THE IMPACT OF AGE ON INTERMEDIATE STUDENTS’ SELF-SELECTION OF LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

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It is a well-supported fact that students who have an internalized motivation to read will engage in literacy-related practices throughout life. Because of this, teachers must strive to help students develop intrinsic desires to become avid readers. However, this is not always a simple task, especially when concerned with intermediate-level students who face the impending “fourth-grade slump.” The encouragement of avid reading requires implementation of fundamental aspects of motivation: choice, access, and self-selection of literature.

This study focused primarily on the self-selection strategies utilized by third and sixth grade students attending a nearby intermediate school. Little is known about how self-selection methods alter as students age. To avoid the decline in motivation that most students encounter around fourth grade, educators must be aware of how students choose texts to provide them with appealing literature, successful selection strategies, and guidance to promote autonomy.

To determine how third and sixth grade students choose recreational literature, participants responded to a 12-question survey. A variety of questions were used to collect information related to students’ reading habits, preferences, and self-selection processes. The data obtained from the survey were analyzed to determine the degree to which age is a factor in the self-selection processes exercised by students in intermediate grades.

The findings of this study indicate that no methodology of choosing literature is specific to a certain grade level. Despite this, it was acknowledged that both third and sixth graders were likely to implement a variation of the same three steps first when choosing texts: reading the title, identifying the author, and surveying the cover design. Although there were similarities found between the surveyed age groups, it was concluded that age is a factor in relation to the
number of steps students take when choosing a book, the degree of importance related to a
book’s topic, and the frequency to which each strategy is used. Despite whether age has an
impact or not, evidence from this study indicates that students need continuous support from
both the school and home to encourage the development of successful self-selection strategies
that will lead to life-long reading.
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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Motivating students to read is a key component in fostering positive, avid reading behaviors. When students become interested and confident in reading and related activities, they begin to find these tasks to be meaningful and relevant in their own lives; students who identify themselves as readers and have positive dispositions toward reading have been found to be more likely to continue to engage in reading-related activities as adults (Kasten & Wilfong, 2005). Creating life-long readers is a main goal for any educator, and it is imperative that these educators understand various strategies to accomplish this. Clearly, motivating students is an essential task that may increase the likelihood that positive reading behaviors continue. However, it is crucial that professionals also understand the processes that students utilize when selecting literature and how those strategies change with age. By accomplishing this, educators will be able to guide students to be autonomous in their abilities to select literature that they will enjoy and continue to read in the future.

Most research regarding self-selection has uncovered numerous factors to which students are drawn when selecting literature for pleasure reading. These factors significantly impact students’ decisions to read one book over another. Of course, the topic is a primary influence, since it is known that individual interests play a huge role when getting students engaged with literature (Reuter, 2007; Swartz & Hendricks, 2000; Williams, 2008). Other significant features include physical characteristics of a text, such as the size, front cover illustration, or back of the book summary (Monson, n.d.; Phythian-Sence & Clark, 2008; Reuter, 2007; Swartz & Hendricks, 2000; Williams, 2008). Many students use alternate strategies to select a book, other than simply glancing at the cover. Some students decide to read a passage before settling on a title; others utilize recommendations from other individuals, and some choose titles because they
believe they might be able to make a connection to a character. All in all, every student has a method in which he/she engages when purposefully determining what title he/she would like to read for enjoyment.

Other factors also influence the book selection process of children. Gender, socio-economic status, and cultural background all have a significant role in the decisions that students make when selecting texts. For instance, studies have indicated that males have a higher preference for books about science and adventure, whereas females generally prefer fantasy and realistic fiction titles (Haynes & Richgels, 1992). However, little research has been conducted to determine how age impacts the text selection process of students. Additionally, the available research does not appear to explore the topic of how self-selection strategies develop as students age. The present study was developed to contribute to previous research related to this subject. As more information is acquired, professionals will be able to understand more about what impacts choice as students age. This can do more to ensure that students are provided with interesting, quality literature that they will find appealing and will be motivated to select at various grade levels. This information can also allow educators to develop methods to teach students how to make selections that they can continue throughout their adult lives.

To begin this process, educators must first find ways to intrinsically motivate their students to read. By creating excitement around the topic of reading, students will be more prone to read on their own and also view reading as a positive, meaningful activity (Kasten & Wilfong, 2005). There are many important areas of focus that can result in an increase in enthusiasm for literature. To identify what motivates students, it is essential to determine their unique interests and personal values (Pitcher, Albright, DeLane, Walker, Seunariesingh, Mogge, Headley,
Ridgeway, Peck, Hunt & Dunston, 2007). A book that some students may find intellectually stimulating may not have the same effect on their peers.

In addition to discovering students’ interests, influential motivational experts agree two critical factors that lead to increased motivation to read include the incorporation of choice and access to literature (Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006; Gambrell, 1996). Once teachers can effectively recognize the interests of their students, they can then begin providing them with a selection of literature from which to choose. It is imperative that the selection of literature consists of a variety of topics that have been identified as particularly interesting, in both narrative and expository formats (Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006; Guthrie & Davis, 2003; Malloy, Marinak, & Gambrell, 2010). Allowing the students to make choices and take charge of their reading experiences has been shown to improve attitudes and increase the frequency of participation in reading-related activities (Rettig & Hendricks, 2000). Other researchers concur with the further addition that giving students the authority to make choices and utilize self-selection techniques provides them with a sense of control over what they are learning, promoting autonomy and development of decision-making techniques (Atwell, 1998; Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006; Gambrell, 1996; Guthrie & Davis, 2003; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Oldfather, 1993). Establishing some form of ownership in literacy-related tasks in school is the first step to promoting students’ autonomy throughout life.

Statement of the Problem

During adolescence, particularly around grade four, students begin to lose interest in reading (Samuels, 2007; Tyre & Springen, 2007). At this so-called “fourth-grade slump,” students seem to stop making the progress that they typically show in the earlier grades (Samuels). In addition, students at this age often experience a significant drop in their motivation
to read, both in and out of school, which continues on past these grades (Guthrie & Davis, 2003; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Clearly, this factor is a hindrance to an educator’s goal of promoting life-long learning through reading.

In addition, students’ development of autonomy is often negatively impacted because of deficiencies in motivation to read, guidance on how to select literature, and sufficient amounts of time to select and read books. These points are supported and explained further by Ivey and Broaddus (2001):

…as students mature, [they] are expected to become independent readers, yet they get limited opportunities to explore their own interests in reading, to read at their own pace, or to make their own decisions about whether or not to read a book. In short, if the goal of instruction is to create, skillful, versatile, engaged readers, then…schools may be missing the mark. (p. 350)

Based on this contention, a significant problem may ultimately be that the research supporting key best practices for motivating students to read is being ignored.

To reverse this, it is essential that teachers stay up-to-date on the research surrounding motivation and how students select books. This research must then be implemented into the classroom. These best practices can be achieved by providing access to literature that appeals to students’ interests, encouraging students to peruse a wide variety of texts, and giving them ample time to make decisions about which books they would prefer to read. Furthermore, to ensure that students have the skills necessary to make efficient literary decisions, educators must learn how to guide them to do so. To accomplish this, teachers must learn how students typically select books and then, based upon their own students’ techniques, model new strategies on how to choose literature for pleasure reading. As Caperna (2007) argues, “The teacher must also know
[his/her] students’ selection process[es] if [he/she] is to provide appropriate books and
guidance…[for] reading” (p. 2). By achieving this, students will become more autonomous with
their self-selection strategies and intrinsically motivated to continue their positive reading habits.

Overall, there appears to be a deficiency in the amount of information that is available
about students’ self-selection habits and age. Because of this, there is the potential that students
may not be provided with the literature that they are genuinely interested in reading as they age.
If grade-level differences in methodology for selecting books are determined, teachers will need
to adapt their classroom libraries and practices to accommodate them. This could include
providing books with specific features and content that will promote students in various grade
levels to develop and continue to exhibit positive reading behaviors that will last throughout life.

Research Question

Since it is essential that educators be aware of students’ self-selection processes, this
study was developed to contribute to the available information about how texts are typically
chosen. More specifically, this study was developed to determine whether age is a factor that
alters the ways in which students select literature. Although there is a great deal of research
regarding the factors that impact text selection, there appears to be a lack of information
regarding how these methods are utilized and altered as students age. To add more knowledge to
the current collection of research available on students’ self-selection of texts, the following
driving question was designed for this study: How do self-selection habits related to pleasure
reading differ according to age?

Rationale

In addition to uncovering more information about how students self-select texts, this
study is beneficial because not much is known about how this process develops or changes as
students mature in age. By obtaining this information, educators can do more to keep their students interested in independently choosing literature and encouraging avid reading habits. As stated earlier, many students experience a significant decline in motivation towards reading. The results of this study can be used to help teachers to improve the choices of books presented to students at different grade levels, based on their selection processes. In addition, these findings can provide more information about what educators need to do to model various selection techniques for students to encourage effective strategies for discovering titles that will appeal to individual interests. By increasing motivation, incorporating effective self-selection strategies, and being aware of how students typically select books for pleasure reading, educators can increase the likelihood that their students will become autonomous, lifelong readers.

Definition of Terms

Aliteracy – Students who have “the capacity to read, but [elect] not to do so” (Alvermann, 2003, p. 1).

Early Adolescence – Typically referring to children ages 10 to 14 (Ryan, 2008).

Extrinsic Motivation – “Refers to the performance of an activity in order to attain some separable outcome” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 71).

Fourth-Grade Slump – “A declining interest in reading and a gradual disengagement from school” that commonly begins to present itself as students begin to enter the fourth grade (Tyre & Springen, 2007).

Intrinsic Motivation – “Refers to doing an activity for the inherent satisfaction of the activity itself” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 71).

Motivation – “Beliefs, values, needs and goals that individuals have” (Guthrie & Wigfield, 1997, p. 5).
Nonreaders – Individuals who have the skills necessary to read, but rarely voluntarily engage themselves in pleasure reading; Aliterate individuals (Strommen & Mates, 2004).

Pleasure Reading – The act of reading for recreational purposes (Wilson & Casey, 2007).

Readers – Individuals “for whom reading extended texts is a significant, pleasurable, recreational activity and consistent part of daily life” (Strommen & Mates, 2004, p. 189).

Reading Motivation – “Individual’s goals and beliefs with a regard to reading…[that] influences the individual’s activities, interactions, and learning with text” (Guthrie & Wigfield, 1999, p. 199).

Self-Selection – The opportunity for children to choose the books that they prefer to read (Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006).

Limitations

In this particular study, the population of participants involved was limited to three third and sixth grade classrooms in northwest Ohio. Of these six classrooms, only 22 third graders and 20 sixth graders chose to respond to the survey questions. This sample size may not accurately represent the general self-selection habits of the larger population of students at each grade level. Additionally, there was a chance that obvious and specific self-selection processes for each grade level may not exist. This limited population size may not have made it possible to confidently accept or reject this possibility.

Moreover, the data collection of selection strategies was gathered through use of surveys. Utilization of these surveys did not allow for further, in-depth explanations of participant responses. Some of the questions involved could have forced the participants to make choices that might not be accurate representations of their individual strategies or preferences. To reach a larger population of participants in less time, this method was chosen over interviews. Although
interviews may have presented more details and clarification to questions, they would have taken longer to conduct and analyze, further limiting the population size of participants involved in the study.
CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

If educators are to create future generations of avid, engaged readers, it is necessary to foster a strong motivation to read. According to Ryan and Deci (2000), “motivation is influential and is highly valued because …motivation produces” (p. 69). This brief quote explains motivation in education. Students who are internally motivated to read will continue to do so throughout life. Conversely, students who are lacking in motivation will struggle more to find learning, reading, and other academic tasks enjoyable and meaningful. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators can be useful in developing a strong interest in learning. However, fostering a genuine passion for education can do more than help children earn high scores on tests and report cards. As stated by Fawson and Moore (1999), motivating students “…support[s] development of self-determination, autonomy, and interest in literacy tasks” (p. 328).

