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Engaging Middle Schoolers: Teaching Strategies for Boosting Independent Reading Motivation in Middle School

Hannah Schrempp

Factors in Independent Reading Engagement for Middle School Students

by

Hannah Schrempp

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Capstone Project Facilitator: Kelly Killorn
Content Reviewer: Sarah Krall
Peer Reviewer: Elizabeth Moklestad

DEDICATION

To my husband, Slater, who has held my hand through this entire journey. A huge thank

you to my Capstone Committee, specifically Elizabeth. I wouldn't have made it through

without your wisdom, encouragement, and guidance. Lastly, I want to thank my students

who continue to inspire me and push me to seek information so that I can be the best

teacher that I can be.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Capstone Question

Literacy has always been at the forefront of my life. I did not have one profound moment where a parent or teacher made a large impact, but I had many experiences around literacy that have made an everlasting impact. I was considered a non-proficient reader and struggled with fluency. I was beyond proud of myself when I was finally able to read an entire page of a chapter book without one single error. Despite knowing I was not the best, I was never put in a position where I felt like a failure. Every single literacy experience felt positive and successful. Those small academic experiences led me to where I am today. When students walk through the doors of my classroom, I want to provide them with opportunities to feel successful. Working in the field of literacy education and serving middle school students, it is astounding to meet the number of students who do not view themselves as readers and writers and read at levels that are significantly below grade level. These experiences are what have led me to my capstone project question: *What factors impact reading motivation in middle school students to help them identify as readers?*

This chapter includes the context of my project, my journey with literacy, and how my passion for understanding the whole child developed over time. The chapter also details my life as a student, educator, and graduate student at Hamline University. This led to the capstone question and my capstone project of educational blog posts. The importance of this capstone question in education and, more specifically, in the author's

middle school classroom is also addressed. Finally, the chapter is summarized and addresses the organization of the rest of the chapters.

Rationale

My interest in this topic derives from my work with middle school students, more specifically, the students in my current urban school district. It is profoundly troubling to witness the number of students who consider themselves non-readers. Early in my career, I found that I would place blame on parents or other educators when I received a student who fit this particular profile. Although both are crucial in developing a student's love for reading, I quickly learned there are a multitude of factors that contribute to a student's motivation in reading, especially in reading independently.

It is important that throughout this project, I discover what factors impact reading motivation in middle school students, which has contributed to an adolescent's limited intrinsic motivation to read independently. It is important that students identify as readers. Gambrell (1996) stated engaged readers are motivated, choosing to read for a variety of purposes and using the information gained from previous experiences to construct a new understanding from a text. Engaged readers are strategic, use a plethora of strategies, and work through a difficult text. Students should be socially interactive with texts and their peers so they are able to share and communicate with others in the process of constructing and extending the meaning of a text (p. 16). I want to provide educators with resources and literature that support the whole child and give teachers concrete information on how to support students who struggle to find the motivation to read.

This project is important to me because I want to contribute to the field of literacy education that considers the whole child: the cultural, social/emotional, academic, and

socioeconomic aspects of their life. I want middle school students to fall back in love with reading and to continue that journey into adulthood. Providing positive literacy experiences can change the trajectory of a student's academic success into high school and beyond. The information gathered throughout this process will not only benefit my classroom, students, and school, but it will also have a much further reach to many varied school communities, due to the nature of this project. This project could change how educators view readers in their middle school classrooms.

Context

Early in my career, I read Miller's *The Book Whisperer* (2009) and one specific quote has stuck with me since:

Reading changes your life. Reading unlocks worlds unknown or forgotten, taking travelers around the world and through time. Reading helps you escape the confines of school and pursue your own education. Through characters – the saints and the sinners, real or imagined – reading shows you how to be a better human being. (p. 18)

I know first-hand the impact independent reading has on a child, and how it can benefit them throughout their lives. I want students to feel as though they have the world at their fingertips through reading.

The purpose of this capstone is to do an in-depth literature review of the motivational factors, families' roles in reading, and teaching practices that have contributed to students' lack of interest in independent reading; discover what strategies educators can implement to combat this lack of motivation; and create classrooms that foster a love of reading, specifically in the middle school. I want to discover the social,

academic, and economic factors that contribute to a student's lack of interest in independent reading, strategies that can be used to engage students in reading, and how independent reading impacts academics. I believe independent reading can ignite a love for reading, increase academic achievement, and provide windows and mirrors through which students can view the world and themselves through new lenses.

Experience

In this section, I explained my educational background and my career journey that proved to be significant to this project. My literacy path was influenced through my experiences with books. In addition, my courses at Hamline University have contributed to my passion for fostering a love for reading in middle school students. Finally, independent reading played an important role in my classroom.

Personal Experience

I grew up in a single-parent home where my father worked late nights. We did not always have the most traditional nighttime routine where a parent tucked you into bed and read you a bedtime story. I vividly remember sleeping in my dad's car just outside his work if there was no one else to watch my brother and me. But, I do remember that whenever he could, he read to us. My brother and I would scurry up his lap as he pulled out yet another Berenstain Bears book. Even at a young age, I felt like I could relate to Brother and Sister Bear. As my dad read the words, I felt myself right beside Sister Bear, devastated that the boys would not let us into the neighborhood clubhouse. Whenever he could, my father made reading moments special.

There were times I would come home from school and walk up two flights of stairs to unload my school bag in my shared room to find a little surprise on my pillow.

My father knew how much I loved to read, but he also knew my endless love for Beanie Babies. He would shop at a local knick-knack boutique, find my new stuffed best friend, and select a book to match. Before I had even learned how to read, I could not wait to dive in. With my new friend in tow, I would embark on a new adventure as I flipped through the pages.

My kindergarten teacher brought reading and writing to another level. Everything we did in the classroom matched a theme. I vividly remember learning all about pumpkins. We read fiction and non-fiction texts, explored pumpkin patches, and examined their insides to help us scribble our thoughts out on paper. She created moments where we felt empowered about what we were reading.

In third grade, I started to realize some of my faults as a reader. I struggled to read fluently and became frustrated. I felt judged by my peers and started having a negative view of myself. I did not see myself as smart or as a good reader. Luckily, I had a teacher who saw my reading potential and provided me with the assistance I needed. A couple of times a week, I was pulled out of class by a volunteer. She was a parent of a student in my class. I was excused from class to meet in my favorite place, the school library. We were reading *Hatchet* by Gary Paulson (1986). She would have me read aloud, too, but I never felt like I was being judged. As I read through the pages, she would coach me in different ways to work around unknown words. Each week my confidence as a reader grew. I could read paragraphs without a single mistake, and I finally felt like I could tackle any word. This parent volunteer helped me find my love for reading again.

I was eager to start my middle school years. I loved school and appreciated the learning process. But I soon found out that in middle school, reading seemed to

disappear. Reading turned into timed reading. It felt punitive. Long gone were the days with the parent volunteer and my little slice of reading paradise. No longer supported, I had to maneuver through difficult texts. Teachers assumed students knew everything, and if they did not, they were left in the dust. I did not come out of it a better reader or writer; I came out a literacy survivor.

Luckily, even with these experiences, I still loved to read. Each night I would pull out one of many Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul (1997) books. The poems, diary entries, and stories engulfed me as I read. I saw myself in each story. I felt the writers' pains, successes, and worries. The reflections encouraged me to write too. Although my diary days were short-lived, I enjoyed writing about my day. It helped me process my thoughts and kept me sane through some of the hardest times of my life. Books are mirrors and windows and I have yet to lose my passion and love for books. That is why I want to further my investigation into what causes students to lose their love or motivation for reading independently.

Professional Experience

As a current middle school reading teacher, I have seen literacy survivors just like me. Year after year, a multitude of students pass through my door that do not see the benefits of reading. Many students identify as non-readers or have said, "I hate reading", typically accompanied with moans and groans when asked to take out their choice books. Reading felt like a chore and students would not put forth their best effort. When I hear these common phrases come out of a student's mouth, it makes me wonder, what happened in this student's life to cause such ill feelings towards reading? Is this an

access, educational, or social issue? I feel as though I am slowly learning the answers to these questions.

