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Factors That Influence Motivation To Read With African American Middle School Males

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FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE MOTIVATION TO READ WITH AFRICAN AMERICAN MIDDLE SCHOOL MALES

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Literacy Education.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

I have found that my major teaching victories have transpired when I am able to motivate students to accomplish classroom tasks in order to succeed. Yet, not a day of instruction goes by without encountering students who are unwilling to exhibit the necessary behaviors in order to be successful with literacy. “Why should I care about this?” or simply, “I don’t care,” could be my classroom mottos if I became detached from my responsibilities as an educator. Instead, I have found many strategies to engage hesitant readers, such as encouragement, relevant texts, choice, and timely and specific feedback. Although these strategies help to motivate a significant number of students I see, there are still roadblocks denying others academic success.

The school where I have spent all my years as a licensed educator is made up primarily of African American students (over seventy percent) and English Language Learners (over ten percent). Over thirty percent of our school’s students receive special education services, many of whom attend my Reader’s Workshop for additional reading support. Although pushback in reading is common among many students I encounter in reading intervention classes, I have found it most difficult to connect personally and academically to motivate and support the reading growth of my African-American male students.
For this reason, I am choosing to research the question, “What factors influence motivation to read with African American middle school males?” Chapter one introduces my personal and professional reasons for researching this question. The chapter will also define motivation, while explaining personal obstacles in finding strategies to motivate African American male students. Finally, I will provide a brief roadmap of the following chapters found in this research paper.

Background of the Researcher

I grew up in a northern city of the upper Midwest, graduating high school with a class of over eighty percent Caucasian students. Wanting to teach became an interest of mine as a teenager. Identified within a middle class white family, I had no concept of life in impoverished areas. Still, I dreamt of changing the lives of ‘high poverty adolescents,’ without even really understanding what that meant or entailed. I had ambitions of moving to a larger, industrious area, to make differences in poverty-stricken youths’ lives. Remaining faithful to my original aspirations, I moved, and received my first teaching position. This middle school, located in a metropolitan upper Midwest city, was comprised predominantly of students of color, ninety five percent of whom receive free or reduced lunch. To my excitement, I was hired on as a Reading Specialist with a focus on teaching reading comprehension strategies to struggling readers.

No formal education could have prepared me for what was to follow, and to what I am experiencing seven years later today at the same school. My commitment to my original goal grows each day, my knowledge of what a teacher’s life consists of in my chosen atmosphere widens continually, but one thing remains constant; a large
percentage of struggling readers who enter my classroom avoid reading books, articles, or any other type of texts at all cost. While some students outright refuse to pick up text and read, others become disengaged quickly when taking part in literacy related activities.

As a young teacher, my initial response was frustration. “How will you become a better reader if you won’t even pick up a book?” But soon it became evident; many students simply did not care. Becoming a good reader held no significant value to many of my students, and years of being told they were “D-” students who could not read had completely brainwashed them into believing that they were unable to perform at a proficient level. Others were already great students and competent readers, but were failing standardized tests and being thrown into an intervention class they were all too familiar with.

I was fortunate enough to work alongside two individuals who already possessed the capabilities to transform reluctant readers into “expert readers.” Through mentoring and countless trial and error experiences in my own classroom, I became skilled in the area of assisting students in realizing their true potential as readers. Yet, like any method or strategy in education, there is not a one-size-fits-all technique. Beyond this fact, some students are still resistant to text no matter what the approach. A significant portion of my classroom population regularly consists of African American male students. For these reasons, my interest in researching the factors that influence motivation to read with African American middle school males has steadily grown throughout my teaching career.
Defining Motivation

The Oxford Online Dictionary (2015) defines “motivation” as “the reason or reasons one has for acting or behaving in a particular way.” Many students speak frankly when expressing that they simply do not want to read or complete work in my classroom. Some seem motivated by other distractions. If a student has his own legitimate reasons for holding conversations with classmates during instruction while ignoring all class work, why should I expect that he is going to respond to my demands that he focus and complete a task I have placed in front of him? The truth is that he may not do so unless it matters to him and is relevant to his own life, something he can connect to. As an educator, it is my responsibility to make each task important to every student, while explaining the value of completing the given task, and how it may connect to his life and his future. To directly connect this scenario to the Oxford definition of “motivation,” I must give the students reasons to act or behave in a particular way in my reading classroom, which in this case means motivating them to be successful with literacy. As I begin researching my topic I will continually ask, what motivates African American male students to read? Through my research, I strive to find culturally relevant strategies for my students in order to help them grown as readers, while helping me improve as an educator.

Obstacles in Motivating Students and Avoidance

I have encountered various obstacles while attempting to motivate African American male students to be successful with literacy in my classroom. The most common form of refusal to complete classwork and read text is when students avoid
academic tasks altogether. Although I have developed techniques in addressing avoidance issues, I often feel as though we may be experiencing cultural barriers, both personally and academically. For these reasons, and others, my techniques often produce the same results of avoidance.

A popular form of text avoidance is when students express disinterest in the classroom library when it is time to choose an independent reading book. Different excuses that attribute to this refusal to choose a book include students telling me, “There aren’t any good books in here,” “I’ve already read all of these books,” or simply “I hate reading and am not going to do it.”

An obvious way to curb avoidance is to keep high interest books spread across the room ranging all Lexile levels. I’ve also found it important to find out about student interests in order to scour the school for books they would be willing to read. Finally, I have spent much more money than I would like to admit on purchasing specific books that students have expressed interest in. Although these techniques have helped students succeed at a tremendous level, I’m still searching for answers of how to motivate all students at the highest possible rate of success.

Other forms of text avoidance involve students going to sleep during classroom activities, pretending to read, communicating with other students, or simply acting out in class. No matter how the avoidance comes across during class time, one thing remains the same; it is my responsibility as an educator to do whatever humanly possible in order to help the students find success in order to show cognitive growth.
Motivation in Relation to Reading Achievement

Frustration can immediately diminish any motivation to engage and be successful with a given task. The majority of students who have been told repeatedly that they cannot read are more likely to enter through a classroom door that proclaims itself “Reader’s Workshop” and shut down immediately. It is my role to mentor, encourage and show the students that they do have the capabilities to succeed with text, while ensuring that what they see before them is relevant to what they experience in their personal lives. I have found that the first step in helping students’ triumph over existing self-beliefs is to develop a relationship with them before they even walk into my classroom.

Giving students specific feedback on actions or class work that I have been witness to enables them to feel a sense of trust with me before they come to a day of my reading class. I also provide students with grade printouts after the very first day of class. When every student sees they have received an A, they are encouraged to continue working hard to help reverse what others may have made them believe about themselves as a reader.

Being aware of student interests also helps motivate them to succeed. First, it provides me with an area of shared interest when I greet them to enter my classroom or when I see them in the hallway. Most importantly, it gives me an idea of what type of reading material the student may be interested in during instruction. Catching students before they have the opportunity to feel disengaged helps keep enthusiasm at the
forefront of their reading and classroom experiences. Still, a cultural barrier exists that needs to broken down through my own learning and self-reflection.

I also take the time to contact parents as soon as possible. Yet, from my experience it is sometimes difficult to contact some parents or guardians for various reasons. When I am able to get parents on board from the beginning, I find that students are more likely to stay focused and succeed in my class. Through this study, I definitely want to find strategies to establish ongoing dialogue with the parents of my African American male students.

The main goal in developing these teacher/student relationships is always to aid struggling readers to achieve with text. Daily, I witness my strategies in motivation impact my students to a great degree. Yet, I have still have a substantial amount of work to do. What more can be done, and to what degree does my motivation hold significance with students?

Summary

In this chapter, I have introduced my research question, “What factors influence motivation to read with African-American middle school males?” I have also explained why I am passionate about this topic, defined motivation in relation to education, described my experiences in attempting to motivate African American male students, and touched on obstacles in getting the true potential out of all students. In Chapter Two I will review what the professional literature says about utilizing motivation in order to help African American males succeed in the classroom. Chapter Two will also introduce four recurring strategies that I found within the literature, including culturally relevant
instruction, student choice, relationships and parental involvement. I will add my personal reflection to my findings, while explaining how my research has led me to make decisions regarding the research I will conduct. Chapter Three will explain fully why I have chosen to develop curriculum focusing on four specific areas of motivation, as well as explain the format of the strategy guide that I created for other reading teachers to utilize. Chapter Four will explain the results of creating a strategy guide, and how it can be used to assist teachers in the reading classroom. Finally, Chapter Five will include my personal reflection of my concluded research and curriculum development. The actual strategy guide can be found in its entirety in Appendix A.
CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

The goal of this study is to answer the research question, “What factors influence motivation to read with African American middle school males?” The following literature review will explore six areas: first, it will define motivation in relation to reading, and cite research suggesting that African American males are performing poorly nationwide in reading; second, it will examine the use of culturally relevant instruction in response to underachieving students, while offering suggestions for culturally relevant instruction specifically for African American males; third, the review will compile and analyze current research in using choice as a strategy to motivate students to read; fourth, it will examine how strong classroom relationships build confidence to help students achieve, with both student/teacher relationships and collaborative classroom environments; fifth, the review will discuss the barriers which exist and possible solutions for more parental involvement; finally, the chapter will conclude with a section giving a rationale for the preceding literature review and how it relates in motivating African American males to read.
Defining Motivation in Reading

Ryan and Deci (2000) define motivation as being moved to do something. An individual stimulated to behave or perform an action with a purpose is considered motivated, while one who feels no inclination to accomplish an act in order to reach an end goal is deemed unmotivated. Yet, every person varies in levels and types of motivation. Such is the case with being motivated to read.

Reading motivation is essential in order for educators to successfully develop each student’s cognitive abilities (Guthrie & Cox, 2001). Gambrell (2011) concluded that students who are uninspired to read may never achieve their true literacy potential. Cambria and Guthrie (2010) highlighted three independent motivations that drive students reading; interest, dedication, and confidence. They go on to express how motivated students enjoy books, get excited about authors and are fascinated by learning new information. Students who possess one or more of these characteristics are motivated intrinsically; the act of reading is inherently compelling to them (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In turn, these students are considered engaged readers. Gambrell (2011) described how engaged readers read with various personal goals, use strategies in order to comprehend text and construct knowledge, and are willing to interact with others about text. Of course, no teacher can expect every student to enter the classroom showing this kind of motivation and enthusiasm to read.

Some students may feel completely disengaged from many or all aspects of reading. Frequently, educators offer disengaged students rewards if reading tasks are accomplished in order to motivate them extrinsically. Yet, while it may become
somewhat desirable to succeed with a task in order to receive a reward, students may still perform these actions with bitterness and disinterest, while also lacking the motivation to achieve with reading in the long term (Ryan & Deci, 2000, Cambria & Guthrie, 2010). The following section will review research specifically addressing the lack of motivation for some African American male students.

Lack of Reading Motivation with African American Males

A significant amount of research has been conducted in the field of education concluding that African American males are performing poorly nationwide in reading (Howard, 2003, Tatum, 2006, Flowers, 2007, Sampson & Garrison-Wade, 2010, Kafele, 2012, Wood & Jocius, 2013, Sciurba, 2014). In 2014, Black males in a prevalent upper Midwest school district, grades K-12, averaged 30.8% proficiency on all accountability reading tests, as opposed to 63.1% proficiency by white males of the same demographics ([Upper Midwest State] Department of Education, 2015). Although many would argue that high-stake tests should not define educational outcomes, the achievement gap demonstrated in this statistic is severe. While countless educational initiatives have been implemented over the past fifteen years, this achievement gap continues to be problematic all over the country (Barry, 2013).

Tatum (2006) listed many obstacles in raising the reading achievement of African American males, both internal and external. Internal factors include self-concept and issues with identity. These factors often end in student violence, resistance to adapt to a school’s expected culture, or in students completely shutting down. Outcomes of these behaviors often end in poor grades and suspensions because educators do not have the
tools or cultural knowledge to interpret and successfully work with the students. External factors include structural racism, the surrounding community, family education, socioeconomic status, stereotypes, lack of positive role models, and culturally relevant instruction. Tatum suggests that many students have conflicts in their communities and families that far outweigh what they believe to be important within the classroom.

Still, millions of African American males have succeeded in life and gone on to do great things, including those growing up in at-risk communities (Kafele, 2012). The ability to succeed is present in every student, yet many students end up dropping out, often because they are unable to relate to the content being taught. The following section will describe culturally relevant curriculum and instructional practices that have been thoroughly researched and found to have success with African American male students.

**Culturally Relevant Instruction**

Ladson-Billings (1994) described culturally relevant instruction as “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p.17). Teachers who operate with a culturally relevant pedagogy recognize student race, culture, and ethnicity, while still meeting demands of the district and state curriculum (Huang & Mason, 2008). In this sense, it teaches to the cultural strengths of the students, while still making sure to meet government mandated standards. In the context of culturally relevant instruction, it is important that the meaning of ‘culture’ is explained. Hollie (2012) defined culture as “a behavior learned from the home or the community that is passed down from generation to generation and represents our heritage” (p. 33).
Sciurba (2014) explained how students often neglect text because they are not interested in the material or are unable to see themselves reflected in the story. Students who can’t connect with characters may feel disengaged from the text, while a lack of background knowledge may make ideas seem foreign and uninteresting to them. Yet, students of color will take ownership in their education when teachers are able to connect what is being taught to their own lives (Ladson-Billings, 1985). Ultimately, the goal of a culturally relevant pedagogy is to increase student achievement (Howard, 2003). Still, before a classroom community and the lessons presented within it are able to thrive culturally, teachers must take the time to critically reflect on their own practice. The next section will examine the process an educator must take in order to successfully create a culturally relevant environment. It will also explore important aspects of culturally relevant classrooms, as well as the texts used within this environment.

