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## Student-Led Book Clubs Support Reading Engagement In Primary Grades

Cassie Torbenson

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STUDENT-LED BOOK CLUBS SUPPORT READING ENGAGEMENT IN  
PRIMARY GRADES

By

Cassie Torbenson

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching.

Hamline University

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This Capstone project was created to support primary grade teachers in learning about student-led book clubs as a format of literacy instruction. The author set out to answer the question: how can student-led book clubs support the development of reading engagement in primary grades? As an elementary teacher responsible for creating an engaging classroom, the author feels strongly that when students are able to make meaningful connections from school work to real life, learning is more authentic and therefore supports students in building skills for lifelong learning. One intriguing format to create these connections and support student engagement in learning is through student-led book clubs. Research concludes that small-group, student-led book clubs have the opportunity to increase reading engagement. Research also identifies that book clubs have the ability to support ownership over student learning, strengthen listening and speaking skills, as well as increase students' understanding of the text. Using this information, the author created a [website](#) for teachers to learn how to implement small-group, student-led book clubs in primary grades based on researched scaffolds.

## DEDICATION

To my beloved family and partner in life, Ryan, for your constant love and encouragement throughout my life to follow my heart and for your support throughout my Capstone journey. To my colleagues who have inspired me as a teacher and my Capstone Committee who have supported and motivated me as a learner. To my past, current and future students whose small but mighty hearts and minds drive me to be the best teacher I can be.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

#### Capstone Overview

One of my primary responsibilities as an elementary teacher is creating a classroom atmosphere that is engaging for every student. Through observations and personal experiences growing up, I have learned that when students are able to make meaningful connections from school work to real life, learning is more authentic and helps to create lifelong learners. Teachers are typically eager to learn new ways to engage students fully in their learning. One intriguing format to support student engagement in learning is through student-led book clubs. This project will explore the question, “how can student-led book clubs support the development of reading engagement in primary grades?”

The beginning of Chapter One will discuss the benefits of book clubs that go beyond building student’s literacy skills. This is followed by a description of my journey with book clubs as a teaching tool and the reasoning behind using this format of literacy instruction to support the development of reading engagement with primary students. Next, this chapter will describe this Capstone and what you can expect to learn and bring into your classroom. Lastly, Chapter One will describe the significance of this project to primary grade teachers.

#### Rationale for Using Book Clubs to Support Student Engagement



James (2003) describes that while book clubs are a fun and interactive way for students to strengthen their literacy skills to listen and talk about books, they have the ability to do even more. As a primary teacher, I am passionate about this topic because of its ability to support the development of reading engagement. James (2003) described that by giving students the opportunity to be a part of authentic learning, they were able to transfer it to real-world problem solving. Book clubs support authentic learning because the format, which will be discussed in Chapter Two, allows for student choice, which according to James (2003), can increase engagement.

The structure of a book club as a part of literacy instruction is different than my experience growing up in the traditional school setting. In my experience in the traditional school, the vast majority of the time students were told what to do and how to learn. This created students who were motivated by grades and checking off the requirements on a checklist. Even a student like myself, who truly enjoyed school and tried my hardest, was motivated by my grades rather than the excitement of what I was learning. However, the projects and activities I remember being truly passionate about were those that allowed me to have choice, not the ones that where I simply completed the checklist of requirements to get an “A.”

As a primary grade teacher, my children are just beginning their career as a student. This means they are practicing skills like raising hands, walking in the halls, tying shoes and writing letters and numbers. In the midst of this constant practice, some of my colleagues feel that student choice can be hard to offer at this age. However, my perspective is that if the teacher is intentional about the choices they offer and how they

scaffold the students learning, they can observe student's motivation increases when they put time into something that is interesting to them.

As a child, teenager and now as an adult, my motivation is greater when I am putting time into something that interests me. For this reason, as an educator, I work hard to make sure my students are surrounded by meaningful projects and activities that allow them to have choice. I have witnessed my students put more effort into activities and projects they are interested in. The idea of offering student choice can be applied to book clubs in primary grades. Miller (2015) explains that while student-led book clubs can be put together based on reading level, they can also be created based on interest. In addition to having interest in the topic of the book, students discuss what they find valuable in the text, as opposed to the traditional ask-and-answer format of conversation. After all of the scaffolds are put in place, these small group book clubs can be run by the students.

From my experience as a primary grade teacher, I observed three positive effects of book clubs. The first benefit is that it increases reading engagement. Second, it creates an authentic learning opportunity that can help students learn skills used beyond the classroom. Lastly, this format of literacy instruction also allows for student choice that can increase engagement and excitement for learning. Because of these benefits, my project design is to create a website to support teachers in learning how to successfully and efficiently implement book clubs. It will be compiled of strategies, steps and resources that primary grade educators can use to begin book clubs. The next section elaborates on my professional experience creating book clubs in my classroom.

### **My Teaching Journey with Student-Led Book Clubs**

One of the benefits of student-led books clubs that I have witnessed in my classroom is a positive change in student reading engagement. The first time I observed this was during student teaching while working with a small-group, student-led book club. The book clubs were created by my cooperating teacher, whom I think highly of and who offered student choice in a variety of ways. Her use of student-led book clubs created the opportunity for the development of a classroom full of independent, driven learners.

My cooperating teacher began a full class book club early in the year while reading a chapter book aloud to the class. We used multiple strategies during this time. We began by having full-class conversations after listening to the chapter, which Serravallo (2010) explains is time for the entire class to sit in a circle and discuss the book, or portion of the book, that was read aloud to them. At this time for discussion, we used *turn-and-talks*, which according to Serravallo (2010) is when a student “talks to a partner about a prompt given by the teacher” (p. 132). We also used a strategy called *stop-and-jots*, which is when students “stop and write in a reading notebook, on a sticky note, or on a notecard in response to a teacher prompt” (Serravallo, 2010, p. 132). Turn-and-talks and stop-and-jots were strategies we used to encourage student engagement in the chapter after we read aloud.

Once our students were confident in these strategies, we would choose a student’s stop-and-jot to share and have the rest of them practice responding, agreeing or disagreeing. The next step we took was to have one student share their jot with the class and then the rest would build on the original thought shared with sentence starter

supports. This ensured students were listening to their classmates and encouraged them to think and respond critically to other's thoughts. Eventually, small group book clubs were put together for the higher reading level groups to read a chapter book and have a discussion with a student as the facilitator.

I was the long-term substitute in this same classroom for three months in the spring of 2018. At the end of the year, I saw how the students in the book clubs benefited and grew throughout the year. For example, when we first began book clubs, one group had a difficult time truly listening to what each other was saying. Instead of responding to what the person before them said, they would share their own thought about a different part of the book. Sometimes they would make random comments not connected to the book. When this would happen, the other students did not realize or did not know how to bring the group back on topic.

Throughout the year, they slowly became better at listening and respectfully responding at the correct time. On top of this, their responses were genuine, in comparison to making statements that changed the topic abruptly. The students also learned how to decipher when something shared was off topic and how to bring the conversation back to the book. They learned how to work together and have discussions about books independently. In sum, I have seen the benefits of student-led book clubs, but have not had the experience or completed research regarding *how* they can be implemented. Completing this capstone provides me with an opportunity to review the academic literature to deepen my understanding of the positives and challenges of book clubs, as well as how to implement them.

An important part of implementing book clubs Miller (2015) states, is to offer choice in book selection. While it can be beneficial for students to be in book clubs based on reading level for various reasons, McIntyre (2007) agrees with Miller (2015) that offering choice can increase engagement. Therefore, book clubs should be based on interest and not strictly reading level. While it is important that students are reading good-fit books, it is just as important that they are reading books that they are interested in. Students are able to engage in more meaningful conversation with their classmates when their feelings are invested into the reading. Though my cooperating teacher chose books she knew the kids were interested in, offering student choice in book selection was not a focus in the book clubs I observed in 2018. I am interested bringing this component into my research and project.

