A CASE STUDY OF MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS’ READING PERCEPTIONS, ATTITUDES, AND PRACTICES.

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A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

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This case study provides an insight as to the effects of exposure to reading materials while growing up and an insight as to the effects of the exposure on reading habits as adults. It examines the attitudes and practices of middle school teachers. The study was designed to investigate what influences the reading habits of educators in a public school. The responses addressed the specific research question: “What are middle school teachers’ reading perceptions, attitudes, and practices?”

The study surveyed middle school teachers of at least twenty-two years of age, employed by a public school system in central Ohio. Ten educators, representing five different curriculum areas were surveyed.

The survey questioned gender, age, content area taught, and number of years of experience in teaching middle school. The survey questions focused on early reading experiences, personalized definitions of reading terms, and current reading practices.

The data collected was analyzed to reveal common themes among the responses. Personal quotations to support various themes were noted to reinforce the categories presented.

Conclusions concerning the reading perceptions, attitudes, and practices of middle school teachers were summarized. Review of the summarizations encourages educators to motivate lifelong readers.
This work is dedicated to Jim, Kathy, and Matt Stroupe who encouraged and supported me throughout this process and always believed in me.
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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

People can be motivated to do certain things for a variety of reasons. Motivating a child to read is a process that may begin when a child is only a few months old; however, motivating a child is not all that it takes for the child to become a good reader. Becoming a good reader demands a curriculum-rich environment with concepts from the everyday world and fields of study, requires books that explain how and why things function as they do, and depends upon teachers who insist students in thinking about the interconnections among ideas as they read (Anderson & Pearson, 1984).

The influences presented throughout childhood and the teen years may follow paths that include a wide range of spectrums. It seems curious that children who are influenced by similar developmental motivators and stimulators unfold into individuals with extensive differences in literary behaviors. Exposure to common motivational practices does not necessarily guarantee that uniform results will occur regarding motivation.

Why do individuals respond so differently to various motivators and influences? Anderson and Pearson (1984) believe that instructional researchers should conduct classroom and materials research to build and validate better programs of comprehension instruction and for educators to begin to develop and evaluate instructional programs that will lead to the literate citizenry our future demands (Anderson & Pearson).

Statement of the Problem

Some children were read to all the time when they were young. Now, however, they hardly ever read for enjoyment or any other reason. Students are not motivated to read. Exposure to reading materials and reading influences may be very prevalent, but some people are not motivated to read despite their literary backgrounds.
Research Question

Extensive research indicates that there are numerous factors that influence the motivation and ability to read at various life stages. The purpose of this study was to investigate what influences played a role in the reading habits of educators in a public school. The specific research question was, “What are middle school teachers’ reading perceptions, attitudes, and practices?”

Justification

The results of this investigation should be helpful to all teachers. The outcomes will provide valuable information for reading both at home and at school. The answers provided by the participants will provide an insight as to the effects of exposure to reading materials while growing up and an insight as to the effects of the exposure on their reading habits as adults.

It is also important to examine the attitudes and practices of middle school teachers. One would expect that elementary teachers would have positive attitudes toward the teaching of reading since much of their time is spent teaching reading; however, for students to develop into lifelong learners, reading must be stressed throughout schooling. Research suggests that as students get older, little reading is done. Therefore, examining the attitudes and practices of middle school teachers may lead to some insight regarding how to continue developing strong positive attitudes in the students they teach.

Based on the results of this investigation, parents can be informed of effective resources and motivators that can be incorporated into the home literary environments. Teachers and specialists can advocate home practices and have insight into students’ needs and how home influences affect school performance. This research creates an awareness of reading motivation.
Parents can become more aware of the significance of home influences. Educators can become more aware of the effects and what needs to be done to create bridges between home and school.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are listed in alphabetical order and are defined in relationship to the research. Except where noted, all the definitions are taken from The Literacy Dictionary – The Vocabulary of Reading and Writing (Harris & Hodges, 1995).

1. Adult Literacy – “A level of literacy that enables a person in or about to enter the work force to function effectively both as an individual and as a member of society; functional adult literacy” (p. 5).
2. Attitude Scale – “A set of self-report items for measuring one’s reactions to some issue, person, or object” (p. 14).
3. Early Reader – “A student who is able to read before entering school” (p. 68).
4. Literate Environment – “A situation that stimulates reading; an environment in which written language . . . is meaningful and useful” (p. 145).
5. Motivation – “The forces within an organism that arouse and direct behavior, as internal sensory stimulation, ego needs, etc.; internal motivation” (p. 158).
6. Perception – “The extraction of information from sensory stimulation. Note: Perception is an active, selective process, influenced by a person’s attitude and prior experience” (p. 181).

Limitations

One of the limitations of this study was the size of the survey population. Ten teachers were interviewed for this investigation. The fact that all interviews were conducted with middle
school teachers could also be a limitation. The reading practices and motivation for elementary or secondary teachers may be different based upon the age level of the students taught.

The number of years of teaching experience and subject area taught may have affected individual responses. Moreover, the number of years spent in the educational profession - specifically middle school - most likely has an impact on current reading practices.

Another limitation to be considered was the level of education of those interviewed. All interviewees had at least a four-year college education. Results from this study may not be able to be generalized to the average adult population.
CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There has been a lot of research about reading motivation and creating lifelong readers. Prominent researchers have focused on the importance of motivating children throughout their lives to have a lifelong love of reading. The purpose of this study was to determine what level of reading motivation and initiative middle school educators exhibit, and to what home/school influences they attribute these behaviors. This chapter summarizes research that describes past studies and information about the motivation and initiative to read including the school and home relationship.

Reading Motivation

Lindskoog and Hunsicker (2002) believe that one way to prepare children for enjoying literature is to talk to them frequently. They suggest that four weeks is the right age to start preparing a child to become a reader. When words and love are associated with each other in a child’s life, the child may grow up loving the words. Lindskoog and Hunsicker add that mothers who regularly talk to their babies are preparing them to be readers. They explain that by decorating the nursery with big letters of the alphabet, parents are helping their child to recognize shapes of the letter he/she will later learn to read. Some parents cut letters out of foam rubber for babies to touch, while still others provide sturdy books made of cloth or cardboard so that babies can learn to turn the pages as well as wave them, drop them, and chew on them.

