6-15-2022

USING TARGETED, SMALL-GROUP INSTRUCTION AND CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING TO IMPROVE READING ENGAGEMENT AND CONFIDENCE

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by

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A Thesis

Submitted to the
Department of Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Education
College of Education
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
For the degree of
Master of Arts in Reading Education
at
Rowan University
June 30, 2022

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my mother, Joanne Marie Recine. You were my first teacher, and you always believed in me.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude to the professors with whom I have had the pleasure of working throughout my Master of Reading Education program. I have learned so much in such a short period of time. I have been able to implement so much acquired knowledge into my classroom, and I hope to use it to continue to encourage my students to strive for a lifelong love of literacy.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge my husband, Marc, for his continued support throughout my educational journey. Thank you for all of the dinners you prepared, the piles of laundry you folded, and the comic relief when I needed it the most. The shirt you wore at my commencement, "I Survived My Wife's Master's Degree," says it all. You now know more about being a reading specialist than you ever could imagine. You were my source of encouragement to keep going at the most difficult times, especially through a pandemic. I love you.

Gianna, my daughter, my angel - you are one of the most important reasons that I worked so hard to complete my Master's degree. You won't remember the countless hours that I sacrificed after you went to sleep, but I do hope you will one day realize just how much you can accomplish if you work hard and follow your dreams, no matter how far away they may seem. I love you, my little "bean burrito."

Abstract

Tina M. Tuminaro
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2021-2022
Valarie Lee, Ed.D.
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The purpose of this study was to investigate what happens to reading engagement and student confidence when targeted instruction and culturally responsive teaching is used in a middle school literacy classroom. Individual instruction in the areas of reading comprehension and fluency, as well as book clubs and literature circles, were used over a three-month period in an effort to motivate striving and reluctant readers and build confidence in their reading skills. Eleven sixth grade students participated in the study, and both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used. Data was collected using a teacher's research journal, audio recordings, surveys, interviews, and student work samples. Patterns of reading volume, stamina, and student responses to targeted instruction were analyzed using triangulation methods and coding in order to determine common themes. Based on the findings of the study, students tended to be more motivated to read texts that included topics in which they had prior knowledge or otherwise interested them. Reading engagement also tended to increase surrounding social interactions with peers about shared texts. Increased reading engagement, as well as evident progress with fluency and reading comprehension skills, tended to cause student confidence in reading to increase as well. This study was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, further research is needed during a more "typical" school year.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

It was March of 2018. I was sitting in the weekly meeting at my middle school where teachers and school counselors come together to discuss student concerns and strategies. One of the school counselors spoke up, “I wanted to touch base with you all about Anastasia. I was checking in with her last week and she basically told me that she can’t read. She is having a hard time keeping up in Science and Social Studies, but especially Math. She understands how to do the work, but the word problems are a challenge for her. She doesn’t understand what they are asking her to do. She also told me that she hasn’t completed a book all year. She seemed so ashamed. Right now, she’s reading *Save Me a Seat* and she seems to really like it, so hopefully we can find similar books to keep her going once she finishes this one. Tina, have you noticed her struggling with reading at all in Language Arts?”

I sat there, almost speechless, but was able to explain that I did notice she was having some trouble with reading comprehension. Anastasia was an English Language Learner (ELL) who had just exited the ELL program for the start of the 2017-2018 school year. The school counselor explained that Anastasia had shared that she came to the United States as a fourth grader, only two years prior to now. She had learned spoken English out of social necessity, but was still learning to read and write more fluently. I remembered that in both December and February, the ELL teacher had sent forms for all teachers of former ELLs to complete. These forms were meant to check in on how the students were progressing without any official ELL support. I struggled to recall what I had written down on them. I know I had mentioned that Anastasia had some difficulty

identifying crucial plot points in stories, but I had no idea that she was struggling this much. How had I missed all of this? I felt like I had failed her.

Story of the Question

After that day, I began to take a hard look at my approach to reading instruction. My school uses a reading workshop model. While it has its advantages, such as allowing for student choice and increased independent reading time, there are some flaws that just were not working for some students. The only reason I had known that Anastasia had difficulty with plot was because I had asked the students to read chapters of our read aloud independently. She had struggled to identify the key events from these chapters, but had been able to blend in and feign true understanding for so long. I was extremely familiar with the class novel. Relying on student responses to their independent reading novels and conferring briefly with individual students once every couple of weeks was not going to make much of a difference for true learning and comprehension. If I could find a way to allow for student choice during independent reading time, but also have some control over what the students read, I would be able to more accurately assess their progress throughout the year. More importantly, what if I could find ways to connect the texts to students' life experiences? Would that help striving readers like Anastasia?

Over the next few years as a sixth-grade language arts teacher in the same school, I experimented with book clubs, guided reading, and other types of small-group instruction. I tried implementing book clubs using novels on the students' instructional reading levels. The groups of students were able to vote on one novel they would read together, but there was never enough time in the 40-minute periods to really be able to meet and discuss the books on a regular basis, not with everything else that is required for

the sixth-grade language arts curriculum in my school: grammar, writing, word study, and whole-class reading instruction. Another year, I decided to use excerpts from novels to teach reading skills and strategies, but the instruction felt choppy, as the students were introduced to novels, but never got to read them in their entirety. One year, I decided to pull small groups of students for reading strategies but have them use their own independent reading novels. This would have worked perfectly except this type of small-group reading instruction was missing something: the ability to discuss the same text together as a community of learners.

Finally, in the summer before the 2021-2022 school year, still in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, I decided to try something I hadn't before. I would no longer group students based on their reading abilities. I decided that they could choose their groups based on their favorite genres. They would not be expected to read entire novels or even novel excerpts. Instead, I would use short story collections in various genres to teach and reinforce reading skills and strategies. This idea solved most of my previous issues. Short stories were not as time-consuming to read as full novels. The students would still have some choice in their reading, as the groups would be genre-based. Avid readers could even continue their independent novels in addition to the short stories if they wanted. Reluctant readers might not feel as overwhelmed when reading a short story as they would an entire novel. Perhaps they might even feel more successful in completing an entire story instead of abandoning large books within the first couple of chapters. Most importantly; however, the students would be able to discuss a text and share personal connections. I finally had a way that might just be able to increase reading engagement, improve comprehension, and hopefully boost students' confidence levels.

Purpose Statement

Look around at any classroom during independent reading time, an essential part of any reading workshop, and you will find that some students are devouring books, barely coming up for air between pages. These students are readers in the true sense of the word. Not only do they know how to read at their grade level, they know how to read even when the text is challenging for them. They have acquired strategies that they use naturally whenever they are stuck on a confusing part of the text. They have learned how to find joy in reading by connecting to the text. Other students in the classroom read on grade level. The majority of these students enjoy reading as well, and they are open to learning and applying new reading strategies as they are taught.

Then there are the reluctant readers. They are the struggling readers, now known as striving readers. These are the students who either can read and choose not to engage with the text, or those who lack foundational skills and have not learned to read on grade level. Beers (2003) states, "Additionally, remember that *anyone* can struggle given the right text. The struggle isn't the issue; the issue is what the reader does when text gets tough" (p. 14). According to Tovani (2000), reluctant readers "start books and never finish them" (p. 6). They put their heads down and pretend to read while flipping through pages. They avoid reading any way that they can by leaving the room for a drink of water, a trip to the school nurse, or an unnecessary restroom visit. They conveniently forget their books on a daily basis. They "see the movie instead of reading the book" and "read without paying attention" (p. 7). For them, the task of choosing a book is intimidating and not enjoyable. They, like Anastasia, most likely have not completed an entire book since early elementary school. Arming students with realistic strategies they

can use when struggling with a text is the key to improving students' reading engagement and confidence.

Statement of Research Problem and Question

Many reluctant and striving readers have found ways to get by in the classroom without having to truly read. In order to combat this issue, educators must engage students in reading, allow them to discuss literature with peers, and implement strategies for readers to connect with and better comprehend text. In order to do this, teachers may choose to implement culturally responsive teaching into their classroom. Culturally responsive pedagogy is an instructional approach through which teachers use students' cultures, languages, and life experiences to connect more deeply to text (Samuels, 2018, pp. 22-23). According to Park (2012), "Even very young children can draw on knowledge of their own worlds to enter and make sense of the story world" (cite in Sipe, 2002, p. 192). Middle school students often have more background knowledge than they often even realize, which can improve their engagement and understanding of text. After reviewing the available literature on book clubs, literature circles, reading engagement, culturally responsive teaching, and various reading comprehension strategies, the following question was investigated in my sixth-grade classroom: How can using targeted, small-group instruction and culturally responsive teaching improve reading engagement and confidence in a middle school classroom?

Significance of the Topic

Culturally responsive teaching is a crucial part of the study. It is what creates a sense of connection between the students and the text. Educators who use culturally responsive pedagogy in their classrooms create an inclusive learning environment for all

students. Students should feel comfortable and safe in their classrooms. For example, as stated in a study by Milner (2014), “It was clear from my observations that Ms. Shaw believes that she is, in her own words, ‘called’ to the work of teaching, and she attempts to cultivate relationships with all the students at Bridge Middle School with the aim of helping them understand how to contribute to society at large” (p. 12). Students’ feelings of security are created when teachers take the time to get to know their students’ personal interests. Before creating and implementing book clubs, teaching reading strategies, or collecting data on reading engagement, this study by gathering information about the students’ interests, cultures, and experiences, the true foundation for engaging students and building their confidence.

Organization of the Thesis

The chapters of this thesis are organized as follows: Chapter 2 outlines the key components of this research study and reviews the literature surrounding these topics. These include reading engagement, student choice, benefits of peer discussion, technology, genre selection, culturally responsive teaching, building student confidence, building reading skills and strategies, and book clubs and literature circles. Chapter 3 details how the participants were chosen for the study, the steps taken for qualitative research and sources of data, and data analysis. Chapter 4 discusses the data collection and describes the findings. Chapter 5 provides the conclusion to the research study. It describes the implications of the study, as well as suggestions for future research in the area of reading engagement.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Human beings tend to be social by nature. That sociability can and should carry into the classroom, especially when it comes to reading instruction, as part of overall literacy development. Students are much more engaged when there is a social aspect connected to their reading. Collaboration and discussions amongst peers lead to better learning outcomes. Students are able to make deeper connections with the text when they are able to discuss literature with each other. Book clubs, literature circles, book talks, and similar opportunities for students to share book recommendations and other ideas about text are crucial to increasing reading engagement.

Students are also more engaged when they are able to choose texts that are enjoyable and relevant to their own personal lives and experiences. People do not tend to enjoy reading about topics of which they have no prior knowledge. This is because they are unable to connect the text to important moments and concepts in their own lives. Jean Piaget coined the term "schema," which is a person's prior knowledge" (as cited in Yoo, 1997). Piaget explains that cognitive development of the human being is a process of adaptation in the interaction between an organism and its environment. Adaptation is a process consisting of two complementary processes--assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation is the process of taking in new information and fitting it into a preconceived frame of a concept about objects or the world" (Yoo, 1997, p. 6). Schema plays a critical role in reading comprehension. It takes a text from "boring" or "confusing" and brings it to life through personal connections and emotions. Texts are easier to comprehend with more background knowledge on particular subjects within the text. Being able to choose

texts that are naturally engaging due to familiarity of concepts makes reading much more meaningful and appealing.

Defining Reading Engagement and Motivation

Reading engagement is consistent time and effort spent on a reading task. According to Fisher & Frey (2018), it can be measured through volume and stamina. Guthrie (2013) further explains, "Engagement is the act of reading to meet internal and external expectations. Such engagement may be positive, referring to reading with effort, purpose, and intention to learn, which we term dedication, or it may be negative, referring to students' intents and actions that enable them to evade reading tasks or activities, which we term avoidance" (p. 10). Much of students' intention to learn or to avoid learning stems from motivation. Guthrie explains that reading motivation consists of students' objectives and attitudes regarding reading. These include "intrinsic motivation (interest and enjoyment in reading), self-efficacy (confidence), valuing reading (perception that reading is important), and prosocial goals (intentions to interact socially in reading)" (p. 10). In order to have higher reading engagement, students must find value in spending their time reading. Some students determine reading value through their own intrinsic motivation factors, while others only find outside sources, extrinsic motivation factors, as necessary for the completion of reading tasks.

Reading Volume

Increasing reading volume, which is the amount of "exposure to print" is one way to build students' reading engagement. (Fisher & Frey, 2018, p. 89). Fisher and Frey also state, "It is hard to get good at doing something you rarely do. Whether it is a physical skill such as passing a soccer ball or a cognitive one such as reading, proficiency requires

regular practice" (p. 89). The more words that students read, the better success they will have at reading fluency and comprehension. According to Cunningham & Stanovich (2003), "While it is generally agreed that most children's vocabulary growth occurs indirectly through language exposure rather than direct instruction, we now realize it is reading volume, rather than oral language, that is the primary source of their differences in vocabularies" (p. 35). Exposure to a variety of words and experiences through reading builds background knowledge and vocabulary.