Throughout my career, I have taken the time to read through informational texts by literacy greats such as Kelly Gallager (2009), Penny Kittle (2018), and Donalyn Miller (2011, 1996). I noticed a recurring theme when they spoke about books in a classroom: Let kids read. Not assigned or leveled reading, but reading where students make their own choices. What I struggled with the most was finding the time in the school day to provide reading choice. I had to change my mindset around independent reading, and this took time.

I made small strides toward this goal of allowing extended independent reading time, but I did not find my groove until my sixth year of teaching. Anytime my students were inside a book, whether it was for guided reading or independent reading time, I made sure they were the ones selecting the text. As students moved through the school year, I noticed how more of my students were engaged in reading activities, were eager to select books on their own, and were reading through chapter books.

Last year, I had the privilege of teaching only sixth-grade reading. With 48 minutes, I had to become creative to squeeze in independent reading time. Wanting to make sure I was using this time wisely, I met with a group of students each day at the start of class. This was no easy feat; however, I was successful. Books moved through my classroom library like a constant stream. I witnessed students fall in love, feel heard, seen, and become obsessed with characters and storylines. Carving out time to allow students to fall back in love with reading not only benefited their social and emotional growth but their academic growth as well.

Positionality statement

Growing up as a middle class child who lived close to a public library within a privileged neighborhood, I understand that this is not the norm for many children. I lack an understanding of what it is like living in an area with limited resources and access to reading materials. I was part of a school district and environment that valued literacy and creating positive literacy experiences throughout my academic career. I understand that not all children have the same experience as I did. I want to understand more about the factors that hinder an adolescent's motivation to read and what can happen within the classroom to reverse negative feelings towards reading.

Conclusion

In this section, I explained my aspiration to complete this project and the context of why it is important to me. I shared my journey as a daughter in a single parent home, a student, and a teacher. Finally, I revealed the importance of this project. This project is important to me and important to the field of education because I want other students to have experiences with books that are similar to what my students have had. I also wanted other educators to see the benefits of independent reading. In Chapter Two, I summarize the social, academic, economic, and pedagogical factors when considering students' lack of motivation to independently read. Additionally, I provide gathered information to indicate the benefits of independent reading inside middle school classrooms. In Chapter Three, I describe my capstone project in complete detail. My project is a series of blog posts. These blog posts seek to inform educators of answers to my capstone question: *What factors impact reading motivation in middle school students to help them identify as*

readers? Each post is outlined and explained. Finally, Chapter Four is my final reflection

on this project. I detail what I learned throughout my capstone project.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

Student choice and motivation in reading are interdependent. Both are essential components in curriculum design and for the middle school reading environment. Chapter One displayed the vital role choice played in this author's literacy journey. It acknowledged that student choice was at the core of classroom instruction and contributed to positive literacy experiences at home and school. Chapter Two surveyed the current literature behind reading motivation and student choice. This literature answered the capstone project question: *What factors impact reading motivation in middle school students to help them identify as readers?* It is important to note that current literature around student choice has become more prevalent throughout the years (Brozo & Flynt, 2008; Cambourne, 1995; Gambrell, 2011; Guthrie & Klauda, 2014; Malloy, Marinak, Gambrell, & Mazzoni, 2013). These factors were evident in current literature on middle school students and success in reading. The information shared the many studies of the interdependence of student choice and motivation and how that learning can benefit adolescent independent reading motivation.

After a thorough review of literature on student choice as it relates to reading motivation, three overarching themes emerged. The first theme is the definition of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and what it looks like inside and outside the classroom. The second theme explained family influence on reading motivation, understanding parent perspectives and beliefs around reading, the importance of home experiences with print, and challenges families face to provide reading resources and experiences at home.

This section also described the relationship between home and school in relation to reading motivation. Lastly, the final theme in Chapter Two is teaching practices. This section provides an overview of teaching practices that have hindered adolescent reading motivation and challenges educators face within reading curriculums to foster student engagement. This theme detailed teaching practices that promote student choice, best practices, and increased motivation in the classroom.

The end of Chapter Two addressed the literature behind effective educational blogging that was used to develop this capstone project. The rationale for this project and how it relates to the question: *What factors impact reading motivation in middle school students to help them identify as readers?* was also given. Overarching themes were also reviewed. Finally, Chapters Three and Four were introduced. In the next section, types of motivation were defined, and the connection between motivation and reading and learning was described.

Motivation to Read

In this section, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation were defined through various resources and citations. Studies in motivational constructs may help identify factors that hinder middle school students' motivation to read. Additionally, this section provides an overview of motivational construct theories that provide evidence of the idea that multiple factors contribute to an adolescent's literacy journey. It is important to understand factors that may positively or negatively affect students' motivation to read.

Definition of Motivation

Motivation is the process that initiates, guides, and maintains goal-oriented behaviors (Cherry, 2020). Motivation involves the biological, emotional, social, and

cognitive forces that activate behavior. Motivation does not only refer to the factors that activate behaviors; it also involves the factors that direct and maintain goal-directed actions (Cherry, 2020). Motivation causes one to act, regardless of whether they are cleaning their cars because of the mess or reading a book for pleasure. Hayenga and Corpus (2010) identified two different types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is the engagement of a task for the simple reward a task brings, while extrinsic motivation is the engagement in an undertaking to accomplish a certain result to receive a reward.

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation and its Relation to Reading

Reading is an intrinsically and extrinsically motivated action. Middle school students read for numerous reasons, including social interaction, involvement, and relevance. Gambrell (2011) promoted the idea of reading as an intrinsic action because when students are intrinsically motivated to read, their internal desire drives them, resulting in a lifelong practice. Intrinsically motivated students who see reading as desirable will continue and sustain their engagement in reading and thus become better readers (p. 177).

Extrinsically motivated reading, in contrast, is directed toward receiving external recognition, rewards, or incentives. Wang and Guthrie (2004) found:

When students desire to avoid punishment or to meet teachers' or parents' expectations, they are extrinsically motivated because their desire to read is controlled externally. Furthermore, when students are extrinsically motivated, their reading is not initiated by their interest but rather by their desire to attain

socially valued outcomes, defined as good grades, recognition from others, or

required work. (p. 165)

In a later section, Chapter Two addressed the various factors that have led to

increased emphasis on external motivation. Children are part of a society where they are

required to pass tests, receive titles, earn degrees, and receive rewards that bring instant

satisfaction. Extrinsic motivation has increased over time due to this social phenomenon

(Pinnell & Fountas, 2009).

Motivation and Learning

Motivation plays a critical role in learning. Students read for various reasons that

are both extrinsically and intrinsically motivated. Both have a powerful influence on an

adolescent's literacy journey (Gambrell, 1996). Literature on reading supported the idea

that good reading needs to be systematic and explicitly taught to enhance literacy

development. However, if educators teach students to read, but they have no desire to do

so, there will be little to no achievement in creating life-long readers. Information

gathered supported the idea that educators need to focus on creating motivating

experiences as well as developing a reader's skills. The two experiences must be nurtured

simultaneously (Becker, McElvany, & Kortenbruck, 2010; Malloy, Marinak, Gambrell, &

Mazzoni, 2013; Morrow, 2004). There needs to be a naturally occurring combination of

intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. In a study conducted by Hayenga and Corpus (2010),

research showed a rapid decline in academic engagement in middle school due to its rigid

rule structures and less support for student autonomy. Middle school students are entering

a stage of life and education where they are expected to have already developed intrinsic

motivation for their learning and reading. However, they may not have had the

experiences needed to foster that type of intrinsic motivation. A student's sense of belonging, feelings towards exams, and the increasing difficulty over their middle school years contribute to their reading motivation (pp. 371–380). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are needed to create lifelong readers.

