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**USING MULTICULTURAL TEXTS TO MOTIVATE SPECIAL EDUCATION
MIDDLE SCHOOLERS TO READ INDEPENDENTLY**

by

Ramona Maria Di Maria

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 15, 2023

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Dedication

I dedicate this research paper to all the teachers who want to get their students excited about reading. I dedicate this to my daughter, Daniella, showing her that ‘even though I paused for ten years to raise her, you never give up and always finish what you start. This is to all the moms who have to juggle graduate school and motherhood, you can do it!

Acknowledgment

I would like to thank the students for participating in the study. Thank you to my family, especially Corey. I could not have done this without all your help, whether it was taking D to soccer, making dinner, cleaning or just a shoulder to cry on when I was exhausted and wanted to throw in the towel; you were always there. To my colleagues, Alice and Amanda, god put us together for a reason. There is no way I would have made it through this without your support. I love you both, and I am so lucky to have shared this journey with both of you!

Abstract

Ramona Di Maria

USING MULTICULTURAL TEXTS TO MOTIVATE SPECIAL EDUCATION MIDDLE SCHOOLERS TO READ INDEPENDENTLY

2022-2023

Susan Browne, Ed.D.

Master of Arts in Reading Education

The purpose of this research study was to investigate and examine middle school students' motivation to read independently. The goal was to see what happens to seventh grade special needs students' motivation when using authentic multicultural texts during independent reading. Motivation profiles, student interest surveys, reading habit observations and student multicultural book choices were collected and analyzed. The special needs students that participated in the study showed how a structured daily independent reading schedule, choice of multicultural literature, and classroom environment can increase their motivation to read independently. The implications for teaching independent reading in a middle school special needs classroom are discussed.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Let us remember: One book, one pen, one child, and one teacher can change the world. (Malala Yousafzi, 2013)

As a special education teacher of over twenty years, I understand the importance of motivation for reading. Most of my career was spent in elementary schools teaching special education to students in preschool up to fifth grade. I love teaching reading and utilized the reading workshop model or a variation of that model in all reading classes. I have used literature circles in the upper elementary classes with students in conjunction with reading logs. This is my second year teaching in the middle school and the lack of motivation to read is prominent in my classroom, school, and district. I need to understand what motivates my students to read and how to keep them engaged in independent reading during the school year.

Growing up in a low socioeconomic, blue collar town, I was challenged by Mrs. Walker, my second grade teacher, who taught me to speed read and encouraged me to read every day. I didn't have many books at home and Mrs. Walker always let her students borrow books from her personal library. I loved Mrs. Walker, her enthusiasm for reading was contagious and she gave us cookies and milk each morning if we had our parents sign our reading logs, and for recess, she taught us the hand jive from the movie *Grease*. I always enjoyed reading and loved chapter books, mostly about animals, *Black Beauty* being my favorite. I realize now that she used what she knew about our background knowledge, culture, and community to motivate us to read.

I need to build relationships with my students, use Funds of Knowledge to gain insight into their homes, community, and culture, and allow my students' voices to guide their motivation to read (Moll, 2005). By interpreting Funds of Knowledge into instructional practices that draw on students' cultural identities, reading skills would be enhanced and improved. According to Moll (2005), students succeed when relationships are built between schools and communities.

Story of the Question

My research interest came in a very natural way; I wanted to motivate my students to read literature and expository texts, I wanted them to know how wonderful and magical books can be, but also know that this is an important skill they will need to be successful in life. This is my second year at the middle school teaching special needs students reading below grade level, in seventh grade. I noticed the lack of motivation to read right away, as soon as we picked out books from the library. When we returned with our new books students would ask to use the bathroom, nurse, or phone. Some students would pretend to read by turning pages or just reading the same page over and over again. Coming from being an upper elementary school special education teacher for many years, it was not shocking that my students do not want to read independently. I understood that most of my students dislike reading logs and independent reading. There are many distractions for middle school students, such as extracurricular activities, digital influences, and social media. I think what really stumped me was that I felt I could always change my students' minds by the end of the year; my enthusiasm is contagious. This was not the case in my new school. Was it the age group? Was it the demographics?

Was it due to not having a librarian at school? Is it the Accelerator Reading Program?
The book choices?

Another aspect of independent reading at Hill Middle School is the media specialist. The school hired a media specialist in December of last year. This ultimately changed everything related to independent reading, in a positive direction. The media specialist began to reorganize the library since we had not had a librarian in three years. Mr. D cleaned up the library, donated the old books, reorganized the library, ordered new; relevant books (multicultural texts, new LGBTQ+ texts, and wrote several grants purchasing over 100 new books), purchased comfy new furniture, and added lots of plants. He made our library the hub of the school and welcoming for the middle school and community to enjoy. He understood that this is the closest library the students would be able to go to. The county library is at least twenty minutes away, with not many students able to travel to check out a book. I believe having a librarian, someone the students can talk to about books can lead to a considerable change in motivating students to read independently at my school. This is important to my research due to the nature of our independent reading program and how it directly correlates to the Accelerated Reading Program. Students interact with the librarian to get recommendations and books on their interests.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to investigate middle school special needs students' motivation to read during independent reading. The study will examine students' independent reading behaviors when they select multicultural reading materials. The students will choose how they would like to participate in independent reading,

specifically the daily schedule and time to read independently. Incorporating multicultural literature, along with student choice of text, and increasing silent reading time within the classroom are the goals of this study.

Successful independent reading programs all give students the opportunity to read; to read in class and for more than ten minutes a day. Donalyn Miller (2009) in *The Book Whisperer* states:

Students will read if we give them the books, the time, and the enthusiastic encouragement to do so. If we make them wait for the one unit a year in which they are allowed to choose their own books and become readers, they may never read at all. To keep our students reading, we have to let them (p. 72).

There are several independent, silent reading programs that many teachers and school districts have used throughout the years. The time allocated to read independently, and silently was known by a multitude of names and acronyms such as Sustained Silent Reading (SSR), Drop Everything and Read (DEAR), Super Quiet Reading Time (SQUIRT), Wonderful Exciting Books (WEB), Daily Independent Reading Time (DIRT), and Daily 5.

The research is simple and profound. As little as 15 minutes of daily independent reading significantly increases student reading performance at all levels (ILA, 2021) and serves to build habitual readers with conscious reading identities (NCTE, 2021). Giving students a choice of text and time to read should motivate and engage them during independent reading (Brooks & Frankel, 2019). My students were given flexible seating options, 15 minutes per class (30 minutes total each day) and 45 minutes one day a week, designated as independent reading time.

Culture and race can also play an important role in the processes of motivation (Conradi et al., 2013). Students may benefit from linguistically and culturally-responsive approaches to addressing motivation. When considering a culturally responsive pedagogy, student lives, cultures, and experiences are valued and acknowledged (Bryd, 2016). Using this pedagogy, teachers must include a variety of authentic books that reflect diverse cultural groups (Guthrie & Davis, 2003).

My school uses Accelerated Reading as an independent reading program. The library runs this program, weekly, each Language Arts class attends a library session to complete independent reading. Students in seventh grade are required to read two books during a marking period using their independent reading level, their Zone of Proximal Development level (Vygotsky, 1962), when finished a book the students complete a quiz.

Statement of Research Problem and Question

Realizing that I had to do something to motivate students in reading, I thought about using multicultural texts so students could see themselves represented through characters in the story. I wanted to know how I could incorporate my students' diverse backgrounds into independent reading to foster their motivation which leads to the research questions that ask: *How does consistent incorporation of multicultural literature enhance students' motivation to read within a special needs middle school classroom? How do I get to know my middle school students as readers? How does multicultural literature support middle school students' independent reading?*

The problem is many struggling adolescent readers do not read books for pleasure, lacking sufficient reading motivations that will foster independent reading for pleasure (Wei, Y., Spear-Swerling, L., & Mercurio, M. 2021). Students are not reading

independently for many factors, such as lack of access to authentic texts, not having time to read at home, and undervalue of literacy in middle school (Messer, 2020; Daniels & Steres, 2011; Lee, 2011). Without sufficient independent reading, they will not have opportunities to practice reading strategies taught in school which should increase their reading ability (Guthrie & Klauda, 2014). In addition, many middle school students choose to spend their time being entertained online, “adolescents report spending more time engaging in digital rather than traditional texts, and this greater use of digital activities increases throughout adolescents” (McGeown et al., 2014). Even though motivation is recognized as an important condition for students to read for pleasure, educators continue to have difficulties understanding why students read and how they truly feel about reading (Conradi et al., 2013).

