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Abstract

This research paper examines the various factors that motivate boys and girls when it comes to reading, while also addressing the mixture of influences that impact student reading preferences. Current research claims that boys and girls have different preferences, which result in the “gender gap” that students are faced with in the schools today. Action research was conducted in which 12 students, two boys and two girls from fourth, fifth, and sixth grade, were asked to select books based on their individual reading preferences. This research found that the factors which influence boys and girls reading preferences were similar among the different genders, but varied by grade. This finding implies that students need the opportunity to select books based on their individual preferences.

Document Type

Thesis

Degree Name

MS in Literacy Education

Department

Education

Subject Categories

Education

Reading Motivation:
The Difference between Boys and Girls and their Reading Preferences

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
M.S. Literacy Education

Supervised by

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Spring 2012

Abstract

This research paper examines the various factors that motivate boys and girls when it comes to reading, while also addressing the mixture of influences that impact student reading preferences. Current research claims that boys and girls have different preferences, which result in the “gender gap” that students are faced with in the schools today. Action research was conducted in which 12 students, two boys and two girls from fourth, fifth, and sixth grade, were asked to select books based on their individual reading preferences. This research found that the factors which influence boys and girls reading preferences were similar among the different genders, but varied by grade. This finding implies that students need the opportunity to select books based on their individual preferences.

Reading Motivation: The Difference between Boys and Girls and their Reading Preferences

During the early stages of children's schooling, it is important that the main goal of literacy teaching is to stimulate their interest in language and literature, which will result in a positive attitude towards reading (Merisuo-Storm, 2006). As children grow, it is important that they learn to choose appropriate reading material from various sources. Merisuo-Storm (2006), states that "students are very different as readers, and they are motivated to read very different books and texts. The reader should find the topic of the text interesting and possess enough previous knowledge related to its subject matter" (p. 112). Because of the different qualities that each reader possesses, it is important that students are given a chance to show and express their individual reading preferences.

Concern over the "gender gap" regarding reading preferences in and out of school has prompted a great deal of research when it comes to boys and girls reading behaviors. The inconsistency between boys' and girls' reading interests specifically looks at the differences that arise in their reading habits and choices. These differences change over time, especially as they reach their middle school years. Research has considered age, gender, and peer influences to be the three most popular factors that influence a child's reading preference, especially as they grow older (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009). According to the Canadian Council on Learning (2009), it was found that "boys' gendered attitudes towards reading keep them from reading as frequently as girls" (p. 5). Due to this "gap", it is important to expose boys to a variety of books at an early age, which will promote their enthusiasm and motivation for reading before they enter school and continue on as they progress through the upper grades. As for peer influences, "University of Michigan" (n.d.) state that "as peers accumulate gender-stereotyped information,

and behaviors, they are in turn shaped by their peers' beliefs and behaviors (p. 1).

Boys and girls demonstrate very different attitudes towards reading, some of which may be because of the different reading preferences that each gender possesses. Because of these differences, it is important to understand how boys and girls select books based on their interests and abilities, which in turn can motivate them to become better readers.

The literature and action research examined the various factors that motivate boys and girls when it comes to reading, while also addressing the mixture of influences that impact student reading preferences. Based on the reading disparity, this research project asks, given that the differences between boys and girls and their reading preferences impact their reading motivation, what factors influence boys and girls reading preferences? In order to determine both male and female reading preferences, a study was conducted in which 12 students, two boys and two girls from grades four, five, and six were chosen to participate in a study where they were asked to select books based on their interest level. Multiple surveys, interviews, and information from the school librarian (e.g. grade, gender, and genre) were gathered based on the types of books that students are checking out. From this study, it was found that there does not seem to be distinct factors that motivate boys and girls to read, however their reading preferences do vary.

Theoretical Framework

Many individuals describe literacy in various ways, partially because the definition has constantly changed, but all explanations encompass the dimensions of literacy. These dimensions of literacy: developmental, sociocultural, linguistic, and cognitive all relate to literacy events that happen throughout an individual's life. Gee (2002) defines literacy as "control of secondary language" where "discourses are a socially accepted association among

ways of using language, of thinking, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaning group or “social network” (p. 532). According to Gee, this definition means that primary discourses are acquired in the home through socialization with family members, which takes place mostly in oral form. Gee creates a cohesive definition that draws on the fact that literacy is a social practice in which individuals interact with one another to create an environment where they learn and acquire different aspects of literacy.

Much of what individuals know after their initial introduction to a topic is often times a mixture of acquisition and learning (Gee, 2002). Gee’s (2002) definition of literacy also draws on sociocultural theory, by stating that literacy is a process that involves a large amount of factors that affect a student’s learning process. According to Lankshear and Knobel (2003), the sociocultural perspective builds on a vigorous conception of literacy that can be found in a three-dimensional model including the operational, the cultural, and the critical dimensions. The operational dimension focuses on the language aspect of literacy. The cultural dimension involves competence with the meaning system of a social practice, knowing how to make and grasp meanings appropriately within the practice. However, the critical dimension involves awareness that all social practices and thus all literacies, are socially constructed and selective (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). The cultural dimension is important because as students are reading, they develop meaning from the topic that helps build upon their previous knowledge. The cultural dimension is also important because knowing that boys and girls possess different literacy strengths, the way the students’ interpret or select a text is often times dissimilar because they acquire different reading preferences as they progress through the higher grades.

Most children gain much of what they learn through the process of trial and error or modeling, almost always done without formal instruction (Gee, 2002). Williams (2008) finds it

important that teachers should continuously try to expand their students reading interests through practices that involve reading aloud to their students, modeling book selections, while offering them a wide access to books on a daily basis.

A second theoretical framework that is important to student reading motivation is the developmental dimension of literacy. This framework is important because according to Kucer (2009), "The child's focus is on trying to understand the intentions and meanings that undergird the language being used" (p. 270). If students are unable to comprehend the vocabulary, overall meaning of a text, etc. then they will become unmotivated to continue reading the text that has been selected for them. As children grow older, they will start to develop certain literacy skills that will benefit their learning styles and needs.

Kucer (2009) states that the meanings that are generated to meet an individual's purpose are displayed through various text types, genres, and text structures. Text type, genre, and text structures are systems of language that children encounter on a daily basis. A student's text type, genre, or text structure can affect their interest to read and their ability to comprehend what they are reading, which will in turn motivate the student to read.

This interplay among text type, genre, and text structure becomes particularly important for teachers to consider as students move beyond the primary classroom. Frequently, students who have acquired the literacy "basics" in the early grades suddenly encounter difficulty with informational, disciplinary-based discourses in the upper grades (Donahue, Voelkl, Campbell, & Mazzeo, 1999; Fang, 2008; Rand Reading Study Group, 2002; Wilhelm, 1996). Because of this complexity, students are often times unmotivated to read as they enter the upper grades because they fear they will not comprehend what they are reading, or they will simply not enjoy what they are asked to read.

The intertwining of new language structures and new concepts places new linguistic and cognitive demands on the students. Academic literacy tasks require students to analyze, synthesize, evaluate, and critique texts in ways not experienced in the primary classroom. The specialized ways with words (Greenleaf, Schoenbach, Cziko, & Mueller, 2001; Gebhard et al., 2007) and the specialized ways of thinking within the disciplines (Greenleaf, Jimenez, & Roller, 2002), as well as the specialized content, frequently cause students difficulty. Due to the difficulties that students face as they become older, they often times prefer to choose their own books, rather than having the teacher do it for them. As content areas become more demanding, it is important that students are still motivated to read, whether it be books that they can choose or their own, or books that they have had some input on.

Research Question

In this research paper, I will discuss various factors that motivate boys' and girls' when it comes to reading, while also addressing the mixture of influences that impact student reading preferences. Schwartz (2006) claims that boys and girls have different preferences, which can result in the large cause of the gender gap students are facing within the schools today. Given that boys and girls reading preferences vary, it is important that students are given the opportunity to choose texts based on their own preferences and interests. Based on the reading disparity, this research project asks, given that the differences between boys and girls and their reading preferences impact their reading motivation, what factors influence boys and girls reading preferences?

Literature Review

The literature review explores multiple perspectives on the issue of reading motivation and the factors that influence boys' and girls' reading preferences. Most of these perspectives

often times contradict one another, but both boys' and girls' reading preferences are identified.

First, I will investigate the effects of intrinsic and extrinsic rewards on reading motivation.

These rewards have shown to either motivate students' reading abilities, or have had the opposite effect on students, which results in being unmotivated. Secondly, there has been an ample amount of research done on the reading preferences of boys and girls. This research shows why boys, as well as girls, prefer certain genres, authors, book characteristics, etc. over others.

Finally, the different factors that influence these reading preferences will be examined thoroughly. Research shows that there are multiple aspects that determine why a student chooses certain reading material, other than just the physical features of a book.