Increasing students’ motivation to read can be accomplished by students selecting their own reading materials and taking ownership of their reading experiences. The purpose of this investigation was to answer the research question: How do self-selection habits related to pleasure reading differ according to age? This chapter will outline some of the theoretical and historical research on motivation, including factors, such as choice and self-selection of literature, that have been found to positively impact intermediate-level students’ intrinsic desires to learn.

Human Motivation Theories

Human motivation, in general, has been a topic that has interested researchers for decades. Many of the theories on motivation that exist today have been based upon Maslow’s Theory of Human Motivation. Published in 1943, Maslow’s theory proposed five basic needs that drive human motivation and behavior: physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization.
needs. According to Maslow, individuals must meet the basic physiological needs first, before they can be motivated to satisfy any others. The order of these five basic needs ranges from the most essential needs to the most advanced and intellectual ones. Maslow suggested that once particular needs are met, an individual’s motivation does not dissipate; instead, it is redirected to the satisfaction of more sophisticated needs that may arise. He posited that humans are always pursuing the fulfillment of some necessity, regardless of their level on the hierarchy.

Despite this, Maslow (1943) declared that both gratification and deprivation of a particular need have an equally powerful impact on the individual’s ability to advance in the hierarchy; for if a lower need is not met, the individual will remain in pursuit of that necessity and cannot proceed to fulfillment of a higher level need. However, if needs at a lower level are met, the individual may progress to a more sophisticated level on the hierarchy. Individuals cannot skip one of the five stages, but must advance sequentially in the overall endeavor to meet the various needs presented at each level (Maslow).

In addition to identifying the five human needs and how they link to motivation, Maslow (1943) suggested that there are some other factors that contribute to the overall human desire to pursue them. He mentioned that goal-centering, or the idea that one’s motivations are driven by the ultimate outcome of their efforts, is a significant dynamic factor that influences one’s determination to satisfy a need. As stated by Maslow, this principle focuses “neither [on] the instigation nor the motivated behavior but rather the functions, effects, purposes, or goals of the behavior” (p. 392). This idea suggests that the key underlying factor behind motivation is essentially the knowledge that a specific need will be obtained as a result of completing a task.

The concept of goal-centering is also a significant component mentioned in many other theories on motivation. Weiner (1985) mentioned the importance of goal-centering, referred to as
goal expectancy, as a key factor in his *Attributional Theory of Achievement Motivation and Emotion*. In this theory, Weiner discussed the connection between motivation and human emotions, as influenced by the outcome of an activity. He argued that the success and failure of a task have an impact on emotion, which will positively or negatively impact an individual’s degree of motivation. In addition, Weiner postulated that this outcome is based on the impact of factors such as reinforcement from outside sources, self-concept, and changes in personal beliefs about success. He described this relationship using Eccles’ (1983) Expectancy X Value Theory, in which the degree of motivation is the result. Defined by Weiner, “motivation is believed to be determined by what one can get as well as by the likelihood of getting it” (p. 564). Ultimately, goal expectancy can be defined in similar terms. Positive or negative motivation is a direct result of the recognition of a specific goal and the belief as to whether one will be a success or failure in the attempt to obtain that goal (Weiner). As indicated by both Maslow’s (1943) and Weiner’s theories, it appears as though the motivation behind the fulfillment of a particular need is driven by the knowledge that some sort of product will be obtained in the end, whether it is intrinsic or extrinsic in nature.

In 2000, Ryan and Deci reiterated two of their own previously proposed motivational theories related to the concepts of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Like Maslow (1943) and Weiner (1985), they postulated that individuals find the motivation to accomplish goals and satisfy needs because they are aware that the outcome may deliver a desired reward. However, they added to the aforementioned theories by describing how motivation can result from the potential acquisition of either intrinsic or extrinsic rewards. Intrinsic motivation results from a personal desire to learn, accomplish a task, and/or challenge oneself (Ryan & Deci). To further explain this idea, Ryan’s and Deci’s *Cognitive Evaluation Theory*, states that intrinsic motivation
can be significantly impacted either positively or negatively by outside factors from the environment. In addition, they argued that intrinsic motivation must be continuously self-monitored to ensure that it is not negatively influenced or completely devastated by another source. To have intrinsic motivation, one must possess feelings of competence and autonomy; these traits must be derived from a personal satisfaction with accomplishments and a sense of control over those results (Ryan & Deci).

Alternatively, extrinsic motivation is displayed when the goal of accomplishing a task is not for personal pleasure; instead the motivation to succeed is derived from the aspiration to please others, obtain a physical reward, or receive a similar result (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In correlation with this concept, Ryan and Deci discussed their Organismic Integration Theory. In this particular theory, they described how extrinsic motivation can range on a scale from a complete lack of motivation to the internalization of intrinsic motivation. On this scale, four types of extrinsic motivation were identified, based on the degree to which the desire to succeed becomes more inherent. These levels included factors that influence extrinsic motivation, such as receiving a physical reward, following rules, avoiding punishment, and recognizing the importance of the task. This theory was presented to defend the idea that as extrinsic desires become more internalized, or more similar to intrinsic motives, they allow the individual to feel more positive about his/her achievements and self-concept. Overall, these theories regarding intrinsic and extrinsic motivation tie into the arguments of prominent theorists who studied motivation decades ago. A common thread that strings from theory to theory is that human motivation can be positively or negatively impacted by many factors, but the main goal of attempting a task is to achieve a desired result.
Educational Motivation and the Motivation to Read – History and Theory

Over a number of decades, human motivation has become an area of interest for educational researchers. Researchers have developed numerous studies and theories to establish a better understanding of students’ motivations to learn and read. In this section, a chronological history of these studies will be presented to explain what has been uncovered regarding these specific aspects of motivation. Moreover, since many research studies regarding educational motivation have influenced theoretical perspectives, these theories will also be identified in accordance with this historical timeline. Information that will be covered in this section includes intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence academic motivation, the importance of self-selection and choice, and what is and is not known about early adolescents’ self-selection habits. These topics are vital to the study of self-selection of literature, since the findings and theories of previous researchers have a direct influence on the direction in which future research ensues. Most importantly, these findings, studies, and notions will undoubtedly shape the practices used in educational settings, directly impacting students’ motivation to learn, read, and strive for lifelong literacy.

**Intrinsic/Extrinsic Motivation in Education**

The literature regarding motivation in education has prompted a number of contemporary theories and studies regarding the readership of students. However, the theories of Maslow (1943), Weiner (1985), and Ryan and Deci (2000) can be seen in a majority of these works. For example, the ideas of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation have been a consistent focus of research for decades. In addition to their earlier publications, Ryan, Connell, and Deci (1985) analyzed the role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in the realm of education. They argued that educators were placing too much attention upon extrinsic motivation and related strategies to
engage students. They mentioned that although a focus on extrinsic rewards could help to yield higher test scores on state and national exams, these motivators did nothing to promote students’ autonomy. To rectify this, the researchers suggested that in addition to motivating students extrinsically, educators needed to also attempt to foster their intrinsic desires to learn. Their publication stressed that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors must be considered to positively impact students and encourage them to become independent and enthusiastic learners.

A few years later, Lepper and Hodell (1989) also discussed the growing deficiency of intrinsic motivation in education. They contended that a significant reason for a decline in students’ intrinsic desires to learn was the push for a standard curriculum that limited their abilities to make choices and have some control over their learning. Additionally, they claimed that students become disconnected from various topics due to lack of interest or readiness for the subject. They asserted that because of this, many teachers had to use more extrinsic motivators to get their students to do well in class. Detrimentally, more students had less motivation to choose particular activities, especially when rewards were not offered for their completion. Moreover, the theorists maintained that students put forth less effort on tasks that do not have an extrinsic reward associated with them, causing a decline in creativity, critical thinking and overall performance. To rectify this, Lepper and Hodell presented that some restoration of student control would help to empower them and concurrently promote more of an intrinsic response to learning.

The importance of intrinsic motivation in schools was also expressed and stressed by Metsala (1996). In her article, she reported early adolescents’ claims about what encourages them to read. In agreement with the aforementioned researchers, Metsala argued that intrinsic motivation leads to lifelong desires to learn; however, she did not completely disregard the
utilization of extrinsic motivation in the classroom. Although she did mention that extrinsic
motivation typically produces temporary incentives to learn, she asserted that these rewards are
“powerful because they induce immediate effort and attention” (Metsala, p. 661). Unlike
previous motivational theorists, Metsala argued that extrinsic and intrinsic rewards should be
used simultaneously in the classroom. Based on her findings through interviews and
questionnaires with students, she concluded that children are all motivated by unique factors. As
she stated, “children are not merely motivated or unmotivated, but they possess a profile of
different types of motivational goals” (Metsala, p. 660). She further argued that by
acknowledging the differences in students’ motivation, teachers can better promote the lifelong
reading habits; teachers can incorporate the benefits of extrinsic rewards into the development of
intrinsic inspiration using their knowledge of each students’ various interests and motivations.

More recent publications have supported Metsala’s (1996) presumptions regarding
intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. In concurrence with her ideas, Fawson and Moore (1999)
recognized that regardless of motivation caused by extrinsic or intrinsic factors, the end result is
accomplished. Nevertheless, they too noted that the most significant difference between the two
types of motivation is the lasting impact they have on the student: intrinsic motivation promotes
an enduring motivation to learn, while extrinsic motivation is for the moment. Because of this
factor, they emphasized that intrinsic motivation must be fostered in students to ensure that they
continue reading and learning in the future. Similarly, Brophy (2004) also indicated a preference
for intrinsic motivators; however, he too argued that extrinsic incentives do not devastate the
growth of intrinsic motivations, but can be useful counterparts to the development of internal
motivation.
Although the ideas surrounding the concepts of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation have been altered and argued over time, the benefits regarding intrinsically motivating students to learn have been affirmed by all. The idea that intrinsic motivation leads to lifelong learning habits is a thought that has been supported by many researchers and theorists for decades (Brophy, 2004; Fawson & Moore, 1999; Guthrie & Davis, 2003; Lepper & Hodell, 1989; Metsala, 1996; Ryan, Connell, & Deci, 1985). As stated by Guthrie and Davis, “The most highly internalized level of motivational development is intrinsic motivation. At this point, the reader will engage in literacy activities for their own sake, irrespective of whether they provide a reward” (p. 71). Although the use of extrinsic rewards may result in short-term motivation in students, educators should strive more to encourage students through use of intrinsic incentives. It has been agreed upon that intrinsic motivation leads to an increase in students’ level of autonomy (Fawson & Moore; Guthrie & Davis; Ryan, Connell, & Deci). If the most significant goal of a teacher is to instill a lifelong passion for learning and reading, it appears that the best tactic to use to accomplish this is to increase the intrinsic desire to do so.

Recent Research on Early Adolescents’ Educational Motivation

Over the last two decades, researchers and theorists have reiterated the importance of motivating students to learn and read. According to Gambrell (1996), it is imperative that educators succeed in promoting positive, avid reading behaviors in their students. In regards to motivating students to learn, she maintains that, “motivation plays a critical role in learning. It often makes the difference between learning that is superficial and shallow and learning that is deep and internalized” (p. 15). Gambrell’s definition of motivation deals with students’ enthusiasm to read avidly and for a variety of purposes. The manifestation of this internal
motivation to learn is what all educators should strive to instill in their students. This is especially true in regards to early adolescents.