Intrinsic reading motivation has a positive association with the level of ability, text comprehension, amount of reading, and reading efficiency. Effective readers possess both the skill and the will to read. However, school districts have moved towards incentives to motivate students to read, which can produce self-terminating behavior. Once a child receives the reward, their motivation to read ceases. Extrinsic incentives foster a child's dependence on rewards and recognition to encourage their reading (Pinnell & Fountas, 2009). As children move through their academic careers, their motivation to read will differ based on their experiences. In addition, a child's socioeconomic status and social influences contribute to their motivation to read (Becker, McElvany, & Kortenbruck, 2010; Gambrell, 1996). The ultimate goal is that middle school students are intrinsically motivated to read, however, there are still many external factors that can motivate students. It is important to utilize extrinsic motivation as adolescents are still motivated by their school environment, peers, and guardians (Becker, McElvany, & Kortenbruck, 2010).

Summary

In the previous section, motivation was defined as intrinsic and extrinsic. This literature stated the factors that potentially cause adolescent readers to lose interest in reading. The experts that defined intrinsic and extrinsic reading motivation believe both should be used simultaneously to achieve motivation to read independently. In order to

understand the factors that impact reading motivation, one needs to understand the meaning of motivation. This is one answer to the question: *What factors impact reading motivation in middle school students to help them identify as readers?* Furthermore, motivation was defined which led to the next point of discussion which focused on the factors that may impact adolescent reading motivation. This next section focuses on the family's role in reading and how it contributes to one's reading motivations and experiences.

Family's Role in Reading Introduction

Parents play a critical role in the literacy development of their children. A home's influence on a child's motivation to read begins in the preschool years. Parental factors such as education and income are connected to the quality and quantity of literacy experiences (Baker, Scher, & Mackler, 1997). Early reading engagement stems from the relationship to reading parents convey to their children that reading is pleasurable and valuable. Additionally, literature supported the importance of home-school collaborations between parents and teachers (Baker, Scher, & Mackler, 1997; Neuman, & Celano, 2001). This section detailed family influence on reading motivation, understanding parent perspectives and beliefs around reading, the importance of home experiences with print, and challenges families face to provide reading resources and experiences at home. The second part of this section presented the relationship between home and school in relation to reading motivation.

A Home's Influence on Reading Motivation

A home's influence on reading can be defined as the experiences parents provide their children with in terms of developing their attitude, interest, and motivation towards

reading (Baker, Scher, & Mackler, 1997). Information gathered supported the role of families as contributors to a child's positive relationship with reading. Adults have developed their values and beliefs based on their personal experiences which ultimately guide their actions around reading (Neuman & Celano, 2001, p. 8). This contributes to a child's perception of reading, engagement, and motivation to read.

The Impact of Families' Perspectives and Beliefs

Caregivers conveying that reading is pleasurable is a critical component in fostering a child's enjoyment and engagement with reading. Baker (2003) suggested the importance of analyzing the guardians' perspectives and experiences with literacy activities in relation to understanding a child's motivation to read (p. 90). Baker's (2003) findings stated three essential perspectives that promote and foster reading motivation:

> Literacy is a source of entertainment, book reading itself is fun, and there are many other enjoyable activities in which literacy plays a role; literacy consists of a set of skills that should be deliberately cultivated; children should be given opportunities to practice their emerging competencies; literacy is an intrinsic ingredient of everyday life; children come to see the functional value of literacy. (pp. 90–91)

The literature suggested that children raised in homes who view reading as entertainment would see greater involvement in reading and the motivation to read independently, which ultimately contributes to reading achievement. When parents provide opportunities to read at home they promote a child's self image as a reader. Studies from Baker (2003), and Neuman and Celano (2001) detailed that perspectives and beliefs were closely linked

to income level. Both studies examine the complexities of the social and economic environment in which children are involved

Social and Economic Environments. Literature indicated the importance of looking at an adolescent's home environment in terms of understanding their motivation to read independently. Neuman and Celano (2001) stated it is widely known that children from middle-class homes and well-educated parents will generally have positive reading experiences; " . . . those who do not are likely to start school behind and stay behind" (p. 8). However, McKool (2007) reported:

> The amount of time children spend reading voluntarily outside of school is more directly related to the existence of a positive educational home environment and in particular to the value placed on reading in the home than on the socio-economic background. (p. 8)

Furthermore, even if families place equal importance on creating an educational home environment, their ability to do that differs depending on their access to resources. Thus, various factors in the home have inhibited adolescents from developing the motivation to read such as digital entertainment, taking care of younger siblings, involvement in organized activities, homework, and families' access to reading materials (McKool, 2007, pp. 8–9).

Recent literature recognized previous studies that showed a correlation between low socioeconomic status and a lack of reading engagement outside of school (Neuman & Celano, 2001, p. 12). Limited resources can and do hinder reading activities within the home. Although access to reading materials is an important component of a literacy environment, it is not the only component that fosters reading motivation. Neuman and

Celano (2001) stated that reading motivation and achievement within the home is "profoundly interconnected with the actions, goals, and circumstances within the activity" (p. 12). A child's involvement with print comes in many forms.

In conclusion, informational texts on this topic stated that a print-rich home environment is important, however, it is not the sole determinant of an adolescent's ability to independently engage with reading materials. Educators must also recognize the importance of providing a print-rich environment which will be addressed later in Chapter Two.

The Relationship Between Home and School in Relation to Reading Motivation

Building a relationship between a student's guardian and the teacher is a critical component in fostering a love for reading. Baker (2003) stated that teachers should not assume guardians know how to help their child read at home. Providing resources and advice on "what to read, how much to read, how long to read, how to respond to mistakes, what kind of discussion to hold, and how to keep the experience enjoyable" will help build a connection between school and home (p. 93). Literature supported the importance of surveying families to learn about literacy resources and opportunities available at home. Additionally, integrating students' cultural backgrounds into reading activities and instruction can create positive experiences within the classroom and build on the relationship between home and school (Baker, 2003; Baker, Scher, & Mackler, 1997).

Summary

In this last section, information was presented on the family's influence on reading motivation, and understanding parents' perspectives and beliefs around reading. Scholars

stated the importance of home experiences with print. Challenges families face to provide reading resources and experiences at home are additional factors to consider when analyzing a student's outside reading habits. Additionally, it was stated why it was important to build a relationship between home and school. Building successful reading relationships between all who are involved in an adolescent's life will help contribute to their reading motivation (Baker, 2003). This is another answer to the question: *What factors impact reading motivation in middle school students to help them identify as readers?* This next section focused on another factor: teaching practices and how they hinder reading motivation as well as how to create positive reading experiences in the classroom.

Teaching Practices Introduction

The teacher has a critical role in creating a classroom culture that fosters reading motivation (Gambrell, 1996). If students are not motivated to read, they will never reach their full literacy potential. Information gathered revealed that reading engagement is a more critical factor than students' family backgrounds (Gambrell, 2011). Educators have a critical role in fostering students' love and engagement for reading so that students will view themselves as readers. The first part of this section provides an overview of teaching practices and federal policies that have hindered adolescent reading motivation and challenges educators face within curriculum to foster student engagement. The second part of this section presented teaching practices that promote student choice and increase motivation in the classroom.

Challenges to Adolescent Reading Motivation within Schools

As mentioned earlier in Chapter Two, studies suggested that home environment and family values have a significant impact on a child's reading engagement and motivation. However, Gallagher (2009) suggested factors such as schools valuing the development of test-takers more than the development of life-long readers, limited authentic reading experiences, and teaching practices happening within the classroom (p. 5) that hinder students' relationships with reading.

