

Reading Interest in Boys of Color

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Submitted for the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Education

August 2017

Goucher College

Graduate Programs in Education

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine whether reading materials of interest will change the engagement and quantity of reading of boys of color. The study seeks to answer the question; how can we foster an interest for boys of color in reading? The goal is to analyze the demographics of male students in 5th grade and determine whether finding books of interest will promote more reading. A survey was used to measure student motivation and general views of reading. Overall, the students have positive views on reading and are willing to do more schoolwork in reading when provided with text that is interesting. There were some factors that may have influenced the results. Additional data could be used to investigate the interest of the students.

**CHAPTER I**  
**INTRODUCTION**

**Overview**

Teaching in an urban school, teachers often find difficulties engaging and motivating boys of color. African Americans continue to lag behind their white counterparts in reading. According to a national survey of adults conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (1993) “two out of five adult African Americans were functionally illiterate or at the lowest level in prose literacy compared to one seventh of European Americans” (p.111). The achievement gap is often based on income level, race, and ethnicity. These achievement gaps have played a vital role in how we teach our youth and it can also determine how their future will turn out. If current trends persist, researchers say that by the year 2020 educators will be faced with 50 percent of their students being educationally disadvantaged (Rogers & Freiberg, 1995). Thernstrom and Thernstrom (2003) noted, “African American and Latinos consistently showed frightening gaps between academic skills” (p.12). It is alarming that African Americans and Latinos are lagging behind their counterpart. It makes it more difficult for teachers to help students bridge these gaps.

The National Center for Education Statistics in 2012 indicated that the scores gap has been narrowing but overall minorities compared to whites are still lagging behind. This is alarming because schools have adopted many different standards and programs to help intervene. African American and Latinos are especially lacking by this because they are already lagging behind. Educators must find alternate ways to engage students in order for them to be career and college ready. Boys of color need ways to interest them in order to teach those reading skills

so they can meet with success. In order to engage boys of color in reading educators must find literature that engage them, in doing so educators must find literature to which they can relate. According to a study released by the University of Wisconsin, “Cooperative Children’s Book Center, only 93 of the 3,200 children’s books published in 2013 were about Black people, and only 67 of these were written by African Americans” (University of Wisconsin, 2015). With very limited literature about African Americans and written by African Americans it makes sense that African Americans do not have a positive outlook on literature and the importance. According to Husband (2012) “many adolescent African American males do not read because the texts that are available for them to read are not socially and culturally consistent and authentic” (p. 7). Too often in school’s literature about African Americans are only read during Black History Month. Literature about African Americans should be read throughout the school year in order to demonstrate an importance of African American history and to provide a role model for boys of color. With the power of literature, we can interest boys by providing a road map of what their culture is truly like.

The researcher often considers his impact on his students, especially the African American boys. Throughout the years of the researcher’s teaching, the researcher has found that boys as young as seven years old are disengaged in reading. Often teachers, like the researcher, feel stressed because of the curriculum that needed to be taught, standards that had to be mastered, and less time trying to find literature that the students can relate too. Working in low poverty schools, many of the students felt that they will never amount to anything, which is heartbreaking. Many of the students came from a single-family home, which is led by

mothers. The researcher wanted to be that role model to show students that they can change the world and make a difference. They can make a difference through a well-rounded education. The researcher wanted the students to know the power in literature and how it can create a change.

This study explores the effect of exposure to reading materials that interests the students. If it can be shown that exposure to reading material that interest boys of color will increase their enjoyment of reading, then teachers will be able to effectively make changes in their teaching of reading. Information gained from this research will help teachers to make a conscious effort to add reading of interest for boys of color.

#### **Statement of Problem**

The purpose of this study is to examine whether reading materials of interest will change the engagement and quantity of reading of boys of color.

#### **Research Question**

What are the perspectives of boys of colors in terms of reading engagement, motivation and quantity, given choice in reading material and selection?

#### **Operational Definitions**

Reading Materials is defined as text of journalism, literature, nonfiction, and academic texts. It is not restricted to the printed word and may include online reading.

Homework Reading Log is defined as record keeping of how often students have read and how long. Students are asked to read for a minimum of 20 minutes 4 days a week.

Reading Questionnaire is a student rated assessment of the extent to which each student is motivated to read. This questionnaire was designed by the researcher to assess different aspects of student's reading motivation.

Literature Circle Facilitator refers to the teacher who serves as the moderator during book talk, discussing books, questioning the students during discussions, and guiding student to self-discovery. The teacher will be a math, science, and health teacher.

