

THE DIFFERENCES IN THE ATTITUDES TOWARD AND PERCEPTIONS OF READING
IN SUCCESSFUL AND STRUGGLING MIDDLE SCHOOL READERS

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not there was a significant difference in the attitudes toward and perceptions of reading between the highest performing and lowest performing readers in three middle schools serving sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students. All three middle schools were from one school district.

The survey was administered to all students in the schools whose teachers agreed to participate, and the respondents' STAR reading assessment results were used to determine which students' responses were used in the study. All successful readers (identified by STAR scores as the top 15% of the total population) and all struggling readers (identified by STAR scores as the bottom 15% of the total population) were given consent letters for parents and students to sign. The responses for all participants who agreed to participate comprised the data collected and evaluated for this study.

Comparisons were made (based on the number of students responding in agreement or disagreement with 20 survey statements) that dealt with attitudes or perceptions of middle school readers. A chi square test for independence was used to determine whether or not the better readers' responses differed significantly from those who are lower performers.

Results of the study show that of the 12 statements that were related to attitudes and interests, five did differ significantly. With alpha at .05, these responses had a p-value of less than .05. There were seven of the responses related to perceptions of reading. Four of the responses showed a significant difference (p-value less than .05) between the top readers and those from the lower-performing group.

This work is dedicated to Mom, Scott, and Brody.

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that when a child reaches the sixth grade and enters a middle school setting, he or she has already developed some perceptions of what reading is and of what makes a good reader. Many factors influence the development of these perceptions. For many students, the major factor is the level of parental involvement in academics or the level of importance parents place on reading in their own adult lives. This example often seems to promote a positive perception of reading. The child either believes that reading is enjoyable or that it is necessary to become successful, which in turn, motivates the student to perceive reading as important.

Although many students can connect the relevance of reading to their own lives easily, many cannot. There are a myriad of reasons young adolescents perceive reading as a chore forced upon them or as an unnecessary waste of their time. Parental example can sometimes work adversely in this way. Some students come to school from homes where the importance of reading is not emphasized and sometimes the parental figures do not read or cannot read.

The varied perceptions and attitudes of readers at the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade levels pose a particular challenge to educators. Many questions linger in their minds as teachers try to reach these students by improving their reading habits, reading levels, and promoting a love of reading that can send them into young adulthood with interest in the written word.

Statement of the Problem

The perceptions of middle school readers should be of great importance to educators. Determining what is interesting to students, what they read, how often they read, and even whether or not they enjoy doing it should be a part of any middle school teacher's plan for reading intervention. Unfortunately, too often, many teachers make reading assignments without consideration for students' attitudes and feelings. Many teachers also select reading materials

without considering whether that material will be interesting to the students for whom it is intended. Likewise, knowing what students think of themselves and their attitudes toward reading play a significant role in what students will read or even if students will read. There is a research base that evaluates the differences between the interests of boys and girls, but there has been little study of the differences of interests of students who are high and low performing readers.

Research Question

The focus of this study was the varied perceptions that middle school readers hold toward their own reading experiences. The problem facing educators is that there exists a gap between good readers and poor readers in their attitude and motivation toward reading in these grades that gets wider as the students get older. Finding ways to identify those students whose negative perceptions can be changed into positive ones is of the utmost importance.

This research addressed whether or not there was a clear difference in how successful readers perceive reading and how struggling readers perceive it. The students surveyed were asked to define reading, tell whether or not they enjoyed it, report how often they read, and what they like to read. The students in three middle schools were surveyed during their reading/language arts block; approximately 1250 children in grades six, seven, and eight were administered the survey. The surveys of the top 15% of the students identified as good readers were compared with those of the bottom 15% of the students identified as poor readers. These groups were determined by the STAR reading test given district-wide in September. This comparison assessed the differences between successful readers' and struggling readers' perceptions of reading.

This research question was “Are the attitudes and perceptions toward reading of successful readers (as identified by STAR test scores) significantly different from attitudes and perceptions of struggling readers (as identified by STAR test scores)?”

Rationale

This research was necessary because of the many varied perceptions of adolescent readers today. Educators need to understand the variances in attitudes toward print. Educators also need to understand that student perceptions of themselves as readers become more difficult to alter as they become young adults. This study will assist educators in understanding the differences in the perceptions of students with high and low reading levels. Educators who truly want to intervene and help floundering readers will want to understand these differences and use that understanding to motivate middle school readers.

With many students coming to school without the parental support that often shapes positive attitudes about reading, educators must have a knowledge base about what those students’ attitudes are toward the subject. It would be detrimental to ignore such influences on reading performance, especially at this age.

Definition of Terms

Accelerated Reader (AR) – This is a software program used after obtaining a STAR reading level for each student. This is a set of six different types of quizzes that can be ordered for most chapter books and has been used for several years at the target schools for use with independent reading.

STAR reading test – The STAR is a computerized, multiple choice, cloze reading assessment for grades one through twelve that has been adopted by the targeted middle schools. It helps

to determine the reading level of each student, measure individual and class growth, and claims to forecast standardized test scores. (<http://www.renlearn.com/starreading>)

Renaissance Place – The Renaissance Place is an integrated, web-based learning information system that assists in the collection of STAR scores after students take tests. It places STAR scores and Accelerated Reader test scores into one retrievable database.

Attitudes – Feelings or emotions toward the act of reading.

Perceptions – The way a child observes or sees the act of reading as it pertains to his/her own life or the way he/she defines reading.

Limitations

The reader should be aware of some of the limitations of this study prior to considering the results. First, there were over 1200 students in the total population of students who were to be surveyed. Some teachers chose not to participate and/or did not return surveys to the researcher. There were 718 students surveyed. Of that number, 15 students could not be matched with a STAR test score, given district-wide. This could be due to transient students moving into or out of the district.

The limitations of this study vary with respect to their impact on the results. Perhaps the most important limitation was the STAR test was used to determine the top and bottom 15% of middle school readers. As it is the only test given district-wide to determine reading levels, it was an obvious choice for this study. The test limited the study because it is a multiple choice, cloze experience for the students who might have guessed at the answers to the questions or answered the questions without reading.

Another important limitation of the research was the lack of racial diversity in the population within the three middle schools. This may not be considered a representative sample due to a lack of diversity among racial groups participating in the study.

Another limitation over which the researcher had no control was the way the students answered the survey questions. It is important to note that many students from the bottom 15% subgroup may have been unable to read and comprehend all of the survey responses. The researcher had no control over whether or not the language arts teachers who administered the surveys read the statements to the students or had the students complete the survey independently.

It is also important to note that there were no students in the study who were from the gifted and talented program. These students did not participate in the district wide STAR assessment for reasons unknown to the researcher. There were some surveys that could not be used because they had no last name given, and some surveys were disregarded because only the front page of the survey was completed. Any of these factors may have changed the results of the study. The reader should consider these limitations and use caution when interpreting the results.

CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to literature, there are many research-based methods being used to motivate reluctant readers. However, motivating them and maintaining that motivation is still a matter of great frustration for most educators. The benefits of reading are difficult to convey to these readers because they consist of a population of students who are reluctant to perform, reluctant to practice, and often reluctant to learn new strategies with regard to reading. This population is extremely large. According to Dreher (2003), 54% of nine-year-olds reported that they read daily, but by age 13, only 28% reported reading daily for enjoyment. By age 17, the figure dropped to 25% (Dreher). Even children who can read often read very little; some research investigations (Worthy, 1996) show that even competent readers report that they hate to read.