**Critical reflection.** In order for teachers to become culturally relevant, they must first reflect on their own biases. This reflection should allow them greater clarity into the way their own thinking affects their students. Howard (2003) offered three components to be examined as a part of the critical reflection:

- First, teachers must acknowledge how deficit-based notions of diverse students continue to permeate traditional school thinking, practices, and placement, and critique their own thoughts and practices to ensure they do not reinforce prejudice behavior. Second, culturally relevant pedagogy recognizes the explicit connection between culture and learning, and sees students’ cultural capital as an asset and not a detriment to their school success. Third, culturally relevant
teaching practices reflect middle-class, European American cultural values, and thus seeks to incorporate a wider range of dynamic and fluid teaching practices. (pp. 197-198)

Critical reflection should cause teachers to question if they truly believe that students of all races and cultures are as capable of learners as any student who enters their classroom. Teachers who are able to reject all prejudices demonstrate to their students that they value the cultures present in their classroom. This allows the educators to authentically borrow from and celebrate a wide array of cultures, adding depth and cultural relevancy into their teaching practice. As a result, a classroom community is established with a caring teacher and students who are motivated to engage in classroom activities drawing on their own cultures. The following section includes suggestions for creating culturally rich instruction for teachers who have successfully reflected critically.

Culturally relevant instruction ideas for African American male students. Kafele (2012) expressed that many teachers have confessed to have run out of ideas to inspire black males. Green-Gibson and Collett (2014) responded by indicating that adding African culture into the classroom positively effects the learning environment for these students. African centered curriculum should be developed that addresses the needs and interests of the students. Class activities, field trips and assemblies can reflect important aspects of the African American culture, while allowing students to take part in creating culturally significant artifacts and observing cultural events. While these ideas can succeed in showcasing culture throughout an entire school, it is imperative that students feel their culture being represented within the classroom walls. Of course, culturally
relevant instruction must also remain rigorous while helping students succeed academically (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Yet, educators should not have to change curriculum in order to make it culturally relevant, but rather tailor what has already been created by adding rich texts and resources that students will find relatable (Kirkland, 2011). Therefore, when trying to motivate students to read and become successful with literature, it is important to start with the actual classroom texts.

Texts. Tatum (2006) asserted that “...by selecting appropriate reading materials, teachers can engage African American adolescent males with text, particularly those students who have not mastered the skills, strategies and knowledge that will lead to positive life outcomes” (p.45). Appropriate reading materials certainly point towards text that the students are able to relate to. African American males often are disadvantaged when reading in the classroom because their family culture and experiences are not reflected in the chosen texts (Wood & Jocius, 2013). For example, a student who has no conception of the wilderness or little history of taking part in outdoor activities such as fishing and hunting may have little interest in reading a novel like Hatchet (Paulsen, 1997). Without the background knowledge, a lack of exposure to the language used, and no relatable experiences to topics introduced throughout the book, the building disinterest will give the student little reason to continue to read or engage in activities relating to the novel. On the other hand, the same student who has seen gang life take its toll on family members or friends within his community may relate to the graphic novel Yummy: The Last Days of a Southside Shorty (Neri & DuBurke, 2010). Robert “Yummy” Sandifer has become infamous within Southside Chicago’s gang culture and many hip-hop artists
have referenced the deceased young male in their songs. African American males may find that they can make connections to the story, while access to visuals can help support struggling readers’ comprehension. Of course, this is not suggesting all books focus on subjects similar to the consequences of gang violence. Rather, a title such as *Yummy* may catch a student’s attention that otherwise refused to pick up a book, motivating them to interact with text, and giving the teacher the opportunity to recommend more intellectually challenging books.

In addition to his push for engaging reading materials for African American males, Tatum (2006) explained the characteristics that “must read texts” share. First, they must be cognitively stimulating for both teachers and students. Students must be able to engage in discussion which analyzes the text and connects it to the curriculum. Next, the texts should serve as a roadmap for students and offer role models who may not be present in the students’ lives. Students should not only connect to the characters or conflicts in a text, but also believe this to be a path they may follow one day. Third, “must read texts” should be cognitively challenging. Instead of focusing on remedial curriculum, students should be supported and challenged intellectually. Finally, the texts must assist students in using reading strategies and skills. These texts don’t choose either skill development or intelligence as a focus, but rather fuse the two to reach both requirements.

“Must read texts” are culturally relevant materials that will help to engage and motivate African American males. By finding ways to relate texts to the students’ lives in a meaningful way, students will become more invested in their education (Gambrell,
As a result, African American males will become more motivated to be successful with literature when it is relevant to their own lives.

This section has focused on motivating African American males to read by using culturally relevant instructional techniques. If teachers truly want to take the approach of teaching with cultural relevancy, they must first reflect on their own biases. Researched components of critical reflection have been identified in order for teachers to successfully reflect. Next, ideas to support culturally relevant instruction have been presented specifically for African American males to become more successful with literacy. Finally, suggestions for texts have been identified. Tatum (2014) found that giving students choice within the classroom can offer many opportunities for relevancy. The following section will present ways in which giving African American males choice with activities and text can help motivate students with literacy.

Choice with Literacy

Students who are given opportunities to make their own educational choices are going to be more motivated to read as a result (Gambrell, 2011). Guthrie and Alao (1997) explained that self-direction occurs when “…teachers enable students to assume responsibility for learning by helping them select the topics, texts, tasks, and media for learning about the conceptual theme” (p.99). African American males who are allowed options in how they are going to engage with specific literacy activities, as well as with the particular text to read, will become more likely to show interest in learning and succeed. Furthermore, those who both recognize they are being given options and are able to react with confidence are more likely to show increased intrinsic motivation for
reading. Of course, teachers must always establish structures and routines within this practice, as opposed to offering up unrestricted freedom. If a middle ground is created for student choice, educators will recognize the benefits as students take ownership and find success with literacy. Tatum (2014) suggested that teachers use a combination of engaging texts and compelling reading instruction in order to impact students. The next section will examine how teachers can build student motivation by providing choices with text and activities.

**Choice in classroom libraries.** Students who are given a wide selection of reading materials become more motivated to read (Gambrell, 2011). Classroom libraries must include many titles from all genres, both fictional and informative, in order to catch diverse learners’ attention. It is also important for classroom texts to relate to student interests. Guthrie and Cox (2001) asserted that students who don’t want to read often lack interest in the texts that are offered. Educators should constantly be searching for and adding to their selections of texts to reach every single student. A classroom library filled with new and interesting books spanning all genres is likely to produce an increase in motivation for students academically.

Still, collections of culturally relevant titles are often absent from classroom libraries, depriving African American male students of opportunities to connect literacy to their own lives, families, and experiences (Kirkland, 2011, Wood & Jocius, 2013, Tatum, 2014). As a result, students may become reluctant to read, participate, and in turn, deny themselves the opportunity to gain new knowledge. Often times, this is the result of white teachers who are unaware of the white superiority they create in their
classroom and the texts they supply for students. These teachers must not only critically reflect on their teaching practices, but also make attempts to consider other cultures when building up classroom libraries.

In order to avoid the issue of African American male middle school students giving up because they are unable to relate to the literature in which they must choose, multiple researchers suggest that classroom libraries have enough cultural variety for students to be able to see themselves reflected in the text (Barry, 2013, Wood & Jocius, 2013). Both fiction and non-fiction titles must reflect the diversity of the students. All aspects of texts should be considered, such as author, illustrator, characters, themes and conflicts. Educators can stay up to date with the Coretta Scott King Award winners, which annually celebrates novels that “demonstrate an appreciation of African American culture and universal human values” (Barry, 2013, American Library Association, 2015). Classroom libraries should contain cultural sections in order to direct students towards a specific interest. Educators may also offer a wide variety of fiction and non-fiction resources such as expository books, references, electronic databases, poetry, articles, essays, and internet sites at all different levels of difficulty (Tatum, 2000, Cambria & Guthrie, 2010).

When a classroom library includes cultural variety with many different types of genres and resources, African American males will be more likely to find something interesting and relatable to read. As a result, the wide selection will motivate students to be successful with the text they choose. Of course, at some point in the school year students may be required to read something that does not appeal to them. For example,
regardless of the tactics a teacher uses to teach a read aloud book, it is not guaranteed that every student will like it. In this case, it may be helpful to give students a choice in the way they respond to the text through classroom activities.

**Choice in classroom activities.** Beyond choosing books to read, teachers have the power to give students innumerable choices that can be applied in nearly any lesson being taught (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010). Deci (1992) explained how students will become more intrinsically motivated to learn when they are allowed to make their own decisions regarding the learning activities in the classroom. Although curriculum is steered by the state and district standards, students can still contribute to the ideas of a lesson, as well as how they will respond to the material within that lesson. For African American males, these choices will often give students additional opportunities to engage with culturally relevant materials (Sciurba, 2014). For example, African American males reading *Copper Sun* (Draper, 2008) may have questions or show interest in the protagonist’s homeland early in the book. This may lead to engaging conversations about race, culture and identity (Wood & Jocius, 2013). Teachers can use this opportunity to give the students journaling options in how they will respond to the chapter based off of the ensuing discussion. As a result, the intended lesson is taught, while students are given a culminating journaling activity to use their own voice in order to explore their inquiries deeper.

As stated above, there are multiple ways that teachers can give students choices with classroom activities. For example, Cambria and Guthrie (2010) asked a group of middle school students the choices a teacher had given them during a single day.
Students responded that they were allowed to decide whether or not they worked with a partner, only had to take notes if they wanted to, had different colored options for the notecard they would write on, and were all able to identify what they thought was the key word in a paragraph. These choices take up little class time, while allowing students to take ownership for their learning. In response, students expressed that they felt better when being able to partner read, read alone which helped them concentrate (or was faster for another student), and enjoyed choosing the key word on a page. While proving that students prefer various learning styles (in response to reading independently or with a partner), students also expressed interest in responding to the text by choosing what they believed to be the key word in the paragraph. Cambria and Guthrie offered up many other choices for students, such as students choosing one concept within an informative text to become an expert on, choosing three of five questions to answer from the board (or writing a summary instead of answering questions altogether), or becoming an expert with one character in a book. Guthrie and Alao (1997) added that different forms of expression should be offered in response to text, such as “written information reports, performances, posters, videos, peer teaching, poetry, or stories” (p.99). Ultimately, the content of the lessons remain the same while engaging the students with mini-choices. In return, students became more cooperative after noticing that the teacher was willing to support their learning by allowing these choices.

Guthrie and Alao (1997) found that students became more involved with educational tasks when given freedom to choose what to read and how to respond. Tatum (2014) added that students need to be supported with a wide range of texts that
examine both their lives in and out of school. Earlier, Tatum (2000) expressed that African American male students’ confidence grew when they were allowed to respond in many different ways. This confidence enhances student motivation, with an end result being successful participation in the classroom. Of course, the work does not end here for teachers. In order for students to find the motivation to succeed, they must also trust their teacher, while feeding off of the relationships with the other students in the classroom. The following section examines the how teachers can motivate students to succeed by creating a safe, collaborative environment.

Classroom Relationships

A belief that one is able to succeed, or confidence, is the number one determinant of motivation in school (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010). Often, an encouraging teacher who can be trusted and gives helpful academic feedback builds a student’s confidence. Furthermore, confidence thrives in classroom cultures where students encourage and support each other during difficult tasks (Wood & Jocius, 2013). Yet, the teacher must create this culture in order for students to willingly and comfortably assist each other to be successful. Educators who have effectively developed relationships and collaborative communities with African American males have found increased confidence and motivation within their students (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This section will examine how teachers are able to build positive relationships with African American male students while also creating collaborative environments among students to increase motivation with literacy.
Building strong student/teacher relationships. Pollard (1993) expressed that African American males are most likely to achieve at higher academic levels when they feel like they are given a great deal of teacher support. Students often succeed when teachers offer constructive, accurate, and specific feedback and praise, as opposed to motivating students with extrinsic incentives (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010, Gambrell, 2011). As a result, students are intrinsically motivated to complete tasks after proving they can succeed with meaningful teacher support.

When students struggle with a concept, they may begin to doubt their abilities and assume they will fail in reading, writing, and discussion activities. Cambria and Guthrie (2010) offered suggestions to help motivate students to believe in themselves to achieve. Often times this means providing small stepping-stones to gain confidence towards a larger goal. In relating to choice, this could mean a teacher encourages a student who has struggled with a concept to read only a small part of text, or to read for a number of minutes while offering ways the student may respond to the activity. When accomplished, the teacher gives the student specific feedback both academically and relating to the progress towards the larger goal. While these suggestions may increase student achievement, a cultural piece must be added to ensure success with African American male students.

Maat (2011) acknowledged that for teachers to be academically successful with African American male students, they must also be multiculturally competent. Recommendations in reaching this competency include teachers making attempts to familiarize themselves with students’ backgrounds and cultures, while also becoming
prepared and comfortable to lead conversations involving race in the classroom.

Educators willing to do so could benefit greatly by critically reflecting on their practice. Furthermore, districts must offer additional professional development interventions in order to help teachers, white teachers specifically, to develop skills associated with cultural diversity. A teacher striving to reach multicultural competence and build student relationships may look past the classroom and school in order to achieve these heights.

Ladson-Billings (1995) suggested making an effort to be a part of the students’ community. This includes living in the area, utilizing the communities services, and acknowledging the community as an integral part of the larger area. When this level of teacher support is given both in and out of the classroom, African American male students will become more motivated to achieve with literacy and academic success as they recognize their own culture being intertwined into the educational world. Teachers who have develop these positive relationships with their students will be more likely to find success when creating a collaborative classroom environment.

Collaborative classroom environments. Tatum (2006, p. 48) defined a collaborative environment as “one in which the students know and understand that as a group, all are working to become more proficient and critical readers.” In this model, African American males acknowledge that at times any given student may struggle to find success with literacy. Instead of simply being told to “keep trying,” students are made aware of each other’s strengths and weaknesses and work together to overcome challenges in order to grow academically. In this sense, teachers are clear about the strides that need to be made in order to succeed, and students recognize the struggles as
being part of the learning process. Furthermore, Gambrell (2011) found that students are more motivated to interact with text when they have opportunities to interact with others about the text they are reading. Of course, teachers must continually model and promote this sense of community in order for it to be effective (Wood & Jocius, 2013).