The Effects of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Rewards on Reading Motivation

Throughout the field of education, both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, and a mixture of both has become a debatable topic on children's motivation. These factors often times influence the amount of motivation children have when it comes to reading. Corcoran and Mamalakis (2006) state that when children are experiencing increased motivation it is often times due to the increased amount of time that is spent on the assignment at hand. Students often times find this success rewarding, so therefore, they continue the pattern that has given them the satisfaction.

Building upon Corcoran and Mamalakis (2006), Atkinson (2006) has found similar findings in reading motivation. Atkinson (2006) recognizes that helping students to understand the importance of reading and the enjoyment it can bring children are necessary for increasing, creating, and sustaining reading achievement. Students' motivation is likely to increase when they are invested in a school assignment and feel excited about it. Motivation research has suggested that students thoughts and attitudes about their interest for reading and the value that reading has on motivation has a tendency to lead to increased commitment and knowledge that are central to attaining reading progress (Atkinson, 2006).

Corcoran and Mamalakis (2006) and Atkinson (2006) found that motivation plays a key role in students reading success. Throughout a school day, teachers are frequently providing rewards for their students reading behaviors, including praise, but also tangible or extrinsic rewards such as certificates, gifts, and special privileges. According to Chen and Wu (2010), teachers should use rewards judiciously in attempting to motivate students to read. To be effective, rewards should be intangible rather than tangible. The reinforcement theory states that “Rewards serve as reinforcers to increase the possibilities of desired behaviors” (Chen & Wu, 2010, p. 2). Gambrell and Marinak (2010) state that, “while phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension allow students to be skillful and strategic readers, without the intrinsic motivation to read, students may never reach their full potential as literacy learners” (p. 9). Lepola (2004) noticed similar patterns in children with both poor phonemic awareness and poor language comprehension skills, finding that they are at an increased risk of motivational problems than children with more favorably developed cognitive competencies. Lau (2009) credited the decrease of reading motivation to the unexpected shifts in students’ school reading experiences, such as a disconnection of reading instruction from all of the content areas, lack of teacher instruction on reading strategies, less student choice, separation of students from teachers, and not experiencing real-world interactions with texts.

Sex and grade also have an impact on student motivation (Chen & Wu, 2010; Gambrell & Marinak, 2010). Through research, it has been shown that sex and grade have a predictive effect on intrinsic, extrinsic, and global reading motivation (Chen & Wu, 2010). In addition, Coddington and Guthrie (2009) concluded that in general, girls and boys continue to maintain stereotypical gender roles within the classroom environment. Gender is a widely researched demographic variable in motivational studies. Previous studies have indicated that boys and girls

differ in certain types of motivational constructs as well as in their levels of motivation in gender-role stereotypic activities and subject domains. In general, boys tend to have higher self competence beliefs and are more oriented to performance goals, while girls are more oriented to mastery goals and have higher intrinsic motivation in learning (Lau, 2009). Boys in general report higher levels of ability and talent in the content areas of science and math, whereas girls tend to have more efficacies in language arts and writing (Coddington & Guthrie, 2009). It seems that it is not a matter of boys demonstrating a lower level of reading motivation; rather, the little motivation that boys are experiencing when reading a text can be due to the *value* that they place on reading activities within or outside of the classroom (Gambrell & Marinak, 2010).

Not only is the value students place on reading motivation vital in the lower grades, but also in the higher grades as well. However, both Gambrell and Marinak (2010) and Applegate, A. and Applegate, M. (2010) found that motivation to read decreases as children become older. This decline can even be seen among elementary school children. Several researchers have suggested that this decline or erosion for reading begins about the fourth-grade year. In contrast, Lepola (2004) found that children are predominately intrinsically motivated until the third grade, but in the upper grades students' intrinsic motivation declines and changes toward an extrinsic pattern. This information is contradicted by Mucherah and Yoder (2008), who found that younger children read more for extrinsic purposes compared to adolescents and eighth-grade students who are less motivated by extrinsic goals and are more motivated by intrinsic goals. Bauserman and Edmunds (2006) attribute this decline in motivation to the children's increasing consciousness of their own academic performance as compared to their peers, as well as to education that highlights competition and does not address children's interests.

Based on Chen and Wu (2010) and Gambrell and Marinak's (2010) views about the

affect gender has on motivation, Scholes (2010) found that girls are more motivated in reading than boys, because boys often times perceive reading as “nerdy” and “uncool,” which results in lower levels of reading. As noted by Scholes (2010), it is reluctant male readers who position reading outside the boundaries of their identity and appear to engage less in this endeavor whereby this reluctance subsequently contributes to creating narrow experiences of reading within the classroom context. Teachers have found that when reading is constructed as non-gendered, boys have a tendency to read more. It is important for teachers to realize what motivational techniques work best for each student; therefore, students should be actively engaged in lessons. The lessons should be made personal, meaningful, and relevant to both boys and girls interests and needs. Bauserman and Edmunds (2006) have found that there are two aspects to reading that get children excited about reading in general. These factors include characteristics of books and knowledge gained. Children enjoy books that are funny and scary, which has a positive effect on children’s reading motivation. By being able to choose these books, the children are gaining knowledge about things that interest them, which results in positively influencing their motivation to read more.

Based on Chen and Wu (2010), Gambrell and Marinak (2010), and Lau (2009), motivation plays a critical role in students reading interests. Corcoran and Mamalakis (2009) have found that research has shown the value of everyday teacher read-alouds and literature discussions on students at the intermediate level. By conducting read-alouds on a daily basis, children are seeing the importance of reading, and will engage in similar stories that they find interesting. Dedicating time towards intermediate students for read-alouds, discussions based on the stories, preference, and exploration of literature will motivate students to continue reading as they grow older.

Based on the research that has been conducted, there are multiple viewpoints on extrinsic motivation. Engagement in reading and the motivation to read intuitively go hand in hand. According to Mucherah and Yoder (2008), research shows that extrinsic sources of motivation may be challenging. Atkinson (2006) suggests very similar challenges, stating that while social class can strongly impact the performance amongst boys, intrinsic motivation is a more significant factor in attainment than extrinsic motivation. For example, students who are becoming actively involved in reading are only engaging in the text because of the expected reward that they receive, rather than developing an interest in reading for its own sake. Also, some students may lose interest in reading altogether when the teacher “fails” to recognize them. Because of this, it is important for students to realize that they themselves have to intrinsically become motivated when it comes to reading. According to both Gambrell & Marinak (2008) and Marinak (2007), the cognitive evaluation theory and personal causation theory suggests that if students are motivated intrinsically by an activity and not controlled forces, they are more likely to return to or frequently engage in the activity if given the chance. However, according to research, “Extrinsic rewards enhance motivation to read if the rewards are given for the following: low reading motivation or low interest in reading, effort, progress, and/or meaningful performance, attaining a challenging goal, and choice of learning activity” (Gambrell & Marinak, 2008, p. 12). In Marinak’s study (2007) she found that rewards that are attributed to reading-related experiences (books) do not weaken intrinsic motivation to read and that nonreading-related rewards (tokens) do damage reading motivation.

Reading Preferences of Boys’ and Girls’

Due to the gap between girls’ and boys’ reading abilities, it is important that both genders are motivated to read in an educational setting and at home. According to Merisuo-Storm

(2006), there is a contrast between boys and their school reading and “life reading,” but there are no differences for girls. School reading consists of texts that are too long and too difficult and unrelated to their individual interests, whereas life reading is based on their likes and interests and are usually short passages that relate to their individual lives. Life reading can often times be demanding, but boys feel capable of reading what they choose for themselves. Books, textbooks and popular culture magazines are mostly read by students in school (Merisuo-Storm, 2006).

In order to motivate both genders, students should be given an opportunity to select books based on their reading preferences on a regular basis. By providing students with choice, the gap between boys and girls reading abilities may diminish. Lu and Gordon (2008) found that because of the variety of book choices the students were given, they were more likely to find what was of interest to them, and therefore, the students were reading more than before. Duthie, Larsen, and Nippold (2005), and Hendershot and Moss (2002), share very similar thoughts like Lu and Gordon (2008), who reported that when students are engaging in literature related to topics that really interest them, their reading motivation, attitude towards reading, and effort all improve. Hendershot and Moss (2002) found that when students are provided with options and class time for reading, their motivation to read increases. Research noticeably confirms that the time students spend in school reading self-selected materials that are of interest to them not only increases their positive feelings about reading, but also improves student success (Hendershot & Moss, 2002).

Lu and Gordon (2008) and Hendershot and Moss (2002) found that when students are given reading choices, reading motivation increases. However, as noted by Davila and Patrick (2010) there is a distinct difference between the concepts of reading interest and reading

preference. For example, a preference infers a “forced choice,” in which one selects a book option from a defined collection found in a library or bookstore. In contrast, an interest reflects one’s personal curiosity and imagination. Thus, it is possible that one’s interest may not be represented by any of the books within a defined collection. Cavazos-Kottke (2006) shared very similar thoughts based on reading interests and reading preferences. Essentially, interest includes an assortment of books that a student might be likely to read, while preference refers to the various kinds of texts a student might be interested in reading, no matter if he or she has read books related to the same topic in the past. Based on these differences, a child’s interests inform his or her reading preferences.