Reading Stamina

When students are able to increase their reading volume, it means that they can read longer pieces of texts for significantly longer periods of time without distraction. This is called stamina. However, Fisher & Frey (2018) warn, "...we cannot sacrifice deep reading for wide reading. Both are important. Students need opportunities to develop stamina and strength. Wide reading, especially reading at home, can build stamina. Teacher scaffolding of complex texts can help students develop strength in reading complex texts" (p. 95). Serravallo (2015) cites comprehensive research (Allington 2011; Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding 1988; Krashen 2004; Cunningham and Stanovich 1991; Stanovich and Cunningham 1993; Pressley et al. 2000; Taylor, Frye, and Maruyama 1990) as support for the finding that the "amount of time kids spend practicing, on-task, with eyes on print, makes the biggest difference to their success as readers, and across content areas" (p. 45). The only way to ensure that all students, even the most reluctant of readers, are reading and learning is to increase reading engagement. Serravallo also points out, "...sometimes to help readers with the goal of *engagement*, you actually need to work on *comprehension* (as cited in Ivey and Johnston 2013)" (p. 45). In her book, *The*

Reading Strategies Book: Your Everything Guide to Developing Skilled Readers, Serravallo offers a multitude of strategies for improving reading comprehension, and she includes a chapter specifically for teaching reading engagement. Serravallo states, "You could be the most eloquent teacher, the best strategy group facilitator, the most insightful conferrer. But if you send your kids back for independent reading and they don't read, then they won't make the progress you are hoping and working. . . Without engagement, we've got nothin'" (Serravallo 2010, p. 44). Reading engagement is a major component for learning, especially when reading in the content areas or when reading particularly challenging text.

Building Confidence Using Frequent Praise and Specific Feedback

Another aspect of reading engagement comes from students' confidence levels based on perceptions of their own abilities. Educators can make a difference in building confidence by using recurrent praise and providing specific, constructive feedback to students while they are practicing literacy skills. O'Handley et al. (2020), researched how behavior-specific praise and immediate feedback affects the overall engagement and behavior of students in secondary classrooms. Four secondary, general education classrooms in rural parts of a southeastern state were observed three times per week for twenty minutes at a time. Teachers used their usual behavior management system and specified a certain time of their class period where behavior was particularly difficult. Teachers were then trained on BSP (Behavior-Specific Praise) and public praise. "Examples of BSP included 'Great job raising your hand, Tom.' or 'I like how Julie is working quietly on her assignment.' General praise that included a statement of acknowledgement but did not specify the appropriate behavior (e.g., 'Excellent job!') was

not counted as BSP" (p. 1104). By the end of the study, all teachers involved experienced increased engagement and appropriate behavior within their classrooms. More research is needed to determine if use of BSP automatically decreases teachers' use of verbal reprimands. People thrive on the acknowledgement and recognition that they are doing a good job. Students often need an extra boost of confidence and positive or constructive feedback in order to increase their motivation for reading and learning.

Fake Reading is Not Reading Engagement

Many students engage in what is known as "fake reading" and other reading avoidance strategies. These behaviors can include abandoning books, relying on others to learn what the text is about, and decoding words with ease while lacking true comprehension. In her book, *I Read It, But I Don't Get It: Comprehension Strategies for Adolescent Readers,* Tovani (2000), recollects her own experiences with fake reading by stating, "I started to 'fake-read' in sixth grade and continued to do so for the next twenty years. In high school, I fooled everyone by attending classes, reading first and last chapters, skimming through Cliffs Notes, and making Bs or better on essays and exam" (p. 4). Fake reading is often the result of students simply getting by and relying on others to do critical thinking about reading. Students who utilize fake reading strategies lack reading engagement. According to Tovani, "These students aren't concerned with understanding the material well…When reading the words alone doesn't produce meaning, word callers assume the material is too difficult and not worth the time it takes to master it" (p. 16). Tovani goes on to state, "Too many bright kids are wasting time sitting in the back of the classroom expecting to be filled with knowledge. It's time to pull the plug on this type of behavior and begin teaching adolescents of all ages and

reading abilities how to understand what they read so they can begin constructing meaning on their own" (pp. 16-17). Guthrie (2013) explains the difference between avoidance and dedication. "...dedication tends to be accompanied by advanced cognitive skills and self-regulation during comprehension. In contrast, although students may be strategic in their avoidance (e.g., planning to lose the textbook, deciding to forget reading homework), the cognitive element in such avoidance is minimal" (p. 23). By finding ways to promote reading engagement in the classroom, teachers can increase their students' reading comprehension and overall enjoyment of reading.

Allowing Student Choice

Traditionally, teachers chose most reading material for their students on a daily basis in the classroom. Providing student choice in reading allows students to choose a text they wish to read for their own independent reading and practice. According to Fisher & Frey (2018), Students have a much stronger desire to read when they have the freedom to choose their own books. The ability to select their own text is an important skill. It creates more independent readers who have created their own motivation to read.

Allowing student choice can also mean that teachers provide a set of texts and students choose a text from within the teacher's selection. For example, educational researchers, Ivey and Johnston (2015), collaborated on a study in which four eighth grade teachers opted for "student-selected, self-paced reading," (p. 298), as opposed to the teacher-chosen texts and materials they had used in the past. According to Ivey and Johnston, the four educators provided students with culturally relevant and engaging text. They allowed students to select what they would read and how they would read. They also encouraged discussion in favor of traditional reading comprehension assignments.

This idea connects to Guthrie's work regarding strategies for building reading success and engagement. "Extensive study of the contexts in which engaged reading occurs shows that it is more likely when students have access to personally relevant texts, choice among texts, opportunities to collaborate, and opportunities to learn strategies" (Guthrie et al., 2012, p. 298). Allowing student choice in their reading material helped to increase reading volume in the four classrooms involved with the study, produce higher state test scores, and create deeper student connections to the texts.

Benefits of Peer Discussion

As previously stated, many readers may also benefit from "prosocial goals" as a motivational factor for reading (Guthrie, 2013, p. 10). Reading is often looked upon as a quiet, independent activity; however, there can be a social aspect to reading. This may include discussing a text's meaning or sharing personal and societal connections with others. These interactions are crucial, especially for reluctant or striving readers. Mahn (1999) explains Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which is related to social interactions and learning. "The core of Vygotsky's work examines humans as meaning makers…For his ontogenetic analysis, Vygotsky focused on the way that a child co-constructs meaning through social interaction, and the role word meaning plays in the development of thinking" (p. 341). Social interactions are particularly crucial in the adolescent years. For example, Knoester's (2010) study looked at why some adolescent readers are more reluctant to read than others, and how to motivate reluctant readers through the use of social interactions. In this study, the core variable and central concern appeared to be cultivating relationships using books or other texts. According to the results of Knoester's study, "Adolescents strategically selected, read, discussed, and

avoided literature based on the relationships they hoped to cultivate" (p. 7). These relationships were developed through the use of book clubs and literature circles, buddy reading, and interactive book journals. Students are able to acquire new knowledge and share personal experiences and connections through the discussion of literature. These social interactions also force students to read the material and think more deeply about text. This allows readers to find text more meaningful, relevant, and enjoyable.

In addition to creating rich conversations about text, students are also able to motivate each other to read outside their comfort zones by recommending books to one another. According to one middle school teacher in Knoester's study: "When other kids get excited about books, that turns kids on to a book. If I can hype a book [and say] 'you've got to read this book,' and they trust me, they'll read it. The main motivator is seeing other kids enjoying a book and hearing another kid talk about a book and say, 'I want to read that book'" (2010, p. 1). People naturally want to share their thoughts, experiences, and connections with others when they read a story.

Book Clubs

Book clubs have been known to increase reading engagement and motivation by promoting discussion about text. In a study conducted by Park (2012), the use of adolescent book clubs based on reader-response pedagogies, allowed students to exhibit 21st century skills, such as emotional intelligence, collaboration with team members, and communication about text. The students also showed empathy in their discussions by relating to personal and worldly events and even criticizing characters for their actions by putting themselves in the characters' shoes. According to a subject in Park's study, "If you read alone, you don't really get to talk about it with anybody. But you get to talk

about the events that happened in it, and that makes you remember the book more. And it makes the book more special in ways" (p. 208). Peer discussion through book clubs allows students to become more involved with the text, and therefore accomplish deeper learning.

When implementing and facilitating book clubs, it is important for educators to acknowledge their students' needs and encourage participation, especially for English language learners. Scaffolding can be very beneficial in literacy instruction; however, it can be overused to the point of student disengagement. Lewis & Zisselsberger (2018) studied the ways in which teachers and students participated "discursively" in small-group discussions within an in-class book club (p. 168). According to the study, "The authors found that although a primary purpose of a literature discussion group is to provide more equitable participatory opportunities for EBs (emerging bilinguals), in this case, the linguistic and discursive practices of the teachers and the native English speakers did not fully honor EBs' contributions. These practices led to EBs' ultimate withdrawal from discussions" (p. 167). Students can sense when they are not being heard or taken seriously. Teachers need to be aware of the limitations they are sometimes setting when speaking to, scaffolding for, and listening to their students during book club and other class or group discussions.

Literature Circles

One way to increase social interactions between readers is through the use of literature circles. Literature circles are used in many classrooms, including virtual settings. According to Bromley et al. (2014), Literature circles are groups of students who read a shared text and take on roles to engage in student-facilitated and organized

discussions. There are many different ways in which educators can structure literature circles to increase reading engagement.

Hsu (2004) studied how literature circles can engage reluctant readers. Hsu also discussed twelve key ingredients for literature circles. Some of these include student-chosen literature, "small, temporary groups based on book choices," and literature circles meeting "on a regular, predictable schedule to discuss reading" (p. 2). Hsu was influenced by the theoretical framework of Louise Rosenblatt's Reader-Response Theory and Lev Semionovich Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). According to Rosenblatt (1982), "Reading is a transaction, a two-way process, involving a reader and a text at a particular time under particular circumstances" (p. 268). According to Hsu, literature circles create opportunities for "open-ended, natural discussion of a literary work and role rotation, both of which enable readers to approach a text from various perspectives," as Rosenblatt encouraged (p. 5). They also provide opportunities for students to work in their individual ZPDs. According to Vygotsky (1978), ZPD is "the distance between the child's actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). In literature circles, text information is scaffolded and discussed with teachers and peers so that learners gain new perspectives and understanding. The literature becomes more meaningful and personally relevant. Therefore, students become more invested in their own learning through the use of literature circles.

Furthermore, in a study (Bromley et al, 2014) conducted by seven graduate literacy education students at Binghamton University in New York, the students read a

middle grade novel, *Al Capone Shines My Shoes.* Students could use digital resources to enhance their learning, such as maps, websites, and digital drawing tools. The findings concluded that, "All seven students said they had a better understanding of the story because of their ability to use digital resources. They were pushed to learn more about the book, and the result was better comprehension and appreciation of the story" (p. 232). The use of digital resources can truly heighten student learning; however, there are certain aspects to take into consideration when incorporating technology into the classroom. For example, "Do students have access to a form of technology at home to complete a digital assignment? If not, can you allot time for them to complete the assignment at school?" (p. 230). As the technology in schools advances, mostly due to necessity during the pandemic, these implications will become less of an issue.

Reading Engagement and Technology

Technology plays an important role in education, especially during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. Teachers and students have been expected to adapt their teaching and learning to fit the requirements of virtual learning environments. Long before the pandemic; however, students have been known to prefer the use of technology when reading and learning. Mitchell (2015) looked at how using Nooks for summer reading assignments motivated a group of below proficient middle school readers. The students tended to read from and carry their Nooks with them everywhere they went. Students enjoyed using the Nooks because they could use them to figure out challenging words and they couldn't tell how long the books were that they were reading. According to the results of the study, "The students enjoyed the program and when asked whether they would prefer to read with a digital reader or read a traditional book the students

overwhelmingly opted for the digital reader, with 80% of the participants indicating that they prefer reading with digital readers to traditional books" (p. 80). In addition, students were able to acquire a better variety of texts using the Nooks, as they had unlimited access to titles. The study found that more intrinsically motivated students were more motivated to read. Implications of this study could include investigating how and why some students persist through more challenging text and looking at the differences between less proficient students' experiences with E-books as opposed to more proficient readers (p. 86). E-books can be effective in motivating students, but more research is needed on the extent of their effectiveness.

Reading Engagement Through Genre Selection

Providing readers with literature selections based on their interests and choice genres has been studied. Onofrey (2006), a teacher researcher, conducted a qualitative empirical study that looked at how five sixth grade honor students responded to humor used in middle grade novel selections. Honor students were chosen for the study, as they would have "a plethora of textual experiences that they could possibly connect with humor in the texts from this study" (p. 211). The focus group included three boys and two girls from a public middle school in the southwestern region of the United States. The study revolved around the following question: "In what ways do selected middle school students talk about the connections between humor and characterization in response to adolescent literature?" (p. 207). Onofrey planned to seek out how humorous literature affects literary learning. What Onofrey found is that the students had a preexisting attitude toward the humor in the text based on their own life experiences. For example, if they had experience with the particular type of comedy in the novel, they were more

inclined to think the novel was humorous. Students often have a stronger response to literature when they can make connections based on personal knowledge and experiences.

In addition, Dunn (2021) looked at using elements of screenplay to promote reading comprehension outcomes and stimulate visualization techniques in striving readers and those with disabilities. This particular study also looked at how reading instruction using screenplays affected reading motivation. The students responded well to the intervention in the areas of mental imagery and reading comprehension; all students enjoyed the intervention and found it engaging. Because this study was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic, a longer intervention period is needed. This intervention period would need to include more time to practice skills, the creation of a pre- and post-measure designed specifically for the intervention, and scaffolding of individual student skills. Although there are limitations to this study, the results show that using screenplays as a genre for literacy instruction produced satisfactory results for increasing reading comprehension and engagement.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Identifying and teaching to students' individual interests and cultural traditions is what is known as culturally responsive teaching. Originally coined by educational theorist Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994), culturally responsive teaching is "a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (pp.17-18). Samuels (2018) states, "...Participants contended many strategies that embrace culturally responsive practice are simply characteristic of 'good teaching'" (p. 27). It is common knowledge that student

engagement increases significantly when instruction can be related to their personal and cultural experiences and traditions. In this study, "Participants engaged in small focus groups of four to five to explore characteristics of culturally responsive teaching as highlighted by Villegas and Lucas (2007): (1) understanding how learners construct knowledge, (2) learning about students' lives, (3) being socio-culturally conscious, (4) holding affirming views about diversity, (5) using diverse instructional strategies, and (6) advocating for all students" (p. 23). Results determined several benefits of culturally responsive pedagogy, including stronger social interactions, increased inclusivity, and elevated student knowledge about the world. Time restraints and lack of resources were among some of the challenges founded through the study (pp. 24-25). Limitations of this study came from the fact that the subjects were teachers who already cared about diversity and had expressed an interest in using culturally responsive pedagogy in their classrooms (p. 28). It may be more demanding to apply this type of teaching to areas with less diversity or openness to learning about a variety of cultures.