Babies, toddlers, and preschoolers are drawn to books. Their reading includes having stories read to them. As children get older, reading at home plays a large role. Lindskoog and Hunsicker (2002) agree that the basic way to interest a child in good books is to have good books in the home. Children should see both parents reading and hear their parents talk about books. The authors suggest that pleasure is an important word in developing young readers. They add
that for children to want to read, reading must be presented in a positive way, not seen as drudgery. Lindskoog and Hunsicker also recommend many book lists to help motivate children to read. For some children, reading is a necessity. These children read widely and deeply. However most children, read more selectively, and often disappoint parents and teachers with their book choices. They claim there are many reluctant readers who are almost impossible to hook on books, but they can be hooked (Lindskoog & Hunsicker).

Lindskoog and Hunsicker (2002) also say that to motivate children to read requires that they share reading experiences with others. When their peers like and respect certain books, children are likely to do the same. Talking about books may help a child understand what makes a book appealing or disappointing. Looking back on their own growth as readers and seeing the development of students as readers, Lindskoog and Hunsicker report that book talks got her hooked on reading.

Spufford (2002) explains the search for her motivation to read:

I want to know why I read as a child with such a frantic appetite, why I sucked the words off the page with such an edge of desperation. In a way, of course, I’m looking in the wrong place if I expect the books I’ve read to tell me that. No addiction is ever explained by examining the drug. The drug didn’t cause the need. A tour of a brewery won’t explain why somebody became an alcoholic. It wasn’t any property of electric bells that made Pavlov’s dog drool. Nor does it necessarily prove anything about books that my reading childhood was succeeded by a turned-out adulthood. In fact every account of addiction that lets the thing the addict craves provide the plot, in a sense tells the wrong story; or at any rate tells a half-story, made up of effects without causes. Likewise I know
that I have to look elsewhere in my life than the nature of prose to find the origins of my reading habit. (p. 11)

Duncan (1998) believes that the motivation for a child to read occurs over a lifetime, not just when the child is young. She tells parents they should stay aware of their children’s progress and continue reading aloud as a part of daily life. But she warns parents that they should not have an anxiety attack, or provoke one in their child if he or she is not reading at ages eight or nine. For many children, third, forth, and fifth grades are when they turn into voracious readers.

Duncan (1998) also believes that children should grow up reading a variety of materials in addition to books such as: newspapers, magazines, cereal boxes, notes, and letters. She adds that children should read the Internet and other items on the computer, TV listings, Sunday comics, box scores, game instructions, cross word puzzles, hymnals, sheet music, billboards, theater programs, titles on movie screens, receipts, catalogs, and street signs. According to Duncan, children should read from a broad scope of genres. Duncan also adds that children should read great books, but that “a little junk in a well-balanced reading diet is perfectly fine” (p. 153). Duncan explains that parents should pay attention to interests of their child, capitalize on it, and then use it to help in encouraging variation in reading materials.

Duncan (1998) has many ideas about how motivation to read and reading the classroom go hand in hand. According to Duncan, books in the classroom are necessary for children who aren’t being read to at home. Duncan believes that children should always be reading a good book, whether parents are reading it to them or they are reading it to themselves. She believes that children who grow up in homes where reading is viewed as an enjoyable and predictable part of the day are less likely to be turned off to reading. Duncan also has ideas about how parents should handle reading at home and what they should do. She believes parents cannot
depend entirely on teachers to bring literature alive. Parents should then read great books to their children and encourage them to read for pleasure. It is the parents’ responsibility to ensure there is a supply of books child would enjoy, and from which they may choose. She states, “Reading is a way of life in our home. It’s a habit- one we all enjoy immensely. A child whose life is full of books will always have a friend and a conversation. Reading opens doors to the world” (p. 189). Duncan believes that parents can set a good reading example in the home by making a wide variety of reading and writing materials available, establishing daily reading routines, and having read-aloud sessions with each other.

Linksman (1998) also is a firm believer that it is not only up to the school, but it is up to the parents to provide help in reading for a child. He says that more support is needed than what the school can provide. Parents provide the most valuable resources-time, attention, and love, which are the key ingredients to help a child be successful. Linksman focused on the various learning styles that can effect the motivation of a child’s reading habits. According to Linksman, our five senses are connected to learning styles that affect reading. He believes that successful reading requires continued practice. He adds that studies have shown that the habits of good readers develop by reading 15 minutes a day, because practice increases fluency. Linksman warns that if a student fails in reading, the student will want to avoid the task; however, if a child experiences success, the child will feel good about himself or herself and will want to repeat the activity and the pleasurable results it brings.

Linksman (1998) views pleasure in reading as essential; he states, “The act of reading and the material read should be enjoyable for the child if we want him or her to develop into a lifelong reader (p. 51). Linksman says certain ingredients need to be present for a person to experience an act as pleasurable, enjoyable, or fun: (a) interest, (b) recognition and approval, (c)
a challenge that can be met, (d) emotional satisfaction, (e) comfort and security, (f) a sense of belonging, (g) a sense of gaining power over one’s life, (h) a sense of accomplishment, (i) the satisfaction of curiosity, and (j) having novel or unique experiences” (p. 238).

Star (2002) agrees that reading with a child helps with habits and attitudes. Star says that once good reading habits are established, the child will be receptive to reading more complex books, and books with differing viewpoints. Trelease (1982) believes competent readers and writers are no more born than athletes are. He claims adults who have succeeded in both school and life were probably read to by an adult in their lives. According to Trelease, they probably had library cards and books, drawing paper, crayons and pencils, which are the seeds that grow readers.

Early Readers

Cullinan (1992) describes how many different people involved in a child’s life can affect reading habits later in life. According to Cullinan, because early readers make connections between the sounds of words at the beginning letters or end rhymes of words, parents don’t need to give the child flash cards and isolated letters of the alphabet. She believes parents need to point to the words as they read aloud to the child and parents should answer a child’s questions. Cullinan adds the two major ingredients in instilling a love of reading are the right book and time for sharing the book with the child.