According to both Merisuo-Storm (2006) and Chapman, Filipenko, McTavish, and Shapiro (2007), similar findings were found, in which the reader should find the topic of the book intriguing and be able to possess enough background information related to the information presented in the content area. Therefore, it is critical that students are being offered with a wide array of reading material. In other words, an assortment of books that represents various themes, different levels of difficulty, and diverse genres of literature are crucial. From this research on reading achievement, educators have found that children reading at the primary level have important consequences both cognitively and affectively when providing them with various forms of genres (Chapman, Filipenko, McTavish, & Shapiro, 2007).

Chen and Wu (2010) and Gambrell and Marinak (2010) found that gender and grade had an effect on reading motivation, but according to Chapman et al. (2007) it was found that viewing gender from a social aspect rather than from the traditional approaches, assumes that there is no variation at all between boys and girls. According to this view, students reading preferences for one genre over another result from their interactions with other individuals. This

view creates a mixture of children's gendered literate identities and emphasizes the traditional ideas of what boys and girls like to read (Chapman et al., 2007). Children's awareness of what other students like to read reflects their gender stereotypical ideas. For example, boys chose significantly more story books than informational books for girls, and the opposite for boys, indicating a notion that boys prefer to read informational books and that girls prefer to read stories. The girls also thought that like the boys, boys prefer informational books and girls have a greater preference for story books (Chapman et al., 2007). It shows that boys' insights of what other boys like to read are based not on their own reading preferences and selections, but rather from a general understanding of what they have known to be true. Chapman et al. (2007) also state that when selecting reading materials for children, it is important that gender is not the only deciding factor. It is essential that teachers and parents consider children's interests and, at the same time, encourage both genders to read an assortment of genres for the benefits that grow from different texts. Ulper (2011) found similar patterns compared to Chapman et al. (2007), by stating that parents who take the responsibility by discussing the books they read and by talking about the books with their children, this has a remarkable effect for motivating children to read. In 2011, Ulper's study found that, students believe that if they are allowed to select the books they want to read, they will be motivated to read more. Children's motivation to read will increase when they are provided with interesting books which emphasizes the importance of interest.

Chapman et al. (2007) found that there are ample factors that motivate students to read, but Atkinson (2006) found that both genders have a different purpose for reading and, by the age of seven, these differences are evident between boys and girls reading preferences. Mohr (2006) found that stories, especially folk tales and fantasy are more prevalent in younger readers, but as

they grow through the intermediate grades, their genre preferences increase. Because of the differences in reading preferences at various grade levels, it is important that boys and girls are being provided with adequate exposure to a mixture of texts. This exposure will help students to develop and apply the literacy skills and strategies they have been taught, which will transfer to real-world reading. It is evident through research that, overall, boys read less than girls, tend to be less confident, have little motivation to read, reading is not considered as a free time activity, and overall, have less interest in reading than girls (Farris, Fuhler, Nelson, & Werderich, 2009). Due to boys' lack of interest in reading, Farris et al. (2009) define a pedagogical environment for stimulating boys' reading habits as one in which

Everyday voices are welcomed in a permeable curriculum in which children's relationships with each other are a kind of breeding ground for meaningful literacy use...Moreover, it includes ample guidance so that diverse populations and audiences can be made socially sensible for and with children; in this way, children are supported in entering new kinds of textual conversations, new sorts of dialogues with the world (p. 181).

Mohr (2006) found distinct differences between boys' and girls' reading preferences. However, all teachers search to find books that every reader will enjoy, but the book that seems to hook a particular boy reader is often times intangible. Farris et al. (2009), Williams (2008), and Duthie, Larsen, and Nippold (2005) agree that boys preferred to read comic strips, magazines, scary stories, fact books and informational books that included short passages that was supported by either photographs or cartoon drawings. Shelley-Robinson (2001) states that informational books and books that often times reveal violent behavior, strong physical action between characters, and much anticipation is preferred by most boy readers. Boys also have an eager

interest in stories pertaining to war, sports, adventure and exploration, science and machines and inventions. However, the least popular pieces of literature that male students prefer are plays, technical books or newspapers. These interests that boys portray seem to contradict Atkinson (2006) and Davila and Patrick (2010), who found that boys reported reading newspapers.

Atkinson (2006) states that reasons for these interests are uncertain but could be attributed to the specific interests that boys possess. Another conclusion could be because they view reading newspapers as a favored reading choice among their adult male role models. Davila and Patrick (2010) believe these preferences to be true because if boys read what they read because they identify with men, it makes sense that boys would interact more frequently with information-based books and texts, including newspapers, annuals, and manuals.

The top five subject preferences that boys centered around were on animals, science, sports, literature and biography. Mohr (2006) found very similar findings compared to Farris et al. and Williams (2008), in that, boy readers have often shown to prefer nonfiction texts that include sports, science, and history information. However, the subject of animals has been linked with both boys' and girls' preferences, whereas Farris et al. and Williams (2008), found animals to be of interest to boys. In contrast, Shelley-Robinson (2001) found that stories related to animals were noted as being of interest mostly to girls. Another distinct difference between Mohr (2006), Williams (2008) and Lu and Gordon (2008) is that Williams (2008) and Lu and Gordon (2008) found that girls were less likely than boys to select nonfiction books. Whereas, Mohr (2006) found the same gender inconsistency; however, her participants varied from prior participants because girls chose more nonfiction books than they did fiction books. This finding disagrees with much of the previous research that indicates young readers, particularly girls, favor narrative text.

Another distinguishing factor that relates to reading preferences are stated in Farris et al. (2009) who found that boys selected books that were written by a favorite author or part of a series. The boys in this study indicated that they enjoyed being able to follow a particular character through a number of situations and, in the case of sequel books, over multiple years. These preferences were also seen in Williams (2008) study where boys preferred series because of the fact that they would be able to see the character “grow” over the course of a few books. Merisuo-Storm (2006) found similar findings as Farris et al. (2009) and Williams (2008), in that boys enjoy reading books that contain humor, have short chapters and cliff-hanger endings that leave the reader wanting to read more, and include some funny or slightly gross things that make the reader feel what they’re reading is a bit rebellious. In contrast, Davila and Patrick (2010) indicate that research shows that girls like to read sequenced fiction-based stories- in other words, series books.

Like Corcoran and Mamalakis (2009), Farris et al. (2009) noticed the importance of teacher read-alouds on students reading preferences. Male students often times chose books that have been written by the same author or on similar topics that their teacher had shared with them during a read-aloud. These selections are mostly found in struggling readers because they prefer not to select books on their own. Williams (2008) states that as literacy educators and classroom teachers it is important to recognize reading interests and preferences of boys within the classroom. Observing the different types of texts that are available to incorporate into lessons will encourage boys to read, while giving them a purpose for reading.

Although there are differences between boys’ and girls’ reading preferences as stated by Merisuo-Storm (2006), Farris et al.(2009) and Williams (2008), girls have a wider range of preferences and interests when it comes to book choices. For example, Davila and Patrick

(2010) state that while boys prefer books with male protagonists; girls will read stories with either heroes or heroines. Mohr (2006) contradicts this statement by saying boys prefer to read about male characters, while girls prefer stories with female protagonists. The reason given for the girls reading preferences might suggest that girls choose young adult materials as a means to reading up (Davila & Patrick, 2010). According to both Williams (2008) and Davila and Patrick (2010), girls have a much greater preference for realistic teen fiction, as well as romance and/or relationship stories, emotion, pets, horses, plays, and animal stories. Shelley-Robinson (2001) found very similar findings like Williams (2008) and Davila and Patrick (2010), in that, girls generally prefer stories that include romance, one's family life, growing up, social empathy, sentimentality, fiction, catalogues, song lyrics, poetry, and interpersonal relationships. When it comes to fiction, however, girls like funny, scary, adventure-based fiction stories as much as boys.

Williams (2008) found that race was a factor that impacted students reading preferences. In Williams' (2008) study, it was found that books that illustrated Black famous people or characters on the covers were selected more by female participants. Females were twice as likely as male participants to select these books; however, most of these texts were biographies of individuals that were widely known through the media. This finding suggests that girl participants, more so than boys, could have been greatly influenced by books that featured representation of the media, rather than with those individuals with similar skin tones.

Although there are distinct differences between boys' and girls' reading preferences, there are also many similarities. For example, Williams (2008) found that with either gender being equally symbolized, book characteristics of either the inside or outside of the book were acknowledged for at least one book selection. An equal comparison was also made for the

percent of participants who chose more than one book because they assumed that certain family members would like them. Finally, a common occurrence of book selections was a participant's everyday culture. Media and mass marketing are a few influences that infused many participants' everyday cultures and as a result impacted the students' book selections (Williams, 2008).