Teaching Practices and Federal Policies. Educators face great challenges within their classrooms. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 has created schools in which lessons are focused primarily on improving reading test scores. The purpose of NCLB was that states set high standards for raising reading achievement in all children. Allington (2006) reported that the gap of reading achievement between several subgroups remained substantial. Subgroups included children from ethnic minorities, economically disadvantaged students, English language learners, and individuals with disabilities. Congress reviewed this data and looked for what could be the cause. Their conclusion was that educators were not basing their reading instruction in research-based practices. As a result, the Reading Excellence Act was put in place in conjunction with NCLB to focus educators on using evidence-based instruction (pp. 4–5). Gallagher (2009) called this phenomenon "Readicide"; the systematic killing of the love of reading often exacerbated by the inane, mind-numbing practices found in schools (p. 2).

Marzano and Kendall (1998) explained that secondary educators are covering 200 standards with 3,500 benchmarks. It would take, on average, four hours to "adequately cover the content in a single benchmark" (p. 5). Their information also indicated that the

current structure of grades K–12 is not sufficient to cover state-mandated standards and

would need to extend to kindergarten through grade twenty-one (Marzano & Kendall,

1998, p. 5). In conclusion, educators are required to develop curriculum and create

environments where teaching approaches are shallow and learning is hurried. Gallagher

(2009) stated, "Students are developed into memorizers instead of into thinkers" (p. 11),

which correlates with the increase of extrinsic motivation students need to feel like

successful readers. This causes students to rely too heavily on extrinsic motivation rather

than a balance of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation that is needed to foster positive

reading habits.

  Gallagher (2009), in *Readicide,* examined the factors behind the achievement gap.

The Paige Paradox (p. 17), a term coined by Gallagher (2009), outlines major

contributing factors to this gap due to the Bush administration. In summary, regulations

put into place by this administration, and that are still in place, contributed to the vicious

cycle of reluctant reading in schools today. There is now a heavy focus on high-stakes

tests that value narrow thinking to measure proficiency on state and national levels

(Gallagher, 2009, p. 13). A school's worth is measured by how well students perform on

these tests, thus teachers and administrators make choices to narrow the curriculum in an

attempt to raise test scores. The era of workbooks has overtaken the use of novels in

classrooms, fostering the idea that the purpose of reading is to pass a test (Allington,

2013, p. 326). Reluctant readers tend to be placed in test preparation environments that

do not allow them to develop life-long reading habits. Many tend to see no value in

reading at all. This contributes to the decline in authentic interactions with high-interest

reading materials.

Historically, high-stakes test scores identify low-income students as having the most need. However, schools serving low-income students are threatened with economic sanctions and tend to receive money only to enhance their test preparation courses. As a result, low-performing schools continue to intensify ineffective approaches due to the constant pressure of federal and state policies (Gallagher, 2009, p. 17). From this text, one could conclude that the achievement gaps within schools are the result of movement away from authentic reading experiences and a push for high achievement on standardized tests.

Approaches and practices used in classrooms are major factors that contribute to an adolescent's lack of motivation to read. Teachers and students have limited input in what is used to teach state standards. Students move through the educational system and many are placed in *drill-and-kill* reading remediation programs (Allington, 2013; Miller, 2012). Schools focus heavily on test preparation, thus leaving little room to engage with high-interest reading materials and authentic reading with peers that contribute to creating lifelong, motivated readers.

Teaching Practices that Stimulate Reading Motivation

Motivated readers are the ones who initiate and sustain literacy activities. They choose to read for pleasure and to gain knowledge. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, motivation to read can be defined as the likelihood of engaging in reading or choosing to read. The engagement is linked to motivation and has strong implications for teaching practices (Gambrell, 2011, p. 172). Engaged readers are intrinsically motivated and can construct new meaning about a text. They have developed positive reading behaviors, and reach personal reading goals. Although educators have barriers to overcome when it

comes to required curriculum and remediation programs, scholars suggested that a high priority should be placed on promoting intrinsic motivation practices within the classroom (Allington, 2013; Gallagher, 2009; Gambrell, 2009, 1996; Miller, 2012; Morrow, 2004).

Scholars have examined the habits of life-long readers. Educators can explicitly model and teach these habits for and to reluctant readers by redesigning their classrooms to increase student reading engagement (Miller, 2009). Educators should be models of what good reading habits look and feel like. Atwell stated:

> Teachers are the best readers in the classroom, and as such, each should be a mentor, mediator, and a model. Teachers should provide students with high-interest reading materials and ample reading choice, in addition to carving out significant time in the school day to read, and conducting mini-lessons to help students find their *reading zone.* (as cited in Gallagher, 2009, p. 90)

Literature supported that reading engagement is a vital component of achieving learning outcomes.

Foster Reading Engagement through Curriculum

Articles by Guthrie and colleagues (2000, 2004, 2014) showed "reading engagement comes from multiple perspectives on reading that consist of internal and external motivation, cognitive strategies, conceptual understanding, and socialization around texts" (p. 1). Adolescents need a balance of reading between academic and recreational texts. Educators can do that by creating a curriculum where students' identity, race, culture, and social constructs are embedded in everyday teaching. The volume of reading adolescents complete each day directly affects learning outcomes

(Gambrell, 2011). Increasing the volume of reading helps prepare students to move through a changing world and develop empathy and understanding (Gallagher & Kittle, 2018, pp. 13–14). Also, students' diverse backgrounds and experiences must be represented in the reading materials of classrooms. Reading engagement occurs when students are interested in what they are reading. In addition, when they are provided time to read, they read more. The literature revealed instructional practices based on the principles of engagement–relevance, choice, success, and collaboration--increased intrinsic motivation in reading and gains in conceptual knowledge (Brozo & Flynt, 2008; Gambrell, 2011; Malloy, Marinak, Gambrell, & Mazzon, 2013; McRae & Guthrie, 2009; Wang & Holcombe, 2010).

Access to a Range of Reading Materials

Classrooms that provide easy access to a large amount of interesting reading materials support adolescents' development of intrinsically motivated reading which will ultimately increase reading achievement. Gambrell (2011) suggested:

Student motivation to read increases when . . . the classroom environment is rich in reading materials and includes books from a variety of genres and text types, magazines, access to the Internet, resource materials, and real-life documents. Providing a variety of reading materials that reflect authentic forms of text communicates to students that reading is a worthwhile and valuable activity and sets the stage for students to develop the reading habit. (p. 7)

Gambrell's article also supported that instruction focused on students' interests and embedded in high-interest reading materials at a student's independent level is more effective. High-interest reading is well-written texts about relevant topics that

adolescentes find interesting. (Mascott, 2019, para. 3) This suggests that when students have access to books, it sets the stage to develop positive attitudes towards reading and they will put forth the effort necessary to read and learn from the material (Allington, 2013; Gallagher, 2009; Gambrell, 2009, 1996; Miller, 2012; Morrow, 2004).

Book-Rich Classroom Environment. Studies have shown that when students have environments that are book-rich, the motivation to read is high. Gambrell (1996) reported that the majority of children select books from their classroom library versus the school, community, or home libraries (p. 21). Access to books can have a positive effect on the "amount and quality of literacy experiences in the classroom as well as home environment" (Gambrell, 1996, p. 21). Morrow (2004) suggested a literacy-enriched environment also includes meaningful print on walls including student work, informational postings, and hints for successful reading.

Independent Reading. In Creating a Classroom Where Readers Flourish, Miller (2012) shared a study done by the Commission on Reading which reported that it is recommended for students to participate in two hours of sustained reading per week (p. 89). However, as mentioned earlier in this section, educators face demands within required curriculum and the need to prepare students for standardized testing.

Miller (2012) suggested analyzing the instructional day and finding moments where instructional time is wasted: waiting in line, bellringers, and "when you are done" activities. It is important that teachers ask themselves the purpose behind each activity in which a student engages. Eliminating these wasteful instructional practices can add as much as fifteen minutes of independent reading time each day (p. 90). Reading practice fosters better readers. Research done by Gambrell (2011) found that time spent reading in

and out of school had a direct correlation to reading success. Evidence revealed that time spent reading during the school day is " . . . strongly associated with reading proficiency" (p. 174). In conclusion, a school environment that promotes independent reading will positively impact adolescent reading motivation and proficiency.

