher wanted to know what could be done to motivate the students in Blue Sky Middle School to want to read for pure enjoyment and not because they felt they were forced to read. Pitcher et al. (2007) suggested that one way to get middle school students to read is by having a variety of reading materials including electronic resources available on a wide range of topics at their disposal. If educators can provide these reading resources for them, these resources might make reading a more pleasurable and purposeful experience for students.   Partin and Hendricks (2002) proposed that educators find acceptable reading material for the students they teach to help broaden their scope of learning.   For example, educators can be specific about what reading materials will aid students in not only their educational quest, but as they become productive citizens. In time, educators must extend the text by differentiating their lessons and broadening the reading materials in their classrooms to include diversity in other cultures, poetry and music, the Internet, magazines, technology, the arts, and other alternatives that might invite opportunities for middle school students to become critical thinkers. Therefore, the researcher suggests that an even better idea might include polling students at middle schools and asking them what text they are most interested in reading.

The researcher decided to poll her eighth grade students at Blue Sky Middle School where she is the Communication Arts teacher for the students in this study. Blue

Sky Middle School is located in a Midwest suburban area of the north region. The

students are from a diverse area of North County, made up of mostly middle class

families. Of the 784 sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students at this school, 97% of them

are African American, 0.1% are Asian, 0.3% are Hispanic, and 2.5% are Caucasian.

Fifty-one percent of the student population is male, and the other 49% are female. Sixty-

two point nine percent of the students receive free or reduced lunch, while 37% percent

of them do not. The Special Education Services Department serves 21% of the students

at this school in some form. Despite the fact that Blue Sky Middle School has a large

percentage of African American students, the researcher believes that the students want

to be heard and that their voices stand to matter in a community of learners that may be

identical to this macrocosm. This is a major reason why the researcher chose to use the

qualitative method. The researcher wanted to get the opinions of the students in this

school. The researcher also wanted others in the field of education to know exactly what

this population of students had to say as to why they were not interested in reading and

what possible strategies might help to motivate them.

Educators, parents, and students at Blue Sky Middle School voiced what they

believe is the reason so many middle school students are not motivated to read. They

believe television, computer games, and the cell phone have taken the place of leisure

reading for many adolescents. This information resulted from casual conversations the

researcher had with the parents, students, and educators at Blue Sky Middle School.

These casual conversations were sparked by the researcher when she noticed the poor

reading habits of the students in Blue Sky Middle School. These anecdotal remarks are

supported by the school's test scores. The data, the Missouri Assessment Program

(MAP) from Blue Sky Middle School, showed more than half of the students in eighth

grade were reading below grade level. The MAP is a series of standardized tests

designed to assess student progress in curricular areas (MO DESE, 2010). Educators

know that for most students, scores from standardized tests, such as the MAP, are not

important to them. While many of the students may not care much about their scores, the

researcher was concerned about the MAP scores in Blue Sky Middle School.   However,

the researcher's focus is not on the school's MAP reading scores, but on middle school

students' interest in reading. Although, the researcher feels that MAP achievement

scores may be indicative of the students' reading interests and that their lack of interests

in reading may attribute to the outcome of their MAP scores.

Shanahan (2007) gave some practical advice for educators, noting that they need

to provide books that are not mundane, but books that students can connect to, and maybe

then the students would enjoy and learn to love reading for pure reading. If educators

truly want to get kids reading, one crucial way to do that is for educators to learn the likes

and dislikes of the students they work with. On account of that fact the students are some

of the major stakeholders in education, and if educators want them to succeed, the best

way to do this is by involving them in the process of their learning.

The researcher felt compelled to involve the students in Blue Sky Middle School

in this research project by getting their perceptions as to what types of books might

motivate them or pique their reading interests. Listening to the voices of the students in

Blue Sky Middle School attributed to the importance of conducting this investigation.

After carefully listening to what the students had to say, and reviewing the MAP scores,

this further motivated the researcher to choose a qualitative method for this study. The

researcher did not want the opinions of the students in Blue Sky Middle School to go

unnoticed. She believed that what they had to say about reading could benefit other

middle school students and educators. The researcher's ultimate goal is to focus on

middle school students' perceptions of their interests in reading as defined by

engagement and social interaction when using Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) and Peer

Interests Reading Strategies (PIRS).

Problem

This study examined what the researcher believes is in part the reason middle

school students are not reading. In the first place, they are not reading because they do

not have a vested interest in the reading materials in their school**.** Subsequently, many

schools find it difficult to keep the middle school student engaged in reading. As Guthrie

and Davis (2003) suggested, educators have noticed that once this group of students

enters middle school the love for reading they once had has diminished. At any rate,

research from Guthrie and Davis (2003) supported that many middle school students do

not seem to be as engaged in the reading process as deeply as they were when they were

in elementary school. In as much as the previous statement does not hold true for all

middle school students, the majority of them do fall in alignment.

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) (2007) in their release of *To Read*

or Not to Read noted less than one-third of 13 year olds are daily readers, a 14% decline

from 20 years earlier. Reading scores for adolescents in this age group seem to continue

to plummet. Some adolescents appear to be involved in other things and do not find

reading fun anymore. They are more interested in texting, playing and watching video

games, and participating in extracurricular activities more than reading. The National

Institute for Literacy (2008) Stats and Resources report alluded to the fact that

adolescents and adults alike are reading less because of personal reasons or because of

their busy schedules. If the poor reading habits of adolescents continue, the United States

may be heading toward a generation of alliterate individuals. Alliterates are those

persons that can read but choose not to read (American Heritage College Dictionary,

2002). It is this researcher's opinion that educators share in the responsibility of finding

out what holds students' attention and interests in reading and make sure that reading

becomes a goal for all students. Educators can begin to do this by offering students a

choice in what they want to read. They can also start by having a class library that has a

variety of books on different topics and different grade levels available for their choosing.

These classroom libraries should be overflowing with a wide variety of current books,

and genres, magazines and pamphlets that students will be interested in reading (Worthy,

Moorman, & Turner, 1999). The researcher believes strongly in finding strategies that

will engage and interest the middle school student, so the researcher chose two strategies

to study, Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) and Peer Interests Reading Strategies (PIRS), to

determine whether they would encourage and motivate this group of students.

Rationale

This qualitative study examined the perceptions of a Midwest suburban school

with 97% African-American students on their impact of PIRS and SSR on their interests

to read. PIRS was developed by the researcher out of a need to further investigate the

effects of a partnered reading strategy that encourages social engagement of students'

perceptions of their interests in reading. The PIRS and SSR strategies were incorporated

into the regular Communication Arts curriculum and instructional time. All students used both strategies.

Peer Interests Reading Strategies (PIRS) is a partner reading strategy based on the Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) where the students learn how to coach each other while learning how student engagement and peer pressure influences their perceptions of their own interests in reading. Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) is defined as a period of uninterrupted reading where the student reads whatever they like independently in a specified amount of time (McCracken, 1971). On alternating days for one semester the students participated in either PIRS or SSR. On Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, the students used the PIRS strategy and on Tuesday and Thursday, the students used the SSR strategy. Each strategy had a writing prompt to indicate how the students enjoyed and engaged in the strategy for that particular day. The researcher hopes to be able to report to the librarian an analysis of the data from the students' writing prompts that will tell what genre of books the students are most interested in reading, whether the students are interested in more fiction books versus nonfiction books, and what authors the students in Blue Sky Middle School perceive as popular.

This study is worth accomplishing because it will not only provide strategies that teachers, the librarian, parents, and students in Blue Sky Middle School can use, but will add to the very limited knowledge base of adolescent literature concerning middle school students' interests in reading independently or with partners and the influences of peer pressure and student engagement.

The researcher understands that Blue Sky Middle School is not a unique population within itself and that there may be other schools, especially in

underrepresented areas, similar to Blue Sky Middle School whose voices must be heard.

Hopefully, the data gathered from this school will give researchers some insight as to

how these populations of mostly African American students feel about reading. This data

may also probe the minds of experts to acknowledge that this might be a reason for the

achievement gap that is seen in schools with this population of students.

To conclude, the researcher believes, if educators want all students to succeed

they must be willing to leverage their relationships and listen to all groups of students so

that no child from any environment will be left behind. The students' voices at Blue Sky

Middle School will help to add to what the experts know about why middle school

students are not interested in reading and what strategies could help motivate them.

The researcher will answer the following questions about the middle school students at

Blue Sky Middle School:

1. What qualities about SSR and PIRS did the students perceive increased their interest

    in reading and why?

2.   Did the students like reading alone, with a partner, or both?

3.   How did interacting with a peer while reading influence student interest?

Definition of Terms

The purpose of this section is to clarify terms in the research. These terms are

used to help the reader clearly understand the terminology related to this research.

Adolescents/Middle School Students - Adolescence is the transition between childhood

and adulthood. Early adolescence is between the ages of 11-13 (U.S. Department of

Health & Human Services, n.d.). These words were used interchangeably throughout this

study.

Class Within a Class - This is a class of students with educational disabilities who are placed in a general education setting (Hudson, 1989).

Engagement - This is the relationship between the reader and the text or a conversation between readers. It is also how readers use the reading strategies they have learned to interact and understand how they perceive what they are reading (Venuti & Armstrong, 2010).

Extrinsic Motivation - An activity one chooses to do in order to obtain some reward or avoid some punishment external to it (Lepper, 1988). External motivation I provided by a reward comes from outside. Examples- food, verbal praise, or stickers are rewards that educators give to motivate their students.

Intervention - This word is used interchangeably with the word strategy throughout this study by the researcher. An intervention is a strategy the researcher used to try to change the thought process of the students to encourage and influence them to read more.

Intrinsic Motivation - An activity one chooses to do for his/her own sake (Lepper, 1988). Internal motivation is when a person makes his or her own choice. The reward is from within the person. Humans do things because they want to do them.

Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) - This is a reading strategy that was developed by Dr. Lynn Fuchs and Dr. Doug Fuchs. This strategy focuses on encouraging peer mentoring and tutoring (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1998).

Peer-Interests Reading Strategies (PIRS) - A few of these strategies were taken from the PALS program and implemented with the researcher's strategies that fit the culture of the students in Blue Sky Middle School. PIRS was developed by the researcher.

Peer/Partner Reading - This is a form of paired reading, a strategy used to facilitate the development of fluency, social cooperation and engagement, and active listening (Meisinger, Schwanenflugel, Bradley, & Stahl, 2004).

Perception - A perception is the result of perceiving: observation: capacity for understanding (American Heritage College Dictionary, 2002). This is how the middle school student envisions what they believe a classroom should look like to them (Moon, Callahan, Tomlinson, & Miller, 2002).

Social Interaction - This is the process in which people act toward or respond to others.

Student Motivation - This is a student's desire to participate in the learning process (Lumsden, n.d.).

Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) - This reading strategy is defined as a period of uninterrupted reading where the student reads independently whatever they like in a short time span of 15-20 minutes or it can be slightly more (McCracken, 1971).

Limitations of Study

Student characteristics. This study has a few limitations. First, honesty was a limitation because the students in this study were supposed to keep a writing log and record how they felt about the reading strategy for that day. The researcher continued to remind students to be honest in their responses and that confidentiality was priority, and there was no way they could be identified. They were also expected to read a book of their choice alone or with a partner. Secondly, not only did they have to be honest, but they had to remember to write and record in their writing logs whether they read the books or whether or not there was what is called "fake reading." In the book, I Read It, But Don't Get It, author, Cris Tovani (2000) wrote students and adults alike have all

learned how to play the "game of school". They have learned how to skim and scan

material that should be thoroughly read. To address this limitation the researcher was

diligent about making sure the students remained on task. Self-reporting is a common

limitation in research studies (Cook & Campbell, 1979). A third limitation would be

those students who were transient.   The researcher found that during the course of the

study there were students leaving and enrolling in class. The researcher had to review the

study with those students who were new to her classroom. The directions were reviewed

continuously with all students.

     Survey instrument. First off, the student survey was a limitation. After looking

at several different styles of surveys and Survey Monkey, the researcher created surveys

that would best answer the research questions and based on the review of the literature.

Second, the return rate of the survey was a limitation. Students sometimes have a

tendency to miss deadlines.   Students may have lost the survey form or not given them to

their parents immediately and the researcher may have to give the student another form or

wait until the student returns the form. Several students returned the surveys after the

deadline and the deadline for the permission slip had to be extended. Students could not

participate in the study until their permission slip was turned in. There were 66 students

who had an opportunity to participate in the study. Sixty-four students returned the

parent permission slip and two students opted not to participate. Last, alteration was yet

another limitation the researcher was concerned with. Sometimes responders of a survey

tend to alter their responses because they want to write what they think they believe the

researcher wants to hear (Cook & Campbell, 1979). The researcher would remind them

to remain honest in their answers so that the results would be true results.

Population studied. Certainly demographics were a limitation because all of the students who participated in this study are from a Midwest suburban school with 97% African-American students. These students are from one Communication Arts teacher's classroom. All but two of the researchers' students were African-American.

Researcher's observations. While objectivity of the researcher may be limited, the reason that this researcher chose to use the qualitative research methodology was because the feedback from this method would match her students. The researcher could observe the body language and could quietly listen to the students' comments without providing any input. The students were able to trust the researcher because they knew her. The observing of the participants gave the researcher firsthand information about how they viewed the reading strategies and what they thought about the reading materials that are available to them.

Summary

What middle school students perceive as interesting is totally different from what a child or an adult may perceive as interesting. For years teachers have been given a tremendous task of finding reading material that adolescents perceive as interesting. Although, the promotion of students with the ability to read and comprehend remains to be a challenge for educators today, educators and school districts should want to take the initiative to find out how adolescents feel about the reading materials in their schools. If educators want their students to enjoy reading, then educators and the administrators in those districts must listen to the students' voices. If not, there will be an entire generation of functional illiterates. Some alarming statistics by The National Institute for Literacy (2008) warned that if schools continue to graduate those who are functional illiterates

then this could have a grave impact on the economy. This would mean there will be more people living off the aid of the state because they are not prepared for the jobs in this century. The National Right to Read Foundation (1996) described these persons as those persons whose reading level is at the fourth or fifth grade. These persons tend to be able to read just enough to be able to survive.

The main purpose of this study was to determine what reading materials the students liked and if the students had a stronger interest in reading after actively participating in PIRS, SSR, or a combination of these two strategies after a semester experimental period. The perceptions of middle school students' interests in reading and their reading habits can prove beneficial to both Blue Sky Middle School and the school system at large. The researcher chose a qualitative approach to tackle this study. In an article written by the National Association of School Psychologist (NASP, n.d.), the authors supported that if students are intrinsically involved in their learning, success can and will be achieved.   Educators know when students like something and are motivated by it then they will continue to do what they enjoy doing. Adolescents want to read and will read when they can connect to what they are reading. If the right reading opportunities are provided, adolescents can and will be intrinsically motivated to succeed. If middle school students are allowed to explore, are provided some adult and peer encouragement, are given a choice, and are intrinsically motivated, the end result can be rewarding for all. The review of the literature chapter will address the impact that SSR and PIRS had on the students' perceived interest and engagement in reading. Chapter 2 will also examine other strategies that have been implemented to try to motivate the reading interests of the middle school student.

Chapter Two

Introduction

   While educators continue to stress the importance and value of reading to their

students, the reading results for American students continue to decline. In this 21st

century, all persons need to know how to read.   Reading encompasses everything from

reading the ingredients in a recipe to reading the State of the Union Address. The most

recent report from the National Assessment of Educational Process (NAEP), known as,

"The Nation's Report Card", stated that exams showed that 26% of eighth graders and

26% of 12th graders are reading 'below basic' levels in 2002 (Nagel, 2009). The results

of this report card in 2009 shows that the NAEP reading results for eighth graders are

about the same as they were in 2002.   The results of reading for fourth graders and

eighth graders in 2007 and 2009 revealed there was no change in the fourth grade reading

scores and an only one point increase in the eighth grade reading results from 2002. This

same report showed reading results have made minimal progress since the test was

implemented in 1992. With alarming statistics like these, the educator's job should be to

find out why middle school students are making minimal progress in the area of reading.

This literature review will examine what middle school students perceive as a factor in

why there is a reading problem and the researcher will offer strategies that can be

instituted to help educators, students, and parents work together to promote reading.

    As mentioned in Chapter 1 of this study, one of the main reasons middle school

students do not value reading is because of the reading materials in their schools (Gay,

2002). They have voiced that they have little or no connection to the stories in their

literature books or the books found in their school's library or in their classrooms.

According to Gay (2002) the students want to read relevant material. They want reading material that is similar to what they are experiencing in their own lives. One way to address this issue is to ask them what they would like to read. There is research which supports that middle school students really do want to read and will read if and when provided the right reading materials. In the article, "I Want To Read: How Culturally Relevant Texts Increase Student Engagement in Reading", Feger (2006) gave several testaments to the fact that if teachers would take the time to incorporate culturally relevant, non-fiction literature into the lessons, the students will be more engaged in what they are reading. She further added that when students can see what they are reading is similar to their life or lifestyle they become motivated and want to read the material because they have some kind of connection to it.

In summary, having students connect to the reading and student engagement is important in encouraging middle school students to want to read. The act of having students engaged then becomes a major factor for educators. When students are engaged in the learning process research supports that there can be an improvement in student achievement and student interest (Pilgreen, 2000). Although student achievement is one of the factors of student engagement and interest, the researcher will not be discussing reading achievement at all in this literature review. She will only focus this writing on middle school students' perception of their interest in reading, and what the research says about who and what helps to motivate the middle school students to learn to love and value reading. One sure way to turn middle school students on to reading is to make sure educators become responsible for stimulating their students' reading interests.

Middle School Students' Reading Interests

If educators want to find out the reading interests of middle school students, one simple way would be to ask the students what they like to read. Students enjoy putting their two cents in on a conversation. Having a voice is very important to middle school students. Sloan (2006) wrote that what students want more than anything is to be listened to. When students are offered a platform where they can voice their opinions, and they believe they are being heard, their voices empower them to feel safe to communicate their ideas without much criticism. Ueland (1993) said, "When students are listened to it creates them, makes them unfold and expand" (p. 1). Educators do not always have the answers for what they think their students want and like. Educators can and should involve the students in creating lessons centered on them. When students are made to feel part of a community of learners they cannot help but to succeed. The same applies with reading. It is important to find out the students' likes and dislikes in the area of reading.