Mohr (2006) states that there have been disputes among various experts concerning gender differences that are not inherited, rather culturally influenced. If this is the case, "cultural norms change, assessing boys and girls independent reading behaviors is of renewed interest, especially with picture books that have historically prompted gender stereotyping" (p. 84). Williams (2008) finds it important that educators continually strive to expand their students' reading interests through various practices that include teacher read-alouds, modeling how to choose different books, while offering boys and girls a wide access to books; however, educators should not fail to see their students' everyday cultural interests because these preferences can encourage students to read more. Williams (2008) also states that modeling book selections for students and their personal reading is an important consideration for educators. As teachers model these book selections, students will be increasing their awareness of different topics, authors, series, and genres.

Factors that Influence Reading Preferences

Not only are children motivated to read what they select, but other factors are also taken into consideration when a child reads. Students' parents, siblings, and peers, as well as their culture images all play an important role in children's selection of reading materials. Geske and Ozola (2009) have found that there are multiple factors explaining students' reading achievements. Several studies have indicated that there are various factors that influence

children's literacy levels. These factors include gender, confidence, motivation and attention towards reading, school, parents' schooling, socioeconomic and culture disparities, and various home situations as well as children's background. As for gender, the school environment has a greater impact on boys reading achievement, which could be stimulated by them reading more outside of school. A child's home should include an atmosphere that encourages or supports reading, which results in greater reading achievements as the child grows older. Lastly, a child who has parents' that are well educated shows a positive relationship with reading achievement. This means that children with educated parents have higher reading success and preschool writing skills (Geske & Ozola, 2009).

Atkinson (2006), Williams (2008), and Mohr (2006) can relate to Geske and Ozola (2009) because they also found that a child's social class and cultural differences may drastically influence their reading achievement. Williams (2008) noted that multicultural theorists are more likely to believe that once students notice their own cultures and experiences being reflected through reading materials, they will become increasingly motivated to read. Mohr (2006) stated that "socially influenced reading behaviors might include the preponderance of nonfiction books promoting science careers and targeted to boys and recently published multicultural literature that targets minority populations" (p. 84).

Merisuo-Storm (2006) found very similar findings like Geske and Ozola (2009), which state when a child's upbringing offers a rich reading atmosphere that includes various books and magazines, and when parents are able to read to their children on a daily basis, the children are more likely to adopt a positive attitude because of the various factors that they have experienced as a child. These factors show how important the role of reading and writing are in the lives of other family members. Furthermore, the convenience of appropriate and interesting reading

material at home is significant for children's reading development. In school, it is important that teacher's portray their love for literature, while allowing interesting reading and writing materials to be of easy accesses to students. As the child grows older, the influences of their peers increase (Merisuo-Storm, 2006).

Like Geske and Ozola (2009), Shelley-Robinson (2001) found that the impact of a child's geographic location, rather it be rural or urban, on children's reading interests, especially in developing countries, had an impact of the students book selection choices. In Shelley-Robinson's (2001) study, it showed that geography was a definite problem for Jamaica. This problem could be attributed to Jamaica being a developing country, which had limited resources to purchase books.

Although Geske and Ozola (2009) did not identify peer perceptions as being a factor that influences boys and girls reading and or reading preferences, Atkinson (2006) found that during a child's teenage years they want to be able to identify themselves from the point of view of others. This viewpoint is important for children because it shows how one appears to others. At this age, peer involvement becomes increasingly vital and adolescents' views about achievement and motivation are influenced by their classmates. Both Williams (2008) and Gordon and Lu (2008) agree with Geske and Ozola (2009) in that book recommendations from peers, teachers, or family members really impact what students read. Gordon and Lu (2008) state that reading interests and book recommendations by friends, family, or teachers are the two most important factors affecting children's book selections.

Most factors that influence boys and girls reading preferences are similar (Geske and Ozola, 2009), but boys tend to possess a few different factors when deciding whether or not to read, or even what book to read. For example, Atkinson (2006) states that there are multiple

factors that affect boys' literacy achievement. These factors include community expectations, family pressure, early literacy experiences, peer group pressures and stereotyping, classroom situations, parents' expectations that are placed on their children, certain behavioral issues and the availability of literacy materials that are offered by schools. As noted in Merisuo-Storm (2006), similar findings were found, in that teachers should invest their time discovering what their students interests are and use the information when planning and instructing their literacy teaching because boys find the approval of friends and peers important. Schools should provide boys with diverse reading materials that they can find fascinating. Davila and Patrick (2010) found another factor affecting boys reading factors and preferences which are influenced by their hegemonic stance as efferent readers. Efferent readers read for specific information, as in looking for an answer to a question.

Not only does the geographic location (Shelley-Robinson, 2001), or the social class and cultural differences (Geske and Ozola, 2009) affect student preferences, but also the physical features of a book play into affect what boys prefer to read. Farris et al. (2009) found that boys often select books to read based on the look of the cover. It was found that struggling readers or students with lower reading abilities would skim through the book in order to examine the print layout. Books with wide margins, large print, ample amount of white space, and relatively shorter compared to others, were often selected. Mohr (2006) seemed to contradict this statement because she found that "nearly one third of the students' responses mentioned visually scanning the book or books to make their selections, but more girls than boys preferred to look through the book to make a decision" (p. 93). Another physical feature that attracts boy readers would include books that have strange or abnormal fonts. Lastly, the visual characteristics such as captions above or below pictures, colorful photographs, and graphics throughout the book

seemed to hold the interest of many male readers. Cavazos-Kottke (2006) found very similar findings in that texts that tend to be relatively short, highly visual, both in text and graphic descriptions, connected closely to real life situations, include present information, allow readers to be on edge while reading, and entertaining are likely to engage many boy readers. Hendershot and Moss's (2002) study also found that pictures and other visuals were dominant factors in student books selections. Most of the students reported that their book selections were influenced by the visual features that consisted of pictures on the cover or photographs that were seen throughout the book. Sometimes, however, the visuals all the way through the book encouraged students to consider the connections between what they were reading and their own lives. These visuals provided an incentive for deeper thinking about the title and led to various speculations about the text (Hendershot & Moss, 2002).

Chapman et al. (2007) found similar findings like Farris et al. (2007) and Cavazo-Kottke (2006), but differed slightly in that all children were attracted to books for many reasons that included visual appearances, text topic, humor, and the literary merit (awards) that certain books received. However, male students made additional observations that were related to specific connections, more so than female students, but all addressed the texts visual appeal, interest in topic, and humor. As Chapman et al. (2007) observed "it's not the text type (nonfiction) that engages so much as certain features of texts, such as visuals and topic of interest, features which allow readers to make connections to the world" (p. 542). On the other hand, Ulper (2011) slightly differed in his findings, which found that the color and the design of the cover of the book have an effect on the reader's attitude.

Edmunds and Bauserman (2006) also found similar findings in which personal interests, characteristics of the books, choice, family members, and peers were all factors that influenced

students' book selection choices. In order for students to select a book, they have to be funny or scary, have exciting covers, action-packed plots, humor, and great illustrations. Children's reading motivation and what they are presently reading can be influenced by their family members. Children often report that they choose books based on family input from their mothers, fathers, siblings, and or cousins. In Edmund and Bauserman's 2006 study, children frequently answered that their mothers had the maximum impact on their reading preferences. As for peers, it was stated that most of the children had found out about books they wanted to read through their friends.

It is imperative to not misjudge the importance that reading has on children during their childhood and adolescence years. Duthie et al. (2005) found that as children grow older, there interests to engage in texts are less likely to occur because of the other free-time possibilities that are competing for the adolescent's attention. A decline in reading achievement is problematic for any students who shun all other kinds of reading aside and for those whose language and literacy skills are weak. Luckily, certain skills and activities can be implemented by the classroom teacher that can "maintain and even expand students' enthusiasm for reading when their individual needs and preferences are considered" (Duthie, Larsen, & Nippold, 2005, p. 100).

Method

Context

Research for this study will occur in the Rainbow Ridge Intermediate School (a pseudonym). Rainbow Ridge is constantly striving to offer their students, pre-kindergarten through grade twelve, with a rich foundation that will provide them with success within the classrooms and then continue on after they graduate. Rainbow Ridge Intermediate School serves

students in grades four through six, with more than 950 students' altogether (The New York State School Report Card, 2011). Students who are eligible for free lunch consists of only 51 students' (5%), while 40 students (4%) receive reduced lunch (The New York State School Report Card, 2011). Rainbow Ridge is a predominately white school with 92% of their students being White, 2% are Black or African American, 2% are Hispanic or Latino and 3% are Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (The New York State School Report Card, 2011). The classroom where the research took place was in a multi-age classroom, consisting of students in all three grades, four through six. Multi-age encompasses different ability levels of students who are grouped together, without separating them or the curriculum by grade. Students who are placed in this classroom spend more than one school year together while recognizing the benefits of social interaction with their peers.