Many times, reluctant readers are struggling readers; therefore, self-esteem can be an issue for them. In a case study of a reluctant and struggling reader (Colvin, Ford, Wiebe, & Windham, 2001), the authors explain that when a teacher feels frustrated, something within the instruction needs to change. Sometimes tested approaches need to be re-examined and new avenues need to be explored. A teachers' frustration can deepen the feelings of shortcomings of readers of all ages.

There are vast differences in the many approaches being used in early literacy development and in middle school and young adult literacy development. Research reveals many different options for motivation with little research supporting the use of tangible rewards. Chapter II explores the literature related to factors impacting middle school readers' attitudes and interest.

Middle School Students' Attitudes

In a recent study conducted by two middle school librarians in the northeastern United States (Hughes-Hassell & Lutz, 2006), students were asked whether or not they enjoyed reading. Of the 214 students who responded to the survey, 37% responded yes, 58% responded sometimes, and 4% said no (Hughes-Hassell & Lutz). In addition, according to Hughes-Hassell and Lutz, 22% of the students surveyed responded that they only read when they were assigned to do so by a teacher at school, and there were a small group of students, 6%, who said they did not read at all. This is staggering information, considering that in another, separate study, 54% of nine-year-olds report reading daily (Dreher, 2003).

Much of the research concerning attitudes of middle school students reflects the importance of a teachers' influence on a student's feelings toward reading and a child's likelihood to read for pleasure. Hughes-Hassell and Lutz (2006) summarize another portion of a study conducted by two middle school librarians:

The top three adults who teens say encourage them to read are their parents, teachers, and school librarians. Eighty percent said that their parents encouraged them to read; this was equally true for boys and girls. Sixty-six percent said their teachers encouraged them to read, followed by the school librarian at 29 percent. (p. 41)

This research is supported by findings of Bear, Korterling, and Braziel, 2006, who studied students who had learning disabilities related to reading performance. The students in the study had either completed or dropped out of school. Both subgroups recognized that the influence of their teacher was a direct influence on their own attitude toward academic endeavors.

As teachers it always important to be aware of what students are thinking about reading before beginning a new school year or semester with students. Teachers need to remain

cognizant of their own models for students' attitudes toward school (Bear, Kortering, & Braziel, 2006). Since every area of school is directly affected by reading performance, the attitude of every student toward reading should be a major concern for middle school teachers.

Middle School Students Interests

Middle school "refers to the period in a child's life when there are more variables among like-aged children than in any other period, so the only real common denominator among all of them is the building in which they are educated" (Rudinger, 2005, p. 41). The interests of middle school students are so widely varied, and the interests of middle school readers is "uncertain and constantly evolving" (Rudinger, p. 41). While these students' interests are constantly changing along with the many areas of their lives that are changing, it is the responsibility of teachers to attempt to understand their students' interests and what motivates them to read. One of the goals of middle school reading teachers should be to foster an appreciation for reading in the students.

Hughs-Hassell and Lutz (2006) have found middle school boys and girls to have vastly different reading interests "Many students expressed interest in reading periodicals, specifically magazines and newspapers. Seventy-seven percent of the girls liked fashion and beauty magazines, while 71 percent of boys were fond sports, cars, and wrestling magazines" (p. 41). The add, "Celebrities are among the most popular topics for teens' leisure reading" (p. 41) where books were concerned. Many children enjoyed reading about famous people. In this study, more boys than girls enjoyed reading about "fantasy characters" (Hughes-Hassell & Lutz).

Perceptions of Reading

Townsend (1998) attempts to explain the reason for "subtle non-compliance" of some readers (p. 130). First, the student is bringing with him/her a history of failure and is predisposed to being "turned off" from print. Second, students such as these probably have had limited

success with phonics. More of that could be demoralizing. Also, these older students are having difficulty finding non-condescending, sophisticated but low level text. Fourth, they have not yet developed a sense of purpose for reading. Whether or not anyone has attempted to instill that in them is irrelevant. It means little until they get that purpose, according to Townsend. Further, students who have struggled so long and have lost motivation are embarrassed and self-conscious when reading aloud to an adult. Lastly, for some people, “reading is [just] boring” (Townsend, p. 130). Adolescents are especially busy entertaining themselves in hundreds of other ways. Making reading a priority is difficult just because of the nature of the beast.

The middle to upper grades is where the attitudes toward reading begin to diminish. It is also the place where struggling readers lag even further behind their peers. Getting all students to learn to read requires using productive strategies and reading tasks that provide for success.

Atkinson, Frey, Wilhite, and Williams (2002) provide a summary of statistics about eighth grade students studied by personnel at the University of Maryland:

Seventy percent of eighth grade students think reading is boring. Less than 45 percent of them perform above a basic reading level; only 7 percent can read at an advanced level required to critically analyze text or extract information from multiple sources. These are the same children who started their reading education with enthusiasm and interest in the first and second grade. (p. 158)

Similar to other researchers, Atkinson, Frey, Wilhite, and Williams reiterate that choice in what they read and more time to read in school are the factors that best foster success and motivation in reading tasks. They have developed a more extensive list that teachers can incorporate to boost reading ability and the attitude of student readers. First, they suggest daily reading for enjoyment. Secondly, they stress importance of reading interest centers with material on a

variety of topics. Third, all kids should have weekly library time. Also, the room should be motivational. Posters and displays should emphasize the joy of reading. Contrary to some other experts, they believe that selective classroom incentives for reading are acceptable for reluctant readers. Finally, they are proponents for cross-age tutoring and for pairing struggling readers with community leader “reading buddies” (Atkinson, Frey, Wilhite, & Williams, p. 161).

An early adolescent’s reading achievement is influenced by many factors, one of which is the way the child perceives reading. As Pearson (2003) reports, entering into the middle school environment alone can change the perceptions of reading that children hold. “[The students] have to redefine for themselves what counts as literacy” (Pearson, p. 79). Students can become frustrated and confused by the vast differences in the literacy environment in an elementary classroom versus that environment in a middle school language arts or reading classroom.

Student perceptions concerning what effective readers do is of particular interest as well as what defines a good reader or a poor reader. Pearson (2003) found that in interviews with 24 students in year seven of their schooling, it could be said that children believed that frequency and amount of reading were important in determining one’s effectiveness as a reader. Pearson reported, “few comments were made in the category [of] enjoyment” (p. 82).

According to Juel (1998), a longitudinal study of 54 children from first to fourth grade revealed that of those readers who were considered to be poor readers (24 of them), only 5 said they like to read. In that same study kids were asked, “which would you rather do, clean your room or read?” Five percent of good readers said they would rather clean their room. However, poor readers felt differently. Forty percent chose cleaning their room. This shows a definite correlation between being a poor reader and not liking to do it. The results obtain by Juel are easily explained by Dreher (2003), who believes “Struggling readers are often caught in a

vicious cycle; they typically avoid reading, thereby getting little of the practice they need to become fluent reader” (p. 26).

It is important to recognize what exactly these middle school readers perceive as reading. Some may consider scanning a newspaper a reading task, but may not see searching Internet sites for daily news as a reading experience. Pearson (2003) states, “The intentional and unintentional actions of teachers convey to the learners messages about what ‘counts as literacy’ and these may not be consistent across classrooms or settings” (p. 79). Research overwhelmingly supports the idea that teachers sometimes must surrender some instructional reading practices to foster environments for students where any type of reading is appropriate for school is accepted.