Using culturally responsive teaching on a consistent basis can be advantageous, yet challenging for any educator, but further research would need to be done to identify how successful it would be for more resistant teachers. According to a similar study by Milner (2014), "More research studies are needed to help us develop more knowledge about teaching with cultural relevance--particularly how to prepare teachers to teach with cultural relevance" (p. 16). The subject used "purposeful thinking and classroom specifically to: (1) building relationships with her students, (2) seeing teaching and learning as a mission and responsibility, (3) remembering race, (4) moving beyond materialism, (5) accepting and serving in multiple roles, and (6) promoting self and

school pride" (p. 12). All of these aspects are best practices and part of good teaching; however, it would take effort to create an environment where all teachers and students embrace this type of teaching and learning.

Building Fluency and Vocabulary

Research has shown that building students' fluency and vocabulary increases their confidence in reading as well. This is particularly true in adolescent students who have struggled with reading for several years and are convinced that they are poor readers. They feel as though there is no hope for them to learn to read well. Fisher & Frey (2018) discuss constrained and unconstrained reading skills, which are crucial for reading success. "Constrained reading skills are those associated more closely with automaticity and fluency; they include phonemic awareness, alphabetics, and phonics. Unconstrained skills draw on the reader's stamina and include vocabulary and comprehension" (p. 89). Practicing fluency through interactive materials, such as Reader's Theater and repeated readings, allows students to build both constrained and unconstrained skills, as well as their motivation and confidence. According to the results of a study conducted by Keehn, Harmon, & Shoho (2008), "Groups were not significantly different on comprehension measures. However, the Readers Theater class nearly doubled the vocabulary acquisition of the comparison group. Qualitative measures attested to the potential of Readers Theater to motivate struggling adolescent readers and to build their reading confidence" (p. 335). Thirty-six eighth grade students, many of whom were striving readers, were instructed using weekly Reader's Theater selections, focusing specifically on vocabulary acquisition and expressive reading. The group that received

instruction through Reader's Theater improved significantly more than the rest of the eighth-grade classes in the school.

In addition, Smith & Elly (1997) studied how recorded materials and repeated readings help students' fluency and confidence in reading. Students listened to a book on tape while reading a print version of the same text. Students read and listened repeatedly until they felt they could read it on their own. Then they moved on to a new next text. The results showed great success with this type of instruction: "If we expect one month of gain for one month of instruction, the gains from the intervention were spectacular: nearly three times expectations, or 2.2 years" (p. 29).

Furthermore, Koskinen et al. (1999) improved the reading skills and confidence of English language learners using recorded materials and repeated readings as well. There were four groups of students with possible conditions:

> These conditions were (a) small-group shared reading in a book-rich environment at school and rereading of books with audiotapes at home (SRS-BAH), (b) small-group shared reading in a book-rich environment in school and rereading of books (without audiotapes) at home (SRS-BH), (c) small-group shared reading in a book-rich environment in school (SRS), and (d) unmodified reading instruction in school (control). (Koskinen et al., 1999, p. 25)

The group of students that had practiced repeated readings with audiotapes at home made the most progress in their literacy skills and confidence, and were motivated to practice reading at home in the first place using the audiotapes.

Finally, another way students can gain literacy skills, particularly in the area of vocabulary acquisition, is through the use of short stories. Nazara (2019) based a study of

thirty sixth grade students on Nunan's (2003) four principles for teaching vocabulary. These principles include: teaching the most useful words first, differentiating between high-frequency word instruction and low-frequency word instruction, giving deliberate attention to high-frequency words, and encouraging students to take responsibility for their own learning. The results showed that the students' perception towards the use of short stories was positive. For them, short stories were interesting materials to use to develop vocabulary. Based on findings, short stories are recommended to use to develop students' vocabulary.

Reading Comprehension Skills and Strategies

With each new reading skill and strategy they master, students develop confidence in their own abilities. At the middle school level, reading comprehension includes a combination of literal and higher-level skills, such tracking plot, setting, and characters, identifying conflicts, and making character inferences. One way readers can track plot events and conflicts in stories is by developing story mountains. According to Serravallo (2015), "When you retell, think about the problem (uh-oh), how the problem gets worse (UH-OH!) and how the problem gets solved (phew!)" (p. 137). Students should practice identifying the most crucial plot points and be able to explain why they are important to the story.

Tovani (2000) discusses several strategies for reading comprehension, including annotating text, making connections to prior knowledge, and rereading purposefully for meaning. These strategies help readers set a purpose for reading and make reading much more meaningful and enjoyable. Tovani states, "I teach my students how to mark text early in the semester, because it gives them a way to stay engaged in their reading. Often

students complain that they get sleepy or their mind wanders when they read. Marking text helps readers pay attention and remember what they read" (p. 29). In addition, Tovani discusses text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections. Text-to-self connections come from the reader's personal experiences and memories in relation to the text. Text-to-text connections are connections made between two different texts. These can be movies, songs, or other stories. Finally, text-to-world connections involve connections between the text and the reader's knowledge of world events and social issues. According to Tovani, "Connections help readers call on their background knowledge. When readers make connections to their reading, they have a richer experience. The more connections a reader makes to the text, the better her comprehension is" (p. 70). This connects to the idea that students are better engaged and learn better when they can make text relevant to their own knowledge and lives.

Conclusion

Reviewing the research on using culturally responsive teaching, increasing reading engagement, and building student confidence through targeted instruction has shown that students learn best when they can connect to literature on a personal level and collaborate with peers throughout instruction and practice. Many students are striving to read on grade level, comprehend text effectively, and identify themselves as competent readers. In order to do this, they must be provided with endless opportunities to engage in culturally relevant topics during instruction, interact with peers, and receive valuable feedback from their teachers.

This study will organize students into small group book clubs based on their interests in a variety of topics and genres. Students will be expected to collaborate and

discuss literature in the form of short stories with peers. This study will encourage students to think critically and connect text to their own lives and the lives of others in the world around them. In addition, students will receive small-group and individual literacy instruction in the areas of fluency and reading comprehension skills and strategies. Ultimately, this study will aim to produce stronger, more confident readers, those who engage and connect with text, as they learn new ways to construct meaning on a more personal level.

Chapter 3

Research Design/Methodology

Research Paradigm

The design of this research study uses qualitative data collection to determine how using targeted, small-group instruction and culturally responsive teaching can improve reading engagement and confidence in middle school students. Qualitative studies are commonly used in teacher research, as they most often include classroom observations, student interviews, work samples, and anecdotal records. According to Shagoury & Power (2012), "In contrast to traditional education research studies, written in a distant, third-person voice, teacher research often has an immediate, first-person tone. Findings in teacher research are usually presented as narratives from the classroom, with metaphors a common means of highlighting key findings" (p. 5). This is because qualitative research is best used when exploring the opinions and experiences of students in order to improve instruction. In addition, as stated by Patton (1990), "Qualitative inquiry typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples, even single cases (n = 1), selected purposefully" (p. 169). This is important because a qualitative teacher researcher can truly focus on the subjects of the study in order to conduct a more comprehensive analysis of the data.

Qualitative research is best-suited for the current study. Student surveys and interviews, as well as student work samples and audio recordings were used to collect data throughout the study. The nature of this study focuses on student engagement and confidence levels, which can be measured in such ways as identifying the length of time spent with eyes on print, how often students are prepared with their books or reading assignments, and the number of times students say something negative about their own

reading abilities. Reading engagement and confidence levels can also be described using observations of body language, students' written responses, and students' reflections on their learning. The approach of this study focused on describing these observations and interactions. One-on-one and small-group discussions were held to gather students' thoughts and ideas about the stories they read, their opinions about these stories, and their own interpretations of themselves as readers.

Participants

A small sample of students was used in this study in order to acquire a deeper understanding of the data and results. Students were chosen to be included in the study based on if they were both "reluctant readers" and reading below grade level. Reluctant readers were identified as those learners who scored below 60 points out of 80 points (75% or below) using the *Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile* reading survey or if they responded with, "I hate reading." or, "Reading is something I do if someone makes me, but I don't enjoy it." on their "September 2021 Reading and Writing Survey." To be a candidate for the study, the students also had to be reading below grade level. A level "V" is a late 5th grade level, according to *Literably*, an online K-8 running record assessment. The assessment records students reading a passage aloud. Students receive a fluency score, which includes pace and accuracy. Students are also assessed on their reading comprehension using five multiple-choice questions. Assessments are scored by trained *Literably* employees, but recordings, level U or lower is considered below grade level for sixth grade according to the "Teachers College Reading & Writing Project Benchmark Independent Reading Levels and Marking Period Assessments" document used by the school district where this study was conducted. Using this criteria, eleven

students, across five different class periods, qualified and agreed to participate in the study. Table 1 provides information about the participants as readers in the classroom.

Table 1
Student Demographics

Name*	Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile Score	Reading Level (as determined by *Literably* assessment)	Short Story Book Club Genre	Accommodations
Kami	72.5%	U	Realistic Fiction	
James	62.5%	U	Mystery and Suspense	receives multisensory reading instruction (MSR)
Sean	65.5%	O	Funny Stories	
Barbara	75%	T	Mystery and Suspense	
Henry	70%	U	Sports	
Ricky	75%	T	Fantasy	
Connor	68.75%	Q	Sports	IEP - inclusion setting; receives multisensory reading instruction (MSR)
Valerie	63.75%	T	Graphic Novel	IEP - inclusion setting; receives speech instruction
Vivan	66.25%	U	Fantasy	
Jack	72.5%	R	Sports	receives multisensory reading instruction (MSR)
Kendall	48.75%	U	Sports	

*All names are pseudonyms to protect privacy.

Procedure of the Study

This study took place in a sixth-grade language arts classroom, during 48-minute class periods, between the months of October and December 2021, for approximately eight weeks. Data was collected before and after implementation of short story book clubs and during each of the short story book club meetings, which met for four nonconsecutive weeks. In addition, individual instruction took place throughout the research study period.

At the beginning of the school year, three surveys were distributed to all students. The first survey provided general background information and student interests, such as participation in sports and activities, languages spoken at home, and favorite movies, music, and television shows. This survey was entitled "The Life of a Middle School Student: 2021-2022 Edition." The second survey was a reading survey entitled "Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile" (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni, 1996). This survey gauged students' personal attitudes, motivation, and confidence levels regarding reading. The final survey, "September 2021 Reading and Writing Survey," identified students' general interests regarding literacy, including genres, authors, and topics about which to read and write. See Appendix A for the surveys used at the beginning of the year to collect initial student information.

Before implementing short story book club routines, a brief survey was administered to place students into groups based on their interests in a variety of genres. Students were asked to give their first-choice genre and then list additional choices if

their first choice could not be accommodated. Based on the overall interests of the classes from the "September 2021 Reading and Writing Survey," the students were given the following choices for possible genres:

a. action/adventure/survival
b. fantasy
c. funny stories
d. graphic novels
e. historical fiction
f. mystery and suspense
g. realistic fiction
h. scary/horror
i. sports

The following short story book clubs were created based on the results of the survey:

a. Sports
b. Fantasy
c. Funny stories
d. Graphic Novels
e. Realistic Fiction
f. Mystery
g. Scary/Horror

In each class period, students were placed in groups of two to five students. Engaging texts were chosen based on the book club genres and general interests within

the groups. Table 2 includes the short story titles that were chosen, many from short story collections.

