

The Effect of Male Reading Role Models
on the
Reading Attitudes of Fourth Grade Male Students

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine whether exposure to male reading role models would affect the attitudes of sixteen fourth grade male students from the researcher's class toward pleasure reading and toward reading as a male activity. The measurement tool was the Reading Attitude Survey designed by the researcher based on the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS). This study involved the use of a pretest/posttest design to compare data from the beginning to the end of the six week study period. Results of the study were mixed. There was no significant difference between the mean pre-intervention Attitude Toward Reading score (Mean = 27.64, SD = 6.02) and the mean post-intervention score (Mean = 27.57, SD = 5.42) [$t(13) = .08$, $p = .94$]. The mean post-intervention Attitude Toward Reading as a Male Activity score (Mean = 26.21, SD = 3.95) was significantly higher than the mean pre-intervention score (Mean = 23.57, SD = 3.92) [$t(13) = 4.17$, $p = .001$]. The mean post-intervention Total Reading Attitude score (Mean = 53.79, SD = 8.68) was significantly higher than the pre-intervention score [Mean = 51.21, SD = 8.51] [$t(13) 2.17$, $p = .05$]. Results could have been influenced by several factors. Research into the effectiveness of using male reading role models to influence the reading attitudes of male students should continue and extend beyond the scope of this study. Additional data could affect the practices used to improve the literacy development of students.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Reading is an essential skill for success in school and in life. There is widespread agreement that reading critically and analytically by using complex comprehension skills in a purposeful manner is a major goal of all reading instruction. Purpose-driven reading enables students to reach for and achieve lofty goals. Making students aware of the importance of reading is also a key focus in schools. Students who view reading as worthwhile and necessary for success are more likely to read. However, in our quest to convince students of reading's necessity and importance, have we neglected to stress its value in terms of pure enjoyment? Has the utilitarian nature of reading overshadowed the most basic gift of reading—that of reading pleasure?

This study was in response to continued concern about male students' views of reading not just as a worthwhile or important activity, but as an enjoyable one, specifically for males. The school in this study is a private, all boys' school in Baltimore, Maryland. The goals of the school include meeting the specific needs of male students. Much time is spent on staff development, specifically on how boys learn and how best to teach them. This includes efforts to make school engaging, enjoyable, and meaningful for students. Lessons typically involve movement, activity, and opportunities for collaboration and competition. Lunchtime reading clubs have been formed so students can read and discuss different genres of books and teachers make both in-class and at-home reading part of their regular routines. There have been

indications, though, that even boys who participate in reading still do not see it as something that boys and men do for fun. Instead, it is accepted as an activity that will lead to an end. Students appear to understand that in order to reach goals, they must read often and read well. They have shown a willingness to do so. What is missing, though, is a view that reading can be enjoyed as a pleasurable, free-time activity, one that serves no other purpose than to create joy.

Many studies have been completed that conclude that male reading role models can increase the amount of reading done by males (e.g. Clark, 2012; Sullivan, 2003). Having a father, coach, big brother, or male teacher who reads can influence boys to read more. But can seeing male role models read actually change young boys' attitudes towards reading not just as a routine or utilitarian activity but as a joyful one? The researcher contends that this question is worthy of further study.

This study explores the effect that exposure to male reading role models has on boys' views of reading as a pleasurable activity. If it can be shown that young male readers' exposure to male reading role models increases boys' enjoyment of reading, and not only their quantity of reading, then teachers and parents can make effective and rather easily implemented changes in the teaching of reading. Information gained from this research can help ensure that adults are doing everything possible to make reading a favorite activity for boys and men.

Statement of Problem

The purpose of this study is to compare attitudinal differences of fourth grade male readers toward pleasure reading and their feelings about male readers before and after they had been exposed to male reading role models.

Hypothesis

The null hypotheses is that there is no statistically significant difference in Reading Attitude Survey Scores – Attitude Toward Reading, Attitude Toward Reading as a Male Activity, and Total Reading Attitude before and after exposure to male reading role models among fourth grade male students.

Operational Definitions

Pleasure reading is defined as reading that is primarily for enjoyment. It includes a wide range of genres and publications. It is not restricted to the printed word and may include online reading.

Reading role models are those who serve as inspiration for students to read by reading in their presence, by discussing book topics, by explaining their book selection process, and by sharing the impact reading has had on their lives. Specifically, these included five male teachers, ten middle school students, and four high school students. Teachers included an assistant head of school, and representatives from the science, music, physical education, and math departments. Students included middle school reading students, high school athletes, and representatives of several academic clubs.

Reading Attitude Survey is a self-reporting rating scale designed by the researcher to gather information on the students' views toward reading as a preferred male activity.

Attitude Toward Reading is defined as the score on the Survey that reflects the students' attitude towards reading in general.

Attitude Toward Reading as a Male Activity is defined as the score on the Survey that reflects the students' attitudes toward reading as a specifically male activity.