It has been noted that students at the early adolescent years “are less intrinsically motivated for reading than elementary students” (Guthrie & Davis, 2003, p. 61). As Alvermann (2003) asserts, aliteracy is one of the most significant contemporary literacy problems facing early adolescents and their educators. Contemporary research conducted by Guthrie and Davis revealed that as students matured in age, their intrinsic desires to read decreased. Their results also indicated that compared with third and fifth graders, students at the eighth grade level had the lowest motivation and sense of autonomy. These alarming findings are surprisingly consistent with research on an all-too-commonly encountered decline in adolescent motivation. Tyre and Springen (2007) posit that early adolescents tend to hit what is referred to as “the fourth-grade slump.” Around this grade level, students begin to show a lowered interest in academics and school altogether. Interestingly, these researchers mentioned that near the fourth grade, schools put more of a focus on earning high marks on state test scores. It is possible that this extrinsic form of motivation has diverted students’ internal desires to become lifelong readers.

In addition to the fourth-grade slump, other theories for the decline in academic interest at early adolescence include a potential mismatch between what students want to read or learn about and what materials educators provide for them (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1999). Similarly, some researchers suggest that schools are not using the most effective techniques to foster positive reading habits (Ivey & Broaddus; Strommen & Mates, 2004). Although educators are attempting to use strategies to help their students enjoy learning, some argue that what is most to blame is that students’ interests are simply being
overlooked. Pitcher et al. (2007) argued that, “school practices act as disincentives because they fail to take into account what motivates adolescents to read” (p. 379). Through their research using the Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile, survey and interview results indicated that students are being denied the freedom to select from literature that they consider to be significant or appealing. Regardless of what has caused a diminished interest in education and reading, it is the role of the educator to take the necessary measures to ensure that this fourth-grade phenomenon is avoided at all costs.

Although it may appear challenging to evade what seems to be a natural occurrence in a child’s education, recent research suggests that some common and relatively simple practices can assist educators to fight back against the fourth-grade slump. Motivating students is undoubtedly a principle way in which this can be accomplished. Alvermann (2001) reasons that to be considered “effective instruction,” educators must consider “students’ perceptions of their competencies as readers and writers, their level of motivation and background knowledge, and their interests” (p. 24). A key factor in the aforementioned quote is that students must believe that they are competent in academic tasks to feel encouraged to pursue them. In their research, Smith and Wilhelm (2004) discovered that students are more likely to participate in activities in which they feel capable. This concept concerning a high degree of self-esteem and self-efficacy has been maintained in multiple contemporary theories that have predated this particular study (Alvermann, 2001, 2003; Fawson & Moore, 1999; Gambrell, 1996). In fact, this need for confidence in the academic world can be connected back to Maslow’s (1943) Theory of Human Motivation. In his hierarchy, Maslow clearly explains the esteem needs as the aspiration “for strength, for achievement, for adequacy, for confidence in the face of the world, and for independence and freedom” (Maslow, p. 382). According to Maslow, motivation to accomplish
tasks is a direct result from a high feeling of self-worth and competence. Moreover, the
development of positive self-concept has a significant impact on the development of autonomy,
which is ultimately what educators strive to accomplish with their students. Students who are
autonomous in their education are those who are likely to continue to be motivated to learn and
read in the future.

Early Adolescents’ Choice in Education

Since autonomy is a significant goal amongst educators, students must be given the
opportunities to develop this at an early age. It has been noted by many that giving students the
chance to make choices in their learning leads to an increase in motivation and a positive outlook
on education (Gambrell, 1996; Gambrell, Dromsky, & Mazzoni, 2000; Guthrie & Davis, 2003;
Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Ohlhausen & Jespen, 1992; Oldfather, 1993; Phythian-Sence & Clark,
2008; Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1999). As Oldfather affirmed:

…issues of student motivation for literacy have to do with empowerment. For students to
take personal ownership of their literacy learning, they need to feel that they have been
able to have some say about what happens in their classrooms. (p. 680)

Based on the available research, it appears as though promoting ownership and autonomy in
learning are the results of giving students the opportunity to make choices whenever possible.

Choice in education is not a new concept. In 1977, Hickman interviewed two adult
friends who considered themselves fluent and avid readers. The purpose of these interviews was
to determine how those habits were initially developed and why they are still maintained in
adulthood. The findings of this research suggested that fluent, lifelong readers are the product of
classroom practices that involved some degree of student choice. Ultimately, it appeared that
their autonomy was developed through positive interactions with choice as children.
Recent research does not dispute Hickman’s (1977) decade-old claims. In fact, many studies have noted that students themselves have recognized and reported the positive impact of choice on their literacy endeavors (Bang-Jensen, 2010; Oldfather, 1993; Pitcher et al., 2007). As stated by Bang-Jensen, “when readers make their own book selections, they exercise agency in the development of their own reader identities…” (p. 169). The results of her contemporary study indicate that choice is still an enormous factor to consider when developing students into avid learners and readers. Through conversations with fourth and fifth graders, she was able to note how choice allowed student to mature their sense of “readership.” The students who participated in this study discussed how making choices gave them the opportunities needed to discover their genre preferences, utilize various self-selection strategies, and extend their preferences to a wider variety of texts. Clearly, one of the most effective ways to ensure that students exhibit ownership of their learning is to actually let them take control of it. To do this required giving children a voice in the classroom through exercise of decision-making skills.

Early Adolescents’ Self-Selection of Literature

An easy, yet valuable tactic to use when incorporating choice into education is to allow students to utilize self-selection strategies when selecting books. For students to create meaningful relationships with literature, they need to be provided with and have frequent access to a wide selection of books that they can peruse independently. Establishing a thorough classroom or school library is one major step in encouraging motivation in reading; however, an extensive collection of literature is meaningless if students are denied the opportunity to participate in self-selection of texts. Other researchers concur, adding that self-selection provides students with a sense of control over what they are learning, promoting autonomy and development of decision-making techniques (Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006; Gambrell, 1996;
Guthrie & Davis, 2003). The opportunity to choose a book can be monumental to a child, especially since selecting something to read may be one of the only instances in which the child can exert power over his/her own life (Priest-Ploetz, 2003).

In addition to promoting the overall goal of autonomy, allowing students to make their own choices gives them necessary opportunities to engage in their interests through a variety of genres, or to explore new topics that may not have been available elsewhere. It has been noted in research that self-selection of literature provides an essential opportunity for students to pursue these interests, while increasing versatility when reading (Gambrell, 1996; Ollman, 1993). As argued by Bang-Jensen (2010), “when readers have their say in selecting books, they exercise agency in the development of their own reader identities and create a rich relationship with books” (p. 175). Having students learn to select the literature they read early on will help motivate them to continue to do this, promoting lifelong reading habits. To encourage students to have an enduring desire to participate in literacy-related activities, educators must be aware of the strategies they use when selecting their own books. By acquiring this knowledge, teachers will be more likely to increase students’ motivation to read and promote an interest in books. Moreover, using students’ common selection habits, educators can do more to provide them with a variety of quality literature that they will find appealing.

The importance of understanding students’ book selection processes has been acknowledged for a number of decades. In 1957, Jenkins noted that, “…self-selection in reading is becoming an important consideration to those who first look at the child and his ways of learning and then design procedure that will pace him in seeking and selecting that which satisfies his needs” (p. 84). In her study, Jenkins compared two groups of students; one group used conventional reading strategies where the classroom teacher selected books, while the other
group participated in self-selection of texts. The impacts of these two strategies were clear on standardized tests. Scores of the self-selection group were “significantly greater” than the other classroom in regards to reading vocabulary, comprehension, and total reading (Jenkins, p. 89). These results established clear support for the implementation of self-selection in the school.

A few years later, Smith and Becher (1960) analyzed responses from intermediate children who participated in an individualized self-selection program. Similar to Jenkins’ (1957) report, the students in this specific study also improved their scores on standardized tests. According to the findings:

…at the end of the year and a half of reading under the “self-selection” plan, the reading scores of the self-selection class equaled those of the other classes in the city, while the growth of the self-selection class in reading skills exceeded that for the city as a whole by six months. (p. 86)

In addition to this progress, students in this study also developed a stronger interest in reading and respect for literature. The combined positive effects of this particular self-selection program also indicated clear support for considering students’ choices in regards to literature.

More recent research centered on self-selection of literature has focused on the actual processes students use when choosing books, as well as what factors are most significant when determining this choice. In Ollman’s (1993) study, seventh grade students completed questionnaires to reveal which book selection strategies they typically used. The most common factor that influenced students’ decisions to read a book was determined to be the subject. Interestingly, students noted that the subject was also the most helpful indicator of a story’s overall quality. Other factors that were determined to be important when selecting literature.
included the title, introduction, pictures, beginning, type of story (genre), number of pages, questions at the end, author, number of hard words, and sentence length.

In 2000, Swartz and Hendricks researched the self-selection habits of sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students with special needs. Their subsequent findings were somewhat similar to those of Ollman’s (1993); however, they examined some additional factors that were not addressed in the earlier study. The results of this study added to a limited amount of research surrounding self-selection and students with disabilities. What they found was that the students’ selection processes did not significantly differ from those utilized by their typically developing peers. Like Ollman, Swartz and Hendricks concluded that a book’s topic had the most significant impact on a child’s decision to read it. Following this factor, in order of frequency, students also identified the author, writing style, characters, cover/illustrations, back-of-book summaries, title, length, recommendations, and the media to be contributing factors to students’ self-selection tactics. In regards to characters, students identified more than one reason for finding character to be an important consideration; these factors included familiarity with certain characters, the longing to be similar to one, and the degree to which they could relate to a character. These findings have been noted in subsequent research related to culture, gender, age, and socio-economic status (Gray, 2009; Haynes & Richgels, 1992; Hunt, 1996; Kragler, 2000; Langerman, 1990; Monson, n. d.; Williams, 2008). Furthermore, one final, yet imperative finding of this study was that the students typically used a combined strategy of two or more of the aforementioned factors to settle on a title that they truly wanted to read. No singular factor accounted completely for a student’s decision to select a text.

Through further observations, discussions, and interviews with children, Moss and Hendershot (2002) conducted a study that “…reaffirm[ed] the value of creating classrooms
where self-selection is the norm” (p. 14). Although their work focused solely on nonfiction selection habits, this study endorsed the conclusions made by Ollman (1993) and Swartz and Hendricks (2000). The number one factor that influenced self-selection of a nonfiction title was the topic. The researchers noted that 75% of their population sample chose a book because they were curious about, interested in, or wanted to find out more about a specific topic. The second most mentioned factor was the appearance of the book, which was inclusive of photographs, outside cover, and inside make-up. Other influences noted by Moss and Hendershot included familiarity with authors, knowledge of book awards and genre, personal connections made by students, or recommendations from other readers.

Other research studies have considered other aspects of the book selection process of early adolescents. Kragler (2000) evaluated the strategies used by fourth graders; however, a significant finding in the data revealed that amongst the other factors identified in previous studies, interest played a critical role regarding the level of a selected text. She found that when a student was genuinely interested in a topic, the level did not matter. She also noted that the selection was not always at the most appropriate level for the student who chose it. These conclusions are actually very similar to a deduction made by Hunt (1996). He determined that:

…when [a student] has chosen the material to read because of personal interest, he can break many of the barriers. Strong interest can frequently cause the reader to transcend not only his independent but also his so-called instructional level. Such is the power of self-motivation. (p. 280)

This information is extremely important to consider in the classroom. A student’s choice during pleasure reading opportunities should not be undermined by a teacher or other educational professional. During free-reading times, students need to have the chance to try out various
selection strategies, explore interests, and consider other book features in their quest to become literate individuals. Their esteem needs and autonomy will undoubtedly be positively impacted from this early experience with educational freedom, self-selection, and choice.