When educators reframe the curriculum to meet the needs of the students, this promotes student engagement and a deeper understanding for learning (Wilhelm & Wilhelm, 2010). Once educators have identified what students like to read by a written assessment or survey, then the educator's job is to fill the classroom library with those kinds of materials. Promoting self-selection of reading materials encourages interest in reading and helps to develop life-long readers. Middle school students like to read material mirrored from everyday things that they see. In the researcher's experience as a communication arts teacher, the students have shared some of the kinds of books that they found interesting to read. For example, the students are interested in vampire

stories, science fiction, mystery, and drama. These are just some of the popular genre of

books they like to read. Some students even like books that come in a series, and are

interested in books that have been made into movies. Goodnow (2007) of the Seattle

Post Intelligencer reported that she has seen a surge in teens buying books in this last

decade that has not been seen in years. This surge has happened because young adult

authors are now catering to writing books that can be viewed as an adult read. Most of

these books have language that is not very kid friendly and includes a lot of violence and

sex.   Books like these tend to appeal to and interest the middle school student. These

new books seem to straddle the fence between being written for middle school students

but can be read by adults. Goodnow (2007) also gave an example of the types of books

that middle school students are drawn to. The Gossip Girls, she says, are pretty similar to

"Sex in the City" or books by Mike Lupica who writes a lot of sports books that cater to

boys. These are just some of the books that middle school students have found an

interest in reading. Witches and wizards are other types of books middle school students

are interested in. Although, some schools, mainly religious schools, have banned The

Harry Potter books, book stores and libraries could not keep them on their shelves.

Dunne (2011) of Education World reports that J. K. Rowling's, The Harry Potter Series

tops the list for being banned in 1999 than any other book that year. Odd as it may seem,

students were still visiting the school libraries and public libraries to check the series out.

Middle school students continue to be interested in reading material that is over

exaggerated. Fiction in this 21st Century continues to interest middle school students

because of its mystical tone but as educators the priority should be to encourage the

reading of more nonfiction material. Educators may not like the idea that students are

reading these types of books, but they are reading.

Contrary to what the educators in Blue Sky Middle School believe, there are

some students who do enjoy nonfiction. Sullivan (2001) mentioned that nonfiction is not

just informational for some students. Some middle school students really do see the

value in reading nonfiction for fun, entertainment, excitement, and it also sparks their

imagination. Sullivan (2001) even believed educators and librarians may be part of the

problem as to why middle school students may not be reading nonfiction.   Sullivan

alluded to the fact that there are too many schools and public libraries that do not give

enough credit for students' interests in nonfiction books. The librarian in Blue Sky

Middle School stated, "Most students come in looking for fiction books and will only

check out nonfiction books when they have to use the book for a project for class." There

are educators who use nonfiction material only for homework assignments and when this

happens, the students only see it as homework. The students then equate the reading of

nonfiction material as a task or chore than as an interesting or educational piece of

literature. This has been a major reason as to why middle school students have lost the

zeal to read any reading material. If this is the case then it should be eminent that

teachers and librarians find time to collaborate to ensure the reading success of the

students.

One way to spark that interest in middle school students is by offering them

reading material that is neither a chore nor that makes them feel incompetent. Educators

can put the Reading is Fun back into reading by doing book talks or book reports with

enthusiasm that will make middle school students want to read. What educators need to

do more than anything is to help the students understand that reading can be fun and

pleasurable when they can relate what they are reading to what they enjoy doing. Guthrie

and Davis (2003) believed that the context of any reading material for middle school

students is crucial to adolescent literacy and its understanding. Educators need to begin

to stress the importance of nonfiction reading versus fictional reading to their students.

They need to provide students with evidence that nonfiction reading is valuable to their

livelihood. Duke (2004) provided evidence that nonfiction reading can affect one's life.

Nonfiction reading can help increase the student's vocabulary, build student interests,

fosters a positive attitude toward reading, is important to life outside of school, and helps

to make us better citizens. If students can uncover the importance of nonfiction reading

then maybe they will see the benefits in reading this type of material.

The 2000 Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) Best Books for

Young Adults survey found that there was a 3:1 preference for fiction books over

nonfiction books and only one nonfiction title was in its top 10 list. The aforementioned

survey was conducted by librarians across the nation. From the YALSA survey it is easy

to see that middle school students still prefer fiction over nonfiction books. What one

might attribute to students reading more fiction is that they can easily relate to these

books. Most educators know that familiarity brings on a sense of understanding. Public

libraries everywhere are inundated with more fiction material in the young adult section

than with nonfiction material (Jones, 2001). One reason for this might be because this is

what is being checked out the most by their patrons. The students appear to be

comfortable with reading these types of books because of the familiarity, the comfort,

and the connection they have with these books. Students should be encouraged to move

outside of their comfort zone and read things that can stretch their imagination. It should

then become necessary for educators to impress upon the middle school student to engage

in reading nonfiction. Williams (2005) emphasized that it is important for educators to

help students understand that if what they are reading can be connected in some way to

their lives, then they will learn to enjoy reading for both interest and pleasure. Both

educators and librarians are in the position then to make this happen. They can do this by

working collaboratively to make this happen. Collaboration between the classroom

teacher and the librarian will be discussed later in this chapter.

     Literature circles are another way educators can capture the reading interests of

middle school students. Literature circles offer students a voice and a choice. Students

of all ages like to come together to talk about things that they enjoy doing. In literature

circles students are afforded the opportunity to have critical reading dialogue with each

other. They can come together to engage in a conversation about a book they are reading.

A literature circle offers students a chance to share their thoughts and ideas with one

another about the reading. Literature circles gives students a chance to work on various

reading skills, critical thinking skills, group roles, literary terminology, and enhance peer

interaction (Pitton, 2005). Although there are pros and cons to incorporating literature

circles in middle school the greatest benefit is that literature circles for the most part can

and have generated interest in reading for some students (Pitton, 2005). Daniels (2002)

denoted that when literature circles are implemented correctly students are engaged at

higher levels of thinking, are socially motivated by their peers, and academically, their

grades improve. One disadvantage has been where educators have not given explicit

directions as to how literature circles should be implemented (Daniels, 2002). As with

anything, when things are implemented correctly and one understands, the steps to follow, the end results can be rewarding. Daniels (2002) concluded that educators should never take for granted what kids can do when given the opportunity to work together. Literature circles can be a great way to engage all students in reading. Discerning student reading interests is crucial to engaging students in literature circles. When educators know their craft and know their students' reading interest, the possibility of student reading engagement will be beneficial for all.

Interest and Engagement during Sustained Silent Reading

Educators have been perplexed for years trying to find strategies to motivate middle school students' interest in reading for pleasure. One researcher came up with a reading strategy that is still being used by many educators today and that is Sustained Silent Reading. Sustained Silent Reading or as it was originally called, the Individual Reading Program (IRP), was developed by Lyman Hunt in the 1960's (McCracken, 1971). Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) is a strategy that is used in the classroom where the students read for an uninterrupted period of time. Its primary purpose is to promote a positive student attitude toward reading in a nonthreatening environment.

While some educators have used SSR as a way to pass time, others have used it to promote student engagement and interest in reading. McCracken (1971) is one researcher who many educators follow when it comes to incorporating SSR into the day. McCracken (1971) defined SSR as a time set aside for quiet reading time without interruption. Ivey and Broaddus (2001) conducted a qualitative study surveying about 1,765 students from 23 diverse reading language arts classrooms in the mid-Atlantic and northeastern United States where they listened to what the students had to say about their

interest in reading. What they found was that SSR was a big factor in student

engagement. The students in their study gave some insight as to the benefits of how time

spent engaged in SSR or independent reading helped them to concentrate, comprehend,

and reflect on what they were reading. This study went even further to discuss how SSR

allowed the students free choice reading without being disturbed. The students felt a

sense of empowerment during SSR time because they were able to read anything that

they wanted without the reading being tied to the curriculum. Pilgreen (2000) wrote that

when implemented correctly, SSR can have a positive impact on increasing reading

engagement. In her book, *The SSR Handbook: How to Organize and Manage a*

Sustained Reading Program, she listed eight factors for making SSR work for the

students. These factors are:

1. Staff training: supporting staff is the rationale for SSR as well as best practices

    for effective implementation. Staff training is very important to implementing

    SSR. It is necessary that the students clearly understand the teachers' directions.

    All teachers will not teach the strategy the same way so it is vital that the

    classroom teacher explains how they will be implementing the strategy for their

    students (Pilgreen (2000).

2. Access: ensuring students have access to a wide range of reading material. The

    students should be provided with a wide array of reading material. The reading

    material should not be limited to one single genre or one author. It is good for

    students to be exposed to both fiction and nonfiction reading material. Chow and

    Chou (n.d.) agrees with Pilgreen (2000) in that a classroom should be filled with a

variety of books that will ensure that each student might find a book that interests him or her.

3. Follow-up activities: establishing activities that occur after SSR to allow students to share what they are reading with others. Students should be provided with activities related to the reading after SSR. In order for one to retain what they have read dialogue is good for reading retention. When students are able to discuss with their peers what they have read the information can have lasting effects (Pilgreen (2000).

4. Appeal: tapping into students' reading interests and letting them choose their own materials. Ownership is very important to students at this age. When middle school students have the opportunity to make choices students are then involved in their learning (Pilgreen (2000).

5. Distributed time to read: creating opportunities to read on a regular basis. Students' time for reading should be sacred. They should have an allotted amount of time every day for reading to become habitual (Ediger, 2009).

6. Environment: providing a comfortable atmosphere in which to read. Creating an environment that is conducive to student learning is also important to the SSR strategy. The lighting of the room, space, and noise are also important so that students can stay and remain focused during SSR (Ediger, 2009).

7. Non-accountability: making sure not to attach work to reading that takes place in SSR. As mentioned earlier, as educators we do not want to make SSR a chore. We want SSR to be something the students enjoy. When teachers take the pleasure out of SSR by assigning an assignment to SSR that takes away from

student ownership because the students do not have a sense of empowerment in

the reading (Chow & Chou, n.d.). We want our students to be a part of a

community of readers and not be forced to read during this time.

8. Encouragement: implementing various strategies to support students in

developing effective reading habits. Some strategies that might support students

in becoming lifelong lovers of reading might include: letting the students choose

their own books, allowing them time to dialogue with a peer about what they read,

helping them to find books on their reading level, model reading with the

students, and providing time for them to read are just a few strategies educators

can implement (Pilgreen, 2000).

 These strategies are by no means the only strategies educators can use; there are a

number of researchers and authors that provide educators with a list of factors that can

help make SSR successful for middle school students. SSR can be and has been proven

to be successful if implemented correctly. When Chow and Chou (n.d.) evaluated SSR in

reading classes throughout Hong Kong, they found their students had a more positive

attitude toward reading and cultivated a better reading habit after participating in SSR.

Coley (l983) reported that with the six month experimental study he did on SSR, he saw

gains in reading in both seventh and eighth grade students and that the students' attitude

was more positive after they participated in the study. Valeri-Gold (l995) found that

most of her college development learners reported that they felt SSR had a positive

impact on their attitudes toward reading.

On the other hand, although there is research to support the success of SSR, there

is also research that shows how the implementation of SSR can have a negative impact.

Herbert's (1987) attitude survey reported that the students' responses from his survey

revealed that students from seventh through ninth grades in a suburban junior high school

responded negatively towards SSR. The students did not feel that SSR helped them at

all. In analyzing this, perhaps the types of reading materials made available to the

students had an impact as to why they did not feel like SSR helped them. The books may

not have been of much interest to them or maybe they were not allowed a choice in what

they read. There could have been a multitude of reasons why the students did not enjoy

SSR but when implemented correctly, research supports its success.

Albeit as it may, the key to having a successful SSR program is to make sure that

there is buy-in by the students and the educators. No one program is 100% guaranteed

but the success of SSR depends on the support of the educators and students involved in

the strategy. There is sufficient enough research to support the efficacy that SSR can and

has worked for a diverse population of students. Although SSR is just one of many

reading strategies educators can use to interest and engage students, peers reading

together is yet another successful reading strategy.

Peer Interests Reading Strategies, PIRS, and Student Interests and Engagement

Peer Interests Reading Strategies (PIRS) was developed by this researcher out of

need to further investigate the effects of a partnered reading strategy that encourages

social engagement of students' perceptions of their interests in reading. Portions of PIRS

were adopted from Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) (2007) after the researcher

read about the success of this strategy. PALS was developed in 1989 by Dr. Lynn Fuchs

and Dr. Doug Fuchs (2001) in conjunction with Dr. Deborah Simmons to study the

impact of their peer tutoring intervention. This strategy was originally developed for

students with learning disabilities but has been structured so that it now services

preschool through high school with an emphasis on a peer-mediated activity.

The researcher used PIRS as a parallel to PALS in that it allowed students to help

each other and learn by teaching. The students are paired together to work as a reading

coach or player. The students take turns switching the role of coach or player every other

day as they rotate partners every two weeks. This strategy is commonly known to

educators as a peer tutoring strategy. The PIRS strategy like PALS is used to improve

student reading interest, reading motivation, and student engagement. This PIRS strategy

allows the students to read with a partner for 15-20 minutes per day three times a week.

Its design is to complement the current school program, not to replace it. This strategy

also works to focus on the individual students' reading needs as they work to help one

another. Aside from the academic piece, Topping (2005) a peer tutoring expert and

author, echoes what other researchers have said about peer tutoring, peer tutoring is a

strategy that can help students develop their communication and social skills and

encourages student motivation. That is what educators want. Educators want their

students to be self-motivated to read. If educators can provide opportunities for this to

happen, then by the time students reach middle school they will not be so reluctant to

want to read for pleasure. The peer tutoring strategy is one strategy that has seemed to

work for some students.

Strong research support exists for the peer tutoring strategy. Fulk and King

(2001) reported that when class wide peer tutoring is used effectively, students' self-

esteem and social skills improved. Fulk and King (2001) reviewed the work of The

Juniper Gardens Children's Project which is the organization that developed the original

peer tutoring model more than 20 years ago. Fuchs and Fuchs (2001) made reference to the fact that when students work together as peer tutors to help or coach their partner in a reading skill or strategy they have mastered, they may motivate the learning of their partner. For instance peer tutoring happens when one student who has mastered a skill or strategy can show their partner how to understand that skill like they did. The aforementioned is an example of the peer tutoring strategy. The researcher also believes that students can learn from their peers if the peer tutoring strategy is used correctly. There are times when students have voiced in the researchers' class that peer tutoring worked for them. With peer tutoring students normally do not feel demoralized or like a failure because they have made a connection with that peer. Many middle school students oftentimes do not want to be put on the spot in front of the class and therefore working in a smaller group or one on one with a partner alleviates frustration and embarrassment for many students. The students can engage and relate with each other without feeling like they are being forced to learn but rather want to learn. Daniels (2002) supported that the peer tutoring model. His rationale for supporting peer tutoring groups is that when students work together they can work openly by respecting each other's differences. When students respect each other, they can feel free to have that open and honest dialogue with one another without being threatened by whether they believe they will be the laughing stock of the classroom. Kagan (1994) is yet another supporter of the peer tutoring strategy. Kagan stressed that when students work collaboratively to help each other in a structured environment, then the learning is enhanced by more positive social interactions among students.

The benefits that students gain from peer tutoring can have some lasting effects for both the tutor and the tutee. Three commonly cited benefits of peer tutoring are: the learning of academic skills, the development of social behaviors and classroom discipline, and the enhancement of peer relations (Greenwood, Carta, & Hall, 1988). Although there is extensive research to support the benefits of peer tutoring and its effect of student engagement and social interaction, there are some critics that have found some discrepancies with peer tutoring. When tutors are not trained properly on the delivery of the process of how peer tutoring is to be implemented, the tutor and tutee may miss some valuable information (Roscoe & Chi, 2007). Tutors and tutees need to know what roles they play in the tutoring process and how to deliver their knowledge to their partner. The educator in charge needs to clearly explain the peer tutoring process before they begin this strategy. Educators can even go further to express how important it is that the tutor and tutee be willing and active participants in the process so that the strategy can benefit both parties. There is an insurmountable amount of evidence that shows peer tutoring can and does work. When implemented correctly, monitored, and with buy-in from most everyone, the rewards of a peer tutoring strategy can prove successful for middle school students.

Student Motivation and Engagement in Reading

Tapping into a student's internal drive has been monstrous for educators. That internal drive that educators face daily is known to the world as motivation. It is the driving force behind a student's determination to learn or the lack thereof. Motivation comes in two forms, intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation refers to doing something because the person wants to, enjoys it and the learning or doing

comes from within. Extrinsic motivation refers to the doing of something because the

person has been motivated by something outside and leads to a separable outcome (Ryan

& Deci, 2000). What motivates middle school students to want to read? An example of

intrinsically motivated readers is the readers who read a book because they want to, not

because they are made to. They read for themselves and no one else. The reading

becomes personal to them and therefore they want to participate in the reading.

Extrinsically motivated readers are reading because some outside reward has been

offered to make them participate in the reading. An extrinsic reader reads for someone or

something else. Naturally, all educators desire that all students be intrinsically motivated

to read because student engagement in reading can be and has been tied to student

motivation. From this perspective, Colker (2007), a writer for Reading is Fundamental,

believes that engagement in reading can be correlated with reading achievement. An

example of a reading program that can be tied to reading achievement is The Accelerated

Reader Program. The Accelerated Reader Program was developed by Judi and Terry

Paul in 1984. The Accelerated Reader Program was created to offer students a chance to

read independently at their level. After reading, the student then takes a comprehensive

quiz whereby the teacher uses a point system to set individual student goals. The purpose

of the point system is to help motivate the student. If teachers want they can offer

incentives or rewards for those students meeting their points. There are some advantages

and disadvantages of the program that can either lead to a student being intrinsically or

extrinsically motivated to earn these points. An advantage might be an increase in

student achievement and motivation. This is because the student has decided that they

want to reach the goal they have set leading to the development of intrinsic motivation.

Some disadvantages of the Accelerated Reader Program might include student competition, frustration, and the reward system. The students show signs of extrinsic motivation when instead they are only doing it for the reward and not because they want to. The researchers' focus in this section is not on the Accelerated Reader Program but how a reading program can be correlated to a student's motivation to read. If students are actively involved in any activity and they like what they are doing then that creates some form of internal motivation and interest for the students. Reading, like anything else, is a skill and to become better at it a person must like it to be motivated to continue to practice that skill. Student engagement and motivation at the middle school level is powerful. Therefore it becomes the educators' job to make sure that the middle school students engage themselves in reading to help make them successful (Accelerated Reader, 2008).

Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) commented that engaged reading is a merger of motivation and thoughtfulness. They believed that engaged readers comprehend the reading, take an active interest in their learning, and have self-confidence (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). If engaged readers have the traits that Guthrie and Wigfield speak of, then these students truly are readers who have been intrinsically motivated. Educators can help to create an environment for student motivation and engagement when the right opportunities have been provided for this to happen. Students gain a sense of ownership in their learning when there is social interaction among students in an environment that enables students to discuss and construct meaning from the text. Many educators have used peer mentoring or support strategies as a way to activate and maintain students' intrinsic motivation. Educators have continued to struggle for years by using these

strategies and activities with varying degrees of success (Sanacore, 1999). Educators

have given parties and other extrinsic rewards to motivate these students, which

sometimes leads to only a temporary solution. When educators really want students to

value reading, they should create ways to make reading more meaningful to them. A

very big part of the educators' job is to find other means and ways to encourage intrinsic

motivation in reading.

One writer suggested that there is another way to create motivation and that is

through "visualization and connecting" (Mulcaire, 2009). Visualization is when the

reader can make a mental picture of what they are reading. Making a connection is when

students can relate what they are reading to their own lives. The reader may ask

themselves questions like; "Have I seen something like this before?" "Have I read

something like this, or have I visited a place similar to this?" These types of questions

will trigger something in the persons' mind and make them truly understand and connect

to what they are reading. The strategies of visualization and connecting are two

strategies that can prove beneficial for the peer tutors to use. The more middle school

students can visualize and make a connection to the reading, the more likely they are to

understand what they read. If students begin to use these motivational techniques, then

reading becomes more meaningful and promotes continued reading. Educators need to

succinctly stress to students the value in creating a personal connection to the text

because it takes real effort to understand the many textbooks and other forms of reading

material. To summarize Torgesen's (2007) ideas on engagement, unless students are

appropriately engaged and actively participating in the reading, they often do not and will

not fully apply the skills they have, nor will they be motivated to acquire additional skills

and knowledge. This happens because the students are not actively engaged in what they are reading. Creating more engaging and motivating classrooms, and interacting with students in a way that promotes internal motivation for reading is imperative for student success. Students will learn to process text more deeply if the reading is relevant to their lives and if they are pursuing meaningful learning goals in an atmosphere that support their initiative and personal choice (Torgesen, 2007). The atmosphere or classroom climate is important to a student's success in reading.   The classroom should have books ranging from all grade levels, include diverse topics, and cover a variety of reading material. If a classroom is rich with reading material like newspapers, magazines, and even recorded books that the students believe are interesting, there is more of a chance that the students will be motivated to read.

Enhancing motivation to read is important for two reasons. First, children who are motivated to read are more likely to spend more time reading, which has been directly linked to improved reading achievement (Taylor, Frye, & Marigamu, 1990). Second, scales of reading motivation account for approximately 10% of the variance in reading performance measure (Wigfield, Wilde, Baker, Fernandez-Fein, & Scher, 1996). Educators need to take note of what motivates students in the classroom and hopefully this will strengthen the chances that the students will want to be self-sufficient readers for the rest of their lives. Goodman (2003) offered educators a way to do this by finding short interesting pieces of literature. It is also a good idea to find text that leaves the students wondering and their imaginations running. With the right pieces of literature students will be motivated to read. Most educators can concur that motivating students to read is important to the longevity of producing proficient readers. All stakeholders that

are involved in educating children need to be more proactive in finding methods,

attending workshops, writing lessons, implementing programs, and using effective

strategies that teach students how to become motivated when reading.

The Librarian's Role in Motivating Students to Read

Students' voices should not only be heard in the classroom but also in the library.

Librarians in this 21st Century are facing some of the same challenges in the library that

classroom teachers are facing and that is the fact that students are not interested in the

library materials contained in the school libraries. The librarian's job now involves

finding ways to increase students' interests in reading particularly for the middle school

student. What librarians can do more than anything is to learn which books interest the

middle school student. Librarians can ask the teachers and students what books are

available that this population of students are interested in reading and then provide access

to not only those books but books that meet the academic needs as well as the personal

interests of the middle school student. Bernadowski and Kolencik (2010) reminded

librarians that having a well-stocked library may help to encourage student interest. But,

is having a well-stocked library enough? Stocking the library is not enough if there is not

a diverse selection of reading material there. What educators and librarians do know is

that it is not the quantity that matters but rather the quality of books that are available for

the students to read. The librarians are also responsible for making sure that their book

collections include books that reflect a diverse population of students in relation to their

language, social class, race, gender and religious preference (Bernadowski & Kolencik,

2010). When students can read something that they are familiar with, the likelihood of

them completing the reading is higher and this is just another way for educators to tap into that motivational piece of engaging students in reading.

Another way educators and librarians can keep up with what middle school students are reading so they can continue to motivate these students is by joining educational associations. The International Reading Association, The School Library Journal, and the American Library Association are all organizations that can provide librarians and educators with a list of books that middle school students perceive as interesting. A membership in an educational association allows the classroom teacher and the librarian to keep up with current research and reading trends for the middle school student. Knowing what reading material interests students is very important to promoting literacy. One sure way of forming a bond with the students to promote literacy is to speak with them about what they want to read and supply the library with those books.

In their effort to work collaboratively, the librarians and educators must continue to make sure that students are reading material that is conducive to the school setting. A very tedious job of the librarian and educator might be the censoring or screening of the books middle school students may be reading. The screening of books can be very difficult for both the librarian and the educator. Librarians and educators may have to read book reviews or check with local book venders to make sure that students are choosing books on their grade level. The age of the protagonist in the book can sometimes let the reader know if the book is age appropriate or not. For reasons listed above, it is of the utmost importance that communication between the librarian and the

educator be ongoing as they work to find material that will interest the middle school student (Moreillon, 2007).

Collaboration among classroom teachers and librarians by way of educational association or some other form of communication is a great way to help students in their effort to find interesting reading material. Collaboration is more than just talking with other educators about what they think students like to read but also involves working with the educators to promote student interest in reading. Collaboration as seen by one writer says, "Collaboration at its best is, a dynamic, interactive process among equal partners to which teaching partners bring their own unique skills and knowledge base together" (Moreillon, 2007, p. 4). One benefit of collaboration is that it allows the classroom teacher and librarian to work together so that they can select school appropriate text. Another benefit to having the librarian and the classroom teacher collaborating is that the librarian's familiarity with text in the library is invaluable. While the librarian is more familiar with the library, the classroom teachers sometimes are the first to know what books the students are interested in reading because they see them more often than the librarian does. One major drawback for librarians has been that the librarian is seen as more of a collaborator to the classroom teacher rather than of a collaborative one (Moreillon, 2007). Classroom teachers and the librarian should have more of a synonymous relationship. Their main goal should be to work together and not in isolation to one another. According to the Position Statement on the School Library Media Specialist role in Reading adopted by the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) Board in February 2009, they too have addressed the issue of classroom teachers and librarians working more closely together to encourage more

reading from all students (American Association of School Librarians, 2005). If one of the goals of educators is for all students to become proficient in reading then collaboration between the classroom teacher and the librarian is paramount. It is not only paramount for this century but for centuries to come. As the librarian continues to find interesting and motivating materials for the middle school students to read, they should work cooperatively to plan programs with public libraries and community organizations that serve this age group so that the society at large will become a literate rich society.

The Parents' Role in Motivating Their Children to Read

Parents play a key role in helping to prepare their children for school. The parents are the first ones to serve as their child's first teacher. They can and should be the earliest ones to encourage their children to read and to learn to love reading for pleasure. Dr. Richard Bavaria, vice president of Sylvan Learning Center, agreed that a child's reading habit is developed early in life and their parents are some of the first ones to influence them to read (Sylvan Learning Center, 2010). In some cases, there are parents who begin to read to their children even before they are born. Some parents, like many educators, question what happens to their child's thirst for reading as they progress through school. Parents today more than ever are looking for strategies that will help them to motivate their children to read. The Parent Teacher Association (PTA, 2010) is one organization that offers parents a variety of strategies they can use to help them to motivate their children to read.

Parents can begin by serving as the child's role model. They can do this by modeling what good reading habits look like. Parents can set aside time during the day where they and their child or children can read. They can read the same book and have a

conversation about what they read. The parents must first begin to value reading for pleasure themselves if they want their child to learn to value reading for pleasure. Strong parental support and involvement can have an impact on student learning and achievement. The results from a study of a national group of eighth grade students completed by Keith and Keith (1993) demonstrated that parental involvement can influence the academic lives of their children. The parents' role in motivating their children to read can serve as a double edge sword in that the parents can communicate with the teacher that outside reading is taking place at home and they can learn more about what is going on in their child's school when they become equal partners in the connection between home and school. When parents can communicate that reading is important and the children can see their parents reading then children may want to read.

Parents can equip the home with a variety of reading material. Reading material like the newspaper, magazines, books that are appropriate for themselves and their children, the comics and comic books are all good reading material (PTA, 2010). The home, like the classroom, should have reading material that encompasses a variety of subjects and topics. Parents can help to broaden their child's imagination by providing these materials in the home. Another strategy parents can use to encourage and motivate recreational reading is to let their child choose their own book to read. Middle school students want to read books that speak to them and talk about issues they may be facing in their lives. When middle school students can make a connection to a book, then they are more apt to read the book and may even want to read other books by that same author (Bromann, 2001). Building a connection with books is extremely important in motivating reading. Other strategies such as audio reading, visiting a library together,

reading with the child, joining book clubs, and visiting a local bookstore are all useful and practical strategies parents can use to help motivate their child to read.

The parents in Blue Sky Middle School have voiced that they want their child or children to be avid readers. They just need to know exactly what to do or who to turn to for help. The parents' role is crucial in motivating their children to read. The earlier parents can get involved in the reading process and reading with their children the greater the chance the child will be motivated to read. Kuersten (n.d.) concluded, when parents take an interest in their child's learning there is an increased chance of self-motivation and self-esteem for the child. While the task of parents attempting to motivate their children to read more may be daunting, it must be done. Cotton and Wikelund (1989) of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory School Improvement Research Series added that when parents are engaged in reading with their child this could possibly motivate the child to want to read. So, to ensure and foster good reading habits for children, parents may want to begin to take a more active role in finding strategies that fit their individual child so that their child will want to read for the luxury of pure reading. Educators know that a child's success in reading can be motivated by the positive and active role the parents play in educating their children. However, there are some parents that have very different ideas about the role they should play in their child's education; with this in mind, the first place a parent can start is with their child's teacher. Parents can find all kinds of strategies to use to help them to motivate their children to read and they can attain to do this by beginning to have that open and honest dialogue and keeping the lines of communication open with the school system and the educators in the schools.

Summary

Educators have seen a decline in reading scores in the 21st Century for middle school students that are astonishing to say the least (National Endowment for the Arts, 2004). The researcher first looked at the national decline in reading scores over a span of 10 years and spoke with other educators, parents, and students in Blue Sky Middle School before gathering all of the research material to support a need for a few strategies that might help this group of students. This review of literature provided some insightful information as to how Sustained Silent Reading, the creation of Peer Interests Reading Strategies, parental involvement, and collaboration between the teacher and librarian has the potential to foster student motivation, social engagement/interaction, and student interest in reading. For this reason, the researcher uncovered a few instructional strategies that could actively involve middle school students in reading while at the same time promoting an interest in reading and improving their socialization skills. The literature review showed that there were both advantages and disadvantages in the strategies used to promote student interest. The literature in this chapter made reference to the fact that for some students, reading can be a personal matter for them. When students have the desire to read and take ownership in their reading, intrinsic motivation occurs. On the other hand, a negative impact of extrinsic motivation occurs when the student is only reading because some outside force has encouraged or motivated them to read.

This researcher also investigated that extrinsic motivation does not always have to have a negative impact on whether students will want to read but rather that students can be intrinsically motivated to read through the use of strategies by way of using the

reading strategies to promote intrinsic motivation. Vacca and Vacca (1999) agreed that social interaction among peers, teachers, and other adults can help to promote reading motivation. It was concluded from some of the experts that students can be motivated to read when the proper strategies have been established. Clearly the researcher knew that these strategies are not an end all to motivating middle school students, but that there needs to be further research to identify what can help motivate middle school students to want to read. The researcher hopes that this study will provide middle school students and educators information on effective reading strategies that will help motivate and promote good reading habits in middle school students to encourage them to become enthusiastic, lifelong readers. The following chapter will explain the research design selected for this study and will detail the methods used.

Chapter Three

Overview

The purpose of this study was to determine if middle school students perceived a greater interest in reading after participating in two reading strategies, Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) and Peer Interests Reading Strategies (PIRS). Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) is a strategy that allowed the students to read a book of their choice independently in a short time span of 15-20 minutes. Peer Interests Reading Strategies (PIRS) was a partnered reading strategy, similar to the reading program developed by Dr. Lynn Fuchs and Dr. Doug Fuchs (2001). The Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) program allowed the students to coach each other while learning how student engagement and social interaction influenced their perceptions of their own interests in reading. Many educators know that one of the biggest obstacles they face today is motivating middle school students to read. One way to overcome this hurdle is by offering students a choice in what it is they would prefer to read. When students are afforded the opportunity to have some input in their reading, choice becomes an instructional strategy that promotes a feeling of control and a sense of purpose for them. Furthermore, offering students a choice in their reading material fosters higher levels of interest, student engagement, and motivation (Perks, 2010). When students are afforded the opportunity to choose their reading materials, then half the battle of struggling with getting school students to read has been conquered.

If educators want students to succeed in reading then educators have to provide interesting and engaging materials for them to read. Venuti and Armstrong (2010) surmised that when students are engaged in and motivated by what they are reading, then

they tend to be more engaged in the reading activity itself. The researcher allowed her

students the opportunity to voice what they wanted to read believing that students' voices

were an intricate part of the educational process. Many educators will agree that when

students feel a sense of empowerment this can increase their self-esteem and their

motivation to learn.

Prior to commencement of this investigation the students in Blue Sky Middle

School voiced that their lack of interest in reading was due to a lack of interesting books

in the school's library and in the classroom, and the stories in the communication arts

curriculum were dreadfully tedious. The school's library and classroom had reading

material that the students were not interested in reading. Student motivation, engagement

or social interaction, and interest, became some of the focal points for this study. These

focal points help to answer the following research questions in Chapter 4: (a) What

qualities about SSR and PIRS did the students perceive increased their interest in reading

and why? (b) Did the students like reading alone, with a partner, or both and why? (c)

How did interacting with a peer while reading influence student interest? To determine

the perceived reading interest of the middle school students, the researcher decided to use

a qualitative method because student engagement and motivation was difficult to

measure. This chapter will describe the participants who were involved in this study, the

instruments used for data collections, and the procedures followed.

 Participants and Setting

This qualitative study examined the perceptions of students in a Midwest

suburban school and the impact of PIRS and SSR on their interests to read. Blue Sky

Middle School is a fairly new school that was approaching its fifth year of inception. It is

one of six middle schools in a large district of over 18,000 students. There were 784 students in this school with one head principal and three assistant principals. There had been two principals at this newly erected middle school. The first principal was there for one year. At the time of this writing, two of the principals had doctorate degrees and the other two principals would complete their doctoral programs in the near future. The teaching staff was made up of 56 regular classroom teachers, eight special education teachers, 12 elective teachers, one librarian, and one gifted teacher. There was a reported average of 19 students per classroom teacher. The 2010 data from the District of Blue Sky Middle School, reflected that 59.2 % of the teachers in this school had a master's degree or higher. The students followed a modified block schedule where all of the classes ran for approximately 86 minutes. The students met with their Communication Arts and Math teacher daily and reported to their Science and Social Studies classes on alternating A and B days.

The librarian at Blue Sky Middle School had a tedious job of scheduling the Communication Arts and the special education teachers a visit to the library every other week. The librarian worked closely with the classroom teachers to make sure that her lessons aligned with what the teachers may be teaching in their classes. She was also responsible for keeping track of the 30,000-45,000 books that were housed in the library.

The researcher gathered data from three eighth grade Communication Arts classes that consisted of 66 students. Of the 66 students, 65 were African-Americans and one student was Caucasian. Sixty-four of the 66 students participated in the survey. All classes ran for approximately 86 minutes. There were 22 students in first period, 21 students in the second period, and 23 students in period three. Period two was a Class

Within a Class (CWC). This CWC class was made up of 21 students, 11 were special

education students and the other 10 were of the general population of students. There

was also a special education teacher in the room assisting in this class.

Instruments

The students were given a pre-survey during the month of February before the

implementation of the two strategies, SSR and PIRS. The questions from the pre and

post surveys and the writing prompt were designed around the three research questions.

A post-survey was given after the implementation period was over. A volunteer teacher

distributed and collected the pre and post surveys, placed them in a binder, and stored

them in a cabinet. The students were told not to write their names on any of the data

materials. One student from each hour passed out and collected the daily reading log and

writing prompt (Appendices E and F). Another student was responsible for making sure

that no names were visible, and kept the logs in a binder in the room. At the end of the

semester long experimental period, the researcher gathered the student writing prompts

and daily logs, the recorded and written notes from the focus group interview session, and

the pre and post student surveys. These items were placed in a box until analysis of the

data by the researcher, after the school year had ended (Appendices B, C, E, F, G, H, and

I).

In this investigation, the researcher used a qualitative approach because it best

addresses human behaviors. Although it is difficult to measure the perception of humans,

the qualitative researcher's goal was to explore the thinking of people in their natural

surroundings (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001). The researcher knows that responses

of humans can be very subjective, and for the purpose of this study she thought a

qualitative method would best suit this type of study. Because the researcher wanted to

know the reading perceptions of students in this particular setting, a qualitative method

was most conducive for this research study. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) wrote that if one

really wants to know the who, what, when, where, and why thoughts of individuals, and

the type of environment in which they are placed, they believe the best possible way to

gather this type of data is to use a qualitative method. Holloway and Wheeler (2002)

defined Qualitative Research as research that gathers data from participants by way of

observation, through interviews, or any other contact the researcher would have with an

individual that focuses on their interpretation of how they make meaning of something.

In accordance with Holloway and Wheeler, this researcher did not report on the

observation pieces of data that she was journaling. Her journaling was only used to

improve her instructional teaching skills. She only made reference to the student surveys,

the focus group interview session, data received from the school's librarian, and the

students' writing prompts.