      Social Interactions. Middle school students have entered a stage of life where they have become in tune with themselves and others around them. Adolescents become more aware of their feelings and how others perceive them. Experts in the field of literacy indicated the benefits of peer collaboration around reading. Their literature showed that reading experiences that are active, social, relevant to their lives, engaging, and student-centered led to deeper learning and motivation (Allington, 2013; Gallagher, 2009; Gambrell, 2009, 1996; Miller, 2012; Morrow, 2004).

      Teachers can create opportunities for students to work together to construct new meaning and knowledge of a text. Brozo and Flynt (2008) stated that increased opportunities for social motivation in a classroom could lead to more intrinsically motivated readers. Collaborative learning can also lead to an adolescent's sense of belonging (p. 3). Guthrie and Klauda (2014) analyzed Vygostky's (1978) work, who viewed collaborative scaffolding to foster a student's Zone of Proximal Development. This study highlighted the importance of collaboration between teachers and students. These opportunities empower students to " . . . acquire literacy practices and accompanying cognitive proficiencies" (p. 389). Their conclusions warned that with the absences of these practices, teachers would see a decline in engagement which leads to disengagement and affects later outcomes of an adolescent's success in school (Guthrie & Klauda, 2014, p. 389).

In summary, providing students opportunities to collaborate with peers and teachers gives them a sense of responsibility and control over what and how they learn. These opportunities allow students to develop relationships with peers that create positive learning environments within the classroom and will positively influence their reading motivation and engagement.

Choice

Students who lack input in decision-making feel powerless and unmotivated (Cambourne, 1995). Choice is one of the most critical elements of reading motivation (Turner & Scott, 1995). Current literature stated that as students advance in their academic careers, it was noted that their choices outside of school increase; however, their options in school can be limited. Creating opportunities for students to have input on text selections, response options, and learning experiences will increase student motivation to participate in reading experiences (Brozo & Flynt, 2008, p. 3).

Tools to Establish Book Choice. It is important that teachers help students learn how to select reading materials that are appropriate for them. Giving them the tools to self-select books will create an experience for the reader where they feel supported and successful. This is called bounded choice (Gambrell, 2011) because students have the power to choose what they want to read. They apply the skills and strategies they learned to choose books that are appropriate for their reading ability (p. 175). The acronym PICK is one strategy to teach adolescent readers. After selecting a book, students identify the book's purpose, reflect on their interest in the book's topic, confirm they can comprehend what they read, and determine their background knowledge of the book's vocabulary (Person, 2009). By establishing book choice and giving students the tools, adolescents are

more likely to invest time in and think deeply about what they are reading (Gallagher & Kittle, 2018, p. 12). Person (2009) stated:

> When educators enable choice, they're setting in motion a child's ability to direct interest towards something that matters. If we can capitalize on the interests that a child has, what we've done is taken some of the difficulty out of learning it (0:07).

Curriculum. Literature supported rethinking practices when designing units in reading (Gallagher & Kittle, 2018; Gambrell, 2011; Miller, 2012). Miller (2012) stated to redesign instruction around the "knowledge and skills a student must learn" (p. 91) instead of teaching specific books that we see often in middle school classrooms. In fact, a curriculum that incorporates books which cover a diverse array of topics, experiences, and themes, to mirror the diversity present in a classroom, helps foster positive relationships between teachers and students. Students see "their lives are worthy of study and reflection" (Gallagher & Kittle, 2018, p. 13). Gallagher and Kittle (2018) found that students are more likely to engage in their reading journey when given opportunities to explore their own lives (p. 13).

Social Interactions. *Social interaction* is defined as communicating with others, through writing and discussion, about what has been read (Gambrell, 2011, p. 175). Instruction that incorporates book clubs, student observations of peer progress, peer reading conferences, and sharing their thinking with peers "increases students' motivation to read and comprehension achievement" (Gambrell, 2011, p. 175). Gallagher and Kittle (2018) stated that talking deepens thinking and learning. Planning opportunities for adolescents to talk to their teachers, peers, to bigger audiences, and to

practice their listening skills will create a learning environment where inquiry can flourish and students become the center of the classroom (p. 16).

Summary

In conclusion, educators have a critical role in fostering students' love for reading so that students will view themselves as readers. Although there are many challenges teachers face in the classroom, there are also research-based practices that teachers can use to create an environment that will foster extrinsic and intrinsic reading motivation in middle school students. These are factors that influence an adolescent's motivation to read. The following section addressed the rationale for this capstone project and its relation to and why it is important to consider the factors that impact reading motivation in middle school students.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter was a literature review. Two types of motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic, were defined. Motivation plays an important role in reading and experts find understanding motivation valuable. Furthermore, the impact of families' beliefs and perspectives on reading influence the type of reading environment that is created at home. The reading home environment can be a factor in adolescents' motivation to read. This information is essential to educators in building a relationship with each student's family. Additionally, there are teaching practices that hinder reading motivation but there are also ways to shift practices to foster reading motivation in a middle school classroom. Finally, the rationale for this project is to provide educators with the strategies needed to positively impact middle school students' motivation to read. It also pertains to the

capstone question: *What factors impact reading motivation in middle school students to help them identify as readers?*

The focus for Chapter Three is how this literature impacted a series of blog posts to inform teachers. These blog posts cover how to create a literacy-rich environment, how to build a classroom library, how to bring student choice into a reading curriculum, and resources to connect with families that foster reading motivation in middle school students. Chapter Three is all about the project description, the setting of the project, and how blog posts were created. It also includes how the blog posts will be promoted and who the blog posts will target.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

As a student, I always valued having a positive reading experience. Similarly, as an educator, I value creating a positive reading experience for my students. When students walk through the doors of my classroom, I want to provide them with opportunities to feel successful. Working in the field of literacy education and serving middle school students, it is astounding to meet the number of students who do not view themselves as readers. I have discovered that my love for reading came from positive experiences within classrooms, access to a plethora of books, and my teachers working alongside my father to support my reading journey. These experiences are what have led me to my capstone project question: *What factors impact reading motivation in middle school students to help them identify as readers?* Throughout my literature review I have discovered that in order for a student to have a positive relationship with reading, classroom libraries need to have titles that reflect the world. Students should have access to a wide range of high-interest books within classrooms. Additionally, students need to be allowed time to read in and out of school. When teachers and parents collaborate together in fostering a student's love for reading, this is ultimately where there will be a positive shift in an adolescent's mindset around reading. I want to share my research and discovery with my fellow educators by creating purposeful and effective blog posts.

From my own personal experience, I know the importance of access to quality blog posts focused on researched-based classroom strategies. When I reflected on how I access and view educational blog posts, it was important to pay attention to the blog posts

I liked best and continue to refer to. Educational blog posts need to be easy to read and embedded with real-life classroom examples and experience to have the best results. Additionally, I have found myself more drawn to educational blog posts to learn about current educational research and best practices versus attending conferences or professional development sessions. For the past five years, I have been an active member of the teacher community on Instagram. I have found that I truly appreciate connecting with educators around the world to discuss and share what we are doing inside our classrooms to motivate middle school students to read. This is another reason why I decided to write blog posts for middle school teachers that will be shared with my Instagram followers. Based on my own experiences of accessing educational blogs, I wanted to create resources for teachers to access at any point and read at their leisure.

Throughout Chapter Three, I address my capstone project and the methods behind my chosen project, a series of blog posts. In addition, I share why my project is important, the setting of my project, the participants, and the timeline of my educational blog posts. Finally, I provide a summary of the chapter and highlight the information that will be in Chapter Four.