**Unknown Factors Regarding Early Adolescents’ Self-Selection Strategies**

Based on the above research history, it is apparent that there are a number of common factors that students evaluate when deciding what to read. Of all the named qualities, a book’s topic seems to be the most influential. Author, physical characteristics, recommendations, and characters were amongst a number of other aspects that students typically considered in their appraisals of texts. As research continues, children seem to be recognizing more and more significant factors during their book selection processes. With the addition of advanced media and technology, extrinsic incentive programs, such as Accelerated Reader, and enhanced illustrations, it has become more challenging to exactly pinpoint what makes some texts more appealing than others. However, it is undeniable that self-selection plays a critical role in developing early adolescents’ motivation to read and promoting lifelong literacy. As stated by Kragler (2000), “self-selection allows students more latitude to be deeply involved with the learning process, thus fostering an interest in, as well as developing an ownership of, the reading process” (para. 2). Notwithstanding, one area that is not identified in the aforementioned literature is the impact of age on book selection strategies. Reuter (2007) argued that, “…findings suggest that…developmental ability play[s] a role in children’s book selection” (p. 1755). Despite this claim, there is not much substantial research that identifies examples of how development effects pleasure reading decisions. This knowledge can shed some more light on how students’ selection processes alter as they mature in age, allowing educators to meet the unique needs of children in various grade levels.
Summary

It is widely agreed upon that motivation to read is a critical factor when molding early adolescents into lifelong, independent readers. Motivating students to read is not a simple accomplishment; however, with implementation of research-based best practices, the likelihood of encouraging students to develop positive outlooks about literacy is high. As the motivation theories of Maslow (1943), Weiner (1985), and Ryan and Deci (2000) suggest, humans are naturally programmed to establish and pursue goals. The needs of all individuals, regardless of which level they correlate with, must be met to promote autonomy and the highest objective of self-actualization. Additionally, whether satisfying a need requires intrinsic or extrinsic drive, the ultimate reason for achieving a goal is the knowledge that a reward will be gained. However, theorists and researchers alike acknowledge the lasting impact that intrinsic motivation has on the human desire to attain their objectives; this knowledge certainly applies to the aspirations to learn and read. Since a primary goal of any teaching professional is to instill a passion for education, it is imperative that students are given the opportunity to develop an internal desire for knowledge.

In addition to human motivation theories, research has identified many factors that have been specifically shown to support the development of educational motivation and the desire to read. Learning to read should be a social experience that is enjoyable, in addition to being educational. A key component, which ensures that students will find literacy tasks as valuable activities, is the incorporation of choice. As mentioned before, permitting students to have some freedom of choice in the classroom will promote their autonomy and establish a feeling of ownership about what is learned. An easy way to integrate choice into a daily routine is to give students the ability to self-select the literature that they read for pleasure. As Swartz and
Hendricks (2000) mentioned, “self-selection and choice have a positive impact on learning…particularly when it comes to learning to read and becoming lifelong readers” (p. 608). Although this point is clearly supported in both historical and contemporary research, simply allowing early adolescents to self-select texts is just the beginning. Educators must be knowledgeable on the research surrounding students’ self-selection habits, including an understanding on which text features are most appealing to them. To establish further awareness on the topic of self-selection habits of adolescent readers, this particular study was developed to investigate a factor that has not been popularly recognized – the impact of age on intermediate-level students’ book preferences and selection strategies.
CHAPTER III. METHODS AND PROCEDURES

To contribute to the collection of available research regarding the impact of age on self-selection of literature, the strategies of actual students at varying grade levels were analyzed. To accomplish this, third- and sixth-grade students completed a survey to supply data that revealed their reading preferences and self-selection techniques. This information was evaluated to answer the research question: How do self-selection habits related to pleasure reading differ according to age? The contents of this chapter include the research methods and procedures for data collection and analysis that contributed to the completion of this study.

Methods

Research Design

This study relied solely upon quantitative research methods. Numerical data were obtained through survey research consisting of closed-response questions that involved a variety of question formats (i.e. multiple choice, ranking scale, Likert-type scale). One significant benefit of using this particular research design is that a great deal of information could be gathered and analyzed quickly. Mertler (2009) supports this statement, in his assertion that “…quantitative data collection techniques are more efficient [than qualitative data collection techniques] in that you can collect data from numerous individuals simultaneously” (p. 117). Despite this, he warns that quantitative data can be limited in regards to depth of participant responses. Because of this, it was imperative that the construction of the survey was designed to efficiently gather enough data to answer the proposed research questions. A strong survey design also helped to ensure the validity of the research.
Participants

The participants involved in this study included a total of 42 students attending a local intermediate school. Of the 42 students, 22 (10 male, 12 female) were in third grade and 20 (9 male, 11 female) were in sixth grade. To partake in this study, all students at these grade levels provided both parent (See Appendix A) and individual consent (See Appendix B) to the researcher. This particular school was chosen for data collection because of familiarity with the staff, travel convenience, and location in regards to Bowling Green State University. To initiate communication between the researcher and the school, a letter was sent to the principal of the participating intermediate school. Support for this study was then granted by both the principal and the administrative coach of the school district. The letter sent to these professionals can be found in Appendix C.

Despite its rural surroundings, the city in which the school district resides can be considered to be more of an industrial city, with a very urban atmosphere. The economic classes are generally considered to be lower-middle class. According to the 2009-2010 Ohio Department of Education statistics, 75.8% of the community’s residents were considered to be “economically disadvantaged.” According to the 2000 U.S. Census report, the median income for a family living in the community was approximately $38,427.

The 2000 U.S. Census report also included information of the racial demographics of the community. At this time, there were approximately 13,931 individuals living in the city, with 87.3% of this group being Caucasian. 7.92% of the population was Hispanic, 5.7% was African American, and the rest of the population was established as being from Native American, Asian, biracial or another racial decent. The students who participated in this study were a decent representation of these racial demographics. Of the 42 students, 69% were Caucasian, 2.4% were
Hispanic, 11.9% were African American, 2.4% were Asian, and 14.3% identified themselves as belonging to another race.

The school system’s statistical information indicates a high rate of attendance that meets the requirements established by the state of Ohio. On the 2009-2010 Ohio Department of Education report card, the district received a rating indicating “Continuous Improvement.” At this time, the district was in its sixth year of improvement.

Instrumentation

An online survey, created at www.surveymonkey.com, was the primary tool used in data collection (See Appendix D). Surveys and rating scales have some clear benefits in a research study. Mertler (2009) states that, “the advantages of surveys and rating scales include the fact that they are very effective at gathering data concerning students’ attitudes, perceptions, or opinions” (p. 124). Additionally, the results of a survey can be analyzed quickly, especially when using technological resources (Mertler). This survey consisted of approximately 12 questions and took no longer than 15 minutes for the students to complete.

The questions included helped the researcher to gather data, demographic information, book selection processes, reading habits, and other various factors that influence students’ self-selection strategies. Questions ranged in format and included multiple-choice questions, Likert-type scales, and rating scales. The overall design of the survey forced participants to select one answer over another. All questions had to be answered to complete the survey and no neutral responses were offered. Although this strategy is controversial, this design was considered to be the best source of useful information for the researcher. As Mertler (2009) alludes, there is no one right way to establish a scale in a survey. In any design, results will be swayed in some way.
To limit any potential bias or confusion, all questions were written as clearly as possible, avoiding jargon and subjective language.

The first three questions on the survey simply recorded students’ gender, race, and grade level. Following the three questions that gathered students’ personal information, participants were asked to indicate how much time they spend reading for pleasure during the course of one week. The categories from which they could choose were: less than seven hours per week, 7-14 hours per week, 14-21 hours per week, and more than 21 hours.

The next question was designed to determine what types of readers the third and sixth grade students considered themselves to be. The four types of readers from which students could select were: avid, dormant, uncommitted, or unmotivated. As defined by Beers (1998), an avid reader is one who chooses to read, enjoys reading, and makes time to do so. A dormant reader still enjoys reading activities, but may not utilize available time to participate in them. An uncommitted reader may still have a positive disposition regarding other people’s avid literacy habits; however, individuals who are defined as uncommitted do not enjoy the task of reading for their own purposes. Lastly, unmotivated readers do not have any positive feelings toward reading. They do not enjoy reading, do not make time to do so, and do not think highly of other people who may think otherwise (Beers, 1998). Students who participated in this survey were provided with similar descriptions of each type of reader and were asked to select the choice that best reflected their own reading habits and perceptions. Students were not provided with the technical terms that correlated with each definition.

The next question displayed a large chart for students to organize the steps that they take, in order, when choosing a new book to read for pleasure. Thirteen steps were provided as choices for students to numerically rank. These factors included common strategies that researchers have
noted as influential in the self-selection process. These steps, listed in the order in which they appeared on the survey, consisted of: looking at who the author is, checking the length of the book, reading the title, looking at the cover design, checking the text size, checking whether a book belongs to a series, obtaining a recommendation, reading the first page, reading the summary on the back of the book, looking at the interior illustrations, seeing if the book won an award, looking for a certain character, and looking for a book related to a certain topic. In addition, students were provided with an “I don’t do this” column, where they noted which of the thirteen strategies, if any, they do not consider as they choose texts.

Procedures

The first necessary step in conducting this research study was to develop the survey to which students responded. The survey was created using surveymonkey.com and consisted of 12 questions pertaining to the book selection preferences of young adolescents. The content of the survey questions were derived from previous research findings regarding students’ self-selection habits.

Concurrently, the researcher obtained permission to complete the study from the Human Subjects Review Board, school personnel, parents/guardians, and student participants. Care was taken to ensure that students clearly understood their role in the study. After all of the essential permissions were acquired, the researcher worked with participating classroom teachers to establish convenient times to survey students. Since the students did not have regularly scheduled computer lab times, the researcher collaborated with the principal and classroom teachers to schedule brief visits to the lab.

After obtaining the proper permissions and establishing computer lab times, the researcher visited the school one final time to conduct the survey. Only one class was surveyed
at a time. Before commencing, the researcher explained the study once more to the students. The researcher then directed students on how to access a link to the survey; potentially confusing questions were clarified to ensure that students understood exactly what the question was asking of them. Independently, the students responded to the survey and submitted their answers online. The survey, in its entirety, took each classroom of students no longer than 15 minutes to complete. At the week’s end, after all students from every participating third and sixth grade classroom had successfully submitted their surveys, the researcher then analyzed data and reported findings.

Data Collection

The data collection process took the entirety of one week, while the researcher visited the intermediate school to administer the survey. All data collected were quantitative. This information was gathered solely through student responses to the questionnaire survey posted on surveymonkey.com. Students utilized the Internet to respond to 12 survey questions and submitted their answers electronically. The results were automatically collected through the services provided by this particular website.