Participants

Throughout the course of collecting the data, a total of twelve students from grades four through six were researched, along with the classroom teacher and the school librarian. Four students, two boys and two girls, from each of the three grade levels were selected. These students consisted of both struggling and strong readers.

One of the two multi-age classroom teachers was also included in the study. Ms. Smith (a pseudonym) has been with the Rainbow Ridge School District for 20 years, 18 of which have been in the multi-age classroom. When Rainbow Ridge was first designing the multi-age curriculum, she was part of the committee that made decisions based on the program. Since then changes have been made to the program and teachers have been moved, but Ms. Smith has been a consistent face for all students going through the multi-age program at the Intermediate School.

The school librarian, Mrs. White (a pseudonym) has been an elementary school librarian

for 13 years, all of which have been at the Rainbow Ridge Intermediate School. Throughout these years, she has observed many factors that play into the book selections of boys and girls reading preferences.

Ben (a pseudonym) is a 4th grade, 9 year old Caucasian male student who receives no additional services outside of the classroom. Ben is a student who is consistently distracted and is very unorganized. He is always concerned with everyone else and what they are doing rather than focusing on the assignment at hand.

Ava (a pseudonym) is a 4th grade, 10 year old Caucasian female student who was adopted at a very young age. Ava receives no academic services. She is an average student who is very conscientiousness, kind, and hard working.

Cam (a pseudonym) is a 4th grade, 9 year old Caucasian male student whose parents are divorced. Because of the separation between his two parents, he now has a step father and a step mother. Cam is an above average student who is good in math and likes science. Cam is also liked by all of his classmates and gets along well with others.

Kia (a pseudonym) is a 4th grade, 9 year old Chinese female student, whose parents are both Chinese as well. Kia is an excellent student, is very organized, and loves to read. Her parents believe that she doesn't receive enough homework every night, so they provide her with more. Kia is an outcast by personality, but in her past she has written a class play and currently publishes articles in her school newspaper.

Ella (a pseudonym) is a 5th grade, 10 year old Caucasian female student who is the youngest child in her family. Ella is an average student who receives no additional services. This school year, she is much more responsible with completing her homework by the assigned due date. Both of the multi-age teachers have also seen a great deal of maturity this year

compared to last school year.

Avery (a pseudonym) is a 5th grade, 10 year old Caucasian female student who is the youngest of four kids in her family. Avery receives no additional services, however she is a below average student who is extremely unorganized. She is also a student who very rarely completes her homework.

Jackson (a pseudonym) is an 11 year old Caucasian male student who is in 5th grade. He is a middle child who comes from a household with divorced parents. Due to his low self-esteem, he has difficulty interacting with other students in his class. Jackson is an intelligent student who receives no additional services, but has a hard time focusing on the assignment at hand. His teacher often times refers to him as a “day dreamer.” Jackson loves art and drawing.

Carter (a pseudonym) is a 10 year old Caucasian male student who is in 5th grade. Carter is the only child in his family. He receives no additional services, but is often times lazy, manipulative, and is a student who feels superior to his classmates, which results in very few, if any, strong relationships with the other students. According to his teachers, he is a student who thinks he knows everything.

Jacob (a pseudonym) is a sensitive, affectionate, and conscientious 6th grade, 12 year old Caucasian male student. Jacob is a middle child. He is a good student who has really come a long way in the three years that he has been in multi-age. He is actively involved in hockey and lacrosse.

Payton (a pseudonym) is a 6th grade, 12 year old Caucasian female student who is the oldest of three children. She doesn't receive any services, but does have a very difficult time separating supporting details from big ideas while reading. Payton is sensitive, kind to others, and is overall a great student. In her free time she babysits and participates in karate.

Cash (a pseudonym) is a 6th grade, 11 year old Caucasian male student who is the youngest of two boys in his family. Cash is extremely strong in math; however he struggles with his writing skills. During his math block, he is escorted to the junior high school, where he participates in 7th grade math. Cash is a very compliant and quiet student who is well liked by everyone. Sports are a big part of his life, as well as his family's.

Isabella (a pseudonym) is a 6th grade, 12 year old Caucasian female student who is the youngest child among her siblings. Her parents are divorced and each remarried, resulting in Isabella having two separate families. Isabella is an average to above average student, however she is lazy and very rarely completes her homework, but when she does, it is never done well. Isabella struggles to find her close knit "group" of friends.

Researcher Stance

As a researcher, I took on the role of a passive observer. According to Mills (2011) a passive observer is one in which solely focuses on data collection and no longer has student interaction or responsibility on a teacher level. Implications of this role on my research may include losing out on student and teacher interactions, as well as the opportunities to engage in the daily challenges and rewards that personal interaction leads to. As an examiner, I have had the pleasure of knowing Ms. Smith for many years and working with her class as a substitute teacher. Ms. Smith was my multi-age teacher for three years when I went through the Rainbow Ridge Intermediate School. Currently, I am a graduate student at St. John Fisher College working towards achieving my Master's Degree in Literacy Education, birth through grade twelve. I presently have my bachelor's degree and certification in Elementary and Special Education, birth through grade 6, from St. John Fisher College.

Method

During this study, I conducted multiple questionnaires (Appendix A), interviews (Appendix B), collected data and observed boys and girls selecting books based on their reading preferences, and gathered information (e.g. grade, gender, and genre) from the school librarian about the types of books that students are checking out. By distributing surveys to the students' parents and the school librarian and conducting interviews with the classroom teacher and the twelve students, I gathered further insight on the reading preferences of boys and girls. The parents, school librarian, classroom teacher and students were all asked similar questions based on reading and student preference, but the context of each question was slightly different. The parent surveys were sent home with the kids and were asked to be returned to school as soon as possible. The librarian's survey was delivered to her on a Thursday and was collected the following school day. Both the student and teacher interviews were conducted in the school setting, where each of their answers was voice recorded for the clarity and detail of their responses.

I observed twelve students selecting books based on their reading preferences during a single 1-2 hour time slot. The students were observed outside of their classroom in an environment that was not distracting to students and did not influence their text choices. During this time, the twelve students were divided into their appropriate grade level. First, I observed the 4 fourth grade students, then the 4 fifth grade students, and finally the 4 sixth grade students in selecting grade appropriate texts. The students had roughly 8-10 books that they will be able to select from, some of which were fiction and others that were non-fiction. The majority of these books that students were able to choose from were non-gender bias stories and stories that may be geared more towards female or male students. I observed student reactions (e.g. facial

expressions, whether or not they choose a book based on its cover, whether or not they read the first paragraph or page to see if it is something that will interest them, or if they are flipping through the pages, etc.) and peer interactions as they reviewed and chose books. After the students had time (roughly ten-fifteen minutes) to review the books, I asked follow up questions to each of the students. These questions consisted of “Why did you choose the book(s)?” and “What factors contributed to you choosing the book(s)?” By asking these questions, it gave me further insight as to why certain books were selected.

Quality and Credibility of Research

In conducting this research, it was important to guarantee the quality and credibility of the study. Mills (2011) defines credibility as “the researcher’s ability to take into account the complexities that present themselves in a study and to deal with patterns that are not easily explained” (p. 104). In order to assure the credibility throughout this study, I incorporated multiple strategies. These strategies included peer debriefing, practicing triangulation and collecting data items. By engaging in peer debriefing with my critical colleague, it allowed me to reflect on the various components of my research and data, while also providing me with additional insights to various components throughout my research that I may have not seen otherwise. Triangulation will be a second aspect of the study that I took part in. According to Mills (2011), practicing triangulation means that the researcher is evaluating various data sources while using different methods, which results in cross-checking of data. In the process of collecting my data, I used multiple approaches. These approaches consisted of observing the twelve students in a passive way, while also conducting student and teacher interviews based on student reading preferences. The third form of credibility that I used was collecting documents, interviews, surveys, voice recordings, and all observations that I take note of while the students

reviewed the various book choices.

Transferability was also incorporated into my study. Mills (2011) defines transferability as “qualitative researchers’ beliefs that everything they study is context bound and that the goal of their work is not to develop “truth” statements that can be generalized to larger groups of people” (p. 104). In order to assure transferability, I collected very detailed and descriptive observation notes of the students reviewing and selecting their book choices. By collecting specific notes, it allowed me to understand the explicit factors that affect students reading preferences.

Dependability, which refers to the stability of the data, was also important to ensure during the study (Mills, 2011). Overlap methods, which is very similar to the triangulation process, was used. Student observations and data and student interviews were two methods that were used in such a way that the weakness of one was compensated by the strength of the other (Mills, 2011).

Finally, confirmability, which Mills (2011) defines as “the neutrality or objectivity of the data that has been collected” (p. 105) was ensured throughout the research. By conducting student interviews and observations I was able to compare my findings and cross-check the data. Lastly, I was able to practice reflexivity, which allowed me to reflect back on the information that I have gathered and allowed me to create further questions or observations if needed to enhance my research.