Cullinan (1992) also believes that simply reading establishes a lifelong habit of reading and it also makes children better readers because they practice. Cullinan argues that practice makes perfect in reading and the more children read, the better they read so the more they enjoy it and want to continue reading. Many of Cullinan’s thoughts are similar to those of Duncan (1998). According to Cullinan, the reading habit is like a seed. If the seed is planted early, then it
takes deep root. The seedling needs to be nourished once it starts to grow, but the most important step is to get it planted. This is like reading. The love must be instilled early and then nourished along the way.

Cullinan (1992) also believes that reading in today’s busy world is still possible. She emphasizes that even busy parents can help foster a lifelong reader. She says the most important things parents should want their child to do are: (a) to love books and stories, (b) to learn about language, and (c) to learn to handle books. This can be accomplished by reading wherever and whenever possible – books, magazines, road signs at home or in the outside world. Cullinan describes a school volunteer project, Read Aloud, that organizes over 500 people to visit classes in every school to read aloud for an hour and then to donate the books to the school. According to Cullinan, programs like these make a difference in children’s reading ability. Cullinan and Bagert (1993) claim that the most important activity for preparing a child to succeed as a reader is reading aloud together. One goal of reading instruction should motivate children to want to read so they will practice reading independently and, become fluent readers.

Bouchard (2001) believes that reading in the home creates tranquility. He adds that books and reading help slow the pace of life. According to Bouchard, books and reading serve two purposes at home: “establishing a peaceful period and the means for doing it at the same time” (p. 33). Bouchard says the most important thing is that they are gaining first hand knowledge of the value of reading and writing.

School and Home Relationship

The home environment is a very important factor affecting lifelong readers. The literacy skills of parents will definitely have an impact on their children. Smith and Elish-Piper (2002) report that studies show that whenever parents have literacy problems, the potential exists for
their children to struggle with literacy acquisition. They add that, parents with low literacy may feel less competent to assist their children and may be uncomfortable participating in school activities and talking with teachers. Smith and Elish-Piper believe teachers must recognize the extent of the literacy problems that affect students’ parents and schools must address these problems. They believe teachers must extend their literacy instruction beyond the classroom and into students’ families and communities.

Gambrell, Morrow, Neuman, and Pressley (1999) stress the school-home literacy connection:

Educators must recognize that the power that literacy holds in young children’s lives ultimately depends on whether writing and reading become meaningful to them in daily practices. This, in turn, will depend on people who are most central to children-their family, caregivers, and their kinship networks outside of school-and on the messages these people communicate about the children’s development as writers and readers. Thus, it becomes imperative to involve parents in the children’s language and literacy learning in schools. In fact, the accumulation of evidence is now beyond dispute: when schools work together with families to support learning, children tend to succeed not just in school but throughout life. (p. 262)

It is very important to influence a child when he/she is young. This will influence the child to enjoy and want to read later in life. The child’s habit to read when he/she is older will be shaped by the family and educators who encouraged reading. Gambrell, et al. (1999) stress the bridge between home and school by recognizing that both home and school are contexts for language and literacy and learning. According to the authors, each has its unique goals and different ways of achieving those goals. The culturally responsive approach (views the cultural
and language differences of home and school as contributors to the development of young children’s motivation to learn about literacy) bridges these two powerful learning contexts.

Rasinski (2001) believes educators miss opportunities to have a significant effect on children’s literacy development because schools do not do a good job of communicating with parents. He believes parents want to know what teachers think about teaching reading, what the best materials are for children to read and what they can do to help their children become better readers. He agrees that teachers communicate fairly well among their professionals but do not seem to do such a good job communicating with parents.

Encouraging Reading

Kropp (1989) offers book lists and suggestions that will encourage children to be lifelong readers. Kropp believes a child cannot do it alone. According to Kropp, for a child to be a real reader, he/she needs parental support. Kropp also believes that parents should turn off the television so there is time for reading in their children’s lives. If parents provide books and offer to help read those books, they can ensure that their child will become a lifelong reader.

Zill and Winglee (1989) believe that the reading of literature does not occupy a prominent place in the lives of most Americans. They believe that we have become a nation of watchers (movies, television, videocassettes, and computer displays) rather than a nation of readers. They question whether young people read literature when they leave school. According to Zill and Winglee, everyone who is educable is expected to learn to read literature.

Tovani (2000) advises students that it is never too late to become good lifelong readers. According to Tovani, students should know that it is not too late for them to become better readers. She tells students that pretending to read isn’t going to fool her or help them. She prides herself in explaining that she became a reader at 28 so it is not too late for them. She believes
sharing her story with students allows for authentic reading to take place sooner. Tovani also believes that it is important to have a purpose for reading various materials. She states that in the real world, readers are expected to read all types of text. Setting a purpose for reading helps her get through a piece of uninteresting text. She adds that if there is no reason to read the piece she throws it away and she tells students that other adults do the same.

Fialkoff (2001) believes that there is not enough emphasis on reading for pleasure. She also believes that technology discourages browsing the stacks. She says that because libraries have become so information driven, they don’t encourage people to read for pleasure. According to Fialkoff, information technology has made it possible for library users to check the online catalog, put books on hold from home, and then come in to pick up their books at the checkout counter and leave. People do not have to browse the library stacks any more. She believes the lack of library browsing has had an adverse effect on her daughter’s summer reading program, whose purpose was to encourage reading for pleasure. She claims the culprit is the curriculum. According to Fialkoff, her middle-school child came home with a list of about 60 books for summer reading. Fialkoff believes the problem is that the list is an assigned list and not one generated by her daughter; thus reading books for the summer program did not allow student choice of books. Giving the children a list of books eliminates the joy of discovering a new book, author, or genre browsing through the stacks.