There are multiple strategies I have tried and am eager to try to build a successful book club in my first year of teaching. However, I have felt overwhelmed putting together strategies and taking the time to research most effective methods as a first year teacher. There are many other parts of the day that I am trying to build effectively as well. This project will allow me to fully research and create a chronological *toolkit* in the form of a website. Teachers will be able to use this toolkit with ease to implement the necessary scaffolds to eventually have small group, student-led book clubs in their classroom.

### **Significance to Primary Teachers**

Talking to the teachers I work alongside, many are intrigued with student-led book clubs and would like to implement them soon. However, a common theme among

these conversations is the question, *where to start?* Amidst incredibly busy days and constant work towards beginning other intriguing and beneficial strategies, it can seem like a daunting task to figure out where to start. Therefore, a goal of my Capstone project is to support teachers in answering the question, where to start, by providing them with strong scaffolds.

As a first grade teacher, I know the importance of creating strong scaffolds for student success in independence. My focus for this project will be creating a “toolkit” for teachers to scaffold their students to partake in small group student-led book clubs. This project will compile strategies, steps and resources needed to successfully implement book clubs and will be shared in the format of a website. This information can be adjusted for older grades that do not need as many scaffolds as the primary grades do. Since it is available online, teachers around the country can use it as a concise and efficient way to learn about another important format of literacy instruction. In summary, this project is accessible world-wide and can be adjusted based on teacher discretion to best meet the needs of their students at all ages. After exploring the website, primary teachers can feel more confident in implementing book clubs.

In addition to supporting primary grade teachers in implementing book clubs and giving students the opportunity for a more interactive way of learning, this Capstone also impacts the larger scale of the district and state. According to the Minnesota Department of Education (Academic Standards K-12, n. d.), the Common Core English Language Arts was put in place in 2010. The Common Core State Standards Initiative explains the implementation as follows:

to ensure all students are ready for success after high school, the Common Core State Standards establish clear, consistent guidelines for what every student should know and be able to do in math and English language arts from kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. (Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) & the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center), What Parents Should Know, 2019, p 1)

Since the implementation of the Common Core in Minnesota, the rigor of work and expectations have increased in Minnesota schools. This Capstone project is a resource teachers can use as to support students as they master the rigorous standards.

### **Summary**

It is important for students to be involved in authentic and engaging activities. One format of instruction that encourages this is student-led book clubs in primary grades. I have witnessed different parts of the implementation of book clubs. This observation and experience has sparked my passion for using them to help strengthen reading engagement. The research I completed has solidified and supported my observations. When looked at as a whole, this project has the ability to help primary teachers seamlessly implement book clubs in the classroom. It is also full of strategies that can be used individually in other formats of literacy instruction. The strategies can be used to differentiate based on students instructional needs. For example, a teacher could use the information given about how to use stop-and-jots and use them during guided reading groups. Teachers could also use the information about listening, responding, and building on other student's thoughts during share time or other instructional times

throughout the day. This project can be used in whole to implement student-led book clubs or in parts to learn about strategies to be used other times of the school day.

This chapter began by discussing some of the many benefits that student-led book clubs can have on reading engagement. Next, I discussed my journey and how it has led me to believe in the importance of book clubs. After this, I described the significance this information has on primary grade teachers. Using this information, I created a website toolkit for teachers to use who feel passionate about increasing reading engagement through student-led book clubs. Teachers who use this toolkit will learn about the scaffolds necessary for success. They will also have access to strategy recommendations, research and resources.

This paper is composed of four chapters. The next chapter is a review of the literature surrounding student-led book clubs in primary grades. Following Chapter Two, Chapter Three will describe the project I have created. Lastly, Chapter Four is a personal reflection about the most impactful information from this project in regards to personal growth and impacts on the teaching profession.

I have conducted a review of scholarly articles, sources and research projects for information to educate primary teachers about small group, student-led book clubs. The following chapter will begin by describing the components of book clubs and primary students' needs. It will then explore reading engagement and what it looks like when primary students are engaged in their reading in the context of student-led book clubs. Lastly, Chapter Two will review the literature surrounding the benefits and challenges of student-led book clubs. The goal of this chapter is to support in answering the question:



how can student-led book clubs support the development of reading engagement in primary grades?

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Introduction**

There is an abundance of research and literature supporting different formats of literacy instruction. Some of these formats include stations, reading workshop, interactive read alouds, strategy groups, guided reading groups, reading conferences and book clubs. Each format has specific benefits and are used for different learning purposes. This literature review will focus on student-led book clubs in primary grades. Specifically, it will explore what book clubs are composed of, how they can support reading engagement, and the benefits and challenges of student-led book clubs. The central question that this chapter will focus on answering is: “how can student-led book clubs support the development of reading engagement in primary grades?”

First, this chapter will explore primary students in book clubs. It will describe the definition and characteristics of book clubs in a school setting. The review of the research for this Capstone project is focused on primary grade students, which is kindergarten through second grade. This chapter will explore the characteristics of book clubs for primary students. It will describe the different scaffolds and strategies identified in the research that have been used to successfully implement book clubs.

Next, this chapter will delve into student’s reading engagement. According to Parsons, S. A., Malloy, Parsons, A.W., and Burrowbridge, (2015), “engagement is a vital component of classroom instruction because it is explicitly associated with reading

achievement” (p. 224). For this reason, the first component to explore is the definition of “reading engagement” and strategies teachers use to promote engagement. This chapter will also discuss what it looks like when primary students are engaged in their reading in the context of student-led book clubs.

Lastly, this chapter will summarize key ideas in the research about both the benefits and challenges of book clubs. Benefits include increased ownership of their learning, strengthened speaking and listening skills, and increased comprehension of the text. One challenge to student-led book clubs is making sure all perspectives are represented. A second challenge for teachers is managing off-task behaviors during the discussions. The next section explores the use of book clubs in the primary grades.

### **Primary Students in Book Clubs**

Primary students are typically known as students in kindergarten through second grade. However, the research in this literature review was focused on first and second grade, and sometimes older. Book club set up and expectations differ depending on the age and ability of the reader. This section will focus on what it means to have a book club in the primary grades and how researchers have suggested to scaffold their students to eventually partake in small-group, student-led book clubs.

**Book club definition.** Heller (2006) defines book clubs as seen in her first grade classroom as follows:

Book Club is a student-centered management system that takes advantage of the social nature of learning and celebrates children’s voices. All six of the language

arts communication areas - reading, writing, listening, speaking, visualizing and visually representing- are central to planning and instruction. (Heller, 2006, p. 362)

Heller's (2006) definition of book clubs forms the theoretical foundation of this capstone. While this capstone is based on Heller's (2006) definition, there are multiple ways to structure and implement book clubs.

Duffy-Hester (1999) explained that book clubs can be structured in multiple ways depending on student needs and teacher preference. The majority of book clubs, however, are composed of four parts: community sharing, reading, writing, and book club discussions. Bond (2001) calls the community share portion *instruction* time and Serravallo (2010) calls it the *mini-lesson*. Though this time can have different names depending on the researcher, they all have the same focus. It is a time when teachers discuss and teach focus strategies and learning targets (Duffy-Hester, 1999; Heller, 2006; Serravallo, 2010), preview new texts (Duffy-Hester, 1999), activate background knowledge (Heller, 2006; Serravallo, 2010), and answer questions that arose during previous book club discussions (Duffy-Hester, 1999).

The next part of a book club is to read the book. This can be done independently, the teacher can read to the whole class or to a small-group, or students can partner read (Duffy-Hester, 1999; Heller, 2006). Allowing for different ways of reading the book is important given the primary purpose of book clubs is to be a part of the discussion about the book, not necessarily to be able to read it independently (Serravallo, 2010). Therefore, students read the book in whichever format is most beneficial for them as a reader.

The third part of book clubs is the writing portion. At this time, students write down their thoughts that will prepare them for their book club discussion (Duffy-Hester, 1999), which Serravallo (2010) calls stop-and-jots. Serravallo (2010) went on to explain that the stop-and-jot notes are typically based on teacher prompts. These prompts are usually open-ended questions that encourage critical thinking. Examples include “how did it make you feel?” or “did the text remind you of anything in your life?” (Heller, 2006, p. 362).