In my seventh grade special education classroom, I have noticed students do not want to read in school and they struggle to complete daily reading assignments which affects their participation in classroom activities and discussions. Students are below grade level, most between grade levels three to five, which also makes it challenging to motivate them to read, incorporate high interest texts, and keep them engaged. This is caused by many reasons, learning gaps, the pandemic, and the lack of reading every day. Each day students start class by choosing a spot in the classroom to read for ten minutes. One day a week the students read for one class period, forty-five minutes, usually in the library. Upon reflecting on the types of books read in my class, I noticed that several books did not relate to the cultural and environmental identities of my students. Incorporating contemporary, relevant multicultural text is a much-needed addition to my classroom library and the student's independent reading. The students are

not motivated by the Accelerated Reader program; however extrinsic motivators along with environmental stimuli within the classroom are motivating for the students (I play music while they read and offer comfy seating). Research indicates that providing culturally relevant text and allowing students to choose their text is effective (Byrd, 2016), which is lacking in my classroom. This study will examine how adding contemporary relevant, authentic multicultural text to my classroom library, and offering student choice of those texts influences motivation.

Organization of the Paper

The following chapters of this study present a qualitative exploration of my research questions. Chapter Two reviews and evaluates current research on Independent Reading, student engagement and motivation to read, and culturally responsive teaching practices in the classroom. Chapter Three represents the context of the study, the design and methodology, and information on the study site and students in the study. Chapter Four analyzes the data sources. Last, Chapter Five will summarize conclusions, limitations, and implications for the teaching field.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Young adolescents need opportunities to read, because books, filtered through their own experiences, open to students a new world. (Sanacore & Palumbo 2010, p.181)

Introduction

Motivation to read and creating independent readers have been dominant literacy issues topping lists for many years. Prioritizing in-school independent reading with student choice of text was number five according to the International Literacy Association's *What's Hot in Literacy: 2020 Report*. Students in the middle grades (6-8) have less motivation to read as they progress through the grades and into high school with a decline in motivation with age (Roberts, 2019). Some factors that contribute to this are intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, motivation and engagement over time, socioeconomic factors, and self-efficacy (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Motivating Middle School Readers

The most commonly used theoretical perspective to study children's motivation to read focuses primarily on self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and differentiates between intrinsic; internal sources of motivation such as a need to gain knowledge or independence and extrinsic reading motivation; external rewards such as money, prizes, and acclaim. Although intrinsic motivation can reward students externally, the ultimate goal, however, is for students to be intrinsically motivated to read—to find joy and love in reading (Dabrowski & Marshall, 2018). When teachers encourage students to provide input into instruction and link their interests to learning

activities students' commitments (motivation) and participation engagement) are expected to increase, which enhances their achievement (McGeown et al., 2020).

A review of many studies shows the leading factors increasing motivation for independent reading and struggling readers would include intrinsic factors of self-determination along with direct instruction of reading strategies (Guthrie & Klauda, 2014; Barber & Klauda, 2020; McGeown, Bonsall, Andries, Haworth & Wilkinson, 2020). Significant research on motivation discusses using the Motivation to Read Questionnaire (MRQ, Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997), or an adapted version of it. The MRQ uses constructs aligning with intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions of reading motivation, using 11 dimensions of intrinsic (efficacy, curiosity, involvement, challenge, importance) and extrinsic (recognition, grades, social, competition, compliance, avoidance) motivation. Through the use of motivational surveys which gauge students' attitudes about reading, teachers can gain valuable insight into understanding literacy choices students make when choosing texts (McGeown et al., 2020).

In the study "Just Plain Reading," Ivey and Broaddus (2001) surveyed students in middle school, sixth graders, to identify what motivates them to read. They discussed how their study was different from other studies due to the spotlight being on students and not teachers. As they interviewed the student they found students valued independent reading and when teachers read aloud during instructional time. Another aspect of reading in class that students liked was the time to focus on the act of reading instead of activities related to reading or the social aspect of reading. The last finding was students were motivated to read in school by the quality and diversity of reading materials. Both researchers have extensive experience with middle school students who struggle with

reading and believe that “motivating, successful reading environments should include diverse genres and multiethnic children’s and adolescent literature that inspires students and evokes personal responses that help students to develop a sense of purpose for reading” (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001, p. 356). Independent reading has been a practice in schools because “practice leads to progress.” By listening to and surveying students, Ivey & Broaddus found that students did not view independent reading as a way to get better at it but as a way to make more sense of the text, have time set aside to concentrate on reading, and have undisturbed time to comprehend and reflect on what they read.

Special needs students are similar in regard to motivation to read as other students. In Stenson’s 2006 study, the goal was to improve reading comprehension through extrinsic motivation in a middle school resource room. Additionally, teacher’s used scaffolding as a way to differentiate instruction, and graphic organizers to organize the concepts in the reading passages. Providing specific feedback for students is a way increase student’s motivation and academic efficacy. Stenson stresses the importance of challenging students and slowly increasing difficulty incrementally. Special needs students need to recognized their achievements and start at a level where they are not frustrated. Teachers recorded student’s improvement on a classroom chart when mastery was achieved. At the end of a three week period students who showed this improvement were also rewarded extrinsically. At the end of the nine week period student’s self-efficacy, reading level and comprehension improved on classroom and state testing. By recognizing students individual academic achievements in reading with extrinsic motivation it increased their self-efficacy and gave students more confidence.

Williams, Hedrick, and Tuschlnski (2008) argue that extrinsic motivation does not work to motivate students to read as well as intrinsic motivation. They focused on eight principles to motivate students to read: 1) Choice and Control. 2) Social Interaction. 3) Novelty. 4) Feedback/Response. 5) Attainable Success. 6) Interest. 7) Read-World Experiences/Relevancy. 8) Positive Learning Atmosphere (p. 136). Interestingly, under the principle of Choice and Control, the authors discuss ways to help students select books; this was not found in other studies. "Choice puts responsibility in the hands of children and empowers them as they exercise the role of decision maker (p.136). They advocate for students' learning strategies to help them select books to read and see this as an opportunity for students to implement these strategies independently for a lifetime. *The Goldilocks Strategy* (Ohlhausen and Jepsen, 1992) suggests choosing books like Goldilocks chooses porridge, too hot, too cold, and just right. For example, students can ask themselves: How well do I know the book? How much do I understand the book? How many words are familiar to me? How smooth or choppy do I sound while reading parts of the book aloud? A similar strategy is *Like* (Ohlhausen and Jepsen, 1992) Children ask themselves questions such as like a dream (too hard); Like A Walk in the Clouds (too easy); like a warm chocolate chip cookie (just right). Another strategy is *Read -to-Me, Read -by-Myself, and Read-with-Me* (Richgels & Wold, 1998). Again, similar to the last two strategies, the categories are books too hard for me, easy-to-read books that students can read by themselves for independent reading, and books that are in between too hard and too easy that should be read with someone who can help with difficult parts. *Buyer Beware!* (Ollmann, 1993) is a strategy that teaches students how to look beyond the marketing techniques authors use to sell books. Students not only read

the book jacket but focuses on the first page, pages one-third of the way, and two-thirds of the way into the story. The *I Pick* (Boushey & Moser, 2006) strategy uses an acronym to remind students to ask questions, “When I Choose a book, I need to know my Purpose for reading. Also, I need to make sure that the book Interests me. As I read, I make sure that I am Comprehending and Know all of the words.” The last strategy to increase students' motivation in choosing a “just right” book is *BookMatch* (Wutz and Wedwick, 2005), an acronym that stands for book length, ordinary language, organization, knowledge prior to the book, manageable text, appel to genre, topic appropriateness, connection, and high interest. These strategies increase motivation for independent reading and teach students strategies they can use to be able to select and choose “just right” books for independent reading.

Motivation to read independently is linked to an appropriate match between the reader and the text selection. “Students with special needs like the same books as other children and should be allowed to choose their own books” (Swartz & Hendricks, 2000, p. 608). This study investigated factors that influence book selection of students with special needs. Special needs students choose books based on factors that “typical” students would use to select a book. They also used a combination of strategies at the same time. The factors are listed in most identifying factors are: topic, book length, back-of-the-book summaries, recommendations, cover/illustrations, title, characters, and movies. Students with special needs choose books in similar ways as other students. Characters that students related to, wanted to be like, had similar experiences with, and were familiar with were important in selecting a book. Most of the special needs students chose books based on the cover and the back of the book summaries. Additionally,

students preferred books with less than 100 pages, shorter books. Swartz & Hendricks (2000) urged teacher not to “dumb down” reading list but let students self-select texts. Special needs students chose books with themes of horror, mystery and action. It is important to have many books on the topics of interest and series books included in the classroom library.