Some believe that influencing reading right from the womb affects children’s reading initiative. Lindskoog and Hunsicker (2002) believe that to have above average chances of having a booklover, the mother must be an active reader booklover, marry another booklover; and have four grandparents who are booklovers. Lindskoog and Hunsicker also believe that children who read are usually born to parents who read. They believe reading tends to run in families. They
postulate that some people, however, seem destined to love books whether they are plentiful or scarce, and whether their parents love them or not. They just love books.

Organizations Promoting Literacy Motivation

Reading is Fundamental (RIF) is a nonprofit organization that was started in 1966 to promote a literate America (Graves, 1987). RIF is one of the largest reading motivation programs in America. RIF believes that parents know their children better than anyone else so it is only natural that parents be provided with activities to promote reading at home. The activities turn household routines into reading opportunities—and are fun while doing so. RIF has a dual principle for reading to be both fun and fundamental.

The American Library Association (ALA, 2004) is the ultimate promoter of reading and literacy. The ALA website (www.ala.org) defines their mission as the “voice of America’s libraries which strives to promote the highest quality library and information services and public access to information” (p. 1). The information provided on their website and through their publications provides the public with valuable reading and literacy resources for librarians, teachers and parents.

Lifelong reading does not have to focus solely on books. The Newspaper Association of America (www.naa.org) recently reported the results of a 2004 study that surveyed 1,500 men and women between the ages of 18 and 34. The results indicate newspapers in the classroom have a strong impact on young adult readership even when controlling for parents’ education, family wealth, the presence of newspapers in the house as a child, and parental readership and discussion of newspaper contents. According to the study, newspaper exposure is associated with greater interest in news, politics and sports.
The International Reading Association is universally renowned organization designed specifically to achieve their goal – “teaching the world to read”. This association is composed of reading professionals at a variety of levels. The IRA provides hundreds of resources, publications and lesson plans for teachers and reading specialists at all levels in numerous geographical areas. Most importantly, the IRA is a worldwide advocate for literacy.

Adolescent Reading Behaviors

Block and Mangieri (2002) revisited a 1981 survey of elementary teachers’ knowledge of children’s literature to determine whether advances had been made. According to the study, teachers who had a high knowledge of children’s literature were lifelong readers. These teachers provided their students with a rich and wide array of pleasurable experiences with books. These teachers routinely offered opportunities for children to read self-selected books silently, provided incentives to read at home, and checked students’ responses to books read during recreational reading activities in class. They found the time and priority that teachers placed on voluntary reading is not significantly different than it was 20 years ago. They believe that recreational reading and the use of high-quality literature increases student achievement and develops avid reading; therefore teachers should revisit the amount of time and level of effort spent advocating recreational reading.

While most would agree that literacy skills begin at birth, sometimes it seems as if advocacy of skills need to continue throughout schooling. While middle school is a unique environment for many reasons, motivating middle school readers is also a unique challenge. Atwell (1998) believes that teachers must be good reading models and that teachers need to “rethink reading” and “make a place for reading” to improve reading motivation in middle
school. She suggests organizing reading workshops on conversations about the books children are reading.

Cole (2003) conducted a study with four students in her classroom. The question of motivation was summarized by stating that the students were motivated to read by totally different factors and exhibited their own distinctive literacy personalities. Cole offered some practical ideas for classroom teachers to use to promote intrinsic motivation. First, Cole says that students should be offered a rich, literate environment in the classroom. Next, a wide variety of reading experiences is recommended to engage students in reading (SSR, buddy reading, choral reading, teacher-led small groups, storytimes, read-alouds). Cole says that because students’ voices are important, opportunities for them to express their opinions should be part of the classroom culture. Finally, Cole suggests incorporating thematic units and author studies that allow students to experience literature and reading beyond the basic comprehension and reading skills. According to Cole, arranging opportunities for students to engage in social interactions is essential. Cole believes that it is a challenge to motivate and meet the needs of literacy personalities. She thinks flexibility is key, “Perhaps an awareness of literacy personalities can help lift the burden of trying to teach all children the same way, and we can focus instead on intrinsically motivating students to become independent, successful readers and learners” (p. 335).

Codell (2003) believes that books must be matched to children at a variety of levels. When asked about motivations children have to read, Codell indicated they were: interest, integration, and invention. He explains interest-motivated reading is when a child seeks out reading materials for information and/or enjoyment. Codell believes that integrated reading
happens when a child is convinced to use reading as a springboard into other disciplines and invention-motivated reading reflects the many facets of the book as well as those of the reader.

**Adult Reading Habits**

In a recent study conducted by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), Hare (2004) reported that over the last 20 years there has been a steady decline in the number of American adults who read literature. The biggest decrease was found among 18 to 24 year olds. Hare states, “the trends among younger adults warrant special concern, suggesting that –unless some effective solution is found-literary culture, and literacy in general, will continue to worsen. Indeed, at the current rate of loss, literary reading as a leisure activity will virtually disappear in half a century” (p. 6). The survey, which was conducted in 2002, showed that 57% of adults had read a book during that year, compared to 61% found in a study 10 years earlier. The NEA strongly believes that “digital entertainment” has a direct relationship to the decline in reading. Another summary of the NEA reported the survey of 17,000 adults showed a 10.2% decrease in readers during the past 20 years. This article questioned whether “can’t” read or “won’t” read is the culprit. (NEA, 2004)

Vaccaro (2000) suggests that the plight of reading is inconclusive. The article suggests that the reason more than 20% of Americans are functionally illiterate is directly related to immigration and poverty levels. Statistics show that the proportion of people who did not complete reading a book doubled from 8% to 16% between 1978 and 1990, while the percentages of television viewers and video rentals are rising. Academic achievement tests show below grade level results, indicating that many students have not mastered the reading and comprehension skills necessary to be proficient readers.
However, Vaccaro (2000) also suggests that statistics and surveys can be manipulated to create a crisis. He says that current studies and surveys have demonstrated increases in public library usage. There also seems to be a difference between the reading habits of various age groups. One study revealed that reading habits increase with age. Older adults seemed to have more time in their lives to devote to reading. Another argument was made that even though people spend a lot of time watching television, viewers may be encouraged to read. *The Oprah Winfrey Show* has transformed many of the titles on Oprah’s booklist into best sellers (Vaccaro).