Informed Consent and Protecting the Right of the Participants

Before beginning the research process, it was imperative that I collected informed consent from all of the individuals that I gathered information from in order to enhance the quality of my research. This research is a qualitative study where I had various interactions with

students, their parents, the classroom teacher, and the school librarian. The classroom teacher and school librarian were both given consent forms that discussed the study and were asked for their permission and signature to use any or all of the information that was given to me through the surveys or interviews to improve the quality of my research. In addition, I also gave each of the twelve students an assent form, as well as their parents asking for permission to work with their child, while also using the data I collect to improve my research stance. For this study, it was important to note that all parents know that the name of their child will be anonymous and that identifying marks will be removed from all of the student observations and interviews during the study. All of the participants' names were replaced with pseudonyms and confidentiality was guaranteed.

Data Collection

As mentioned previously, there were various forms of data that were collected. While being a passive observer, I was able to observe how each student interacted with the various texts and the factors that played a role in their book selections. During all of the observations, I took detailed and descriptive notes that allowed me to assess and analyze the different text selections. After each observation, I asked students two follow-up questions that also aided in developing a more accurate understanding of their book choices. Lastly, the surveys that were completed by the students' parents (12), the school librarian and also the interviews from the classroom teacher, and the twelve students were analyzed in order to improve the quality of my research paper.

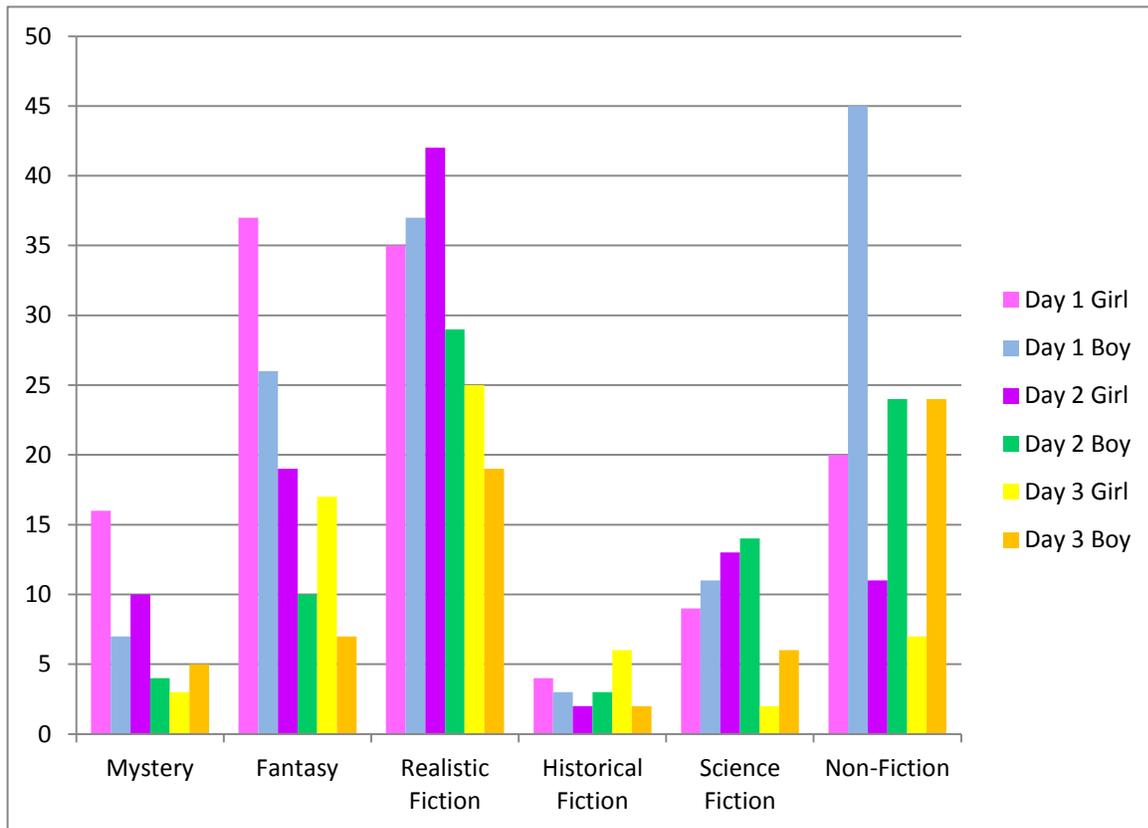
Data Analysis

After all forms of data were collected, I reflected back on each piece and analyzed what I observed. For example, after the students selected books based on their interests, I thoroughly

examined my field notes and later compared them to the student interviews that I conducted. I wanted to make sure what each student said in their interview matched with what I saw in my observations. After I conducted all of my student interviews, I made sure to listen to the audio recordings multiple times to make sure I included everything the students stated. When analyzing all of my data, I made sure to first read through each piece and then the second, third, fourth, and fifth times I was analyzing each form. When analyzing each interview, I went through and looked for commonalities between each one. When a common characteristic was found, I made sure to code it. After the common characteristics were found is when I was able to identify my themes. The information that I received from the school librarian and the students parents were organized into a chart. I found that this was the easiest way to display this information, while reinforcing the major themes.

Findings and Discussion

The results of this action research were very similar with the various sources that were used in the literature review. The first form of data was collected by the help of the school librarian. Over a three day period data was collected, which included the gender of the 4th, 5th, and 6th grade students and the genre of the book that the students checked out of the Rainbow Ridge Intermediate School library. I chose to include this as part of my action research because it shows the reading preferences of what boys and girls prefer to read when given the opportunity to select books on their own.

Figure 1.1. Summary of Student Genre Reading Preferences

On day one, the same amount of the books that were checked out by both boys and girls were Realistic Fiction stories that were preferred more by male students and Fantasy stories that were preferred more by female students. However, this information contradicts both the school librarian and the literature review. Mohr (2006) found that boy readers have often shown to prefer nonfiction texts that include sports, science, and history information.

On days two and three, Realistic Fiction stories were preferred more by female students. When the librarian was asked which genre she finds female and male students are most attracted to she responded, “Girls are more open to different types of books such as Realistic Fiction, Ghost stories, and Mysteries, whereas boys prefer Fantasy, Survival stories, and Sports” (Librarian Questionnaire, 2/16/12). This information is contradicted by Ms. Smith (Multi-Age

school teacher), who states that, “Boys tend to be more open minded when it comes to book selection. Even if the book doesn’t look appealing, they will often read about the book to make a decision” (Teacher Interview, 3/9/12). Additionally, according to Shelley-Robinson (2001), informational books and books that often times reveal violent behavior, strong physical action between characters, and much anticipation is preferred by most boy readers. Boys also have an eager interest in stories pertaining to war, sports, adventure and exploration, science and machines and inventions. Perhaps this interpretation could be due to the media’s power and society’s notion that boys are seen as strong, unemotional, and can be impacted by what they observe from these influences. In addition, like the school librarian, Merisuo-Storm (2006), Farris et al. (2009) and Williams (2008) have found that girls have a wider range of preferences and interests when it comes to book choices. These preferences could be attributed to their notion that reading is considered “feminine” so it is acceptable for females to read a variety of material.

When looking at the chart, more girls read Mystery stories than boys 2/3 days. Fantasy stories were read more by girls 3/3 days and more girls read Realistic Fiction and Historical Fiction stories than boys 2/3 days, which the librarian also believed to be true. However, more boys read Science Fiction and Non-Fiction stories on all three days. Perhaps this data could be due to the push for Non-Fiction stories in the common core, which calls for primary sources and pieces that reflect social studies and scientific topics. The significance of the new common core assist educators in ensuring that their students are given the skills and knowledge that they need in order to become successful in the future.

A second form of quantitative data that was collected consisted of parent and school librarian questionnaires. Both the parents of the fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students and the

Rainbow Ridge Intermediate School librarian were asked very similar questions. Below is a chart summarizing all of their responses based on their knowledge of their child or students' reading preferences and what affect certain variables have on student motivation when it comes to reading.

Table 1

Summary of Parent and Librarian Questionnaires

Questionnaire Question	4 th Grade Parents (4)	5 th Grade Parents (3)	6 th Grade Parents (4)	School Librarian
Do you find that most students(your child) select a book based on its cover?	100% NO	33% YES 66% NO	25% YES 75% NO	100% YES

In table one, 100 percent of the fourth grade parents believe that their child does not select a book based on its cover; however the school librarian stated that, "The cover of a book is very important. Kids pick books that have kids that 'look' like them on the cover" (Rainbow Ridge School Librarian, 2/16/12). This drastic difference between the parents understanding and the school librarian's understanding could perhaps be due to the fact the students' parents are unsure of the factors that affect their child's book selections. Like the school librarian, Hendershot and Moss's (2002) study also found that pictures and other visuals were dominant factors in student book selections. Most of the students reported that their book selections were influenced by the visual features that consisted of pictures on the cover or photographs that were seen throughout the book.

Two fourth grade parents stated in their questionnaires that their child used to select books based on the cover until they were older. Now they read the back of the book when deciding whether or not to select a text, instead of only looking at the cover. Perhaps this

information could be true because as students grow older they develop more strategies that allow them to look deeper into a text, rather than solely selecting a book because of its cover.