Data Analysis

The collected data were organized based on students’ grade levels. Much of the analysis of this information occurred automatically, as each student submitted his/her survey on surveymonkey.com. Any of the data not processed through this website was analyzed manually. After the data for each grade level were evaluated, the results of the third-grade and sixth-grade students were compared. The findings resulting from this comparative analysis were expected to indicate signs of the impact of age on students’ book selection processes.
Summary

The proposed research was conducted with third and sixth grade students attending a nearby intermediate school. Participants involved in this particular study responded to various questions presented in a questionnaire survey format. The questions involved assisted the researcher to determine the self-selection habits of third and sixth graders when choosing books for pleasure reading. The analysis of this data allowed the researcher to determine whether age plays a role in the self-selection strategies utilized by students at these grade levels. The findings associated with this study help to contribute to the current research on student self-selection. These results can provide potential suggestions for educators to utilize in the classroom, while also establishing research implications for those who may have an interest in this topic.
CHAPTER IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

To conduct this study, a survey was administered with 42 students. Of these participating students, 20 were in sixth grade and the remaining 22 were in third grade. This survey was conducted through surveymonkey.com, and a majority of the results were gathered automatically. After acquiring the responses of all participating third and sixth grade students, the data were filtered to separate the surveys by grade level. In this way, the researcher was able to denote any similarities or discrepancies in results between students in varying grade levels. The filtering of results also helped to determine the answer to the following research question: How do self-selection habits related to pleasure reading differ according to age? In this chapter, the data acquired from the survey will be presented and related back to the aforementioned research question.

Data Analysis

Questions 1-3

The first three questions on the survey recorded students’ gender, race, and grade level. The results from this information are presented under the Participants section in Chapter III. After completing these initial questions, the students were then asked to respond to 10 more questions related to their reading habits, preferences, and book selection strategies. A copy of the complete survey can be found in Appendix D.

Question 4

Following the three questions that gathered students’ personal information, participants were asked to indicate how much time they spend reading for pleasure during the course of one week. For third graders, 31.8% (n=7) of students responded that they spend less than 7 hours a week reading. However, 63.6% (n=14) determined that they spend 7 to 14 hours reading during a
week. Not one student responded that he/she spent 14 to 21 hours reading during one week. Despite this, one student, representing 4.5% of the third grade population, indicated that he/she reads for more than 21 hours in a week. These findings suggest that 68.2% (n=15) third grade students typically read at least 7 hours during the course of one week.

For the sixth grade students, results were fairly comparable. Of the sixth grade students, 45% (n=9) specified that they read for less than 7 hours a week. Another 30% (n=6) of the students said that they read anywhere from 7 to 14 hours during one week. One student, representing 5% of the sixth graders, determined that he/she reads 14 to 21 hours during a week, and 20% (n=4) of students’ responses suggested that they read for pleasure for more than 21 hours during one week. These results indicate that 55% (n=11) of the sixth grade participants spend time recreationally reading for at least 7 hours during a week.

**Question 5**

The next question was designed to determine what types of readers the third and sixth grade students considered themselves to be. The four types of readers from which students could select were: avid, dormant, uncommitted, or unmotivated. However, students were not provided with these technical terms. They were given descriptions of each type of reader and were asked to select the choice that best reflected their own reading habits. Of the third grade students, 63.6% (n=14) considered themselves to be avid readers, meaning that they enjoy reading, choose to read, and made time to read. The remaining students (36.4%, n=8) identified themselves as dormant readers, meaning that they like to read, but do not make the time to do so. Not one student indicated that he/she was an uncommitted reader, which would indicate a person who does not like to read, but thinks it is acceptable if other people do. Similarly, no student
suggested that he/she was an unmotivated reader, which correlates with a person who does not like to read and does not think highly of others do.

For the sixth grade students, results were similar to those presented by the third graders. Forty-five percent (n=9) of these participants matched themselves to the habits of an avid reader; another 45% (n=9) indicated habits of a dormant reader, and 10% (n=2) suggested that they were uncommitted readers. Again, none of the students identified themselves to be unmotivated.

**Question 6**

The following question displayed a large chart for students to organize the steps that they take, in order, when choosing a new book to read for pleasure. Thirteen steps were provided as choices for students to numerically rank. These factors included common strategies that researchers have noted as influential in the self-selection process. These steps, listed in the order in which they appeared on the survey, consisted of: looking at who the author is, checking the length of the book, reading the title, looking at the cover design, checking the text size, checking whether a book belongs to a series, obtaining a recommendation, reading the first page, reading the summary on the back of the book, looking at the interior illustrations, seeing if the book won an award, looking for a certain character, and looking for a book related to a certain topic. In addition, students were provided with an “I don’t do this” column, where they noted which of the thirteen strategies, if any, they do not consider as they choose texts. This question directly provided the information needed to answer the research question behind the entire study.

Overall, no specific order of steps was determined to correlate directly with students at the third grade level. The third grade respondents, on average, appeared to utilize a total of 7 steps when selecting literature for recreational purposes. However, based on the students’
responses, it was found that some students claim to utilize as little as 2 steps when selecting books and others reported that they employ all 13 possible steps in the decision-making process.

Since it was practically impossible to pin a specific step-by-step methodology on the sample of third grade students, the researcher organized the acquired data into a frequency distribution chart. This chart was then used to discover which strategies were amongst the top three steps undertaken by students at the third grade level. To accomplish this, each of the 13 strategies was analyzed separately to determine how many students identified them as the first, second, or third step of their selection process. After acquiring this information, each possible strategy was then rank ordered from greatest to least. This data was then used to ascertain the most common top three steps utilized by third grade students. See Table 1 for the frequency distribution chart.

Using the frequency distribution chart, it was discovered that the most common strategy employed by third graders was to read a book’s title. For this particular step, 77.3% (n=17) of the third grade students ranked it as either the first, second or third step utilized when selecting books. The second most common step was found to be identifying the author of the text, which accounted for 54.5% (n=12) of the third graders. The third step frequently put to use by third grade students was to analyze a book’s cover design. For this item, 40.9% (n=9) of all third grade participants acknowledged this method as the first, second, or third step in the overall text selection process.

Based upon the students’ responses, it was also determined that there were a number of strategies that the majority (51% or greater) of third grade students indicated that they never used when selecting recreational literature. Of the 22 third graders, 77.3% (n=17) of the students noted they do not check the length of a book; another 77.3% (n=17) do not consider text size,
Table 1
Third Grade Student Responses Frequency Distribution Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book Selection Strategy</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read the title</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>77.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look at who the author is</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look at the cover</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>40.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read the first page</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read the summary on the back of the book</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check to see if the book is part of a series</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get someone's recommendation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check the book length</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See if the book won an award</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look for a book on a certain topic</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See if the book won an award</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look for a certain character</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look at the illustrations in the book</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

while 68.2% (n=15) do not search for award-winning texts. Of the students, 63.6% (n=14) do not ask for recommendations; 59.1% (n=13) do not look for certain characters, and 54.5% (n=12) ignore interior illustrations. As can be seen in Table 1, these factors make up six of the seven
steps that were identified least frequently as the first, second, or third step employed by third grade students.

Sixth grade participants were also asked to complete the chart related to the numerical steps utilized in their self-selection processes. Based on the results of this question, it was determined that sixth grade students claimed to utilize an average of 9 steps when self-selecting texts. However, parallel to the third grade results, no precise order of methodologies was discovered to match specifically to students at the sixth grade level. Because of this factor, another frequency distribution chart was created to rank order steps based upon whether students utilized each strategy first, second, or third when selecting texts (see Table 2).

Using the completed frequency distribution chart, it was determined that the most common strategy employed by sixth grade students was also to read a book’s title. For this specific step, 75% (n=15) of the sixth graders ranked it as either the first, second or third step employed when self-selecting literature. The second step most frequently used was identified as studying the cover design of a book, which accounted for 70% (n=14) of the sixth grader sample. The third step commonly utilized by sixth grade students was to identify the author. For this item, 35% (n=7) of all sixth grade students marked this method as the first, second, or third step in the overall text selection process.

Another finding about sixth grade selection habits indicated that these students found all 13 presented strategies to be useful when deciding on a book to read. A clear-cut majority (51% or greater) was not present for any one of these steps that suggested that most students do not consider them during the self-selection process. Despite this, there were some strategies students noted that were used less frequently than others. Of the 20 sixth grade students, 50% (n=10)
Table 2
Sixth Grade Student Responses Frequency Distribution Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book Selection Strategy</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read the title</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look at the cover</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look at who the author is</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look for a book on a certain topic</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read the summary on the back of the book</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check the book length</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check to see if the book is part of a series</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read the first page</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check the size of the words in the book</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get someone's recommendation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See if the book won an award</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look for a certain character</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look at the illustrations in the book</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

reported that they do not look for certain characters; another 50% (n=10) do not ask for recommendations, yet another 50% (n=10) do not consider the size of the text, 45% (n=9) do not acknowledge the inside illustrations, and 40% (n=8) ignore the presence of a book award.
Question 7

After completing the chart concerning students’ book selection processes, participants were asked if they follow these same steps each time they independently select literature for pleasure reading. According to third graders, 9.1% (n=2) of the students always take identical steps when choosing books; 45.5% (n=10) often use the same measures, and 45.5% (n=10) sometimes follow these same steps. Not one student indicated that they never follow their previously identified steps when selecting a new book to read for pleasure.

Sixth grade responses were moderately parallel to those provided by the third grade students. Of the sixth grade participants, 25% (n=5) indicated that they always follow the same steps when choosing new books to read: another 25% (n=5) responded that they often use the same methods, and 50% (n=10) revealed that they sometimes take the same steps as they previously indicated. Once more, not one student suggested that he/she never follows similar steps when selecting books.

Question 8

The subsequent question that students were prompted to answer asked them to identify who taught them how to select books independently. This question was created to determine who, if anyone, has the most influence on the development of students’ book selection techniques. Their choices included the following: a parent/parents, sister or brother, other family member, friends, librarians, bookstore workers, teachers, or no one. Of the participating third graders, 50% (n=11) noted that a family member taught them how to choose books. Of these 11 students, 10 (45.5% of all third graders) said that this family member was a parent, and one (4.5% of all third graders) indicated that this family member was a sister or brother. A total of 22.7% (n=5) of the students replied that a teacher taught them how to select literature. The
remaining third grade students (27.3%, n=6) signified that no one in particular taught them how to select books for pleasure reading. Other family members, friends, librarians, and bookstore workers had no influence on students’ adoption of book selection habits, as indicated by the fact that no student selected them as a response to this question.

When sixth grade students responded to the same question, 25% of these participants (n=5) suggested that a family member originally taught them methods to use when picking out books for pleasure reading. Of these 5 students, 4 (20% of all sixth graders) noted that this family member was a parent and one (5% of all sixth graders) revealed that it was some other family member. 10% (n=2) of sixth grader respondents denoted that a teacher showed them how to select books, and a majority of 65% (n=13) of these students implied that no one taught them how to do this. Sisters or brothers, friends, librarians, and bookstore workers did not have a role in the development of book selection techniques, since no student noted them to be a source of these skills.

Question 9

The next question asked students to indicate who, if anyone, they would ask first when looking for a recommendation on a book to read for pleasure. Similarly to the previous question, possible responses included the following: a parent/parents, sister or brother, other family member, friends, librarians, bookstore workers, teachers, or nobody. For the third grade students, 22.7% (n=5) signified that a family member would be the first person they would go to for a book recommendation. Of these 5 students, 3 (13.6% of all third graders) noted that this family member was a parent, and 2 (9.1% of all third graders) implied that it was a sister or brother. Of the third grade participants, 27.3% (n=6) identified friends as the first source of a good suggestion; 4.5% (n=1) of these students noted that they would go to a librarian to obtain a
recommendation; 9.1% (n=2) indicated that they would turn to a teacher for advice on a book, and the remaining 36.4% (n=8) suggested that they do not ask for recommendations when looking for a book to read for pleasure. For third graders, other family members and bookstore workers were never identified as a primary source for book recommendations.