The last component of book clubs is the discussion, which Duffy-Hester (1999) explained is typically student-led and teacher supported as students build their thinking upon their classmates. Serravallo (2010) explained that in this discussion time, one student should begin the conversation by sharing the thought they wrote down or the answer to the open-ended prompt. All students listen and then think about a response to that thought. Students share and build their thoughts about the book in a conversational style. Successful conversations depend on students developing listening skills.

Serravallo (2015) explained that teachers need to deliberately teach students how to listen to the speaker and then form a response that adds to the conversation. For example, students could practice connecting their ideas by asking themselves, *what do I think about that?* Helpful prompts to respond include “I agree/disagree with you because . . .” and “I heard you say . . . I’m thinking . . .” (Serravallo, 2015, p. 338). Book clubs can be set up in a variety of ways, but most are set up with time for sharing, reading, writing and discussions. As all age groups have specific needs to be met, the following section will describe primary students needs in regards to implementing book clubs.

**Primary student needs.** As a first grade teacher, it is clear that kindergarten through second graders need more support than upper elementary students to build the skills to partake in small-group, student-led book clubs. In particular, Serravallo (2010) explained that they will need to see their expectations being modeled through whole-class conversations as well as having ample opportunities to practice their skills. On top of this, the overall environment of the classroom needs to give students the confidence, support, and time to learn these skills. McIntyre (2007) agreed with Serravallo (2010) and went on to say that this type of atmosphere can be fostered when teachers focus on student choice, respect, decision making, and active participation. In addition to creating a positive atmosphere for book clubs, the review of the research also identified strategies for scaffolding primary students to engage in them.

**Strategies used for implementation.** According to McIntyre (2007), scaffolding is the process a teacher uses to help a student learn how to eventually do something on their own that they previously could not. This could involve activating background knowledge, asking probing questions, and elaborating on student's thoughts by bringing in their own thinking (McIntyre, 2007). A review of the literature found five key steps that teachers can take to scaffold primary students before partaking in small group, student-led book clubs. The steps are: create guidelines as a class, teacher models necessary skills, students partake in full-class conversations, students partake in small-group discussions and students write stop-and-jots reacting to the reading to share with their small group. The following section will begin with how to create guidelines to

help manage book clubs. It will then dive into the different scaffolds a teacher could use to implement student-led book clubs.

To help manage book clubs, Heller (2006) stated that it is important to create expectations as a class to follow during book clubs. Serravallo (2010) suggested that the class should come up with guidelines everyone must follow about what it means to listen to each other and be respectful as they contribute to the conversations. Examples of expectations to discuss include what your body should be doing when you are listening (facing the speaker), non-verbal cues that can be beneficial (nodding along), as well as detrimental (looking away) (Serravallo, 2015).

McIntyre (2007) recommended that when students are first learning a skill, the teacher may need to directly “tell, demonstrate, explain and define” (p. 618) the skill or goal. The author also states that even though this format seems traditional, students must be explicitly taught the skills needed to successfully partake in book club before gradually releasing them to have the responsibility to complete the task (McIntyre, 2007). On top of this, Heller (2006) noted how students should observe successful book club conversations being modeled, whether it is with a parent volunteer, a paraprofessional in the class, or with a small group of students from a previous year’s class (Kong & Fitch, 2003).

Serravallo (2010) recommended the first step to scaffolding students is to begin with a full class book club. In this stage, the teacher reads the book or a portion of the book aloud to the whole class before the teacher prompts the students to begin the discussion. Some possible prompt examples include “my favorite part was \_\_\_ because

\_\_\_” or “this book reminds me of \_\_\_” (Blum, Koskinen, Bhartiya, & Hluboky, 2010, p. 497). During the discussion phase, Serravallo (2010) states that it is the teacher’s role to make sure students are listening to each other’s thoughts and their responses are related to what the person before them shared.

One way that the teacher can scaffold a student’s response, described by McIntyre (2007), is to relate it to the previous persons thought is by “restating what the student has just said in a way that explicitly invites the student to continue” (p. 612). Serravallo (2010) recommended that another way to scaffold a student’s response is to structure a portion of the discussion time as turn-and-talks, where two students share their thoughts to each other. These can be used when a topic comes up that many students want to talk about (Serravallo, 2010) or before the full-class discussion to make sure all students have thought about the prompt.

The next scaffold Serravallo (2010) recommended was to have students discuss the full class read aloud in a small group discussion. Students use the same prompts as they practiced during full-class book club discussions to practice listening to each other and having a discussion together. Examples that Heller (2006) recommended includes “how did it make you feel?” or “did the text remind you of anything in your life?” (p. 362). Duffy-Hester (1999) explained that the teacher’s role is to listen and prompt student discussion when necessary. This supports students as they learn how to continue their book club discussion on their own. Serravallo (2015) stated that at this time, students also practice taking turns talking without raising their hands first. She went on to say that they



should begin to read cues such as making eye contact with the current speaker and waiting for a break in conversation before sharing their idea.

Next, Serravallo (2010) explained that students should practice writing quality stop-and-jots. Students will bring these quick notes about the reading to the discussion to help remember important pieces of the book. These notes will support students as they have a conversation about the text. According to Serravallo (2010), students can have difficulty sharing quality, conversation-starting thoughts. Serravallo (2010) went on to say that it is the teacher's role to give an introduction to the book to activate prior knowledge, share important components of the genre, and then direct them to think about the book with a specific focus. With background knowledge and a clear focus of what they need to think about while reading, students learn how to differentiate quality, discussion-starting thoughts from simply re-stating facts found in the text.

Duffy-Hester (1999) explained that these scaffolds help students build the skills needed to be a part of a meaningful student-led book club. Students need the opportunity to watch successful book clubs being modeled, as well as practice conversing about a book with other students. These scaffolds generally follow the gradual release model which McIntyre (2007) explained is an opportunity that allows for students to practice a skill with support before being expected to use the skill independently in a student-led discussion.

**Summary.** This section explored primary grade students participating in book clubs. First, it looked at what book clubs consist of in a school setting before looking closer at primary grade students as they participate in book clubs. Then, this section

summarized what the literature shares as important scaffolds for primary grade teachers to use as they begin to implement student-led book clubs. The following section will look at reading engagement in the classroom. It will begin by exploring the benefits that engaged reading has on reading comprehension before diving into how the book club instructional format lends itself well to offering student choice, which McIntyre (2007) and Miller (2015) stated is an important component to engagement in the classroom. The review of the literature found multiple benefits that book clubs can have on engaged reading.

### **Reading Engagement**

The following section looks at the academic literature surrounding reading engagement. This will support in answering the question: how can student-led book clubs support the development of reading engagement in primary grades? This section will first look into the definition of reading engagement. It will then explore how being engaged in reading strengthens reading skills. Lastly, this section will delve into the role of student choice in book clubs and how this is a key component of how book clubs help to strengthen reading engagement.

**Reading engagement definition.** *Engagement* is defined as being interested and enthused in an activity with full participation and use of persistence to complete the task (Parsons, et al., 2015). The following components were found to increase reading engagement. First, James (2003) and Raphael and McMahon (1994) explained that the activity should be authentic, which means it relates to real-world problem solving. On top of authenticity, it should also allow for collaboration with peers (Griffin, 2010; James,

2003; Parsons et al., 2015). Finally, Parsons et al. (2015) explained that activities should offer students a challenge and should be completed over time. The activity should not be too hard that students feel overwhelmed and unsuccessful. At the same time, it should be enough of a challenge that students feel proud after they complete it. Parsons et al. (2015) explained that when learning activities are completed over time, students can see how differing skills are related and how to be a part of complex projects over time, as they will in life. In summary, these findings suggested that when students are able to have a choice in their learning, work with their peers and work on an activity that is a positive challenge, they are more engaged.

**Reading engagement strengthens reading skills.** Miller (2015) explained that high reading motivation increases reading comprehension. Therefore, it is important that students are motivated to read. James (2003) explained the importance of being a motivated and engaged reader. He stated that when students are involved in interesting activities about books that are relatable to them, they read more. Further, the more students read, the better readers they become. Students who are more successful readers have a more positive attitude towards reading. In summary, it is critical that students are involved in meaningful, engaging activities so they feel a desire to read. Different types of engagement will be addressed next.