Many “self-system factors” (Chapman & Tunmer, 2003, p. 5) contribute to a child’s perception of reading tasks. Chapman and Tunmer state, “Reading self-concept, academic self-concept, and reading self-efficacy appear to develop in response to initial experiences in learning to read” (p. 5). Students who struggle with word recognition concepts in their early reading experiences often stay behind their peers throughout their school career which leads to difficulty developing fluency and successfully using comprehension strategies. Bouzeineddine and Ghaith (2003) suggest that, “readers with positive self-concepts are more likely to persist in reading than their uninterested counterparts” (p. 105). Students who develop these inferior self-concepts as early readers tend to read less than successful beginning readers. Therefore, early struggling readers have less reading experience which widens the gap in performance year by year.

Meltzer, Katzir, Miller, Reddy, and Roditi (2004) conducted a study of a group of middle school students comprised of half average-achieving students and half students with learning disabilities. The study was an effort to increase self-perceptions in lower functioning readers by infusing strategy-based instruction into classrooms in a couple of urban and suburban

communities. In this study, “students reported more consistent use of strategies with their schoolwork and perceived themselves as struggling less in reading” (Meltzer et al., p. 99). More importantly, once the students noticed this change and felt more confident when faced with reading tasks, teachers “perceived the students with learning disabilities as more strategic and as applying more effort to their schoolwork. Teachers also perceived their students as showing significant improvements in spelling, regardless of whether they had learning disabilities.” (Meltzer et al., p. 99). This is an example of the kind of direct connection between self-perception and performance. Self-confidence is a key to help middle school students become better readers.

Factors Impacting Attitudes and Interests

Motivating Text

Much of professional writing revolving around motivation would indicate that books and materials that are interesting to readers help them evolve into better readers. Worthy (1996) believes “Far more important than readability is interest...[readers] can often transcend their so-called reading levels” (p. 205).

Worthy (1996) believes pattern books are encouraging to reluctant readers because they provide predictable language and the pressure is off. He suggests that poetry and verse can be given a modern spin by teaching jump rope and street rhymes. As Worthy reports, a seventh grade language arts teacher with a wide range of reading ability within her room began a unit on this emerging genre. It was found that the unit was motivating in that it held the support of “easily memorized text” (Worthy, p. 208) and this made readers feel confident and successful.

Worthy (1996) states that research conducted by interviewing avid adult readers demonstrates that adults who are lifelong readers were “hooked on comics (e.g., superheroes,

Archie, and even classic comics) or series books at one time...” (p. 209). Thus, allowing early adolescent readers to read cartoons, comics, and series books may be a better way to move children from early literacy experiences toward middle childhood literacy opportunities.

Student Choice

Middle school and high school students want to have a choice in what they read. According to Worthy (2002), when students do not read on their own their general academic progress is in jeopardy. Schools often offer programs to try to reward students for extra-curricular reading. However, Worthy believes that students do not respond positively to this and can even be found to consider reading a job that is not worth doing on its own merit. Worthy also believes that motivation at this age level falls into two categories: engaging instruction and choice/variety in the materials the students will read. Some students will need to be pushed to read by their teachers’ love for reading and by the techniques and strategies that teachers have learned in their teacher preparation courses; however, all students need to own what they read. They need to choose their own material.

According to Worthy (2002), student’s choices in reading are as varied as any group of adults. Therefore, it is our responsibility to foster an environment of appreciation. Classroom libraries are one great way to do this. Students in many classrooms all over the country have consistently complained about the limited number of books and the lack of new, relevant books in their classroom libraries (Worthy). Worthy (1996) also advises that schools who have success with reversing a lack of interest in text are ones “that are centered on making reading meaningful and successful through the use of interesting literature” (p. 205). How do we set up and decide what goes in our libraries? The answer to that question is not universal. Students want a voice.

Some suggestions from the experts (Hughes-Hassell & Lutz, 2006; Worthy, 2002) include magazines, mysteries, sports literature, sophisticated picture books, comics and cartoon collections; adult books (Stephan King, John Grisham, Mary Higgins Clark), specific nonfiction books interesting to students, and joke books are some other examples.

Appropriate Text

Research suggests that struggling readers often become reluctant because they have little literature of interest to them at their level (Graves & Philippot, 2002). High-interest, easy reading books were created for older students who read below grade level. These series fall into four categories, according to Graves and Philippot. They are original fiction, simplified classics, self-help/teenage problems or concerns (which includes concepts like eating disorders, coping with divorce, and more), and other non-fiction.

Graves and Graves (2002) developed ten factors that influence the difficulty of books. Vocabulary is the most identifiable. Publishers of easy reading books avoid unfamiliar words, but they have to try not to oversimplify and turn kids off. Sentence structure is the second factor. Limited clause usage helps keep sentences simple enough for students to comprehend. Sentence length, coherence and unity, text structure, audience appropriateness, familiarity of content and background knowledge, quality and verve of writing, interest level of the material, and elaboration are also factors

Erickson (1996) explains that, “Elaboration refers to the amount of explanatory oral recitation...Students can read literature aloud for themselves and their classmates to enjoy” (p. 212). Erickson lists an extensive collection of read-aloud books for reluctant adolescent readers. She says that she recommends nonfiction read-aloud books for reluctant adolescent readers. She

says that she recommends nonfiction read-aloud books in addition to this list because they usually appeal to reluctant male readers.

Motivated adolescents who have difficulty seeing the importance of literature can find sports literature an easy and interesting read. Carter (1998), after reading *Slam!* to her tenth grade literature class, says “Sports literature provides invaluable life lessons for adolescents who find it difficult to function academically or socially in traditional high school settings” (p. 309). Ohanian (1981) suggests that teachers need to broaden their view of what good literature is. She believes, as well as others, that as long as kids are reading, it’s good literature. Carter also expresses that in her experience beginning with “starter materials” such as sports articles and novels written for a young adult audience, many reluctant readers can be encouraged to develop capacities to read more willingly and think critically.

Using Picture Books

A picture book is usually described as a piece of children’s literature that has been paired with illustrations to heighten the reading experience for children. Generally, these types of short, illustrated books are not prevalent in middle and upper grade classrooms. According to Miller (1998), the thoughts of most in the field of education is that as the average reading ability increases, the class library and reading activities should be restricted to materials “at instructional levels” (p. 376).

For grades three and up, that basically means abandoning picture books. Research points to the favorability of utilizing picture books for many reasons. Miller (1998) gives several reasons after conducting research on picture books being used in grades 5-8. First, this reading is enjoyable. It is especially enjoyable for that part of middle childhood students that is not quite ready to give up childhood experiences. Secondly, these books are useful for people who have

independent reading time and cannot find interesting books at their level. Finishing books is often an issue for reluctant readers, so the completion rate is encouraging. Third, there are picture books that can be used to introduce abstract topics before encountering the higher-level text. Lastly, Miller has found that content area reading can be laborious to reluctant readers. If students will not read for pleasure, they are definitely not reading textbooks in most cases. Picture books can serve as a way to activate prior knowledge, develop vocabulary prior to reading, build schema, or create interest; this is helpful for teachers of struggling and reluctant readers.