According to the sixth grade participants, results were relatively similar. Of the sixth graders, 25% (n=5) suggested that a family member was the immediate resource for a book recommendation. Of these 5 students, 2 (10% of all sixth graders) noted that this family member was a parent; one (5% of all sixth graders) indicated that it was a brother or sister, and another 2 (10% of all students) reported that this person was some other family member. For the remaining sixth grade students, 20% (n=4) suggested that friends were the first source of a recommendation; 10% (n=2) regarded a librarian to be an initial reference for a book suggestion, and 45% (n=9) replied that they do not ask for any recommendations. Bookstore workers and teachers were not identified as first sources to ask when obtaining new literature for pleasure reading, since not one student selected them in response to this query.

Question 10

The following two questions related to the importance of students being able to relate to characters in some way. These questions were used to determine if students select books based on these perceived connections. The first of these two questions had students identify how important it was that a character was similar to them in some way, whether this similarity stems from race, gender, culture, or another factor. For third grade respondents, 9.1% (n=2) noted that it is very important that the character they read about be similar to them, while 40.9% (n=9) of the students suggested that similarities between themselves and the character in a book was
somewhat important. The remaining 50% (n=11) of third graders indicated that it was not important at all if characters shared any similarities with themselves.

Sixth grade students reported results that were somewhat comparable. Of these 20 students, not one student indicated that it was very important to them if a character was similar to them in any way, while 15% (n=3) responded that it was somewhat important to them that a character shares similarities with them. The majority of sixth graders (85%, n=17) suggested that it was not important at all if they read about a character that was similar to them.

**Question 11**

The second question concerning character and student connections considered the importance of having a character who encounters experiences or problems to which the student could relate. Students were asked to identify the degree of importance this factor holds when they read for pleasure. Of the 22 participating third graders, 22.7% (n=5) responded that reading about a character with analogous experiences or problems is very important to them, while 68.2% (n=15) of third graders noted that it was somewhat important if they could relate to the experiences of a character in a book. The remaining 9.1% (n=2) of the students responded that it was not important to them if they read a book containing a character that faced experiences or problems related to their own experiences.

When sixth graders responded to this same question, results were somewhat opposing. Not one student reported that it was very important to them if they could relate to the experiences or problems of a character they read about in a book. Of the participating sixth grade students, 40% (n=8) indicated that it was somewhat important that they encountered a character who faced a situation to which they could relate. The remaining 60% (n=12) students implied that it was not
important whatsoever if they could establish a connection between themselves and a character with regards to experiences or problems.

**Question 12**

The final question presented on the survey had students indicate as to whether or not their school library contains many books with topics they found to be interesting. This question was included to determine whether the school library contained literature that appealed to the students. This information helps to determine whether or not the presence of interesting reading materials is impacting the students’ reading habits and outlooks. For the third graders, 86.4% participants (n=19) responded that yes, their school library does have many books related to topics of interest. The remaining 13.6% (n=3) of third grade students reported that their school library is lacking in literature that appeals to their individual interests.

The sixth grade students had opposite responses compared to the third graders. Of these sixth graders, 35.5% (n=7) suggested that the library does contain books related to interesting topics. However, the majority of these participants (65%, n=13) identified that their school library does not contain any literature that they are interested in reading for pleasure.

**Discussion of Results**

The survey was conducted with third and sixth graders to answer the following research question: How do self-selection habits related to pleasure reading differ according to age? Based on the data presented above, it appears that in various ways, age does play a role in the book selection processes of intermediate students.

**Questions 1-3**

The first three questions on the survey gathered participating students’ gender, race, and grade level. The students’ gender and race were not considered as factors when analyzing the
findings of the survey. This information served as a way to determine demographic information of the participants in the study. However, participants’ grade levels were necessary to know, so that age could be considered when determining whether or not it was a factor in students’ self-selection processes. Of the 42 students, 22 were in third grade and 20 were in sixth. These numbers were used to ensure that results were as comparable as possible.

Question 4

The data show that, with respect to reading habits, a majority of students from both of these grade levels read for 21 hours or less during the course of one week. This equates to approximately 3 hours of reading or less for each day during a week’s span. Very few students acknowledged that they read for more than 21 hours during a week; however, this number increased for students at the sixth grade level.

Question 5

An overwhelming number of third and sixth grade students considered themselves to be either avid or dormant readers. In fact, for third graders, all students fit into either one of these categories. For sixth grade students, only two reported that they are uncommitted readers. This means that the great majority of sixth graders also defined themselves as either avid or dormant. All students involved in the study acknowledged that reading is an acceptable recreational activity, regardless of whether they identified themselves as avid, dormant or uncommitted.

Question 6

Although there were no specific self-selection processes unique to students in either third or sixth grade, some differences between the age groups did appear. First of all, there were a number of strategies that the majority of third grade students indicated that they never consider when selecting recreational literature. Although there were sixth graders who reported that they
never utilize particular strategies when choosing books, not one of the 13 options was clearly found to be a step that most sixth graders ignore in this process. Another finding related to age is that, on average, students at the sixth grade level claimed to take a greater number of steps than third graders when choosing a new book to read for pleasure. Furthermore, it appeared that finding a book related to a topic of interest was a step that was very important to sixth grade students. Conversely, third grade students’ responses indicated an indifference to the topics found in recreational literature.

In addition to the previously discussed findings, no clear self-selection methods were determined that related directly to the students’ age levels. As formerly suggested, there was a possibility that obvious and specific self-selection processes for students in each grade level would not be determined. This appears to be accurate according to the results of the survey. Despite this, there are factors related to students’ individual self-selection processes that seem to be correlated with age. More research on this topic would help to uncover further information regarding age and book selection techniques.

The results of the survey administered in this study did not indicate that there are specific self-selection methodologies utilized by students of differing age levels. Despite this, third graders appeared to use fewer steps when selecting texts when compared to sixth grade students. In addition, third grade students claimed to utilize the features provided mainly on the front covers of books to make decisions about their appeal. Alternatively, sixth graders indicated more of a wider use of self-selection strategies by exploring the front cover, back cover, and inside features of texts. Furthermore, a majority of third graders made it apparent that students at this level do not consider about half of the strategies that can be employed when it comes to finding a recreational text to read. Sixth grade students seemed to indicate awareness of more of these
methods and put them into practice more frequently than their younger peers. In addition to the differences discovered between third and sixth graders, it was determined that in some cases, age is not a factor in the book selection processes of intermediate-level students.

**Question 7**

The above results indicate that age does have an impact in the self-selection methods utilized by students in intermediate grades. However, in many aspects, age does not appear to be a factor when dealing with self-selection of recreational texts. In addition to the differences, many similarities were also found between the students. For example, students from both age groups typically vary the steps they take when choosing literature. This finding is indicated by the number of third and sixth grade students that reported a tendency to often follow the same steps or sometimes follow the same methods when self-selecting texts. Very few noted that they follow the exact same procedures each and every time they attempt to choose a new book to read. Alongside these factors, both third and sixth grade students maintained that they, to some degree, utilize similar steps that they have adopted in their pursuit to find appealing literature.

**Question 8**

When concerned with reading backgrounds, more students from the third grade classes noted that a parent taught them how to select books independently. However, the third grade students maintained that no one in particular taught them how to choose literature on their own. Many of these students indicated that they achieved this accomplishment independently.

**Question 9**

Another finding that indicated similarities between third and sixth graders was that a large number of students from both grade levels claimed that they do not usually ask for recommendations. When they do, third and sixth grade students both indicated that they typically
ask a friend or family member for a suggestion. However, recommendations did not seem to have a strong influence on the book selection process of students from either grade level.

**Question 10**

In regards to the characters featured in recreational texts, third and sixth graders reported different preferences in relation to their ability to find similarities in race, age, gender, or other personally identifying characteristics. Most third grade students indicated that finding books that feature characters with similar physical factors is not important to them at all. However, there was no overwhelming majority, since a great number of students also reported that this was somewhat important to them. Very few third graders suggested that a character with similar physical appearances was very important to them. Conversely, none of the sixth grade students indicated that this was a very important factor. For a majority of these students, character similarity in regards to physical features was reported to be of no importance whatsoever.

**Question 11**

When considering the presence of characters that are similar in regards to relatable problems or experiences, the results of third and sixth grade students show that this is more important than finding books that include characters with physical similarities. For third graders, the majority reported that this text feature is somewhat important. Only a few students noted that this aspect was very important or not important at all. For sixth graders, these results showed that more students found similar character situations to be somewhat important than physical similarities. There was close split between students who found this to be somewhat important and not important at all; however, the majority did suggest that this aspect was still of no importance to them when self-selecting texts. Despite this, relating to a characters’ problem or
experience appeared to be of more importance and consideration than finding characters that have similar physical features for students at both grade levels.

**Question 12**

The final question concerned with the reading preferences related to students’ interests and their ability to find texts related to these topics in their school libraries. Opposing views were expressed by the differing age groups. Third graders reported that their school library contains a number of books that they would be interested in reading. Conversely, the sixth grade students indicated that there are few books in their school library that relates to topics of specific interest.

Although brief, the survey administered to the participating third and sixth grade students revealed much information regarding students’ literacy-related self-selection strategies, habits, preferences, and backgrounds. Age was determined to be a factor in some instances regarding the ways in which students choose their books. More information regarding the implications and interpretations of these results will be covered in Chapter V.

**Summary**

Third and sixth grade students attending a nearby intermediate school responded to a brief survey related to their self-selection strategies, habits, and preferences related to pleasure reading. Based upon the results that were gathered from this 12-question survey, it appears that age does have an impact in some of the strategies that students use when choosing books to read for recreation. However, the data also indicate that in some ways, age is not a strong factor related to students’ reading preferences and strategies. Another key finding suggested that there appears to self-selection methods or strategies that relate specifically to certain age levels. Overall, self-selection strategies appear to be developed and then personalized by each individual student.
CHAPTER V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based upon the results of the aforementioned survey, many conclusions and recommendations can be drawn. These results can help teachers, parents, and future researchers to enact best practices that can foster students’ intrinsic motivation to read. By becoming familiar with the information gathered from this study, students can be directed toward a path of life-long literacy devotion. In this chapter, a summary of the entire study will be provided, which reiterates the importance of motivation and choice when concerned with students’ self-selection of recreational texts. Following this summary, conclusions that evolved from the acquired survey data will be explained, and recommendations for teachers, parents, and researches will be provided to help these individuals put the findings into practice.

Summary of Study

The goal of any educator is to foster students’ development of life-long learning habits. To accomplish this, students must find value in reading and be motivated to engage in literacy-related activities. Throughout history, motivational theorists have suggested that every individual possesses the drive and desire to accomplish goals and meet needs (Maslow, 1943; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Weiner 1985). Meeting these needs and goals help individuals to become autonomous and develop intrinsic desires to continue to pursue more. These theories undoubtedly correlate with students’ interests and motivation related to reading.

In addition to human motivation theories, there has been much research conducted to determine how to support motivation in education and in reading. Educational researchers agree that one significant factor that supports students in their endeavors to become enthused and engaged readers is implementation of choice. Allowing students to make choices and take control of some aspects of their learning and literacy growth can promote the development of
autonomy, independence, and ownership of their education (Atwell, 1998; Bang-Jensen, 2010; Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006; Gambrell, 1996; Guthrie & Davis, 2003; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Oldfather, 1993; Pitcher et al., 2007). Incorporating self-selection of recreational texts is an effortless, yet essential way, that educators can involve choice in classrooms on a regular basis. As Swartz and Hendricks (2000) mentioned, “self-selection and choice have a positive impact on learning…particularly when it comes to learning to read and becoming lifelong readers” (p. 608). Although this statement is obviously supported in both historical and contemporary research, simply allowing early adolescents to self-select recreational texts is just the initial step in promoting life-long literacy habits.