Table 2

Summary of Parent and Librarian Questionnaires

Questionnaire Question	4 th Grade Parents (4)	5 th Grade Parents (3)	6 th Grade Parents (4)	School Librarian
When students (your child) are selecting books, do you see them skimming through the pages?	25% YES 75% NO	33% YES 66% NO	50% YES 50% NO	100% YES

When asked when students are selecting books if they skim through the pages, many parents had different beliefs. For example, in table two, 75 percent of the fourth grade parents said that their child does not, 66 percent of the fifth grade parents also said their child does not, and 50 percent of the sixth grade parents said their child does not, while the other 50 percent said they do. Rainbow Ridge's Intermediate School librarian stated that, "When their teacher has emphasized this strategy, they are more likely to do it" (2/16/12). This information might be a result of teachers spending time instructing their students on how to select appropriate books for their reading level and reading interests. Perhaps this instruction takes place in the beginning of the school year so students are able to apply this knowledge throughout the year. As stated earlier, this information may be due to the fact that as students grow older, they develop various strategies and techniques when selecting books, therefore the parents of the sixth grade students observe their child skimming through the book looking for graphics, font size, the length of the book, etc. because they have developed these strategies as they progress through the higher grades.

Table 3

Summary of Parent and Librarian Questionnaires

Questionnaire Question	4 th Grade Parents (4)	5 th Grade Parents (3)	6 th Grade Parents (4)	School Librarian
Do you see most students (your child) selecting books based on their interests?	100% YES	100% YES	75% YES 25% NO	100% YES

According to table three, when asked if children read books based on their interests, parents of fourth and fifth grade students, and the school librarian all stated that they do 100 percent of the time, however, only 75 percent of the sixth grade parents responded yes. Twenty-five percent said, "While he does read some books that directly relate to his interests, he reads a very diverse group of subjects" (Parent Questionnaire, 2/27/12). Perhaps this information could be attributed to as students progress through the upper grades, their required reading is often subject based. Hendershot and Moss (2002) reported that when students are engaging in literature related to topics that really interest them, their reading motivation, attitude towards reading, and effort all improve. Perhaps when students are given the opportunity to self select their own reading materials, not only does their reading motivation increase, but also their overall student success.

Table 4

Summary of Parent and Librarian Questionnaires

Questionnaire Question	4 th Grade Parents (4)	5 th Grade Parents (3)	6 th Grade Parents (4)	School Librarian
Do most children (your child) select books based on the content or curriculum they are learning?	50% YES 50% NO	33% YES 66% NO	25% YES 75% NO	100% NO

By looking at table four, it is evident that as children grow older, their reading preferences for stories based around the content or curriculum that they are learning in school starts to diminish. Perhaps as students reach the higher grades, books are only being selected based on the content or curriculum they are learning if their teacher is requiring it. According to Merisuo-Storm (2006), "school reading" consists of texts that are too long and too difficult and unrelated to students' individual interests.

Table 5

Summary of Parent and Librarian Questionnaires

Questionnaire Question	4 th Grade Parents (4)	5 th Grade Parents (3)	6 th Grade Parents (4)	School Librarian
Have you found it to be true that children (your child) prefer series books?	50% YES * 2 parents didn't respond	100% YES	50% YES 25% NO	100% YES

Like similar sources found throughout my literature review, I found that parents of the fourth, fifth and sixth grade students, as well as the school librarian believe that almost all students prefer series books. Most of the parents responded by saying that their children prefer stories written by Laura Ingalls Wilder, The Diary of a Wimpy Kid Series, The Hunger Games, Harry Potter, etc. These series could be popular among 4th, 5th, and 6th grade students because of peer recommendations. Although the school librarian at Rainbow Ridge Intermediate School responded "yes" to students liking series books, she stated that, "Many do prefer series, but I think that it is not universal. As they become more sophisticated readers, the 'dependence' on series books drops off" (2/16/12). On the other hand, perhaps this information is not true with the young adult series that are becoming more and more popular. There seems to be a push back to series at the secondary level with series such as, The Hunger Games, Twilight, and Harry

Potter. However, Ms. Smith (Rainbow Ridges Multi-Age teacher) stated that, “The kids go crazy for a good series and are determined to get the next one as soon as the first book is finished. They love reading an entire series and feel like the story is complete when they are finished. The kids are often sad when at the end of a series and feel a void. They don’t know what to read next and often want to replace it with another series. I think they find comfort knowing they like a certain author or story and there is another one when they are finished with the current book. It’s interesting to observe. Definitely- reading books in a series is hugely popular, and there are several really good ones to choose from” (Teacher Interview, 3/9/12).

Table 6

Summary of Parent and Librarian Questionnaires

Questionnaire Question	4 th Grade Parents (4)	5 th Grade Parents (3)	6 th Grade Parents (4)	School Librarian
Have you found that most students (your child) select books based on what their friends have read?	25% YES 25% NO * 2 parents didn't respond	100% YES	75% YES * 1 parent didn't respond	75% YES (Not most, but many)

As seen throughout table six, it is apparent that parents, as well as the school librarian believe that students select books based on what their friends have read. It is shown that as students progress through the higher grades, peer recommendations have a greater impact on the texts that they are selecting. Recommendations might be important at this age because students feel that the need to “fit in” among their peers. Rainbow Ridge’s Intermediate School librarian also has similar views. She states that, “Not most, but many students select books based on what their friends have read. The older they get the more likely it is that recommendations from friends are important” (2/16/12). Like the school librarian, Atkinson (2006) found that during a child’s teenage years they want to be able to identify themselves from the point of view of

others. This viewpoint is important for children because it shows how one appears to others. At this age, peer involvement becomes increasingly vital and adolescents' views about achievement and motivation are influenced by their classmates.

Table 7

Summary of Parent and Librarian Questionnaires

Questionnaire Question	4 th Grade Parents (4)	5 th Grade Parents (3)	6 th Grade Parents (4)	School Librarian
Do students ever ask for your input when selecting books? (Librarian)	75% SOMETIMES 25% NO	100% YES	50% YES 50% NO	100% YES
Do you help your child with selecting books? (Parent)				

Lastly, it is shown in table seven that students who are in the younger grades (4th and 5th) often times receive additional help from their parents or the school librarian when selecting books. One parent of a fourth grade student stated that, "He picks his own books from the library; I will help him in the bookstore" (2/27/12). Additionally, sixth grade parents were split, each being 50 percent yes and 50 percent no. A sixth grade parent stated that, "He is a very independent kid and has never needed our input in selecting books" (2/27/12). Like other variables (book cover, peer recommendations, etc.) perhaps these change as students become older and progress through the higher grades.

In addition to the parent and school librarian questionnaires, I interviewed the 4th, 5th, and 6th grade students as well as the classroom teacher. These interviews were conducted in order to gain a better understanding on student reading preferences as well as what their classroom teacher observes. Throughout the interviews, common themes occurred. These themes included the following: Factors that Contribute to Book Selection and The Variety of Influences on Book

Recommendations.

Factors that Contribute to Book Selection

The first theme that emerged from the student and teacher interviews were the various factors that impact whether or not students select a book. Both the students and teacher identified that students select a book after they have read the back. This selection was also seen in my field notes that were conducted as students were selecting books based on their interests. A fourth grade student stated in his interview that, "If my initial glance of the cover looks interesting, then I will first read the back of the book. The back usually gives a good description of what the book is about" (Student Interview, 3/5/12). Perhaps the majority of the students select books after they have read the back because this is what they have been taught to do by their teachers. In addition, Ms. Smith, Rainbow Ridge's Intermediate Multi-Age school teacher states that, "After kids pick a book up to look at it for whatever reason, they definitely read the back of the book and the first few pages to get a feel for the story. It's pretty important for kids that the story pull them in quickly- they look for this feature and decide to read the book or look further. I encourage kids to give a book a good try before deciding they don't want to read it" (Teacher Interview, 3/9/12). Perhaps the students are given the suggestion to try and read some of the book before putting it down because not all books lure the reader in until a few pages or chapters in.

A second factor that attributes to students book selections would include skimming through the book and reading the first few pages of the text. In interviewing a 5th grade student, she stated that, "I'll usually read the first three or four pages in the book and then I'll decide if I want to keep reading or if I want to stop there" (Student Interview, 3/7/12). Additionally, Farris et al. (2009) found that books with wide margins, large print, ample amount of white space, and

relatively shorter compared to others, were often selected. Perhaps this information is why most students skim through the book and read the first few pages.

Lastly, a third factor that determines whether or not most students select a book is based on the colors and pictures seen throughout the book. A fourth grade student stated in her interview that, "I usually flip through the pages and look for pictures that interest me. I also like when books include colorful images" (Student Interview, 3/5/12). Perhaps these are the types of factors that keep the students interested in what they are reading and result in them reading more. In addition, Mohr (2006) states that the visual characteristics, such as captions above or below pictures, colorful photographs and graphics throughout the book seemed to hold the interest of many male readers.