Using Informative Text

Dreher (2003) has researched the use of information texts in adolescent instruction due to “the overwhelming use of stories in what students are expected to read and write” (p. 25). It is estimated that up to 90% of what elementary students read is narrative (Trabasso, 1994). Research overwhelmingly suggests that nonfiction text does not get a fair amount of coverage in elementary school. Primary teachers when surveyed reported that only about 6% of classroom reading time is devoted to information text (Pressley, Rankin, & Yokoi, 1996). Dreher’s push in favor of information text for adolescent readers began because of her assumption that there has been little exposure to it in elementary school. Information books can be a point of interest because they foster the development of forming one’s own purpose for reading. They focus on particular interests unique to each child.

An excellent way to engage readers with informational text is through the use of the Internet (Dreher, 2003). Students are very interested in the Internet. Reluctant readers lose sight of what they are actually doing while scanning the computer screen, which is reading. As Ohanian (1981) puts it, “English teachers must set aside their devotion to great literature and

decide that their goal is to get kids reading” (p. 27), even when the type of reading does not seem the most desirable to them. Burnett and Wilkinson (2005) add, “The Internet offers new possibilities for engaging with information and is associated with a wide range of literacy practices” (p. 158).

Another way to motivate reluctant readers through information text is through idea circles. This is similar in format to the literature circles of past years. Guthrie and McCann (1996) are the co-developers of this concept that involves “peer-led, small group discussion of concepts fueled by multiple text sources” (p. 88). The students are collaborating to learn a concept based on the information they gather from nonfiction texts. The advantages are that the students are highly motivated to read and comprehend, and they are evaluating, analyzing, working cooperatively, and exercising critical literacy practices (Dreher, 2003).

Modeling

Research shows that even though there are many methods to motivate reluctant readers, it may not be the materials at all that can help, but instead the people around the unmotivated readers (Meltzer et al., 2004). People who aren’t good at doing something rarely practice doing it. People who rarely practice are generally not good at whatever it is they are doing (Meltzer et al.). Therefore, this correlation is seen between struggling and reluctant readers. The struggling readers do not practice and have become locked in a circle of fearing text, running from it, and facing it again with great anguish. They practice avoidance to save face. In the classroom, if teachers do not actively set out to entice struggling readers, it could be argued that, while probably not the direct cause, the school can certainly intensify the difficulties (Townsend, 1998).

Summary

Research clearly points out that to read well one needs to read as much as possible. The recurring theme in the research is that despite the many methods and teaching styles that have been studied and proven useful, there is one important way to change negative reading perceptions and to motivate students to read. That is giving students some choice in what they read.

The approaches studied in this research have produced results in classrooms, small group settings, and in one-on-one tutoring. In the middle and secondary levels, research specifically points to success in the use of choice in what is read: a variety of high interest, low level text available to the readers; the continuance of the oral read-aloud even into the upper grades; and the use of sports literature in classrooms as well as picture books, information books, performance texts and popular texts. There is also a correlation between the struggles of low-performing readers and their lack of motivation in free reading and in classroom reading.

For early readers, many methods have been investigated and shown to be effective. Such practices as using repetitive texts and performance texts (as children of this age usually relish the drama) are practices that do not have to be abandoned during middle school reading instruction. Middle school and young adult readers also have positive reading experiences by being given opportunities to maintain their status as children. Children's listening comprehension is better than reading comprehension until late in middle school (Sticht & Janus, 1984), therefore read-aloud experiences should be used to motivate readers and model reading behavior that will make students want to read on their own. Many students will still enjoy this type of literacy practice. This may help struggling readers become a part of a literacy environment with equal footing with their peers which may in turn trigger an interest in a type of text or a particular author.

Students in upper grades do, however, react positively when given choice in what they read. They need to be exposed to and have access to high-interest, low-level literature so that they have opportunities for success without being given children's literature. Sports literature can be very motivating. Carter (1998), among others, has reported success with a number of titles in this genre particularly with struggling readers.

Another type of genre that has been proven motivating that is statistically not well represented in schools is informational books. This type of text is motivational for reluctant readers because it is new to most students. Research shows that it is not used in elementary schools. Dreher (2003) calls it "very interesting to children in upper grades and high school and particularly to boys" (p. 28).

Perhaps the most conclusive of research is that which aligns the struggling reader with poor perceptions of reading and lack of interest in it. "These factors (academic self-concept and self-efficacy) influence school performance by impacting motivation and metacognition (Meltzer et al., p. 99). While it is important, obviously, for teachers not to assume these types of students and attitudes will be found together absolutely, to ignore the correlation would also be destructive. Worthy (2002) believes, "Students who can proficiently read a wide variety of materials and formats will be better prepared for the real-world reading tasks they will encounter in their lives" (p. 569). That is why the correlation is important to acknowledge. Struggling readers need additional motivation because they sometimes lack purpose. This ties in once again with the need for choice in reading and class time in which to read material and discuss it.

The good news in this research is that, according to Worthy (2002), the students are "savvy in their understanding of reading motivation" (p. 569). If we listen to students and attend to what they say about classroom instruction and reading materials, schools can affect

motivation, engagement, and ultimately achievement. There are many strategies suggested in the research. They are not alone the answer. An effective teacher, a family that values reading, and literature-rich environments are the obvious keys. However, with many reluctant readers missing any one or combination of these, schools will need to be responsible for setting reading as a priority for the children who cannot see the purpose in it or do not perceive reading as an integral part of their lives.

CHAPTER III. METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This study focused on the attitudes and perceptions toward reading of middle school students, particularly the successful top 15% of readers in sixth, seventh, and eighth grade and the struggling bottom 15% of readers in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. The researcher examined the responses of a survey given to all middle school reading students to determine whether significant differences occurred. The purpose of the survey was to determine whether the attitudes and perceptions toward reading of successful readers (as identified by STAR test scores) significantly differ from attitudes and perceptions of struggling readers (as identified by STAR test scores).

This chapter outlines the methods used in this investigation including research design, a description of the participants involved and the survey that was administered. Procedures used for collecting and analyzing data are also described.

Methods

Research Design

This study involved the analysis of quantitative data collected through a survey developed by the researcher (see Appendix A). The purpose of the study was to evaluate responses of the top 15% of successful middle school readers in comparison to the bottom 15% of struggling middle school readers in three middle schools. The high-performing and low-performing readers were separated based on levels obtained by the STAR reading test given in the fall in the students' reading classes. Student survey responses from the middle 70% of the population were not evaluated in this study. The research question was "Are the attitudes and perceptions toward reading of successful readers (as identified by STAR test scores) significantly

different from attitudes and perceptions of struggling readers (as identified by STAR test scores)?”

Participants

The participants in this study were reading students in three middle school buildings. All sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students whose teachers had agreed to participate were surveyed; however, only the top and bottom 15% of readers based on STAR reading levels were evaluated. The surveys were color coded by middle school.

There are between 1200 and 1300 students enrolled in the three middle schools collectively each year. About 30% were subjects in this study. The school system is a predominantly Caucasian, middle class community in Northwest Ohio; however, no consideration to gender or race was given in choosing participants. All students participated who were present on the day the survey was administered. Surveys were selected for analysis based on reading level only.