Some research dispels the belief that television has overtaken reading as a leisure activity (*School Library Journal*, 1985). According to the study’s results, 90% of all adults and young people read for relaxation. In this investigation, readers were categorized as “light” (1 to 3 books read in 6 months, “moderate” (4 to 25 books) and “heavy” (26 or more books). Notably, the reading of the “heavy” readers increased over years of study. Trends toward reading nonfiction or magazines and newspapers have grown. The author concluded that readership is influenced by education, income and occupation.

MacFarquhar (1997) provides substantial statistics concerning reading. According to her, studies show that over twice as many people were reading in 1990 as in 1957. More people were aware of authors and titles. There was a tremendous increase in book sales as well as the number of bookstores. Perhaps the changes in what types of materials are being read may be questioned, but people are reading, according to MacFarquhar.

**Summary**

Many things affect motivation, reading habits, attitudes, and perceptions of reading. Many different aspects are believed to play a role. These include, home environment, parent involvement, and the needs of the individual during adulthood. In the end, teachers and their
reading instructional practices affect adults as readers. In addition, since a major goal of reading education is often the development of lifelong readers, a solid foundation is essential when children are young to ensure lifelong reading initiative and habits occur. Interestingly, the combination of varied reading influences in the educational years has substantial effects on the reading habits in adulthood.
CHAPTER III. METHODS AND PROCEDURES

With the emphasis on reading practices in today’s educational world, just what makes a person become a lifelong reader? Codell (2003) believes the open doors of homes, libraries, and schools allow children to walk through and find a lifelong love of books. Cullinan (1992) believes the most important things parents should want their children to do are to love books and stories, to learn about language, and to learn to handle books. New theories and practices relating to reading are constantly being developed. From the time a child is born, he/she is influenced by reading. Cullinan (1992) also believes that, “the two major ingredients in instilling a love of reading are the right book and the time to share it with your child” (p. 29). Throughout the school years, teachers, parents, and other caregivers can expose children to reading. Some children have more reading and literacy influences in their lives than others, but what sparks the reading initiative in certain people so that they will continue to read throughout their lifetime? The purpose of this study was to determine what the perceptions, attitudes and practices of middle school teachers were towards reading. This chapter describes the methodology and procedures of the study and includes a description of the survey instrument development, data collection, and data analysis.

Methods

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to investigate what past influences generated the reading habits of educators in a public school. The specific research question was, “What are middle school teachers’ reading perceptions, attitudes, and practices?” This survey study was based on qualitative data collected from middle school educators. Survey items were developed using
information about reading motivation gleaned from research. Interviews were then conducted with participants using the survey instrument.

**Participants**

Participants asked to complete the survey were at least 22 years of age and employed by a public school system in central Ohio. The middle school selected had a student population of 1,200 students with a staff of 120 characterized by the middle to lower socio economic background of the suburban community. The school demographics represented diverse backgrounds. The selection of the site for the survey was based on identifying adults from a community who would be representative of other communities as well as cooperative. Ten teachers representing different subject specialties were surveyed.

**Instrumentation**

The questions on the survey were generated from information gained from research about motivation and reading. Interviews were conducted so that participants could discuss their responses. The case study addressed participants’ early reading experiences, home influences, definitions of readers, and current reading practices. The survey questions were printed on two 8.5 by 11-inch sheet of paper along with an explanation of the study (see Appendix A). The survey contained 11 open-ended questions, which were addressed in an interview format.

**Procedures**

First, the survey questions were developed based on research related to reading motivation. Each survey included an explanation of the purpose of the study and how the study was to be conducted. A preliminary review of the research instrument by the thesis committee led to further revisions of the survey instrument. After the survey was revised, the information
necessary for approval was sent to the Human Subjects Review Board which granted permission to complete the case study.

After the investigation was approved, 10 surveys were printed. The investigator arranged specific dates and times to meet with the participants and conduct the interviews. Participants reviewed the purpose of the study and gave oral consent to be part of the case studies. After the participants read the explanation of the study and agreed to participate, the interviews took place. One-on-one interviews were conducted and the responses were recorded. Those who were interviewed were guaranteed confidentiality regarding the data provided.

Data Collection

The survey questions concerning the perceptions, attitudes, and practices of middle school teachers were answered through a personal interview process. Participants were asked to respond to the questions and the interviewer recorded the responses. When the interviews were complete, the information from the case study was compiled and analyzed for common themes. Information from all of the surveys were analyzed and recorded.

Data Analysis

To analyze the items on the survey, the researcher reviewed each response. The data were organized into categories to allow answers to be sorted by school reading experiences, home reading experiences, definitions of reading terms and current reading practices. The information was separated by various categories and responses.

Summary

The main purpose of this study was to compile descriptive information that will answer the various parts of the research question. The research question asked was, “What are the middle school teachers’ reading perceptions, attitudes, and practices?” The study also provided
some answers to the question that so many ask: What makes someone a life long reader? The
survey included questions developed to gather qualitative data needed for the study. Once the
data were collected, the researcher analyzed it and identified common themes between the survey
questions and the responses.
CHAPTER IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The main purpose of this study was to compile descriptive information to answer the various parts of the research question. The research question asked, “What are the middle school teachers’ reading perceptions, attitudes, and practices?” Survey questions were developed based on research pertaining to reading motivation. Ten middle school teachers within varying teaching disciplines in a suburban community were interviewed. After the interviews were conducted, common themes were extracted from the qualitative responses. This chapter describes the details of these themes provided by the individual responses to the survey questions.