Total Reading Attitude is defined as the total score on the Survey that reflects the students' overall attitude toward reading and their perception of it as a male activity.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Overview

The major goals of a school system are to promote literacy, to support literacy development in students, and to instill a spirit of lifelong learning and a quest for high achievement. The path to literacy begins with the development of reading skills. Schools are not only responsible for teaching the skills and strategies of reading, they are also tasked with presenting reading as a lifelong activity that is both pleasurable and worthwhile. Students who receive this message can continue to develop as literate citizens when they leave school.

In a broad sense, the better schools do in supporting and producing highly literate students, the more likely we are to have a productive, accomplished, enthusiastic and successful society. It benefits all, then, to find ways to help students develop into literate citizens. One of the best ways to promote literacy, as determined by research, is by increasing the time students spend actually reading.

Terms commonly used to refer to actual reading include Free Voluntary Reading (FVR), voluntary reading, pleasure reading, choice reading, or self-selected reading. This type of reading is the reading students choose to do on their own. It is not assigned by or chosen by the teacher. Rather, students select text based on their own interests and preferences. With such importance placed on voluntary, self-selected reading, this literature review will discuss the importance of voluntary reading, what roadblocks may affect reading, and possible interventions that may be effective in motivating the reluctant reader.

The Importance of Voluntary Reading

There is ample evidence to suggest that reading begets reading. Just as an athlete repeatedly practices his sport, or a musician engages in endless hours of rehearsal, a reader who spends more time with text is more likely to achieve the highest level of literacy. The more students read, the more gains they make in vocabulary, comprehension, language, spelling, and motivation. This has been proven repeatedly in research.

According to the Clark (2012), one of the major differences between low- and high-achieving readers is the quantity of time they spend reading. A study by Tunnell and Jacobs (1989) showed a strong relationship between the amount of self-selected reading students completed and their academic achievement. In addition, those students who read more also showed stronger verbal ability and had better attitudes toward reading.

Krashen (2004) noted that literacy development is positively correlated with more reading. Krashen's report went on to state that more time spent reading is directly related to increased growth not only in reading, but also in writing, grammar, and vocabulary. McQuillan and Krashen (2008), in their commentary on Cobb's 2007 study, note that free reading is a "very powerful tool" in the acquisition and development of vocabulary. In addition, they surmise that even a minimal amount of free reading can have a "powerful" and "impressive" effect on the fluency levels of readers (p.107).

Cunningham and Allington (1999) describe a classroom where students are "destined to succeed" as one where they are given time each school day for reading self-selected materials (p.20). Graves, Juel, Graves and Dewitz (2011) suggest that it is "crucial" to provide

opportunities for independent reading (p. 352). They further state that students “need to read a lot if they are to get really good at it” (p. 355).

Damber, Samuelsson, and Taube (2012) studied the teacher, classroom, and student factors commonly found in high-achieving reading classes. Results indicated four main factors that were at play in the most successful classrooms. These include a positive classroom atmosphere, an experienced, engaged teacher, authentic literature, and extended voluntary reading. The study found a significant positive link between independent reading time and high reading achievement. The authors further noted the importance of self-selected reading, stating that reading time at school, in addition to increasing reading achievement, could even help compensate for negative factors such as low socio-economic factors and poor home literacy.

Miller and Kelley (2014) consider a significant amount of time reading in class (they suggest approximately one third of the class time) as a non-negotiable component of their instruction. They repeat the idea that the more students read, the better readers they will become. This idea of the cyclical effect of reading is espoused by many teachers, researchers and readers themselves.

In a summary filed by the National Endowment for the Arts (2007), the authors found evidence that the best readers, the most literate citizens, not only had more opportunities for jobs, but the jobs they secured were more likely to be higher-paying. In addition, from attendance at art museums to sporting events, readers were more likely to be actively engaged in society. The authors stated that strong readers are people who “enrich our cultural and civic life” (p. 18). Their evidence showed that voluntary reading greatly contributed to categorization of people as

highly literate. This high rate of literacy was strongly related to academic achievement, employment, and general quality of life.

A review of literature related to the topic of voluntary, self-selected reading points to its overall importance, purpose, and necessity in a successful reading program. Research shows that time spent reading, both in and outside the classroom, has positive effects on all aspects of literacy. In short, those who read often will become better readers and read even more, perpetuating a cycle of growth. Given this information, it becomes necessary to investigate what factors interfere with voluntary, self-selected reading and why it doesn't occur in all classrooms.

Roadblocks to Reading

If evidence exists to support the fact that time spent reading is correlated with reading achievement, vocabulary development, and basically all aspects of literacy, then why aren't all students participating in it? For the purpose of this literature review, the question of why intermediate grade boys in particular don't participate in voluntary reading will be specifically addressed.

Miller and Kelley (2014) warn that teachers must "eliminate or reduce the negative influences of classroom practices that don't align with what readers do" (p. 4). What are these negative influences and what effect do they have on the reading habits of male intermediate readers? What practices, procedures, or routines are hindering the development of boys as avid readers?