The largest of the three middle schools that participated in the study had an enrollment of approximately 487 students. There were 254 males and 233 females in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. About 82% of the student body was Caucasian with about 5% Asian, about 5% Latin American, about 5% multiracial, and less than 2% are African American. This school had 42.7% of its population receiving free or reduced lunches.

The second largest middle school included 467 students, with 259 males and 208 females enrolled. The student population was less racially diverse with over 93% of the students being Caucasian. There was approximately 1% each of Asian, African American, and Latin American children. Less than 3% were multiracial. This school had approximately 20% of students receiving free or reduced lunches.

The third middle school served 440 students. Males accounted for over half of the population numbering 225, and females number 215. Eighty-five percent of the student body was Caucasian, while 5% were Latin American and 5% were multiracial. There were 3% Asian and 2% African American. This school had 30.2% of students receiving free or reduced lunches.

Even though there were over 1200 students in the total population of students who were surveyed, not all students' scores were considered. Some teachers chose not to participate and/or did not return surveys to the researcher. There were 718 students surveyed. Of that number, 15 students could not be matched with a STAR test score, given district-wide. This could be due to transient students moving into or out of the district. There were some surveys that could not be used that had no last name given, and some surveys were disregarded because only the front page of the survey was completed.

Instrumentation

The method for data collection for this study was a survey developed by the researcher. The survey consisted of demographic information such as gender, grade level, and age. It also contained questions that solicited responses that produced quantitative data.

The quantitative data collected came from 20 questions that required participants to respond based on whether statements applied to them or not. Twenty statements were given and students responded with "That's Me" or "That's Not Me". See Appendix A for the Perceptions of Reading Survey.

Procedures

The Perceptions of Reading Survey was distributed to all reading teachers in three middle schools. All sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students whose teachers were willing to use class time for the survey completed it. After all the surveys had been collected, the surveys were

separated into the top and bottom performing readers based on their STAR reading levels. Only 15% of the top performing reader surveys and 15% of the bottom performing reader surveys were evaluated. The students and parents who did not return consent forms or opted not to participate were omitted from the study. Additional surveys from the middle population were not considered as replacements to preserve the integrity of the study. The researcher wanted to ensure that the responses being evaluated were truly from successful readers or readers who struggle in relation to their peers.

Data Collection

All students in three middle schools were given the Perceptions of Reading Survey. Only the responses from the top 15% of successful readers and bottom 15% of struggling readers (based on STAR reading levels) were used in this study. Participants were asked to read 20 statements and indicate whether the statements described their attitudes, interests, or perceptions and respond by circling “That’s Me” or “That’s Not Me”. Teachers administered this survey in their language arts classes.

STAR tests were also taken with language arts teachers. The computerized tests were given during class time. After the entire district had completed the testing, the researcher obtained all scores from the district curriculum coordinator via school district database.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed by comparing the responses of the top readers and the struggling readers. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences system was used to analyze the data. Descriptive statistical information was generated for outputs including frequency tallies and percentages in regards to quantitative data. A chi square test for independence was run for each response on the survey to determine whether or not there was a statistically significant difference

between reading level and attitudes, interests, and perceptions of the middle school readers in this study. The quantitative data was evaluated in relation to the STAR scores, which gave each student a grade level equivalent.

Summary

The question to be answered in this research was whether or not there was a significant difference in the attitudes and perceptions of successful readers and poor readers at the middle school level. This chapter provides the reader with specific information about methods and procedures that were used in this study. A description of the participants who participated in the study and a description of the instrumentation used in the study was included, as well as procedures, data collection, and data analysis.

CHAPTER IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

As students enter the middle school setting, they come with many varied perceptions of what reading is and how well they perform the task of reading itself. They also have varied attitudes and interests that are unique to each of them. It is important for teachers to identify as much of this information in their students as possible to help them achieve in the classroom.

In this study, language arts teachers from three middle schools administered a survey (see Appendix A) developed by the researcher to obtain insight into their students' attitudes toward and perceptions of reading. The teachers were able to use these inventories to guide classroom instruction; additionally, survey responses were also evaluated to determine whether the attitudes and perceptions toward reading of successful readers (as identified by STAR test scores) were significantly different from attitudes and perceptions of struggling readers (as identified by STAR test scores). These two categories of readers were identified using the STAR reading test given during their language arts class time.

In this chapter, the results from the responses will be presented in the form of percentage comparisons. There were 718 surveys returned of over 1200 sent to teachers. All but 15 of those surveys could be matched with a STAR score on file, taken the week prior to completing the survey. It was from the group of 703 students that the study sample was taken.

Data Analysis

The data analyzed were based solely on the top 15% and bottom 15% of sixth, seventh, and eighth grade readers in the entire district (all three middle schools). This numbered about 105 surveys to evaluate for the top 15% and the same for the bottom 15%. A consent/assent letter (see Appendix B) was sent home for parents and students to sign giving permission for their responses to be used in this study. The top 15% of respondents returned the forms favorably with

94 giving consent while the bottom 15% had 54 returned with signed consent at the time of data analysis.

After the survey was administered and data analysis began, one item (number 12) was omitted from the study after the researcher reviewed and evaluated the responses. It was decided that the statement was not relevant to the study because it did not address either perceptions or attitudes of middle school readers.

Students' Self-Perceptions as Readers

There were 20 statements randomly placed on the survey that dealt with attitudes and interests toward and perceptions of reading. Some of the statements regarding perception were aimed at the students' self-perceptions, or the way they see themselves as readers, and others were aimed at their perceptions of reading itself. Responses that dealt with self-perceptions were numbers 3, 14, 16, and 18.

There were significant differences in the self-perceptions of high-performing and low-performing readers. The chi square test for independence showed a statistically significant difference for all self-perceptions responses except for number 14. When students were given the statement, "I am good at reading.", 92.3% of the top 15% responded in agreement and 66% of the struggling readers did so. A similar set of responses was given near the end of the survey when the wording was altered to say, "I am not a very good reader." Of the higher readers, only 14.8% believed they were not, and 37% of the lower readers responded that way. These percentages and the results of the chi square test for independence reflect significant differences in self-perception. A similar discrepancy appeared in the results of the responses to statement 16, "Sometimes I don't understand things even after I have just read about them." This statement

deals with the readers' perceptions of their ability to comprehend, and only 15.9% of high readers concur, while 75.9% of the low readers say they do not always understand what they read.

Conversely, when the statement, "I can learn how to do something by reading about it first." (Item 14) was given, the responses for high and low readers were nearly identical, by percentage. There were 76.5% of the high readers' sample and 76% of the low readers' sample circling "That's Me" to indicate that they can, in fact, learn to perform tasks by reading first.

In summary, for three out of the four responses on the self-perceptions part of the survey, there was a significant difference between high and low middle school readers. It is important to note that two of the statements are similar, but have different wording and were placed in different parts of the survey (see Tables 1 and 2).

Students' Perceptions of Reading

The statements regarding perceptions were aimed not only at the students' perceptions of themselves as readers, but also at their perceptions of the act of reading and reading at school. The purpose of these statements on the survey is to determine how the middle school children see reading in their lives. These statements appear as numbers 2, 9, and 20 on the Perceptions of Reading survey.