Project Description

After an extensive review of the literature on the factors that impact reading motivation and my experience with social media, I realized that my project would best be delivered through four weekly educational blog posts. I used my already active Blogger.com account to publish each blog post (see Appendices). I selected educational blog posts for my project because I wanted to share my research with a larger audience. I see value in being able to access information in a manner that is easy and accessible.

Furthermore, the information I discovered while reviewing the literature will benefit

teachers as they start out the school year. These educational blog posts were spread out

over a four-week period to allow teachers to implement their learning in their own

classroom. It also allowed time for individual reflection and goal setting. My educational

blog posts targeted teachers, specifically middle school teachers who are active members

of my Instagram community. The educational blog posts addressed four topics over four

weeks. The topics included how to create a literacy-rich environment, how to build a

classroom library, how to bring student choice into a reading curriculum, and resources to

connect with families that foster reading engagement and motivation in middle school

students. I will further explain these topics and the educational blog posts in the

following paragraphs.

Educational Blog Post One

The first educational blog post is scheduled to be released during the first week of

August 2021, which highlights important information, including my contact information

for readers if they have questions or would like to connect further on the discussed topic

(APPENDIX A). This educational blog post was shared through my Instagram account

with a direct link, in addition to daily blog post marketing on my feed and Pinterest page.

The blog post started out with a photo of a teacher with a look of confusion with the

question, *How do I create a literacy-rich environment?* underneath the image. The post

moved into the rationale behind this educational blog post and an overview of what

readers will learn.

Throughout the blog post, I provided multiple examples of what it means to have

a literacy-rich environment, such as designing a layout, using anchor charts, and having a

designated reading area. This means that my educational blog posts included real classroom photos and reflection points for educators. When educators shared their thoughts through the comment section of the blog, I engaged in the conversation. The discussion centered around challenges educators face and what others are doing in their classrooms to create literacy-rich classroom environments.

Finally, at the end of the blog post, readers were provided a checklist on what to include or add to their classrooms. This checklist is important because it was a tool they could refer to often when setting up their classrooms for the coming school year. The checklist was a tool to help educators analyze and reflect on what their classrooms currently include and how to shift their mindset towards creating an environment where literacy was at the forefront.

Educational Blog Post Two

The second educational blog post is scheduled to be released during the second week of August 2021 (APPENDIX B). The post included the same group of educators and the same method of presenting information, through daily marketing images and links on my Instagram and Pinterest feed. In addition, this educational blog post was similar in length to the first.

In this educational blog post, I addressed why and how one should build a classroom library. In this post, I provided a rationale for why it is important for all educators to have a classroom library, regardless of the content area they teach. Then, the blog post moved into how to get started with collecting books for one's classroom library. Furthermore, I provided easy ways to sort and keep books organized, discussed why it is important to include students in the process of building a library, how to select books that

are mirrors and windows to the world, and how to build student interest around the classroom library. Lastly, I provided real classroom photos that were embedded in the categories mentioned above.

At the end of the educational blog post, I placed "Where do you go from here?" when building a classroom library as a tool to reflect on the information presented in the blog post. I, again, left them with my contact information if they have further questions and engaged in the comment section of the blog post.

Educational Blog Post Three

The third educational blog post is scheduled to be released during the third week of August 2021 (APPENDIX C). It included the same group of educators and it included the same method of presenting information, through daily marketing images and links on my Instagram and Pinterest feed. In addition, this educational blog post was similar in length to the first and second.

In this educational blog post, I first reminded the reader of my prior published blog posts to continue the engagement of the blog post series. Then, I presented the rationale on why middle school teachers should include student choice in reading curriculum design and its connection to reading engagement and motivation. Next, educators were provided four ways to include student choice in a reading curriculum. The four methods included explanations around Project-Based Learning, letting students choose the topic of a current reading unit, how essential questions foster student engagement in reading, and giving students the power to choose books. Lastly, I provided real classroom examples and printables in the categories mentioned above.

At the end of the educational blog post, I placed a section titled "Lingering Questions". This provides a space for participants to consider questions focused around embedding student choice within a reading curriculum. Additionally, for each topic in the post, I provided readers a printable "Cheat Sheet" where educators could find shortened versions of the information learned within each post. That way, the information was easy to access when designing reading units. I, again, left them with my contact information if they have further questions and engaged in the comment section of the blog post.

Educational Blog Post Four

The final educational blog post is scheduled to be released during the fourth week of August 2021 (APPENDIX D). The post included the same group of educators and it included the same method of presenting information, through daily marketing images and links on my Instagram and Pinterest feed. In addition, this educational blog post was similar in length to the first three blog posts.

In this educational blog post, I first reminded the reader of my prior published blog posts to continue the engagement of the blog post series. Then, I presented the rationale behind this series of blog posts. This post focused on the importance of connecting with families. It provided the reader with resources to build positive relationships with families around reading and to foster reading engagement at home. Middle school teachers read about the importance of surveying families about reading habits at home and understanding the reading resources available at home. Then, educators learned about the importance of sharing resources for families on how to foster reading engagement at home. Lastly, middle school teachers learned about the importance of providing a wide range of reading materials for students to take home and

creating a reading choice board that encourages students to engage in reading with people in their home.

At the end of the educational blog post, I provided links to resources mentioned within the blog post and reflection questions to consider. Additionally, I linked a Google Form for middle school teachers who engaged in the entire blog series. Questions such as, "What was your greatest takeaway from this blog series?", "What is something from this blog series that you will implement right away?", "What part of this blog series are you still struggling with and would like to focus on in another blog post?", and "Did you find this series helpful?" I left them with my contact information if they have further questions and engaged in the comment section of the blog post. This blog post wrapped up the four educational blog posts which helped answer: *What factors impact reading motivation in middle school students to help them identify as readers?*

Summary

This section addressed the series of four blog posts that helped me answer the question: *What factors impact reading motivation in middle school students to help them identify as readers?* In the next section, I address the research and theories behind the educational blog posts I designed.

Literature Review

The research behind my question: *What factors impact reading motivation in middle school students to help them identify as readers?* can be found throughout my literature review in Chapter Two. In order to understand my project description, I summarize my review of the literature surrounding the use of educational blog posts in the following paragraphs.

Social Media and Blogging Theory

The information presented in Chapter Two was best presented through educational blog posts. Luo, Freeman, and Stefaniak (2020) supported that social media enables professional learning environments to be highly interactive since participants can control with whom they interact and can learn from each other within the social media space (p. 1660). It was also stated that to ensure faculty stay up to date with current trends and learning strategies, faculty need to "engage in comprehensive professional learning environments that can meet their individual needs" (p. 1660) meaning learning needs to be easily accessible. Additionally, blogs have strong archival features, therefore, through the input of keywords, educators can continue to access the information for years to come (Tan, Eu, John, Ho, and Yuen, 2008, p. 3). Furthermore, blogging causes the reader to reflect. Wheeler (2011) emphasised:

> Reflection on, in and through practice were vital components of any professional practice. Teachers naturally think back on what has happened in their classroom, and often wonder what they could have done better. Blogging can help with this process, enabling teachers to keep an ongoing personal record of their actions, decisions, thought processes, successes and failures, and issues they have to deal with. (para. 2)

Ultimately, blogging is a quick and effective way for teachers to connect with other educators from around the world. It is a space where they can reflect on what is happening within their classrooms.

Wheeler (2011) also wrote that blogging is a way to open up to a wider audience (para. 4). Dean (2020) stated, "The key to growing your blog is to publish high-quality

content on a consistent basis" (0:38). This is why I posted daily blog promotions on

Instagram that focus on the particular week's content. In addition to using Instagram, I

used Pinterest as another platform for marketing. It is important to consider user intent.

"User intent is the reason why people go on a social platform" (Grazer, 2021, 5:19). The

user's intent on Pinterest is information. When viewers access Pinterest, they are looking

for new ideas and plans or looking for solutions to their problems (Grazer, 2021, 6:38).

Creating high-quality advertisements engages followers to click the link leading them to

the educational blog post.