Table 2
Short Story Selections by Genre

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Sports	*Lou Gehrig: The Luckiest Man* by David A. Adler	"Laura's Key" by Anne-Marie Reidy	"Sometimes a Dream Needs a Push" by Walter Dean Myers	"The Distance" by Jacqueline Woodson (from *Guys Read: Sports Pages* by Jon Scieszka)
Fantasy	"Percy Jackson and the Singer of Apollo" by Rick Riordan (from *Guys Read: Other Worlds* by Jon Scieszka)	"Percy Jackson and the Singer of Apollo" (Part 2)	"The Test" by Theodore Thomas	"The Months of Manhattan" by Delia Sherman (from *A Wolf at the Door and Other Retold Fairy Tales* by Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling
Funny Stories	"Dear Grandpa: Give Me Money" by Alison DeCamp (from *Funny Girl*, edited by Betsy Bird)	"One Hot Mess" by Carmen Agra Deedy (from *Funny Girl*, edited by Betsy Bird)	"Fleamail" by Deborah Underwood (from *Funny Girl*, edited by Betsy Bird)	"Artemis Begins" by Eoin Colfer (from *Guys Read: Funny Business* by Jon Scieszka)
Graphic Novels	"My Ghost Story" by Dav Pilkey (from *Guys Read: Terrifying Tales* by Jon Scieszka)	"In Which Young Raina Learns a Lesson" by Raina Telgemeier and "The Thumb Incident" by Meghan McCarthy (from *Funny Girl*, edited by Betsy Bird)	"The Wager" by Cathy Camper (from *Guys Read: Heroes and Villains* by Jon Scieszka)	"They Warned Him Not to Eat the Pudding" by Jarrett J. Krosoczka (from *Guys Read: Thrillers* by Jon Scieszka)

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Realistic Fiction	"The Low Cuts Strike Again" by Jason Reynolds (from *Look Both Ways* by Jason Reynolds)	"How a Boy Can Become a Grease Fire" by Jason Reynolds (from *Look Both Ways* by Jason Reynolds)	"Becoming Charise" by Kathe Koja (from *A Wolf at the Door and Other Retold Fairy Tales*, edited by Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling	"Need That Dog" by Sharon Creech (from *Guys Read: Heroes and Villains* by Jon Scieszka)
Mystery	"Check Under the Bed" by Judy Truesdell Mecca	"Boys Will Be Boys" by James Patterson (from *Guys Read: Thrillers* by Jon Scieszka)	"The Case of the Angry Chef," "The Case of the Death Plunge," "The Case of the Hitchhiker," and "The Case of the Fatal Slip" by Arnold J. Sobol (from *Two-Minute Mysteries* by Arnold J. Sobol)	"Monkey Business: A FunJungle Mystery" by Stuart Gibbs (from *Super Puzzletastic Mysteries* by Chris Grabenstein)
Scary/ Horror	"The Hitchhiker" by Lucille Fletcher	"The Landlady" by Roald Dahl	"The Elevator" by William Sleator	"Marcos at the River" by Daniel Jose Older (from *Guys Read: Terrifying Tales* by Jon Scieszka)

Generally, students were given a week to read a short story and complete an assignment for homework; however, the routines did change based on what the school schedule and literacy units would allow (i.e., a shortened week for Thanksgiving, etc.). The assignments followed either whole-class or small-group instruction. Depending on

the particular story and the group's instructional needs, the assignments were designed to practice any or all of the following skills:

- identifying characters and their roles within the story
- tracking crucial plot events and why they're important to the story
- identifying key problems/conflicts
- identifying theme
- making connections to text (text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world)
- Book, Head, Heart, Question (BHHQ) jots

According to Beers and Probst (2017), who developed the "Book, Head, Heart (BHH)" framework, "Reading is about growing, about changing who we are, about helping us see ourselves in the world from a slightly different perspective" (p. 69). They continue, "Reading gives us an opportunity to have an intimate conversation with the text, with the author, with oneself, and then ultimately with others" (p. 48). Students were taught that good readers think about what is happening in the book, in their heads, and in their hearts as they read. They should also make text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections. Doing so helps readers better understand what they read, which increases their reading engagement and overall enjoyment. Groups met after a week to discuss the story and their responses to the homework assignments.

Book club routines were initially introduced by calling each book club to a kidney-shaped reading table in the back of the classroom, one at a time. A question was posed as an icebreaker: *What does your perfect breakfast look like?* Students were given time to respond to the icebreaker question. They were asked to create more informal conversations during book club meetings without raising their hands, as long as they did

not interrupt other group members. Table 3 exhibits the schedule, which was discussed and implemented for the first week. This schedule was followed whenever the school and calendar days allowed thereafter.

Table 3
Short Story Book Club Schedule

Monday	Sports
Tuesday	Fantasy
Wednesday	Funny AND Graphic Novels
Thursday	Realistic Fiction
Friday	Mystery AND Scary/Horror

Book clubs met on a specific day of the week, according to the schedule for their particular genre. I introduced the group's short story, built background, and frontloaded important vocabulary words, as needed. Students were asked to read the short story for homework and complete an assignment on Google Slides. The assignment for each group included graphic organizers related to plot, characters, or conflicts and a Book, Head, Heart, Question (BHHQ) jot (Beers & Probst, 2017). Students were asked to come prepared the following week on their group's assigned day to discuss the story.

For the second week, all book clubs were given the following assignment on the same day: *How is something in this week's story similar to something else you know about?* Students were asked to make a text-to-self, text-to-text, or text-to-world connections. The assignment on Google slides included possible sentence starters for each type of connection and examples of a "surface connection" versus a "deep

connection." Students were given a week to read the story and complete the assignment. A week later, students met simultaneously with their book club groups. They were asked to complete a "Conflict/Problem Tracker" together, which asked them to identify the main conflict, its impact on the characters, and the resolution of their assigned short story. Once the graphic organizer was completed, students were asked to share their text-to-self, text-to-text, and/or text-to world story connections. Finally, they were asked to use some or all of the following questions to help guide their discussions:

- *Did you like the story? Why or why not?*
- *Did you race through the story to find out what happens or did the story drag on?*
- *What would you do if you were in the same situation as the story's character(s)?*
- *Would you want to read another story by the same author? Why or why not?*
- *Which part of the story stood out to you the most and why?*
- *What surprised you most about the story?*
- *Choose a character from the story. Did you like this character? Why or why not?*
- *Are there any characters you could yell at or lecture? Who? What would you say?*
- *What do you think happened to the characters after the story ended?*
- *Did the story feel real to you? Why or why not?*
- *Did you guess the ending? If so, at what point?*
- *What questions do you still have about the story?*

While students worked, I circulated to each group to observe discussions. At the end of the class period, students completed a brief self-reflection assignment about how

they felt their group did during the activity and how they personally contributed to their group.

During the third week, they read their group's short story and responded to comprehension questions for homework independently. These consisted of a combination of multiple-choice and short-answer questions. This week, I was able to meet with book clubs according to the previously-made schedule. As I had done the first week, I introduced and previewed the text with each group. After a week, the students met to discuss the story and their responses to the questions. Students were asked to describe what stood out to them from the story.

By November, we began to transition from a reading unit to a writing unit. There was not as much time for book club meetings, so I began to use the students' independent reading time (usually about ten minutes) before each daily writing lesson for individual reading instruction. During these sessions, I focused on fluency and reading comprehension, depending on the needs of each individual student.

In December, I began to invite students to my daily WIN ("What I Need") period. I met with one student participant per day. During this time, they completed a book club survey, recorded a brief student interview about their confidence in reading, and followed up with individual fluency and/or reading comprehension instruction.

For the final week of book clubs, just before winter break, students read their assigned short stories and identified the resolution of their stories independently during class. They then met simultaneously with their book clubs to complete an assignment and discuss the story in a literature circle format. According to Hsu (2004), "Discussion roles are crucial in literature circles." Hsu describes four key roles for literature circles

according to Daniels (1994), discussion director, literary luminary, connector, and illustrator, as well as four optional roles: summarizer, vocabulary enricher, travel tracer, and investigator (p. 3). These roles allow students to take an active part in their learning by creating accountability and increasing reading engagement. For my study, each student assumed one of the following literature circle roles: Savvy Summarizer, Inspired Illustrator, Creative Connector, Discussion Direction, and Word Wizard, which is similar to the literary luminary.

It is important to note that this study was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic at the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year. The pandemic impacted small-group instruction, as students could only work in groups for under fifteen minutes at a time. If groups of students worked together for longer periods of time, contact tracing needed to be reported for all students in a small group where a student tested positive for Covid-19. In order to minimize the amount of time spent working in small groups, reading assignments had to be given for homework ahead of time instead of during class.

Data Sources

Qualitative data for this study was collected using surveys, interviews, small group discussions, anecdotal notes, and student work samples. Data was also collected quantitatively, using the online running record/reading level assessment, *Literably*, which assesses students' fluency and comprehension. Surveys were taken at the beginning of the year, which led to further surveys being developed. These more streamlined surveys allowed me to place students into groups based on their common interests in particular genres of reading. I took notes during each small group book club meeting and during each interaction with participants during individual instruction. My teacher's journal,

kept on a Google Doc, allowed me to keep track of grades, student responses, transcriptions of student interviews, student observations, and student reflections all in one place. I collected and summarized student work and survey responses, so that I would be able to analyze the data easily.

Data Analysis

The data I collected throughout the study was used to support my inquiry into the effects of targeted, small-group and individual instruction on student engagement and confidence in reading. By providing preliminary surveys, I was able to identify students' general interests and attitudes towards readings. I was also able to gauge a general idea of each student's reading abilities and motivations. This allowed me to place students into small group book clubs and select short stories that would engage students by promoting deep discussion.

Preliminary analysis began with short story book club unit. I was able to see which students struggled with reading comprehension and engagement. I was also able to see how students connected with the texts on a variety of levels. Personal interviews and individual instruction allowed me to dig deeper into students' feelings of confidence (or lack thereof) about reading. In addition, I was able to pinpoint some of the personal struggles students encountered while reading. Graphing students' fluency progress allowed them to see how they were improving and boosted their confidence levels by providing a visual representation of their efforts. For the most part, students were honest in their responses about reading and confidence levels. I was able to create personal goals for many of my students based on these responses.

In order to analyze the data collected in this study, I made several charts of the data I collected. Next to this information, I made notes by summarizing and identifying common themes throughout the data. These themes emerged from a variety of data sources, including specific quotes from transcribed interviews, observation notes, written responses from student work, and charts with quantitative data. According to Shagoury & Power (2012), "The results need to be triangulated with other data sources to provide truly valid findings." This means that a variety of "sources, methods, investigators, or theories (at least three)" are used "to confirm findings" (p. 144). Although this study was primarily qualitative, I triangulated my findings from student interviews, surveys, and written responses with quantitative findings from both formative and summative assessments. The majority of this data, such as work samples, transcribed student interviews, and assessment grades, were color-coded with highlighters for common themes that emerge (p. 122). Organization is crucial, as reliable analysis depends on multiple sources of data that coincide with each other.

Context

Community

This study was conducted in a central New Jersey, suburban community with a rural feel. According to New Jersey Multiple Listing Service, Incorporated, the population of this township is 16,541 (Whitmore, 2022). Over recent years, there has been an increasing population of Asian-Americans, particularly of Indian descent. The Italian-American culture from nearby Trenton and Hamilton Township makes up a large part of the population as well. In addition, there is a growing number of Latinx students in the community. As more families have moved in, there has been a major increase in

residential and commercial development. Townhouses and luxury condos, as well as affordable housing options, are being built daily in order to accommodate the town's residents. An influx of stores and restaurants in the community's downtown area have been built and continue to increase in both number and diversity. Overall, the community is very affluent, with many adults working as doctors, lawyers, and businesspeople in either New York or Philadelphia, both only a train ride away.

District

The school district includes one elementary school, one middle school, and one high school. The schools are becoming more crowded. Class sizes, which were once firmly under twenty-five students per teacher, are now increasing to at least thirty per classroom. Academics and extracurricular activities are major priorities in the community and the school district, as many parents and students place a lot of importance on sports, grades, and higher education. It is not uncommon for students to be a member of the school team, a traveling team, and a town recreation team for their particular sport, and then feel overwhelmed with academic obligations as well.

School

The study site, which is the district's middle school, has over 1,000 students across four grade levels: fifth grade through eighth grade. Although it is a middle school, students have the opportunity to participate in a variety of clubs and activities while attending the school. These include such activities as chess club, drama club, yoga, art, music, and a variety of sports. Students who qualify for additional reading assistance receive multisensory reading instruction (MSR). These students meet in small groups

twice per week to practice fluency and decoding skills with a reading specialist or academic support teacher.

Students

22 students across five sixth grade language arts class periods with the same teacher were identified as both reading below grade level and scoring 75% or below on the "Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile," the criteria needed to participate in this study. Eleven students returned their parent permission forms in order to participate. Two of these students have IEPs and are instructed by myself and a special education teacher in an inclusion setting. Table 1 provides information about the participants as readers in the classroom.

Conclusion

Overall, the results of the initial surveys and testing indicate that the participants have poor fluency and/or reading comprehension skills, often choose to avoid reading, and have generally low self-esteem when it comes to their own reading abilities.

In Chapter Four of this thesis, I will analyze and discuss the results from surveys, observations during individual and small-group instruction, audio recordings of student interviews, and the students' short story book club assignments. Chapter Five will sum up my conclusions and implications for this study.

Chapter 4

Findings of the Study

Introduction

A literacy consultant who often provided professional development to my school's English department once said that the most important part of any reading workshop model is the individual and small-group instruction that takes place during independent reading time. She explained that if we ever happened to be short on time during a class period, it would be more beneficial to skip the whole-class mini-lesson and work with small groups on reading skills and strategies instead. Her message stuck with me as I collected data in my sixth-grade language arts classroom from early October through late December.

This chapter focuses on how targeted instruction in fluency and reading comprehension affects reading engagement and student confidence in reading. This is accomplished through analysis of the data collected from various elements of the reading workshop model, short story book clubs, independent reading, individual instruction, and read alouds. Each component of the workshop model reveals themes that have emerged from the data collection. A summary of the findings of the study follows the individual components and themes.

Book Clubs

One way this study implemented targeted, small-group instruction as part of the reading workshop model was through short story book clubs. Students were placed into groups after selecting their favorite genres (i.e., fantasy, mystery, realistic fiction, etc.). Students read one teacher-chosen short story per week within their chosen genre for four

weeks. After reading, students were given the opportunity to discuss the stories with their peers in small groups. This allowed students with similar interests to interact with each other and engage with the text more easily and effectively.

Building Reading Engagement Through Relatable Stories and Connections

During independent reading each day throughout the study, I would call various genre-based student groups to the back table for discussion. Even in sixth grade, students typically jumped up from their seats and quickly made their way to the kidney-shaped reading table in the back of the room when called. Often, students excitedly asked me questions after the mini-lesson, such as, “Are we doing book clubs today?” or “We didn’t get to finish meeting yesterday. Are we meeting today?”

Reading engagement during the book clubs was measured by how many times students completed the weekly short story reading assignments. These assignments included reading the assigned short story and completing reading comprehension activities. In addition, students were graded on how well they were able to contribute to their group’s discussion of the story each week. Students were given six points for the accuracy of their individual reading comprehension activities and four points for their participation in group discussion, for a total of ten possible points each time their book clubs met. Table 4 shows the students’ book club assignment grades for each of the four weeks.