The first of these statements was, "I think we have too much reading at school." Of the two groups responding, 68% of high-performing readers did not concur while 57.5% of low-performing readers did not as well. This did not yield a statistically significant difference between high and low readers. Another statement given was, "You have to get good grades to be a good reader." There was a discrepancy in the responses here. Only 19.1% of the students in the high group agreed with this statement, while 38.8% of the low group agreed. There was another set of responses that produced a significant difference in the groups. After reading the statement,

“I think I’ll use the things I learn in reading when I am grown”, 12.8% of the high readers’ group responded negatively by circling “That’s Not Me.” More than one-fourth, or 27.7% of the low-readers did not believe they would use what they are learning about reading in their distant futures. This seems to be a crucial difference in perceptions of the two groups.

In summary, the responses elicited from one statement did not produce a significant difference in perceptions of reading of the two groups. Two of the sets of responses produced data that showed a discrepancy between high and low readers’ perceptions of reading (see Tables 1 and 2).

Students’ Attitudes and Interests

When students’ attitudes toward reading are being discussed, they often go hand-in-hand with their interests. Young adolescent readers are often motivated by what interests them personally; therefore some of the statements regarding attitude also relate to what the respondents are interested in reading. Item numbers 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 15, 17, and 19 were used to measure attitudes and interests of the respondents.

Of the 12 statements that dealt with the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade readers’ attitudes, seven of them did not yield responses that showed a significant difference between the high-performing and the low-performing groups. Table 1 presents the approximate results of those seven responses that did not produce a significant difference.

Of the 12 statements that dealt with the middle school students’ attitudes and interests, there were five of them that yielded responses that did show a significant difference between the top 15% and bottom 15% of respondents. Table 2 presents the approximate results of those six responses that did show a significant difference.

Table 1

Summary of the Attitudes and Interests Statements and Responses

Item	High Readers		Low Readers		χ^2 / p-value
	Yes	No	Yes	No	
6. I love to read textbooks and other school books.	12.8%	87.2%	24.0%	76.0%	2.0/ .155
7. I would rather read magazines or newspapers.	59.6%	41.4%	31.5%	68.5%	0.8/ .344
5. I read during the summer.	54.3%	45.7%	40.7%	59.3%	1.0/ .312
10. I enjoy reading about new things on the Internet.	72.3%	27.7%	66.6%	33.4%	0.1/ .708
11. I read a lot of comic books.	23.4%	76.6%	22.2%	77.8%	1.4/ .233
13. I don't like it when teachers read to me.	56.4%	43.6%	75.9%	24.1%	3.2/ .070
19. Sometimes when I try to read, my mind is thinking of something else.	73.6%	26.4%	85.2%	14.8%	1.6/ .194
1. Reading is a hobby of mine.	41.5%	58.5%	20.4%	79.6%	6.8/ .009*
4. I usually read ahead of the class when we are all reading the same book.	53.2%	46.8%	29.6%	70.4%	10.3/.001*
8. I like to read about famous people and places.	51.0%	49.0%	66.6%	33.4%	3.9/.048*
15. I think teachers should give us more class time to read.	16.0%	84.0%	30.0%	70.0%	8.5/ .004*
17. I like to pick out my own reading materials.	95.8%	04.2%	85.2%	14.8%	5.9/ .015*

*p<.05

Table 2

Summary of the Perceptions Statements and Responses

Item	High Readers		Low Readers		χ^2 / p-value
	Yes	No	Yes	No	
2. I think we have to read too much at school.	32%	68%	42.5%	57.5%	1.8/ .178
14. I can learn how to do something by reading about it first.	76.5%	23.5%	76%	24%	0.7/ .400
16. Sometimes I don't understand things even after I just read about them.	64%	36%	74%	26%	1.5/ .213
3. I am good at reading.	92.3%	7.7%	66%	33%	10.2/ .001*
9. I think you have to get good grades to be a good reader.	19.1%	80.9%	38.8%	61.2%	6.7/ .009*
18. I am not a very good reader.	14.8%	85.2%	37%	63%	10.4/ .001*
20. I think I will use the things I learn in reading when I am grown.	87.2%	12.8%	72.3%	27.7%	4.4/ .034*

*p<.05

Discussion of Results

This research study investigated whether or not the perceptions and attitudes of struggling, low-performing middle school readers were significantly different from the perceptions and attitudes of high-performing, successful readers. Based on the responses of the survey given, some areas were significantly different while others were not. The perceptions of the readers varied significantly according to a chi square test for independence in four out of seven responses. The attitudes of the readers varied significantly in 5 out of 12 responses. Therefore, it can be said that there is a significant difference in perceptions of reading in sixth, seventh, and eighth grade readers in this school district. There are areas of discrepancy between the attitudes of the top and bottom 15% of this group; however, a more definitive conclusion could not be made due to the fact that over half of the statements' responses did not yield significant differences.

Summary

Chapter four contains an analysis of the quantitative data collected from surveys given to sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students who were deemed low or high performing readers for this investigation. The data collected addressed the attitudes and perceptions of these readers. Their responses can be seen through percentage comparisons and results of chi square test for independence where alpha was .05. There was a significant difference in four out of the seven responses that related to perceptions, but only 5 of the responses related to attitudes were significantly different out of 12 total attitudes and interests based statements.

CHAPTER V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As students enter the middle school, many of their attitudes and perceptions of reading have already been set. Teachers are asked to teach large groups of young adolescent readers to use comprehension strategies, content reading strategies, and, for some, decoding strategies that have yet to be mastered. Teachers have an extremely difficult task to undertake on a daily basis. Knowing a reader's perceptions of him/herself as a reader, as well as of reading and knowing a reader's attitude toward and interest in reading are critical for the students and teachers to be successful. More importantly, knowing if there are significant differences in the attitudes and perceptions of successful readers and struggling readers may help determine whether it is possible to change a student's chances for success by changing his or her beliefs about reading.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine whether there were significant differences in the attitudes and perceptions of middle school readers who were successful and those who were struggling. The study focused on three areas: students' self-perceptions as readers, students' perceptions of reading itself, and students' attitudes toward reading. These areas were examined after students from three middle schools in the same school district completed a survey that contained statements based on these areas. The students' responses were separated based on the top 15% reading performance on the district's STAR reading test and the bottom 15% of reading performance based on the STAR reading test. All students participating were in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade and were between the ages of 11 and 14.

The study was conducted after the students and their parents signed a consent form to participate in the study. Fifty-four out of approximately 105 low-performing readers returned

consent forms, and 94 out of about 105 of the high-performing readers returned consent forms. The total population surveyed was over 700.

A review of literature examined the motivation of reluctant readers, focusing on students whose attitudes toward and perceptions of reading were negative. The research lent itself to the idea that the more negatively one perceives and feels about reading, the less likely one is to perform the task. The review of literature suggested that, in turn, reading less often hinders a reader's ability to be successful.

Conclusions

This research study was based on a comparison of high-performing and low-performing readers, particularly in the areas of the students' self-perceptions as readers, perceptions of the act of reading, and their attitudes toward reading in general. Based on the responses given by students in this study, there were some areas that showed significant differences and some areas did not.

The perceptions of readers varied widely in four out of seven responses. In the category of self-perceptions of middle school readers, three out of four responses showed a significant difference between the high and low readers. In the category of middle school students' perceptions of reading, three out of four responses showed a significant discrepancy between high and low-performing readers.

The attitudes of middle school readers did not yield the same results. Twelve statements on the survey related to this area, as it was the focus of the review of literature in chapter two. Seven out of the twelve responses did not show significant differences in the attitudes of high and low-performing readers. Therefore, no clear, direct correlation could be seen between successful and struggling readers in this research.