Parsons et al. (2015) found that engagement in the classroom is directly correlated to reading achievement. Parsons et al. (2015) identifies three different types of engagement. In the following quote the authors define the three types:

Affective engagement emphasizes interest, enjoyment, and enthusiasm.

Behavioral engagement relates to effortful participation. Cognitive engagement encompasses strategic behavior, persistence, and metacognition. In addition, engagement is currently conceptualized as a dynamic, malleable construct.

(Parsons et al., 2015, p. 224)

When *engagement* is broken down into the above categories, it is clear to see the different components that teachers need to look at. Each part cannot be looked at separately when creating engaging activities. For example, it is not enough to create a learning opportunity that is interesting and enjoyable for the students. It is also not going to work if the teacher's goal is for students to show persistence when completing a difficult task if the activity is not of any interest to the student. Each component is intertwined and should be looked at accordingly.

**Student choice increases reading engagement.** According to Parsons et al. (2015), working on a project or activity with other students is typically more enjoyable and motivating than working alone. Godwin, Almeda, Petroccia, Baker and Fisher (2013) also explained that small group activities have been found to increase student on-task behavior. They stated that this could be because small group activity formats typically lend themselves to more interactive learning with a social aspect in comparison to whole-group or individual work.

Miller (2015) stated that one of the major components related to reading engagement is the opportunity for students to read books that they choose on their own. This means students are able to choose books that reflect their cultural background and their interests. Kong and Fitch (2003) explained that this allows for students to make

deeper connections and understand the text more fully when they can relate it to their own lives. According to McIntyre (2007) and Miller (2015), when students were offered choice on the books that they read, as well as what topics to write about, they were more engaged in their work. Therefore, when students are a part of meaningful activities about text that they find interesting, their attitude towards reading can grow stronger. Miller (2015) explained that as opposed to guided reading groups, where the teacher chooses the book, book clubs allow for students to choose books based on personal interest.

**Summary.** This section explored reading engagement in the context of book clubs in primary grades. It began by defining what reading engagement is and then looked into how reading engagement strengthens reading skills. Finally, it explained why the book club format increased reading engagement by offering student choice in book selection and interactive activities. The next section will look into benefits of student-led book clubs. The three main benefits include heightened student ownership over their learning, strengthened speaking and listening skills and finally, increased understanding of the text. The following section will take an in-depth look at the review of the literature surrounding the benefits of student-led book clubs.

### **Benefits of Student-Led Book Clubs**

The literature surrounding student-led book clubs explains multiple advantages to this form of literacy instruction. The first benefit is it helps to promote student ownership over their learning. It has also been found to strengthen listening and speaking skills, both in and out of the classroom. Lastly, book clubs are able to help support students in understanding the literature effectively.

**Student ownership of learning.** According to Chan, Graham-Day, Ressa, Peters and Konrad (2014), when students play an active role in their education, they are strengthening ownership over their learning. Platz (1994) explained that this means students are a part of the *process* of their learning. For Platz (1994), being involved in the process means that students fully understand their learning target goal, are involved in their goal setting, self-monitoring and reflections. Another way that students can be involved in the process is described by Chan et al. (2014), who encouraged students to be part of the feedback process by using strategies such as rubrics for self-assessment and conferences with the teacher.

Chan et al. (2014), stated that the first step to promote student ownership over their learning is to have clear learning targets posted in the room and to also be used intentionally by the teachers and students. In a book club, Serravallo (2010) recommended that the learning target be discussed during the mini lesson portion when the focus skill is taught, modeled or revisited. Chan et al. (2014) explained that discussing learning targets gives students a goal to work towards during book club, as well as an understanding of the expectations. Having a goal allows students to be involved in monitoring their growth towards the learning target. Chan et al. (2014) noted how this can be done through setting goals and observing their own performance honestly.

Serravallo (2010) recommended that an effective time to support students in setting goals and reflecting on their growth would be during small groups. Supporting Serravallo (2010) in using small group to reflect on goals is Chan et al. (2014), who noted that while students are in book clubs, they should collect evidence to support their growth

related to their goal. Serravallo (2010) explained that two ideas of evidence, depending on their goal, could be reading logs or a journal about what they notice about their reading patterns. Once they understand the skills they have and need to build, Chan et al. (2014) explained that students should then play an active role in receiving and sharing their feedback. This can be done during a time that Serravallo (2010) called goal-setting small groups, in which teacher feedback and student's noticings can be discussed.

**Listening and speaking skills strengthen.** Mills (2009) explained that metacognitive strategies, which are strategies that teach children *how* to think, have been supported by research as positively impacting student's understanding of and ability to discuss texts. Examples of metacognitive strategies are: think-alouds, checklists, rubrics, and teacher modeling (Metacognitive Strategies, 2015). The goal of book clubs is not to simply answer low-level questions about a text verbally in a group. Instead, McIntyre (2007) explained that book club discussions should encourage students to learn about their life and other perspectives, and promote deep thinking about quality literature to help improve comprehension. According to Kong and Fitch (2003), students in book clubs are able to connect their reading to their own life, share different thoughts, and build their own ideas on their classmates'.

In book club discussions, students practice reading cues and following basic rules for communication needed in and outside of school. For example, in life, people do not raise hands and wait to be called on when having a conversation. Kong and Fitch (2003) and Serravallo (2015) agreed that students must learn to use cues, such as waiting for a break in the conversation, before adding their own thoughts. It is also important for

students to learn to make eye contact with everyone in the conversation (Serravallo, 2015), not just the person who seems to be in charge, which is often the teacher in a traditional school setting (Kong & Fitch, 2003). Serravallo (2015) recommended that when more than one student begins to share at one time, students should practice taking turns by saying “I’ll go after you.”

Kong and Fitch (2003) went on to add that students can also practice inviting other students to share their thoughts or asking for another student’s opinion. Students can also practice responding to other’s thoughts in a non-verbal, authentic way that is transferable to outside of school. For example, McIntyre (2007) explained that students can non-verbally respond by nodding in agreement or laughing when appropriate. All the skills above are used in daily life, which makes this conversational activity authentic. In turn, it can positively impact student engagement (McIntyre, 2007; Parsons, et al., 2015).

**Understanding of literature increases.** Mills (2009) stated that “scaffolded classroom talk assists students to deepen their understanding of texts” (p. 325). Book clubs contribute to greater understanding of literature because it gives students the opportunity to ask questions, make connections (Griffin, 2010; Barone, 2011; Kong & Fitch, 2003), form judgements, draw conclusions, make comparisons (Barone, 2011), and practice identifying context clues (Kong & Fitch, 2003) with other students. For these reasons Barone (2011), stated that book club discussions contribute to a greater understanding of the text for students, in comparison to when an individual thinks about a book on their own.



In order to increase understanding of the text, Kong and Fitch (2002) found that, “students need not only to comprehend factual information about the text but also to explore the relationships among characters, interpret messages sent by the author, and construct the meanings of the text using their prior knowledge” (p. 357). Therefore, the questions asked should be open-ended and the conversations should be focused on topics such as these in order to deepen their understanding of the book. Barone (2011) explained that if conversations are centered around literal pieces of information from the text that can be found by pointing at an answer, it can be a sign of the text being too hard for a particular student. When students are reading and discussing a book that is at an appropriate level, they will move their conversations toward making connections, interpreting meaning, and making predictions based on evidence from the book.

The following strategies have been shared by Mills (2009) to increase comprehension of text when paired with speaking and listening activities, such as book club conversations: activating background knowledge, making inferences, understanding text structures, visualizing, asking and answering questions, and retelling and summarizing. This means students use these strategies in the context of speaking and listening in the beginning, middle or end of book club discussions. These strategies help students learn *how* to think and talk about a book rather than identifying right-there answers from a text (Mills, 2009).

In a different study, Barone (2011) found in her research that many book club discussions begin with conversations about right-there answers in the text. An example of this is to identify the characters and plot. This is a way for students to create a basis for

the more in-depth conversations to be built on in the middle of the book. At the end of the book, conversations may come back to the more literal statements to summarize and wrap-up the discussion about the book. Both of these strategies regarding discussion questions have been found to be effective.