It is crucial for teachers to create a learning environment that fosters a classroom culture that supports all students' diverse experiences when reading. The classroom's physical environment should reflect and support the classroom culture (Vuong et al., 2021). Reading classrooms need a designated area where students can get comfy, it's quiet and they can choose a good book from the classroom library (Houghton et al., 2016). Teachers should have classroom libraries that have a variety of genres, and books for different levels of readers.

Independent Reading

Providing the time to read independently is an important factor in independent reading motivation. Barber & Klauda (2020) discuss important interventions for students who cannot complete independent reading at home. Time must be given in the classroom for independent reading for these students. At least 20-30 minutes each day should be set aside for students to read independently. This study utilized the acronym SMILE (S-sharing, M-me, I-importance, L-linking, E-engagement) to represent dimensions of reading motivation and engagement, using instructional practices. They emphasize that students time should be spent “immersed in sustained reading” not with direct instruction or practicing comprehension skills. Students utilize skills during independent reading

such as decoding, monitoring understanding...to comprehend text. When students spend time in authentic reading they build their comprehension.

Pilgreen (2000) discusses guidelines for a successful student-centered, independent reading schedule. She stresses that just giving students a book and letting them read is not enough, students need guidance to structure independent reading time. Students need (1) *access* to authentic text, whether from the classroom library or school library, students should not be responsible for bringing a text from home; it should be available and easily accessible. (2) The *appeal* consists of student interest, variety, and the range of levels to provide students with literature that motivates them. The *environment* (3) is also an important factor during independent reading time. Students' physical comfort, not traditional sustained silent reading at a desk, is not only motivating but can keep students engaged as well. (4) *Encouragement* includes teacher modeling, discussion, and post-reading opportunities. *Staff training* (5) for teachers, guiding them in the organization of independent reading, and encouraging all teachers to provide a daily time set aside for independent reading is another factor. (6) *Nonaccountability* considers not assessing the students formally but providing accountability through discussions, writing, or other formats with student choice. Pilgreen states that giving students *follow-up activities* "sustains their excitement about books they have read" (p.16). These follow-up activities are very effective in encouraging further voluntary reading. The last factor in the guidelines is *distributed time to read* (8). This considers that reading stamina is formed over time. A schedule for daily reading, for at least 10-15 minutes, is much more powerful than reading occasionally for more extended periods of time (p.142).

Similarly, Brannan and Giles (2017) discussed the connection between the volume of reading that students engage in and reading achievement. Teachers need to set aside time daily to read in class, following a lesson on a focus skill that can carry through to students' independent reading. Additionally, they agreed that leveled texts and access to texts; with a variety of text types making sure all genres were covered, along with student-teacher conferences are all necessary components of successful independent reading programs.

The research shows the benefits of time in class for independent reading. "The benefits of independent reading are inarguable; the best readers are those who read the most and the poorest readers are those who read the least" (International Literacy Association, 2018). Stairs & Burgos noted when students have time in school, with a choice of text, they became more interested in reading and connecting characters and themes to their own lives (2010).

Struggling readers benefit from reading a wide range of literature. It not only helps to create lifelong readers but it also exposes them to vocabulary, grammar, comprehension and other literary skills (Sanacore & Palumbo, 2010). Middle school teachers can build students' knowledge base by including a variety of texts read in class like, poetry, descriptive and expository texts. Sanacore & Palumbo observed English, math social studies, and science teachers in a middle school incorporating independent reading into their class one day a week. This helps struggling readers make interdisciplinary connections that can be applied to many subjects and topics. Another way struggling readers can benefit from independent reading is from teacher monitoring during independent reading. Teachers need to "work the room," interact with students

during independent reading, ask questions, and document with pages and books students have read. Teachers should encourage readers to ask questions about what they have read, the characters, or the vocabulary.

Multicultural Literature

Multicultural literature values different student cultures and prepares students to thrive in a diverse world. Multicultural literature fosters equality, justice, and equity, and it establishes the reality of philosophical ideals in classroom environments. Multicultural literature can establish equitable educational opportunities for all students. Bedard & Fuhrken (2019) discussed how important it is for seventh-grade students to see themselves reflected in literature and into their peers' experiences that are unlike their own. At this age students are highly impressionable; reading multicultural literature is important and middle school students value the opinion of significant adults in their lives. In their study, students independently read *Brown Girl Dreaming* by Jacqueline Woodson (2014). "Teachers in the middle school classroom have the potential to positively influence students' ability to engage and connect with multicultural literature" (p. 25). By presenting students with opportunities to engage and connect to multicultural literature students will develop empathy for themselves and other's experiences.

Reading motivation also is influenced by culture and social norms. The external environment (including home life, school, and society) plays an essential role in changing reading motivation in a positive direction. Kambara (2020) discussed incorporating students' societal and cultural context into motivational learning since cultural values are influential in affecting students' motivation to read. Students' motivation to read takes different forms in a classroom setting, in a library, and at home. Culturally relevant

teaching centers students' culture in teaching practice through three primary approaches: *high expectations*, promoting *cultural competence*, and promoting *critical consciousness* (Ladson-Billings, 2021). Culturally relevant teachers also use students' previous experiences and funds of knowledge gained from their families and communities as assets in the classroom (Byrd, 2016). Discussing why the curriculum is important in their lives and empowering students to use their voice is also an important aspect of culturally relevant teaching.

The literature selected for independent reading should represent the diversity of culture in today's globalized world. Multicultural literature collections must not exclude any cultures but include all cultures. Students should recognize their own communities in the books we teach or they choose for this can increase engagement and push students to think critically. "Diversity in literature reflects a dynamic intersection of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability, economic condition, religion, and more" (International Literacy Association, 2018). This can help students understand more about themselves, their identities, their communities, and the world. Middle school students "often need to gain assistance in answering life's basic questions, including who they are and why they are the way they are, as well as questions about the world" (Ogletree, 2014).

In Landt's 2006 study, she explains how to choose authentic multicultural literature for adolescents, the importance of including it in the curriculum, and giving high-quality examples of such literature. She compares multicultural literature to a kaleidoscope, with a spectrum of perceptions and possibilities. There are six purposes for integrating multicultural literature (Barta and Grindler, 1996): 1) Students show respect for. 2) Celebrate the many cultures' accomplishments. 3) Encourages respect and

tolerance for others. 4) Enhances students' self-concept where they are proud of their heritage. 5) Society developed a value system that students realize validates some differences and minimizes others. 6) It encourages students to detect prejudice. When selecting books for a classroom library there are many factors to include: developmental appropriateness, quality of writing, the relevance of issues to students, general accuracy, the believability of characters, and interest level of the story. Landt (2006) synthesized a guide and list to assist teachers in selecting quality multicultural literature for students to read independently. Multicultural literature includes an accurate portrayal of the culture and relationships among people within the culture and with people of different cultures. The literature depicts diversity within the culture, not stereotypical representatives, with real social issues and problems. Additionally, using culturally authentic dialogue where characters use speech that represents their oral traditions. Diverse characters are shown as leaders in their communities where they can solve their own problems.

Multicultural literature often has themes of social justice which allows students to question and analyze these important issues. Ogletree (2014) insists that increasing the amount of multicultural literature not only allows students to see themselves in the story but also provides opportunities to draw on Funds of Knowledge. Furthermore, it increases their reading motivation, reading engagement, and reading achievement. Research continues to suggest home literacies support the need to draw on the backgrounds of diverse families to improve their child's reading motivation and abilities. Disconnect between home and school literacies impacts students' motivation as they can lose interest in school, often performing below their abilities (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti,

2005). Experiencing gaps in knowledge between what students learn at home and school is common (Volman & Gilde, 2020). The knowledge students learn and bring to school from their homes, communities, and social groups is important; therefore, understanding students' Funds of Knowledge teachers can decrease the gap by utilizing the knowledge students acquire at home and in their communities (Hogg, 2011). Ogletree (2014) suggests increasing the amount of multicultural literature would decrease the home and school gaps and improve motivation to read of culturally, linguistically, ethnically, and economically diverse students.

Au (2011) found four Keys to Success in reducing the size of the literacy achievement gap: (1) the first key to success requires a systemic approach to change; (2) the second key to success imposes a curricular emphasis on higher-level thinking; (3) the third key places emphasis on sensitivity to and investment in culturally responsive instruction; and (4) the fourth and final key to success involves creating a school-wide professional learning community. For example, she stated teachers need to share author's works from diverse backgrounds, present diverse cultures with materials in an authentic manner, and become culturally responsive in the classroom and interactions with students, this aids in the academic achievement of students from diverse backgrounds.