The Variety of Influences on Book Recommendations

The second theme that emerged from the student and teacher interviews were the variety of influences on book recommendations. Both the teacher and students identified peer recommendations as being one of the greatest influences that affect book selections. Ms. Smith stated that, "One of the greatest influencing factors in book selection is peer recommendation. When we talk about books and kids are excited about what they're reading, the kids literally get on a waiting list to be the next to check it out of the library. Kids are in tune with one another and their recommendations are highly regarded" (Teacher Interview, 3/9/12). Perhaps students believe that if their friends have enjoyed the book, they themselves will enjoy it as well. A sixth grade male student also believes that peer recommendation is important because, "If my friends say it's a good book, I might check it out because if someone else likes it, I most likely will" (Student Interview, 3/1/12).

A second form of book recommendations that the students identified comes from the

student's family. One student stated in her interview that, "My mom usually recommends books to me that she has heard about from on the TV or books that she has seen in the book store" (Student Interview, 3/1/12). Perhaps most family members are recommending books to their child based on what they have heard to be good books. Both Williams (2008) and Gordon and Lu (2008) agree with Geske and Ozola (2009) in that book recommendations from peers, teachers, or family members really impact what students read. Gordon and Lu (2008) state that reading interests and book recommendations by friends, family, or teachers are the two most important factors affecting children's book selections.

A third form of book recommendations that the students identified as being important consisted of teacher recommendations. Ferris et al. (2009) stated that male students often times chose books that have been written by the same author or on similar topics that their teacher had shared with them. Perhaps students believe that their teachers recommend books that they know the students will enjoy. When recommendations are given to the students, they might feel that they no longer have to take the time to search for books when they are told which books are good ones to read. A fifth grade student stated in her interview that, "My teacher always provides me with good book recommendations. All I have to do is tell her what I am interested in reading and she will provide me with a good book" (Student Interview, 3/5/12).

The two themes that were identified through the data research are important when it comes to student book selection and book recommendations. This information is important for educators because teachers need to understand what books interest their students and motivate them to read.

Implications and Conclusions

The findings of my action research include key implications for myself as well as current or future educators. Reading is an activity that occurs throughout an entire day of schooling. If students are not motivated to read, or struggle with this concept, they will then eventually fall behind their peers as they progress through the upper grades. Therefore, it is important to examine the key implications of this study.

The first implication of my study is that students should be given the opportunity to select texts based on their own reading preferences and interests. The results from this study indicate the importance of teachers keeping in mind that in order to motivate students to read, they need access to books that appeal to their students and allow them to make personal connections. When students are able to make connections while reading, their interest level increases.

A second implication for teachers that was found throughout my study is that it is important for teachers to realize what motivational techniques work best for each student; therefore, students should be actively engaged in lessons. The lessons should be made personal, meaningful, and relevant to both boys and girls' interests and needs. Throughout my instruction, I have found that teaching is most beneficial when students are engaged hands on with an activity and are able to fully understand the concept being taught.

Lastly, a third implication for teachers regarding children's reading preferences is that teachers should provide their students with a wide array of reading materials to fit the needs and preferences of all students. Merisuo-Storm (2006) found similar findings, in that teachers should invest their time discovering what their students' interests are and use the information when planning and instructing their literacy teaching. It is important to keep in mind that the convenience of appropriate and interesting reading material at home is significant for children's

reading development. In school, it is important that teacher's portray their love for literature, while allowing interesting reading and writing materials to be of easy access to students.

Limitations

Looking back, there were a few limitations during the course of this research. If this study were to be conducted again, I would first distribute a class set of consent forms rather than only the twelve I had anticipated originally working with. As the forms were returned to school, I would select the first four students from each grade, two boys and two girls, and use those students in my research. By selecting the first four students from each grade, I would receive a total of 12 students, which was used for my study. By dispensing a class set of consent forms, it would have eliminated the fact of the researcher only being able to start the research on the dependency of the selected students bringing in their forms.

A second limitation of the action research would include the organization of my parent questionnaire. Although the questionnaire (see Appendix A) only included 11 questions, three of these questions were located on the back side. Even though I had an arrow directing the parents to the additional questions on the back, not all parents answered all of the questions. In order to eliminate this, I may disregard some of the questions that I now find are less significant to the overall understanding of my action research topic.

Lastly, instead of pre-selecting the nine books and one newspaper, I would bring the selected students to their school library and allow them to select two or three books on their own. Even though the pre-selected books that I choose were popular among the three grade levels, I still feel that I would have understood each child's reading preference and interests more by allowing them to select books on their own. As students were looking through the books and making their selections, discussions were centered around which students have read which

books. By pre-selecting popular books among the various grade levels, it was evident that most of the students had already read the books I selected. This issue may have resulted in them choosing other books they may not have chosen if given the opportunity to select other popular books that weren't an option.

Conclusion

This action research helped me to fully understand student motivation towards reading and boys and girls reading preferences. However, there are still some questions that I have in regards to my topic. First, I would like to know how many fourth, fifth, and sixth grade teachers spend time in the beginning of the school year instructing their students on how to select books. Is this common throughout all three grade levels, or does this instruction usually only occur in the lower grades, such as fourth grade? Having only researched a multi-age classroom, it would be interesting to see if this instruction differs in grade level classrooms. Secondly, it would be interesting to see if the school library or classroom teachers support any motivational techniques in regards to engaging students in self selected reading materials. For instance, are students being reward for reading books throughout the school year? Are teachers keeping track of the amount of books their students are reading? Looking at this information across all three grade levels and comparing the statistics would be interesting to see how the numbers vary.

The literature and action research examined the various factors that motivate boys' and girls' when it comes to reading, while also addressing the mixture of influences that impact student reading preferences. To determine both male and female reading preferences, a study was conducted where twelve students, two boys and two girls from grades four, five, and six were chosen to participate in a study where they were asked to select books based on their interest level. From this study, it was found that there does not seem to be distinct factors that

motivate boys and girls to read, however their reading preferences do vary.

In order to effectively teach boys and girls it is essential that teachers portray to their students the importance of reading, both as an enjoyable and necessary activity. Students' are more likely to become motivated when they are invested in a school assignment that is of interest to them and is something that they are excited about. Motivation and allowing students to select books based on their interests and reading preferences are especially vital as students reach the older grades.

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Appendix A

Librarian Questionnaire

1. **Y/N** Do you find that most students pick a book based on its cover?

2. **Y/N** When students are selecting books, do you see them skimming through the pages?

3. **Y/N** Do you see most students selecting books based on their interests?

4. **Y/N** Do most children select books based on the content or curriculum they are learning?

5. **Y/N** Do you find that girls are geared more towards a certain genre? If so, what genre?

6. **Y/N** Do you find that boys are geared more towards a certain genre? If so, what genre?

7. **Y/N** Have you found it to be true that children prefer series books?

8. Y/N What type of stories or genres do you find are the most common among students?

9. Y/N Have you found that most students select books based on what their friends have read?

10. Y/N Do students ever ask for your input when selecting books?

Parent Questionnaire

*I would appreciate it if you would answer these questions based on your knowledge of your child's reading preferences. Thank you.

1. **Y / N** Have you always allowed your child to choose their own reading materials?

2. **Y / N** Has your child always picked a book based on its cover?

3. **Y / N** When selecting a book does your child skim through the pages?

4. **Y / N** Does your child prefer stories based on their interests?

5. **Y / N** Has your child always been drawn to a similar genre or has it changed throughout the years?

6. **Y/N** Does your child choose a book based on the content or curriculum he/she is learning in school?

7. **Y/N** Do you help your child with selecting books?

8. **Y / N** Do you talk about your child's book selections with them?

9. **Y / N** Do you purchase books for your child? If so, what kinds? How do you choose them?

10. **Y / N** Does your child enjoy following a character through multiple stories? For example, series books?

11. **Y / N** Does your child choose books based on what their friends have read or are currently reading?

*Thank you so much for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.
Megan Mead

9. How do you hear about good books to read? Book discussions, teachers, parents, friends, etc.?

10. Do you choose books based on what your friends have read or are currently reading?

11. Do you enjoy reading series books? Why?

12. Do you enjoy getting books as gifts?

13. Do you talk with friends, teachers, parents, etc. about the books you have read?

Teacher Interview

1. Do you allow your students to choose books based on their own interests or are the majority of the books selected for them?

2. Do your students select a book based on its cover?

3. When your students are selecting books, do they skim through the pages? How do they decide if it is a book they want to read?

4. Do you instruct your students on how to select books?

5. When your students are given the option to select books, do they pick books based on the curriculum or their personal preferences?

6. What sort of books (genres) are your female students more attracted to? Your male students?

7. Do your students select books based on what their friends are reading?

8. What type of books are dominant in your classroom library?

9. Have you found that your students enjoy reading series books?