In order for the classroom community to work effectively, teachers need to become part of the group, while sharing their experiences and encouraging others to do the same. Educators may find it useful to hand over instruction to students in order to motivate the entire group. In one study, conducted by Ladson-Billings (1995), a teacher encouraged African American males to become the academic leaders of the classroom. In turn, cultural values became the focal point of the lesson being taught. Other students in the class felt encouraged to engage academically while watching their peers lead classroom discussions without sacrificing their values and styles. When allowing students to act as the instructor, the teacher would sit at desks with other students.

Another effective strategy for raising both engagement and motivation became highlighting an area where students were deemed the expert on a specific concept, and requiring classmates to visit with that expert before asking the teacher for assistance. In all cases, the teacher kept the community of learners as the focus, avoiding a competitive or individualized community. As a result, students were made to celebrate class-wide successes as a whole group. Students who had not previously experienced success with literature were given fresh opportunities to help motivate them in the future.

Teachers are the single most important person influencing a student’s motivation to read (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010). For a teacher to be able to reach students and
convince them of their abilities, they must first develop a trusting relationship with them. In order for teachers to build relationships while creating a collaborative learning atmosphere, Ladson-Billings (1995, p. 480) stated that teachers must implement the following expectations within their practice: “maintain fluid student-teacher relationships, demonstrate a connectedness with all of the students, develop a community of learners, encourage students to learn collaboratively and be responsible for one another.”

This section offered a review of research with recommendations for teachers to create meaningful relationships with students both inside and outside of the school in order to connect closer to students academically and culturally. Further, the section identified the concept of a collaborative classroom, while exploring ideas for creating a thriving, community of learners. In following these suggestions, educators of African American males will find an increase in student motivation when engaging in literacy related tasks. In connecting to building trusting student-teacher relationships, it is necessary for educators to seek out assistance from the families of their students. The following section will examine parents and families of African American male students, and the effects they are able to have on motivation and reading achievement.

Parental Involvement

Current research widely supports the perspective that African American parental involvement is an important factor in positively influencing student motivation to succeed academically (Edwards, 1992, Behar-Horenstein, 2008, Howard & Reynolds, 2008, Trask-Tate & Cunningham, 2010, Kirkland, 201, Williams & Sanchez, 2011, Fan,
Williams & Wolters, 2012). Trask-Tate and Cunningham stated that African American males who are encouraged to succeed by actively involved parents have higher academic expectations of themselves in the future. Still, some African-American parents, specifically those living in low-income communities, have expressed barriers that prevent them from becoming more involved with their student’s education. Furthermore, Dawkins (2006) found that African American females report a higher level of academic support than that of African American males. Regardless, it is critical that all students experience encouragement from parents in order to succeed at the highest possible level. Parents who are provided the tools to contribute to their student’s school achievement are much more likely to remain actively involved with their children’s education (Huang & Mason, 2008). The next section will examine both the barriers involved in hindering parents from becoming more involved with their student’s education, as well as suggestions for breaking down these barriers to help motivate students to succeed in school.

**Barriers preventing parental involvement.** Williams and Sanchez (2011) identified four major areas acting as barriers which hinder African American parents from being more involved with their student’s school experiences; lack of free time, lack of access, lack of financial resources, and lack of awareness. Below are areas where these barriers have been found to prevent family involvement to further academic achievement in African American male students.

Lacking the available time to support students with their education is often the result of working multiple jobs, or working long or inconvenient hours (Williams &
Sanchez, 2011). Not only does this affect the amount of time a parent can work with a child on academic activities at home, but also takes away opportunities to become involved in school related events. Time also becomes a factor with single parent families who may face similar work dilemmas, but are unable to rely on another adult in the family to attend school events (Jeynes, 2005). Consequently, these parents are more likely to become uninvolved with their child’s school life.

Parents with disabilities or sicknesses may not find buildings accessible in order to attend school events. Williams and Sanchez (2011) suggested that previous research on parental involvement has not fully explored parental disabilities as a detour in a parent’s capacity to support their child’s education. Yet, parents of low-income families may lack the medical care enabling them to regain their health, resulting in a wider range of families who may suffer from this barrier. Parents may also lack access to schools because of scheduling issues. Related to the issue of time, conferences and other school related activities are usually only offered during hours which may be inaccessible for parents. Both obstacles suggest teachers examine possible meetings outside of the school to sustain parent communication.

Socioeconomic status is another major issue that effects parental involvement. In a study conducted by Behar-Horenstein (2008), parents expressed challenges of having to choose between meeting financial needs or attending a school sponsored function. Further, Williams and Sanchez (2011) express that the lack of money to pay for school fees or transportation to the school for a parent often affects the relationship between families and school staff. Miscommunications may cause for parents to feel inferior,
while lack of contact could cause the educator to deem the student’s family unwilling to participate in that student’s education.

Finally, a lack of awareness is created due to inaccurate parent contact information and a reliance on sending information home with students. When conducting research at a school in a low-income community, Williams and Sanchez (2011) found that communicating messages to families through students was often unreliable. It is important to take into consideration that many families at this school had a high rate of mobility, and obtaining accurate contact information was often an unrealistic expectation. Regardless, important information should always be communicated directly from the school to the parent.

Although these barriers are present in some families, research has examined ways to raise parental involvement in order to motivate African American males to achieve in school. Yet, it should be mentioned that there have been many definitions, and findings, of parental involvement within the research community. This has led to inconsistencies in some areas. The following section presents suggestions found by various researchers which have been found to positively influence parental involvement.

**Recommendations for parental involvement.** Innumerable studies have named a variety of specific components that attribute to successful parental involvement. For example, Epstein (2001) defined six types of parental involvement opportunities that relate to student success including parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. This framework assists educators and families in creating a relationship to best support the child in question.
Fan, Williams and Wolters (2012) used a combination of five factors to explore the areas of parental involvement, including parental educational aspiration, parental advising, parental participation in school functions, parent-school contact concerning student school problems, and parent-school contact concerning benign school issues. Similar to both frameworks, as well as other researchers frameworks with similar goals, are the presence of the educator, the parent, communication, participation, and collaboration. The following suggestions build off of these essential elements, while referencing research related to parental involvement with African American families.

Behar-Horenstein (2008) suggested creating cultures where teachers prove that they believe parents care about their child’s education. Often times parents do not feel as if they are actually being invited into the educational setting, or otherwise aren’t being informed about their child’s school performance. Both Howard and Reynolds (2008) and Williams and Sanchez (2011) expressed how crucial it is to keep parents up to date with school happenings. In turn, parents remain inquisitive about their child’s performance, and are more likely to create an ongoing dialogue with the teacher. In order to reach all families, schools must be diligent in obtaining contact information for all students.

Fan, Williams and Wolters (2012) found that African American students were more likely to develop an enhanced relationship with teachers as a result of parental participation in school events, which carried the message that school was important. Of course, if parents are unable to attend school related events for reasons explored above, other arrangements must be made for this interaction to become a reality. This could mean parents and educators set up flexible meeting times and locations (Behar-
Horenstein, 2008) such as meeting up at a community event to discuss school matters (Ladson-Billings, 1995). When parents are available, workshops providing families with information to encourage collaboration, while also allowing parents strategies to assist students with academic work at home (Huang & Mason, 2008). Finally, many parents believe that their voice is unheard in the educational process (Howard & Reynolds, 2008). It is critical that all voices be heard. In order to accomplish this, schools must create opportunities and forums to listen to the proposals brought forward by parents.

Studies have found evidence that supports the idea that parental involvement in school relates to student motivation (Fan, Williams & Wolters, 2012). This section has discussed both the barriers involving parental involvement, as well as recommendations for increasing parental involvement to enhance student motivation with the goal of achievement in school. The last section of this chapter will explain why I have chosen to conduct research pertaining to the preceding literature review.

**Rationale**

Cambria and Guthrie (2010) declared that “ignoring motivation is neglecting possibly the most important part of reading” (p.16). As a literacy educator teaching in an urban setting, I have experienced African American male students whose major hurdle in finding success with text has been a lack of motivation. Yet, I have found strategies that enable some students to connect with literature in order to take great strides towards reading achievement. Still, I find it necessary to collect data in an attempt to find strategies that will further influence motivation with African American male students whom I teach. In conducting my literature review, I have found four areas which
extensive research has suggested will influence African American male students to become motivated to succeed with reading. In turn, I will use these strategies within my own setting to test their effectiveness in relation to influencing motivation. The goal of my research is to 1) raise African American male motivation to read text and 2) raise African American male reading proficiency as a result.

Summary

This chapter presented research examining factors that influence motivation in reading for African American male middle school students. The chapter examined the definition of motivation in reading while citing the achievement gap currently plaguing African American male students in reading proficiency. Next, it looked at the importance of culturally relevant instruction, giving students choice in the classroom, the importance of strong relationships within the classroom, as well as barriers to and suggestions for increased parental involvement. Chapter three will introduce the curriculum design approach I have decided to take in order to assist other teachers who are dealing with similar issues. I will explain my rationale for creating a strategy guide for teachers to use, while also explaining the format of this guide. I will also describe in depth the setting in which I have taught for the past seven years in order to provide the context behind choosing the specific research method that I will be using.
CHAPTER THREE

Methods

The purpose of my study was to answer the question, “What factors influence motivation in reading for African American middle school males?” The following chapter will explain why curriculum development was the best method to support the goals of my research. I will describe the setting and demographics of the school I have taught at for the past seven years to help give insight into how my own students will benefit from the curriculum format I have chosen. Next, I will explain my rationale behind creating the specific type of curriculum that I developed. I will also offer an outline of my chosen curriculum format and explain how the content of the curriculum was presented.

An initial look at my school setting and student demographics will help put into perspective why I have chosen to focus my research question on motivating African American middle school males. The following section of this chapter will focus on the school setting where I am currently employed.

Setting

In order to understand the work that I chose to do in this Capstone, it is important to have an idea of the setting that I have worked in for my entire full-time teaching
career, and why I chose to study my specific research question. For the past seven years, I have taught at a high poverty public middle school in a metropolitan upper Midwest city. The middle school has been recognized by the state to be a “Continuous Improvement” school, meaning it is in the bottom twenty five percent of Title 1 schools. Approximately three hundred students in sixth, seventh and eighth grades attend the school. Over seventy percent of the school population consists of African American students. Ninety five percent of the school population receives free or reduced lunch. As of 2014, the middle school averaged an eighteen percent school-wide proficiency on the MCA reading test.

**Classroom Setting**

I have taught as a reading intervention teacher for all seven of my years at this school. Class sizes range from approximately ten to fifteen students per class. These classes focus on using comprehension strategies to become successful with text. The goal of reading intervention class is to have students engage with reading, writing and discussion activities on a daily basis.

Although the focus of my research question was African American male students, the curriculum created is accessible to entire student populations. For the sake of my research question, I will explain in depth the African American male students who enter my classes.

African American male students in my reading intervention classes range from eleven to fifteen years of age in sixth, seventh and eighth grade. Students in these classes typically show “low growth” on standardized tests while scoring in the bottom thirty-
ninth percentile of the state standardized reading test. On average, about sixty percent of my reading intervention classes consist of African American males. I chose to focus my study on African American males for this reason, being that this student demographic typically outnumbers any other student demographic in my classes.

The following section of this chapter will explain the rationale behind choosing to create a curriculum guide to help answer my research question.

Rationale

It was no secret to me when beginning my journey at the current middle school in which I work that my cultural background was much different than those of the students I would be teaching on a daily basis. My initial teaching goal was to help pass on the skills that would be essential for my students to become successful as adults living and working in the 21st century. I quickly learned that to be an effective teacher and reach my personal goals in this setting, I must also be able to connect to my students and prove to them all that I had something worthwhile and valuable to offer them. Throughout my years of trial runs, stumbles and triumphs I have found that the success rate of many of my African American male students all boils down to how well I am able to motivate them to read and enjoy reading. While researching the topic of motivation in African American male students, I found four recurring patterns that seemed to add up to the most likely formula in order to find the highest percentage of successes with my students. These four categories include culturally relevant instruction, choice with literacy, building relationships and parental involvement.
Over the years I have searched for and dug up many tools and strategies that have helped me connect to my students, while cultivating many students’ appreciation for literature that once seemed unattainable. Among these resources include Doug Lemov’s (2010) book *Teach Like a Champion*, which contains techniques that can be accessed in seconds to help foster a caring and motivating classroom atmosphere. This current school year Sharroky Hollie has been working with teachers at my school, myself included, to help implement classroom practices that will increase student successes using “culturally and linguistically responsive teaching methods” (Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching and Learning, 2012.) While educational scholars such as Alfred Tatum and Baruti Kafele have laid the foundation in explaining how fostering a motivational, culturally responsive teaching atmosphere will help close the achievement gap, educators who offer unique and easy to access strategy guides have proven to be the most influential and helpful resources in building my repertoire as a culturally responsive reading teacher. For this reason, I decided to create a curriculum in the style of a strategy guide that will offer educators resources and tools that can be easily accessed and implemented with minimal preparation. The following section outlines the format of my curriculum design, while explaining how reading intervention teachers can access and use the different tools and strategies to help motivate students in their classrooms.

**Setting Up the Strategy Guide**

In creating a strategy guide, I hoped to answer the question “What factors influence motivation in reading for African American middle school males” as explicitly
as possible, while offering other reading intervention teachers resources and tools that will help foster a culturally responsive, caring and motivational educational environment. The format of the strategy guide loosely models that of educational resource books such as *Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching and Learning* (Hollie, 2012). The reason I chose this format is because I have had tremendous success in using these types of tools in my own teaching career, and have found them simple to use, with many carrying an abundance of easy to access strategies that I was able to add to my teaching toolbox. I did not feel as though a unit curriculum was appropriate for this research topic. In my personal experiences with fellow educators, I have found that most are in constant need of fresh resources that can be used sporadically throughout a unit, quarter or school year. The strategies that I provided can be used often, and some are sustainable from the first day of contact with a student and throughout the entire school year.