Results

*Question One*

The first three questions were based upon the participants’ early reading experiences. Question one explored initial reading instruction in elementary school and reinforcement throughout middle school and high school (see Appendix A). The majority of the responses indicated that participants were taught through phonics-based tactics with the support of basal readers and programmed reading. Middle school and high school reading was reinforced but mainly through interactive curriculum areas. Several mentioned that reading groups were significant at all levels. Examples of comments from teachers included:

1. “Phonetically mostly throughout all years in school.”
2. “Taught with phonics and whole word recognition in context.”
3. “Reading groups of about 10 students throughout K-3.”
4. “Learned to read through basal reading series which taught me how to read phonetically. These were reinforced throughout junior high and high school.”
Question Two

Question two explored the impact of early reading practices on present day experiences. Except for the two physical education teachers, all interviewees believed their early experiences had positive influences on their present-day reading habits. Most mentioned that throughout their school years they were taught to read for work and fun and now they believe they are “avid readers”. Some responses from the teachers included:

1. “I always enjoyed reading out loud and was a good reader in the high reading group. I hated having to listen to other students read who weren’t so good.”
2. “I was taught to read for work and fun.”
3. “I describe/consider myself an avid reader since I learned how to read.”

The responses from the physical education teachers included:

4. “I was not taught very well which has affected my ability to read at high levels.”
5. “I do not consider myself an avid reader.”

Question Three

Question three queried the home reading experience. All of the respondents said their parents encouraged reading. Not only did their parents model reading, they also promoted it by providing a variety of reading materials at home and by making sure the children had library cards and could visit the local library. The teachers’ comments included:

1. “My parents did not read much, but they read to me daily. As a result, I read constantly once I learned how.”
2. “Reading was always encouraged and modeled at home.”
3. “Reading was always encouraged and honored. If I was reading a book, I was allowed to continue reading even if there was work to be done. My mother was an avid reader and encouraged me to read.”

**Question Four**

Question four asked the teachers to define “reader.” All of the definitions reflected a positive attitude. Someone who can fluently read and comprehend what he or she has read typified all the definitions of a reader. Almost all of the respondents believed that readers not only understood what they were reading, but enjoyed reading and engaged in reading on a daily basis. One teacher stated, “A reader is someone who questions, clarifies, laughs, shrieks, and becomes involved as the main character in a plot.”

**Question Five**

Question five required the teacher to define life long reader. The “life long reader” explanations mirrored those of a reader, emphasizing the enjoyment of various types of reading at various times. Examples of comments from the teachers included:

1. “An individual who enjoys reading daily for enjoyment, interests, knowledge and bettering oneself.”

2. “A person who seeks out knowledge, fun, and a thirst for current events all of the time.”

3. “A person who has the ability to read and exercises that ability all of their life.”

4. “A life long reader is someone who is curious and reads for information or pleasure. A motto for a life long reader might be – ‘so many books, so little time’.”
Question Six

Question six asked the interviewees to describe their present day reading habits. No matter what the reading material was, each one said that they all read something everyday. Examples of comments included:

1. “I read daily but almost strictly for pleasure at this point.”

2. “I read a half hour a day, frequently more, usually 10-15 spurts. I read often at bedtime and I try to read at least one book a month in addition to several periodicals.”

3. “I listen to audio books round trip to work and home each day. I always have something to read with me--books, magazines, and Internet articles.”

4. “I LOVE TO READ! I always have a book on tape in my car at all times, have a book by my bed, and one by my chair. My husband gave me a small notebook where I record month, year, title, and author of every book I read.”

Question Seven

Question seven asked exactly what types of reading materials were utilized. The responses included: audio books, magazines, newspapers, paperbacks, the Internet or email, and the Bible. All commented that their daily reading was for pleasure.

Question Eight

Question eight asked for places where the teachers obtained their reading materials. Most had subscriptions to newspapers and magazines. Some bought books, but many used the public library as a resource. Several mentioned that they traded materials with family members and friends. Some responses from the teachers included:
1. “I mostly obtain from friends, word of mouth, or book reviews from magazines”

2. “The public library and my family shares good books”

3. “I receive periodicals by mail, books and paperbacks I buy or trade, hand backs, and also the library.”

**Question Nine**

Since all of the interviewees work in a public school, Question nine asked each teacher if he/she stressed the importance of reading in his/her classroom. Even though a wide range of subject areas were covered, each one did emphasize the importance of reading in each curriculum area – language arts, math, science, music and physical education. Examples of comments included:

1. “Yes definitely! I make independent reading projects part of each nine weeks. Grades--also by helping students choose books.”

2. “Yes! We practice how to dissect word problems with pre-writing, rereading, looking for questions and key words.”

3. “I enjoy reading to students--not just the textbook but also fun children’s books. When students read I ask them to read slowly and pause at periods.”

4. “I teach music so students have to read the lyrics on a daily basis. Not only do the students have to read frequently, but they have to read in rhythm and keep up.”

5. “Yes, I reinforce the importance in school and in research about our P E activities.”
**Question Ten**

Question ten asked the respondents to share their special reading relationships. All of them have a relationship with the students in their classrooms. Many of them read to their own children and continue to share reading suggestions and materials. Some have friends or social groups that allow them to interact with each other on various reading levels. Examples of comments included:

1. “My wife mostly, and some of my sibs and my daughter. We mainly just recommend good books we’ve read.”

2. “My family enjoys reading some of the same books. My husband, son and mother. But they enjoy separate books as well.”

3. “Both of my children.”

4. “My parents and grandmother recommend books and sometimes we briefly discuss them after I am finished reading them.”

**Question Eleven**

The final question specifically asked if there was any certain person or incident that influenced current reading habits. Four of the respondents reported there was nothing that had a significant influence. Reading was a developing process that came about through individual experiences. Three of those interviewed cited some type of school experience -- a teacher or instructional practice. Three credited family influences. Several influences were negative in nature. For example,

1. “My second grade teacher was in her first year of teaching and did not prepare my whole class very well.” This person really believed that early experience had lasting effects.
2. “I was always in the ‘bluebirds’ -- the ‘redbirds’ were the smart kids. However, through my interest in comics and science fiction, I became a better reader, which would be credited, for my improvement in reading. I barely read science fiction today -- but it is where I started.”

Those who did not attribute their reading habits to any one person or event mainly believed that reading was basically a skill developed over time.

1. “No- I just took my time to develop a love for reading.”

2. “Not really -- rather a series of small incidents when combined -- proved significant.”