Community is another aspect of Instagram. Grazer (2021) stated that Instagram

posts need to have clear instructions and reasons to entice followers to click the blog link.

This is why my daily posts highlight important topics within the educational blog posts

(11:59). This changes weekly based on which blog is published each week.

Lastly, throughout each blog post, educators have access to free content they can

print and refer to later. This is called a "guest post bonus" (Dean, 2020, 1:16). This makes

readers want to access the blog post after they finished reading. Furthermore, I provide

readers with links to the previous blog posts and direct links to my Instagram and

Pinterest pages. This technique is called "cross-pollinating audiences" (Dean, 2020,

6:22). This allows viewers to access my information on multiple platforms which

ultimately creates a sense of community and trust with my following (Grazer, 2021).

Blog Post Summary

This section addressed the important factors that I considered when designing my

educational blog posts, including the use of Instagram and Pinterest to entice readers,

providing "guest post bonuses" (Dean, 2020, 1:16), and cross pollinating audiences to gain more traffic. In the next section I address the setting of my capstone project.

Setting

In this section, I reviewed the setting of my capstone. My project was marketed through my educational Instagram and Pinterest accounts. A link was provided to my educational blog through my Instagram profile. My Instagram following includes 97.3% women and 2.7% men predominantly ages 25–35. Followers are mainly from the United States of America with smaller followings in Canada, Australia, United Kingdom, and Mexico. Marketing posts become live on Saturday mornings with additional promotions throughout the week. Each post highlights topics from the original blog posts to create engagement and traffic to the educational blog posts. My educational blog posts were presented to users who engaged with each Instagram post.

Assessment

I assessed the effectiveness of my educational blog posts through Blogger.com stats feature. This feature indicates how and when participants access and engage with each blog post. Additionally, the stats feature targets where participants are accessing the educational blog posts. This includes Instagram and Pinterest. The comment section with each blog post is another feature I used to engage with participants. At the end of each post, I provided participants with reflection questions to consider and encouraged participants to have an open discussion within the comment section.

Furthermore, Pinterest and Instagram have a stats feature that indicates how many participants engaged with the promotional marketing posts. This includes comments,

swipe-ups, pin saves, and resharing of content. This information conveys the effectiveness of my educational blog posts.

Participants

My intended audience was middle school teachers grades six through eight who were in need of creating a space where students are motivated and engaged to read. Specifically, the audience was teachers who follow my educational Instagram–a following of just over 18.8K educators from around the world.

Timeline

This section addresses my project timeline. My capstone project question was established in February 2021. This question was: *What factors impact reading motivation in middle school students to help them identify as readers?* After my question was created, I was able to write my first chapter. As I moved through the spring semester, I was able to start my research. Throughout this process, I actively searched for multiple resources on factors that hinder and foster middle school reading motivation and engagement. In March of 2021, I closely read, annotated, created a thematic bibliography, and put together my literature review, which led me to the completion of Chapter Two.

At the end of March 2021, I decided to use my literature review to write a series of educational blog posts, leading me to research effective ways to write and promote educational blog posts. I was then able to write Chapter Three in April 2021. As June 2021 came, I started to work on my capstone project. First thing I did was organize each blog post into subsections that allowed readers to understand and implement strategies/ideas to support reading motivation in their middle school classroom. My next step was to compile literature and real life classroom pictures that supported each

subsection. Subsections include creating a literacy-rich environment, the importance of having and building a classroom library, how to embed student choice in curriculum, and tips on how to connect with families to support literacy development and engagement. These subsections were a part of a series Engaging Middle Schoolers: Teaching Strategies for Boosting Independent Reading Motivation in Middle School. My next step was to create printable resources for teachers to use and reflect after reading each post. Then, I placed additional reflection questions and a related readings list to encourage educators to deepen their understanding of each focused topic and to give a space where they can share their thoughts and feelings. The final step to publish each post into Blogger.com. Four blog posts were created and published.

My capstone project was presented over four blog posts. The first blog post was live on August 7th, 2021. This blog post focused on how to create a literacy-rich environment. The second blog post was live on August 14th, 2021, which focused on why and how to build a classroom library. The third blog post was live on August 21st, 2021 and focused on four ways to embed student choice within a reading curriculum. The fourth blog post was live on August 28th, 2021. This post focused on resources to build positive relationships with families around reading and continue to foster reading engagement at home. Each educational blog post followed the same format. I started out by stating a rationale for each topic. Then, I moved into research-based content that provided the reader with sufficient information to implement the strategies within their classroom right away. Each blog post provided a space to reflect and I continued to engage in the conversation when middle school teachers shared their thoughts, ideas, and

questions. Additionally, I linked printable resources for quick references and provided real-life classroom examples.

This timeline was used to ensure I stayed on track throughout my capstone project process and all elements of the project were completed. It encouraged my goals to be completed on time and described how my blog post series were structured. In this final section, I summarized the chapter and introduced the next chapter.

Summary

In Chapter Three, I included a description of the capstone project. This project is a series of four educational blog posts targeting middle school teachers. The blog posts will help answer the question: *What factors impact reading motivation in middle school students to help them identify as readers?* Topics focused on creating a literacy-rich environment, the importance of having and building a classroom library, embed student choice in curriculum, and tips on connecting with families to support literacy development and engagement. This chapter also included a summary of the research that I compiled on educational blog posts and the theories behind my chosen project. Finally, Chapter Three included the setting, target audience, assessment, and the timeline for my project. Chapter Four recounts the finalized project and my reflection of the project.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

Introduction

This capstone project focused on the question: *What factors impact reading motivation in middle school students to help them identify as readers?* This question frames the problem that many middle school teachers face in their classrooms: adolescents are no longer reading. However, over the course of my literature review and the development of this project, I came to the conclusion that each factor stated equally impacts a student's motivation to read independently. An adolescent reader has experienced literacy in many different ways, and all have contributed to their reading journey, whether good or bad.

Chapter One included my personal and professional context, as well as defining the importance of independent reading. It acknowledged that student choice was at the core of classroom instruction and contributed to positive literacy experiences at home and school. Chapter Two contained a concise review of literature behind reading motivation and student choice. There was a history on reading policies and how they affect teaching practices and thus influence classroom reading experiences. This supports that each factor is interdependent in fostering positive reading experiences for middle school students. Chapter Three outlined and stated the implementation of my capstone project and its role in the teaching community. This chapter also included a summary of the research that I compiled on educational blog posts and the theories behind my chosen project.

In Chapter Four, I reflect on my own learning during my capstone project focusing particularly on information from my literature review that was most impactful to

the success of my project. I also discuss the implementation and limitations of this literature and include how this project will benefit the teaching community. Lastly, I conclude this paper with a Chapter Four overview.

Major Learnings

Reflecting on the process that guided me through the literature review, I noticed it shifted my thinking and shed light onto biases I held. I assumed that the adolescent's household had the biggest influence on their intrinsic motivation to read. However, studies from Baker, Scher, and Mackler (2007) and Baker (2003) emphasised the importance of home-school collaboration between parents and teachers. A print-rich home environment is important, however, it is not the sole determinant of a child's ability to independently engage with reading materials. Educators should not assume guardians know how to help their child read at home. Providing resources and advice on " . . . what to read, how much to read, how long to read, how to respond to mistakes, what kind of discussion to hold, and how to keep the experience enjoyable" will help build a connection between school and home (Baker, 2003, p. 93). Having open communication with families is a critical component in a student's relationship with reading.

Furthermore, educators need to realize the importance of peer collaboration. Middle school students are social creators. They are at a pivotal moment in their lives. Teachers can create opportunities where students collaborate to learn from each other and build empathy—in conclusion, fostering an environment where students feel support from the teacher and their peers (Allington, 2013; Gallagher, 2009; Gambrell, 2009, 1996; Miller, 2012; Morrow, 2004).