**Summary.** This section discussed the benefits found in a review of the literature regarding book clubs as one format of literacy instruction. One of the benefits is that book clubs strengthen student ownership over their learning. Other benefits include strengthened listening and speaking skills, as well as increased understanding of the text. The following section explores what can be challenges of student-led book clubs.

### **Challenges of Student-Led Book Clubs**

There were few resources located during the course of the review of the literature describing challenges of student-led book clubs. This is a gap in the research regarding student-led book clubs in primary grades. However, two challenges were identified in particular. One challenge found was that small-group, student-led book clubs can create opportunities where students misinterpret text on their own and reinforce stereotypes. A second challenge was that discussions can be off-task and therefore, less effective.

**Reinforces stereotypes.** Thein, Guise and Long (2011), found that while student-led book clubs encourage students to have authentic discussions with high levels of engagement, they can also create a dynamic that reinforces stereotypes. When texts are chosen that allow for discussions about social issues, students share information based on their preconceived beliefs and stereotypes (Thein et al., 2011; Bond, 2001). It was found that students cannot be expected to have discussions that support multicultural education

on their own. Instead, Thein et al. (2001) stated that they need stronger teacher support and guidance when discussing books that lead to these types of discussions.

**Off-task behaviors.** Studies have shown how off-task behaviors can be a challenge to student-led book clubs. *On-task behaviors* can be defined as having attention on and being engaged in the instructional activity (Godwin et al., 2013). On the contrary, *off-task behaviors* are defined as not having attention focused on the instructional task. Examples that Godwin et al. (2013) described include looking elsewhere, being distracted by supplies, walking around, interacting with other students in ways different than instructions stated to and talking about topics other than the book discussion.

Kong and Fitch (2003) explained that one way that students engage in off-task behaviors in book club discussions is when student's imaginations take hold of conversations. For example, students answer thought-provoking questions with no evidence from the book and instead make up an answer that is interesting to them. It can take multiple attempts of teacher intervention to help students realize their discussions were not quality literature conversations (Raphael & McMahon, 1994; Kong & Fitch, 2003).

Two explanations for why students may engage in off-task behaviors during book club is one, because the reading and/or discussion is too difficult. A second explanation is that the reading and/or discussion is too easy and therefore, not interesting. (Miller, 2015; Parsons et al., 2015). According to Vygotsky (as cited in Fournier & Riccio, 2013), this means that the learning activity, the reading and/or discussion, is not in the student's zone of proximal development. When learning is in the zone of proximal development,

students are able to work independently on a task that is at the correct level for them, or at a step higher level with support. If the activity is too easy for a student, they will be bored and disengaged. If the activity is too difficult, Fournier and Riccio (2013) explained that students feel overwhelmed and discouraged. Therefore, if students are a part of a book club that is not in their zone of proximal development, they are not able to stay engaged in the activity and end up partaking in off-task behaviors (Parsons et al., 2015).

**Summary.** A review of the literature has shown multiple challenges that can be faced when implementing student-led book clubs. The first is that book clubs may reinforce stereotypes and the second is that it may be difficult to manage the off-task behaviors in the book club format.

### **Interpretations of the Literature Review**

The goal of this literature review was to answer the question, “how can student-led book clubs support the development of reading engagement in primary grades?” The current academic literature leans heavily towards the positives of student-led book clubs. One benefit is they help strengthen student ownership over their learning. They also give students the opportunity to strengthen their speaking and listening skills as well as increase their comprehension of the text. The format of book clubs allows students to practice these authentic skills that will benefit them throughout life.

The challenges found in some pieces of academic literature can be problematic for some teachers. However, the difficulties are almost completely dependent on how the teacher initially implements and then manages the book clubs. For example, when

reading books with greater stereotypes, positions of power, or deep topics, the teacher could introduce the book in-depth and explain problems that may arise or help interpret information that could lead to stereotypical discussions. Serravallo (2010) explains this as a time to “introduce elements of the story (themes, concepts, time period) to help with prior knowledge” (Serravallo, 2010, p. 143). Teachers could also make sure to sit in the small-group discussions and share other perspectives when necessary.

A second challenge that became evident when researching is managing off-task behaviors. This is also highly dependent on the scaffolds the teacher has put in place as well as the amount of practice and modeling the teacher has done. Off-task behaviors are more common when students are working on an activity that is too easy or too difficult. This means the task is outside their zone of proximal development and it is the teacher’s role to make sure students are working on literacy tasks that fit for them. Students may also engage in off-task conversations if they are unsure of the expectations or do not know *how* to continue academic discussions.

These problems can be reduced when students and the teacher decide on expectations together and when the teacher creates opportunities for students to observe quality discussions being modeled. Students should also practice having their discussions with teacher support so they can practice building on each other’s thoughts and to learn new skills. The previously discussed difficulties are true challenges for all teachers and can vary in intensity dependent on student needs in each classroom. However, with the right support from resources about book clubs and the school, the challenges of book clubs can be reduced.

The purpose of this literature review was to answer the question, “how can student-led book clubs support the development of reading engagement in primary grades?” Reading engagement was the focus because it is directly correlated to reading comprehension, as Parsons et al. (2015) stated, and the format of book clubs lends itself well to collaboratively working with peers. There are many studies that have found book clubs to be a beneficial format of instruction. First, it strengthens reading comprehension. The format of book clubs also gives students the opportunity to make choices about their learning, which then increases engagement. For the above reasons, one can feel confident when stating student-led book clubs in primary grades *do* increase student reading engagement.

### **Chapter Summary**

There are many formats of literacy instruction that teachers can use to address the varying needs of students. This literature review focused on understanding the research surrounding student-led book clubs. The central question this chapter aimed to answer was, “how can student-led book clubs support the development of reading engagement in primary grades?”

This chapter first explored what book clubs are and how they can be organized in a classroom setting. It also discussed what it would look like in primary grades and then explored the different scaffolds needed for this age group to implement small-group, student-led book clubs.

Next, this literature review looked at reading engagement. It began by exploring what reading engagement is before examining how book clubs can increase engagement

in the classroom. On top of this, research shows that reading engagement increases when students are given a choice in the books they read and the interactive discussions they participate in. The book club format allows for this student choice.

Then, this chapter looked at the positive impact student-led book clubs can have on skills needed in school and in life. These positives include students feeling heightened ownership over their learning, strengthened speaking and listening skills, and greater understanding of the text they read.

Lastly, this literature review explored the challenges of student-led book clubs. Some studies found that student-led book clubs can reinforce stereotypes. A second challenge is that it can be difficult to manage off-task behaviors.

This literature review sought to answer the question, “how can student-led book clubs support the development of reading engagement in primary grades?” After completing a review of the literature surrounding student-led book clubs, it can be seen that they increase reading engagement in primary grades when implemented effectively. This format of literacy instruction offers student choice, opportunities for authentic interactions with peers, and activities that help support student comprehension of text.

Using this research, I have put together a “teacher toolkit” that teachers can use to efficiently and effectively implement small-group, student-led book clubs. The toolkit will be in the form of a website that teachers can use to learn the scaffolds and strategies used for book clubs in primary grades. The following chapter will describe the background information about the toolkit. It will begin by explaining what the toolkit will be composed of as well as who the intended audience is and when to use it. This

chapter will also explain what theories and resources the toolkit is based on. Chapter Three will support primary teachers as they learn more information about how to implement small-group, student-led book clubs in their classroom to increase reading engagement.



## CHAPTER THREE

### Project Description

#### Introduction

Most teachers strive to continually better their practice and learn new ways to engage their students. Depending on resources provided by the school, it can be difficult for teachers to implement a different form of instruction on their own. For this reason, this project will support teachers as they learn how to implement one specific format of literacy instruction: book clubs. A review of the academic literature aimed to answer the focus question of this project, “how can student-led book clubs support the development of reading engagement in primary grades?” After conducting a literature review it can be stated that, in summary, student-led book clubs have been supported by research to support the development of reading engagement.

This project will share the information gathered during this literature review of student-led book clubs. The [website](#) will be compiled of researched scaffolds used to implement student-led book clubs. This will be shared with other educators by creating a *teacher toolkit* website on how to implement them.