 Procedures

        At the beginning of the school year, the researcher met with the district

Communication Arts coordinator and the middle school assistant superintendent to

discuss how this study could help to improve literacy in the classroom without interfering

with the regular instruction of the class. The district already had a Literacy Plan in place

for the middle schools that required them to read an average of 14 books in their

Communication Arts classes for the year. According to this district's Literacy Plan,

every 100 pages the students read equated to one book. After the researcher related that

this study could prove to help the middle school students in Blue Sky Middle School

reach their reading goal, the application to perform research was granted. The researcher

also obtained Institutional Review Board, IRB, approval from Lindenwood University.

Pre and Post Survey Procedures

The students received their permission notices one week prior to the

implementation of the semester-long study that began the first week of February.   The

permission notices were read with the students, collected and addressed to the parents,

dispensed for the students to take home, and then returned with signatures. The students

were given a pre-survey before the implementation of the two strategies, SSR and PIRS.

The pre-survey included a 3 point Likert Scale where students had to check yes, no, or

sometimes (Appendix B). The researcher explained the purpose of the survey and the

study to the students and what SSR and PIRS were all about. The students were given

verbal and written directions as to what to do during SSR and PIRS. They understood

that for PIRS, the partnered reading intervention, one student would be the reader while

the other student would be the listener. They were also instructed concerning what the

listener should be doing while listening. At the end of the study, the end of May, the

researcher gave the students a post-survey. The post-survey included a 3-point Likert

Scale where the students had to check yes, no, or sometimes (Appendix C). The

researcher again explained the purpose of the survey and the study to the students and

what SSR and PIRS were all about. The students were, once again, given verbal and

written directions as to what to do during SSR and PIRS. The students understood that

for PIRS, the partnered reading intervention, that one student would be the reader while

the other student would be the listener. They were also informed that the listener should

be an active listener (Appendix H). The pre and post surveys took no longer than 10

minutes for each student to complete. The CWC teacher would assist those students who needed more explicit directions.

The same volunteer teacher passed out and collected the surveys. At the end of May, the researcher analyzed the results of the surveys. When the surveys were collected, all surveys, including the CWC class surveys, were mixed together to conceal the identity of both the regular education students and the special education students. The surveys were kept in a binder in a box in the back of the room until the researcher was ready to analyze the data at the end of May.

PIRS and SSR Procedures

Every two weeks during the semester-long experimental period, the students changed partners. The first two weeks the students chose their partners. The second two weeks the researcher chose a stronger student to read with a weaker student. The third two weeks the students chose a different reading partner. The fourth two weeks the teacher chose the students' partners. The fifth and last two weeks students chose a different student to read with. Table 1 explains the SSR and PIRS reading schedule.

The students were never allowed to read with the same partner twice at any time during the study. The students were concerned about who should read first, so they decided that they would choose an A student and a B student. The A's would start off and they would rotate turns on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. The students read with the assigned partner, rotating turns at reading, for two weeks at a time.

Table 1

Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) and Peer Interests Reading Strategies (PIRS) Schedule

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Weeks 1 & 2 students chose partner	PIRS	SSR	PIRS	SSR	PIRS
Weeks 3 & 4 researcher chose partners	PIRS	SSR	PIRS	SSR	PIRS
Weeks 5 & 6 student chose different partner	PIRS	SSR	PIRS	SSR	PIRS
Weeks 7 & 8 researcher chose a different partner for student	PIRS	SSR	PIRS	SSR	PIRS
Weeks 9 & 10	PIRS	SSR	PIRS	SSR	PIRS

The reader for the day chose the book they read. They were allowed to bring in their own books. The students were made aware that their books of choice had to be school appropriate. They had the option to choose to read a book until they completed the story. It was strongly suggested that they try to complete their book of choice during the two weeks they were reading with a partner.

The person listening helped the reader with any problems they had while reading (word pronunciation, reading flow, and student encouragement). After reading for 20 minutes with their partner, the students returned to their desks and completed the writing portion of the PIRS activity (Appendix F).

On Tuesdays and Thursdays, the students silently read a book for 15-20 minutes. After independently reading, the students completed the SSR reading log and writing prompt (Appendix E). The researcher tried to make sure the students remained on task for the duration of the interventions by circulating the room and answering any questions that may arise without being biased toward the students' questions or the intervention. The researcher is also the students' Communication Arts teacher.

At the conclusion of the study, at the end of May, the researcher gave the students a post survey. The post survey included a 3-point Likert Scale where the students had to check yes, no, or sometimes. The same volunteer teacher passed out and collected the surveys. The surveys were kept in a binder, in a box, at the back of the room until the researcher was ready to analyze the data.

Interview Procedures

The first of June a few students were randomly chosen to participate in an interview session in the library during which they were asked questions pertaining to their interests in SSR or PIRS (Appendix I). The participants for the survey were chosen randomly. The researcher placed a gold star on eight slips of paper, folded them in half, and placed them in an envelope. Each student was given an envelope with a sheet of paper in it. A student who pulled out a slip of paper with a gold star on it was one of the students chosen to participate in the focus group interview session. The interview session was held in the library and was audio taped. The findings from the interview are presented in the following chapter.

The researcher assured the students throughout the course of the semester and for the interview session that confidentiality would be maintained and that pseudonyms

would be used in reporting the data. The researcher kept a journal for personal use only.

The audio taped interview was transcribed by the researcher.

Research Design

The researcher chose to use a qualitative method to measure the perceived reading

interests of the students while they engaged in reading either alone or with a partner.

The researcher based her design on portions of Joseph A. Maxwell's *Interactive Model of*

Research Design (Figure 1). His design had five basic components which the researcher

thought would help answer the researcher questions in this study (Maxwell, 2005, p.

217).
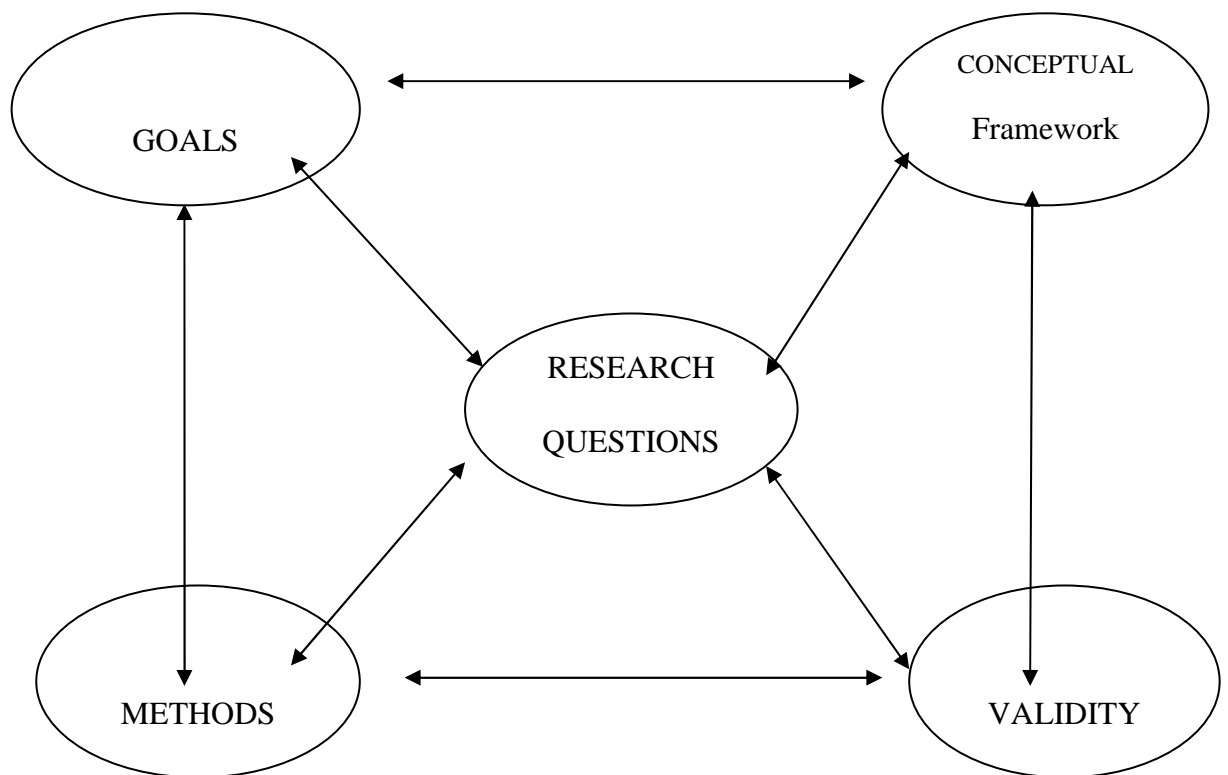
Figure 1. Joseph A. Maxwell's Interactive Model of Research Design.

Goals

A major goal of this study was to uncover why this population of middle school students was not interested in reading. The researcher and those involved with educating children could also learn the reasons the students do not read and consider that identification as a possible contributing factor in closing the achievement gap in this population of students. While many educators know that promoting student reading interests is important, it is also important to know that listening to the students' voices about what interests them is important as well. When educators realize that what students have to say about their reading interests really does matter, the potential outcome of increasing their reading activity can improve dramatically.

Conceptual Framework

The researcher supports Joseph A. Maxwell's Conceptual Framework theory that the participant's environment, the culture of the people, and the beliefs that a group of people share can affect the outcome of the results as related to that research topic. What guides the researcher in her quest to find out the issues behind understanding her population of students? The low reading test scores, the poor reading habits of the students in Blue Sky Middle School, and the casual conversations the researcher had with the students, parents, and teachers in this school led to the study of this topic. The researcher was aware of the diminishing habits of reading for middle school students, but was concerned that there was limited, to no, research applied to similar demographics of her students. She felt that her students' voices could add to what the experts know about this group of students to give other educators in Blue Sky Middle School and beyond, some strategies that could work to help motivate these students.

Research Questions

The researcher will answer the following questions: What qualities about SSR and PIRS did the students perceive increased their interest in reading and why? Did the students like reading alone, with a partner, or both? How did interacting with a peer while reading influence student interest? The answers to these questions will give the researcher and other experts some of the answers about whether the implementation of SSR and PIRS motivated them to read. If the findings from the data can give the researcher some substantive proof that students' perceptions of their interests in reading changed after the implementation of either strategy, SSR or PIRS, then this study was worth accomplishing. Otherwise, further research or a different course of action may be warranted with middle school students as a whole or on the demographics of students in this study.

Methods

The researcher's purpose was to determine if the two strategies SSR and PIRS or either of the strategies alone, helped to answer the researcher's questions. The method the researcher used is called Investigator Triangulation. Investigator Triangulation involves using different participants in the study and evaluating their responses (Guion, 2002). The researcher analyzed the data based on the feedback, the students, and conversations with the school's librarian as it related to the three research questions. The researcher also examined the student pre and post surveys, their reading logs and writing prompts, and the focus group interview questions to analyze the data. The researcher understands that validity plays a major impact on research.

Validity

The researcher presented the best possible answers to her research questions and expected that the participants would be honest in their responses. There are limitations in all areas of research, but hopefully the researcher can provide recommendations, suggestions, and possible solutions, which will help the experts who have studied this topic. The researcher was very careful about letting the participants know that they will be anonymous so that they could be honest in answering. If the researcher could prove to her students that honesty is of the utmost importance in this study, and they answered truthfully, then assuredly other educators and experts would believe the results from this study, too.

The researcher chose John Maxwell's Interactive Model of Research Design because her research questions clearly related to the goal of her study. In his design, all components of the design continuously referred back to the research questions. Her study synonymously mirrored his design in that it represented the cyclical pattern or model for which she was looking. She chose to use Investigator Triangulation because she believed it was conducive to the demographics of her students and her research questions.

The researcher understands that if the participants' responses are similar then validity has been proven. However, there is also the possibility that if the participants' responses differ dramatically, then further study is needed. There may be a few outliers in the study.

The study addressed three research questions by looking at the students' pre and post surveys, their daily reading logs and writing prompts, and the focus group interview session. The responses from the participants were analyzed according to how the

researcher interpreted and coded the data around three major themes. The researcher

analyzed the data by reading and synthesizing the student daily logs and writing prompts,

making a comparison between the pre and post surveys and summarizing the answers

from the focus group interview session. The data was tallied by the repeated responses

surrounded by the three themes. The researcher then created graphs by counting the

students' responses to get a percentage of the students' answers for each category. These

three themes have been echoed throughout the study: student motivation, engagement or

social interaction, and student interests as related to SSR and PIRS. The aforementioned

data was presented earlier in this chapter.

Conclusion

Chapter 3 gave an account of the instruments used, the population of participants

in the study, and explained the procedures followed to draw data for this study. The

researcher believed that from the data gathered the students will have a vested interest in

reading and that their motivation to read was a result of the PIRS and SSR. The reading

strategies were implemented into the regular classroom lessons. The next chapter will go

into great detail about the results from the analysis of the data that was found.

Chapter Four

Introduction

      This study investigated the reading perceptions from the students in Blue Sky Middle School as their responses related to the three research questions: (a) What qualities about SSR and PIRS did the students' perceive increased their interest in reading and why? (b) Did the students like reading alone, with a partner, or both and why? (c) How did interacting with a peer while reading influence student interest? The data contained in Chapter 4 will address the research questions by taking an in-depth look at the pre and post surveys, the daily reading logs and writing prompts, and the focus group interview session. The study supports three overarching themes related to the students' perceptions of reading in the areas of (1) motivation, (2) engagement or social interaction, and (3) interests. All three themes were measured through the pre and post survey questions, the daily reading logs and writing prompts, and the focus group interview session. The researcher will be reporting on the statements from the tables presented in this chapter, which support and answer how the students in Blue Sky Middle School feel about their own reading habits. The researcher chose to do this because the data will help justify for the district and other researchers how students from Blue Sky Middle School think about reading and this information can help to drive policy making and move the students forward.

Measures

      The measures the researcher will chronicle are the results from the students' pre and post surveys, the student writing prompts and daily logs and the focus group

interview session as perceived by the students as they relate to motivation, engagement or

social interaction, and interests.

Pre Reading Survey

Prior to the implementation of the Sustained Silent Reading (SSR), and Peer

Intervention Reading Strategies (PIRS) interventions, the students were given a pre-

survey to measure their perception about how they feel towards reading. The students

answered 11 statements with responses of yes, no, or sometimes for each statement

(Appendix B). Statements 1, 3, 4, 7, 8, and 9 measured student interests (Table 2).

Statements 5, 6, and 10 were statements about student motivation (Table 3). Statements

2, 5, 6, 10, and 11 elicited information about student engagement or social interaction

(Table 4).

Table 2

Student Reading Pre Survey Interest Statements

Student Interests Statements	Yes	No	Sometimes
1. I enjoy reading silently.	47(73.44%)	1(1.56%)	16(25%)
3. I enjoy reading fiction.	44(68.75%)	1(1.56%)	19(29.69%)
4. I enjoy reading nonfiction.	37(57.81%)	4(6.25%)	23(35.94%
7. I can find books I like to read in my school's library.	32(50%)	10(15.63%)	22(34.38%)
8. I visit a library other than the school's library.	18(28.13%)	21(32.81%)	25(39.06%)
9. I am interested in having someone help me with words that are difficult.	28(43.75%)	18(28.13%)	18(28.13%)

Some of the questions overlapped. Sixty-four of 66 students responded to the survey. The numbers in parentheses in the tables represent the percentage of students who responded to that item. The results of the pre-survey are illustrated in tables 2, 3 and 4.

Table 2 indicates that there was a high percentage of students who responded with a yes for statement number one which asked if the student enjoyed reading silently. The researcher learned that most of the students in this study were students who had attended Blue Sky Middle School for three years and their previous year's Communication Arts teachers indicated that these students were reluctant to participate actively when they had to read independently in class. The information also revealed that the students in Blue Sky Middle School preferred reading fiction material versus nonfiction material. Table 2 clearly supports that 68.75% of the students revealed they preferred reading fictional material versus nonfiction material.

One interesting revelation was that 50% of the students surveyed revealed they could find books they liked to read in their school's library. The students went even further to state that although there were books that were available for them, there were only two or three copies of what they considered to be "good books" or books they were interested in reading. One student said, "Although there are not enough books to our liking in the library time had been set aside for the Communication Arts teachers to promote literacy, and it is expected that all students not only frequent their school's library, but that they check books out, too." The students in Blue Sky Middle School are expected to check out one book at least twice a month. The district in which Blue Sky Middle School is a part has a literacy plan in place which encourages all teachers and

students to utilize their school's library. With this being said, and with a literacy plan in place and an emphasis placed on the students to do some outside reading, 39% of students indicated they do not visit any library other than their school's library.

In spite of the fact that the data revealed that the students found books they like to read in their school's library, the librarian mentioned that 50% of the eighth grade students were returning the books without completing the reading. The researcher asked the librarian how she had come to this conclusion and she stated, "The students discussed with her that they did not complete their books, and many of them did not give a reason as to why." The librarian and the researcher theorized from conversations with the students that maybe the students were choosing books that were too difficult for them to complete, they became easily bored with the books, or they did not commit to completing the books because they found other things to occupy their time. The researcher noted in Chapter 2 how collaboration between the librarian and classroom teacher is crucial to student reading success because they can support each other as they encourage reading for the middle school student. The researcher learned the information gathered from the librarian can prove to be very beneficial to the support of the classroom teachers and the district's literacy plan.

Statement number nine revealed that 44% of the students responded by stating they are interested in having someone help with words that are too difficult for them. The researcher discovered that many of the students responded honestly to this statement because they knew their responses would be kept confidential. Almost all of the students, at one time or another, had voiced that they would not want their peers to know they needed help with their reading.

Table 3

Student Reading Pre Survey Motivation Statements

Student Motivation Statements	Yes	No	Sometimes
3. I am interested in reading with a partner.	29(45.13%)	20(31.25%)	15(23.44%)
6. I would like to have a reading partner to help me read.	14(21.88%)	30(46.88%)	20(31.25%)
10. Reading with someone I know makes me feel good.	20(31.25%)	14(21.88%)	30(46.88%)

The data in Table 3 revealed 45% of the students responded they would be

motivated or interested in having a reading partner while 46% responded with a definite

"no" to having a partner that would help them to read. The percentages indicated the

students are interested in having someone to listen to them, but they are not interested in

having someone to help them read.

Statement number 10 revealed nearly 50% of the students responded that reading

with someone they know would sometimes make them feel good. There were some

students who wrote in their journal that they may be able to help a student read but they

did not believe they themselves needed the help. The preceding data indicated to the

researcher that sometimes the students might be motivated by having a reading partner,

but that they valued reading alone.