Book Access & Classroom Libraries

Vuong, Nguyen & Le, 2021 discuss the lack of access to authentic literature and how this contributes to low interest in reading. When students are unable to access authentic reading materials it creates a roadblock in building student's interest in reading. Access to the school library affords students below the federal poverty level

literature that interests them, yet is not a financial burden. Classroom libraries, school libraries, and regional libraries, where a wide variety of diverse, multicultural literature can be found will increase students' motivation to read (Vuong, Nguyen & Le, 2021). Reading interest is associated with book recommendations and personal preference. The study discussed how students' book recommendations are perceived positively and are more likely to be interested in reading books.

Classroom libraries need to contain a variety of genres: fantasy, historical fiction, realistic fiction, myths, autobiographies and biographies, memoirs, narrative nonfiction, and expository nonfiction. Sanacore & Palumbo added poetry, graphic novels, comics, magazines, and bibliotherapeutic materials to special needs classroom libraries. They stated the easier the access to quality books, the more books students will read and continue to read even at home. An easy way to organize your classroom library is by: labeling shelves by general topics, genres, themes, and best books; displaying and organizing reading materials with covers facing out on a rotating wire rack, bookshelf tops, and windowsills; using students - or teacher-made whiteboards and posters to advertise readers' favorite books; and using graphic organizers to show thematic connections among books (Sanacore & Palumbo, 2010, p.182). If teachers notice struggling readers having a difficult time selecting a book they could select a handful of books on the students independent reading levels and interests to allow the students to manage a smaller amount of materials.

Middle school classroom libraries should reflect students' diverse backgrounds and personal interests, providing quality texts and promoting student choice (Messer, 2020). Guthrie & Klauda (2014) noticed when these texts are absent from classroom

libraries, “student engagement declines to disengagement.” Giving students a choice of text is challenging for some teachers; however, it should “not be a luxury, but a norm, particularly in middle grades where students are transitioning from learning to read to reading to learn” (Stairs & Burgos, 2010, p. 43). When students have a well-stocked classroom library, and book displays to showcase new books it allows students to explore and experiment with different genres and authors (Messer 2020).

Lastly, Ng (2018) discussed developing student voice as a way to motivate students with a low socioeconomic status to read independently. When students have an opportunity to be heard they feel valued and become active participants in the reading process. Ng’s research looked to improve reading motivation during daily silent reading sessions. Prior to the study, many of her students, people whose incomes are below the federal poverty threshold, avoided reading during silent reading time in the classroom. There are two ways the study views reading motivation research. First, silent reading loses its educational potential if students miss the opportunity to participate in independent reading. Second, the study showed that when a teacher seeks, uses, and acts on student voice it can engage students in reading. This collaborative approach relies mostly on researcher- or teacher-driven interventions for improving reading motivation. Students should be given equitable opportunities to express their views about their education. This study used teacher training specifically training in developing and engaging student voice. The teacher, in a multicultural school, participated in research meetings and interviewed each of the students independently. By listening to student voice the teacher changed ideas of silent reading, using student voice to engage in daily

silent reading practices (Ng, 2018). “Significant growth happens in a middle school classroom where students have a voice about their literature” (Messer 2020, p. 6).

Above all, educators should remember that students with special needs are not so different. They enjoy reading the same books as typically developing children. Perhaps the reason why the results of this investigation are similar to those conducted in the past with typically developing children is that simple: Children with special needs are children first (Swartz & Hendricks, 2000, p.617).

Summary

Middle school special needs students are often challenged when reading independently; especially when looking at their motivation. As students’ progress through the grades, without the motivation and stamina to read, it becomes more frustrating for special needs students who continue to fall behind. The research shows that independent reading is necessary, especially in middle school. Districts need to make independent reading a priority, allowing time to be set aside to read—in class, each and every day. Providing time, conferencing, and opportunities in school for my students to read and find pleasure and joy in reading are small changes that will support students’ motivation to read. Students need time, each day set aside for independent reading, at least fifteen minutes a day.

A review of the literature indicates a need to create classroom libraries with a variety of genres, and different levels based on student's interests. Teaching students strategies on how to choose books for independent reading will also create lifelong

readers. This would include authentic multicultural literature and require teachers to continually build their classroom libraries with current, relevant texts. Teachers also need to gain an understanding of their students as readers by completing interest surveys to understand what motivates them to read.

Chapter 3

Context of the Study

Community

The Hill Middle School, a pseudonym, is located in a suburban area of South Jersey that is 3.9 square miles, with an estimated population of 10,637 people, 2,720 people per square mile. It is the only middle school in the public school district, which is composed of two elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. Next door to the middle school is the high school, which is adjacent to residential homes. Students from two neighboring towns also attend the high school. The United States Census report states the median household income is \$63,892. About 12.9% are below the poverty line. There are 4,527 households, with 39% married couples and 32% female households, consisting of 2.5 people per household. The racial makeup of those who live in the town are 54% white, 28% black, 9% Hispanic, 7% two or more races, 2% Asian, and 0% Native American and Pacific Islander.

The town is a working-class community, where more than one parent/guardian works, 93.6% having high school or some college courses. Of the residents employed (72.3%), the most common job groups are, Office & Administrative (924 people), Management (484 people), and Sales (460 people).

School

The school's mission statement state that “Hill Middle School strives to provide a safe and nurturing environment in which we educate the whole child.” This mission statement is met by using the New Jersey Student Learning Standards, educating the whole child with related services, and after-school clubs such as the “Togetherness” club,

where students share food and discuss inclusivity. To provide a safe and nurturing environment the school has adopted PBIS-Positive Behavior Intervention Supports, where students are earning points for positive characteristics they show throughout the day. The reason for the program implementation was due to the increased fights, suspensions, and amount of detentions students have been receiving, which took away from the safe nurturing environment. The faculty identified this problem and came up with this solution to provide the students with a safe, nurturing environment, where the students respect themselves and others, by earning points for positive behavior throughout the day. The students can use the points earned for items such as, homework passes, picking a seat for a day, choosing a partner for a day, snack pass, etc.

The total enrollment for grades 6-8 is 401 students. The demographics of students in the middle school for last year are 44.6% white, 32.9% black, 15.5% Hispanic, 2.5% Asian/Pacific Islander, and zero percent Native American. Also included in the middle school student enrolment are 32.57% of people whose incomes are below the federal poverty threshold and 19% of students receiving special education services.

The faculty consists of 40 teachers, four black, one Hispanic, and 35 white. There are two guidance counselors, two administrators, and two secretaries who are white, females. The total female staff is 36 out of 46 and 10 out of 46 male staff. The staff to student ratio is 11:1. All teachers are certified to teach at the middle school, with most having ten-plus years of teaching, and six having three years or less. Additionally, twenty-two of the faculty have master's degrees, either in administration or the content area in which they teach. On the most recently reported New Jersey Student Learning

Assessment for English Language Arts, the students of Hill School scored 44% proficient, with the state average at 47%.

Classroom

The resource room is the site for this study. The curriculum is the same as the regular education curriculum, with extra time for the students to process the information and modifications addressed in their specific Individualized Education Plans. The pace of the classroom is adapted to fit the student's needs. The class meets for two, forty-four minute periods each day. The students receive instruction on the seventh grade curriculum, New Jersey Student Learning Standards for reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

The classroom is located on the first floor of the yellow hallway, the seventh grade hallway, at the back of the school which is shaped like a U with two levels. The class size is limited to 12, and although the class in this study had five students, there are 14 desks in the classroom set up like a small U, with seven desks on each side of the room. There are two tables used for small groups or independent reading with adjustable chairs that have wheels. There is a crate bench at one of the tables, crate seating at the front of the room and two bean bags along the side of the classroom. A large whiteboard and a smartboard that covers the front of the classroom, with two bulletin boards across the back of the classroom that display the writing process and Restate, Answer, Cite, and Explain (RACE) to show text evidence for their response to reading. Along the closets are lists of vocabulary words grouped by units, student goals, grammar, literary devices, and students' work.

Students

The five students in my study are in a seventh grade resource-room, mild language, and learning disabilities program. Two of my students are female, and three are male. Sara is from a family that identifies as Hispanic, Susan as white, Steve as African American, Scott as African American and Hispanic, and Stan as white. One of my student's native languages is Spanish, and the native language of the other four students is English. One of the students is classified with a Specific Learning Disability (SLD), one is classified as Other Health Impaired (OHI), one is classified as Multiple Disabled, and two are classified as Communication Impaired (CI). Three students receive Speech/Language Therapy. Based on the Standardized Test for the Assessment of Reading (STAR) assessment for fall 2022, the students range in independent reading levels from 2.5- 5.6, or 2nd to 5th grade.