The strategy guide was divided up into four separate categories, enabling teachers to locate resources by section headings. The four categories were selected following my research findings explained in Chapter Two, and included what I found to be four recurring areas that help motivate African American males to be successful with literacy. The categories are as followed:

1. Culturally Relevant Instruction
2. Choice with Literacy
3. Building Relationships
4. Parental Involvement
Within each of these categories are a set of tools and strategies that teachers can locate and use on a daily basis in their own classrooms. Each tool or strategy begins on a new page, and contains information that helps educators understand exactly what the strategy is, how to use it, with examples and tips to assist the user. Headings on each page will contain the following information:

1. “Big Four” Category
2. Type of Strategy
3. Name of Strategy
4. What Is It?
5. How Do I Use It?
6. When Do I Use It?

Depending on what the strategy or tool being described is, a graphic organizer or additional information is available in the Appendices for educators to reference and adapt for their own classrooms.

Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the setting and demographics of the school where I have spent my entire professional teaching career, as well as my own classroom setting. I explained the reasons I chose to create a strategy guide as my curriculum to help answer my research question. I also mapped out the format of my strategy guide. Chapter Four will explain the results of creating my strategy guide, and how educators can use the guide to support their classroom.
CHAPTER FOUR

Results

When considering my research question, “What factors influence motivation in reading for African American middle school males?” I came to the conclusion, after conducting extensive research on the topic, that this question may not be answered in the traditional sense. Rather, I found patterns within my research where educators were able to motivate students to succeed with literacy that fit into four distinctive categories, including culturally relevant instruction, choice with literacy, building relationships and parental involvement. The following chapter explains how my review of current research surrounding my topic, as well as the four categories I created as a result, are all essential factors in order to influence motivation in reading for African American middle school males. Next, the chapter will explain how the style of curriculum I developed best supports my research question, while offering teachers effective tools that can be utilized throughout an entire school year. Finally, I will explain how the strategy guide is set up, and how teachers can access additional materials throughout the Appendices. The actual strategy guide can be found in its entirety in Appendix A.

Literature Review and Results

When I began collecting research on my topic by printing off a plethora of journal articles, reading educational books and talking to other educators in order to access all
essential research that has already been conducted on my subject, I felt lucky at the amount of materials I was able to amass. This soon turned into an extremely overwhelming feeling as the material lead me in many different directions. While the research did offer up techniques, strategies and suggestions that would help support my question, I did not feel as though it would directly answer my question objectively. As I brainstormed avenues to pursue, while also considering changing my research question altogether, I began to realize that much of the research I was finding could be organized into four categories; culturally relevant instruction, choice with literacy, building relationships and parental involvement.

The category that specific research fell into depended largely on the particular researcher. For example, the research conducted on motivation in students in relation to literacy by the likes of John T. Guthrie (2001) and Edward L. Deci (2000) helped rationalize the importance of motivation as a driving force in student success. Tyrone C. Howard’s research on culturally relevant pedagogy (2003) created a jumping off point for educators who are prepared to critically reflect on their teaching process. Alfred W. Tatum (2006) and Baruti K. Kafele (2012) offered suggestions for helping teachers to engage African American boys with literacy, promoting student choice and building relationships. Finally, much research has been conducted on parental involvement to advance student learning by researchers like Ellen S. Amatea (2013).

Collectively, educational researchers with ambitions involving literacy, motivation and engaging African American males in schools helped to organize what would become the four categories within my strategy guide. These four areas of focus
helped me dig deeper into the research in order to create a strategy guide that would assist teachers in creating a culturally responsive classroom in order to motivate African American males with literacy. While these researchers, among many others, helped me organize my findings, other professionals in the world of education inspired me to create a curriculum in the style of a research guide. The following section explains why I chose this style of curriculum in order to help answer my research question.

Strategy Guide as Curriculum

Much like my initial exposure to the current literature surrounding motivation and literacy, I had a confidence in how I would present my findings as a curriculum. Originally, I intended to create a literacy unit using the book *The Watson’s Go to Birmingham – 1963* (1995) as a guide. I have read this book with students every year of my teaching career, and have always found great success both with student engagement when reading and the activities surrounding the book. I bought a copy of *The Understanding by Design Guide to Creating High-quality Units* (Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J., 2011) and began developing a unit using resources from both the research I had conducted and from my own classroom experience. Yet, while a unit that will support teachers in the reading classroom is exceptionally useful, I wanted to offer teachers strategies that could be utilized throughout an entire school year and into the future.

At this point, I began asking teachers what they would find more helpful; a traditional unit curriculum with lesson plans and learning targets supported with state standards for that particular grade level, or a strategy guide that would offer tools and
techniques for teachers to use in diverse teaching atmospheres. The response to this question made my decision easy, as I decided to create a strategy guide drawing from books such as Doug Lemov’s *Teach Like a Champion* (2010) or Sharroky Hollie’s *Strategies for Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching and Learning* (2015).

While a lesson plan within a unit may be useful for one or two days of the school year, the strategies within my guide may be referenced all year long. Examples of this include my “Protocol for Effective Feedback” or the long list of “Response and Discussion Techniques.” A teacher who is able to give effective feedback to a student is going to positively influence a student’s thought process and actions, possibly for the rest of their life. Teachers can practice using different response techniques and find ones that are most effective for their classroom. These are practiced by students and become a part of the classroom culture.

Much like the examples above, all of the strategies in my guide can be utilized for an entire school year. The following section explains specifically how I organized the strategy guide, and what teachers can expect to find in each section of a specific strategy.

**Strategy Guide Format**

While Chapter Three listed an outline of the sections within the strategy guide, the following contains information of why each of these sections is included and what teachers can expect to find within each one.

As previously stated, the strategy guide contains four recurring categories resulting from my review of current literature relating to my research question, “What factors influence motivation to read with African American middle school males?”
These categories include:

1. Culturally Relevant Instruction
2. Choice with Literacy
3. Building Relationships
4. Parental Involvement

While these categories are introduced independently, the strategies within each category work together to build a framework for teachers to utilize from the time a classroom is being set up, and lasts long past the end of a school year if relationships have effectively been established with students and families. In turn, educators will have built a foundation that influences motivation in reading for African American middle school males.

Educators should initially read the strategy guide in its entirety and begin pulling elements from each of the four categories before a school year begins. After aspects of the guide have been established with teachers, students and families early in the school year, additional tools can be found within each category that can be adapted and reused throughout the year in any reading classroom.

The strategy guide has been organized specifically to enable teachers to first choose from one of the four main categories (culturally relevant instruction, choice with literacy, building relationships, or parental involvement), then to browse the list of strategies offered in each category to find the specific topic they are seeking out. Each strategy contains the following sections:
1. What Is It? This section explains the strategies being offered while citing research that supports the implementation of using the strategy to influence motivation in reading for African American middle school males.

2. How Do I Use It? The strategy is explained in its entirety, while also offering specific steps to implement the strategy when applicable. This section will often reference tools that are available in the Appendices for teachers to use and adapt.

3. When Do I Use It? The final section explains when it is best to introduce each strategy, as well as when and how often to revisit the strategy.

Some sections also contain tips for educators to consider when pulling resources and ideas from the strategy guide. Many of these tips are suggestions or recommendations of how to utilize or enhance certain tools that I have had success with in my own classroom.

While the strategy guide is found in Appendix A, the rest of the Appendices contain additional tools that correspond with particular strategies throughout the guide. If a teacher wishes to see examples of tools explained in a particular strategy, they will be directed to the corresponding Appendix. Separating the examples of tools from the actual strategy guide gives educators more support with each strategy, while keeping the actual guide organized and easy to search through. The examples and tools found in the rest of the Appendices can be directly copied or modified to support any literacy classroom.

The strategy guide is presented in its entirety in Appendix A.

Summary

In this chapter, I have explained why creating a strategy guide best supports my research question. I also explained how the research guide is set up, and why I included
each section that can be found within the research guide. The final chapter of my Capstone will explain what I have learned while conducting extensive research on this topic, while revisiting the most important aspects of my research and findings throughout the entire process.
CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusions

In researching the question, “What factors influence motivation to read with African American middle school males?” I hoped to identify factors and seek out strategies that would maximize my abilities as an educator to best support the students in my school. In the following chapter I will reflect on the major takeaways I had throughout the research and writing processes. Next, I will revisit the literature review I conducted and connect the research to my own results. I will also consider the possible implications for my research moving forward. Limitations of my study will be discussed, while offering recommendations for future research on the topic. Finally, I will present a plan for using the results that I have found. The following section reflects on what I have learned throughout the entire Capstone process.

Reflection

Working as a reading intervention teacher for many years in an urban setting is what initially led me to ask the question, “What factors influence motivation to read with African American middle school males?” Given an ample amount of support by multiple mentors early in my teaching career enabled me to find successes with this exact question, yet I knew there was still more that could be done to motivate the students in
front of me. Furthermore, I hoped to support teachers in similar settings to experience the successes that every educator is pulling for in their classrooms.

While robust research is currently being conducted on the topic of motivating African American males students to read, it seemed as though there were so many factors to take into consideration that it may be difficult to develop a definitive answer to my research question. The light bulb went off in my head when I realized that the majority of the findings, suggestions and strategies being offered by researchers fit into four distinct categories; culturally relevant instruction, student choice, building relationships and parental involvement. Making this connection with the bulk of the research I had done enabled me to focus my organization and create a strategy guide that would be useful for any teacher in a similar setting.

I have also come to the realization that my research and findings will not only benefit educators who work in urban settings or with African American middle school males, but rather with any students who struggle with reading motivation. When implementing some of these newfound strategies in my own classroom, I have found an increase in motivation to read with students of all different backgrounds. For this reason, my findings can be accessed and adapted for any classroom and by all teachers.

Finally, I have learned that research on the topic of motivating students to read is never-ending. While the strategies described throughout this Capstone are useful in raising motivation with students who may have shut down in reading classes in the past, motivation in reading is not a “one size fits all” topic. Further research will be beneficial
in order to find ways to engage each and every student that walks through the classroom door.

In the following section I will dig deeper into my reflection, focusing on the most important findings of my literature review.

**Literature Review**

While conducting research and preparing to write my literature review, I was able to identify four factors that influence motivation to read with African American middle school males including culturally relevant instruction, choice with text, building relationships and parental involvement. These four factors proved to be the most important aspects that would shape my research and ultimately give an answer to my question.

Working in a large urban district with high poverty schools has given me professional development opportunities to learn more about and explore culturally relevant instructional strategies. Yet, I have yet to feel as though my colleagues and I have had the chance to critically reflect on our own biases. Howard’s (2003) *Ingredients for Critical Teacher Reflection* (p. 195) offered a starting point for all educators to consider before bringing culturally relevant instruction into their own classrooms. It also serves as a great reflective tool to use when preparing to use the strategy guide I have created for this Capstone.

As stated above, working in a large urban district has also had its benefits. While researching my topic, my school was lucky enough to work directly with Sharroky Hollie to learn how to successfully implement his culturally and linguistically responsive
teaching and learning strategies. As Hollie stated, “teachers enter the field of education with the intention of creating an environment where all children feel comfortable and capable of learning” (2015, p. 9). Hollie’s advice and writings assisted me in not only developing culturally responsive teaching where I felt more equipped to create a comfortable and capable learning environment, but also with the eventual design that would shape my strategy guide.

Giving students many high interest choices when choosing a book to read has been an obvious choice for me since I began teaching. Yet, it can become intimidating when deciding when and how to give students other choices in the classroom. Much like the idea of ‘differentiating’ instruction, choice may mean additional preparation of resources and scaffolding ideas well in advance of rolling out actual activities for students to choose from. Cambria & Guthrie (2010), observed students who were given mini-choices that led to the students feeling like they were able to take more ownership of their learning, ultimately motivating them to become more engaged in the classroom. Simple and easy ideas like this pushed me to seek out and develop strategies where students were given choices to help motivate them in the classroom.

When researching the idea of building relationships with students, a coworker gave me an article about providing critical feedback. Not only did this seem beneficial for my strategy guide, but has also positively influenced the way I give feedback to the students in my school and classroom. The idea that students are more likely to construe teacher feedback in a negative light when they are already sensitive to being stereotyped because of race, gender or economic status made me realize that some of my students
may feel similarly (Cohen, Steele, & Ross, 1999; Yeager et al., 2013). Using the tool for
effective feedback enabled me to consciously deliver feedback that will hopefully sound
genuine to my students and ultimately help them further succeed.

This section has revisited my literature review while connecting my findings to
the most important areas of discovery, which allowed me to shape my strategy guide and
classroom while researching each of the four factors that influence motivation to read
with African American middle school males. The following section will present possible
implications and limitations to the research I have conducted.

Implications and Limitations

Having taught reading for a handful of years, I have come across a few different
curriculums that have been created to help ‘struggling’ readers with their literacy skills.
Yet, motivation was not considered with any of these programs. Instead, for example,
students are often expected to select independent reading books from lists that are far
from culturally relevant, while taking tests to gauge comprehension before they move on
to another title. While it is essential that comprehension skills must be assessed by
teachers, going about it in this manner may turn students even further away from the act
of reading.

Curriculums and culturally responsive strategies have typically been two separate
packages for school districts to invest in for teachers. By combining these two crucial
elements, any teacher is going to be better prepared to find success with the students they
are educating. The strategy guide that I have created offers tools that, while not a
standard curriculum, can assist in shaping a reading classroom by offering strategies to motivate students while finding ways to keep students reading.