Table 4 revealed, 46% percent of the students responded with a resounding "no"

that they do not like reading aloud. It was evident from the data how difficult it is to

persuade and encourage the students in this school to read aloud with another person or

by themselves. Although the peers in this school voiced that they realize that peer

interaction is important to student learning, they are more concerned about what their

classmates would say about their reading.

Table 4

Student Reading Pre Engagement Statements

Student Engagement Statements	Yes	No	Sometimes
1. I like reading aloud alone.	9(14.06%)	30(46.88%)	25(39.06%)
5. I am interested in reading with a partner.	29(45.13%)	20(31.25%)	15(23.44%)
6. I would like to have a reading partner to help me read.	14(21.88%)	30(46.88%)	20(31.25%)
10. Reading with someone I know makes me feel good.	20(31.25%)	14(21.88%)	30(46.88%)
11. Reading with someone I know makes me uncomfortable.	18(28.13%)	28(43.75%)	18(28.13%)

Post Reading Survey

At the end of the semester long experimental period, which lasted from February

to June, of incorporating SSR and PIRS every other day into the regular curriculum, the

students were given a post reading survey that measured the students' reading interests,

student motivation, and student engagement or social interaction with their peers

(Appendix C).

There were 14 survey items that measured the aforementioned characteristics.

Sixty-four students responded to the survey. The numbers listed outside of the

parentheses represented the number of students who responded to that particular

statement. Statements, 1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, and 14 are related to student interests

(Table 5). Statements, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 11 are related to student motivation (Table 6).

Statements 4, 5, 6, 7, and 12 are related to student engagement or social interaction

(Table 7). Some of the statements overlapped. The results are as follows:

Table 5

Student Post Reading Survey Interest Statements

Student Interest Statements	Yes	No	Sometimes
1. SSR increased my interest in reading the most.	40(62.5%)	9(14.06%)	15(23.44%)
2. PIRS increased my interest in reading the most.	14(21.88%)	23(35.94%)	27(42.19%)
3. SSR and PIRS equally increased my interest.	22(34.38%)	30(46.88%)	12(18.75%)
8. I enjoyed choosing my own books to read .	60(93.75%)	0(0)	4(6.25%)
9. Once I began reading silently I wanted to keep reading.	47(73.44%)	3(4.69%)	14(21.88%)
10. I enjoy visiting our school's library.	25(39.06%)	9(14.06%)	30(46.88%)
12. I acted like I was interested while reading with a popular reading partner.	9(14.06%)	43(67.19%)	12(18.75%)
13. I enjoy reading fiction.	47(73.44%)	4(6.25%)	24(20.31%)
14. I enjoy reading nonfiction.	31(48.44%)	9(14.06%)	24(37.5%)

Statement number one acknowledged that 62.5% of the students in Blue Sky

Middle School who participated in this study reported SSR increased their reading the

most compared to the PIRS intervention. This was due to the fact that the students

voiced in their writing prompts that they enjoyed and were interested in reading at school

because they did not have time at home to read or follow the district's Literacy Plan.

Although the pre-survey indicated that there were a few students who voiced they would be interested in reading with a partner which is why the PIRS strategy was created, 35.9% of the students reported "no" that PIRS did not increase their interest while 42.1% of students reported that sometimes the PIRS intervention increased their reading interests. The data showed that 21.8% of students who responded with a yes to this statement were those students who are in the Class Within a Class (CWC) class. The researcher noted that these comments were from those students in the CWC class. Although, the researcher informed them that their identity was not to be revealed, the students in the CWC class were adamant about verbally expressing themselves. This CWC class is a co-teaching class with a high percentage of special education students in a general education setting. According to Hudson (1989) a CWC class is a class of students with educational disabilities who are placed in a general education setting. The researcher observed that the students in the CWC class responded by saying that they really appreciated the fact that a stronger reader was able to help them read better.

Students in this school want to be heard and statement number eight revealed that almost 94% of students prefer to choose a book of their choice. Although there have been times when the classroom teacher and the librarian have made book recommendations to the students, the students want to have a sense of empowerment as they choose their own reading materials. The students have voiced on several occasions that they want to have some ownership in their education and they do this when they have the liberty to choose a book they were interested in reading.

Statement number nine reinforced the result found in the previous question which demonstrated that students want to have a choice in choosing what they read because

73% of the students reported they wanted to keep reading even after their time had

lapsed. In the researcher's 14 years of working with middle school students, she had

never had such a large percentage of students who wanted to keep reading for the sake of

reading. Once again, ownership is very important to students at this school.

Forty-six percent of students revealed they sometimes enjoyed visiting their

school's library and noted in their writing prompts that their school's library did not have

the books they were interested in reading. This information was discussed with the

school's librarian and the data from this study was passed on to the librarian.

Statement 12 noted 67% of students responded with a strong "no" when asked if

they acted like they were interested while reading with a popular reading partner. When

the researcher read the results and found that there was such a high percentage of students

who responded this way, she noted that many of the students wrote that they wanted to

keep reading with their partner because the book they were reading was interesting

enough to hold both their attention. Here again, many students expressed that the ability

to choose their books has motivated them to read and keep reading. When students have

the attention of their peers they feel like they are a part of the group. Students want to

feel like they belong to something. One strong fact here is that more than 60% of

students revealed in statement 12 that reading with a popular kid did not play a major role

in how students perform. The researcher surmised that the students were interested in

reading in this study for the pure interest of reading.

There was one student who wrote in the journal that believed most students can be

student-motivated to read more if they had a reading partner. The data in this table

revealed that 39% of the students were not motivated to read by having a reading partner.

Whereas 39% of the students responded this way, 48% of the students agreed that their

reading partner helped them with words they did not know and over 70% of students felt

comfortable reading with someone they knew. Motivation can and has been a driving

force as to how educators encourage their students to learn. While some of the students

may be motivated to read with a partner there are those students that are self-motivated

and the results seem to indicate that a few of them are driven by self-motivation.

Table 6

Student Post Reading Survey Motivation Statements

Student Motivation Statements	Yes	No	Sometimes
4. I enjoyed reading with a partner.	29(45.31%)	7(10.94%)	28(43.75%)
5. Reading with a partner made me want to read more.	20(31.25%)	25(39.05%	19(29.69%)
6. My partner helped me with words I did not know.	31(48.44%)	20(31.25%)	13(20.31%)
7. I felt comfortable reading with someone I knew.	45(70.31%)	10(15.63%)	9(14.06%)
11. I watched the clock as I was reading silently.	2(3.13%)	42(65.63%)	20(31.25%)

The data showed how student interest and student choice can be a factor in

motivating students to read. With that being said, 65% of the students responded they did

not watch the clock as they were reading. This high percentage supported that the

students in this study are choosing books that are interesting because 73% of them

wanted to continue reading even when their time was up. The data here concludes when

a student in this school finds an interesting book it is likely that they will be motivated

enough to keep reading it.

Table 7

Student Post Engagement or Socialization Statements

Student Engagement or Social Interaction	Yes	No	Sometimes
4. I enjoyed reading with a partner.	29(45.31%)	7(10.94%)	28(43.75%)
5. Reading with a partner made me want to read more.	20(31.25%)	25(39.05%)	19(29.69%)
6. My partner helped me with words I did not know.	31(48.44%)	20(31.25%)	13(20.31%)
7. I felt comfortable reading with someone I knew.	45(70.31%)	10(15.63%)	9(14.06%)
12. I acted like I was interested while reading with a partner.	9(14.06%)	43(67.19%)	12(18.75%)

The data in table seven did not reveal any new information to the researcher. The findings only supported the researcher's view before the study was conducted.

Student Daily Logs and Writing Prompt Findings

The students completed a daily writing log and writing prompt checklist for the SSR and PIRS interventions. The students followed the directions given and recorded the information. On alternating days, the students participated in either the SSR or PIRS intervention and completed a daily writing log and writing prompt checklist. There was time allowed for clarity of the instructions. Immediately following the intervention for the day, the students documented the title of the book, whether it was fiction or nonfiction, genre, and the total pages read. Next they placed a check mark in the appropriate column of choices for each statement. They then completed the writing prompt statement located at the bottom of the page (Appendices E and F).

The ensuing data compiled from Appendices E and F, the daily reading log, and writing prompt revealed that most of the students preferred the SSR intervention over the PIRS intervention. This information was recorded in their daily writing log. They wrote comments like, "I don't get to do any reading at home because I am too busy with afterschool activities like sports, music, chores, and babysitting." A few of them had this exact direct quote, "My parents don't monitor that independent reading is taking place so I just act like I am doing the reading in my room when I am either on the telephone, watching television, or on the computer." Others said they lost their zeal to read because they found the reading material given to them by most of the teachers to be unappealing and not significant enough in their lives to matter, or that it did not hold their attention. What the researcher discovered from this data was that the students found value in reading at school and most of them took advantage of this sacred time. The researcher was made aware of this because the students seemed to openly express themselves in writing how they felt about the reading interventions as opposed to verbally expressing how they felt about them. The researcher learned from this data that confidentiality is important to students at this age.

Another key piece of information the students in Blue Sky Middle School validated was that they preferred to read fiction over nonfiction. Some of the responses given for this were:

- I like to read fiction books because all nonfiction books do is state the facts and that gets to be boring.

- I like to read fiction because funny things happen in the stories. I love real life drama because some of the stuff they talk about has happened to me. I love funny things because they can make your saddest day turn into your brightest day.

- Fiction is more entertaining than nonfiction because the information is made up. I get tired of hearing how true something is. I will be an old person soon enough. I want some fun in my life.

- I enjoy when a book can draw me in and it not be so serious.

- I love when I can put a book down and still have the pictures imprinted in my head. Nonfiction does not do that for me.

- I am a drama queen and fiction gives me what I need.

- Fiction gives me a chance to make predictions more than nonfiction does.

- I can find more fictional books in the library than nonfictional books. So that is mostly what is available for kids my age to read.

- Fiction gives the author a chance to be creative. Isn't that what we are supposed to be, creative? That is why I prefer fiction books to read.

- I like cartoons and books that are like cartoons or comics.

- I like fiction because you can just be yourself. You can be and do whatever you want. Teenagers are always being told what to do so fiction gives me an opportunity to imagine and do whatever I want.

- Fiction books are unpredictable. I like that authors can put a spin on things. That's intriguing to me.

As noted in Chapter 2, there are teenagers who enjoy reading nonfiction material including some of the students in Blue Sky Middle School. The following are some of the responses the students gave for preferring nonfiction material.

- I only read nonfiction books when I have too. They are really boring books.

- With nonfiction you get a piece of the real world.

- I like reading nonfiction books only about African American people because we don't get to read a lot about them in our schools.

- There are not a lot of nonfiction writers my age. I would read more of this type of book if there were writers like me.

- I only read it when my teachers make us read nonfiction. I think that is why kids my age don't read it much because we have always been told to read it because the real stuff is what we need.

- I like to read nonfiction books because I can take something from that story and learn from their mistakes and how things were when they were back in the day.

- Nonfiction tells you about true facts and some of us kids need those things.

- Nonfiction is more interesting to me because it elevates your mind.

- My teachers have encouraged me to read more nonfiction because it can make me a more knowledgeable student.

Many of the students responded in their daily checklist that they had chosen nonfiction books when they visited their school's library. The researcher also observed only a few of the students only checking out these types of books. One reason they stated for this was they were used to reading these types of books. There were other students

who voiced that they would check out more nonfiction books if more of their teachers encouraged it. Here again, the findings support that students' voices are very important and necessary to student success. Some of what the students reported could be that one vital piece of information that might help close the reading achievement gap seen in Blue Sky Middle School.

Some days the students wanted to further discuss in writing and verbally how they felt about the reading intervention for that day. When this happened, the intervention was extended with writing prompts that asked questions such as: which do you prefer reading, fiction or nonfiction and why, what interesting things can your teacher do to help you become a better reader, or which intervention interests you the most and why? They wrote their answers following the same directions that were on their daily writing log. This allowed the students to continue to think about their reading and the process of reading. As the researcher observed them daily, the students were attentively engaged in the task at hand most days.

Student Reading Material Preference

The researcher paid close attention to the genre of reading materials the students checked out. Comic, action, and sports books were some of the genres of books the boys were interested in reading. The girls were interested in checking out drama, vampire, and suspense novels. A few students chose historical fiction, realistic fiction, and biographies. Some students wrote in their writing log that they were interested in reading Urban Fiction. Urban Fiction is a genre portraying African American, or sometimes Latino, characters on the gritty streets of the city where their lives are circumscribed by racism, drugs, violence, and sex (Hill, Perez, & Irby, 2008). The students revealed that

Urban Fiction books were easy to read and that they were familiar with the content of

these books. The students also found an interest in reading books by the same author

once they realized that the author wrote a series of books with the same themes. Some of

the authors that the students in Blue Sky Middle School were interested in are listed in

Table 8.

Table 8

Authors and Books the Students Were Most Interested in Reading

Author	Book Title	Genre
Lori Williams	Broken China	Fiction
John Feinsten	The Rivalry	Sports
Matt Christopher	Various Sports Titles	Sports
Sharon Draper	November Blues	Drama
Michael Grant	Lies (series)	Fiction
	Gone	
	Hungry	
Stephanie Meyer	New Moon	Fiction
Various Authors	Bluford High Series	Fiction
R. L. Stein	Various Titles	Fiction
Sharon Flake	Not Without Him	Drama
Walter Dean Meyers	Monster	Fiction
James Patterson	Fang	Fiction
Robert Lipsyte	The Contender	Fiction
Mike Lupica	Various Titles	Sports
Suzanne Collins	Hunger Games	Fiction
	Catching Fire	
	Mocking Jay	
Jeff Kinney	Diary of a Wimpy Kid	Fiction
Matt de la Pena	Ball Don't Lie	Fiction

While there is supportive evidence to show that reading for middle school students has

declined (National Endowment for the Arts, 2004), the researchers' results for the

demographic of students that the she studied showed that the students enjoyed reading.

This data also reflected that the students in Blue Sky Middle School will read and did

read when they found books that represented their lives, when there was time allotted in

the classroom, and when they chose the books they wanted to read. The students voiced

that their school's library did not have enough books represented by African American

authors. The researcher discovered that most of the books listed were books written by

authors that were not of African American descent. The students questioned why this

was the case when more than 97% of the students in this school were African American

students. The students even discussed what they could do to convince some of their

teachers to stock their classroom libraries with books that represent their culture. The

students want books in their school's library that reflect them. Some of the students have

gone as far as making suggestions to their school's librarian about the books they would

like to see in the library. The data revealed that the students are voicing what they

believe will help them to be successful in both school and in support of their own reading

habits.

Sustained Silent Reading Findings

The students who took part in the study in Blue Sky Middle School were provided

with directions to guide what SSR would look like on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The

teacher read the directions with them and then asked the students to reread them again for

their own understanding. The students reflected on the reading strategy of SSR on

Tuesdays and Thursdays and how they felt about it for that day. Time was allotted for

questions from the students as to how the study would be conducted. The students brought their books to class every day. These were books they brought from home or checked out from the school's library. The teacher made sure their books were school appropriate by looking at the Library Booklist for Young Adult Teens and checking with the school's librarian.

At the onset of SSR, the students were excited about participating in the study. The researcher in this study was the students' Communication Arts teacher. The researcher observed that during the first eight weeks of the study's inception, the students were engaged and motivated in reading. She even heard a few students talk about what they had read as they transitioned to the next activity for the remaining class period. The students shared in their writing logs that SSR was less of a chore than it had been in the past, because they were free to choose a book they liked to read and that the time went by really fast. One student wrote, "I really liked reading the book *November Blues* today because the main character reminded me of some of the things my older sister was going through." This is an example of how the students' daily logs and writing prompts reflected that they really were reading and enjoying the books they had chosen.

One key piece to the students being engaged was motivation. Several students wrote that they were motivated to read because everyone else was reading and they did not want to be left out. Another student wrote, "I thought about stopping today because I was sleepy but when I saw a slow kid smiling at what he was reading, I continued to read because I know that he ain't smarter than me." The researcher found this information to be very intriguing because peer pressure seemed to be the driving force behind student

participation in the SSR strategy. As earlier noted, when SSR is implemented correctly

this strategy can increase a student's reading habits and self-esteem.

Fake Reading with Sustained Silent Reading

Prior to the onset of SSR, the researcher spoke to the students about the harm that

fake reading would do to them. She even gave a synopsis of Cris Tovani's account of

how she "fake read" when she was in school and that it serves no good purpose. The

researcher also spoke about how at one time or another she too had "fake read" in her

past. The students were excited and discussed when and how they "fake read". Several

of the students began to raise their hands and respond that they too had "fake read" when

the teacher was not monitoring their independent reading in class, or when they were

reading something boring, or if their minds were on something else. The purpose of

sharing "fake read" in the SSR interventions was to have buy-in from the students so they

would be more willing to share their true feelings.

Of the 64 students who participated in the survey in this study, less than 8% of

them wrote they "fake read" during the study. The student responses suggest that as time

progressed, the study became more meaningful to them. Most of the students reported

that they appreciated having the time to read in class because they did not have time to do

it at home. The researcher observed that the students were actively involved in reading

the books they brought to class. The students said one reason they were so honest about

the "fake reading" was because of the rapport that had been established prior to the onset

of the study. One advantage that the researcher had in this study was that she was not

only the researcher, but the students' classroom teacher, and they trusted that she would

keep their answers confidential. It is important to note, from observations, and written

and verbal discussions that when students learn to build and establish positive school

relationships there is a better chance of successful student learning for all involved.

Peer Interests Reading Strategy Findings

Although the data reflected PIRS being least likely to interest the students, some

were motivated by reading with a peer. The researcher observed students forming new

relationships with students they had not previously worked with before. There were a

few students who held their reading partners accountable to what they were reading and

this was a benefit to the PIRS intervention. The students even made comments that their

reading skills improved because of the support they received during the PIRS

intervention. For example, one student wrote, "I don't like reading aloud but my reading

partner made me feel comfortable with them because they didn't make fun of me."

Another student wrote, "I didn't use to like reading aloud because the students would

giggle and laugh when I read, but my teacher said that we had to treat each other the way

we would want to be treated when we were reading with a partner, so I didn't mind

reading with a peer."

The researcher observed several healthy reading habits that resulted from the

PIRS intervention. The researcher learned that a book club spun from this study. There

were students who were so into reading a good book that they asked if they could meet

during lunch to read and discuss with the researcher what they had been reading.