Sara enjoys reading fiction with female characters who have animals, her favorite involves horses. Sara looks for books that have Hispanic influences or about Latino culture. She also likes biographies with strong female role models. Susan likes to read fiction with strong female characters that are in turmoil. She enjoys reading a physical book and is often seen with a book in her hands. Susan tends to choose books from the fantasy genre. Steve likes books with strong black male characters, in many different genres, graphic novels being a favorite. Scott enjoys similar books as Steve with the exception of graphic novels. Stan loves graphic novels and also enjoys listening to audiobooks, as he follows along in the book.

Research Design and Methodology

Qualitative Teacher Research

Teacher research begins with a question that occurs naturally within their classrooms. According to Shagoury & Power (2012), research is a process of discovering essential questions, gathering data, and analyzing it to answer those questions. This research focuses on a problem in my classroom that came about from my observations of my students. Shagoury & Power (2012) explain that teacher research is a natural extension of good teaching. Teachers constantly observe their students and problems that come up in their classrooms and adjust their teaching after reflecting on these observations. The question of inquiry may not always arise from a problem, it could also be an emerging issue or trend that occurs in the classroom. Teacher research may start with a question but it builds upon their overall knowledge by understanding the meaning and knowledge gained from answering the initial question. Cochran-Smith & Lytle (2009) state:

The basis for this knowledge-practice conception is that teachers across the professional lifespan play a central role and critical role in generating knowledge of practice by making their classrooms and school sites for inquiry, connection their work in schools to larger issues, and taking a critical perspective on the theory and research of others (p.68).

Teachers want to improve their teaching, and they want to gain a deeper understanding of student learning. Teachers want to “create the best possible learning environment for students” (Shagoury & Power, 2012). This study will help to understand

the what, why, and how students can be motivated to read, helping me to adjust my teaching and learning environment.

Qualitative research allows for flexibility and adaptability when undertaking research, a study can be adapted and tailored in response to emerging issues, problems or trends. It provides the opportunity to collaborate with participants and include them as an active part of the research process. This is the research method for this study, with a focus on how students respond to a multicultural text, increasing independent reading motivation, and discussing these books with their peers and community.

Procedure of the Study

The students participating in the study were recruited with an announcement to their parents at Back to School Night, in September. The study was briefly discussed and questions were asked and answered. In addition, parents received an email and letter describing the study in more detail, along with consent forms. Once consent forms were collected, students completed the Motivation to Read Profile (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni, 1996). The survey gave me insight into their reading lives and information to build a schedule and set up the structure of independent reading for the students.

This study began when all consent forms were signed and permission was given. The students took some time to get their forms signed which gave me time to observe them as readers. We discussed how they would like the independent reading schedule to look in our class, there were several options of schedules and different lengths of time to choose from. Students opted for reading at the beginning of our first period together and the last of our second period together each day, for a total of 20 minutes of independent reading time each day.

The next step was to have students choose a book. We spent a period in the library discussing what kind of books would be considered multicultural. Mr. D, the librarian, was very helpful in creating a list of books for each student, with various materials, such as paper books, online books, and audiobooks. We answered questions and gave the students ample time to choose a book. Once their book was chosen, they began reading each day for 20 minutes per day.

Students used a “log” to jot down the pages each week they read to ensure they would finish the book before the Accelerated Reading deadline. When finished they chose how they would like to share the book with their peers: podcast, audio recording, school newspaper, or display case in front of the library were all student choices. The multicultural books used in the study are listed below:

- *Front Desk* Kelly Yang 2018, discusses themes including immigration, racial tension, and financial hardships Asian Americans face.
- *Harbor Me* Jacqueline Woodson 2018, the main themes are immigration, race, forgiveness, bullying, identity, friendship, and family.
- *Feathers* Jacqueline Woodson 2007, has similar themes as *Harbor Me* in addition to having a character who is hearing impaired, like Sara.
- *The Wind Called My Name* Mary Louise Sanchez 2018, containing cultural identity, financial hardship, and racial intolerance, told from a Latina perspective.
- *Rez Dogs* Mary Louise Sanchez 2018, a Native American story with difficult themes discussing girls being taken from their families, forced into foster care or government schools, and sterilized against their will.
- *The Barron Grounds* David A. Robertson 2020,

- *The Crossover* Kwame Alexander 2014, a story in verse about twin brothers who play basketball, struggle with jealousy between each other, and ultimately the death of their father.
- *Becoming Muhammad Ali* James Patterson & Kwame Alexander 2022, with similar styles, using prose and verse as *The Crossover* with one of the same authors. The main character, faces racism and struggles in school.
- *The Unexplainable Disappearance of Mars Patel* Sheela Chari, 2019, a mystery about a diverse group of friends on the search for a missing friend.
- *Stanford Wong Flunks Big-Time* Lisa Yee 2005, the themes that run through this book are grades, especially in English, playing on the “A-team,” and losing friends.
- *The Dead and Gone* Susan Beth Pfeffer 2008 is about the Morales family and how they cope with an asteroid hitting the moon. Themes are family, faith, hope, and sacrifice.

Data Collection Methods

Several sources of data were collected, the collection methods are student interviews to gain information on a view of themselves as readers, motivation surveys to gain information about students’ motivation to read, along with observations and reflections on independent reading within the classroom. I also created a data tool that observed student behaviors during independent reading. I wanted to examine the daily data when students were reading to see how many left the room during independent reading time or were on their phones, went to the nurse or just flipping pages and not reading. Keeping track of my observations was important as I kept a journal and took

notes during independent reading time. Students shared their progress during weekly check-ins, where they asked questions or shared important connections they made to the text. Each time they read, they will track how many pages they read by using a tracking sheet/log. When students finished the selected book they had many tools to use to share their ideas about the book with their peers and the community. Students could complete a book review, display it in the showcase at school, submit it to the school newspaper, or make a podcast. During this research study data collection included: motivational profiles, interest surveys, observations, weekly conferences, and student artifacts.

Data Analysis

During the six-week study, qualitative data collected through several data points helped inform and make conclusions about using multicultural texts to motivate special needs middle schoolers to read independently. By analyzing the data: motivational profiles, interest surveys, and observations, patterns began to emerge. Shagoury & Power discussed data as “finding the patterns within your data, viewing each bit of information as a part of a larger puzzle you must put together” (2012, p.136). Analyzing the motivational survey allowed me to understand the student’s reading identity, by using the data to identify emerging themes. I coded and highlighted the motivational survey questions to identify trends in how students’ answers were scored, looking to see which questions had high scores and low scores. Using the highlighted scores helped me to see similarities and differences that identify the student’s values and self-concept of reading. The observational reading behavior data I collected during independent reading was charted into motivation levels, allowing me to see several parts of independent reading behaviors in my classroom and how they were repeated during the sessions. This chart

examined students' independent reading behaviors: leaving the room during independent reading, flipping through pages, and using their phones. Using this data, I leveled the students into three categories: motivated, somewhat motivated, and not motivated. The structure of independent reading time was an important aspect of motivation and the choices students made when the time was given for independent reading. During weekly conferences with the students, data was collected on the multicultural text, their reading logs, and conversations shared about their progress recorded in my teacher's journal. Using the three pieces of data, I noted changes in their reading logs, the literature they chose, and their racial identity, plus what mode they chose to share their book choices with their peers.

Chapter four will include an examination of the data collected from motivational profiles, interest surveys, reading logs, conferences, and observations. Additionally, an analysis of themes that emerged from this data will be addressed.

Chapter 4

Findings

Introduction

These are the patterns in your work, the pieces of data that fit unexpectedly next to each other, leading to flashes of insight. (Shagoury & Power, 2012, p. 135)

This chapter analyzes data in response to the research questions that ask: *How does consistent incorporation of multicultural literature enhance students' motivation to read within a special needs middle school classroom? How do I get to know my middle school students as readers? How does multicultural literature support middle school students' independent reading?* The data analysis revealed the following patterns: gender influences students' motivation to independently read multicultural literature in my classroom, classroom environment impacts reading motivation, and sharing multicultural literature supports motivation. When analyzing independent reading behaviors, students wanted a consistent schedule, an environment where they can relax, and to have the opportunity to choose their own multicultural literature to read. This helped students to become motivated to read independently and increased their time reading. Through analyzing motivation to read profiles, interest surveys, and observing reading habits I found that the female students valued reading had a higher level of self-concept of independent reading, and read more multicultural literature than the males in my classroom. Lastly, examining weekly conferencing notes, student projects, and book choices also showed that female students were motivated to share their connections and thoughts about the multicultural literature they read with other students.