That being said, the ideas within this strategy guide could be fleshed out to create an entire curriculum that is culturally relevant for different school subjects and aligned to state standards. While I have found four categories that are important when considering student motivation, the strategies within my guide are limited and could be expanded even further. I am also aware that, although I researched an abundance of available resources on my topic, continual research is published at a rapid rate on the topic of motivation and literacy. This new research, along with the strategies that have been overlooked that already work for teachers, could be combined to continually evolve the ideas brought forward in my strategy guide.

Another limitation is that my strategy guide has not been implemented in its entirety. While I have had the opportunity to utilize many of these strategies in my own classroom, the limits on my research within my current district did not allow me to analyze the results to come up with conclusions and final thoughts. Luckily, I am confident that all strategies covered within my guide will create the best learning atmosphere for students in the literacy classroom.

This section has explained the implications of my research, while noting possible limitations of the strategy guide I have created. The following section will examine next steps that could be done to further this research.
Next Steps

As a reading teacher, I find myself constantly on the lookout for new strategies and tools to help motivate my students to be successful with literacy. In depth research on the topic of reading motivation has given me the opportunity to focus in on and categorize what is most important when it comes to creating situations for students to find the most success. With the limitations described above, my journey does not stop with the conclusion of this paper. Current research on the topic grows continually, while my own critical reflection must continue to expand for the rest of my teaching career and life. My strategy guide will to grow as I continue to read current literacy research and observe and talk to educators surrounding me.

I have had the opportunity this past school year to step into a new teaching role. While I am still teaching two reading intervention classes daily, I spent the rest of the day coaching other educators on how to implement reading instruction into content area classrooms. I will begin the next school year with a similar position. Having this role will not only allow me to continue using my strategies in my own classroom, but I will also bring them into my colleagues’ classrooms across our school. Furthermore, I will be introducing many of these strategies into our school’s professional development opportunities this upcoming fall in order to meet the goals of our schoolwide literacy improvement plan.

This section has covered the continual research that I will take part in surrounding literacy motivation, as well as immediate opportunities I have to use and communicate
the results that I have found. The last section of this chapter will offer my final thoughts and a conclusion of the work that I have done.

**Summary**

Since becoming a first year teacher in a high poverty middle school, I have been asking myself the question, “What factors influence motivation in reading for African American middle school males?” After reading extensive research that has been written on the subject, I found four recurring categories to help answer my question:

1. Culturally Relevant Instruction
2. Choice with Literacy
3. Building Relationships
4. Parental Involvement

These categories helped build the framework, which would eventually develop into a strategy guide that could be useful to any teacher asking a similar question.

By laying the framework to assist in answering my question, I feel like I can better equip my students to be more successful in becoming proficient readers than before. I also now have a comprehensive list of to bring other educators in my building to help create a literacy rich environment schoolwide. More than ever, I look forward to and have the confidence to build literacy skills by motivating and inspiring the students that I work with every day.
APPENDIX A

The Strategy Guide
Culturally Relevant Instruction

Reflecting Before Teaching

Critical Teacher Reflection

What Is It? Even before stepping into a diverse classroom, teachers need to reflect on their own biases. This reflection should allow teachers greater clarity into how their own thinking affects their students. Tyrone Howard (2003) points out that it is essential for educators to reflect on racial and cultural differences as the teaching profession becomes increasingly homogenous. Howard has offered questions and considerations to reflect on before creating a culturally relevant classroom. Of course, this reflection process is always ongoing.

How Do I Use It? Teachers may find themselves critically reflecting within a whole group professional development setting, with a small group of teachers, or even by themselves. A teacher who wants to critically reflect may start a “race reflective journal” that can be revisited throughout the school year or an entire career. Below are a handful of questions that may be asked during the critical reflective process:

- How frequently and what types of interactions did I have with individuals from racial backgrounds different from my own growing up?
- Who were the primary persons that helped to shape my perspectives of individuals from different racial groups? How were their opinions formed?
- Have I ever harbored prejudiced thoughts towards people from different racial backgrounds?
• If I do harbor prejudiced thoughts, what effects do such thoughts have on students who come from those backgrounds?

• Do I create negative profiles of individuals who come from different racial backgrounds?

Once a school year begins, critical reflection needs to continue. Below are a handful of questions that may be asked during the critical reflective process while the school year is in progress:

• What is the racial breakdown for students referred for gifted education or AP courses?

• How frequently do I differentiate instruction?

• Do scoring rubrics give inherent advantages for certain ways of knowing and expression?

• Do I allow culturally based differences in language, speech, reading, and writing to shape my perceptions about students’ cognitive ability?

• Do I create a multitude of ways to evaluate students? Or do I rely solely on paper, pencil and oral responses? How often do I allow nontraditional means of assessment, such as role-playing, skits, poetry, rap, self-evaluations, Socratic seminars, journaling, student-led conferences, or cooperative group projects, to be a part of my class?

**When Is It Useful?** As stated above, reflecting on these types of questions should start before the school year, and continue on throughout one’s teaching profession.
Culturally Relevant Instruction

Classroom Environment

Creating a Responsive Learning Environment

What Is It? After a teacher has critically reflected on their own teaching practices, it is time to set up a responsive learning environment in their classroom or learning space. As Hollie (2012) states, responsive here means that the environment validates and affirms each students’ beliefs. A responsive learning environment should feel welcoming to all that walk into the area, while showing examples of every students’ lives that will walk through the door.

How Do I Use It? The following six elements should be considered when creating a responsive learning environment:

- **Print-Rich Environment:** The environment should be filled with academic language, content-specific vocabulary, word walls, and signs reminding students of all routines and expectations in and around the classroom.

- **Books, Books, Books!** Popular and relevant titles should be spread throughout the entire room. Many books should be displayed in a variety of categories, such as genres, favorites, authors, etc. It is also important to have tables that have titles spread out randomly so students are able to preview a wide variety of books in order to find something that is appealing to them. Try hanging books from the ceiling in plastic sleeves. These are usually the first selections snatched by students looking to check out a great book.
• **Students Everywhere:** For many classrooms, examples of student work is displayed and celebrated on the classroom walls. Adding to this, reading classrooms should have photographs of current students holding and reading their favorite titles.

• **Learning Centers:** A prominent learning center in a reading classroom should always be a comfortable and inviting independent reading center. This area may include bean bag chairs and other comfortable seating options with inviting lighting. Other areas might include the class library, small group zone, media zone, and a cultural zone where students can bring in artifacts from home to display and write about for other students to see.

• **Culturally Colorful:** Any work or learning environment will become more lively when the area looks bright and inviting. Furthermore, a culturally colorful classroom should have many examples of culturally significant artifacts with examples of those within that culture reading and writing.

• **Technology:** As technology becomes more prevalent every day in our country, examples of technology should be easy to spot around the classroom, with opportunities for students to use technology to enhance their learning. Often times, the only way a student is going to be able to access a certain book title is by finding it electronically on a tablet or computer.

**When Do I Use It?** A responsive learning environment should be set up before the first student or parent walks into the classroom. As the year progresses, things may be added
or changed within the classroom, but the above elements should always be visible throughout an entire school year.

Culturally Relevant Instruction

Texts

Must-Read Texts

What Is It? Tatum (2006) explains at length the importance of finding “must-read” texts to engage African American males who struggle with literacy. Appendix B contains a full list of books that myself and other educators have deemed “must-read” texts with African American middle school males in mind. Most importantly, teachers should use student input to decide what books are considered “must-read” texts while building up a collection of great reading materials.

How Do I Use It? When searching for “must-read” texts, educators should keep in mind the following characteristics these texts should share in order to reach students who may otherwise not be interested in picking up books in the classroom:

- Intellectually exciting for both the students and the teacher
- Serve as a roadmap and provide apprenticeship (taking into consideration cultural characteristics)
- Cognitively challenging to students
- Help students apply literacy skills and strategies independently

When Do I Use It? “Must-read” texts should be placed in and around the classroom from the very first day of school. Pictures of students holding and reading these titles should be hung on the walls. Teachers and students who have finished the titles should
give book talks encouraging others to check out texts they found engaging. The following page contains an activity I created that has encouraged many of my students to pick up and read books after witnessing classmates enthusiastically review titles they had finished and loved.

Culturally Relevant Instruction

Book Shares

**Book Advertisements**

**What Is It?**  Book Advertisements are exactly what they sound like; students advertising books that they have read and loved. I created this activity in my second year of teaching, and have had students make the advertisements nearly every quarter of the school year since. After recording the students giving their sales pitch for the books, we load the videos to stream throughout the day on a television by the front office in the school. I also show them in my classroom to get students excited about titles that I think they will enjoy.

Below are the specific steps I use when creating Book Advertisements, with the actual materials located in Appendix C.

**How Do I Use It?**

1. Students choose a book that they finished during the quarter or school year that they would like to tell others about.
2. Students use the “Book Advertisement!” graphic organizer to create their sales pitch.
3. Teacher edits the sales pitch with each student during independent reading.
4. Students (or teacher depending on time constraints) type a full page example of the final book advertisement, choosing the largest font possible that will fit on one
page (this will be projected on to a large screen for students to read while they are being filmed, while many students will end up memorizing their advertisements)

5. Students practice reading their book advertisements with partners in class.

6. Teacher records students reading their book advertisement while holding the book. (I was lucky enough to have our ‘tech’ support create a full sized banner that reads “[School’s] Favorite Books!” I hang this with a bright colored backdrop to really give the advertisements a professional feel.

7. Students watch the advertisements and offer constructive criticism to each other.

**When Do I Use It?** I have always had students create Book Advertisements as a ‘final project’ at the end of the quarter. Some students have asked if they could create a book advertisement after finishing a title that they loved, which is as simple as hanging the banner and pressing record before loading the video onto our school computer.

Regardless of when they are created throughout a school year, they can be shown and referred to for years to come.

This past year, a few of my students recognized Seniors from old Book Advertisements that I was showing during a class period! They are also useful to show as an attention getter when introducing a read aloud book to the group, so students can see a classmate who is already giving the same title a glowing review.
Culturally Relevant Instruction

Fluency Practice

**Reader’s Theater**

**What Is It?** Wood & Jocius (2013) showed that African American males feel disadvantaged when their family and life experiences are not reflected in the texts that they read in the classroom. Reader’s Theaters are a great tool to conquer this because teachers can write them about absolutely any classroom topic! Reader’s theaters are scripts that help students practice their fluency, expression and comprehension skills. While websites offer reader’s theaters for downloads, I have found that creating my own using scenes from books, movies or fiction from my own imagination (as well as putting students from my classes into them) is a surefire way to increase engagement while finding ways to connect the text to my students’ lives.

**How Do I Use It?** Before students arrive, teachers should create a script using a concept that will connect to the students culturally and within context of what is being taught in the classroom. (See Appendix D for an example)

When introducing the script with students:

1. Read it aloud as a class with students following along.
2. Ask students to point out difficult or confusing words to practice as a group.
3. Allow students to work in groups of 2-3 (larger depending on roles)
4. Students should get used to always reading the scripts a minimum of three times over.
5. Remind students to practice reading fluently and with expression.

**When Do I Use It?** I use reader’s theaters all throughout the year with my students.

Some of the more common times I use this strategy are listed below:

- To build background knowledge
- Before reading a difficult section of text
- After reading an exciting portion of a fiction story
- Offered during ‘choice time’ in the classroom
- I have even had students create their own!

**Tip** - Once you have created many different reader’s theater scripts, you can offer opportunities for student choice by printing off a few of your scripts and giving a quick explanation of what each scene entails!

Student Choice

Choosing an Independent Reading Book

Choosing the Right Book

What Is It? As Gambrell (2010) has stated, students are going to become more motivated to read when they have a wide selection of reading materials to choose from. Students who take part in prescribed reading curriculums are often forced to read books chosen from a short list in order to meet the correct Lexile level and are often asked to take quizzes after reading to assess comprehension. While having students read at their reading level while assessing proficiency has its place in a reading classroom, it is essential to pique student interest by offering a wide variety of texts in many genres, and letting students choose freely from these selections (Tatum, 2000, Cambria & Guthrie, 2010). Reading classrooms should offer opportunities for students to read anything they show interest in throughout a school year. That being said, it is still important that a student does not choose a book that is much too difficult to read, which may only cause frustration. The following strategy explains how to guide students to find a book that is both interesting and accessible, and how to structurally create an atmosphere that invites students to preview books they find enjoyable.

How Do I Use It?

Before Class:

1. Use as many tables in the room to set up three library areas.
2. Place as many ‘high interest’ titles as possible face up on all the tables in the three areas.

3. Label the three areas with large posters (by number, color, region, etc.)

During Class:

1. Invite students to preview a book cover. What do they notice? (Title, author, illustrator, pictures, awards, summary, praise)

2. Model the process of previewing the front and back covers of books. Think aloud in explaining what draws one to a specific book, or why a book might not look or sound interesting, and so is put back.

3. Model using the “Five Finger Rule” (See Appendix E)

4. Walk through the three areas. Pick up a few books and give ten second book talks that may already interest some of the students in the room.

5. Divide the class into three teams. Give the students a set amount of time to preview books at each area.

6. While the students preview books, they should be writing down titles that look interesting to them, not choosing any books to take with them at this point (See Appendix E)

7. Interact with students and give feedback on how they are previewing books, while remaining enthusiastic about the great titles they are checking out.

8. When students return to their desks, they circle the book that looks most interesting to them. One by one, allow students to go back and select their first independent reading book.
9. Give each student a post-it note to stick on the cover of their book with their name for ownership.

**When Do I Use It?** I always have students choose their independent reading books on the second day of class. I get excited about this day, proclaiming it “My favorite day of Reader’s Workshop,” as they get to search my vast library for anything they would like to check out. I try to set aside as much time as possible throughout the quarter for students to read their high interest titles. The books are also great for when students have completed all classwork, as it always gives them a task to take part in related to reading.