Motivation was the driving force behind why some of the students read. There were

students who were encouraged by their peers to read beyond the time they were to read in

class. Some of the students were holding themselves accountable for following the

district's literacy plan without any pressure. What transpired from a few students reading

with a partner was beneficial for everyone. The researcher noticed a small number of girls reading the same books. They became so interested in two books that six girls formed an outside-of-class reading club. The two books that the students were interested in reading were *November Blues* by author Sharon Draper and *Who Am I Without Him* by Sharon Flake. These books were so popular that the librarian could not keep them on the shelves. The librarian informed the researcher that her quota of ordering a one book title had been met, but she was ordering more of these two books because of their popularity. She also informed the researcher that the eighth grade students must have had younger siblings that were reading the book in seventh grade, because a lot of seventh graders were reading the books as well. This was one positive aspect of student engagement and how it can work when the students see the benefit of working cooperatively together.

Focus Group Interview Session Findings

The students who were randomly chosen to participate in the focus group interview session met with the researcher in the school's library. The librarian and a student assistant were busy re-shelving books, but did not disturb the interview process. The students were a little nervous at first. They were reminded that confidentiality was of the utmost importance in the study and that their responses would help other researchers and educators better understand and come to appreciate the middle school students' perceptions of their interests in reading. Subsequently the students were more at ease when the researcher assured them of this.

The eight randomly chosen students sat in chairs in a semicircle setting because this presented a more welcoming atmosphere. The researcher sat in front of them. The interview session lasted 30-35 minutes and the students responded to 14 questions. The

interview session was tape recorded and all students responded to more than half of the

questions. They could insert a response at any time without being rude to the person

speaking at that time. All of the questions covered the three themes: student interest,

student motivation, and student engagement or social interaction that had been echoed

throughout the study. The names used in reporting the interview session are

pseudonyms. Table 9 is an example of the questions asked of the students and how they

were related to the three themes.

Table 9

Focus Group Interview Questions Based on Themes

Question	Theme
1-How did you feel as you read aloud to	Social Interaction or Engagement and Motivation
2-What did you like or dislike about SSR?	Interest and Motivation
3-What did you like or dislike about PIRS?	Interest, Motivation, and Social Interaction or Engagement
4-Did you feel any pressure from your partner as you read aloud to him or her? Explain why or why not?	Social Interaction or Engagement and Interest
5-How did you actively participate in SSR?	Social Interaction or Engagement and Interest
6-How did you actively participate in PIRS?	Social Interaction or Engagement and Motivation
7-What genre of books interests you?	Interest
8-What did you find interesting about reading with a partner?	Interest, Social Interaction or Engagement, and Motivation
9-What made you feel like your partner was interested in what you read?	Motivation and Interest
10-How do you feel when you read alone?	Motivation
11-How do you feel when you read with your partner?	Interest
12-How do you know if your partner is "fake reading"?	Interest and Motivation
13-How do you know if your partner helped you to read better?	Social Interaction or Engagement
14-What things did your partner do to help you to be a better reader?	Interest

The information in the following section is from the taped focus group interview conversation with the students.

Student and Researcher Response to the Focus Group Interview Session

Question 1. How did you feel as you read aloud to your partner?

In response to this question, three of the students indicated they were nervous at first but as time passed they felt more comfortable. One student said she felt comfortable because she knew she was a good reader. Jacob stated, "I felt scared because I thought I would mess up and my partner would laugh at me." The students' responses gave the researcher some insight as to how the students felt as they read with a partner. One student responded by saying that he was not used to reading out loud with a partner for such a long period of time, but he came to like it because of the longevity of the study, reading aloud became routine for him.

Question 2. What did you like or dislike about SSR?

Six of the students responded that they liked the SSR strategy. Their reason for liking the strategy was because they felt like no one would be able to see their reading flaws. The two students that did not like the strategy stated, "I could not read with the room being so quiet." Sam said that he needed some outside noise when he read. He said that at home he usually had the television or a radio on when he read. Again, there were those two students who reported that they did not like it at all. They said that they just prefer using the SSR strategy better than the PIRS strategy. Cindy said, "I can read faster alone than I can when I read with someone. I just want to get through a book and not have to slow down by having a reading partner."

It appeared that SSR was the favorite of the two reading strategies. The researcher heard one student say peer pressure had a lot to do with them choosing the SSR strategy because they did not want to appear inept in front of their peers since they were not a strong reader. Interest was more pronounced with this question because it appeared that the students chose this strategy because of what they thought their peers would have to say about them. In a recent survey given by the district, some students reported that how their peers see them is more important than getting good grades. The researcher found this to be true in her study. The students were more concerned about how they read aloud in class as opposed to learning to read for pure pleasure. Many students expressed that peer pressure sometimes has affected their academic performance.

Question 3. What did you like or dislike about PIRS?

Six of the eight students disliked this strategy. They stated that they really did not dislike the strategy but preferred SSR better. Two of the eight said they liked the strategy because they were able to get some help with their reading skills. William stated, "I liked that someone was listening to me so that if I messed up someone was there to help me. My partner corrected me several times and I didn't even get mad." Iris stated, "I like that if I skipped over a word my reading buddy would tell me I skipped the word and I could go back and read that word. When I am reading alone I skip over a lot of words I don't know."

The researcher recognized that the two students who preferred this strategy were low readers and that they benefitted from this strategy. This study indicated that the

stronger readers were not interested much in the PIRS strategy. The remaining students said that this strategy was just okay. They could take it or leave it.

Question 4. Did you feel any pressure from your partner as you read aloud to him or her? Explain why or why not?

All of the students responded that they felt peer pressure from their partners as they read. As was stated in the preceding question, the students were more concerned about how their peers perceived them reading rather than conquering the reading skills themselves. Sam commented, "Peer pressure mattered to me because when you read with someone with a higher reading level, you say to yourself, I can't read like them. They read bigger words than I do." Cindy responded, "I felt pressure somewhat because I knew that I had an audience and I wanted to try and please my reading partner. I wanted to show them that I know how to read. I was afraid that I might look stupid in front of my friends." Another student said, "I felt it because I was trying to perfect myself but when I do that I don't comprehend the book and I don't remember what I read because I am too busy trying to please my partner." I was trying hard to read better in front of them." Not one student reported from the focus group that peer pressure did not matter to them.

Question 5. How did you actively participate in SSR?

The researcher observed that most of the students were using the reading strategies they learned earlier in the year. In response to this question William said, "I participated by rereading what I had read to my reading partner to make sure I read the right thing." Sam said, "I chose books that would help me to stay focused." Cindy said, "I was really trying to understand what I was reading by trying to picture the story in my

head." As their Communication Arts teacher observed, many of the students were using active reading strategies. They appeared to be applying what they had previous learned as they were participating in the study. Two students voiced, "I knew I was reading when I could tell others what I had been reading without stumbling and fumbling with words." They did this by writing in their journals how they were connecting to the book. Some of them even used the strategy of previewing a book that was suggested to them to see if this was a book they would want to read.

Question 6. How did you actively participate in PIRS?

The researcher found that more students benefitted from this strategy than they realized. They were actually building relationships during the operation of this strategy. The responses from the students showed that they were acting as coaches as they participated in this strategy. Michelle responded, "I would correct my partner if they made a mistake that is how I was actively participating in PIRS." Sam said, "I would ask my partner to help me read words that I did not know or I would ask them what I could do to read better." Cindy said, "I would nod my head or read along with my partner to make them feel comfortable when they were reading especially if I had a partner that could not read well." Although this strategy was not the strategy of choice for most of the students in this focus group, the benefits of a strategy like this will help the students both academically and socially.

Question 7. What genre of books interests you?

In this focus group interview session more than half of the students preferred reading fiction. Whereas in this focus group interview session three of the eight students said, fiction interested them more and the other five said they were interested in

nonfiction. The researcher also observed that when a student was interested in a certain genre they continued to choose books from that genre. There were some students who said they were persuaded by their reading partner to try a different genre the next time they chose a book to read. Sports, mystery, drama, and crime were some of the genres of books the students in the focus group reported they were interested in reading.

Question 8. What did you find interesting about reading with a partner?

Most of the students responded that they could not believe that most of their reading partners were interested in reading some of the same books and reading material as they were interested in reading. Some of them even noticed their peers reading books by the same author they were reading. They voiced, "I thought I was the only one interested in reading books by this author. I didn't realize that there were other students with my same interests." Michelle said, "When I had a partner that liked my book I felt a connection to that partner because we had something in common." Jacob responded, "Sometimes my partner would talk to me when we were in the cafeteria because we had read together in class." Another student responded, "My best friend found out I was interested in her book so she bought it for me for my birthday." The data indicates that interest among this age group is very important. It also reveals that students can learn from one another whether they can recognize it or not.

The researcher found that social engagement and interaction, and motivation were more pronounced in responses to this question because the researcher learned students valued what their reading partners had to say about them. For instance, there were friendships being formed because a few students made their reading partners feel

important. The researcher observed several of the students started hanging out together

as a result of this study.

Question 9. What made you feel like your partner was interested in what you read?

From the feedback gathered from this question, the students shared that more than

one of their reading partners decided to read the same book they were reading. One

student shared, "I knew my partner was interested in my book because the next time we

visited the library they checked out a book by that same author." A few students reported

they knew their partners were interested in what they read when they learned they could

hold an intelligent conversation with them about their books.

Question 10. How did you feel after you read with a partner?

Michelle said, "I became a more confident reader after the PIRS strategy." One

student responded, "I don't have to hesitate as much about whether I should read aloud

anymore. I still read a little slower, but I am not afraid to read aloud like I used to be."

Another student said, "I felt like I could read bigger or harder words because my partner

gave me the confidence I needed to not be afraid to read aloud because they didn't make

fun of me." These responses revealed that this strategy helped to motivate or promote a

positive attitude toward reading for several of the students.

Question 11. How do you feel when you read alone?

The finding the students identified from the focus group was that they strongly

preferred to read alone. All of the students responded that reading alone during this study

encouraged them to want to read more. They said that they enjoyed having the time to

read alone because of their busy schedules. Nothing new was noted other than what was

previously said because the students voiced throughout this study that reading for them

had not been a priority because their evenings were filled with too many things or

activities to do after school, and time did not allow them to read for pleasure.

Question 12. How did you know when your partner was "fake reading"?

            This question revealed how some of the students knew when their partner was

"fake reading." A couple of students responded with statements like, "When they added

words that didn't make sense I knew they were 'fake reading'." Another student said, "I

knew my partner was 'fake reading' when they couldn't answer a simple question I had

asked about the reading." Yet another responded, "When they acted like they didn't want

to read anymore and they made up stuff that didn't sound real." One student said,

"Maybe they weren't 'fake reading', maybe they couldn't comprehend what they were

reading." The researcher did not expect a response like this, but learned that many of the

students were paying attention to and actively participating in the strategy. Responses

like these validated again that the students were actively engaged in the study.

Question 13. How do you know if your partner helped you to read better?

            Although the researcher's intent was to focus on the three themes, self-reflection

was also a focus for this question. The students had to critically think about how the

PIRS or partnered reading strategy benefitted them. One purpose of the partnered

reading strategy was to allow the students to work together to get feedback about their

reading. A few students expressed that this strategy helped them to learn how to

overcome their fear of reading with a partner. There was one student who commented,

"My partner told me I did a good job reading today." Their answers reflected that they

were actively involved in this strategy. Most of them said that they knew this strategy

helped them because they could tell that their reading was getting better when the

librarian made comments like, "I am glad to see you choosing a book like that to read, and that really made me feel good." Another student said, "When I know that I am not as afraid now as I was in the beginning, I know I have made some progress." Responses like these confirmed for the researcher that even though this was not the strategy of choice, there were a few students who benefitted from this strategy.

Question 14. What kinds of things did your partner do to make you read better?

The results from this question yielded responses that led the researcher to learn more students believed their partner made them read better. Seven of the eight students said that their reading partner helped them in one way or another. Iris said, "My reading partner was really patient with me. She helped me to break words apart so that I could pronounce it correctly." Cindy stated, "My partner helped me with words I did not know." Sam commented, "Although I know I am a strong reader, my partner tried to read like I was reading and this was how I knew I helped my partner." William said, "When I was reading with one of the smart kids, I really tried to listen to them because I thought this could help me to be smart like them." Iris chimed in, "I knew I was doing better when a kid said, 'Iris you are getting better at your reading'."

Data for the School's Librarian

The researcher and the librarian at Blue Sky Middle School met to discuss the data concerning the students' genre choices, what authors the students preferred, and how they felt about their school's library. The researcher reported that most students prefer reading fiction over nonfiction and their main reason for this was because the students felt more of a connection to this genre of reading material. A large percentage of students voiced that they only read nonfiction material when it was highly recommended

and encouraged by their teachers and the librarian. The researcher also reported that the

students would like to see more African American authors in their school's library. The

students' responses also reflected that they would visit the library more if the librarian

took a vested interested in what they wanted to see in their school's library.

       Data from this study allowed the researcher, who is also the students'

Communication Arts teacher, to have a healthy conversation with the librarian about

what mattered to students' reading interest at this age. The data also reflected that

teacher and librarian collaboration is very important to the success of the students'

reading interests. The librarian voiced that she would take an interest in what the

students were reporting by creating a survey for the students to complete that might help

her as she makes her book orders in the future. This data answered questions concerning

which authors the students preferred, how they felt about their library, and their genre

choices.

       Again, as has been mentioned several times throughout this study, what students

have to say is relevant to their lives and their reading interests. This data showed that the

students would like to have some input in the selection of reading materials which should

be in their school's library. The data also reflected that the students felt it was equally

important that they have a voice in choosing some of the reading material rather than

their teacher and the librarian having sole control over their reading choices or material.

Summary

       This chapter presented the results of the pre and post survey data, student daily

writing log and writing prompt, focus group interview session, and researcher

observations. The results of the aforesaid data concludes that the students strongly prefer

the SSR intervention over the PIRS intervention, they are more interested in reading fiction

versus nonfiction material, they want their voices to be heard, and that their school's

library has a limited number of reading material that interests the middle school student.

The data also revealed that both interventions positively affected some of the students'

perceptions toward reading. The students read more at school and frequented their

school's library more often than they had before the implementation of the strategies.

When the students in Blue Sky Middle voiced that they would read more if they were

given more independent reading time in the classroom, and could read what they wanted,

they literally began to read more. The researcher realized that for some students this study

was a profound eye opener for them. It was a new beginning for those students where the

intervention worked in their favor. It was an end for those students whereas a fear of

reading either aloud or silently was now made comfortable for them. It is the researchers'

hope that the students in Blue Sky Middle School envision that reading for pleasure can

and must become habitual for them. The results from this study shed light on how the

students in Blue Sky Middle School perceived reading. The next chapter discusses the

results of Chapter 4, explores factors that affected the data, gives the researchers'

impressions of the data, and makes recommendations for future research.

Chapter Five

Discussion

In a recent newsletter from the Centre for Longitudinal Studies, Oxford researcher, Mark Taylor (2008) conducted a study that spanned over 40 years with over 17,000 participants from which he reports that teenagers who read for pure enjoyment were more likely to get a better job than students who did not. While reading is a valuable asset to the world of academia and in our careers, it also can give one pure enjoyment and relaxation. The researcher's initial task, while analyzing the data, was to determine Blue Sky Middle School's students' perceptions of their interests in reading as defined by engagement and social interaction when reading with a partner or alone. The students in this school had shown signs that they were not interested in reading, not motivated to read, and at times were reluctant to read. Although the District of Blue Sky Middle School implemented a new Literacy Plan, the students were not adhering to the guidelines of this plan. The researcher, the students' Communication Arts teacher, found that many of the students in this school were doing a lot of "fake reading." The implementation of the new district Literacy Plan inspired the researcher to want to measure the effect of two reading interventions on the students reading habits.

The purpose of this study was to determine if middle school students perceived a greater interest in reading after participating in two reading interventions, Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) and Peer Interests Reading Strategies (PIRS), after a semester experimental period. This qualitative study examined the perceptions of a Midwest suburban school with 97% African-American students and the impact of SSR and PIRS on their interests to read. Sixty-four students participated in the study. Responses to a

pre and post survey, student daily log and writing prompt, data received from the librarian, and a focus group interview session were analyzed to gather data about Blue Sky Middle School students' perceptions of their interests in reading in regards to the themes related to student engagement and social interaction, motivation, and student interests with respect to the SSR and PIRS interventions. Prior to this investigation, the researcher felt that student engagement, motivation, and interests were some of the factors which contributed to the student's lack of interest and success in reading.

The researcher learned there were some additional components which contributed to the poor reading habits of the students in Blue Sky Middle School including the students' attitudes toward reading and the students' lack of ownership in their reading. This chapter will draw conclusions from the results and the analysis of data, concur or refute other researchers, and offer suggestions for future research about adolescents and their interest in reading with regards to the research questions, and any other themes that may have emerged and were observed throughout this study. This chapter will also refer to the conversations that were sparked between the students, parents, and educators in this school and perhaps this information will contribute to the existing knowledge base of adolescent literature concerning middle school students' perceptions of and interests in reading.

Discussion and Observation

Engagement and social interaction. The researcher had previously observed that many students in this school were not actively engaged in reading. The researcher deduced that if the students were to be actively engaged in reading then there must be some interaction going on between the student and their books during reading and from

student to peer while they were reading. Topping (2005) noted that when students are involved in peer tutoring, teachers will see an increase in the students' communication and socialization skills. In addition, Fulk and King (2001) concluded that when students are actively engaged in peer tutoring activities, their self-esteem and social skills may improve. This study supports Fulk and King's (2001) findings that social interaction can and does make an impact in the area of socialization, as this researcher recognized an increase in student engagement during both interventions.   Student engagement was observed in the SSR intervention where the students' reading behaviors began to change from the onset of the intervention to its closure. Student engagement during the SSR intervention was noticed when the students documented in their daily writing prompts how they were connecting to the books they were reading. Students were asking to have the SSR time extended because they were actively engaged with the reading and were enjoying reading for fun. Illustratively, the primary investigator observed a few students smile while they were reading silently. There was one student who blurted out during SSR, "Oh my gosh, [sic] I don't believe that just happened!" Statements like the one previously mentioned led the researcher to understand that some of the students were making a connection to their book as they were reading independently.

Student engagement and interaction in the PIRS intervention was noticed as well. The students were dialoguing with their peers about their books. The researcher heard the students engaging in constructive conversations making reference to how the events in the book could also happen in the real world as well. The researcher recognized that the students were focused on the reading because they were actively engaged while their reading partner was reading aloud. During this intervention, the researcher noticed a few

students appeared to be attentively listening to their partners by nodding their heads in agreement or by leaning inward as their partner was reading. These were just some of the student actions the researcher observed during the PIRS intervention.