Table 4
Weekly Book Club Grades

Student	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Kami	95	85	95	100
James	70	100	40	80
Sean	100	100	90	80
Barbara	100	80	100	70
Henry	60	80	60	100
Ricky	95	85	90	100
Connor	60	50	50	80
Valerie	90	90	100	100
Vivan	70	95	80	70
Jack	95	90	100	95
Kendall	70	100	100	70

Looking solely at engagement as the number of times that students completed their weekly book club assignments, all students were engaged. Looking closer, roughly half of the students were able to respond to the reading comprehension activities and discuss the story with detail and accuracy each week. Only one student, Connor, repeatedly had inaccurate or undetailed responses to the majority of his assignments.

After two weeks of working in their short story book clubs, I gave each student a paper copy of "Book Club Survey #1" to complete in order to reveal more about their engagement. I asked students how well they enjoyed each of the stories they had read so far and to explain why they had this particular response. The students could choose,

"Very much!" "It was okay," or "Not at all!" for each story. Table 5 shows some of the students' responses.

Table 5
Book Club Survey #1 Responses

Student	Book Club Genre	Short Story Title	Student Response
Kami	Realistic Fiction	"The Low Cuts Strike Again" by Jason Reynolds	*It was okay.* "It was fine but I would like it more if it wasn't all about getting money."
		"How a Boy Can Become a Grease Fire" by Jason Reynolds	*It was okay.* "The story was about how Gregory's friends were getting him ready for his date. It kind of got boring to read about the story cause they didn't do anything besides getting Gregory ready."
James	Mystery	"Check Under the Bed" by Judy Truesdell Mecca	*Not at all!* "I hated how the words were in play form. I was so confused."
Barbara	Mystery	"Check Under the Bed" by Judy Truesdell Mecca	*It was okay.* "It was a bit hard to understand because it was written in a play format."
Sean	Funny Stories	"Dear Grandpa: Please Give me Money" by Alison DeCamp	*Very much!* "Because it was a funny book matching the category I am in and it made me laugh from Trixie and her Grandpa's personality."
		"One Hot Mess" by Carmen Agra Deedy	*It was okay.* "It was a bit confusing in the beginning. It was funny at the end."

Student	Book Club Genre	Short Story Title	Student Response
Connor	Sports	"Laura's Key" by Anne-Marie Reidy	*Not at all!* "I do not like soccer and it (the story) doesn't fit me."
Valerie	Graphic Novels	"In Which Young Raina Learns a Lesson" by Raina Telgemeier	*Very much!* "I liked it very much because I love all the Raina books and also I can relate to Raina because something like that happened to me before."
Vivan	Fantasy	"Percy Jackson and the Singer of Apollo" by Rick Riordan	*It was okay.* "I disliked it because it was very confusing."
Jack	Sports	"Laura's Key" by Anne-Marie Reidy	*It was okay.* "I don't really enjoy reading soccer stories."
Kendall	Sports	"Laura's Key" by Anne-Marie Reidy	*Very much!* "I gave it a 3 because I like soccer and it was a good story."

Students seemed to be more engaged in the text when the short story was about a topic in which they were interested. For example, Valerie, who read "In Which Young Raina Learns a Lesson" by Raina Telgemeier, claimed to have enjoyed reading the story. On her survey, Valerie wrote, "*Very much!* I liked it very much because I love all the Raina books and also I can relate to Raina because something like that happened to me before." Valerie recounted a specific event that had happened to her previously by stating, "In the story... I can relate to Raina because one time I didn't have any socks on and I thought a rock was stuck between my toes but when I picked it up from off my foot it stung me and then I realized it was a bee." Being able to make connections to the text

was an important factor in book club engagement. In addition, Kendall's response after reading "Laura's Key" by Anne-Marie Reidy was, "*Very much!* I gave it a 3 because I like soccer and it was a good story." One of Kendall's responses about the story was "I connected with the main character on page 2 when she made a bad pass and it went to the other team and they scored, a time I did that is when it was the finals and I made a bad pass and it went to the other team and they scored but I was resilient when we were losing and I went back and scored a goal for my team." Not only was the story interesting to Kendall because it was about soccer, but she had the background knowledge to understand it.

On the other hand, students tended to be disengaged when they were reading a story about a topic that they did not enjoy or understand as well. For example, Connor's statement about the same story was, "*Not at all!* "I do not like soccer and it (the story) doesn't fit me." Text connections became even more crucial in our book club discussions after hearing responses such as these. Connor's favorite sport is baseball, and he dislikes soccer. He was unable to get past the idea that he didn't want to read a story about soccer. He needed to find a way to connect with the story in some other way - as an athlete, through human emotions. Furthermore, students were not as engaged with texts that they perceived to be more difficult to understand. Two students in the Mystery book club disliked the first story that they read, "Check Under the Bed" by Judy Truesdell Mecca. On his response about the story on Book Club Survey #1, James responded, "*Not at all!* I hated how the words were in play form. I was so confused." Barbara had a similar response, stating, "*It was okay.* It was a bit hard to understand because it was written in a play format." While discussing the story as a small group, Barbara's details and

responses about the story were detailed and accurate. James's responses, however, were inaccurate when it came to identifying the characters, and he was unable to discuss the story in great detail. My experience as an educator told me that James had most likely glanced at the story, was disappointed that it was written in a play format, and then tried his best to skim through the story just enough to identify surface-level descriptions for the character map I had assigned. His response to the "Heart Jot" confirmed this idea, as he stated, "I disliked this book because I don't like plays and it was confusing because there were so many indents/tabs." In addition, after reading "The Low Cuts Strike Again" by Jason Reynolds, Kami wrote, "*It was okay.* It was fine but I would like it more if it wasn't all about getting money." Some students may not have loved some of the stories, but they were able to exhibit the ability to be critical of stories and support their opinions with specific reasoning.

Reading engagement can also be measured by reading volume, which is a combination of the amount of time and the number of words that one spends reading. In order to take part in this study, the students had to have indicated on one or more of their beginning-of-year surveys that they did not enjoy reading. This means that they either read very seldomly or they did not read at all. After the final week of book clubs was implemented, I gave students "Book Club Survey #2" to complete. See Appendix B for this form.

The form was distributed to individual participants during the students' W.I.N. (What I Need) time, which is similar to a study hall period. Students were asked to respond to seven questions and add any additional comments if they wished. According to the results of the survey, all students enjoyed at least one of the stories that they had

read during the book clubs. In addition, most students in the study don't typically read at all or read very little. As indicated by the responses on their surveys, they read about the amount of one short story (about fifteen to twenty pages) in a week's time. Only two of the students, Ricky and Sean, responded with, *No, I already read a lot, so this was nothing!* when asked if having the book club assignments each week made them want to read more than they normally would. Students who either had stronger background knowledge or a prior interest in the story topics or authors stated that they enjoyed more of the stories.

Social Interaction Leads to Reading Engagement

During teacher-guided book club sessions, I sat behind a large kidney-shaped reading table in the back of my classroom. Students took a seat around the outside of the table. I often started the session with some type of non-academic question. For example, the very first time each book club met, I asked the students to describe what their ideal breakfast would be. Breakfast is my favorite meal of the day, and I was able to interact genuinely with the students about the topic. It was a very low-stakes question and broke the ice, especially for students who didn't really know each other outside of class or were a bit more shy. Whenever I met with a group of students on a day that was close to a weekend, I would ask the students to share about their past or upcoming plans. This allowed me to learn more about the students' interests, hobbies, and cultures, which allowed me to become more culturally responsive in my teaching. It also allowed students to create better connections with each other and build stronger social interactions.

Providing opportunities for social interactions about stories and books is key in creating reading engagement. After the four weeks of book club sessions were complete, I asked my student participants if they could come to my classroom during their W.I.N. ("What I Need" study hall) period to help out with my study. I showed the students a calendar of December 2021 and asked them to choose a date that was best for them, keeping in mind their schedules for meeting with other teachers, studying and completing assignments, and making up assessments. All of the students chose a date that was sooner rather than later, as they were eager to be a part of my research. As each student participant entered my classroom on their scheduled day, I thanked them for helping me out. I handed them *Book Club Survey #2* and asked them to complete it while I tended to other students in my classroom.

One of the questions on the survey asks, *How much did you enjoy the book club discussions with your group? *Choose the closest answer that describes you BEST.* Approximately 82% of the students chose the response, *I loved them! We always had great discussions.* Two of the students who had struggled the most with completing and comprehending the book club readings and assignments, James and Connor, each responded to this question with, *Some weeks the discussions went well; other weeks they were not as great.* A lot of this depended on how closely they had read the stories and were able to participate in the discussions each week. No one chose the response that said, *I don't think my group had very good discussions at all.* A similar question on the survey asked, *On a scale of 1-3, how much did you enjoy being able to discuss the same story with a group of people?* The majority of the students chose, *Very much!* as their response. Three students chose, *A little bit.* One student, James, chose, *Not at all!* as his

response. The final question asked students to provide their overall opinion of the book clubs. Again, the majority of the students chose *Very much!* Students could include additional comments if they wanted to, so I was able to gain a little more insight from a few students. Kendall explained, *I liked the book club because I love reading about sports and I liked talking about sports.* Jack added, *I really liked my book club members.* Barbara's response was, *Having the ELA book club was a great idea so kudos to whoever came up with the idea.* I asked Barbara to elaborate on her response in a later interview:

> Mrs. Tuminaro: What exactly made it a good idea? What made it work for you, the book club idea?
>
> Barbara: You know how you already have independent reading, where of course you read a book? Not many people talk about the books that they read. They might mention the title of it and say, "Oh yeah, I finished this cool book over the weekend." So yeah, they might mention that a bit, but they don't actually talk about the story. So I thought that the book club was a good idea because then you have people reading all the same stories. I'm just saying also that one of the reasons they probably don't talk about it is because it would be a very one-sided conversation because only you read the book. With the book clubs, they're all reading the same books so you can have an interesting conversation or a funny conversation because they can actually discuss the book. That's why I think it was a good idea to make book clubs.

Barbara stated what I had been thinking about all along. This was the reason I had created these genre-based book clubs in the first place. People love to be social. It is human

nature to want to discuss what is going on in each other's lives, in the world. Creating a place where students can discuss shared texts increases conversation, which in turn, increases reading engagement. Students want to read so that they can discuss the stories and their connections with others. It may have started out as a required reading assignment at the middle school level at first, but eventually, most of the students realized that they actually enjoyed the discussions they had with their groups.

I also looked at how students interacted with each other throughout the book club sessions. In order to gauge how they felt they had contributed to their group, I had students complete a brief book club reflection. The reflection was assigned during the second week of book clubs, when all of the groups met simultaneously to discuss different aspects of the stories instead of one at a time with me at the back reading table. Students responded to the question, *How did <u>YOU</u> help out your group?* Each student interpreted their contributions to their group in different ways. Some provided text-specific examples, while others gave more general responses. Table 6 displays the students' reflection responses.

Table 6
Book Club Reflection (Week 2)

Student	Reflection Response
Kami	*If they forgot something I kind of helped them figure out what they were going to say by giving them some ideas.*
James	*I reminded them who put the mannequin on the train tracks.*
Barbara	*I helped read out questions from the clipboard to keep the convo going.*
Henry	*Well by reminding them about what happened in the book/article.*
Ricky	*I talked about the main conflict and why it was important.*
Valerie	*I helped out by sharing my thoughts about the book.*
Vivan	*By spelling some incorrect words.*
Jack	*We talked about the story.*
Kendall	*I helped them figure out all of the questions.*

Building social interactions through literature circle activities and meaningful discussion questions also helped increase reading engagement. I often observed students rereading the text in order to fact check their conclusions about the stories. Sometimes these "look-backs" were teacher-prompted, but oftentimes I would find the students initiating them as well. Rereading for clarification and deeper understanding was something I modeled in the initial book club sessions and was something that obviously stuck with the students in subsequent sessions. See Appendix C for sample literature circle work.

Building Confidence Through Book Clubs

A major goal of this study was to look at how book clubs and individual instruction impact student confidence in reading. According to a series of student

interviews conducted at the conclusion of the study, students expressed varying levels of confidence in their reading abilities. As I met individually with each student during their W.I.N. period, I asked them roughly the same question: “How do you feel about your confidence in reading, from last year to this year? Now that we’ve done more of the book clubs and some individual instruction? Be honest. Don’t feel like you have to answer in a certain way.” The following are excerpts from some of the interviews I conducted with students about confidence.

Jack: I feel a little bit more confident in myself reading because like I’m working with actual partners and I can talk to them so if I get something wrong, they can actually help me out with what the correct answer is or if I like miss something when I was reading and they actually caught on to it, then they can like help me out and stuff. I feel a little bit more confident than I did last year, yeah.

Mrs. Tuminaro: Do you feel like you can help your group as well, not just them helping you? Do you feel like you can help other people in your group, too?

Jack: (right away) Yeah. Because if they didn’t catch something, then I can also add on and even if they did catch on to it, like *Ryan (name changed) was talking and I added on to it. So, I can add on to what they were saying. Or I can start off saying something and they just add on to me.

In this interview with Jack, he first equated confidence with being able to work with other students who could help him if he needed it. After prompting him to question

how he also might contribute, he quickly realized that he, too, was able to help others with his ideas in group discussions.

Speaking with Vivan about his confidence levels was very encouraging, as he was enthusiastic and genuinely interested in what he was reading:

Mrs. Tuminaro: How do you feel about your confidence in reading, from last year to this year, now that we've done more of the book clubs and some individual instruction?