This study was developed in response to a number of issues that impact the motivation, self-selection, and autonomy of students at the intermediate level. Researchers have suggested that around fourth grade, students experience a diminished interest in reading (Samuels, 2007; Tyre & Springen, 2007). This decline in interest often correlates with a decreased level of reading motivation, which can continue throughout adulthood (Guthrie & Davis, 2003; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). In turn, little interest and motivation in literacy-related practices can negatively influence students’ acquisition of autonomy. Other factors, such as a lack of guidance in self-selection practice, can also hinder students’ development into autonomous readers (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001). Based upon this knowledge, it is necessary to implement best practices to ensure that students remain motivated in reading in the hopes to create life-long readers and learners.

One way to accomplish this is to be informed of the self-selection strategies that students employ when selecting books to read for recreational purposes. Because age has been found to be a factor in the decline of reading motivation, understanding how self-selection and age
correlate is necessary to avoid what researcher refer to as the “fourth grade slump” (Samuels, 2007; Tyre & Springen, 2007). Knowing how and why students choose books to read for pleasure can help teachers and parents provide children with literature that they have a true interest in, regardless of age.

This particular study was created to discover whether age is truly a factor that contributes to the self-selection strategies utilized by students in intermediate-level grades. Even though there are numerous research studies that relate to factors that impact text selection, not many of them expand on the potential effects that age may have on the utilization of these strategies. To add more knowledge to the current collection of research available on students’ self-selection of texts, the following driving question was designed for this study: How do self-selection habits related to pleasure reading differ according to age? By determining the potential relationship between age and selection strategies, educators and parents can do more to keep students interested in developing autonomous, avid reading habits.

To investigate the possible impact of age on self-selection methods, research was conducted with third and sixth grade students who attended a nearby intermediate school. Participants who agreed to participate in this study responded to 12 questions presented in an online survey. The questions involved were created to identify the self-selection habits of third and sixth graders when choosing books for pleasure reading. The analysis of this data allowed the researcher to determine whether or not age plays a role in the self-selection strategies utilized by students at these grade levels. In addition, questions were also included that gathered information related to reading preferences, habits, and history. These data helped to provide further insight about the responses supplied by the participating students. The findings associated
with this study can provide potential suggestions and implications for the classroom, home, and research-related environments.

Conclusions

The survey that was administered in this study yielded a number of results related to the reading strategies, methodologies, preferences, and habits of third and sixth grade students. These conclusions helped to answer the research question: How do self-selection habits related to pleasure reading differ according to age? Although the research design was established mainly to uncover how self-selection habits contrast with age, other findings arose that suggest similarities amongst the students at these two grade levels. Many of these results, whether they are similarities or differences, can be used to help improve their overall motivation and interest in reading. The interpretations of this particular study’s results can help educators, parents, and other professionals to take the necessary steps to ensure a positive, long-lasting relationship with literacy.

The first major finding of this study is that students’ self-selection processes appear to be unique to the individual students, not a particular age group. When concerned with the identification of specific book selection methods of different age groups, there were no strong results that lead to a consensus for either third or sixth graders. Participants from both grade levels identified methodologies that were unique to their own desires. No pattern was discovered to suggest that the majority of third or sixth graders select books in one particular way. Based on these results, it appears that students’ selection habits rely less on outside factors and more on individual preferences. Students at both grade levels seemed to have developed their own unique methods for selecting texts based upon their distinct needs and purposes. Age does not appear to be a strong factor in the self-selection techniques utilized by intermediate level students.
Even though no specific order of self-selection steps was identified for either age group, it was discovered that the first three steps most likely to be utilized by both third and sixth grade students are similar. Results imply that, when deciding to read a book for pleasure, third graders will first read the title, determine who the author is next, and then evaluate the cover design. Similarly, sixth grade students were found to first read the title, analyze the cover design second, and then find out who wrote it. Although the order in which these steps are most likely to be utilized differs according to age, it is clear that the most important three factors are the same for both groups of students. Even though most students recognized that they typically vary their self-selection methods when actually choosing books for recreational reading, it appears that the top three steps, which for both age groups includes reading the title, identifying the author, and looking at the front cover design, indicate that third and sixth grade students tend to initially consider elements featured on the front cover of texts. These results also imply that the external, physical features of texts may have the largest impact on students’ decisions to further explore a text, regardless of their age. These findings refute those of previous researchers, who found that a book’s topic was the most influential factor in students’ self-selection processes (Moss & Hendershot, 2002; Ollman, 1993; Swartz & Hendricks, 2000). Despite this, all three studies indicated that the physical features, especially those present on a book’s front cover, were found to be amongst the top-most important aspects of recreational literature. For the sixth and third graders involved in this research study, these previous results appear to remain true.

Although the above results indicate similarities between the book selection processes of students at both the third and sixth grade levels, it appears that sixth graders are more deliberate in the steps they utilize to decide on a text. The sixth grade students indicated that they commonly employ more strategies than third graders when choosing books. This suggests that
older students may take more into consideration before settling on a book to read, and know how to use more strategies to ensure that their chosen texts are a good match for them. Conversely, third grade students reported use of fewer text features. This could be because they are still learning about text selection strategies and are continuing to develop and refine their skills. It may also be possible that younger students are not as aware of or have not been informed about how some selection strategies may help them to locate a good book for pleasure reading. It appears as though sixth graders are more deliberate in their self-selection processes than their younger peers. These findings support the claim that, “…developmental ability play[s] a role in children’s book selection” (Reuter, 2007, p. 1755). Despite these results, it is important to recognize that regardless of the number of strategies utilized by sixth graders, these older students still ended up identifying the title, front cover, and author as the most influential factors when self-selecting books.

One final conclusion from the data suggests that friends and family members have more of an impact than teachers and librarians in relation to students’ development of self-selection processes and their acquisition of text recommendations. In regards to the ways in which students initially learn how to make use of self-selection methods, not one specific individual stood out for either third or sixth graders. Despite this, students from both grade levels reported that a parent or other family member has been the primary teacher of self-selection strategies. When concerned with text recommendations, the most common answer amongst both third and sixth grade students was that they do not typically ask for suggestions at all; however, the second most common response was that they talk to friends. These results suggest that it is possible that students from both third and sixth grades have not had a lot of experience with obtaining or receiving book recommendations or selection strategies, especially from their teachers or
librarians. These aspects seem to be missing from the school environment. This may indicate that self-selection strategies and utilization of recommendations are not typically a focus of instruction in the school. Since family and friends were identified as individuals who play a more significant role in respect to both recommendations and development of selection methods, it seems as though students find their input to be more valuable and influential than what is provided by school employees.

Clearly the results of this survey relates to multiple factors related to intermediate-level students’ literacy growth and development. Overall, it appears that students’ self-selection strategies are unique to each individual, yet there are three main factors that the majority of students from both grade levels relied upon. Despite this, results do suggest that there are ways in which age is a factor in the processes students utilize when choosing books for recreational reading. Regardless of whether this is always the case or not, students need to be aware of the many strategies that they can apply when independently choosing texts. If students of varying ages learn these techniques from both family members and educators, they will be able to successfully choose texts that will promote more enthusiastic, avid reading behaviors.

Recommendations

The results of this study can be used in a number of ways to benefit students in relation to their self-selection strategies. Assistance should be provided from both teachers and parents to ensure that students develop effective methodologies for choosing books so that their literacy-related interests can be supported. By doing this, students will have a greater probability of becoming life-long readers and learners.
For Teachers

To encourage students to remain motivated to engage in literacy-related activities, it is necessary for educators to incorporate choice, access, modeling, and individual interests in the classroom. This is especially true when dealing with students in intermediate grades, when the “fourth grade slump” is typically encountered. By ensuring that students are getting time and experience connecting with literature that is meaningful to them, students will continue to do so outside of the classroom environment.

As indicated by the students’ responses to the survey questions, teachers do not appear to be a significant influence in early adolescents’ attainment of book selection strategies. Educators serve as models for their students at every point during the school day. Because of these factors, teachers should constantly model various ways to explore books to determine if they would be interesting to read. According to the survey results, students at the third grade level consider fewer factors when self-selecting texts.

To help them identify other beneficial techniques, educators can observe students as they choose books for pleasure reading. Based on the results of these observations, educators can demonstrate how to utilize new methods when choosing literature. Teachers should also be sure to exemplify how to analyze every part of a book, including the inside, front cover, and back cover. By doing this, teachers can show students that they can find out more information about a book by checking more than what appears on the front cover. By achieving this, students will be more likely to discover texts that appeal to their unique interests and preferences. The ability to use strategies to self-select literature also relates to the research related to the benefits of choice in the classroom. Students who get the opportunity to choose the texts that they will read for
pleasure will ensure that they will become more autonomous with their self-selection strategies and intrinsically motivated to continue their positive reading habits.

Another way in which teachers can support students in their quests to find new, appealing books is to give them opportunities to participate in book talks or book clubs regularly in the classroom. Both the third and sixth grade students who participated in this study indicated that they often do not even consider recommendations as an important strategy when choosing books to read for pleasure. Many of the students indicated that they never ask for recommendations at all. By giving students time in class to share books that they have read with their peers, students will have the chance to recognize the positive results of providing and receiving book suggestions.

Additionally, the classroom teacher could invite the school or public librarian into the classroom to share books or self-selection strategies with the students. Most third and sixth grade students did not acknowledge librarians as a resource for obtaining recommendations or self-selection methods, either. Librarians are a wealth of knowledge in the realm of literature; if students get the opportunity to interact with these community members, they will surely benefit since. The librarian can serve as another educated individual that can teach students about more effective methods to use when selecting books. In turn, this can help students to engage in strategies that successfully enable them to find texts that are genuinely interesting to them.

Another strategy that teachers can employ to encourage motivated reading behaviors is to take advantage of the information they have regarding students’ interests. One significant responsibility of any teacher should be to get to know their students. By finding out what students’ interests are, educators can help to ensure that students are surrounded with literature that is appealing to them. Having selections that relate to unique interests will help to improve
students’ overall motivation to read. In addition, discovering what students enjoy can allow educators to provide literature for those students who may have trouble locating texts on topics that they are looking for. A majority of sixth graders who were involved in this study identified that they were dissatisfied with the selection of texts provided by their school library. By utilizing interest surveys and incorporating library visits at the school, teachers can determine ways to acquaint students with books that they actually want to read. If it is discovered that the library truly does not contain books that appeal to students, teachers can help them to connect with the books in another way. To accomplish this, educators can distribute book order forms for students to take home, make visits to the public library to locate books for students, encourage family members to take students on visits to the public library, or even implement a book club that involves the inclusion of a book related to those particular interests.

One main way to ensure that students obtain and maintain positive attitudes toward reading is to provide them with an equally positive disposition regarding literacy. Teachers should encourage students to read for pleasure often, both in and out of the classroom. Moreover, teachers should model frequent, avid reading in the classroom. Any time in which students are reading in the classroom, the teacher should be as well. By establishing themselves as encouraging and optimistic role models, teachers can ensure that students will develop a similar outlook related to literacy.

For Parents

The development of literacy and literacy-related activities begins at home. A child’s home environment plays a critical role in his/her growth as a reader. If family members value and encourage reading, children will be more likely to possess similar opinions. To help children
become motivated and skilled readers, there are a number of strategies that parents can employ outside of the school setting.

It is of utmost importance to model positive literacy habits at home, especially if the overarching goal is to promote life-long reading habits. Parents need to encourage recreational reading on a regular basis in the home. This does not mean that parents should force children to read, since this takes away from the ownership and choice that a child holds over his/her reading activities. Forcing children to read can even prove to be detrimental to their intrinsic motivation and desires to engage in literacy tasks. Instead, parents should establish a strong literacy environment that surrounds children with books and other forms of print. Just like classroom teachers, parents also need to demonstrate positive reading behaviors. If children see their parents reading and genuinely enjoying the activity, they will be more likely to engage in literacy activities as well.