Gender Influences Motivation

The study began with the administration of the *Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile reading survey* (Gambrell and Palmer, 2007). During the third week of school, I read the questions to the students in a whole group setting, of five students. Although I had made observations of the students reading in class and completed interest surveys, I did not know how they viewed themselves as readers. The male students were not happy to take the AMRP, and stated they thought “it was stupid,” and “twenty questions, that’s a lot.” Completing the survey gave me insight into how they viewed themselves as readers and how much they valued reading. Through analyzing the results, the data shows, student’s low value of reading or thinking it’s important, not viewing themselves as “good” readers, and finding reading to be boring. The AMRP has twenty questions, with even numbers focusing on the Value of Reading and odd numbers focusing on Self-Concept. Table 1 shows the student's scores for self-concept, the value of reading, and the total score for the AMRP.

Table 1

Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile Class Results Before Study

Students	Self-Concept	Value of Reading	Total Survey Score
Sara	78%	83%	80%
Susan	73%	68%	78%
Steve	70%	55%	64%
Scott	55%	45%	50%
Stan	48%	40%	44%

Four out of five students concede that they do not read books much, question two “reading a book is something I like to do.” When rating themselves compared to their friends, two students said they read “a little better than their friends,” two said, “same as their friends,” and one said, “Not as well as my friends.” On question nine, students rated themselves as readers, Stan stated he was a “poor reader” and no one thought of themselves as a “good reader.” This was not surprising to me considering their placement in the seventh grade resource room, also the many comments on surveys stated that they do not like to read.

Question four “My best friends think reading is”, ten, “I think libraries are,” and fourteen, “I think reading is” received the lowest scores. This indicates a social aspect of reading if their friends read or enjoy reading they would also perceive it as enjoyable. Although on question six, “I tell my friends about good books I read,” three out of five stated they did share good books with their friends. Similarly, these questions show they have a low value of reading. Having students enjoy the library is crucial for independent reading to be successful and was an important part of the study. “Creating authentic purposes for using the library, such as for individual research, creating book sets...would create a value for the library as a personal and community resource” (Malloy, Marinak, Gambrell & Mazzoni, 2013). Another interesting aspect is the male students scored these three questions with the lowest score, one point.

Notably, question 18, “I would like for my teachers to read aloud in my classes” had the highest score, four’s, among all students answering “every day.” Modeling read-aloud to show students before, after, and during reading strategies are important and a part of my classroom instruction. It is also interesting to note that

question 19, “When I read out loud “received an average of 2, “an OK reader.” Most students do not see themselves as fluent readers. An analysis of the scores for the value of reading and self-concept. Indicated that female students had higher scores for the value of reading and self-concepts, whereas the boys had higher scores for self-concept. “Understanding a student’s self-concept as a reader prepares the teacher to provide support required for engaged reading” (Malloy, Marinak, Gambrell & Mazzoni, 2013). The female students, value reading because they enjoy reading, and find it interesting and important in their future, “They will more likely engage and persist in the reading task presented” (Malloy, Marinak, Gambrell & Mazzoni, 2013).

Table 2

Question Results from Motivational Reading Profile Survey

	1		3		5		7		9		11		13		15		17		19		SC	V	Mot
Name	S	C	S	C	S	C	S	C	S	C	S	C	S	C	S	C	S	C	S	C	Total	Total	Total
Sara	3	4	3	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	2	4	3	4	31	33	64
Susan	2	3	2	2	3	3	3	3	2	2	1	3	2	2	2	2	1	4	1	3	19	27	46
Steve	3	3	3	1	3	3	3	2	3	1	3	3	3	1	3	2	3	4	2	2	29	22	51
Scott	1	1	2	1	2	1	3	1	2	1	3	4	3	1	2	2	2	4	2	2	22	18	40
Stan	1	2	1	1	2	1	3	2	1	1	3	2	3	1	1	1	2	4	2	1	19	16	35

Note. Low-scoring items (1’s & 2’s) are highlighted.

The student interest survey (Appendix B) allowed me to get to know my students and their reading identities. This data was helpful in planning instruction and helping students when choosing their multicultural text.

Sara loves to read. She enjoys mysteries, adventures, and books about other countries. She likes to read shorter rather than longer texts and not too many characters. She does not play sports but is in several clubs, chorus, debate club, and student

government. Sara can “get lost in a book” if it is a topic she likes. Sara is classified as Multiply Disabled. She doesn’t like to read aloud because she has a lisp, although she does read aloud in class. She has speech and occupational services once a week.

Susan likes to read and sees herself in many characters she has read about. She chooses books with characters who are Latino or storylines that discuss Latino culture. Susan likes recommendations from friends, teachers, and the librarian. She enjoys perusing the online catalog to find the perfect book. She also likes books about horses, make-believe, fantasy, mysteries, and adventure. Susan is very quiet in class and does not read aloud. Susan is classified as Other Health Impaired.

Steve likes to read and is the first to grab a bean bag chair when it is time for independent reading. He prefers books with hobbies he is into, sports, mysteries, and books that make him think. He also likes books with characters that look like him and to whom he can relate. Steve likes to talk and participates in class each day. He is an athlete and plays football, basketball, and track. Steve enjoys games in English class, such as trashketball and Blooket. He also volunteers often to read aloud in class.

Scott does not like reading, although he is a fluent reader. He likes books about sports, mysteries, and fiction with not too many characters. He prefers digital books where he can follow along with someone reading on Learning Ally or digital books from the library. Scott is an athlete, he plays basketball and football. Scott is frequently absent or late to school so he missed time for independent reading.

Stan does not like reading; however, he does volunteer to read aloud in class. The topics he reads about involve sports, adventures, different places/countries, and characters like him. Stan is an athlete and plays many sports, including basketball,

baseball, and fishing. He loves to fish on his father's boat and enjoys going to the campground on weekends. Stan is easily distracted during independent reading. He chooses to read books online using Learning Ally and digital books from the library. Stan likes it when we play games in English, like trashketball or Blooket.

Independent Reading Structure & Classroom Environment

To begin the school year, students had a summer reading book that they chose at the end of the last school year with an Accelerated Reading quiz to take in September. Most of the students did not read or did not finish the summer books. After taking the surveys mentioned in the prior section, we talked about independent reading in class, what they think it should look like, and how it would benefit them. We discussed different schedules, not having a schedule, reading in school verse out of school reading, and logging their progress

Students decided on a schedule, and they voted between two options, reading at the beginning of each period for ten minutes each day or reading during the first period for 20 minutes. The students chose to read for ten minutes each period, twenty minutes per day, and once a week for forty-five minutes at the library. During the independent reading sessions, I observed the student's engagement and off-task reading behaviors such as leaving the room, being on the phone, not reading, talking, or flipping through pages. During independent reading, I collected data and tallied the scores which created levels of engagement. Before I set the timer on the smart board, students chose a spot to read from various seating options; covered crates (4), a covered bench, a bean bag chair (2), chairs that spin with wheels, and a soft rug. Steve, Stan, and Scott were the first students to grab a bean bag and choose a spot to read. Susan and Sara often sat together

on the rug or grabbed a crate to sit and read. Some days I played classical calming music while we read. Stan often chose to listen to his books online. The students came into class and were ready to read, Steve would run in to grab a bean bag chair and ask me to start the timer as soon as the bell rang. Once the students were in their spots the timer began and we read for twenty minutes. Fortunately, I was able to model reading and take data during this time frame. It was important for the students to see me reading with them.

Some students had trouble staying focused in the beginning of the implemented independent reading schedule. According to the data the male students left the room frequently during this time, even though they chose this schedule and seemed motivated to read. I discussed with the class how important this time was and that leaving the room during this time was ultimately their choice but they should only be leaving for emergencies. Table 3 below shows what off-task behaviors were displayed throughout the study. As independent reading progressed, the students spent more time engaged in reading.

The engaged and motivated students were on task the most, and got straight to reading when the timer was set with their book and a chosen place to read. These students were able to read the most books during the study. Additionally, their value of reading scores are the highest out of the five students (see Table 3). Furthermore, they stated in the interest survey that they can “get lost” in a book. When finished their book, they search the catalog for a new book and immediately asked for a pass to the library or checked out a book from the classroom like Susan.