Portions of this study contradict the research. Research (Hughes-Hassell & Lutz, 2006; Worthy, 2002) suggested that poor attitudes toward reading would lead to unsuccessful readers. In this study, attitude was really no indicator of whether a student would be successful or struggle in reading. Half of the survey responses resulted in students having similar attitudes toward reading regardless of reading level. The majority of responses for both groups of middle school readers indicated that they don't like it when teachers read to them (Item 13). Further, about half of both groups responded that do not read at all in the summer (Item 5). It seems that all middle school students need to be the target of motivational strategies for teachers. Surprisingly, there was no significant difference related to which of the groups wanted more class time to read (Item 15). It should be further noted that of the two groups, the lower performing readers actually had a higher percentage of students who would like more reading time at school.

The successful and struggling readers were alike in some areas relating to their interests as well. Both groups reported not enjoying reading textbooks or other school books (Item 6). They both responded that they would rather read magazines or newspapers than books (Item 7) and a vast majority of all students participating in this study also enjoy reading materials from the Internet (Item 10). Both groups clearly showed no interest in comic books (Item 11). This is important to teachers because it gives them some options for assignments that may be more productive for all students, for instance many current events lessons and research-based lessons could center around text derived from newspapers, magazines, or the Internet.

Some similarities between both groups appeared in the area of perceptions as well. A majority of students from both the higher and lower performing groups felt that students do not have to read too much at school (Item 2). Also, both groups reported that they can learn to do

something by reading about it first (Item 14). This may surprise some educators who work with students who have difficulty reading. It would seem that these students will read a set of video game directions or directions to performing a magic trick, as long as they can see the purpose. This should be enlightening to teachers because, all too often, teachers use a fixed set of reading materials year after year. It is a good indication of the need for a wider base of text resources to be made available in classrooms. Both groups were alike in that they believe that sometimes they do not understand what they read, even directly after they have read it (Item 16). This should be an indication of the need to spend time on comprehension and metacognitive strategies with students at all levels, even in to the middle school years.

Although there were many areas in which all middle school readers responded similarly, there were some areas where there is a clear discrepancy between the attitudes, interests, and perceptions of the successful readers and those who are struggling to keep pace with the rest of their class. Half of the responses relating to attitudes showed a significant difference between high-performing and low-performing readers. Most top readers did not respond in a way that indicated that their mind is thinking of something else when they read (Item 19). Their counterparts did respond that they have difficulty staying focused. An extremely wide margin exists in relation to reading as a hobby. The successful readers have a significantly higher number of students who called reading a hobby (Item 1). Very few students from the struggling group ever read ahead when the whole class is reading a book (Item 4). The majority of successful readers reported that they do.

There were two areas related to interest in which the groups differed in their responses. More low-performing readers prefer to read about famous people and places than those students from the high-performing group (Item 8). This is very important information for teachers,

because of the multitude of biographies and autobiographies available to young adolescent readers. More successful readers responded that they like to pick out their own reading materials whenever possible. There was a significant difference between the groups, but both groups had over 85% of the respondents concur with that statement (Item 17). This supports the research cited earlier in this study (Hughes-Hassell & Lutz, 2006; Worthy, 2002) and is the basis for teaching strategies such as book clubs and literature circles.

Responses related to perceptions of reading yielded the most extreme differences between the two groups. Four items elicited significantly different responses. A large majority of struggling readers do not perceive themselves as good readers (Items 3 and 18). The successful readers responded in nearly the exact opposite manner. This correlation is supported the research in chapter 2 (Townsend, 1998), (Pearson, 2003), (Juel, 1998), and (Meltzer et al., 2004). There was also a significant difference between the students' perception of whether or not one has to get good grades to be a good reader (Item 9). The lower-performing readers actually believe this to be true, while the more successful readers do not. Finally, there is an unfortunate difference in the perceived importance of reading to the students' future or "when they're grown" (Item 20). Well over one-fourth of the struggling readers responded that they do not feel they will use what they learn in reading when they are grown. All but a few of the successful readers could see that they will use these skills in the future.

It is important to note that some responses were consistent with the literature review, however. Almost half of the high-performing respondents indicated that reading was considered a hobby for them. Not even one-fourth of the low-performing students considered reading a hobby. This is consistent with the research (Meltzer et al., 2004). In addition, well over half of the successful readers enjoy magazines and newspapers. This is also consistent with the research

of Hughes-Hassell (2006). Students who have not yet been introduced to the enjoyment of that type of reading were typically reading at the lower levels. Not even one-third of the low-performing readers were reading magazines and newspapers. An extremely wide gap existed in the responses concerning the students' mind wandering when they read. Just less than 17% of the high-performing readers faced this challenge, while an astounding 85.2% of low-performing readers responded that this was a challenge. Consistent with the literature review (Worthy, 2002), a high percentage of all of the middle school students like to select their own reading materials.

This study conducted in three middle schools did, however, reveal that the students who recognized themselves in positive ways as readers were more apt to be in the top 15%. Many of the students who were in the bottom 15% responded that they could not easily comprehend what they read and believed that reading was a task they were "not good at." Many more low-performing readers believe they have to get good grades to be a good reader. However, a high percentage in both subgroups perceived reading as a skill they would use in their adult lives.

Further conclusions were drawn that would be of interest to teachers. Both high and low-performing readers perceived themselves as people who were able to learn how to do things by reading about them first. Both subgroups had about 76% responding with "That's Me" to that statement (Appendix A) on the survey. It is also important to note that the majority of all students in the study did not consider there to be too much reading in school. A final observation was that more of the struggling readers were actually found to enjoy school books, according to the survey. This may mean the teachers need to give struggling readers more experience with nonfiction text. According to the research, struggling readers can be successful with

informational texts, how-to books, and books or stories about famous people or places, particularly sports figures or famous people in the media.

In classrooms, teachers strive to ensure their students' success in reading. Taking time to evaluate the attitudes and perceptions of young adolescent readers can help teachers to find out who in the classroom has a perception or attitude about reading that could be hindering their performance. Some preconceived ideas will be hard to change, but if teachers do not attempt to, no change can occur. Many educators are already pre-assessing students' academic skills, but some are not concerned enough with their preconceptions, emotional needs, and interests. Clearly, a gap in performance occurs between students who love reading and are self-confident about it and those who have to face it with uncertainty and doubt.

Recommendations

For Practice

The findings in this investigation demonstrate that negative self-perceptions of readers can hinder a students' performance. Self-confidence through identifying one's self as a good reader seemed to be one of the points on which the discrepancy lies. Students should be met where they are, with regards to a reading level, at the beginning of each school year, and, from there, interventions should follow. Small successes along the way can serve to build confidence in struggling readers. For students to maintain their progress, summer reading programs for tutoring sessions are imperative.

In addition, more students need to believe that they have tools to comprehend what they read daily. Students should be entitled to an arsenal of comprehension strategies before encountering texts. Teachers, who model these strategies, facilitate opportunities in the

classroom to practice them, and work with children to internalize them, will see their students' self-perceptions as readers grow.