Emerging Themes

Improved classroom environment. Here, one theme that emerged during the study was a change in the classroom environment. Most educators realize how important it is to set the stage and prepare the students for what is to be expected. One way the researcher did this was by creating an environment that was conducive to student learning. This was provided by assuring the students that their reading time was valued and sacred. The classroom was well lit and comfortable. Furthermore, there were minimal outside distractions during their reading time. No one was allowed to make fun or laugh at anyone during the study. The students bought into the idea that they could read without feeling inferior to anyone else. This sense of freedom during reading provided an environment in which the students wanted to participate without being forced. The researcher believed one of the reasons the study was successful was because a comfortable place was provided for the students to read. Torgesen (2007) proposed that when students are comfortable with the atmosphere of the classroom, students are more successful. In like manner with Torgesen's research, the researcher provided an atmosphere where the students wanted to read and take part in the study.

Consequently, this improved classroom environment was the result of the researcher moving from a teacher-directed method of instruction to a student-directed classroom method of instruction. To make sure that the climate of the classroom was comfortable for the students, the researcher was a facilitator rather than a dictator in this

study. Student choice was encouraged and supported by the researcher in this study. Additionally, the researcher also discovered that, by providing the students with a positive classroom environment, this allowed them to share their reading experiences openly with their peers and in their writing. The researcher believed that by allowing the students a choice to participate in the study, communicating the study's importance, and allowing them to feel free to be themselves helped to foster an improved classroom environment. The researcher found that many of the students voiced that they liked the study because they felt like this was a shared classroom experiment instead of a teacher controlled classroom experiment.

Change in student reading attitudes. At the very beginning, the researcher observed several attitude changes throughout the study. At the onset of the study the students were excited about being a part of the decision-making process in the study. They were nervous at first because most of them thought their opinions and their participation would somehow affect their grades. Once the researcher validated that all their information would remain confidential this put them at ease.

During the course of this study, the researcher noticed a typical rollercoaster effect of the students' attitude toward reading and the study. At the onset of the study, the students were excited because they revealed that they had never participated in a study before. They were also excited to know that their answers might be able to help other middle school students. They were eager to dive into their books and report what they had been reading.

After the third week some of the students began to get a little restless and they said things like, "how much longer do we have to do this" or "can we just stick with the

SSR strategy versus the PIRS strategy?" As their classroom teacher, the researcher believes when students are not focused or interested in the information given, they become bored with the activity and lose sight of its importance. One major challenge for the researcher was to continue to capture and maintain the students' focus throughout this study. The researcher wanted to make sure that the students' attitudes toward reading remained positive so that they would continue reading and not give up on the study. Thus, the researcher kept the students focused by having a visual calendar of the remaining days until the end of the study.

Toward the middle of the study, the researcher saw a spike in the students' attitude toward reading. First of all, many of the students stated they were happy that they were finally able to complete an entire book. Secondly, some of the students said they found the characters in the books that were just like them. A few more mentioned the fact that they found this study was not as bad as they thought it was going to be. Third, many of the students' attitudes towards the PIRS strategy were negative in the beginning because they feared they would be made fun of. The researcher attributed a positive change in their attitude towards PIRS to the comfort level of the study. High expectations were set at the beginning of the study and were followed throughout which also helped to change the students' reading attitudes. The students expressed, once they considered what role they played in the study, that their attitudes toward reading changed for the better. A few more reasons for the students' enthusiasm and enjoyment with reading will be forthcoming as the researcher answers the research questions based on the students' responses to the reading interventions. As a result of this positive change in the students' attitude toward reading, the SSR strategy was continued until the end of the

year because the students were reading their books, doing book reports, completing the

district's reading logs, and the librarian communicated that more students were visiting

the library and checking out more than one book. This was another positive aspect or

outcome from this study. There was an increased interest in reading observed in the

students by the researcher and the librarian.

      Increased interest in book selection. Although the researcher communicated to

the librarian the students' interests in helping to select books they would like to see in

their school's library, this topic continued to arise throughout the study. The students

articulated that they believed a major reason the students in Blue Sky Middle were not

reading was lack of interest in the books they had to choose from. The students said the

school's library had a limited number of books that represented them or their culture.

This topic of conversation was brought up on several occasions. It surfaced so often that

the researcher thought it was worthy of a study at some other time. Many students

communicated that this was not only a concern in their school's library but in their

teachers' classroom libraries, too. The researcher knew this was a concern of the students

but did not realize how important this matter was to them. In short, the students wanted

to make the researcher aware of the fact that when books are placed before them that they

are not interested in reading, they will not read or sometimes they "fake read." The

students clearly wanted to let the researcher know that interest plays an integral role in

whether a student will read or not read a book. After all the ultimate goal of a school's

library should be to stock the library with books that might draw the student's attention.

Answering the Research Questions

The research questions were answered through student pre and post surveys, a student daily reading log and writing prompt, and a focus group interview session. The responses to the research questions will add to the knowledge base of adolescent literature concerning middle school students' perceptions of their interest in reading independently and with partners and the influences of social interaction and engagement while reading.

Research question 1, what qualities about SSR and PIRS did the students' perceive increased their interest in reading and why? The researcher discovered through verbal conversations with the students and the responses written in their daily logs what interested them the most about the reading interventions. The researcher was surprised with the comments received from the students about how they believe the reading interventions increased their interest in reading. Most surprisingly, some of the students voiced that accountability played a major factor in why they chose to read either independently or individually. Many of the students felt that way because they had volunteered to participate in this study and this increased their interest to read. Secondly, some of the students said they were interested in the SSR intervention because they had a quiet place at school to read while their homes were too hectic for them to get any independent reading done. Third, there were other students who revealed that because their teacher trusted that they were doing the reading and not hovering over them, this encouraged them to want to read. Next, there were students who said that some of the books they had chosen increased their interests because they could easily relate to and connect with the text. By virtue of the students forming a connection to the book this

motivated and stimulated the students' interest, which prompted them to want to read.

Finally, some of the students said that having a choice to choose what they wanted to

read interested them because many teachers did not let them choose their own reading

materials.

While there were a large number of students who were more concerned about

what their peers thought of how they read, as opposed to looking at this strategy as a tool

that would enhance their reading skills, a few students said the PIRS intervention did in

some ways increase their interest to read. The researcher read in the writing prompts that

a few students stated PIRS increased their interests to read because they received the

reading help they needed. Some stated, "I am not afraid to read aloud anymore because

the teacher did not let the students make fun of me and this increased my interest to

read." The researcher learned that some students really do need that additional support

from their peers to motivate them. Likewise, there were students who actually gained the

confidence and support they needed by participating in this intervention and therefore this

increased the students' interest in reading.

Research question 2, did the students like reading alone, with a partner, or

both and why? The data revealed that more than half of the students who participated in

the study preferred the SSR strategy versus the PIRS strategy. Although the students

stated they preferred SSR, the researcher believed more of them enjoyed PIRS, but were

afraid to report it for fear of what their peers would say. As an example, one student said,

"Last year some students were giggling when I paused over a word while another student

said the word for me instead of letting me try to sound it out myself." In another case, a

student said, "My parents told me to skip a hard word so that I would not be embarrassed

in front of my peers." The investigator learned comments like the prior ones indicate why many of the students responded that SSR was their favorite reading intervention. As a vigilant observer it appeared that many of the students enjoyed the PIRS strategy. The researcher's reason for this comes from the responses they reported in their journal writing like the comments previously mentioned. There were only a few students who articulated they liked both strategies.

As the students read together during the PIRS intervention, the researcher heard them discuss how both partners were interested in the same book. One note of surprise was that some of the students formed new student relationships after they engaged in reading with someone they had not worked with before. What this suggests to the researcher is that educators need to incorporate more team building and cooperative learning activities that build student to peer relationships. This finding supports Topping (2005) who agreed that when students work cooperatively together there is a greater chance they will be motivated by one another to achieve. Consequently, teambuilding and cooperative learning activities like PIRS are strategies the researcher has used previously in her classroom that have helped to promote academic achievement and can boost one's self esteem. One student expressed that after engaging in the PIRS strategy, he felt better about reading aloud in front of his peers. Another student expressed, "I now know that it might be important for me to have a study buddy that can help me with skills that I am struggling with." The researcher felt that whatever triggered the reading interests and the learning style for that individual student made this a worthwhile study.

Research question 3, how did interacting with a peer while reading influence student interest? At the beginning, there were students who were interested in reading a

book because a friend was reading the book. There were also those students who chose

to read a book because their peers told them what information was in the book. The

students could connect to the information in the book because the content was familiar to

them and their peers. Later on, as the students were actively involved in the study, the

students found several interesting books to read. The researcher heard a few students use

words that made the reading come alive for their reading buddies. As an example, they

said things like, "We have students at this school just like these characters." Most

reading teachers are aware of the importance of teaching the reading process to students

and the skill of connecting and visualization are two strategies in the reading process that

encourages students to become engaged in either their book or while communicating with

their reading partner. When students can connect to or draw a mental picture for each

other, then the material becomes more meaningful to both the listener and the reader.

Along the same lines, this finding supports Mulcaire (2009) who emphasized that

visualization and connecting helps to create student motivation. Visualization is also a

type of learning style that many students utilized with the PIRS intervention to help their

reading partner get a clearer understanding of the book. There were students who were

influenced to read by how their classmates read. Some students wanted to read better

because they said their classmates made the words sound good. Statements like these

helped to validate that there were some students who were influenced to read because of

this intervention.

Ownership and Empowerment

Without a doubt, the resounding importance of student voice and choice was

echoed throughout this study. The students wrote and voiced how important it was to

have someone to listen to what they had to say about their perceived interests in reading. This researcher corroborates Sloan (2006) who agreed that students want to be heard. Students also want to feel empowered, too. The researcher and the librarian took into account that the students wanted to have a voice in the books that are housed in their school's library. The students even made suggestions to the librarian about the types of books they would like to see purchased for the school. For the most part, the researcher learned that buy-in was very important to this study. The students took ownership in the study because they felt wanted and needed. They realized that someone valued their input. The researcher and the students realized that this was a partnership and that to make this study work they all had to work together. The researcher learned that because the students were involved in the decision making process and engaged with the book and their reading partner, true participation emerged. Many of the students voiced how they saw a change in their own reading habits as a result of the study. The researcher discovered from an ongoing dialogue after the study was over, that most students will read if given the right tools and reading materials and when given a choice.

Recommendations

Middle school literacy practices. After carefully analyzing the results, the researcher felt compelled to offer a few recommendations in regards to middle school literacy practices. With over 14 years of teaching experience at the middle level, the researcher understands that middle school students seem to resist literacy. The researcher believes that these recommended practices may create conditions that spark the desire to learn in the middle school student.

Classroom activities. Most importantly, the researcher would like to recommend

that educators use more teambuilding activities in their classrooms. Team building

activities allows the students to work cohesively together and learn from one another.

Activities like these can help to encourage reluctant readers to put forth more of an effort

in their learning. Educators should be diligent about perusing the room making sure that

all students remain on task and are an active participant in the activity. For example,

there were times when a few students tried to get off task when they were having a

conversation about the book. There was one student who tried to sleep while her partner

was reading. The student who was trying to sleep was reminded by the researcher and

the reading partner of the task at hand, that partner participation was expected and

important for both participants. Additionally, if the researcher seems overly interested

and involved in the study and the strategies, there is a higher likelihood that the students

will be interested too.

Furthermore, it would be valuable to suggest that middle school teachers or

educators try some form of peer reading activities to encourage more reading from

students in this similar age group. The researcher would like to encourage other

educators to try the PIRS strategy. Despite the fact that PIRS was not the most favored

intervention, the study proved that some of the students were affected by its use. As

noted in Chapter 4 many of the students began to view reading as meaningful and

important to their learning. In fact, this strategy was developed by the researcher of this

study out of a need to further investigate the effects of a partnered reading strategy that

encourages social engagement while at the same time providing academic support from

peer to peer. This strategy is different from PALS in that PALS was initially developed

as a peer tutoring program to improve student proficiency in reading (Fuchs, Fuchs, &

Burish, 2000). Peer Interest Reading Strategy (PIRS) was also developed with the

desired outcome that the PIRS strategy might influence reading among middle school

students. The PIRS intervention is a simple strategy that can be implemented by any

Communication Arts teacher (Appendix H). A few students acknowledged that the PIRS

strategy made them a stronger more confident reader. This was also the purpose and the

intent of the development of the strategy.

　　　Other examples of activities might involve educators sponsoring a breakfast book

club or using a Pair and Share reading activity to encourage reading among middle school

students. A partnered book report is another activity that the researcher has used in the

past to promote and encourage reading to students.

　　　Team level. First, team level teaching allows for more interaction between

teachers and students. Second, most teams are made up of the five core classes, math,

science, social studies, communication arts, and reading. Not all middle schools use the

same teaming design. Blue Sky Middle School teams are made up of four core classes.

They are math, science, communication arts, and social studies. Teaming would allow

for all the core teachers to implement the PIRS intervention. Therefore, the researcher

highly recommend that different team levels or grade levels implement the SSR and

PIRS strategies for a short period of time to see which strategy would be the preferred

strategy.

　　　One advantage that the researcher noted with the PIRS intervention was the

support the PIRS strategy offered to those students who needed to be motivated to read.

There might be one grade level or team level of students who would enjoy the strategy

because of the students' maturational ability. The participants in this study were all eighth grade students. It would be interesting to learn if age or grade played a factor in which strategy was the preferred strategy of choice. The sixth and seventh grade students in Blue Sky Middle School are known for doing more cooperative learning activities on their teams whereas the eighth grade students in Blue Sky Middle School are encouraged to be more independent due to they are being prepared for a more rigorous high school experience. With this in mind, the researcher would be curious to learn if a team of teachers would be willing to take the risk and implement the PIRS strategy because the results could prove to be most rewarding.

District of Blue Sky Middle School. Considering that the district is still in its incubation period of their new Literacy Plan, timing is now advantageous for educators in this district to implement the recommendations and the strategies used in this study. To begin with, the results demonstrated that there was an increase in the students reading habits. Next, the data reflected that students want to have some input in what they are reading. Finally, student engagement, motivation, and interests influenced many of the students to want to read. The researcher believes the results of this study is worthy of implementation because there is a possibility that when students are motivated to read, there is an increased chance of student achievement. This increased chance of student achievement may be that link to closing the reading gap among the students in Blue Sky Middle School.

Henceforth, the aforementioned recommendations are being made to the District of Blue Sky Middle School to propel and encourage more reading of middle school students and also to see if there is a change in the students' reading habits. The district

could review the results of this study and recommend that this study be piloted for one

trimester in two or more of their middle schools. This recommendation would be made

with the intent that participation in the study would be voluntary and not mandatory for

both teachers and students. The data from the district indicates that the population of the

other middle schools is not the same as Blue Sky Middle School. It would be interesting

to know the reading perceptions of the other middle school students in this district.

For school librarians or media specialists. The researcher recommends that

school librarians work cohesively with the classroom teachers to encourage and promote

reading among middle school students. This research affirms Moreillon (2007) who

agreed that collaboration between the classroom teacher and the librarian is crucial to the

success of reading for all students. At one time the librarian was used only as a resource

to the classroom teacher and not as partner to the classroom teacher (Moreillon, 2007).

However, research does support that when the teacher and the librarian work

collaboratively together there is a greater chance of higher levels of literacy, and then it

would behoove educators to diligently work to support the important role the school

librarian plays.

Implications for future research. To start, the researcher would like to

encourage educators and other researchers that when they are working with students in a

population similar to this setting, the study lasts no longer than an eight to12 week

period. One reason for this would be to help keep the students focused and honest in

their responses. The researcher had previously observed that there were a few students

who were bored with their partner and did not want to work with them. This was one

reason why the students periodically changed reading partners throughout the study.

Consequently, if this happens, the researcher suggests reminders be given to the students about the study's importance to help keep the students on task. It is important to remember to refer to the potential benefits of the study. Comprehension skills and strategies are two necessary components of reading that should not be lost because educators have not found engaging activities to keep students interested in reading.

Next, the researcher would like to recommend that this study be replicated in other populations different from this study. For example, the researcher would like to know if Caucasian or Hispanic middle school students might respond differently or the same after the implementation of the two interventions. The students in Blue Sky Middle School, for reasons listed throughout this study, communicated they preferred the SSR intervention over the PIRS intervention. This researcher would be curious to ascertain if the reading perceptions of other middle school students within or outside of this district were similar to the students in this study.

Of course, the reading study came to a close and some of the students wanted to continue the SSR strategy. If this happens, the researcher recommends that educators use their best judgment and do what works best for students. For instance, if the examiner has some control over the study environment, it would be best to continue the process of learning. Student success is what is most important.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that the researcher would have liked to have heard more students express that they enjoyed the PIRS intervention, the researcher was extremely happy with some of the positive comments received from the students about this study. Cecily wrote, "My partner encouraged me to think hard to come up with something in my life that was

similar to something in the book." Another student said, "I did not think I would like

working with a reading partner, but I enjoyed it." The best comment came from a student

who said, "I believe I saw an increase in one of my reading test [sic] because I had a

reading partner who helped me study for a reading comprehension test we had in class

and I received a B on that test." In the prior comments from the students, student interest

and motivation was prevalent as a result of this study.

The researcher will report to the district administrators that there was evidence of

improved reading habits observed in the students from Blue Sky Middle School. First, as

previously mentioned, there were students who expressed in writing that they felt SSR

and PIRS helped them to overcome the fear they had of reading with a peer and

independently. Secondly, the researcher observed an overall increase in student

interaction and engagement where new student to student relationships had been formed

during and after the PIRS intervention. The primary investigator also observed a few

students holding conversations with students they had not talked with before the study's

inception. Third, there was also increased student engagement in independent reading

because the librarian reported that more students from this researchers' class were

discussing with her what they had been reading and whether they liked or disliked the

book they were reading.   Furthermore, there were students who were actively engaged in

reading their book and asked if they could read and discuss it with the researcher. The

aforementioned information supports the fact that many of the students benefited from

being a participant in the study.

Indeed, it is of the utmost importance that those persons involved in educating

children find interesting, relevant, and engaging material that will help to encourage

increased time spent reading for the students. Student engagement has been known to show an improvement in both student achievement and student interest (Pilgreen, 2000). The researcher also knows and understands that when students actively participate in their learning by engaging in meaningful conversations with their peers, this allows them to think critically about what they are doing.