Table 3*Classroom Reading Observation Chart**Engaged/Motivated to Read Independently*

Student	Off Task Behavior	Books Read	Self-Concept	Value of Reading
Sara	0	3	31/40	33/40
Susan	5 (not reading, looking up at teacher)	3	19/40	27/40

Somewhat Engaged/Motivated to Read Independently

Student	Off Task Behavior	Books Read	Self-Concept	Value of Reading
Steve	14 (leaving room to use the bathroom/office/nurse, talking, on phone)	2	29/40	22/40

Not Engaged or Motivated to Read Independently

Student	Off Task Behavior	Books Read	Self-Concept	Value of Reading
Scott	21 (leaving room to use the bathroom/office/nurse, talking, on phone, sleeping, looking up, turning pages)	1	22/40	18/40
Stan	27 (leaving room to use the bathroom/office/nurse, talking, on phone, looking up, turning pages)	0	19/40	16/40

The next level, somewhat engaged, included one student who had eleven to twenty off-task behaviors while reading. This student left the room several times to use the bathroom and see the counselor, or the nurse. Steve was also talking and on his phone during independent reading; however, he only was on his phone that one time. This student's self-concept was higher than their value of reading. He successfully read two of the books during the study.

Lastly, the final category of students who were not engaged, had twenty-one to twenty-seven off-task behaviors such as using the bathroom, talking on their phone, turning pages, looking around, and switching books. These students had a difficult time choosing a spot and staying in that spot. One of the students distracted students around him and need to be moved to a different spot in the classroom. Unfortunately, one of the students did not finish a book during independent reading. For these students, the value of reading was lower than the self-concept.

Multicultural Book Choice

The table below (Table 4) shows the student's book choices throughout the study and their racial identity. When exploring the literature the students chose, it was evident that for most of them, their identity played a part in their book choice. Sara's literature choices revolve around strong female characters that are white, Asian, and African American. In *Harbor Me*, the characters are struggling with personal issues but have a safe space to share where everything stays private. The main themes are immigration, race, forgiveness, bullying, identity, friendship, and family. The book *Feathers* has similar themes in addition to having a character who is hearing impaired, like Sara. As we met weekly to conference about the literature, Sara gushed when she explained the characters, themes, and connections she made with the books. Her favorite of the three books read was *Feathers*.

Susan identified with similar characters, in addition, to Hispanic and Native Americans. *Front Desk* discusses comparable themes including immigration, racial tension, and financial hardships. Again in *The Wind Called My Name*, similar themes are found, containing cultural identity, financial hardship, and racial intolerance, told from a

Latina perspective. The third book Susan read was *Rez Dogs*, a Native American story with difficult themes discussing girls being taken from their families, forced into foster care or government schools, and sterilized against their will. Susan commented that she like both stories because the characters were strong females. She connected with the main character, Malian, in *Rez Dogs*, as she felt alone and isolated during the pandemic. Susan also connected to the culture and how she struggles with her mom speaking Spanish and it being hard for her to communicate with school activities.

Steve and Scott are good friends, who have been in class together since first grade. Choosing the same books was not out of the ordinary for these two students. The *Crossover* was suggested by the librarian. It tells a story in verse about twin brothers who play basketball, struggle with jealousy between each other, and ultimately the death of their father. When we conferenced they both were excited to talk about their connections to the characters, basketball, and how brothers can fight and make up. Steve commented that he liked the use of figurative language and imagery, he could paint a picture in his mind. Scott was excited to talk about all the basketball terms that were made into poems. They also read, *Becoming Muhammad Ali*, written by the same author, with similar styles, using prose and verse. Again, both students can identify with the character, facing racism and struggling in school. Only one of the two finished this book.

Stan chose books with strong male characters from different races. Although he did not finish one book, he was motivated by the choice of text and each time chose a multicultural text. He was off task during most independent reading sessions. Stan can relate to the character in *Stanford Wong Flunks Big-Time*. The themes that run through

this book are grades, especially in English, playing on the “A-team,” and losing friends. Stan enjoyed when the tutor Stanford’s parent higher is actually his arch enemy.

Table 4

Student Book Choice and Racial Identity

Students	Book Choice Summer	Book Choice #1	Book Choice #2	Racial Identity
Sara	<i>Front Desk</i> Kelly Yang 2018	<i>Harbor Me</i> Jacqueline Woodson 2018	<i>Feathers</i> Jacqueline Woodson 2007	White
Susan	<i>Front Desk</i> Kelly Yang 2018	<i>The Wind Called My Name</i> Mary Louise Sanchez 2018	<i>Rez Dogs</i> Joseph Bruchac 2021	Hispanic
Steve	<i>The Barron Grounds, The Misewa Saga, Book One</i> David A. Robertson 2020	<i>The Crossover</i> Kwame Alexander 2014	<i>Becoming Muhammad Ali</i> James Patterson, Kwame Alexander 2022	African American
Scott	<i>The Barron Grounds, The Misewa Saga, Book One</i> David A. Robertson 2020	<i>The Crossover</i> Kwame Alexander 2014	<i>Becoming Muhammad Ali</i> James Patterson, Kwame Alexander 2022	African American & Hispanic
Stan	<i>The Unexplainable Disappearance of Mars Patel</i> Sheela Chari 2019	<i>Stanford Wong Flunks Big-Time</i> Lisa Yee 2005	<i>The Dead and Gone</i> Susan Beth Pfeffer 2008	White

Response to Multicultural Literature: Sharing as Support

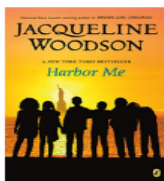
When students completed a book they had several activities to share their ideas about the multicultural literature they read. We discussed the activities before the study began, asking the students to brainstorm their ideas on how they could share details about the books they read with the community. They came up with a book report, movie

poster, comic strip, podcast, a pretend post on social media, a page in the school newspaper, and posting in the library display case.

Only two students shared about the multicultural literature they read during the study. Sara added a book review in the school newspapers in issue one and issue two. She completed the review independently and shared it with students in the newspaper club. The reviews were for two Jacqueline Woodson books, *Harbor Me* (shown below Figure 1) and *Feathers*. Sara absolutely loved collaborating with the students in the newspaper club to add her book review to the paper. Sara wrote about her connections to the main character, they are both very quiet and scared to talk in a group. She also expressed interest in the different cultures discussed in the book. This showed that Sara was motivated by the multicultural texts she read, identifying with the characters she read about. From this positive experience, Sara decided to join the newspaper club. Sharing her responses to multicultural literature she read gave her the confidence to express herself and move out of her comfort zone.

Figure 1

Sara's Book Review Harbor Me



Book Review

By Liliana Scipione

In the novel *Harbor Me* by Jacqueline Woodson, six kids from Ms. Laverne's class (Haley, Amari, Tiago, Ashton, Esteban, and Holly) must meet every Friday of the year to talk, alone, with no adults in the room. They choose to name this special room, the ARTT Room (short for "A Room To Talk"). With the ARTT room, they have a safe space in which they are free to talk to each other about what's bothering them.

All the kids share their problems but Haley waits and is the last one to share. Some themes are deportation, bullying, race, friendship, and financial problems. I don't want to give too much away.

My favorite part is when Ms. Laverne brought them to the ARTT room but nobody will talk. She said "Come on talk. I'm letting you talk and how many times have I told you guys not to talk and I'm letting you talk for an hour." I like this part because this was the beginning of when they went to the ARTT room.

I recommend this book to anyone that is interested in reading about kids from different cultures and backgrounds.

Figure 2

Susan's Instagram Post



Susan also completed an activity discussing a multicultural text she read during the study. She chose to make a social media post (pretend) on Instagram. Susan made connections with the main character, Margarita, they both had to leave their part of their families. Susan's parents got divorced this year and she was with her mom but had to move into her father's house this year. Susan (bilingual) and her mother speak Spanish. The book discusses how Hispanic heritage was not embraced when Margarita moved from Mexico to Wyoming. Susan made many connections with the themes of this book

and it helped her feel better about her parent's divorce. It showed her choice of multicultural text was directly related to her Hispanic heritage; it also helped her get through a tough time in her life by relating to the characters, knowing there are others going through similar issues. Susan did not want to share this outside the classroom, but she did allow it to be hung up in our room. She was motivated to read and share why the story was interesting, by “posting” a book review (Figure #2, above).

Findings

Comparing the beginning AMRP survey results to the end of the study AMRP survey results show that student's motivation to read multicultural literature increased, for all students, and both their self-concept and the value of reading increased. (See Table 5, below)

Table 5

Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile Class Results After Study

Students	Self-Concept	Value of Reading	Total Survey Score
Sara	88%	90%	90%
Susan	73%	80%	78%
Steve	80%	70%	75%
Scott	63%	55%	61%
Stan	55%	48%	53%

Students chose literature that relates to their cultural identities by using their individual interests to identify literature with those topics. They had several options in choosing a text, they used the online catalog or the classroom catalog. The multicultural

literature students chose motivated them to read and make connections to the characters, and themes because they self-selected the text. Although, some students read only one book, the results of the survey show an increase in self-concept and value of reading for all five students. Student choice of what they read, when they read, and where they read was the most motivating during independent reading. The female students were more motivated to read, scored higher on the AMRP, were more engaged during independent reading, and shared their multicultural literature with their peers.