Parents should also involve their children in the public library. Taking children to the library will provide them with more exposure to literature and give them the opportunity to select from a larger collection of books that may appeal to their interests. As children select books in the library, parents should do the same. This will provide children with yet another model to provide insight on successful strategies for self-selecting texts. After deciding on a book, parents can show the child how that particular text was selected and determined to be a good choice. In this particular study, many third grade respondents indicated that they learned their book selection methodologies from a parent. Because of this, parents can use their influence to teach children a wide variety of strategies in which texts can be chosen.
For Future Researchers

The amount of research related to education and literacy is constantly growing and expanding. To obtain the most accurate and pertinent data about any topic, continuous research must be conducted and refined. Previous studies must also be analyzed and reconstructed to discover further in-depth information to add to this educational database. Individuals who are interested in conducting further research regarding the impact of age on self-selection methods can utilize this particular study in attempt to discover further information or detail related to reading and self-selection of texts.

One way that future researchers can use this study is to adapt it and refine it into a similar investigation regarding age and its potential relationship with self-selection strategies. Researchers who are interested in this topic can construct a study with a larger population of participating students from a wider range of grade levels. In this manner, more reliable data may be acquired to develop a better picture related to age and students’ selection methods. This study can also be altered in order for researchers to follow students as they age. Observations, surveys, interviews, or other investigatory tools could be utilized to gather as much information as possible related to the manner in which students refine their self-selection processes as they get older.

Researchers who are interested in the specific steps that intermediate students employ when selecting books to read for pleasure could observe students as they choose literature to determine if they actually do use all the steps that they claim. Many students who completed the survey described in this study indicated that they typically vary the exact steps utilized when choosing texts. If a researcher were to observe students during library times, they may get more of an accurate and authentic idea about the specific steps and strategies students apply. A number
of these observations could be conducted to determine the degree to which students vary their self-selection strategies as well.

Another study that may benefit students who consider themselves to be uncommitted or unmotivated readers could be to determine the degree to which their individual self-selection habits impact their likelihood to find appealing literature. It may be possible that some students who do not like to read hold this perspective because they are not aware of effective strategies to use when choosing a book to read. It would be interesting to see if students who are taught to utilize successful selection methods continue to hold negative outlooks about reading once they acquaint themselves with books they have genuine interests in. Perhaps their disinterest in reading stems from their individual self-selection strategies rather than a perceive lack of intriguing books.

Summary

Inarguably, literacy is a key component to promoting success in the lives of children. Educators must strive to stay current with the most recent research related to improving the ways in which students engage with reading and related activities. Incorporating choice, access to literature, and the ability to independently select reading materials will encourage students to become intrinsically motivated and to continue engaging in literacy throughout adulthood. These factors directly impact students’ development of autonomy, ownership, social skills, competence, and self-esteem. Providing students with the supports needed to foster a positive relationship with literacy is an essential goal that educators must make every effort to accomplish. This is especially true when considering students, such as those in the intermediate grades, who are at risk of facing a significant decline in academic interest and motivation. One way to work towards this objective to support student achievement is to ensure that students are made aware of the
many methods that they can employ when self-selecting literature for recreational purposes. If students of all ages are educated on how to utilize a number of selection strategies, they will be more likely to successfully find texts that they will want to read. In turn, these students will be able to engage in more constant, enjoyable reading experiences, further motivating them to continue on the path toward life-long literacy.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A.

PARENT CONSENT FORM
To: Parents and Guardians  
From: Cassandra Koch, Graduate Student  
Re: Invitation to Participate in a Research Project

My name is Cassandra Koch and I am currently pursuing my Masters Degree in Reading from Bowling Green State University. In order to graduate, I am required to submit a thesis related to my area of study. I will be gathering this research with the third and sixth graders at your child's intermediate school. I am inviting your child to participate in this research project. I am interested in researching the strategies that young adults use when self-selecting books for pleasure reading. This research could help teachers to better understand what methods students use when choosing books to read, which will allow them to improve the choices of books presented to students at different grade levels. In addition, these findings can provide more information about what educators need to do to model additional self-selection strategies. This study could also benefit students, since it has been noted that students who have the opportunity to select their own literature become more motivated to read. By increasing motivation to read, educators can also increase the likelihood that students will remain readers throughout life.

Your child will be asked to devote approximately 15 minutes of his/her computer lab time to the completion of an online survey. Students will be accessing the website www.surveymonkey.com to respond to this brief survey. A variety of questions concerned with student self-selection methods and reading habits will be asked. Students will be asked to read the survey and respond to the best of their abilities. Your child will complete this survey only once and electronically submit his/her responses. Students can refuse to participate at any time by letting the classroom teacher or me know that they would not like to continue. If students choose not to participate, they will be asked to quietly read a book while their classmates continue. Your child's decision to participate will not, in any way, impact his/her grade in class.

In order for students to participate, we will need your written permission. If you are interested in having your child join in this project, please sign and return one copy of this permission slip. Please keep the other copy for yourself. Participation is voluntary, and you or your child may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without problems.

The results of your child's assessment will be anonymous, since www.surveymonkey.com will not link the students with their individual responses. In written data and/or oral presentations, your child will not be identified in any way. The information gathered will be used for research purposes only and will be stored in a secure area during the time of the study. Because this study involves asking children about the methods that they use to select literature, there are no risks to any participants beyond those encountered in their daily lives.

Thank you very much for considering this request. I look forward to hearing from you. Please contact me at cmkoch@bgnet.bgsu.edu or my advisor, Dr. Cindy Hendricks, at (419) 372-7041 or cindyh@bgsu.edu if you have any questions about this study. If you have any questions regarding your child's and your own rights as research participants, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Board, Bowling Green State University at (419) 372-7716 or hrb@bgnet.bgsu.edu.

I grant permission for (Child's Name) ___________________________ to participate in this research project. I have read the description of the study and I am agreeable to all the terms and conditions.

(Signature of parent or guardian) ___________________________ (Date)
APPENDIX B.

STUDENT ASSENT FORM
To: Fourth and Sixth Grade Students  
From: Cassandra Koch, Graduate Student  
Re: Invitation to Participate in a Research Project  

My name is Cassandra Koch and I am a Graduate Student at Bowling Green State University. In order to graduate, I must do a research study. I hope to do this research with all of the third and sixth graders at your school. I would like you to help me with this study. I want to find out how you pick out books to read. Your answers could help teachers choose better books to keep in their classrooms, which could help keep students like you interested in reading.

If you want to help me with this study, you will be asked to take a short survey during your computer lab time. This survey will only take about 15 minutes. This is an online survey that has many different questions about how you choose books and how you feel about reading. You will only have to take this survey once. You can choose not to take this survey at any time by telling your teacher or me.

If you want to take this survey and help me with my study, I will need you to sign this form. Any answers you give me will not be shared with anyone else. Nothing bad will happen if you choose to take this survey or if you tell me that you do not want to finish it. Your grades in school will not change based on your choice to take this survey. If you ever have any questions, please ask me!

Thank you for reading this and learning about my study! If you want to take my survey, please sign your name below.

(Signature of student)  
(Date)
APPENDIX C.

SUPPORT LETTER
To: School Principal and Administrative Coach  
From: Cassandra Koch, Graduate Student  
Re: Support to Conduct a Research Project  

My name is Cassandra Koch and I am currently pursuing my Masters Degree in Reading from Bowling Green State University. In order to graduate, I am required to submit a thesis related to my area of study. I am interested in researching the strategies that adolescents use when self-selecting books for pleasure reading. Ideally, I would like to administer a brief survey to all of the students in your fourth and sixth grade classrooms at your school. This survey will not exceed twenty questions and should not take more than fifteen minutes of your students’ valuable class time. This survey will be administered using surveymonkey.com, an online data collection tool that will automatically gather my results. Because of this, I would like it if I could meet with the students during their regularly scheduled computer lab times. As I mentioned before, this survey should only take fifteen minutes for the students to complete. I have estimated that I will only need to enter the school for the duration of one week. Of course, this all depends on the number of classrooms that will be participating and the individual schedules of the classroom teachers. If you are interested in assisting me with my thesis, I would need to know how many fourth and sixth grade classrooms are in the school. In addition, I would need to know the days and times when these classes have their regularly scheduled computer lab times. Please let me know if you are willing to help me with this project. I have attached a copy of the tentative survey that I will be using for your review. Let me know if you have any questions or concerns regarding any aspects of this study. I would greatly appreciate it if I could have your support!

Thank you,

Cassandra Koch
APPENDIX D.

STUDENT SURVEY
READING SURVEY

1. Are you a boy or girl?

☐ Boy
☐ Girl

2. Which best describes you? (If the student is not sure how to answer this particular question, the researcher will request this information from the classroom teacher. This information is being collected solely for data collection purposes and will not impact the remaining survey questions.)

☐ Caucasian/White
☐ Hispanic/Latino
☐ Black/African American
☐ Asian
☐ Other

3. What grade are you in?

☐ 3rd
☐ 6th

4. How much time do you spend reading for pleasure during one week?

☐ Less than 7 hours
☐ 7 - 14 hours
☐ 14 - 21 hours
☐ More than 21 hours

5. What type of reader are you?

☐ I choose to read, like reading, and make time to read
☐ I like reading, but do not make time for it
☐ I do not like reading and do not make time for it, but I think it's okay if other people do
☐ I do not like reading, do not make time for it, and do not think that it's okay if other people do
6. Please rank order what steps you take when you pick out a book to read for pleasure. If you do not use one of the choices, mark “I don’t do this.” Make sure to read every choice before answering this question!

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<th>Step</th>
<th>1st</th>
<th>2nd</th>
<th>3rd</th>
<th>4th</th>
<th>5th</th>
<th>6th</th>
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<th>9th</th>
<th>10th</th>
<th>11th</th>
<th>12th</th>
<th>13th</th>
<th>I don't do this</th>
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<td>Look at who the author is</td>
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<td>Check the book length</td>
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<td>Read the title</td>
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<td>Look at the cover</td>
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<td>Check the size of the words in the book</td>
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<td>Check to see if the book is part of a series</td>
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<td>Get someone’s recommendation</td>
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<td>Read the first page</td>
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<td>Look at the summary on the back of the book</td>
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<td>Look at the illustrations inside the book</td>
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<td>Check if the book won an award</td>
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<td>Look for a certain character</td>
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<td>Look for a book on a topic you like</td>
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7. Do you follow the same steps each time that you select a book for pleasure reading?
   - Always
   - Often
   - Sometimes
   - Never

8. Who has taught you how to select books on your own?
   - Parent
   - Sister/Brother
   - Other family member
   - Friends
   - Librarian
   - Bookstore employees
   - Teachers
   - No one has taught me how to select books on my own

9. If you ask for recommendations when choosing a book to read, who would you ask FIRST?
   - Parent
   - Sister/Brother
   - Other family member
   - Friends
   - Librarians
   - Bookstore workers
   - Teachers
   - I do not ask for recommendations

10. When choosing books, how important is it to you that the character is like you (same race, gender, age, etc.)?
    - Very important
    - Somewhat important
    - Not important
11. When choosing books, how important is it to you that you can relate to a character’s problem or experiences?

- [ ] Very important
- [ ] Somewhat important
- [ ] Not important

12. My school library has a lot of books about topics I am interested in.

- [ ] True
- [ ] False

Thank you for taking my survey!