**Tip** - If a student is still reluctant to choose a title, ask the student privately what they would like to read about, or what interests them. I often scour the rest of the school (or even book stores) for titles to bring back to students the following day in order to find them something they will show interest in.

Student Choice
Choosing How to Respond

Reader Response Options

What Is It? An easy and quick way to assess what students are taking away from their independent reading books is to have them keep a Daily Reading Log. These can be utilized to assess students’ comprehension of the things they are reading, while giving them opportunities to practice using reading strategies. Cambria and Guthrie (2010) suggest giving students mini-choices, which in turn help students think deeper during while they are reading. These choices can be quick and affordable, while keeping with the original content of the lesson plan. The following section explains how to set up and use three different reader response options for when students have finish their daily independent reading. The three options include a daily reading log, teacher questions and a summary.

How Do I Use It? The reader response graphic organizers are combined so that students have access to all three within a packet, folder, or single sheet.

- Choice One: Daily Reading Log - This choice will ask the students for the date, their daily starting and ending page, and two reader’s response sentences. The graphic organizer is equipped with a number of sentence starters that the students may choose from to respond with.
- Choice Two: Here’s What Happened - Again, the students write the date, starting page and ending page. With this graphic organizer, the students write a summary
from their reading on that day. It has been intentionally created without giving a lot of support for students who may be ready to form their own summaries without a prescribed template, although it is worth using sentence starters earlier in the year while teaching students how to write summaries.

- Choice Three: Choose 3! - After writing the date, starting page and ending page from that day’s reading, students simply answer three of the five questions a teacher has posted on the board. Although most students will be reading different books for independent reading, teachers can still ask questions about fiction, non-fiction and reading strategies. Teachers can even take the sentence starters from the Daily Reading Log and turn them into questions. Below are five questions that may be posted on the board on any particular day:

1. Who is the protagonist in your book? Why do you think this is the protagonist?
2. What is one question you have about your book right now?
3. Open up to the last page you read. What is one word that you think is important to know on this page? Why do you think it is important?
4. Explain a mind movie you made while reading your book today.
5. Would you tell your friends to read this book? Why or why not?

When Do I Use It? The individual tools should be introduced and scaffolded with students from the beginning of the school year. Students who are unfamiliar with all of the reading strategies may struggle to use them while reading until they are explicitly
taught more about each strategy. After each response tool has been introduced, students can begin making their own choices daily after they read.

**Tip** - I give students other mini-choices early in the year before they have been introduced to these three tools, such as what color post-it note they want to use to write their reader response on.

**Student Choice**

Choosing Books

**Book Scavenger Hunt**

**What Is It?** The *Book Scavenger Hunt* allows students to interact with a variety of preselected books around the classroom. The key to this activity is that the teacher has created a scavenger hunt using books that they already know are among some of the most popular with students. Teachers could also use the results from student surveys to include books tailored to individual student interests.

**How Do I Use It?**

1. Prior to students coming into the room, the books should be set around the classroom (see Choosing the Right Book) with specific titles from the scavenger hunt in visible areas.

2. Once the students enter the room, they all receive a “Book Scavenger Hunt” packet (see Appendix F)

3. Give the students a set amount of time to complete the activity (20 minutes)

4. Students hunt around the classroom for books that are listed on the activity. When they find one of the books, they preview it to fill out the required information from the sheet.

   **Tip** - I like to allow students to work with partners, as I find it builds student relationships and students often talk about books that they loved in the past with one another. A variation of the activity that a colleague of
mine uses is that students are not allowed to speak to each other, but they can use movements and gestures to help each other out during the scavenger hunt.

**When Do I Use It?** This is a great activity to do the day before choosing independent reading books. Time and time again, I have had students who enter my classroom who are quick to let me know they hate reading, only to find the same student finding books that they want to read during the scavenger hunt activity. It can also be repeated later in the year, when attempting to help students discover new genres they may have not considered reading in the past.

Created by Tuttle, B. (2015).
Student Choice

Project Choices

Choosing Your Own Projects

What Is It? Guthrie and Alao (1997) explained that giving students opportunities to express themselves with many different options will ultimately make them more motivated to learn. A great time to utilize this strategy is when assessing what students have taken away from a novel that has been read by an entire class. Students can be given a smorgasbord of ideas, which they ultimately choose from when creating their projects. Ideas could include reports, posters, videos, songs/lyrics, poetry, etc.

How Do I Use It? Depending on the novel being read, teachers should create a set of projects for students to choose from that will assess what they have learned. Different learning styles should be taken into account when creating the actual assessments. Teachers should also create rubrics for the assessments, while showing students examples of possible outcomes. Appendix G shows an example of possible projects I created for the book *The Watson’s Go To Birmingham – 1963* (Curtis, C. P., 1995).

When Do I Use It? This project is great for the end of every unit that has included a class novel. If students have found enthusiasm in a good book recently finished, they are more likely to put time and effort into a project that speaks to them and that they have chosen from themselves.

Adapted from Tuttle, B. (2016).
**Student Choice**

High Interest Topics

**What We Want to Know About**

**What Is It?** Allowing students to contribute ideas of what they want to learn about will lead to more opportunities for students to engage with culturally relevant topics (Sciurba, 2014). Interest and reading surveys will give teachers a plethora of information concerning what students may want to learn about, but it is still useful to specifically ask classroom communities what they would like to cover in order to maximize engagement.

**How Do I Use It?**

1. Have the class brainstorm ideas of things they are interested in and would like to know more about on a half sheet of paper. (It might be useful to create a generic list of ideas for the students to view)

2. When the time is up, have the students crumple up their papers and throw all of the “snowballs” to the front of the classroom.

3. One by one, students or the teacher open up the papers and read ideas students have written down.

4. Each idea is written on a poster that is displayed somewhere in the classroom. (This helps hold teachers accountable for touching on these subjects as the school year progresses.)

5. Be sure to reference the poster of ideas and the student who added them when covering the topics!
When Do I Use It? This activity should be done at the beginning of the school year. Along with the surveys, this is a great way to get to know students, build relationships, and ultimately give students more choices to increase motivation and engagement. The poster of ideas can be referenced throughout the entire school year for classroom topics, and becomes more useful as the year gets longer.

Building Relationships

Getting to Know Students

Interest Surveys

What Is It? Ladson-Billings (1995) argued that teachers must connect to their students to build and maintain strong student-teacher relationships. Teachers can immediately begin to learn about their students by having them fill out interest surveys on the first day of class. Furthermore, a teacher who has created a short presentation about themselves that includes their background and interests is more likely to make connections with the students in front of them. The following section describes how to use interest surveys as sustainable artifacts that can be referenced throughout all of a students time with that teacher.

How Do I Use It?

1. Think of questions and topics that will be spark student’s interests and make them want to respond thoughtfully and honestly (See Appendix H)
2. While students fill out the survey, walk around and try to make instant connections with the responses you are reading on their papers.
3. After the surveys are completed and handed in, read through the responses to learn more about each individual student. Opportunities will always arise when you can make a connection to specific students interests.
4. But it doesn’t stop there! Keep the surveys in a folder or binder so that you can refer to them throughout the school year.
5. Not only can they be used to help find students high interest independent reading books, but can also be referenced when looking for non-fiction articles, etc.

**When Do I Use It?** Interest Surveys should be given within the first couple days of students coming into the classroom. As explained above, you can continue to use these surveys to connect to students and build relationships throughout the year, while also using them to find high interest reading material for each student in the classroom.

Building Relationships

Reading (Views) and Interests

**Reading Surveys**

**What Is It?** Reading surveys are another great artifact to keep yearlong in order to make connections with students through literacy. Much like interest surveys, they can be used to find texts that will motivate students to read, while also giving educators a view of how the students identify themselves and those around them as readers. Ladson-Billings (1995) suggested highlighting areas where students are deemed an expert on a classroom topic in order to build classroom relationships. By analyzing a students reading survey, teachers can begin planning in the early stages which student will be the expert on specific concepts.

**How Do I Use It?**

1. The Reading Survey (See Appendix I) is two sided. Both sides serve specific purposes.
2. “What Interests You?” gives students a plethora of ideas, and asks them to grade each topic like a teacher grades a student, assigning higher marks to topics that interest them.
3. This resource is valuable to learn more about student interests, find books that may interest particular students, and to get an idea of topics each student would be motivated to learn more about.
4. “This Is How I Feel About Reading” presents students with ten sentence starters.
5. Students are asked to respond with the first thing that pops into their head as they read the sentence starters.

6. This resource will aid educators in finding out how the student identifies as a reader, while getting a quick glimpse into the reading culture among their friends and family.

7. Keep these surveys for the entire school year, in the same binder or folder as the interest surveys the students have taken.

**When Do I Use It?** As with the interest surveys, this is a great resource to have the students fill out within the first couple days of class. The “What Interests You” portion has useful information to consult if a lesson allows for teachers to choose from any text to use, in order to spark the interest of students who need quick motivation.

Building Relationships

Giving Students Academic Feedback

**Effective Feedback**

**What Is It?** Yeager (2013 et. al) explained that feedback is one of the most important levers of control teachers have to positively influence learning. Students are more likely to buy in and succeed when teachers are able to give them effective feedback about the tasks at hand. Giving all students the same feedback can affect people differently based on cultural affiliation. Academic feedback often has little or no effect (or even unintended negative effects) on students. Feedback’s efficacy is all about the components included in its delivery. The following section explains how to give students effective feedback using a specific protocol.

**How Do I Use It?** Use the “Effective Feedback” protocol (See Appendix J) to practice giving students feedback. Effective feedback is:

- **Goal Referenced**: The specific learning or behavior goal
- **Timely**: Delivered as close to the target behavior as possible
- **Actionable/Specific**: Included what is being done correctly to move toward the goal
- **Actionable/Specific**: Includes what can be improved upon in order to read the goal
- **Supportive**: Contains explicit affirmation that the teacher will support student growth
Below is an example of effective feedback a student could be given after completing a standardized reading test:

- “Look, your goal for the right amount of learning was 190, it says here your score was 195, so you beat your goal by 5 points. That tells us your brain is growing faster than predicted!”

- “I see you took 2 hours to complete the test. That tells me you took your time to read and reread and figure out each question before you answered so they couldn’t trick you. That is what great readers do! Keep it up!

- “One thing I notice here is that your score in the vocabulary section is lower than your other scores, so you know how you can improve your vocabulary like when they give you questions about roots and prefixes, right? Well, those are what we study during “Word of the Day” in the morning, so make sure you are paying attention to how words are put together during “Word of the Day” instruction and your vocabulary score will go up. This is how you are going to keep growing your brain, and I am going to help you get there.”

**When Do I Use It?** Students can be given feedback regardless of what they are doing in the classroom. Here are some examples of when feedback can help motivate students:

1. Individual feedback while work is being done
2. While a teacher is circulating
3. While referencing a rubric
4. Around the learning target or prerequisite skills that lead to the learning target
5. Students can even use a modified version of the protocol to give peers feedback when using a rubric or with a clearly defined goal and task.

Building Relationships
Conferencing

Independent Reading Conferences

What Is It? Ladson-Billings (1995) found that students are more confident and motivated to learn after they have developed a collaborative relationship with their teacher. A great way for a reading teacher and students to join forces is by talking about the books they are reading. Teachers have the perfect opportunity to do this during independent reading. Yet, Fountas & Pinnell (2001) explained that an independent reading conference should not be an interrogation. Teachers must be prepared to have genuine, enthusiastic conversations with students about the books they are reading. The following section offers suggestions for talking points during independent reading conferences that won’t sound like the teacher is simply assessing a student’s knowledge of what they are reading.

How Do I Use It? When conferencing with a student a reading teacher should:

- Approach the student enthusiastically about what they are reading
- Have a genuine conversation with the student about the text
- Remind students of effective reading strategies that expert readers use
- Practice reading aloud together
- Encourage the reader to continue (“I’m excited to find out if your prediction comes true! I can’t wait until you get to the next chapter, it’s so exciting!”)
**When Do I Use It?** Independent reading conferences should occur throughout the entire school year. The conferences will give teachers the opportunity to listen and understand the reading process for each student. Furthermore, teachers can tailor their instruction to the individual student in front of them. A conference may only last four or five minutes, but don’t expect to reach every student daily. Successful reading conferences will build relationships when students are excited to update the teacher about the book they are reading.

Building Relationships

Response and Discussion

Response and Discussion Techniques

What Is It? Hollie (2015) argued that using a variety of response and discussion techniques will build positive relationships with students. He went on to say that teachers who use these techniques responsively “demonstrate appreciation and value of students culturally when using the techniques frequently and strategically” (p. 53). Response and discussion techniques are designed to get all students talking (and often moving) in a short period of time. The following section contains a few examples of response and discussion techniques that have found success in the classrooms of the school in which I teach.

How Do I Use It? Some response and discussion techniques will have to be taught and practiced with students before they reach their maximum effectiveness. When choosing a technique, consider how you want the students to respond as well as the amount of time you will allow for the sharing to take place. Of course, these techniques can be tweaked in many ways to make them most relevant to the specific classroom and students.

Examples of Response and Discussion Techniques:

• Whip Around: The teacher asks a short answer question to the class. Beginning with one side of the room, the teacher “whips around” and gets a quick response from each student. Students are allowed to respond with the same answer as others, in most cases.
• **Silent Appointment:** Students respond to a question from the teacher on a piece of paper. Next, students make a “silent appointment” by making eye-contact, nodding or using hand gestures with another student in the classroom. When a student has made an appointment, they give the thumbs up signal. Finally, the two students walk towards each other to discuss.

• **Pick Up Sticks:** Prepared popsicle sticks with students names (or class numbers, etc.) are kept available for teacher use. After the teacher asks the class a question, one stick is chosen, and that student responds. Used sticks can be placed aside until all students have responded throughout a class period.

• **Corners:** Chart paper with answers are placed around the room. After the teacher poses a question, students walk to the portion of the room that matches their response. Once in these corners, students discuss with others that are standing at the same answer. Groups eventually share aloud.