Chapter 5

Summary

Conclusions

I realized that students were not engaged in independent reading in my classroom. This encouraged me to investigate the research questions that ask: *How does consistent incorporation of multicultural literature enhance students' motivation to read within a special needs middle school classroom?* Shagoury & Power (2012) discussed how teacher research can transform how we teach and understand our students. Before this study, I would let my students read once a week, in the library, for a forty-minute period. This was not enough time for students to read, Barber & Klauda (2020) stated time must be given in the classroom, at least 20-30 minutes each day should be set aside for students to read independently. For the study, students chose a schedule and decided to read every day for twenty minutes a day. Having a schedule and time to read in class helped motivate the students to read independently. The five students are in a seventh grade resource room, mild language, and learning disabilities program. Two of the students are female, and three are male. One of the students is classified with a Specific Learning Disability (SLD), one is classified as Other Health Impaired (OHI), one is classified as Multiple Disabled, and two are classified as Communication Impaired (CI). Three students receive Speech/ Language Therapy. The students were encouraged to choose multicultural literature that reflects them, their interests, and their culture. The books they read were: *Front Desk* Kelly Yang 2018, *Harbor Me* Jacqueline Woodson 2018, *Feathers* Jacqueline Woodson 2007, *The Wind Called My Name* Mary Louise Sanchez 2018, *Rez Dogs* Mary Louise Sanchez 2018, *The Barron Grounds* David A.

Robertson 2020, *The Crossover* Kwame Alexander 2014, *Becoming Muhammad Ali* James Patterson & Kwame Alexander 2022, *The Unexplainable Disappearance of Mars Patel* Sheela Chari 2019, *Stanford Wong Flunks Big-Time* Lisa Yee 2005, and *The Dead and Gone* Susan Beth Pfeffer 2008. The literature chosen discuss many different cultures such as Hispanic, Asian, African American, and Native American.

Looking at the patterns that emerged, when examining the Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile data from the beginning and end of the study, I can conclude that all students have a higher value of reading and self-concept when compared to the initial AMRP survey. All students' value of reading and self-concept scores increased at the conclusion of the study. Additionally, question #19, suggests increasing oral reading fluency such as the use of Reader's Theater.

The results showed the male students had a low value of reading compared to the female students. This was also related to their levels of engagement during independent reading. The female students who were on task read more than the male students who displayed off-task behaviors and these students did not read as many books as those students who were engaged in reading. By self-selecting multicultural literature, students identified themselves in the text, which increased their motivation and value of reading. Going to the library and conversing with the librarian about books that interest them was another motivator for the students. Giving students time to select books, having conversations with the librarian or teacher about the book choice, and giving students choice in what they read, when they read, and where they read all led to motivation and engagement in independent reading. It is crucial to students' motivation and engagement that they have a plethora of interesting, relevant materials (Stairs & Burgos, 2010; Bedard

& Fuhrken, 2019; Ogletree, 2014). The students were excited to choose relevant and authentic literature to read independently. They used the online catalog and search tool to input their interest. Then read the synopsis of the books to find the book they wanted. Some students, Sara and Scott, discussed their thoughts with me or the librarian before they made a final decision. They had many options with new and relevant literature including a variety of cultural backgrounds, graphic novels, and digital and online texts.

Each week during conferencing, students shared their thoughts about the books they were reading and had several choices on how they could discuss the books with their peers. However, only two students took this opportunity to share their ideas or reviews about the books they read. Even though not all students in the study participated in an end-of-book-sharing, they did talk about their book choice with their classmates and read their classmate's reviews in the school newspaper and social media posts.

Limitations

Challenges arise from the district's willingness to invest time, money, and teacher training into independent reading. Teachers need the time and resources to create reading cultures within their classrooms leading to a school-wide culture of reading. This can be challenging for students with special needs and resistant readers. Teachers need to model read-alouds and read-aloud in all classes, not just English/Language Arts classes.

Additionally, the study was limited to a small group of participants so conclusions about multicultural text choice and motivation for independent reading cannot be correlated to an entire student population. It was also a short period of time, considering the amount of reading needed to complete a book, and the study took place at the beginning of the school year as the students were getting used to the routine, many days

off in the month of November which gave the students less time to read in class. Furthermore, the levels of engagement could be viewed as a limitation due to task avoidance and the number of books read during the study.

Although the study did not include book talks with peers directly, conferencing weekly with the teacher was a way for them to share their connections with the book. Students need to share their connections made while reading independently with others, helping students relate to characters from the text and their own lives.

Implications for Teachers

The conclusion of this study indicates that there are teaching practices to employ in the resource room which will motivate special needs students to read multicultural literature independently. Based on this study, independent reading is beneficial to incorporate in middle school special needs students daily schedule; time needs to be built in for independent reading each day, at least twenty minutes a day. The opportunity to choose what they read, where they read, and when they read gives students control over their learning. I realize that prior to this study, I thought I was giving student's choice of text, but I limited their choices to a couple of options. Students need to see themselves as readers, teachers need to build relationships around reading and create excitement about books and reading. In the same way, when teachers have excitement for literature, showing their students that excitement by modeling read aloud strategies, showing their students that reading is valued then students are more likely to be motivated and excited to read independently.

While observing my student's reading and seeing how giving them the choice of text motivated them, allowing them to find value in reading is important for them to have

authentic culturally relevant multicultural literature. Working with the librarian and colleagues to find books on special needs students level that our students can relate to, see themselves through the characters, and make connections to their lives, can assist with exploring their culture and others' cultures, as well as learning about themselves and others around them. Teachers need to gather information about each student as a reader understanding and incorporating their interest into appropriate text. The male students participating in the study had similar interests and genre preferences, they also chose digital text they could read along with on their Chromebook. Teachers in middle school resource rooms must integrate 21st century skills into the classroom.

Additionally, allowing student choice in developing projects showing their understanding of literature read not only increases their reading growth but also motivates them by giving them ownership of their work. Furthermore, to build a classroom culture of reading teachers can add flexible seating including bean bag chairs to assist in motivating students to read independently. The classroom environment should also include access to high quality authentic culturally relevant literature. Classroom libraries need to have a variety of genres

Implications for Future Research

More research is needed discussing special needs students and independent reading. Studies are limited when looking at special needs students in middle school and mostly pertain to meta-analysis with studies in the 1900's, data needs to be relevant to 21st century standards. There are limited studies on special needs students relating to independent reading. Many studies can be found regarding fluency, comprehension,

vocabulary, and specific reading programs to increase reading levels but none that look at middle school special needs independent reading.

With the completion of this study, I am confident that I will continue to reflect on independent reading practices by continuing to incorporate my student's cultures in the literature in my classroom to improve student motivation and my teaching practices.

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Appendix A

Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile Survey

AMRP Malloy, Gambrell, & Mazzoni (2013)

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)

Appendix B

Reading Interest Survey

Reading and Writing student Questionnaire					
Name: _____					
 Reading					
Do You Enjoy...	Rating (5 MOST/1 LEAST)				
Reading for Enjoyment Outside of School/Homework?	5	4	3	2	1
Reading Mysteries?	5	4	3	2	1
Reading Chapter Books?	5	4	3	2	1
Reading Science Fiction?	5	4	3	2	1
Reading Informational Books?	5	4	3	2	1
Reading Picture Books?	5	4	3	2	1
<p>What types of books do you enjoy reading the MOST?</p> <p>Where do you like to read? (Special Place at Home or Outside)</p> <p>Where do you get the books that you read?</p> <p>How do you keep track of what you have read?</p> <p>What would you like to read more of in the future?</p>					

Appendix C

Reading Observations Form

Reading Observations

Reading Habits Observation Form Date:

Student Names	Actively reading looking at book, turning pages	On phone	Bathroom, Nurse, or Counselor. Leaving the classroom	Sleeping
Susan				
Sara				
Scott				
Steve				
Stan				

Appendix D

Student Book Review Template

Name: _____

Book Review

Plot:
How does the story start? What happens in the middle? How does it end?

<p><u>Characters:</u> <i>Who is in the story? Describe what they are like (personality and appearance). Did you like them?</i></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p><u>Settings:</u> <i>Where is the story set? What words or phrases tell you about the location?</i></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
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Your opinions:
What was your favourite part and why? Did any parts make you laugh? Why? Did the story have a moral (a message)? Would you recommend this book to anyone?

Give the story a rating out of 5 