Therefore, the researcher learned that the students in Blue Sky Middle School will read and did increase their reading habits after the inception of the reading interventions. The researcher wished that there was some way to gather feedback next year from the students who participated in this study. The primary investigator would like to think that this study encouraged the participants to keep reading. Therefore, it is the researchers' hope that other researchers and educators would take note of the fact that student interest, motivation and student engagement, and socialization are paramount to improving the amount of time that middle school students engage in active reading, thereby increasing the opportunity to raise reading achievement.

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Appendix A

Lindenwood University
School of Education

209 S. Kingshighway
St. Charles, Missouri 63301

Informed Consent for Parents to Sign for
Student Participation in Research Activities

Middle School Students' Perceptions of Their Interests in Reading As Defined By
Engagement and Social Interaction When Using Sustained Silent Reading and Peer
Interest Reading Strategies

Principal Investigator: <u>Regina J. Ware</u>
     Telephone: 314-953-7473 E-mail: rware@hazelwoodschools.org

Participant_____ParentContactinfo_____

_____

1. Your child is invited to participate in a research study conducted by Regina J. Ware, Communication Arts Teacher, under the guidance of Dr. Rebecca Panagos, Supervising Chair Lindenwood University. The purpose for doing the study is to get the perceptions of the students in Blue Sky Middle School of their interests in reading as defined by engagement and social interaction when using SSR, Sustained Silent Reading and PIRS, Peer Interests Reading Strategies. The researcher wishes to implement two reading interventions, Sustained Silent Reading and Peer Interests Reading Strategies, into the curriculum to test whether the students' interest in reading will change after the implementation of the two interventions. The researcher would like for the teachers, and students to be able to identify what strategies or interventions will help the students in this school to become more interested in reading.

2. a) Your child's participation will involve
    As a participant in this study your child will be asked to take a pre and post reading survey that will gauge what interests them in wanting to read for fun or pleasure. They will be able to choose which intervention interests them the most. The pre and post surveys will last about 20 minutes.

Your child will participate in two reading interventions, SSR- Sustained Silent Reading and PIRS-Peer Interest Reading Strategies. These two reading interventions will be incorporated into the regular Communication Arts curriculum and instructional time. Sustained Silent Reading is where the student will read a book of their choice for a period of 15-20 minutes per day for a semester and then write about what they read. SSR will be implemented on T/TH. The other intervention, PIRS, is where the students will assist other students in a peer-tutoring strategy. This is a strategy where each student will take turns reading while his or her partner will listen to them and will help them with any problems they may encounter. If the reading partner has trouble pronouncing words their partner can help them with the pronunciation of the word. PIRS will be implemented on MWF. Both interventions will help to build self-confidence.

A few students will be chosen to participate in an interview session in the library where they will be asked questions pertaining to their interests in SSR or PIRS. The selection of students will based on the researchers observation of those students that were reluctant to read before SSR and PIRS but appears more engaged after the implementation of SSR and PIRS. The interview session will be held in the library during their regularly scheduled library time. Some of the students will be reading quietly in one part of the library while the researcher is interviewing the participants. The interview session will last no longer than 30 minutes. The interview session will be audio-taped so that the researcher can analyze the data against the current adolescent literature concerning middle school students' interests in reading. The researcher will be the only person privy to listening to the tapes. After the completion of the study the audio-tapes will be destroyed.

Approximately 50-70 students may be involved in this research.

   b) The amount of time involved in your child's participation will be 15-20 minutes for the survey portion of the research and approximately a semester to incorporate the reading strategies.

3. There are no anticipated risks to your child associated with this research. The benefits that your child will receive from this research study will contribute to their knowledge about the reading interests of middle school students. They will also gain insight as to what type of strategy works best for them. They will learn ways to help them learn how to become a better reader, how to find enjoyment and pleasure in reading, and what makes reading interesting for them.

4. Your child's participation is voluntary and you may choose not to let your child participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent for your child's participation at any time. Your child may choose not to answer any questions that he or she does not want to answer. You and your child will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to let your child participate or to withdraw your child.

5. We will do everything we can to protect your child's privacy. All information received from surveys will remain confidential. As part of this effort, your child's name and identifying information will not be revealed, at any time in any research report, any publication or presentation that may result from this study.

6. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may call the Investigator, Regina J. Ware at 314-953-7473 or the Supervising Faculty, Dr. Rebecca Panagos at 636-949-4959.   You may also ask questions or state concerns regarding your child's rights as a research participant to the Office of Research Administration, at 516-5897 or the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board (IRB) through contacting Dr. Jann Weitzel, Vice President for Academic Affairs at 636-949-4896.

**I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions.   I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records.
I consent to my child's participation in the research described above.**

Parent's/Guardian's Signature Date	Parent's/Guardian's Printed Name

Child's Printed Name

Signature of Investigator or Designee Date	Investigator/Designee Printed Name

Appendix B

Pre Intervention Survey

Directions: Please put a check mark (√) in the appropriate column of choices given for each statement.

#	Statement	Yes	No	Sometimes
1	**I enjoy reading silently.**			
2	**I like reading aloud alone.**			
3	**I enjoy reading fiction.**			
4	**I enjoy reading nonfiction.**			
5	**I am interested in reading with a partner.**			
6	**I would like to have a reading partner to help me read.**			
7	**I can find books I like to read in my school's library.**			
8	**I visit a library other than the school's library.**			
9	**I am interested in having someone help me with words that are difficult.**			
10	**Reading with someone I know makes me feel good.**			
11	**Reading with someone I don't know makes me uncomfortable.**			

Appendix C

Post Intervention Survey

Directions: Please put a check mark (√) in the appropriate column of choices given for each statement.

#	Statement	Yes	No	Sometimes
1	SSR increased my interest in reading the most.			
2	PIRS increased my interest in reading the most.			
3	SSR and PIRS equally increased my interest.			
4	I enjoyed reading with a partner.			
5	Reading with a partner made me want to read more.			
6	My partner helped me with words I did not know.			
7	I felt comfortable reading with someone I knew.			
8	I enjoyed choosing my own books to read.			
9	Once I began reading silently I wanted to keep reading.			
10	I enjoy visiting our school's library.			
11	I watched the clock as I was reading silently.			
12	I acted like I was interested while reading with a popular reading partner.			
13	I enjoy reading fiction.			
14	I enjoy reading nonfiction.			

Appendix D

Student Assent Form
Central Middle School
Hazelwood School District
13450 Old Jamestown Road
Black Jack MO 63033

I, _____ have been asked to take part in a research study that focuses on what interest me in wanting to read for fun or pleasure. My Communication Arts Teacher, Mrs. Regina Ware, explained the study to me.

I understand that I will complete a pre and post student survey that will take me about twenty minutes to complete. I will also be asked to participate in two reading interventions. The first reading intervention is one I am very familiar with, Sustained Silent Reading. This is intervention allows me to read a book of my choice for 15-20 minutes per day. After the reading period is over I will complete a reading log and writing prompt that will ask me what I think of the strategy for that day. The other reading intervention is called PIRS, Peer Interests Reading Strategies. This reading intervention is a peer tutoring strategy that allows me to work with a partner on a few reading skills. Some of the skills that I will be working on will include; vocabulary building, pronunciation, fluency, and self-confidence. The two reading interventions will be clearly explained to me before their inception.

A few students will be chosen to participate in a focus group/interview session in the library where they will be asked questions pertaining to their interests in SSR or PIRS.

About 70 students will take part in this study.

The person conducting the study will not reveal my name to anyone, and my name will not appear in any reports on this study.

I was also informed that if I have questions, I can call my teacher, Mrs. Ware at 314-953-7473. If I have questions about my rights, I can call Mrs. Ware's Lindenwood's Supervising Faculty, Dr. Rebecca Panagos as 636-949-4959.

After I sign this form, a copy will be kept on file with Mrs. Ware.

I am willing to take part in this study._____
                                        Student Signature

Date _____

Appendix E

SSR Daily Reading Log and Writing Prompt

Title	Type Fiction or Nonfiction	Genre	Pages Read

Directions: After completing the reading strategy you are to place a check mark (√) in the appropriate column of choices given for each statement. You will then complete the statement at the bottom of the page.

Statement	Yes	No	Sometimes
Today I enjoyed reading by myself.			
I enjoyed reading the book I chose today.			
Today was fun.			
I had trouble paying attention while I was reading today.			
I felt a connection to book as I was reading today.			

Briefly explain how you felt about the reading strategy you participated in today. Write your answer in three or more sentences in the space provided below.

Appendix F

Peer Interest Reading Strategy Checklist and Writing Prompt

Title	Type Fiction or Nonfiction	Genre	Pages Read

Directions: After completing the reading strategy with your partner you are to place a check mark (√) in the appropriate column of choices given for each statement. You will then complete the statement at the bottom of the page.

Statement	Yes	No	Sometimes
Today I liked reading with my partner.			
I enjoyed reading/ listening to the book that was chosen for today.			
Today was fun.			
I had trouble paying attention during the reading strategy today.			
My partner's excitement for reading this book made me more interested.			
I acted like I was interested while reading with the popular kid.			
I felt a connection to the literature during the reading strategy today.			

Briefly explain how you felt about the reading strategy you participated in today. Write your answer in three or more sentences in the space provided below.

Appendix G

Below you will find the writing prompts that the students will be asked to complete after one or both of the interventions. (PIRS and/or SSR) The students will only be responding to one writing prompt per day.

You are to respond to the writing prompt by writing your answer clearly and legibly in your journal notebook.

- Which intervention interests you the most and why?

- What interesting things can your teacher do to help you become a better reader?

- Complete the following statement. I am interested in reading because….

- I was interested in what I was reading today because…

- I had trouble paying attention while I was reading today because…

- I wanted to continue reading with my partner because…

- I get excited about reading when…

- I would choose this partner again because…

- I wanted to keep reading the book when the time period was over because…

- I like SSR because…

- I like PIRS because…

- I wanted to continue reading by myself because…

Appendix H

Definitions Page

Reading is crucial for everyone especially children. Therefore it is important that educators find interesting material to keep students engaged and interested in reading. According to Shanahan (2006), in The National Reading Panel Report: Practical Advice for Teachers, if teachers made reading material available to students that were interesting and not boring then maybe the love of reading will occur. This is another reason the researcher was compelled to offer students a choice in their reading so that they will learn to enjoy reading for pleasure.

The students in Blue Sky Middle School are currently using SSR in the Districts Literacy Plan while PIRS was developed to encourage engagement and social interaction of students' perceptions of their interest in reading. PIRS was also developed to help build fluency, and word pronunciation.

PIRS-Peer Interests Reading Strategies is a partner reading strategy where the students are coaching each other while learning how student engagement and social interaction influences their perceptions of their own interests in reading.

SSR is defined as a period of uninterrupted reading where the student reads independently whatever they like in a short time span of 15-20 minutes.

Benefits of SSR and PIRS

PIRS benefits:
- Helps to build social interaction with peers
- Improves student motivation to read
- Helps with fluency
- Builds vocabulary development
- Exposes students to a variety of genres

SSR benefits:
- Increase in self-esteem
- Increase in reading for pleasure
- Promotes academic achievement
- Improves student motivation to read

PIRS, Peer Interests Reading Strategies- on MWF the students will read for 15-20 with a partner. One person will read while the other person listens. The students will complete a checklist and writing prompt (see Appendix G).

SSR, Sustained Silent Reading-on T/Th the students will read silently for 15-20 minutes. The students will complete a checklist and writing prompt (see Appendix F).

The students will be applying word recognition skills to comprehend unknown words. They can also ask the teacher for assistance.
 Fluency- The students will only tell the student whether they are reading to slow or too fast. They have been taught to read at a comfortable speed by using a tapping method. Meaning-The students will use semantic and syntactic context clues to help them come up with the meaning of an unknown word.
Encouragement-Praise is very important for both partners. They will encourage each other by saying things like, "thanks for helping me with my words, you read well today, or thanks for being a good listener."

The teacher will be assisting as needed as she walks around the room.

Appendix I

Questions for Focus Group/Interview

Some of the questions asked during the interview sessions may require the primary investigator to further ask for clarification of an answer.

1. How did you feel as you read aloud to your partner?

2. What did you like or dislike about SSR?

3. What did you like or dislike about PIRS?

4. Did you feel any pressure from your partner as you read aloud to him/her? Explain why or why not?

5. How did you actively participate in SSR?

6. How did you actively participate in PIRS?

7. What genre of books interests you?

8. What did you find interesting about reading with a partner?

9. What made you feel like your partner was interested in what you read?

10. How did you feel after you read with your partner?

11. How do you feel when you read alone?

12. How do you know if your partner is "fake reading"?

13. How do you know if your partner helped you to read better?

14. What things did your partner do to help you to be a better reader?

Appendix J

Hazelwood
School
District
We're on the move!
15955 New Halls Ferry Road
St. Louis, MO 63031
(314) 953-5000

APPLICATION to PERFORM RESEARCH

I. **Name of Primary Investigator** Regina J. Ware

Position Team Leader - Teacher Affiliation Hazelwood School District

Office Address 13450 Old Jamestown Road Florissant MO. 63033

Home Address 11511 Corwyn Dr. St. Louis MO. 63138

Office Phone 314-953-7473   Home Phone 314-741-8757

Names of additional members of research team:

Name Dr. Rebecca Panagos   Phone 636-949-4959

Name Dr. Sherry Wisdom   Phone 636-949-4498

Name Ms. JoAnn Dumont   Phone 314-953-5000
Dr. Graham Weir   636-949-4315

II. **Project Title** Middle School Students' Perceptions of Their Interests

Description In Reading As Defined By Engagement and Peer Pressure
When Using Sustained Silent Reading SSR and Peer Interests
Reading Strategies, PIRS

Note: Please attach copies of any measures to be used (e.g. tests, questionnaires, surveys, etc.)
See back

III. Participant Involvement

	Number of Subjects	Time Requirements
Pupils:	50-70	½ hour per day for 10 weeks
Teachers:	1-3	15 min x2 to pass out and collect surveys
Administrators:	1	10 min to review the application
Parents:	N/A	N/A

Describe the involvement required of subjects (or access to records if subjects are not required).

All subjects will complete a pre and post survey and complete
a daily checklist and log for 10 weeks.

If applicable, describe any district archived data you will need.

See addendum

Number of person visiting sites in connection with project: 1

Frequency of visits during a school year: 1

Total contact hours of the project: 50-70 hours

1

IV. Project Requirements

Number and type of school:

Early Childhood Education (birth to kindergarten) _____

Elementary (K-5) _____   Middle school (6-8) ✔   High school (9-12) _____

Adult Basic Education _____   Other _____   Grades required _____

Total number of schools __/__   Total number of classrooms __/__

Other school characteristics:

_____ *NONE* _____

_____

Do you require any specific schools? __*NO*__   If yes, please provide building names:

_____

_____

Start date of research: *Upon approval of*   End date of research: *12/20/11*
IRB Application 1/11

Frequency of contact with subject(s): *Daily contact with subjects over a 10 week period.*

V. Results

What is the anticipated value of the research?

In general:

_____ *See addendum sheet* _____

_____

To the Hazelwood School District:

_____ *See addendum sheet* _____

_____

VI. Dissemination

How will the results of your study be used? Will they be available to the public in any form? If so, what groups will have access to the results? Will the Hazelwood School District, or any individuals within Hazelwood, be identified in your reports? Please explain.

_____ *See addendum* _____

_____

_____

_____

VII.   References (You may omit names if you have promised confidentiality.)

Are other school systems involved in this research? _____
        · Please list _____

Have you conducted research in other school systems? _____
        Please name _____
        Date(s) _____

VIII.   Human Subjects' Protection

Has this research been approved by a university or other institutional review for protection of human subjects?

Yes ___   No ___

If yes, please indicate which institution or, specific person reviewed the proposal and when?

_____
_____

If no, please explain why this proposal has not been reviewed for protection of human subjects:

This information/application is being sent to the Institutional Review Board for approval. If any of the information is not approved the HSD will be notified immediately. No research of any kind will be conducted without the approval of the IRB · Institutional Review Board.

Note: All researchers who plan to collect information from or about individual students should attach copies of the proposed consent forms and a brief description of planned procedures for obtaining informed consent. Research involving individual students may require the informed consent and signed agreement of parents or legal guardians.

IX. Upon completion of the research you will be required to submit two copies of the report (or summary) to the superintendent or designee.

By signing this application, the applicant certifies that the research herein described involves an investigation which:

1. promises to produce information of value to Hazelwood or the field of education;
2. provides adequate safeguards for participants' rights;
3. does not detract from the primary mission of instruction; and
4. is not-for-profit in nature

The documents can be expected by (date) Winter term of 2011

1. _Regina J. Stare_   _6/4/10_
   Signature of Applicant   Date

2. DR. _Rebecca Panagos_   _Lindenwood University_
   PRINT – name of institutional advisor,   Institution
   professor or supervisor

3. _Rebecca Panagos PhD._   _636 9494959_
   Signature of advisor, professor or supervisor   Office Telephone

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(For District Use Only)

1. _____   _9/1/10_
   Signature of Superintendent or Designee   Date

2. _____   _____

   Signature(s) of Administrator(s) affected   Date

4

IX. **Upon completion of the research you will be required to submit two copies of the report (or summary) to the superintendent or designee.**

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   professor or supervisor

3. _Rebecca Panagos PhD_   _636 9494959_
   Signature of advisor, professor or supervisor   Office Telephone

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(For District Use Only)

1. _____   _9/1/10_
   Signature of Superintendent or Designee   Date

2. _____   _____

   Signature(s) of Administrator(s) affected   Date

4

Vitae

Regina J. Ware has chosen as a craft, the career of education. She has been involved in educating children for over 20 years. She spent five and one half years teaching elementary school in the St. Louis Public School System. She later transitioned to educating middle school students in the Hazelwood School District where she was a Reading Specialist. She is currently employed with the same district teaching Communication Arts and serving as a Team Leader. She is also an adjunct instructor with the St. Louis Community College District where she has been teaching introductory level reading courses for the last 11 years. She is currently employed with the same district teaching Communication Arts and serving as a Team Leader. She takes both jobs seriously as she strives to "place all students in a position to succeed", a motto she adopted from the middle school where which she teaches.   She recognizes that teaching for her is both an art and a craft to which she focuses on carving the creative minds of her students as she works to give them the best educational opportunities that she can.

Regina earned her Bachelor of Science in Education from Harris-Stowe State University in 1992, and a Master of Educational Administration from the University of Missouri at St. Louis in 1995. She earned her doctoral degree from Lindenwood University in St. Charles, Missouri.