• **Graffiti Talk:** Several questions are posted around the room by the teacher on large posters (leave space for students written responses). Students get up and walk around to the posters responding to the questions. This can be done silently or with quiet conversation. Eventually, students sit back down and a class discussion of responses ensues.

• **One-Three-Six:** The teacher poses a question or problem to the students. First, students respond individually on paper. Next, students move into groups of three and create a list of responses. Then, two groups of three join and create a larger
list of responses (new ideas can be added as well). Eventually, each large group shares their ideas with the entire class.

**When Do I Use It?** Using a variety of response and discussion techniques will bring a continuous freshness to activities in the classroom. Dig deep into your toolbox and expand your techniques as you experiment with different variations!


Huntington Beach, CA: Shell Educational Publishing, Inc.
Parental Involvement

Parent Surveys

Parent/Guardian Surveys

What Is It? Parent/Guardian surveys, much like student surveys, can help teachers gather vital information to build trusting relationships that will translate into classroom successes. Parent/Guardian surveys should be used to find out the best ways to contact families, ask questions about how families view their student (strengths, goals, etc.) and things the teacher can do to support the families goals for the students education. Many parents express that their voice is left unheard when it comes to their students’ education (Howard & Reynolds, 2008). Parent/Guardian surveys can gather information that teachers can use to show families that they are working to include their input. Often, these types of surveys are sent home at the beginning of the year with the expectation that students return them to their teachers. Yet, researchers have found that lack of time and availability keep some parents from becoming involved with their student’s academic activities at home (Jeynes, 2005, Williams & Sanchez, 2011). For this reason, teachers may have to find other ways to make sure that this information is commuted to and filled out by families. The section below offers strategies to make sure communication is established in order to gather the information on a Parent/Guardian survey.

How Do I Use It? Teachers can create their own Parent/Guardian surveys to ask the most important questions that are relevant to their specific class. An example of a
Parent/Guardian Survey has been included in Appendix K. Below is some information that should be gathered on every Parent/Guardian Survey:

- Name of Student
- Birthday of Student
- Name of Parent/Guardian
- Current Address
- Home/Cell Phone Numbers
- Work Numbers
- Best Way to Contact
- Student Strengths
- Goals for Your Student
- Things the school can do to support your student

As stated above, there may be occasions when it is difficult to gather this information from a busy parent. Below are some suggestions to make sure communication is established between teachers and parents/guardians:

- Have copies available for parents to fill out at beginning of the year open houses
- Send copies home with students and offer a small reward if they return it
- Set up at a time to have a phone conversation with a parent/guardian to ask each question
- Set up a home visit/community event visit to meet with the family outside of school
- If communication has been established, email the survey to be filled out
• Complete the survey during Parent/Teacher conferences

When Do I Use It? Much like student surveys, parent/guardian surveys should be completed as soon as possible, even before the school year starts. If communication cannot be established early in the year, the information on this survey should be gathered whenever possible. These surveys can be placed in a binder right alongside student and reading surveys, to be referred to throughout the school year whenever needed.

Adapted from Tuttle, B. (2013).
Parental Involvement

Student-Led Conferences

**Student-Led Conferences**

**What Is It?** Family turnout during conferences increases when teachers use a student-led conference format (Amatea, 2013 p. 330). Not only will more families show up, but students take more ownership for their learning knowing that they will have to explain their learning to their parents. Student-led conferences do require some preparation work by the teacher and students, but students walk away with public speaking skills, writing practice and chances to self-assess. While there are a variety of styles teachers may use during student-led conferences, the following suggestions have been explored by myself and fellow coworkers with great results.

**How Do I Use It?** Here are some ways teachers and students can prepare for student-led conferences. Of course, the suggestions can be tweaked and changed to best support any teacher’s classroom. Below are examples of artifacts to consider preparing for student-led conferences at the beginning of the school year:

1. **Portfolios:** A popular option where teachers and students collect work examples from throughout the school year. Students can prepare writing reflections to go with each piece of work to use as a talking point during their conferences.

2. **Bar Graphs:** Students can do cross-curricular work while creating bar graphs to show the progress they are making in different areas.
3. **PowerPoints**: Students may utilize technology to create a PowerPoint to give their parents that may include all of the information they will be going through during their conference.

4. **Goal Setting**: Students can work with teachers to self-assess their performance in predetermined areas to create goals for the next portion of the school year.

5. **Scripts**: Depending on the style of conference, teachers may create scripts that students use when speaking to their parents during the conference.

Once teachers decide the artifacts that students will prepare, it is time to consider the actual style of conference that the student will lead. Conferencing set-up is often not up to teachers, depending on how entire school delivers them (scheduled, pop-in, content area teams, etc.). Below are three approaches that can be used during student-led conferences:

1. **One to One**: This approach is useful for days that have been set aside for conferences. Whether your school uses the “time-slot” or “pop-in” model, this allows families to come in one at a time and have students give their conferences before parents debrief with the classroom teacher afterwards.

2. **You’re Always Welcome**: With this approach, parents come in during school on days or hours that have been set-aside for those who cannot make the traditional conference meetings. A room has been designated for the conferences where students are pulled out of class to meet with their parents. One issue with this approach is that teachers are often unable to meet with the parents if they are teaching, but if teachers schedule colleagues to lead their class, this obstacle can be
eliminated. Otherwise, the parent and teacher should figure out other arrangements to talk.

3. **Stations:** If multiple families are going to be in the room at once (possibly with multiple teachers from different content areas) stations may be set up for parents and their students. In this type of set up, teachers should be floating around the room to assist with parent questions and to help students deliver their conferences.

**When Do I Use It?** Student-led conferences should be given by students at least twice a year. Teachers must be organized from early on in the school year so that they have the artifacts well in place by the time students prepare for their conferences. Feedback from parents can help drive how teachers decide to have students present in future student-led conferences.

Adapted from Hennick, C. (2016). Kids take the lead: Student-led conferences can boost turnout rates and give kids a chance to shine. *Scholastic Teacher, 54*(1), 41.
Parental Involvement

Out in the Community

**Family Reader’s Clubs**

**What Is It?** Many researches have concluded that educators are more likely to connect with families if they are willing to get out into the community in order to build relationships and communication (Fan, Williams and Wolters, 2012, Epstein, 2001, Behar-Horenstein, 2008, Ladson-Billings, 1995). Doing so isn’t always easy for a teacher with a busy life. This may mean giving up personal time outside of contract hours, spending time in new areas and reaching out extensively to families for worthwhile turnouts. Yet, research suggests doing these things will translate into motivation and academic success in the classroom. Below are some suggestions for opportunities teachers can pursue in order to build stronger bonds with students and their families by offering Family Reader’s Clubs.

**How Do I Use It?** As mentioned above, teachers will need to consider time, resources, money and locations when offering these types of opportunities for parents. Yet, if teachers are willing to put in the extra hours, schools and community figures and businesses are great resources to gather the additional needs.

- **Reader’s Club Picnics:** Parks are wonderful places to suggest meeting up with families and community members, weather permitting. During an initial meeting, teachers can suggest to school administrators that school funds or Title 1 funds be used to purchase food for a community picnic, as well as for books to give away
to families. This offers a great opportunity for teachers to meet with parents and find out more about students’ families. Additionally, teachers can offer parents suggestions for supporting their child’s reading at home (See Appendix L). A picnic is a great way to begin a Family Reader’s Club, even if subsequent events are offered with different formats.

- **Community Writing Projects:** A Community Writing Project may initially be suggested at a school event, conferences, Reader’s Club Picnic, etc. A great way to learn more about families and cultures that can be brought back into the classroom is by having families take part in writing about their family histories. In this “Voices of Family” project, students and family members can interview each other. Afterwards, families can work together to create a visual or presentation (PowerPoint, poem, song, poster, etc.). A culminating event could bring families back together to showcase what they have created. Students could also showcase their family creations during or over a succession of class periods, for families that cannot make the event.

- **Book Clubs for Adults:** If teachers are willing to seek out and provide a space for families to come together, book clubs for adults can be a great way to get families, as well as other educators within the school, involved and communicating. Teachers and parents could work together to model conversations that great readers have, and bring the skills home to continue the reading dialogue with their students. Teachers may even consider involving both students and their parents in these book clubs.
**When Do I Use It?** Family Reader’s Clubs should be offered early in the year, and last all year round. As previously mentioned, parents may be working or busy during these events, so a mixture of during school, after school and weekend events should be offered. Once relationships thrive with families, teachers may not see events outside of the school day as “giving up” their time, but rather an entertaining activity to look forward to with new friends.

Parental Involvement

Learning at the Library

Learning at the Library

What Is It? Trips to the library with students and families are great opportunities to connect with parents and teach students how to use the facility on their own (Stauduhar, 2017). The PewResearchCenter (2013) found that many parents are initially introduced to their local libraries by teachers or their students’ schools. Other parents may already be familiar with community libraries if they already go there themselves, bring their children there, or use the library facility for other resources, such as internet access. Below are some suggestions for teachers who are interested in using the library to meet parents and familiarize students with the resources libraries have to offer.

How Do I Use It?

- **Signing Up:** Library visits will allow families and students to sign up for a library cards/memberships.

- **Tours:** Most libraries will offer tours given by librarians that work at that specific site. Librarians will give advice on how to use all the resources that the facilities have to offer, while answering questions along the way.

- **Author Talks:** This will involve side work from the teacher and students, but convincing local authors to come and read from their books at a local event is a great way to bring community members together.
• **Library Websites:** Local library websites will often include information on how teachers and parents can use different resources such as library storytimes, book recommendations, blogs, etc.

**When Do I Use It?** Library visits can happen during or after the school day. As with other strategies, it may be useful to offer times both during and after the school day, to accommodate to as many families as possible. Once the ball is rolling, teachers may run into the same community members they introduced to the library on a prior visit!

APPENDIX B

Must Read Texts
**Must Read Texts**

Below is a list of books that have been deemed “must read texts” for African American middle school males by educational scholars, myself, and students that I have worked with in the past. Furthermore, educators should always be on the lookout for books that have awards such as the Coretta Scott King Award, Newberry Award, Pura Belpre Award and others.

Check out these books:

- *The Crossover*, by Kwame Alexander
- *The Watsons Go to Birmingham – 1963*, by Christopher Paul Curtis
- *Copper Sun*, by Sharon M. Draper
- *Tears of a Tiger*, by Sharon M. Draper
- *The Skin I’m In*, by Sharon M. Draper
- *Bronx Masquerade*, by Nikki Grimes
- *Malcom X*, by Andrwe Helfer
- *The First Part Last*, by Angela Johnson
- *Still I Rise*, by Roland Owen Laird
- *47*, by Walter Mosley
- *Monster*, by Walter Dean Myers
- *Yummy: The Last Days of a Southside Short*, by G. Neri
- *A Child Called It*, by Dave Pelzer
- *The Well: David’s Story*, by Mildred D. Taylor
APPENDIX C

Book Advertisement Materials
Book Advertisements!

These days many jobs require a recorded interview before an employee can be hired. More and more jobs are also requiring recorded material for employees on a daily basis. It is important to practice these skills to keep yourself ahead of the professional competition!

You will have the opportunity to practice recording your material by making a book advertisement this week in Reader’s Workshop! You will write a short advertisement of a book that you loved, trying to tell other students why this is a book that they should check out.

Requirements

1. Ask a question to get people interested about your book:
   Examples: Do you like scary books?
   Have you ever wondered what it would be like to be trapped in another world?
   Do you like books that make you laugh so hard your stomach hurts?

   Your Question____________________________________________________________

2. The name and author of your book.
   Examples: Then you should check out (title) by (author)
   The name of this book is (title) by (author)
   Then I bet you will love (title) by (author)

   Your Book and Author______________________________________________________

   Example: ___(Name of your book)___ is a book about ____________. The main character in this book is named____________. The story takes place in ____________.

   Your Summary___________________________________________________________
4. Why you think others should read the book
Example: I think you should read this book because…
You might like this book if…
Everybody should check out this book because…

Your Response ______________________________________________________________

5. Other Options (Choose at least one)
You must choose at least one (1) of the following options to mention during your book advertisement:

_____ Why you liked the book  “I liked this book because…”
_____ Awards the book has won  “An award this book has won…”
_____ A book recommendation  “If you liked this book, you should check out…”
_____ The genre of your book  “The genre of this book is…”
_____ How many pages your book has  “This book has _____ pages.”

Your Response ______________________________________________________________

Your have completed the book advertisement! Now write out each of your sentences into paragraph form below:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Here are some tips to make sure you do your best, professional job when recording your book advertisement.

_____ Stand up straight

_____ Keep both feet on the ground

_____ Hold your book up in front of you

_____ Talk Loud!

_____ Speak clearly

_____ Speak with EXPRESSION!

Remember, you want to get others excited about the book you are reading!
Tell Me What You Think!

**Examples of compliments:**
- I liked how you spoke loudly.
- I liked how you smiled the whole time you talked.
- I liked how you looked into the camera.

Examples of constructive criticism:
- It would be good if you spoke more clearly.
- It would be good if you used more expression.
- It would be good if you smiled while you talked.

Book Presenter___________________

One thing I liked about your Book Advertisement is______________________________

________________________________________________________

It would be good if you______________________________________________

________________________________________________________

Book Presenter___________________

One thing I liked about your Book Advertisement is______________________________

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It would be good if you______________________________________________

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Book Presenter___________________

One thing I liked about your Book Advertisement is______________________________

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It would be good if you______________________________________________

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One thing I liked about your Book Advertisement is ______________________

It would be good if you ____________________________________________

Book Presenter ______________________

One thing I liked about your Book Advertisement is ______________________

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One thing I liked about your Book Advertisement is ______________________

It would be good if you ____________________________________________

Book Presenter ______________________

One thing I liked about your Book Advertisement is ______________________

It would be good if you ____________________________________________
APPENDIX D

Reader’s Theater Example
Reader’s Theatre

1. Read Loud
2. Read Clearly
3. Read with Expression

Characters: Narrator, Kenny, Byron

Narrator: Byron, Kenny and Joey are standing at the bus stop. Kenny is complaining to Byron about how Momma makes him wear so many layers of clothes to school every day. Byron lets Kenny know that there is a very good reason for having to be so warm.