## **CHAPTER II A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

Reading is an essential component of a child's success. Being able to read will allow students access to a world where people grow and learn through literature. Reading will allow children to acquire an understanding of the world. Recent research has found that in order for our country to continue to world renown our students must have high quality instruction that meets the needs of all students. "For people to survive and improve the quality of life, basic learning skills, reading, writing, arithmetic and life skills, are necessary" (Anjum, 2015, p.1). Students need to be immersed in extensive and intensive reading. Knowing that for people to survive, people need these basic skills. It is alarming that we fail to include boys of color in the equation when we are teaching our students extensively. Boys of color are lagging behind their counterparts when it comes to academics particularly in reading. So often boys of color are disengaged in reading because they are not reading books that they are interested in. In order to help academic achievement, educators must first foster an interest in reading. Educators must find books of interest, find programs to help with reading, and must teach boys of color strategies to help them when they read.

### **The Purpose of Reading**

In order to take a deeper look as to why boys choose not to read we must first understand reading. According to Akubulio, Okorie, Onwuka, Uloh-Bethels, and Annah (2015), "reading is a process of thinking actively in order to understand the ideas an author portrays" (p. 1). In the beginning of every child's life they are on the same playing field as far as instruction. In school, boys are given books that they find not interesting or they don't have the background knowledge

to have higher level instruction presented to them. This, in turn, can cause boys to lack proficiency in reading. In order for boys to survive, they need basic learning and reading skills. Teachers must find books that interest them. This will allow boys to show their full potential.

### **Boys of Color**

Educators have reported that it is difficult to engage African American, Latino, and Native American boys in reading. People of color have many challenges in life which hinders their learning. In today's world we like to believe that everything is equal but know that when we factor in Social-economic status, it is not. "The child's socio-economic background is a very important factor to be reckoned with in the learning process. Hence, it is a factor to be considered in getting children read in ready, which is not just a matter of sounds, but rather a matter of rapidly and accurately getting meaning of printed words on pages" (Akubulio, et al., 2015). This is a leading cause of reading readiness deficiency among children. African American children especially have low parent involvement in school. As cited by Patricio and Viramontez (2004), "[p]arent involvement therefore is an umbrella term for different types of activities that depict the involvement of parents in nonacademic and academic activities that may contribute to their children's' educational success" (p. 62). Parents are the ones who model the behavior and if they are not expose to seeing someone read they become less motivated to want to read. Parents are the ones that may build the motivation to want to read. Educators must do everything they can do in school to help bridge the gaps and spark interest in reading.

### **Interest in Reading**

Boys' views on reading is that it is for 'girls'. Reading for pleasure for boys has come down to not having the motivation to want to read. Boys tend not to want to read because the men in their lives don't read. "Studies have shown that 74% of girls enjoy reading and only 57%

of boys enjoy reading” (Hebert & Pagnani, 2010, p.37). Many educators know that in order for students to become better readers they must read often. This will allow students to be better at comprehending what their reading. Reading more will also allow students to thinking at a deeper and critical level which is the ultimate goal. When students read for pleasure or “hooked on books,” they acquire, involuntarily and without conscious effort, nearly all of the so called “language skills” many people are so concerned about: They will become adequate readers, acquire a large vocabulary, develop the ability to understand and use complex grammatical instructions, develop a good writing style, and become good (but not necessarily perfect) spellers” (Landt, 2013, p.2). If reading for pleasure has many benefits why are teachers choosing texts that don’t meet the needs of the boys in their classes?

In school many people remember reading novels and fiction stories. “Narrative genre has been dominated in primary classrooms because they were considered most appropriate for young children” (Chapman, Filipenko, McTavish, & Shapiro, 2007, p.532). Being exposed to only narrative and fiction stories may be a reason why boys lack an interest in reading. Boys in the primary grade were not exposed to other genres such as informational text. Hall (1998) argues that a consistent diet of personal and fictional stories rather the genres they will use in later schooling and in their adult lives “divorces school literacy from real-life” (as cited by Chapman, et al., 2007, p. 532). Informational text will help to motivate and engage boys to read. This will help boys specially to see that there is a connection to reading and to the real-world. Increasing the quality of text, real world connections, and popular culture will likely have engaged and motivate boys of color in reading.