Vivan: It changed A LOT for two reasons - I found the Webtoon comic book series online and I really like it so far. My second reason is my brother had some really good books. He had Dragon Ball Z. It's a Manga. They're so interesting. They always leave you at cliffhangers. That's my confidence in reading because I really want to keep reading them. Have you ever heard the term, *Don't judge a book by its cover?* At first, I thought it was bad because of how it looked, how the characters looked. Then I read it and I was like, This book is really really good! So I had to read it and it became more interesting.

Mrs. Tuminaro: How do you feel about things you don't get to pick? Let's say you have to read an article, or like today with your reading pre-assessment? If I gave you a short story in book club, how would you feel about your confidence then?

Vivan: I would use the same method you told me. I would just read the thing and think about what I read at the end and then just write it down.

Mrs. Tuminaro: And you would feel confident to give information about the story and contribute to your book club group?

Vivan: (right away) Yes!

Connor, an extremely reluctant reader, added some more insight, opening my eyes to the idea that a lack of confidence comes from within, often after several years of not feeling "good enough." Students are often very self-aware and have learned ways to cope with their real or perceived inabilities. `

Connor: Um…um. I'm kind of like half and half. I still can't really read good. I still have that special class for reading and spelling and stuff. I'd say five out of ten.

Mrs. Tuminaro: What's happening in that class where you feel like you're not quite there? Are you getting feedback or is that what you're thinking in your mind?

Connor: It's kind of like what I'm thinking in my mind because after I read, sometimes I pause and my brain just stops reading and I just don't read and I just stare.

Mrs. Tuminaro: And are you thinking about what you're reading or you're just trail off or zone out?

Connor: I'll just zone out. I'll just look at the words, but I'm not thinking about anything. But most of the time I am focusing on the reading. I like to imagine it in my head.

Mrs. Tuminaro: That's really important, and I think you do. And I told you this the last time we met: you are able to comprehend just reading out loud

where most people probably wouldn't even be paying attention to what they're reading if they're just focusing on fluency. You were paying attention and you knew EXACTLY what happened in the passage. You knew what this meant: “They were drawn by many natural resources.” I could tell you I could probably ask like ten students what that meant and I don't know if all of them would be able to tell me what it means to be drawn by natural resources and also be able to list them.

So, when you find yourself zoning, how do you sort of like stop the zoning out?

Connor: I don’t know.

Mrs. Tuminaro: How do you like pull yourself back?

Connor: I just come back. I just pause for a few seconds and then I’ll start reading again. Like before when I got to the punctuation, I just sort of stopped and it messed me up. I was thinking about the timer. I was thinking like, *Oh my God, it’s going to be bad,* so I just stopped. And I just kept stuttering.

Mrs. Tuminaro: So, a lot of your confidence level sounds like it’s coming from you. It sounds like you are sort of thinking to yourself, *I’m not doing well enough. I’m not good enough.* And I don’t think that’s true. I think that you’re a lot better than you probably even think. What do you think?

Connor: I think…uh, I have no clue.

Mrs. Tuminaro: Well, how do you think your confidence would start to improve? What would need to happen in order for it to improve?

Connor: I would have to read more.

Mrs. Tuminaro: Yes, that would definitely help. What are some of the things you might want to read?

Connor: I like sports books when it's about their backstory, like chapter books about one person, like Babe Ruth. I like comic books like *New Kid,* like graphic novels.

(Audio Recording Student Interview 12/8/21)

Speaking with James, I was able to dive even deeper into the mind of the reluctant reader. I was able to hear more of the self-doubting thoughts that often plague reluctant readers and cause them to avoid reading.

James: I feel okay. Kind of good and kind of not good. I don't read that many long books. And also, the pages don't have a lot of words on them.

Mrs. Tuminaro: How do you feel about that?

James: It doesn't bother me. I don't really like reading long books and I enjoy short books more because they're short and I don't get bored.

Mrs. Tuminaro: Do you feel like you can attack a longer book? Like say to yourself, *I might not enjoy it 100% but I'm gonna be okay?* or do you feel like, *Ugh… this is gonna be hard*.

James: I feel like the second one.

Mrs. Tuminaro: What makes you feel like that? Is it what others have said to you? Or what you tell yourself?

James: What I tell myself. I say, “I won’t be able to finish all of this book. It’s too big and too many words.” I don’t read books that don’t have too many pictures.

Though some students still exhibited lower confidence levels, there was some improvement shown after the book clubs were implemented. Table 7 shows the students’ scores from the “Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile” distributed at the beginning of the year and again at the end of the study. Appendix A contains the form given.

Table 7
“Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile” Survey Scores

Student	September 2021			December 2021		
	Self-Concept as a Reader	Value of Reading	Full Survey	Self-Concept as a Reader	Value of Reading	Full Survey
Kami	65%	80%	72.5%	75%	80%	77.5%
James	42.5%	47.7%	45%	52.5%	67.5%	60%
Barbara	85%	67.5%	76.26%	72.5%	55%	63.75%
Sean	82.5%	85%	83.75%	80%	80%	80%
Henry	65%	75%	70%	65%	65%	65%
Ricky	82.5%	67.5%	75%	70%	75%	72.5%
Valerie	57.5%	70%	63.75%	60%	62.5%	61.25%
Connor	67.5%	52.5%	60%	82.5%	57.5%	70%
Vivan	77.5%	55%	66.25%	72.5%	65%	68.75%
Jack	67.5%	70%	68.75%	67.5%	45%	56.25%
Kendall	67.5%	30%	48.75%	65%	30%	47.5%

Independent Reading

Independent reading is a key component in the reading workshop model. Not only does it allow students to practice reading skills independently while the teacher checks in with individual students or meets with small groups, but it helps to build reading volume and stamina. Over the course of four weeks, I collected data in order to track the students' accountability during reading class. This included tracking their consistency in bringing their independent reading book to class and staying on task during independent reading time. One student, Connor, needed the most reminders to bring his book to class each day. He also needed to be reminded to stay on task when reading instead of playing games on his Chromebook. At times, he chose to bring books that he didn't enjoy reading, simply to fulfill the requirement of bringing a book to class. Most days, he would leave the book on the back table or bookshelf near his seat before leaving the classroom for the day instead of taking it with him for further reading, making his daily reading inconsistent.

Increasing Reading Volume and Stamina by Allowing Student Choice

Aside from Connor, the rest of the student participants brought their independent reading books to class and stayed on task during independent reading time with at least 88% consistency. Based on the research I had done prior to implementing this study, allowing for student choice during independent reading positively impacts reading engagement, particularly in the areas of volume and stamina. An interview with Barbara about her confidence levels further explains this idea.

> Barbara: Um, um, um, um, um, so how do I say this? I think I've grown as a reader and as an independent reader. Last year (Covid year), we didn't do

any independent reading; it was mostly writing. We would read a story, but it was a story that the teacher told us to read. We didn't have any freedom to read what we wanted. We didn't have that much independent reading time; we didn't have any at all. This year since you gave us independent reading time, I've grown as an independent reader because now I have the freedom to read a book that I actually want to read, not like a random book that she (last year's teacher) makes us read.

Mrs. Tuminaro: Now the book club stories - you have to read them, but what's different about that?

Barbara: You gave us the choice to choose which genre we wanted, but like you also looked at which books we read and picked the stories from there. They didn't do that in fifth grade. They would just pick a random book

Kami, in another student interview about confidence, also alluded to the idea of personal freedom while reading independently, however in a different way. She stated, "I feel more confident reading silently because I don't have to read to other people or pay attention to them. It feels kind of free." Middle school students are beginning to crave much more independence. Students, like adults, prefer some control over their own lives. Allowing for student choice, whenever possible, increases students' motivation to read, as they feel like they have some control over their own learning experience. I gave students full autonomy during independent reading time and limited choice for the genre-based book clubs. As Barbara had pointed out, even though I chose the stories within each genre, I made educated decisions about the types of stories the student population

would enjoy based on reading interest surveys. Students making choices for themselves about their own reading really contributed to reading engagement overall.

As a starting point to track volume, I asked students to identify the approximate number of books they had read over the course of the summer, which is about two and a half months. This was done as part of the "September Reading and Writing Survey" that students completed in the beginning of the year. At the conclusion of the study, I asked students to track the number of books they had read from October through December, another two and a half months. This question was added to the second "Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile" survey I administered at the end of the study. Even though summertime is often much more carefree, all but one student, Henry, read more books from October through December 2021 than they had from June through August 2021. Many of the students nearly doubled or even tripled the number of books they completed. Students kept track of the books they read on a reading log in their English Language Arts folders. Table 8 displays the total number of books read in the summer and during the study for each student participant.

Table 8
Number of Books Read

Student	Books Read from June 2021 Through August 2021	Books Read from October 2021 Through December 2021
Kami	3	5
James	1	4
Barbara	1.5	5
Sean	9	30
Henry	10	5
Ricky	4	8
Valerie	2	6
Connor	1	5
Vivan	7	12
Jack	2	4
Kendall	5	14

Building reading stamina this year has been a challenge. The reason for this most likely has to do with the Covid-19 pandemic. As mentioned earlier in my interview with Barbara, most of my students were not given independent reading time during the previous school year. My guess is that their fifth-grade teachers needed to hold the students accountable for reading and comprehension while teaching remotely. In order to do this, they probably assigned a variety of short stories and articles along with comprehension questions, instead of allowing independent reading time with student choice. I know that the other sixth grade teachers and I often did the same last year, as the previous year was not a typical school year in any way.

This year, I wanted to get back to using the Reading Workshop model and decided to incorporate independent reading while allowing some time for student choice. This occurred while small groups of students were meeting with me for their genre-based book clubs. When I wasn't meeting with small groups, I observed the daily reading habits of the students in my study. I often gave ten minutes of independent reading time at the beginning of the period as a "Do Now" activity before starting a writing lesson. Whenever our class was in a reading unit, the period of allotted time for independent choice reading increased to 20-30 minutes.

During one of the class writing units, I observed a typical ten-minute independent reading period for two consecutive days. I was able to observe what it looks like when students are engaged and what it looks like when students exhibit avoidance behaviors during independent reading. One student, Barbara, just needed a gentle reminder to get started and then was able to engage in reading. At first, she didn't bring her required independent reading book to class. She sat at her desk for two minutes until I walked over and asked her where her book was. She told me it was in her locker. She retrieved the book and then read nineteen pages in the remaining seven minutes. The next day, she automatically brought the same independent book to class as yesterday. She was engaged and read for six minutes, but then went to the restroom for the remaining time.

Some of the students showed a strong interest in the texts they were reading. For example, Henry was engaged in a student-chosen, funny book for the entire ten minutes on both days. He barely looked up from the book during that time and read about thirteen pages on the first day. Valerie chose to read a graphic novel, which happens to be the same genre she chose for her book club, for the entire ten minutes. She read eighteen

pages on the first day during that time period. In addition, Vivan read a student-chosen online graphic novel series. This series was also in the fantasy genre, which he had chosen for his book club as well. He stared closely at his computer screen for the majority of the ten minutes each day.

For some reluctant readers, having the freedom to choose their own texts didn't seem to motivate them to want to read, or they chose to read texts that were well below their grade level. For example, Sean had just begun to open a digital library database on his Chromebook when I asked him what he was reading three minutes into the reading period. He chose to read a story on a third grade reading level from the database. As I observed, I noticed that he was often staring at the screen, but wasn't moving his eyes to actually read. I asked him what he was reading and how he was doing. He gave me the title and said that he was doing okay. The next day, he chose a physical book from my classroom library shelf without being asked. The book was a funny book, just like the book club genre he had chosen. He read a few pages very quickly during this independent reading period.

John's reading habits were quite interesting, as I realized that he was reading random pages out of order. Each time I walked by, he was on a different part of a sports novel written in verse. He started reading around page 160 for about a minute, went to the restroom for about three minutes, and then read pages 110-115. The second day, he tried to get a different book from the classroom library shelf. When I asked him to try to continue the one he had chosen the day before, he started reading from the very beginning.

Kendall started reading a student-chosen realistic fiction book right away. After about two minutes in, she began mouthing across the room to a friend. After I silently addressed this, she returned the book without completing it and started searching for a new book from the bookshelf. She seemed to have only two chapters left to go. After a couple of minutes of allowing her to search, I offered her a suspenseful mystery/thriller book that I had previously recommended in class by reading the first chapter aloud. She took it right away, but then began filling in her reading log for both the previous and new books. With only about one and a half minutes left of independent reading time, she began reading the first couple of pages. The next day, she read the book I had suggested the day before intermittently for the whole period.

Students that seemed to have developed a taste for reading certain authors, topics, and genres were able to stay engaged in reading much longer than students who had not yet found their reading identity. I observed a few students avoid reading as much as possible each day by using the restroom, going on the computer for other purposes, or spending time at the bookshelf in search of a new book when they hadn't completed a previous book.

Individual Instruction for Reading Comprehension and Fluency

In addition to providing whole-class and small-group instruction, individual instruction was implemented as well. This occurred during independent reading in English language arts class and during the students' W.I.N. period. Instruction was provided in the areas of reading comprehension and fluency, depending on each student's individual needs. Needs were assessed using the online running record program called *Literably*, which identifies students' reading levels based on their fluency and reading

comprehension. My school district uses the Fountas and Pinnell system for measuring student reading progress. This system ranges from levels A through Z+. In my school district, a level V is considered on grade level for the beginning of sixth grade. By the end of the year, students are expected to be reading at a level W. Fluency is measured using the Hasbrouck & Tindal Compiled Oral Reading Fluency Norms (2017). In sixth grade, students are expected to be reading 132 words correct per minute (WCPM). By winter, students are expected to be reading with 145 WCPM and by the spring, the benchmark is 146 WCPM. Using the information provided by Literably and the benchmarks provided by my school district, I was able to determine the individual instruction needed for each student.