This chapter will begin by explaining what a teacher toolkit is and why this terminology is used. It will then delve into the overview of this project. Next, this chapter will describe the setting and audience this project is aimed for. It is important that teachers understand the framework supporting the type of project and why a website was chosen. For this reason, it is important to understand the research framework before

explaining the website format in-depth. Next, this chapter will explain the different components that will make up the website. Lastly, a description of the timeline this project was completed will be shared.

### **Project Overview: Teacher Website Toolkit**

I have created a website to educate teachers on how to implement book clubs. The website is designed as a teacher toolkit. This means teachers can access one location, much like a toolkit, to learn the different components needed to build student-led book clubs in their classrooms. In this case, the tools described on the website are researched strategies that were identified in the review of the research literature. These strategies are ones researchers recommend to support students as they learn how to independently lead and be a part of book clubs. In addition to strategies, this toolkit will also highlight additional resources and scaffolds that teachers can use with students when introducing book clubs. All of this information will be compiled on an organized website for teachers to easily navigate.

### **Audience and Setting**

The audience for this project is primary grade teachers who are interested in learning about a new format of literacy instruction that has the opportunity to support reading engagement. As stated earlier, I chose to focus on the needs of primary grade students because they require more scaffolds. Teachers of older grades can also use these scaffolds and adjust them as necessary to support their students. It is beneficial for teachers to have access to more scaffolds and choose not to use them.

The setting this project is aimed at is any elementary classroom. However, the research from the literature review surrounding book clubs is focused on primary grades. I found that book clubs are beneficial in all grades, but primary grades need specific scaffolds in order to be successful. This project will go in-depth into the extra steps and ways to practice that would not be necessary in older grades. It is the teacher's job to identify the needs of his or her students to decide the scaffolds and activities that will be the best fit.

### **Research Supporting Websites for Delivery of Professional Development**

Creating a website is the most efficient and easily accessible format for teachers to learn how to implement book clubs. I have used two academic sources to inform of the critical components of creating a website for teacher professional development. The first source is "Understanding by Design Guide to Creating High-Quality Units" (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). While I am not designing curriculum, this source is beneficial to learn how to organize a project as well as scaffold student learning.

The second source is "Investigating teachers' exploration of a professional development website: An innovative approach to understanding the factors that motivate teachers to use Internet-based resources" (Beach & Willows, 2014). This piece of literature explores the research surrounding professional development through websites. They found important components are needed in order for a website to be an effective format of professional development.

The design of my website begins with using Wiggins and McTighe's (2011) backward process. The first step in backwards design is to identify the desired results.

The desired results or goals for this website are to support teachers in implementing student-led book clubs in primary grades. The next step is to determine evidence that a teacher can use to determine the progress toward the learning goals. The final step is the creation of the learning plan. In this project, the learning plan will be the website.

The website design will also be influenced by the work of Beach and Willows (2014). The authors describe important components of a website that increase teacher use of professional development websites. The major findings are that the website needs to have high quality content, be efficient, and have a professional appearance (Beach & Willows, 2014).

### **Project Format: Website**

I have chosen to use a website format to support teachers as they implement student-led book clubs in primary grades. There are multiple reasons for this. First, it is easily accessible to all teachers and can be accessed whether a teacher is at school or in another location. Second, a website can be designed to allow for easy navigation to the different sections depending on which piece the teacher wants to explore. Sections on this website include overview, scaffolds, teacher testimonies and a location for feedback. Lastly, this format can be updated as research continues to grow and new strategies are found to be beneficial.

Websites are easily accessed no matter where a teacher is located. This is important because teachers learning how to implement book clubs is not dependent on the resources a school has. It is also helpful that teachers can learn about a plan for book club

whether they are at school, home, or another location. Using a website allows for all teachers to have access at their own convenience.

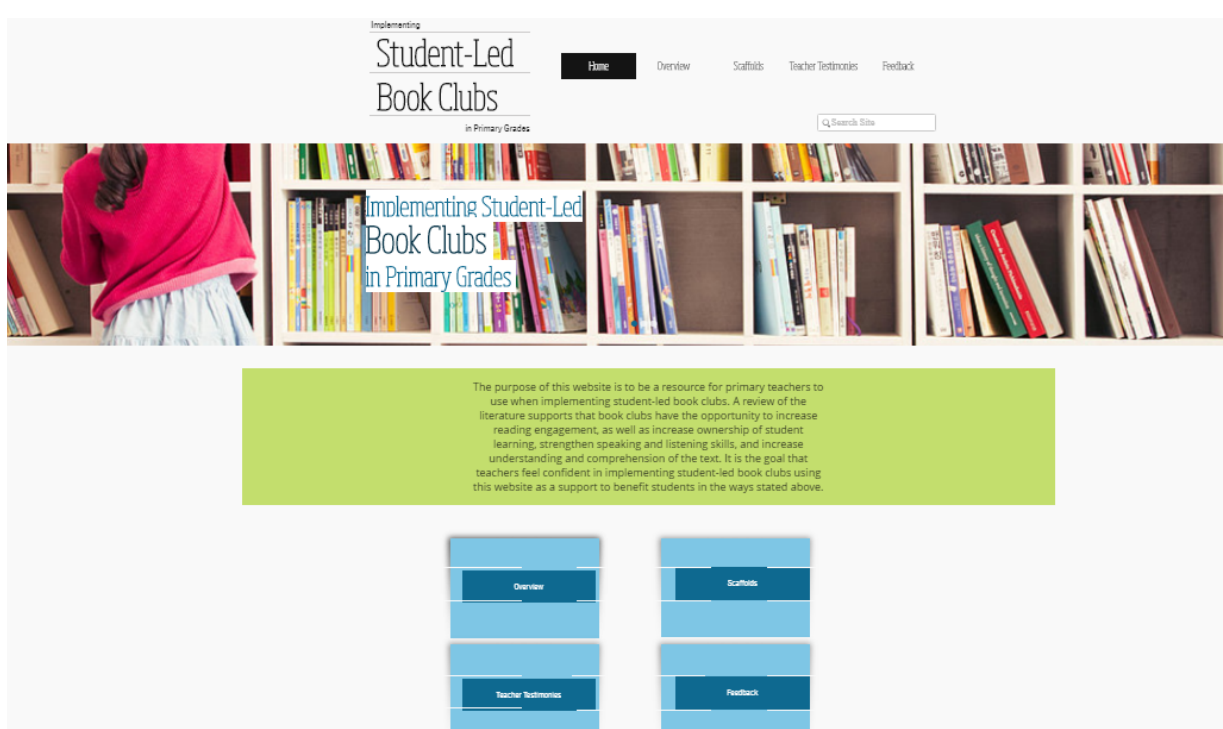
As all teachers know, time is precious. We need to use resources that allow us to work efficiently and effectively. The format of a website allows for this because all components of the project are in one location and are organized in labeled parts of the website. On a website, teachers will be able to download resources and see examples. Some teachers compile their own information about a topic by navigating between multiple websites and using different resources. This website will save time for teachers who are learning how to implement book clubs because all of the information will already be compiled in one location.

The last reason I chose to use a website for my project is because it can be updated. As research continues to grow, more strategies and activities will be created. The format of a website can be viewed as a working document, in which it can always be updated and improved. Information, advice from teachers, and background research can be updated as it comes out. This will ensure that the website is composed of the most current and most effective information.

I chose to create this project in the format of a website for three main purposes. First, it is easy to access for all teachers and from any location. Second, websites are efficient and have all the scaffolds, strategies, activities, examples and downloads in one location. Lastly, websites can be updated to ensure that information is current and aligned with what research states.

### **Project Description**

I chose to create a website for teachers to access so they can learn the research surrounding book clubs, scaffolds used to implement them, strategies and activities to use during each part of implementation, as well as pieces of advice from teachers who have implemented student-led book clubs. It is critical that teachers use research-supported formats of instruction. Throughout the website, the strategies and descriptions will be briefly explained by the researcher so teachers can learn about how they are research-supported. There are four components of the website: overview, scaffolds, teacher testimonials and feedback. The following is a screenshot from the homepage of this website.