To promote an interest in reading, educators must find text that students can make a connection with. According to Hodges & Pringle (2013), “[w]e need to involve them in the selection of books through surveys, suggestions boxes, and simply by asking” (p. 14). Students have to see themselves in the text that their reading. All genres have text that have strong male characters. “Boys need books with which they can connect, books that reach out to them with characters that reflect themselves, books that feature people who speak and look and act like the people in their lives” (Landt, 2013, p.532). When we expose children to a variety of genres we must feature books that boys can connect with as well, too often text that is being read is too much dialogue and too cutesy for boys. “One such young man told researchers that he did not care for books because the characters tended to be boring and talk too much, especially in Dickens’ novels” (Carnell, 2005, p. 1). Instead of these character-driven stories, boys tend to prefer books about action, including spy stories, war memoirs, sports novels, and survival tales” (Hebert & Pagnani, 2010, p. 37).

#### **Use of Technology to Spark Interest in Reading**

Students today are immersed in technology. The use of technology can help support and extend student thinking. Using technology to access reading materials and assessments will help engaged students because teachers are meeting them where they are. According to Biancarosa and Griffiths (2012), “[t]echnology can be more than a tool for drilling students on skills; it can be a tool for acquiring the vocabulary and background knowledge essential to becoming a skilled reader” (p. 143). Allowing students to have text on their devices will help motivate students to be more engaging in reading. It will also allow struggling readers to have text read aloud expressively with the text being highlighted. This will also allow students to improve their focus on and subsequently recognize words from the text, as well as their vocabulary. It will show

students that reading does not always have to come from a book and reading can be engaging. Students of today's world like things fast-paced and through the use of the internet and finding e texts, students will have access to reading material at the palm of their hands to help foster and improve reading.

### **Strategies for Reading**

In order for boys of color to have interest in reading they must have strategies to help them to “attack” complex text. According to a recent study “[a]ctivating background knowledge’ was used by the majority of the students in order to facilitate reading. However, the comparison between the two groups indicated statistically significant gender differences ( $\chi^2=5.098$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<.005$ ), since the vast majority of the female students employed the specific strategy more frequently and efficiently (92.3%) than the male students (61.5%)” (Griva, Alevriadou & Semoglou, 2012, p.26). By exposing boys to a variety of text boys will begin to have more background knowledge in order to better comprehend the text they’re reading. When boys understand what they’re reading they will begin to have an interest in what they’re reading.

In the primary classroom, teachers teach using fiction text which relies heavily on illustrators and pictures. Before reading the text educators use the title and pictures to activate background knowledge and to help students comprehend. Teachers provide a great deal of scaffolding when teaching fictional texts. Research has found, “[a] considerable number of the students made use of the title and the pictures before starting reading the text in order to make it comprehensible. As regards ‘imagery’, statistically significant differences were found between female and male students ( $\chi^2=6.992$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<.005$ ). Only 7.7 % of the boys used the pictures in order to facilitate comprehension in contrast to girls, who got involved in using imagery to facilitate reading comprehension (53.8%)” (Griva, et al., 2012, p. 26). Boys don’t need pictures

or imagery to help with comprehension. Boys also tend to like less scaffolding and prefer to “dive right in” when they are reading a text. Once boys have better background knowledge they can rely on that in order for them to comprehend as oppose to “imagery”. Boys need text that has real- world connections in order for them to be engaged. They rely on their background knowledge to participate in meaningful discussions about texts.

In order to increase motivation for reading, students must be explicitly taught to read text. “[s]chools should follow a process-oriented approach aiming to: (1) promote reading awareness, accounting for students’ linguistic and cognitive development and sociocultural background and (2) encourage their growth of metacognitive skills by training them into a variety of strategies” (Griva, et al., 2012, p.29). With metacognitive skills to help students read, the boys will begin to become engaged and motivate them to want to read. With metacognitive skills being taught, boys also need to consistently construct engagement collaborations or discussion in reading activities. Boys need to discuss what is happening in the text and how they feel and take in what others feel in order to get a deeper understanding of the text. Without discussions boys will become disengaged in reading. Boys need to be actively engaged in the text in order for them to be taught and master these skills.

### **Summary**

With today’s world being fast paced, the world must find avenues to meet the needs of our boys. In order to motivate students, educators and parents must find interests such as mathematics, non-fiction text, internet, social media, etc. in order to help motivate and engage boys of color. In order to motivate students, teachers need to teach them strategies in order to tackle all text and provide opportunities for students to read more. Teachers must have students collaborate and discuss the text that they are reading. They must be exposed to text that is

connected to their lives. Boys must be able to use their reading skills to tackle all text. Educators also need to build a community of learners in order to prepare students to be career and college ready.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODS**

#### **Design**

This study used a descriptive design in order to understand the perspectives of boys of color and their engagement and interest in reading. The independent variable was participating in a literature circle with teacher selected reading materials. The dependent variable was the students' engagement and motivation as measured by Motivations for Reading Questionnaire. This study used a convenience sample because the participants were existing students of the researcher, making access to them easier.