Kenny: Man, I hate taking all that stuff off Joey when we get to school, she whines and cries the whole time.

Byron: Seems to me like you got a real bad memory. Who you think took all that stuff off your little behind all those years?

Kenny: Yeah, but I didn’t cry and whine.

Byron: What? I know you didn’t say what I think you said. You were the cryingest little clown there ever was!

Kenny: Man, I hate listening to Joey whining when I take all that junk off her at school.

Byron: Well, listen here. I’ma help you out.

Kenny: How?

Byron: I’m going to tell her that there is a good reason why you gotta have all that stuff on.

Kenny: Why? We’re the only ones that have to wear that junk.
**Byron:** Yeah, but what you don’t know is that Momma’s only doing what’s right, there’s something she don’t want you two to know yet.

**Kenny:** All right, tell me, I want to know.

**Byron:** Have you ever noticed when you wake up in the morning and hear garbage trucks?

**Kenny:** Yeah, but I never see them.

**Byron:** You know how they have those big doors on the back that open and shut?

**Kenny:** Yeah, they are too big for even the biggest garbage can in the world!

**Byron:** Some of them trucks ain’t real garbage trucks at all. Every cold morning like this the streets is full of dead, froze people. Some of the time they freeze so quick they don’t even fall down, they just stand there froze solid!

**Narrator:** Joey listens in, clutching onto Kenny ready to cry.

**Kenny:** So you’re saying the fake garbage trucks come every morning to take all the frozen, dead bodies?

**Byron:** They sure do.

**Kenny:** That sounds a little too crazy. Are you sure you aren’t trying to tell me one of your crazy lies?

**Byron:** No, I am serious. I looked in one of them trucks once and I’ma tell you, there ain’t nothing more horrible than seeing hundreds of dead, froze-up Southern folks crammed up inside a garbage truck.

**Narrator:** Joey runs away screaming and crying. Kenny gives Byron a dirty look, not sure if he should believe him or not. Byron runs away from the bus stop, ready to skip another day of school.
APPENDIX E

Choosing the Right Book Materials
Choosing the Right Book

Expert Readers try to choose a book that is just right for them. Follow these steps every time you pick out a new book.

Preview

- Look at the front cover.
  - Read the title
  - Look at the pictures
  - Have you heard of the author?
  - Has the book won any awards?

- Look at the back cover.
  - Read the summary

Predict

- What do you think this book is about?

Five Finger Rule

- Choose a book and read the first page or two.

- Put one finger up for every word you don’t know.

- If 5 fingers go up while reading, choose another book.

- If only 2 or 3 fingers go up, you’ve found a “just right” book.
Choosing a Book for You

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<th>Books that look good</th>
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<td>1.</td>
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<td>19.</td>
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A book I want to read that I did not find in the classroom
APPENDIX F

Book Scavenger Hunt Example
Name__________________________________________

**Book Scavenger Hunt**

**Directions:** Search around the classroom for books with the following information:

1. Find a *graphic novel* (comic) in the classroom.

The title of the graphic novel is_____________________________________________

Tell me the name of one character in the book________________________________

How many pages does the book have?________________________________________

Does this book look interesting? Yes/No, because________________________________

2. Find a “Diary of a Wimpy Kid” book in the classroom.

What is the picture on the front of the book____________________________________

The author of this book is_____________________________________________________

Summarize what is happening on page 47________________________________________

Does this book look interesting? Yes/No, because________________________________


The title of this book is________________________________________________________

Describe the picture on the front_______________________________________________

Read the summary on the back cover. What do you think this book is about?________

Does this book look interesting? Yes/No, because________________________________
4. Find a book about sports in the classroom.

The title of this book is ________________________________

Describe the picture on the front ________________________________

What is the name of somebody in the book? ________________________________

Read the summary on the back cover. Predict: What will this be about? __________

5. Find a **chapter book** in the classroom that looks interesting to you.

The title of this book is ________________________________

Read one page in the book. What happened on this page? ________________________________

How many pages are in this book? ________________________________

Why does this book look interesting to you? ________________________________

6. Find the book “Middle School: Worst Years of My Life.”

Who is the author of this book? ________________________________

Turn to pages 36-37. What are five things that you notice in the picture?

1. ________________________________

2. ________________________________

3. ________________________________

4. ________________________________

5. ________________________________

Does this book look interesting? Yes/No, because ________________________________
7. Preview books in the **Read 180 crates**. Choose one book that looks interesting to you.

The title of this book is____________________________________________________

Read the summary on the back cover. Predict: What is this book about?____________

How many hours and minutes do you think it would take you to read this book?

_________ Hours and __________ Minutes

Find a word in the book that you know, and write the definition in your own words:

Word________________ Definition___________________________________________

8. Find a **non-fiction** book (A book about something that is real.) **Hint – Some of the Read 180 books are non-fiction.**

The title of this book is____________________________________________________

I know this book is non-fiction because________________________________________

What do you think the **main idea** of this book is?______________________________

Does this book look interesting? Yes/No, because________________________________


The title of this book is____________________________________________________

Describe what the cover looks like___________________________________________

Tell me the names of three characters in the book:

1. 

2. 

3. 

Does this book look interesting? Yes/No, because________________________________
### Find Book Titles With the Following on the Cover:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A girl’s name:</th>
<th>A boy’s name:</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A place:</th>
<th>That sounds sad:</th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>That sounds like an adventure:</th>
<th>That sounds scary:</th>
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<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>An animal:</th>
<th>That sounds funny:</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>About a sport:</th>
<th>That has won an award:</th>
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APPENDIX G

Choosing Your Own Projects Example
The Watson’s Go To Birmingham – 1963 – Choose Your Project!

**Directions:** We finished another book! Think about the things that you have learned while reading about the Watson’s. How would you best represent them through a number of projects? Read about the projects below and CHOOSE the ones you would like to complete. Make sure you complete one from each of the three sections!

**Section One: Characters (Choose One)**

___1. Write a journal entry from the point of view of one character in the book. Think of three important events this character experienced in the book, and explain how each of these events made you (the character) feel. The journal entry should be at least ten sentences.

___2. Create a battle-rap between Kenny and Byron. Think of things that happened with the brothers in the book when writing your raps. Both boys get six bars (lines) a piece for a total of 12 rap bars (lines).

___3. Interview a character from the book! Create 8 questions you would want to ask one of the characters. Next, imagine you are the character and answer each question! The questions should reference events from the book.

**Section Two: Setting (Choose One)**

___1. Create a collage that represents different parts of the vacation the characters took. On a separate piece of paper, choose 6 items that are included in your collage, and explain why you included each of these items (one sentence a piece).

___2. Create a map that shows the route that the characters took down to Birmingham. Label your map to show different events that took place on their adventure. Make sure to include a key!

**Section Three: Plot (Choose One)**

___1. Create an 8-frame cartoon strip of your favorite scene from the book. Include captions under each frame to explain what is going on in the scene.

___2. Imagine you are a newspaper reporter. You have to write a ten sentence article describing what happened the morning of the church bombing. Remember to answer the following questions: Who? What? When? Where? Why? Include a picture and a caption with your article.
APPENDIX H

Interest Survey
My Life, My Future

1. What is your favorite class in school

Why is this your favorite class?

2. What is your least favorite class in school

Why is this your least favorite class?

3. In what school subject do you feel like you learn the most

Why do you think you learn the most in this subject?

4. Do you prefer to work alone, in small groups or in large groups

Why do you prefer to work like this?

5. What careers can you picture yourself in

Why would you want this type of career?

6. What do you like to do in your spare time?

7. How many hours per day do you think you use technology (phones, computers, television, tablets, etc.)

_________ Hours ___________ Minutes
8. Describe yourself in three words.

1 __________________________ 2 __________________________ 3 __________________________

9. Do you like to read? Yes  No

Why or why not?

10. What is something that you have accomplished in your lifetime that has made you feel proud?

11. If you could travel anywhere in the world, where would you go__________________

Why would you go there?

12. What is your favorite movie or TV show____________________________________

Why do you like this movie or TV show?

13. Do you have any responsibilities outside of school? What responsibilities? (for example, watching siblings, chores, etc)

14. If you could choose to read about anything in this class, what is one thing you would want to read about?

15. What is one thing about you that Mr. Tuttle probably doesn’t know?
APPENDIX I

Reading Surveys
Name_________________

Tell Me What You Like to Read About!

What kinds of things do you like to read about? Pretend you are a teacher, and give each category a grade.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key</th>
<th>A = I love it!</th>
<th>B = I like it</th>
<th>C = It’s okay</th>
<th>D = I don’t like it</th>
<th>F = I hate it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>___ Sports</td>
<td>___ Animals</td>
<td>___ Math</td>
<td>___ Magic</td>
<td>___ Detectives</td>
<td>___ Love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Jokes</td>
<td>___ Things in my community</td>
<td>___ Science</td>
<td>___ Sharks</td>
<td>___ Ghosts</td>
<td>___ Other countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Social Studies</td>
<td>___ News / Current Events</td>
<td>___ Cooking</td>
<td>___ The jungle</td>
<td>___ The ocean</td>
<td>___ Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Drawing / Painting</td>
<td>___ Riddles / Jokes</td>
<td>___ Science Fiction</td>
<td>___ Friendship</td>
<td>___ Prison stories</td>
<td>___ Computers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Fishing</td>
<td>___ Drama</td>
<td>___ War</td>
<td>___ Comics</td>
<td>___ Politics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Are there any other topics you really like to read about? Write them down!
This is How I Feel About Reading

Directions: Read each sentence starter. Write down whatever you think about after reading the sentence starters.

1. I like to read about____________________________________________

2. My friends think reading is________________________________________

3. My favorite book is_______________________________________________

4. At home, reading is______________________________________________

5. On weekends, my favorite thing to do is________________________________

6. When I get older, I’ll read___________________________________________

7. When we read books at school, I_______________________________________

8. I think I could read by myself for_______ minutes, because____________________

9. The best thing about reading is________________________________________

10. The worst thing about reading is________________________________________
APPENDIX J

Effective Feedback Protocol
## Effective Feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Record The Feedback You Have Delivered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goal Referenced</td>
<td>Learning Goal: Engage in a supportive conference.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The specific learning or behavior goal:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timely</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivered as close to the target behavior as possible</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actionable/Specific</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Includes what is being done correctly to move toward the goal:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actionable/Specific</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Includes what can be improved upon in order to reach the goal:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contains explicit affirmation that the teacher will support student growth:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX K

Parent/Guardian Survey
Parent/Guardian Survey

Hello! My name is Brandon Tuttle, I will be working with your student this school year in Reader’s Workshop! Please take a few minutes to fill out as much as this information as you can, so we can stay in contact about your students progress throughout the year. Thank you!

Student Name__________________________________________ Date of Birth____________________

Home Address____________________________________________________________________________________

Your Name______________________________________________________________

Other Adults at Home________________________________________________________________________________

***Please list the best ways to contact the family if needed. Put a star by the best way to contact anybody in the family!

Home 1__________________________________________________________ Name___________________

Home 2__________________________________________________________ Name___________________

Cell 1__________________________________________________________ Name___________________

Cell 2__________________________________________________________ Name___________________

Email 1__________________________________________________________ Name___________________

Email 2__________________________________________________________ Name___________________

Work 1__________________________________________________________ Name___________________

Work 2__________________________________________________________ Name___________________

What can our school do to best support your student?____________________________________________________

What are your student’s strengths?______________________________________________________________

What are goals that you have for your student this school year?_______________________________________

 Anything else you want me to know______________________________________________________________
APPENDIX L

Suggestions for Supporting Your Student’s Reading at Home
Dear Families,

My name is Brandon Tuttle and I am a Reading Specialist here at (School Name Here). I teach Reader’s Workshop, which includes reading strategy instruction, fiction, non-fiction and poetry work.

Students in my classes will be working with a wide variety of text to become the strongest readers possible. Students in any of these classes will read every day!

Listed below are some goals I have for students entering my class, as well as some suggestions for parents when reading at home with your student.

**Our Classroom Goals**

1. Be a *professional* at all times
2. Read as much as possible
3. Have fun reading

**Suggestions For at Home Reading**

Reading is one of the most important life skills a child can have. You can help your child become a better reader by:

- Keeping different types of books and magazines in your home
- Taking time to read to, or with your student
- Having conversations with your student about the books they are reading
- Taking a trip to your local library
While You Are Reading With Your Student

1. Talk about what is going on in your head while you are reading something:
   - “Wow! I didn’t know that…”
   - “This makes me think about…”

2. Ask your child questions that do not have a right or wrong answer about the reading:
   - “Why do you think he did that?”
   - “What would you have done if this happened to you?”

3. Help your student correct reading mistakes by:
   - Being patient. Wait 10 seconds before helping them with unknown words. Then:
     a. Asking them “What word might make sense here?”
     b. Asking them “Does this word look like any other words?”
     c. Helping them chunk the word up and sound it out
     d. Finally tell them the word

4. Praise them for their efforts!!!

Hopefully this letter has helped you get a better understanding of what my classes are all about, and how you can help your student become the best reader possible! Please feel free to contact me here at the school with any questions or concerns.

-Brandon Tuttle
REFERENCES


(Eds.), The role of interest in learning and development (pp. 43-70). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.


Hennick, C. (2016). Kids take the lead: Student-led conferences can boost turnout rates and give kids a chance to shine. Scholastic Teacher, 54(1), 41.


interventions to provide critical feedback across the racial divide. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General, 143*, 804-824.