The first part of the website is an overview of what book clubs are composed of in primary grades. This gives teachers an idea of the different parts of a book club: mini

lesson, read book, write stop-and-jot, have discussion. With this, teachers who are not familiar with book clubs in primary grades can get an idea of what they can expect.

The second component of the website are the scaffolds the research suggests using. It is broken down into full-class scaffolds, small-group scaffolds, and then student-led book club. Within each section, there are multiple scaffolds to help students build skills first with the whole class, then in small groups, and finally in student-led book clubs. Along with each scaffold, there is an identified student learning target to help students identify the skill they are working to master. In this part of the website, there are also links to PDF downloads of resources. Examples of resources include mini-poster sentence starters to support students having discussions as well as a stop-and-jot template. The following is a screenshot of one portion of the section on scaffolds.

The screenshot shows a website page with a blue header containing the title "How do I implement small-group, student-led book clubs in primary grades?". Below the title is a sub-header "Below you will find research-supported scaffolds to use as you work towards creating small-group, student-led book clubs in your classroom." and a three-step process: "Step 1: Full Class Practice", "Step 2: Small Group Practice", and "Step 3: Small Group, Student-Led Book Clubs".

Below the steps are three colored boxes representing different scaffold types:

- Full-Class Scaffolds** (green box): "Begin with a full-class book club and build scaffolds needed while reading a chapter book aloud." with a right-pointing arrow.
- Small-Group Scaffolds** (blue box): "While reading aloud to the class, students practice participating in book club discussions in small groups." with a right-pointing arrow.
- Student-Led Book Clubs** (red box): "Students read their own book and participate in a student-led book club discussion." with a right-pointing arrow.

Below these boxes is a section titled "Full-Class PRACTICE" with a dashed border. Underneath is a sub-section titled "Create Guidelines".

**Student Learning Target:** I can help create guidelines. This means I will help decide guidelines to follow during

**To help manage book clubs, Heller (2006) stated that it is important to create expectations as a class to follow during book clubs. Serrevallo (2010) agreed and suggested that the class should come up with guidelines everyone must follow about what it means to listen to each other and be respectful as they contribute to the conversations.**

**Examples of expectations to discuss include-**

1. What your body should be doing when you are listening (facing the speaker)
2. Non-verbal cues that can be beneficial (nodding along)
3. Non-verbal cues that can be detrimental (looking away) (Serrevallo, 2015).

A third section of this website is advice from real teachers that have previously implemented book clubs in their primary grade classroom. It is incredibly beneficial to learn tips and tricks that other teachers have already tried and have had success with. Having a balance between research and teacher testimonies will bridge the information and make it directly relatable in a classroom. I also know that there are difficulties that arise in activities depending on student needs. If another teacher has already found a way to support a student with a particular need, teachers who are implementing them will be able to share it on the last section of the website.

The final section is created for feedback from teachers who reference this website. This will be a way I can learn from other teachers about parts that are not easily navigated or that need more information. I will also be able to answer questions teachers may have. It is also a goal that teachers who are in the process of implementing book clubs will be able to share their tips on this feedback page so other teachers can learn from them.

### **Timeline**

My project was created during the winter and spring of 2019. The design was supported by the work of Beach and Willows (2014) and Wiggins and McTighe's (2011) to create the basis of the website. This means I focused on first identifying the desired results, which was implementing small-group, student-led book clubs. The next step was to support it with evidence, which means I used research from the literature review to inform and organize the scaffolds and information to share. Using this information, I created the website, or as Wiggins and McTighe (2011) would state, the learning plan. As I created the website, I had Beach and Willows (2014) findings in mind that my website



needs to have high quality content, be efficient to use and have a professional appearance in order to be the most beneficial for professional development.

After completing the literature review and first three chapters of this Capstone in the fall of 2018, I began the journey of creating my project, writing Chapter Four and the abstract in the winter of 2019. In the spring of 2019, I began the gratifying experience of finalizing my entire Capstone project. My final project was completed April 2019 and can be accessed using this [link](#). This paper is available to the public in [Hamline's Digital Commons](#).

### **Summary**

Student-led book clubs increase reading engagement (Parsons et al., 2015) and this format of literacy instruction is supported in academic literature as being beneficial to student learning. I learned this as I researched the question, “how can student-led book clubs support the development of reading engagement in primary grades?” For this reason, I will create a website that will support teachers as they implement this format of literacy instruction.

This chapter began by giving an overview of the project and defining what a teacher toolkit is. Next, it described that the target audience is primary grade teachers who are interested in implementing a new format of literacy instruction that can increase reading engagement. This chapter then explored the research describing important components of creating a website for professional development. After discussing the research, this chapter described the reasoning behind using a website format, which is because it is easily accessible, efficient to navigate and can be updated as needed. Lastly,

the different components of the website were described, which include sections for scaffolds, teacher testimonials and feedback. This project was created during the winter and spring of 2019. It was completed officially on April 30, 2019.

The focus question that this paper aimed to answer is, “how can student-led book clubs support the development of reading engagement in primary grades?” A review of the literature concludes that this format of literacy instruction is incredibly beneficial for students. Using supporting sources, a teacher toolkit was created to help teachers implement book clubs in their primary grade classrooms.

The following chapter begins by discussing new learnings from the Capstone process and is followed by a review of the most important sources and information from the literature review in relation to this project. It then describes the limitations of the research and how they affected my Capstone. After, this chapter will explain recommendations based on the literature review for teacher implementation as well as possible research opportunities in the future. Next, it will explain how the Capstone paper and the website project will be communicated for use of teachers. Lastly, I will discuss how this project is beneficial to the teaching profession. Chapter Four concludes this Capstone paper as a final reflection.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Conclusion**

#### **Introduction**

This Capstone project set out to answer the question, “how can student-led book clubs support the development of reading engagement in primary grades?” The journey of researching, writing a literature review, creating my website and completing this project is a journey that will impact my teaching for years to come. Not only did my knowledge and understanding about an intriguing and beneficial format of instruction increase, but I also went through the process of researching and critically analyzing a variety of sources focused on this topic. This gave me the opportunity to reflect on my current teaching and set goals for the future.

This chapter will begin with a reflection of my personal new learnings from this Capstone. Then I will discuss the most impactful information and sources of the literature review, followed by a description of the limitations of the research and how the gaps in research affected my project. Next, recommendations based on findings for both implementation as well as next steps for research will be explained before discussing how this project will be communicated. Lastly, I will describe how this project is beneficial to the teaching profession.

#### **New Learnings**

The process of completing this Capstone has led me to reflect on personal growth as a researcher, writer and learner. As a researcher and writer, I focused on becoming

more intentional with my time and my writing style. As a learner, I have grown to deeply understand the importance of understanding the *why* behind my instructional practices.

While growing as a researcher and writer in multiple ways, the most significant was my intentionality. Writing a capstone requires in-depth research and synthesizing of dozens of sources. The amount of time put into this process is countless. Because of this, it was critical to become more intentional about my work. One way of focusing my intentions was through my work space and time. I became careful about doing work during the day, knowing I was not as productive at night. It was also important to work at a space that was conducive for solid research and writing. For me, this was at a table I could spread out at with zero noise. A second way to become more intentional about my research and writing was to be more organized and concise. I printed and labeled all the research articles, complete with highlighting and notes in the margins to make synthesizing while writing more smooth. While writing, it was a goal to be direct and concise. This took targeted focus as I know myself as a writer and tend to over-explain. Throughout the process of creating this Capstone, my intentionality has grown as a researcher and writer.

This Capstone process has not only pushed me to grow as a researcher and writer, but also to become a more knowledgeable learner. I learned about the benefits and challenges of book clubs, along with information about how to best implement them in a primary grade classroom. While previously knowing some of this information, which is what drew me to this Capstone topic, I learned a significant amount more throughout this research. This made me realize how many other teaching strategies and practices I know

a surface-level amount about. This idea ignited a desire within me to continue deepening my practices. While feeling like I have a solid understanding of *how* to implement and use a variety of teaching strategies and practices, I do not have a deep understanding of *why*. Now having the knowledge of the research behind student-led book clubs, I truly understand the value of implementing this format of literacy instruction. As a learner, this excites me to learn about the *why* behind other instructional practices to positively impact my current and future students.