3. “Not really -- a cumulative experience.”

The other influences were quite positive.

1. “My parents were the biggest influence as they read to me everyday when I was young.”

2. “When I was in early high school and my brother was in college, he told me to read The Lord of the Rings by Tolkien and The Fountainhead by Rand and I have been reading ever since.”

3. “Summer reading clubs is where I would get positive reinforcement from the librarians.”

4. “My fourth grade teacher, Mrs. Sunbury, introduced me to Laura Ingalls Wilder. We shared the same first name so I was hooked on reading from then on.”
Discussion of Results

The survey results provided insight into my research question: “What are middle school teachers’ reading perceptions, attitudes, and practices?” All of the respondents had motivational influence in elementary school and for some it continued into middle school and high school. All of those surveyed described that reading was a daily part of their adult life and they all promote reading to some degree in their middle school classrooms. All of interviewees gave definitions of a reader and a life long reader that reflected their value of the importance of reading.

Summary

Each question on the survey was designed to explore the research question: “What are middle school teachers’ reading perceptions, attitudes, and practices?” While the responses varied, there appear to be many similarities among influences and ideals. The answers provided by the participants provided insights into middle school teachers’ reading practices and attitudes toward reading, as well as insights into their perceptions of what it means to be a life long reader.
CHAPTER V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to compile descriptive information that would answer the parts of the research question. This endeavor was a case study of middle school teachers’ perceptions, attitudes and practices toward reading. The study was designed to investigate what influences the reading habits of educators in a public school. The responses addressed the specific research question: “What are middle school teachers’ reading perceptions, attitudes, and practices?”

Summary

The study was designed to survey middle school teachers at least 22 years of age and employed by a public school system in central Ohio. These adults were chosen because they teach in a community that would be representative of other communities; they were also cooperative. Ten teachers representing different subject specialties were surveyed. The method of surveying the ten teachers was individual interviews. After agreeing to participate, each teacher was interviewed by the researcher. All responses were recorded in written format for further analysis. All respondents had taught at the middle school level for at least five years.

All of the survey questions were open ended. This format allowed for specific, individual response with no bias from the researcher. Questions included queries about early reading habits, definitions of reading terms and current reading practices. Following the completion of the survey, analysis of the data revealed common themes among the responses. Personal quotations to support various themes were noted to reinforce the categories presented.

The first three survey questions were based upon the participants’ early reading experiences. Most indicated that they had been taught through a phonics program. Details of middle school and high school reading experiences were revealed. The majority also believed
that their early reading experiences impacted their present day experiences. All of respondents had positive home reading experiences as well. The middle portion of the survey asked for definitions of reading terms. The definitions were unanimously positive. Except for a variance in terminology, the definitions were quite similar. The final section surveyed current reading practices. Examples of daily reading materials and practices were unique to the individuals.

Since all of the interviewees worked in a public school, all of them stressed the importance of reading in the classroom throughout all curriculum areas. Many of the respondents cited specialized reading relations with family and friends. Some had special childhood mentors who instilled reading emotions, which have remained until the present time.

It is important for educators to be reminded of the information provided by this specific case study. There is a definite relationship between early reading habits and the reading habits of adults. Depending on age level and curriculum area taught, educators do promote reading practices into student lessons. Certainly most teachers recognize the importance of emphasizing and modeling the value of reading as a lifelong goal, but reminders of continually making reading a central focus cannot be overstated. This case study can serve as a reminder.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to investigate particular reading behaviors of middle school teachers. The survey was categorized into three major headings – early reading, reading terms and current reading practices. The conclusions drawn from each of the sections will be discussed in relation to previous research.

The Early Reading questions asked for details of elementary through high school reading influences as well as reading practices in the home setting. Most of those surveyed were taught to read through a phonics-based program with the support of basal and programmed reading.
Middle school and high school experiences had an impact but mainly through interactive curriculum areas. According to Cullinan (1992), early readers make connections between the sounds of words at the beginning letters or end rhymes of words. It would appear that the readers surveyed in this investigation used the connection explained by Cullinan to become a reader.

In relating early reading practices to present day experiences, all interviewees, except for the physical education teachers, believed that their early reading experiences definitely had an impact on their current reading habits. Most classified themselves as avid readers and believed that their school experiences had emphasized the importance of reading for work and fun. Linksman (1998) views pleasure in reading as essential; he states, “The act of reading and the material read should be enjoyable for the child if we want him or her to develop into a lifelong reader” (p. 51). Linksman says certain ingredients need to be present for a person to experience an act as pleasurable, enjoyable, or fun: (a) interest, (b) recognition and approval, (c) a challenge that can be met, (d) emotional satisfaction, (e) comfort and security, (f) a sense of belonging, (g) a sense of gaining power over one’s life, (h) a sense of accomplishment, (i) the satisfaction of curiosity, and (j) having novel or unique experiences (p.238). It appears that the particular teachers surveyed were exposed to many of the “ingredients” Linksman lists. These ingredients had definite effects on each person’s reading path and were also significant enough to help each person remember incidents and people that influenced his/her reading habits.

Recalling home reading experiences, parental encouragement and modeling were major influences on each respondent. Parents valued the importance of reading and made sure reading materials were available. Cullinan (1992) believes that simply reading establishes a lifelong habit of reading and it also makes children better readers because they practice. She also adds that practice makes perfect in home and school reading. The more children read, the better they read,
so the more they enjoy it and want to continue reading. The participants in this investigation all
seemed to reflect Cullinan’s notions about support at home. All participants were positive about
the practice time for reading, the modeling of reading, and the development of the enjoyment of
reading.

All of the definitions of reading terms provided a positive skew. Although different
wording was used, there was an obvious commonality in the definitions. Each person was asked
to describe a “reader” and a “life long” reader. Each participant believed that “readers” were
competent and able to comprehend the content of whatever they were reading successfully. “Life
long” readers expanded their reading skills throughout their daily lives by means of a vast array
of resources. Duncan (1998) also believes that children should grow up reading a variety of
materials in addition to books such as newspapers, magazines, and game instructions. According
to Duncan, children should read from a broad scope of genres. Duncan also adds that children
should read great books, but that “a little junk in a well-balanced reading diet is perfectly fine”
(p. 153). Duncan explains that parents should pay attention to the interests of their child,
capitalize on them, and then use this information to help in encouraging variation in reading
materials. The interviewees gave varied examples of reading resources that were used to enhance
their reading acquisition skills. Considering the span of ages, interests and professional levels,
the array of present reading materials -- science fiction, religious, romantic -- was widespread.