#### **Participants**

Participants in this study were fifth grade students in a public school of approximately 500 students in grades Pre K- 5 in Columbia, Maryland. The sample was made up of 20 students who ranged in age from nine through thirteen. The students were all enrolled in the researcher's class. Student academic performance ranged from below-, on-, and above- grade level students. Seventeen of the students were African American, one was Hispanic, and two were Native American.

#### **Instrument**

The survey was designed and developed by Drs. Wigfield and Guthrie at the University of Maryland (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). The survey is a student rated assessment of the extent to which each student is motivated to read. This questionnaire was designed by the researcher to assess different aspects of student's reading motivation. For the purpose of this study, the researcher adapted the survey to include items that surveyed boys' general view of reading.

Questions such as “I learn more from reading than most students in the class” and “It is very important to me to be a good reader”, were used ~~to survey~~ to survey the boys’ motivation to read. Participants were not informed about the categories. The researcher modified the survey to ten statements, they were asked to respond to the statements according to the following scale: very different from me, a little different from me, a little like me, and a lot like me. The response format for the above items is 1 = very different from me to 4 = a lot like me. Scores are computed for each aspect and construct by averaging across their respective items. Questions were broken down into the following categories: Reading Efficacy, Reading Challenge, Reading Curiosity, Reading Involvement, Importance of Reading, and Reading Work Avoidance.

### **Procedure**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the reading engagement and motivation of boys of color and to see if those perspectives changed given changes to teacher-selected materials. The researcher spoke with the students during the students’ lunch time. The researcher explained that all the information gathered from the survey would remain anonymous. The researcher explained that the survey is a part of action researcher requirement for their graduate program and to answer the sentences as to how they feel. Directions on how to complete the survey followed distribution. The researcher read each sentence aloud to the participants. All of the students completed surveys.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the reading engagement and motivation of boys of color and to see if those perspectives changed given changes to teacher-selected materials. Scores on the student-rated assessment were used to evaluate each student's interest towards reading. This study used a descriptive design in order to understand the perspectives of boys of color and their engagement and interest in reading. The results of the ten item questionnaire were tallied according to the response to each question. The tallies were then converted into percentages. The results follow.

Table 1. Survey Results Before and After the Intervention

| Question  | % Very Different/A Little Different from Me (Pre-test) | % A Little Like/A Lot Like Me (Pre-test) | % Very Different/A Little Different from Me (Post-test) | %A Little Like/A Lot Like Me (Post-test) |
|---|--|--|---|--|
| I learn more from reading than most students in the class.    | 50%  | 50%                                      | 40%   | 60%                                      |
| If a book is interesting I don't care how hard it is to read. | 15%  | 85%                                      | 5%  | 95%                                      |
| If the teacher discusses something interesting I              | 20%  | 80%                                      | 20%   | 80%                                      |

|                           |  |  |  |  |
|---------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| might read more about it. |  |  |  |  |
|---------------------------|--|--|--|--|

|   |     |     |     |     |
|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| I like mysteries.   | 40% | 60% | 35% | 65% |
| It is very important to me to be a good reader.   | 20% | 80% | 30% | 70% |
| In comparison to other activities I do, it is very important to me to be a good reader. | 25% | 75% | 30% | 70% |
| I don't like reading something when the words are too difficult.                        | 60% | 40% | 55% | 45% |
| I do as little schoolwork as possible in reading  | 75% | 25% | 85% | 15% |
| I visit the library often with my family.   | 75% | 25% | 60% | 40% |
| I am willing to work hard to read better than my friends.                               | 25% | 75% | 35% | 65% |

This study used a descriptive design in order to understand the perspectives of boys of color and their engagement and interest in reading. According to the findings, 60% of the boys of color would like to learn more from reading. 95% of the boys prefer to read books that are interesting even when the text can be challenging. If the teacher discusses something interesting 80% of the boys might read more about it. This percentage remains the same as the pre-intervention. 70% of the boys' view reading important which drop from 80% in the pre-intervention. 40% of boys visit the library with their families which increase from the pre-intervention. Overall, the students show positive views on reading and are willing to do more schoolwork in reading when provided with text that is interesting. These results and their implications will be discussed in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION**

This study used a descriptive design in order to understand the perspectives of boys of color and their engagement and interest in reading. At the end of the research many of the boys had more motivation to read. Over 90% of the boys will read books that are interesting even if the text is difficult. The results show that the students will be motivated if provided with interesting text. Overall, the students have demonstrated positive views on reading and are willing to do more schoolwork in reading when provided with text that is interesting.