Table 9 depicts the students' Literably scores for both the fall and winter. Out of the eleven student participants, six students increased their reading levels by at least one letter. The other five students stayed at the same level, but did not decrease in their reading levels. One student, Connor, remained at a level Q, which is equivalent to the end of fourth grade or beginning of fifth grade, according to my school district's benchmarks. During the study, Connor exhibited the lowest reading engagement, as demonstrated through his reading stamina and time on task.

Table 9
Student Literably Scores - Fall and Winter

Name	Fall - October 2021	Winter - December 2021
Sean	O	U
Barbara	T	V
James	U	U
Henry	U	U
Kami	U	V
Ricky	T	V
Connor	Q	Q
Valerie	T	V
Jack	R	V
Vivan	U	U
Kendall	U	U

Connor's reading level data was consistent as compared to the reading comprehension assessments given throughout the study. The assessments, given in October and December, asked students to read a short story on grade level. Students were then asked to respond to multiple-choice and short-answer reading comprehension questions. Table 10 shows the students' scores for these two assessments.

Table 10
Student Reading Skills Check-In Scores

Name	Reading Skills Check-In #1 10/5/21 Short Story Assessment: "Good Enough" by Rachel Vail	Reading Skills Check-In #2 12/9/21 Short Story Assessment: "It's About Time" by Gordon Korman
Sean	60%	70%
Barbara	85%	70%
James	70%	70%
Henry	95%	90%
Kami	90%	90%
Ricky	80%	60%
Connor	65%	65%
Valerie	95%	100%
Jack	65%	90%
Vivan	80%	70%
Kendall	100%	90%

The scores for the reading comprehension assessments were very inconsistent. Some students, such as Jack, showed much improvement in their reading comprehension skills from one unit to another. Other students had very similar scores from one assessment to another. For example, Valerie's first assessment score was 95%, while her

second assessment was 100%. Connor's scores remained the same from the first unit assessment to the second. I observed Connor during the assessments and regular classes. He often rushed through and did not read the directions or short stories carefully. His answers were typically very brief and lacked detail. Connor retook both the first and second tests verbally with the inclusion teacher. His original grade on both the first- and second-unit tests was 55%, which increased to 65% with the retakes.

The skills that were assessed on the unit check-ins were taught and reinforced during whole-class, book club, and individual reading instruction. Aside from general reading comprehension skills, such as identifying characters and setting, I also taught specific strategies for comprehending text to individual students. I discussed personal reading goals in order to identify strategies that would help students achieve these goals.

During a session with a student, Vivan, I was able to discuss reading comprehension strategies that were more specific to his needs. At the time, he was reading the *Gods of High School* series by Yongje Park, which is in the graphic novel or Manga genre. He told me the book is "never-ending," as the reader chooses the chapter to go to next. He turned his Chromebook screen towards me as he leaned forward to show me how to choose the next chapter. He was clicking through quickly to show me the table of contents and how it worked. He was able to discuss the main conflict and side conflicts of the story with great detail. This was his previous reading goal. After we discussed the conflicts, we had the following conversation:

Mrs. Tuminaro: What is a reading goal you have for yourself?

Vivan: To finish the book!

Mrs. Tuminaro: That's great! What specific reading skill would you want to work on as you're reading?

Vivan: To read slower so that I can understand what happened in the story. When I read too fast, I don't know what's going on.

Mrs. Tuminaro: How do you think you can do that?

Vivan: Stop scrolling so fast!

Mrs. Tuminaro: Oh, because it's digital? Are there chapters in the book?

Vivan: Yes. (Student shows me by clicking through.)

Mrs. Tuminaro: Another way you can make sure you slow down is if you stop after each chapter and think about what you just read. Make sure you understand it before moving on.

Vivan: That would be good! You can choose what chapter you go to next in the book.

(Audio Recording Student Interview 12/16/21)

Since he enjoyed reading this series so much, Vivan would beg me repeatedly to have independent reading time. He was able to increase his reading engagement because he not only found a series of books that greatly interested him, but because he was willing to apply reading comprehension strategies while reading this engaging series. Again, allowing the freedom to choose books greatly affected how engaged students were in their reading, and even in the instruction that accompanied their reading.

Fluency Practice Increases Reading Comprehension and Confidence

An area in which I saw a large increase in confidence was during repeated readings for fluency practice. When I had asked students earlier in the year to identify

areas they wanted to improve for reading, many expressed concerns about their oral reading fluency. Middle school students do not get many opportunities to read aloud in front of others, so they often do not feel confident in these situations. I worked individually with students who were considered below-grade level based on their fall fluency scores, which was initially assessed through the online reading assessment, *Literably*. This means that they were reading fewer than 132 wcpm (words correct per minute).

One student with whom I worked with individually on fluency was Sean. He read "Living in the Dark Zone" from Reading A-Z, which is a level Q. A level Q is below grade level for sixth grade, as a level V is on-level in my district. His first reading was 100 wcpm. His second reading of the same passage was 108 wcpm. Both rates are below benchmark for 6th grade. After these two readings, I asked him the following question: "What do you think might slow you down sometimes?" His response was, "When I move down to the next line, I lose my place sometimes and it slows me down."

I decided to have him try reading the passage a third time. This time, his fluency rate was 122 wcpm. I asked him, "What do you think you did differently this time?" He responded, "I tried going a little faster, but at the same time tried to be a little bit careful. When you're reading faster, sometimes you can lose words pretty easily. It can look like another word and you get confused sometimes." I was extremely happy with this outcome. Not only did the student improve his wcpm, but he also realized that he can read more quickly and smoothly by reading more carefully and not trying to rush.

During a later interview about confidence, Sean stated, "I definitely feel a little bit more confident. When I read, I guess I have a little bit more fluency, but what mainly

helps me is when I'm reading over and over, I can get a little bit faster because I'm a little bit used to the words so I get a little bit better each time." Hearing the immediate feedback that I gave allowed Sean to build his confidence as we tracked his progress on a fluency graph. See Appendix D for sample student fluency graphs. After discussing oral reading fluency, I asked Sean if he thought the same thing can happen when you reread silently in your head. He responded, "Yeah. I can have better and better fluency and I can also recognize each sentence a little bit more."

Engagement During Classroom Read Alouds

Although it wasn't part of the original plan, as the study went on, I decided to look at reading engagement during read alouds in addition to independent reading engagement. While I presumed that engagement would be higher during read alouds than independent reading, some of the same students still had difficulty staying on task during the read alouds, just as they did during independent reading. I observed listening engagement behaviors during our class read aloud of the novel, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963* by Christopher Paul Curtis, for three consecutive days. Each day, students were given copies of the novel in order to follow along with the text as they listened. I reminded them that following along with the reading would prevent them from missing critical details, especially when they were asked to identify crucial plot points after reading.

About half of the students followed along with the text for all three days, but the day that I noticed reading engagement increase the most during the read aloud was when I read the next to last chapter in the book. In this chapter, the author describes the historical event of the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama,

which took place in 1963 during segregation in the South. The chapter is descriptive and suspenseful. I also mentioned before reading that the events of the chapter are a bit confusing to understand at first. As I read that particular day, Vivan sat motionless with his book up in front of his face. Kendall, who days before had to be told to open the book, now followed along with the words closely with a pen. James, another reluctant reader, chose to follow along with the book closely today, leaning down toward the book. Kendall had to be told to open her book at first, but then kept interest throughout the chapter. When someone asked, "What if we don't remember what the most crucial event was in the chapter?" she called out, "Look back in the story!" On the day we read about the church bombing, she had her head down and stared intently at the book, tracking the words with a pen. Connor, who did not typically follow along with the read alouds and had even put his head down many times during them, DID jump at the chance to reread when I asked the whole class to reread a part that was confusing. I told the class, "I got confused by this part when I first read it, too. If this happens, you should find the place where the text first became confusing and reread from that point on. It doesn't matter how many years you've been reading. It happens to all of us at some point!" After rereading, Connor was able to explain what had happened in a confusing conversation between two main characters. He smiled proudly as I praised him for his excellent reading skills.

Although this chapter depicted an extremely sad event in our country's history, the chapter held the majority of the students' interests more than other chapters in the book. Perhaps it was also the fact that I had prefaced this chapter's read aloud with the idea that the chapter was challenging to understand and required close reading. I had even

gone as far as to say that I had been confused by it during my first reading, even though I was a much more experienced reader than anyone else in the classroom. This may have increased students' confidence, which in turn increased their reading engagement.

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Chapter 5

Summary, Conclusions, Limitations, and Implications for the Field

> *It changed A LOT for two reasons - I found the Webtoon comic book series online and I really like it so far. My second reason is my brother had some really good books. He had Dragon Ball Z. It's a Manga. They're so interesting. They always leave you at cliffhangers. That's my confidence in reading because I really want to keep reading them. Have you ever heard the term, Don't judge a book by its cover? At first, I thought it was bad because of how it looked, how the characters looked. Then I read it and I was like, This book is really, really good! So I had to read it and it became more interesting.*
>
> *- Vivan, when asked about his confidence*

Summary of the Findings

This study was conducted with the purpose of finding out what happens to reading engagement and confidence when middle school students are given individual and small-group instruction in a culturally relevant classroom. Students were placed into genre-based, short story book clubs for small-group instruction and were given time for independent reading and individual instruction. The findings suggest that when students have the opportunity to converse with their peers about common texts they are reading, their reading engagement and confidence tend to increase. In addition, the findings suggest that reading engagement tends to increase when students are given the freedom to choose their own texts for independent reading, as long as they have an interest in and prior knowledge for the topic. Reading engagement appears to be limited when students'

own confidence in reading is lower. On the other hand, direct instruction, especially in the areas of fluency and reading comprehension, typically builds confidence in reading.

Conclusions of the Study

Overall, the students enjoyed reading the same text with other students who shared interests in genres of literature and seemed to benefit from the short story book clubs I facilitated. This is because they were able to discuss the meaning of the text and share connections they made with one another. Rosenblatt (1982) describes the connections readers make as "literary transactions" and explains, "I use John Dewey's term, transaction, to emphasize the contribution of both reader and text. The words in their particular pattern stir up elements of memory, activate areas of consciousness" (p. 268). When students are able to share these "elements of memory" with others, they are more likely to become engaged in the text and the activity of reading. Like Tovani (2000), I found that my students enjoyed making connections to the stories and being able to discuss them with each other. The text seemed to have a greater significance to the readers when they could connect in relation to their past experiences and prior knowledge. In addition, most students felt a sense of responsibility to their book club group members, which caused them to complete their assigned reading more consistently than they would have if they were asked to read for themselves only. This created a sense of community and accountability, which further developed their reading engagement.

The student participants often enjoyed the texts that were about their specific interests. For example, if a student played soccer, they enjoyed reading a story about soccer. In contrast, students seemed to shut down or become less engaged in text topics that they found challenging or did not enjoy reading. Striving readers in my study were

quick to dismiss a text if it was not on a topic to which they thought they could relate. These findings align with previous studies (Protacio, 2017; Tovani, 2000), which reported that students have significantly higher motivation to read when the text is about a topic of personal interest or one that they were able to choose themselves. Furthermore, if students do not have the necessary tools to make sense of difficult texts, their confidence levels drop, causing them to exhibit reading avoidance. Tovani (2000) explains that students should be able to identify the signs that indicate confusion and then use a variety of reading comprehension strategies to make meaning out of challenging text. Once students in the study were introduced to this strategy, most found it very helpful.

Throughout the study, I used individual and small-group instruction to introduce and practice reading comprehension strategies, including those that students can use independently when they find they are confused by text. The intent was to increase students' confidence in their reading. Following Guthrie's (2013) research that intrinsic student motivation is increased by allowing students some autonomy in the decisions they make about their reading. This includes choosing topics or texts, exhibiting comprehension skills and strategies in a variety of ways, and choosing partners or groups for text discussion. I also worked with individual students on their oral reading fluency, using repeated readings and direct instruction. The methods were well-received for the most part, as students' confidence expanded as they felt they had the power to control their own reading comprehension, instead of relying on others as they had in the past. Although I chose the individual short stories for the genre-based book clubs, the students were able to choose their favorite genres. They were also able to select an independent

reading book used to practice reading strategies. This connects to Fisher & Frey's (2018) assertion that students appreciate having a choice in their own reading. Whenever students are given a choice, even if it is limited by a teacher-chosen topic or genre, it motivates students by creating the feeling that they have some control over their own learning. This can increase confidence levels and, in turn, reading engagement.

Implications

There are some implications for teacher researchers who wish to increase reading engagement and confidence for their readers' instruction. This includes the importance of fluency instruction, even at the middle school level, as well as building reading comprehension skills and strategies. This may be done through Reader's Theater, as it can be a strong motivational tool for reluctant adolescent readers to practice their reading skills (Keehn, Harmon, & Shoho, 2008). Teachers also need to be aware of a variety of strategies for teaching reading comprehension strategies. For example, a few of my students expressed concerns that reading stories in a play format is often difficult and confusing. Teachers will need to instruct students to use graphic organizers, such as character maps, to track character roles and crucial plot events.

In addition, teachers who choose to implement these strategies will need to make sure that they work for their particular students, classrooms, and schedules. This includes allowing enough time for independent reading in the classroom. Students must have time to read their self-selected or assigned book club texts independently as the teacher confers with individuals or small groups of students. Developing a consistent schedule is crucial. Depending on the time allotted, teachers can plan to meet with one or two small groups each day of the week. Having a predictable schedule in place allows students to

anticipate and prepare for their meetings with teachers and peers. Teachers should select texts according to the interests and background knowledge of their student population.