Responses concerning current reading practices focused not only on how and when
reading was incorporated into teachers’ daily lives, but also how each teacher stressed reading in
his/her particular classroom situation. Everyone who was interviewed read something everyday.
The type of material read and the amount of time spent reading varied. The descriptions of
individual present day reading habits exhibited the biggest variance in response. Subject area
taught seemed to have an effect on current practices. Types of reading material utilized included newspapers, magazines, religious materials, educational resources, as well as recreational reading. Sources for these materials included personal acquisitions, public libraries, and family and friend exchanges. Zill and Winglee (1989) believe that the reading of literature does not occupy a prominent place in the lives of most Americans. They believe that we have become a nation of watchers (movies, television, videocassettes, and computer displays) rather than a nation of readers. They question whether young people read literature when they leave school. According to Zill and Winglee, everyone who is educable is expected to learn to read literature. The reading practices of most of these middle school teachers refute Zill’s and Winglee’s notion that reading is currently not a dominant focus in the lives of most people. All of the respondents stated that reading was a part of daily life either personally or professionally. For the majority, pleasure reading held a definite significance.

Since each person surveyed was a middle school teacher, each was asked specifically how reading was stressed in his or her classroom. While each stated that reading was emphasized, the subject area taught was a major factor in exactly how the emphasis was approached. The language arts teachers had more opportunity to stress reading, while the physical education teachers were limited in the time they had to devote to literacy. Gambrell, et al. (1999) stressed that teachers must play a role in literacy development. The data show that the teachers in this investigation do believe they play a role in the child’s literacy development and they actively participate in that development.

Lindskoog and Hunsicker (2002) believe that to have above average chances of having a booklover, the mother must be an active reader booklover, marry another booklover, and have four grandparents who are booklovers. Lindskoog and Hunsicker (2002) also believe that
children who read are usually born to parents who read. They believe reading tends to run in families. They postulate that some people, however, seem destined to love books whether they are plentiful or scarce, and whether their parents love them or not. They just love books. Nine out of ten interviewees stated that they had a special reading relationship with a family member. These relationships included with spouse and/or children. Most actually shared reading materials and almost all suggested reading titles to others. This survey not only questioned how reading was important to them, but how they were able to share their love and respect for reading with others.

Among this group of teachers, most of them could remember a specific incident or even that impacted their reading. Lindskoog and Hunsicker (2002) also say that motivating children to read requires that they share reading experiences with others. When their peers like and respect certain books, children are likely to do the same. Talking about books may help a child understand what makes a book appealing or disappointing. Looking back on their own growth as readers and seeing the development of students as readers, Lindskoog and Hunsicker report that book talks got them hooked on reading. Certain reading materials, comic books for example, or reading programs encouraged the reading process. The majority believed that whether it was an accumulation or a specific person, the reading path is a continuum of experiences. This is in line with Cullinan’s (1992) notion that people involved in a child’s literacy development can affect reading habits later in life. It appears that the acquisition of reading skills, as well as the enhancement of reading habits, is an ongoing networking process.
Recommendations

For Classroom Teachers

This case study provides useful information for classroom teachers. Undoubtedly all teachers recognize the importance of reading skills in all content areas, but there may be circumstances where encouragement of reading motivation may be necessary. Interestingly, as the survey interviews were completed, almost all off the respondents stated that while they did value the importance of reading, they were grateful for the opportunity to participate in this survey because it gave them an opportunity to reflect on personal reading experiences throughout their lifetimes and it also reminded them of the importance of influencing reading habits in their current classroom situations. This study, as well as future studies, could assist classroom teachers in all curriculum areas in their reading motivational practices.

For Further Study

More research needs to be and should be conducted to investigate perceptions, attitudes, and practices regarding reading. Further investigations of reading motivation in school and home environments should be conducted. More detailed investigations related to the acquisition of reading skills and the continuation of reading practices throughout a school career need to be conducted and correlated to adult reading practices.

According to a study conducted by the National Endowment for the Arts there has been a steady decline over the last 20 years in the number of American adults who read literature. Therefore, it is recommended that further studies investigate reasons why reading among adults is decreasing.

The researcher recommends that the survey population be expanded beyond the boundaries of middle school teachers. Adults of various age, sex, reading ability, education
levels, and professions should be surveyed. Extending the survey population would be advantageous in that it would provide diverse responses and building blocks for future studies.

While the researcher believes that the survey format for this case study was quite suitable, it is recommended that additional formats be used. Multiple choice questions and fill in the blank responses could enhance the interview survey. The format expansion would provide more details and more resources for analysis.

This investigation serves as a building block for future study. Educators and parents can utilize the results of this case study to improve and expand their reading methodologies. The study of perceptions, attitudes and practices of middle school teachers is important to the investigation of how early reading practices and school/home environments influence the development of life long readers.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A. SURVEY QUESTIONS

Male _________     Female _________

Age _________

Content Area _______________________

Number of years teaching middle school? _____________

**Early Reading**

1. How would you describe how you learned to read in elementary school? Were your reading skills reinforced in Jr. High and High School?

2. What impact did your reading experiences in school have on your present day reading?

3. You just told me how you learned to read in school. What was reading like at home?

**Reading Terms**

4. How would you define a “reader”?

5. How would you define a “life long” reader?
Current Reading Practices

6. What are your present day reading habits?

7. What reading materials enforce your present reading practices?

8. How do you obtain most of the materials that you read?

9. Do you stress the importance of reading in your classroom? How?

10. Do you have a special reading relationship with any family members?

11. Do you think there has been any one person or incident that has had a big effect on the type of reader you are today?