#### **Implications of the Results**

The results indicate that, although there may be a lack of interest in reading of boys of color, with reading material that is interesting, teaching and practice reading strategies will improve motivation to reading. The results validate the importance of providing students with materials they are interested in, in order to teaching reading strategies. It also indicates the importance of stressing the importance of reading and to become a better reader. Adding text that interest students will motivate them to want to read and to spark an enjoyment of reading.

In addition, the results also imply that the use of a reading questionnaire to drive instruction works when aiming to improve instruction. Using the questionnaire will allow the educators to pinpoint their students' weaknesses and strengths in reading. It will also allow educators to see what types of books their students enjoy. For instance, one of the questions was if the students like mystery books, if the majority of your students enjoy mystery books, then that will drive your selection of books to teach the reading strategies. Students were more successful

in reading when they were reading books that spark their interest. Literature circles and instruction that is guided by literature of interest will help the students to be more motivated to read.

### **Threats to the validity**

This study contained several threats to validity. This study was done at the end of the school year. The greatest threat to the validity was that there were only 20 students that participated in this study and the type of research done. The research that was done was a descriptive study, this research could have been done as an experiment with a controlled group and an intervention group. Another threat to the validity was that students were pulled out of class for extracurricular activities such as band and string. The students were preparing for their spring musical concert. Also, the students were also pulled out for practice time for the end-of-the-school-year play. Also, students were pulled out, students went two field trips and participated in other end-of-the-year activities, which interrupted their involvement in this study.

In addition to the students being pulled out for end of the year activities, students also were required to take standardized testing. As part of the school district and state requirement, all students must take these standardized assessments. This made the students lose eight days of instruction.

The results of this study support that when boys of color are given reading material of interest it will promote motivation.

### **Connection to Previous Studies**

There has been a great amount of study done on how to engage and motivate minority boys to read. Research cited in Chapter 2 has shown similar results in this study. According to

Akubulio, et al., (2015) “[s]ocio-economic status plays a significant role in the learning process for students. When minorities are a part of the low socio-economic group, they lag behind when it comes to the learning process” (p.38). When boys of color have deficits in reading, they tend to not be interested in reading. In this study, students were provided with a variety of books print and online text to see whether that would motivate students to read more. While providing books that are engaging, teachers taught reading strategies to the students. In the conclusion of the study, the researchers found that teachers must acknowledge the indispensability of reading skills and as such plan an effective program of reading instruction, which should focus on promoting reading culture among children in their schools. In order to promote a reading culture among children, teachers must find text that is interesting to the students.

According to research done by Husband (2012), “there are many contributing factors that contribute to reading under achievements in boys of color” (p. 9). For his research, he chose to investigate the approach of how schools are structured, which includes “institutionalized policies, procedures, and programs” (p.9). One of the examples he gave about the lack of engagement in the boys is that they spend a great deal time out of the classroom due to suspensions. He also cites that teachers often read fictional text. Husband stresses the importance of choosing text that the boys of color can relate to. They should be able to respond and reflect about the people based on the characters, setting, and events. Husband also talks about increasing the number of books read to the students. In his conclusion, Husband found that teachers should go beyond the problem and find ways to fix the problem in reading underachievement. The second conclusion is teachers should go beyond the classroom to fix the problem. Husband stresses that teachers must meet all of the contexts in order for the boys of colors to be successful.

### **Implications for Future Research**

While much research has been done on how to motivate boys to read, further research is needed on how to motivate boys of color who are receiving special education services. These students already have many challenges when it comes to being in school and if they are not interested in reading, what are some ways to motivate them? Future research is needed to investigate what the students' perception of reading is. For example, a teacher can have an interview with the students asking different questions to see what their strengths and weaknesses are in reading. This information could better have helped the teacher drive instruction and select text that interest the student and to help that student with their weaknesses in reading. In terms of the study design, it would be beneficial for to extended the intervention and to start earlier in the school year.

### **Conclusion**

This study provides that with teacher-selected text that is based on the interest of the students, boys of color will be more motivated to read. Students need to be motivated by teacher-selected text and intervention must be done earlier in the school in order to have enough to demonstrate a significant growth with students. When the intervention is done later in the school, the administration of state-mandated assessments may interrupt the progress that has been made. Socio-economic status plays a significant role in the development of reading skills but when the teacher goes above and beyond to meet the needs of their students then there is no boundaries the students can make. Finding ways to interest students through questionnaires and surveys will provide a glimpse into what truly motivates students to want to learn. Future research will be

needed to include all boys of color even with special education services. Motivating students with text that they can relate will provide teachers with no boundaries and students will truly find the love of reading.

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