The findings in this investigation also show a discrepancy in the perceptions of the act of reading between successful readers and their struggling counterparts. Students did not believe there was too much reading at school. That is positive. However, too many low-performing readers tie the act of reading to grades, which may be working negatively for teachers. A high percentage of these readers observed that one has to get good grades to be a good reader. Teachers should offer opportunities to read just because reading is important to daily life. Too many schools and teachers tie their sustained silent reading time to Accelerated Reader (see Definition of Terms). Students are penalized for not comprehending or finishing books they were supposed to be reading for pleasure or in their free time. Another positive perception for schools is that most students perceive a connection between what they are learning about reading now and their futures.

The findings in this investigation did not show a significant discrepancy in some areas regarding to attitudes toward reading of the two subgroups. A majority of students in both groups did not enjoy reading school books and a majority of both groups do not want to spend more time reading at school. Perhaps all middle school reading teachers could spend more time focusing on strategies to motivate all types of readers at these grade levels. However, it is important to recognize that some good readers are making reading a hobby of theirs, reading during the summer, and reading magazines and newspapers for enjoyment. These are not surprising results for teachers, but they are evidence of the need for summer reading and tutoring programs. It is also evidence that educators need to expand their views of what reading materials

can be used, as the students needs arise. Many of the students being served in classrooms today will obtain a large majority of their information through newspapers, magazines, or the internet.

For Further Study

The findings of this study are important to educators, but there were areas that could be improved upon. First, the study sample was adequate, even with some teachers not returning surveys. However, the number of parent and student consent letters returned diminished the sample size dramatically. More surveys from the middle portion of the whole group could not be used as replacements for participants in the top and bottom groups who declined to participate. This was due to an effort to maintain the integrity of the top and bottom subgroups. A future study may be aided by obtaining parent and student signatures at the middle school open houses, to ensure more participants. There were a greater number of high-performing readers participating. Since every comparison was determined through a chi square test for independence and degrees of freedom were considered, this did not alter results.

Another suggestion to ensure the validity of the low-performing readers' results would be to read the survey to the students with cognitive delays or other special needs that may interfere with the process of completing the survey. Some of the bottom 15% subgroup were up to five grade levels behind their peers on the STAR grade level equivalent findings. This survey is geared toward middle school readers. However, a student who struggled to comprehend it may not have given true responses.

Another area that could be studied in the area of attitudes and perceptions of middle school readers could be centered around the habits, interests, and perceptions of the parents or guardians in the home. In talking to educators, the researcher found that many of the struggling readers did not return consent forms may have not done so due to the parents' inability to read

the letter in some cases. It may also be due to their apathy in regards to education. Many of the students returning letters have parents that are interested in their children's success, according to the language arts teachers who gave this survey in their classes.

Summary

A summary of this study, conclusions based on the results of this study, recommendations for classroom practice, and recommendations for further study can all be found in chapter five. In a study of middle school students, there were significant differences in the perceptions of reading of the top and bottom 15% of readers based on reading performance. This study was conducted with sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students.

It was concluded that students at this age had varied perception and attitudes toward reading. These perceptions and attitudes are formed and changed many times throughout their years in school. The negative attitudes and perceptions can be hindering the success of these students in the area of reading. Conversely, students who see reading as a positive experience can flourish as readers.

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APPENDIX A. STUDENT SURVEY AND CONSENT LETTER

NAME: _____

ID NUMBER: _____

DATE: _____

Grade Level: 6 7 8

Gender: M F

Age: 11 12 13 14 15

Please fill in the following survey by choosing the response on the right that best fits the way you feel about each statement.

- | | | |
|--|------------|----------------|
| 1. Reading is a hobby of mine. | That's me! | That's not me. |
| 2. I think we have to read too much at school. | That's me! | That's not me. |
| 3. I am good at reading. | That's me! | That's not me. |
| 4. I usually read ahead of the class when we
are all reading the same book. | That's me! | That's not me. |
| 5. I read during the summer. | That's me! | That's not me. |
| 6. I love to read textbooks or other school books. | That's me! | That's not me. |
| 7. I would rather read magazines or newspapers
than books. | That's me! | That's not me. |
| 8. I like to read about famous people and places. | That's me! | That's not me. |
| 9. I think that you have to get good grades
to be a good reader. | That's me! | That's not me. |

10. I enjoy reading about new things on the Internet.	That's me!	That's not me.
11. I read a lot of comic books.	That's me!	That's not me.
12. I have a quiet place to read at home.	That's me!	That's not me.
13. I do not like it when teachers read to me.	That's me!	That's not me.
14. I can learn how to do something by reading about it first (for instance, learning a magic trick or learning to play a video game).	That's me!	That's not me.
15. I think teachers should give us more class time to read.	That's me!	That's not me.
16. Sometimes I don't understand thing even if I have just read them.	That's me!	That's not me.
17. I like to pick out my own reading material.	That's me!	That's not me.
18. I am not a very good reader.	That's me!	That's not me.
19. Sometimes when I try to read, my mind is thinking of something else.	That's me!	That'd not me.
20. I think that I will use the things I learn in reading when I grow up.	That's me!	That's not me.

September 14, 2006

Dear Parents and/or Guardians:

My name is Angie Ludwig, and I am a sixth grade teacher at Glenwood Middle School. I have been a teacher in the Findlay City Schools for the past five years. I am pursuing a Master of Education degree in Reading from the College of Education and Human Development at Bowling Green State University.

At the beginning of this school year, most of the students in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades completed a survey in their integrated language arts classes. The surveys were administered to assist the middle school language arts teachers in identifying your child's attitude toward reading and perceptions of reading. The surveys also were designed to obtain information regarding the students' reading interests and habits. Through information gathered from the survey, the integrated language arts classroom teachers will be able to work with your child to improve his/her reading performance, while providing materials that are of interest to the students. This should aid the teacher in planning instruction for the upcoming academic year.

For my degree in reading, I would like to select approximately 30% of the surveys for further study. Information from the surveys will be used in my thesis, which focuses on middle school adolescent readers. Conducting this research will help teachers gain a deeper understanding of the interests and attitudes of these students toward reading. With your permission and the permission of your child, I would like to use the information collected from the surveys in my study. The surveys will be given an anonymous identification number and names will not be used in the final project. Only the thesis advisor and myself will have access to any student surveys.

You do not need to have your child complete the survey, as he/she has already done so at school. A copy of the survey is attached only for your review before giving consent. I am requesting permission to use your student's responses to the survey items in my thesis. Please discuss this letter with your student and, if you are both willing to allow me to use the survey results in my thesis, please both sign the permission form and return it to your child's teacher. Participation in the study is completely voluntary, and opting not to participate will in no way affect your child's grades or academic standing. All participants are free to withdraw from the survey at any time. If you have any questions regarding this study or your child's rights as a research participant, please call 419-425-8373 and ask to speak with me, or you may call my thesis advisor, Dr. Cindy Hendricks, at Bowling Green State University (419-372-7341) or the Chair of the Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board at 419-372-7716.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Angie Ludwig
Sixth Grade Teacher
Glenwood Middle School

Permission Form

By signing below, I give permission for Ms. Ludwig to use what I wrote on the survey we completed at the beginning of the year for her thesis. I have been informed she will not use my name and it will not be possible for anyone to identify my responses.

Student Signature: _____

By signing below I give permission for my son's/daughter's responses to a reading survey to be used in Ms. Ludwig's thesis. I have been informed she will not use my student's name and it will not be possible for anyone to identify my student's responses.

Parent Signature: _____

Student Name: _____