This Capstone project has pushed me to become a more intentional researcher and writer. As a learner, it has also encouraged me to reflect on the amount of teaching practices I understand the *how* of more than the *why*. In reality, understanding the *why* positively impacts teaching practices and it is crucial that I continue to learn the background information of all of my teaching practices. These new learnings have positively impacted my teaching abilities and therefore, my future student's learning.

This journey has also contributed to how I view myself as both a teacher and a leader. I now view myself as being in a position in which I am responsible to impact other teacher's practices as I have my own. I will do this on a small-scale by sharing this project with the teachers at my school and offering support to those who choose to use this format of literacy instruction. On a larger scale, this website will be available to all teachers on the internet. I will offer support to those online by being available to answer questions and discuss student-led book clubs on the messaging portion of my website. Because of this Capstone project, I am in a position to share what I have learned and support other teachers as they also work to better their teaching practice.

## Literature Review Discussion

After completing a review of the literature, I found an abundance of information regarding how to implement student led book clubs and the positive effects of student-led book clubs in primary grades. The benefits include: opportunities for higher reading engagement, increased ownership of student learning, strengthened speaking and listening skills, and increased understanding and comprehension of the text.

Completing a review of the literature allowed me to identify important parts of the research behind the model of student-led book clubs to support reading engagement. Not only did my new learnings impact my Capstone project, but they also contributed to personal critique and improvement as a teacher. Multiple sources were particularly impactful. Miller (2015), Kong and Fitch (2003) and Parsons et al. (2015) supported the background information about the positives of book clubs and why they are a beneficial format of literacy instruction. From there, Serravallo (2010 & 2015) was particularly helpful in sharing important scaffolds and ways of implementing book clubs.

This project aimed to answer the question, “how can student-led book clubs support the development of reading engagement in primary grades?” There are a few key findings from my literature review that influenced my project focus of how book clubs can support the development of reading engagement. First, Miller (2015) explained how book clubs have the opportunity to support reading engagement by being a format that allows for student choice in books. Kong and Fitch (2003) found that this is important because when students can relate the book to their own lives, they can make deeper connections and understand the text better. On top of this Parsons, Malloy, Parsons and

Burrowbridge (2015) explained how working in groups with peers can have positive effects on student engagement. These benefits proved to me that this format of literacy instruction is worth implementing. In addition to implementation in my own classroom, I am now in a more knowledgeable position to be a leader in my school and educate other teachers about the research I have done.

Because of the opportunity book clubs have on supporting the development of reading engagement, I chose to create a project to support teachers as they implement student-led book clubs. At this point, Serravallo (2010, 2015) greatly influenced my project. I used her recommendations on how book clubs could be structured and the different scaffolds that should be put in place. This information was most helpful when creating my website. While these sources and more were influential in this project, there is a significant gap in research that impacted my project.

### **Limitations**

A review of the literature found an abundance of sources supporting book clubs as an effective format of literacy instruction. That being said, there is a significant gap in research regarding the challenges of student-led book clubs. Therefore, this lack of research is a limitation of this project and for teachers in the field who want to implement student-led book clubs. This literature review was not able to accurately represent and give advice on real challenges teachers face when implementing student-led book clubs. While it touched on two major challenges, reinforcing stereotypes and management, there are not enough sources about these topics to synthesize and feel confident that my findings are representative of the majority. As an emerging research-scholar, it is my

recommendation that a next step in research would be to learn more about the challenges of book clubs and how teachers can work to limit them in their classroom.

This gap in research affected my project. My original goal was to have a “Frequently Asked Questions” page on my website in which teachers can find answers to questions regarding challenges of student-led book clubs in primary grades based on research. However, due to the lack of sources describing the challenges of student-led book clubs, I decided to adjust my plan and instead create a page where teachers who have implemented student-led book clubs can share their tips. I purposely asked teachers to focus on a challenge and a tip to combat the difficulty, as opposed to sharing only positive advice.

Along with limitations of the research which impacts implementation of book clubs, there is also a significant policy implication: not all schools have the financial ability to supply a variety of quality literature. This project discussed the importance of offering student choice to increase reading engagement in book clubs. However, this is only possible when a school has access to multiple copies of a text from a variety of genres and reading levels. Not all schools have the financial ability to offer this choice. The ability to have a variety of quality literature is dependent on policy decisions for funding made by the district and/or state.

### **Recommendations Based on Findings**

Based on the findings from the literature review, I have made recommendations for teachers as they use the website for implementation of book clubs. I have also made recommendations for future research opportunities.



**Recommendations for implementation.** When teachers use the website to learn the scaffolds, it is important to use the information with their own classroom in mind because each student has varying needs. The literature supports all students being a part of book clubs. However, the book clubs should be structured according to each student's needs. For example, a teacher could continue reading a chapter book aloud to the class so all students can access full-class book club discussions. Other students who are able to read chapter books may be a part of small-group, student-led book clubs. The research shows that being a part of book clubs, even if the format of set up differently, is beneficial to students to strengthen their speaking and listening skills (Kong & Fitch, 2003; Serravallo, 2015), their understanding of the text (Griffin, 2010; Barone, 2011; Kong & Fitch, 2003) and ultimately, their reading engagement. In summary, it is highly recommended for every teacher to look closely at their student's needs so they can offer all students to be a part of book clubs.

**Recommendations for research.** As stated earlier, there is a significant gap in the research regarding challenges of student-led book clubs. It would help teachers to have an understanding of difficulties that might arise with student-led book clubs before implementing them. Further, if teachers are given tools to directly help with a challenge they are facing, it would help teachers to implement them successfully. For this reason, next steps for research would not only identify challenges that teachers face, but also give direct steps on how to prevent and handle the difficulties.

### **Communicating the Results**

This paper and project will be located in the [Hamline Digital Commons](#). Teachers who are interested in learning in-depth about implementing book clubs will be able to read this paper. To access a wider variety of teachers, I created the website as a time efficient and effective way for other teachers to learn about how to implement student-led book clubs. I have shared this website link with teachers at the school I work at and have encouraged them to share the link with other teachers who are interested. It will also be available when teachers search online for support in implementing book clubs. Using the website, teachers will be able to easily follow the researched scaffolds needed to implement book clubs. It is the goal that book clubs become a more common format of literacy instruction in primary grades.

### **Benefits to the Teaching Profession**

This project is beneficial to the teaching profession because it allows for a time efficient and effective format to educate teachers on a new way to teach literacy. As Beach and Willows (2014) found, a website for the use of professional development is successful when it has high quality content, is efficient and has a professional appearance. In addition, websites are available to all teachers no matter the resources their particular school has to offer. Websites also offer a concise format to inform their readers of the most important aspects of book clubs and allow the reader to easily navigate to the parts that are most beneficial to them as a teacher. For the above reasons, teachers will benefit from this efficient and effective format of using a website for personal professional development.

Not only will teachers benefit from using this website to learn how to implement student-led book clubs, students will as well. Each format of literacy instruction has benefits targeted for varying needs of students. As the literature review suggested, in book clubs students are given the opportunity to strengthen reading engagement, increase ownership of student learning, strengthen speaking and listening skills, and increase understanding and comprehension of the text.

### **Summary**

Chapter Four began by reviewing the most impactful sources of the literature review used in this project. Then, limitations of the research and how these gaps affect this project were discussed. From there, I explained recommendations based on findings for teachers as they implement book clubs as well as next steps for research. I then discussed how the information in this Capstone Project will be communicated and finally, how this project is beneficial to the teaching profession.

I set out to answer the question: “how can student-led book clubs support the development of reading engagement in primary grades?” A review of the literature supports that the format of book clubs has the opportunity to increase reading engagement, as well as increase ownership of student learning, strengthen speaking and listening skills, and increase comprehension of the text. This project was made with passion in hopes to support teachers in feeling confident about implementing student-led book clubs. It is the ultimate desire that student’s literacy skills will greatly increase as a result of being a part of student-led book clubs.

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