Another major finding is how much of an impact classroom teachers have on an adolescent's motivation and development of becoming life-long readers. Classrooms have limited authentic reading. Marzano and Kendall (1998) and Allington (2006) argued that the focus on standardized testing under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has shifted what lawmakers and schools value. As a result, development of students as test-takers, and teaching practices happening within the classroom (Gallagher, 2009, p. 5) are hindering students' relationships with reading. Although educators have barriers to overcome when it comes to required curriculum and remediation programs, scholars suggested that a high priority should be placed on promoting intrinsic motivation practices within the classroom (Allington, 2013; Gallagher, 2009; Gambrell, 2009, 1996; Miller, 2012; Morrow, 2004). Educators can explicitly model and teach good reading habits as they are the best readers in the classroom. By providing students with high-interest reading materials, ample reading choice, and carving out time to read during the day, they will contribute to an adolescent's intrinsic motivation to read independently (Gallagher, 2009).

Finally, the literature supported the rationale to embed choice in every facet of reading instruction. Students are more likely to be motivated when they have control over what they read. Students have stories to tell. Creating opportunities for students to share their lives through discussions and texts that mirror their lives encourages them to invest in school and ultimately creates lifelong readers. Students who lack input in decision-making feel powerless and unmotivated (Cambourne, 1995). Choice is one of the most critical elements of reading motivation (Turner & Scott, 1995). Creating opportunities for students to have input on text selections, response options, and learning

experiences will increase student motivation to participate in reading experiences (Brozo & Flynt, 2008, p. 3).

Implications

The implications of these educational blog posts need support from the middle school administration, middle school teachers, and caregivers of middle school students. It must be a unified decision to recognize the importance of implementing changes in strategies and approaches to foster an environment that values reading. It is critical that the administrative team provides resources so that teachers are able to create positive reading experiences, and provide books. These educational blog posts transform practices and enhance approaches in a form that is easily accessible for all who want to make immediate changes in their classrooms. Once middle school teachers engage in creating meaningful experiences around reading, the motivation will transfer to students and guardians. As a fellow middle school teacher, I have experienced the benefits of shifting my teaching approaches mentioned in this capstone. Carving out time for independent reading, engaging in one-on-one conferencing, and creating a literacy-rich environment made a direct impact on my student's view of reading. I noticed more engagement in self-selection of books, having a passion for what they were reading in class, and finishing books they chose to read. The purpose of these educational blog posts is to ensure that all middle school teachers have resources to create and foster an environment where students see and find value in reading. As a result, middle school students become independent, motivated readers.

Limitations of the project

The restrictions of this project could be limited support from the middle school administration, colleagues, and funding available to supply resources for teachers. Some middle school teachers might not see the value in building literacy-rich environments and struggle to move away from what they have always done. Additionally, middle school teachers may not feel prepared to make large changes in their classroom structure to provide time for students to read independently. Another unexpected occurrence is many districts have a scope and sequence that has required texts, causing teachers to be limited to add student choice and voice within curriculum. One more limitation of these educational blog posts is that sufficient classroom libraries take time and need funding. Middle school teachers may not have the space to build a classroom library as well. A further limitation is parental support and involvement. Building an adolescent's motivation to read takes support and encouragement from both the teacher and their guardians. There are also limitations of the blog posts themselves. Although I am using Instagram and Pinterest along with a wide following, the platforms' algorithms can cause marketing campaigns to become *shadowbanned* – "is the act of blocking or partially blocking a user from a platform without it being apparent to that user" (Llewellyn, 2020, para. 5). This can cause limited engagement on posts, thus fewer educators receiving the information and engaging with content. Since the nature of this project is for educators to seek the information themselves, there are limitations of physical support when implementing new ideas. I cannot observe the changes teachers make in their classrooms unless they share their progress through comments on the blog posts. Lastly, although I plan to continue adding to this series as educators and administrators seek counsel,

another limitation may be that I do not deliver the information fast enough or lack insight into their specific needs.

Communication Results and Benefits to the Profession

This educational blog post series has been a collaborative effort with the education community, school leaders, administration, middle school teachers, and student guardians. Middle school teachers have shared their enthusiasm and willingness to revamp, add to, and change up their instructional approaches and strategies in order to address literacy needs and environment in their classrooms.

School leaders and middle school teacher teams will continue to support one another in implementing literacy approaches and strategies to support and foster adolescent reading motivation. The instructional approach will continually be adjusted through reflection and supported by guidelines provided at the end of each blog post. The biggest impact that the educational blog posts offers is that it amplifies student choice and voice, and lays out a step-by-step process to make impactful changes within the classroom and in student households. The educational blog posts will promote communication and collaboration through any school community to ensure middle schools are embedded in literacy-rich classroom environments and receive instruction that fosters a love for reading.

Access to the educational blog posts will be available through Hamlines Digital Portal. Additionally, the blog posts are accessible through a basic digital engine search through https://mrssclassroomcraziness.blogspot.com/, Pinterest, and through my personal Instagram account.

Conclusion

The importance of fostering life-long readers in middle school has shown through the completion of this capstone project and creating these educational blog posts. Revisiting my years of teaching middle school and experiencing the successes and challenges of instilling a love for reading in students helped me realize the importance of creating an environment, whether at home or at school, where students see that reading has value. The learnings in this capstone project showed me when educators are given the resources and support in best practices, they reflect and engage in opportunities for improvement. The literature review highlighted four aspects of an adolescent's academic experience that contribute to their reading motivation: building a relationship with a student's guardian and providing resources to support at home, giving middle school students time to collaborate with peers, embedding choice in all facets of the classroom, and implementing approaches and strategies that uplift and support the importance and value of reading. A limitation of these educational blog posts is that some colleagues and administrators may not understand the importance of creating literacy-rich environments and have limited funding to support building of classroom libraries. Additionally, guardian buy-in has the potential of being limited. A way to assuage these limitations is through sharing these educational blog posts with district and school leaders and having it readily available online. This creates opportunities for middle school teams to collaborate and support one another in their transition to implement said approaches and strategies.

Educators must be willing to make changes, no matter what content area they teach, in order to foster a love for reading in middle school students. If teachers make these vital changes, they will see higher rates of achievement in all components of

literacy. As I continue to make my own changes, I will continue to explore the question:

What factors impact reading motivation in middle school students to help them identify as

readers?

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APPENDIX A

Link to educational blog post #1: How to Create a Print-Rich Environment

https://mrssclassroomcraziness.blogspot.com/2021/08/the-importance-of-print-rich.html

Link to educational blog post #1 resources

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1kQRKuL7_pgjA70kZXXDel5wrmgmI54rj-Swu

zX-l5Og/edit?usp=sharing

The Great Debate

APPENDIX B

Link to educational blog post #2: The Classroom Library

https://mrssclassroomcraziness.blogspot.com/2021/08/the-classroom-library.html

Link to educational blog post #2 resources

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/17iPnMzvql2mpKnxEHnOGLCC5ywONs_v3oz

YSVjaRaH0/edit?usp=sharing

APPENDIX C

Link to educational blog post #3: Add Student Choice in Curriculum

https://mrssclassroomcraziness.blogspot.com/2021/08/add-student-choice-in-curriculum.html

Link to educational blog post #3 resources

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1SdZDnCpJtfYoK7tV60jFyEkWLqGiFdZnZAT1jqaIvYw/edit?usp=sharing

APPENDIX D

Link to educational blog post #4: Connecting with Families

https://mrssclassroomcraziness.blogspot.com/2021/08/connecting-with-families.html

Link to educational blog post #4: resources

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1lP1WzymWlgDs-jZ4JChAXyGzEMTxSLL2X6I

VOlZhVGg/edit?usp=sharing

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1dBDyRjTKm-7klkjw_VR0Gnkuhuya7q7OuXBY21Fc

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https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1qmXXlZ5SyddvKEZfgR_EuSjh-6eOh6tfI4UtCkpppP

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