In the future, teachers should also aim to incorporate multicultural literature into their daily or small-group instruction in order to provide a more culturally relevant environment. One way to accomplish this is by creating multicultural book clubs. Texts can be chosen based on cultures and traditions represented in the classroom, particularly those mentioned during class discussions and individual student surveys or writing assignments. Students will gain exposure to a variety of cultures, which represent our truly diverse society. Students will also be able to think critically about how society views various cultural groups (Milner, 2014). Understanding how students in this study were much more interested in texts to which they could relate will help educators realize that students will also enjoy reading texts in which they see themselves represented culturally. In the future, I plan to grow my collection of short stories for book clubs, using culturally responsive strategies to choose engaging texts.

Finally, student interaction surrounding literature is crucial for building engagement and reading comprehension. Many educators are resistant to making time in their instruction for student talk, or they are uncertain about how to maintain order in the classroom during student discussions. Setting high expectations when book clubs are first implemented is key in creating an environment where students feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings about text. Having a list of engaging, yet general, text discussion questions for students to refer to, as well as a list of sentence starters for accountable talk, will help students stay on task and be respectful to one another.

Modeling these types of discussions would also be beneficial. In addition, teachers can use timers to help keep students on task when scheduled talk time is limited.

Limitations

This study was conducted over a three-month period, from early October to the end of December 2021. The book club portion of the study was only able to take place over four nonconsecutive weeks. It was difficult to maintain a consistent schedule for the book clubs, as reading and writing units alternated each month. During the duration of the study, two reading units were covered. During the writing unit that took place in between the two reading units, time for independent reading was severely limited. Even throughout the two reading units, independent reading time was limited due to short class periods of about forty-five minutes each. During these class periods, I followed the reading workshop model, which includes a read aloud, a mini-lesson, and time for independent reading and practice. This left about twenty minutes daily to work with small groups and individual students. My class sizes ranged from an inclusion class of eighteen students with a cooperating teacher, to a general education class of twenty-six students. The classes that had twenty-five to twenty-six students had larger book club groups and more groups to meet with each week. It was difficult to find the time to follow up and check in with individual students on a steadier basis for increased accountability. Additional research is needed to determine if classrooms that have longer periods of independent reading time, consecutive reading units, and smaller class sizes would be more effective using this type of small-group and individualized instruction.

Another major limitation to the study was that it took place during an atypical school year due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. Although all students have returned

to school full-time this school year, many students had to quarantine for long periods of time and learn remotely. At times, this affected my ability to conduct book club meetings and meet with students individually. I was also not able to observe some of the students' independent reading habits in a consistent manner. In order to get a clearer understanding of how students can become more confident and better engaged in their reading, additional research is needed during a more typical school year.

Implications for Future Research

Future research is still needed in the areas of reading engagement and confidence and in a variety of geographical locations, grade levels, and demographics. Teacher researchers who plan to use surveys with their students need to ask meaningful and purposeful questions in order to gain significant knowledge about their students. Most of my students did not give additional comments when the questions were optional. It would be beneficial to make short-answer survey questions mandatory so that students provide more detailed thoughts. This is something that I realized in my own study, as I had only required responses to multiple-choice questions on some of the surveys. This limited the number of thoughts the students shared with me about their individual book club experiences.

In addition, educators often have difficulty stepping back and simply allowing students to take charge of their own learning and discussions. Teachers need to act as facilitators in the conversations and be careful not to talk too much during discussion times. While I gave plenty of compliments to students throughout the book club sessions, I noticed that I did talk too much at times. It would have been more beneficial to listen

even more and give students more time to figure out crucial ideas instead of jumping in as much to explain key parts of the story.

Conclusion

There are so many strategies that can be used to motivate students and help boost their confidence in reading. Not every strategy works for every single student. Some students benefit from being held accountable by their peers in a book club. Others enjoy reading their own choice materials, or they learn through connections with their peers in discussion groups. No matter what, striving readers will benefit from educators who implement research-based strategies for motivating their students to engage in reading and feel successful in their reading abilities.

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Appendix A

Beginning-of-Year Surveys

The Life of a Middle School Student ~
2021-2022 Edition ~

First and Last Name:

Draw a picture of yourself (or a picture of something that represents you) here:

Name I go by (nickname if you have one):

My Birthday:

I live with (list adults, siblings, pets, etc.)...

Do you speak any other languages at home? If so, which ones?

My 5th grade teacher's name was...

Favorite School Subject:

Favorite Food:

Sports, Activities, or Clubs I Like to Do in My Free Time (or *want* to do - inside or outside of school):

Favorite Music Genre(s), Band(s), Singer(s), and/or Song(s):

Favorite Movie(s), TV shows, and/or YouTube channels:

When I grow up I want to...

I wish my teachers knew/I want my teachers to know...

Figure 1
Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile reading survey

Name: _____ Date: _____

Sample 1: I am in _____.
- ❑ Sixth grade
- ❑ Seventh grade
- ❑ Eighth grade
- ❑ Ninth grade
- ❑ Tenth grade
- ❑ Eleventh grade
- ❑ Twelfth grade

Sample 2: I am a _____.
- ❑ Female
- ❑ Male

Sample 3: My race/ethnicity is _____.
- ❑ African-American
- ❑ Asian/Asian American
- ❑ Caucasian
- ❑ Hispanic
- ❑ Native American
- ❑ Multi-racial/Multi-ethnic
- ❑ Other: Please specify _____

1. My friends think I am _____.
- ❑ a very good reader
- ❑ a good reader
- ❑ an OK reader
- ❑ a poor reader

2. Reading a book is something I like to do.
- ❑ Never
- ❑ Not very often
- ❑ Sometimes
- ❑ Often

3. I read _____.
- ❑ not as well as my friends
- ❑ about the same as my friends
- ❑ a little better than my friends
- ❑ a lot better than my friends

4. My best friends think reading is _____.
- ❑ really fun
- ❑ fun
- ❑ OK to do
- ❑ no fun at all

5. When I come to a word I don't know, I can _____.
- ❑ almost always figure it out
- ❑ sometimes figure it out
- ❑ almost never figure it out
- ❑ never figure it out

6. I tell my friends about good books I read.
- ❑ I never do this
- ❑ I almost never do this
- ❑ I do this some of the time
- ❑ I do this a lot

7. When I am reading by myself, I understand _____.
- ❑ almost everything I read
- ❑ some of what I read
- ❑ almost none of what I read
- ❑ none of what I read

8. People who read a lot are _____.
- ❑ very interesting
- ❑ interesting
- ❑ not very interesting
- ❑ boring

9. I am _____.
- ❑ a poor reader
- ❑ an OK reader
- ❑ a good reader
- ❑ a very good reader

(continued)

Figure 1 (continued)
Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile reading survey

Name: _____ Date: _____

10. I think libraries are _____.
- ❑ a great place to spend time
- ❑ an interesting place to spend time
- ❑ an OK place to spend time
- ❑ a boring place to spend time

11. I worry about what other kids think about my reading _____.
- ❑ every day
- ❑ almost every day
- ❑ once in a while
- ❑ never

12. Knowing how to read well is _____.
- ❑ not very important
- ❑ sort of important
- ❑ important
- ❑ very important

13. When my teacher asks me a question about what I have read, I _____.
- ❑ can never think of an answer
- ❑ have trouble thinking of an answer
- ❑ sometimes think of an answer
- ❑ always think of an answer

14. I think reading is _____.
- ❑ a boring way to spend time
- ❑ an OK way to spend time
- ❑ an interesting way to spend time
- ❑ a great way to spend time

15. Reading is _____.
- ❑ very easy for me
- ❑ kind of easy for me
- ❑ kind of hard for me
- ❑ very hard for me

16. As an adult, I will spend _____.
- ❑ none of my time reading
- ❑ very little time reading
- ❑ some of my time reading
- ❑ a lot of my time reading

17. When I am in a group talking about what we are reading, I _____.
- ❑ almost never talk about my ideas
- ❑ sometimes talk about my ideas
- ❑ almost always talk about my ideas
- ❑ always talk about my ideas

18. I would like for my teachers to read out loud in my classes _____.
- ❑ every day
- ❑ almost every day
- ❑ once in a while
- ❑ never

19. When I read out loud I am a _____.
- ❑ poor reader
- ❑ OK reader
- ❑ good reader
- ❑ very good reader

20. When someone gives me a book for a present, I feel _____.
- ❑ very happy
- ❑ sort of happy
- ❑ sort of unhappy
- ❑ unhappy

Note. Adapted with permission from the Motivation to Read Profile (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni, 1996)

Name: _____ Period:_____

September 2021 Reading and Writing Survey

1. If you had to guess…
    a. How many books have you read this summer? ____
    b. How many books did you read during the last school year (5th grade)? ____
    c. How many of those books did you choose for yourself? ____

2. What are your favorite genres, or kinds, of things to READ? Circle all that apply.

fantasy	mysteries	science fiction	horror
plays	poetry	magazine articles	comic books
funny books	series	biographies	forums
informational	graphic novels	action stories	blogs
true stories	news articles	historical fiction	sports books
realistic fiction	Greek mythology	survival stories	manga

3. What/Who are some of your favorite books and/or authors these days?
_____
_____

4. What do you think is your greatest strength as a reader?
_____
_____

5. What would you like to get better at, in terms of reading?
_____
_____

6. If you know the title of the next book you would like to read, write it here:
_____

7. How do you usually get books to read? Circle all that apply.

classroom library	school library	public library
book store	online	other: _____

8. Do you have a library card? _____
How often do you visit the public library? _____

9. Which of these statements comes closest to the way you feel about reading?

a. I hate reading.
b. I read if someone makes me, but I don't enjoy it.
c. Reading is okay. Sometimes I read something if it looks interesting.
d. I like to read, but I have a hard time with it.
e. I like to read, but I don't always choose to do it in my free time.
f. I really enjoy reading and often read when I have free time.
g. Other:_____

10. What are your favorite genres, or kinds, of things to WRITE? Circle all that apply.

narrative (stories)	persuasive/argument/opinion	poetry
journal writing	informational (expository)	plays

11. What topics do you like to write about (i.e. events in your own life, sports, animals, history?

_____

_____

12. What do you think is your greatest strength as a writer?

_____

13. What would you like to get better at, in terms of writing?

_____

14. Which of these statements comes closest to the way you feel about writing?

a. I hate writing.
b. I write if someone makes me, but I don't enjoy it.
c. Writing is okay. Sometimes I enjoy writing if it's an interesting topic.
d. I like to write, but I have a hard time with it.
e. I really enjoy writing and often write when I have free time.
f. Other: _____

Appendix B

Book Club Survey #2

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. OVERALL, how much did you enjoy the stories that you read for your book club?

*Choose the closest answer that describes you BEST.

a. I loved them all!
b. I liked them a little bit, but I wouldn't want to read another story that is similar.
c. I didn't like most of them, but there was at least one that was interesting, funny, exciting, etc.
d. I really DID NOT like any of the short stories AT ALL!

2. Did having the book club assignments each week make you read more than you normally would?

*Choose the closest answer that describes you BEST.

a. Yes, I usually don't read, but I had to in order to be able to answer the questions and discuss the story each week.
b. No, I read about the same amount because I replaced my usual independent reading with the book club story.
c. No, I already read a lot, so this was nothing!
d. No, I don't like to read and I really didn't read much of the book club stories at all.

3. How much did you enjoy the book club discussions with your group?

*Choose the closest answer that describes you BEST.

a. I loved them! We always had great discussions.

b. Some weeks the discussions went well; other weeks they were not as great.

c. I don't think my group had very good discussions at all.

4. On a scale of 1-3, how much did reading the book club stories and responding to the questions help you acquire (gain) stronger reading comprehension skills?

1	2	3
Not at all!	A little bit.	Very much!

5. On a scale of 1-3, how much did being part of the book club help to improve your vocabulary?

1	2	3
Not at all!	A little bit.	Very much!

6. On a scale of 1-3, how much did you enjoy being able to discuss the same story with a group of people?

1	2	3
Not at all!	A little bit.	Very much!

7. On a scale of 1-3, overall, how much did you enjoy meeting in book clubs during independent reading?

1	2	3
Not at all!	A little bit.	Very much!

8. Write any other comments, if you wish!

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix C

Sample Literature Circle Student Work

Book Club Genre: Fantasy

Short Story Title: Months of Manhattan

Names: 1) [redacted] 2) [redacted] 3) [redacted]

4) _____ 5) _____

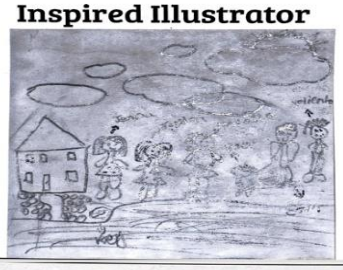
Word Wizard

- Manhatten (setting)
- Mad house (discriptive)
- Twelve months (important)
- Magic (mentioned a lot)
- Metropolitan Museum (setting)

Savvy Summarizer

The main charester Liz Wallach gets a stepsister named Beth. Beth was very cranky about change. Soon she had an assignment about American furniture and got lost in the museum. Then she meets the Months of Manhattan.

Inspired Illustrator



Creative Connector

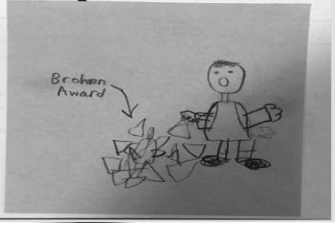
1. I have a sister who's very pessimistic too
2. I really likes the structure of the story and the moral
3. I was surprised when one of the sisters got lucky after meeting the picture, but the other one got unlucky

Word Wizard

1. Idey
2. Fawn
3. Packy
4. Hes wearing blue and grey
5. the wall hit me that back straight ways got a wind to it.

Inspired Illustrator

Inspired Illustrator



Word Wizard

Word Wizard

indigestion

- indigestion - pain in stomach because difficultly in digesting food
- Vandals - person who destroys public or private property.

Appendix D

Sample Student Fluency Graphs