There are many factors that influence the amount of voluntary reading completed by male students. Each of these factors affects not only male students' chances of performing well in

school, but also their likelihood of becoming lifelong readers. These factors include the role gender plays in reading and classroom issues that affect boys and reading, including time, choice and materials.

Gender is a major factor in reading achievement. Sullivan (2003) reported that boys read less than girls, score lower in reading evaluations than girls, read at grade levels well below that of girls of the same age, and are more often labeled as having a reading disability than girls. Brozo and International (2002) noted that boys are 50% more likely to be retained and significantly more likely to be diagnosed with ADD or ADHD. Ross, McKechnie, and Rothbauer (2006) summarize that “boys’ literacy skills, general academic achievements, attitudes, behaviors, and experiences of schooling are significantly poorer than those of girls” (p. 88).

Stereotypes affect boys’ reading habits and views as well. Sullivan (2004) notes that boys are more likely to witness their mothers reading books. In contrast, they are likely to see their fathers reading newspapers and other nonfiction text. The message they receive, that females read books and males read for information, develops stereotypes and shapes boys’ views about reading. Although seeing males reading at all is positive, the fact that it is usually limited to informational reading is not enough. In order to develop a rich, varied reading vocabulary, boys must read beyond instructional material and engage in sustained reading at a more mature level. Maloney and Wilcox (2000) suggest that the large number of female teachers in lower grades could indirectly undermine the importance of reading. There is a possibility that school in general, and more specifically reading, is considered feminine. Ross et al. (2006) furthers this argument by noting that most children’s librarians are female and that mothers tend to read to

their sons more than fathers. Their statements are further examples of how literacy in general may appear as “feminized” (p. 91).

Hamston and Love (2005) completed a study of note that focused on the issue of boys who can read, but choose not to do so. In their research, they found that even when boys’ parents encouraged, supported and guided their reading, they still showed reluctance for leisure reading. They theorized that by choosing not to read, boys may be either consciously or subconsciously reacting against a culture that expects them to read within the confines of a traditional view of reading, mainly that reading means reading novels. The participants acknowledged the importance of reading, but still reported seeing no real purpose or having no inclination to read for pleasure. This leads to several other questions: Do these boys, and others reluctant readers like them, view literacy and school in general, as a construct that is set up against them? What classroom practices and expectations lead them to feel this way?

To answer this question, one can look at typical classroom literacy practices and evaluate the effects they may have on boys as readers. Maloney and Wilcox (2000) again bring up the idea that schools may be set up with an advantage toward female students. He mentions not only the high number of female teachers, but also teaching practices and lessons that lean toward girls. Maloney notes that most of the reading in elementary classrooms is fiction. As mentioned earlier, boys at this point may already have identified non-fiction reading as more “male”. If they don’t connect with the type of fiction being shared in classrooms from the start, then the idea that reading is not for them may already have taken root. Even when non-fiction reading is done in school, it is likely to be from a textbook, which usually appeals to neither male nor female students.

Brozo (2002) asserts that reading, and the type of reading typically done in schools, “conflicts with boys’ sense of masculinity.” (p. 13). Brozo suggests that boys need “literature with positive male archetypes to capture (their) imaginations and improve their thinking about literature” (p. 3.) However, as Maloney (2000) reports, even when boys are given a choice of books, they are not the type of books he recommends. Instead, they are of narrow focus and usually only those books approved of or enjoyed by their female teachers. Adding to the displeasure is the tendency of class discussion to focus on characters’ feelings. According to Taylor (2004), boys are more likely to engage in book discussions if they first center on something concrete. These common classroom practices, lack of choice of reading material coupled with book activities that do not appeal to boys, can further disengage male students.

The amount of time provided for reading in school is a factor that affects both male and female readers. Allington (2002) reports an average of 10 to 15 minutes of actual reading in a 90 minute reading block. He found further evidence of as few as 20 minutes of total reading time across an entire school day, including all content areas. Leonhardt (2003) describes an interview with a superintendent of a large school system who reluctantly admitted that his students had virtually no free reading time, as there was “too much curriculum to cover” (p. 30).

McNinch, Campbell, Shaffer, and Rakes (1998) completed a study in which they recorded the amount of time teachers spent on reading and other activities during a reading block. These results found that no teachers met the recommended amount of time that should be spent with text, and further, that teachers scheduled their classes with full knowledge of the problem. A review of research finds that allowing adequate time for reading in class is not happening in most schools.

Research indicates that the more time students spend reading, the more likely they are to achieve. Further research shows that male students read less than female students, particularly as they progress through adolescence. It follows that as males read less, their achievement may also suffer. In order to increase boys' reading time, schools must choose approaches that encourage more reading and present reading as a worthwhile and pleasurable voluntary activity. The next section of this review will present factors, conditions and practices that are common in classrooms with highly literate, engaged, successful male readers.

Methods of Intervention

Recreational Reading has been identified as strongly associated with success in reading, in school, and in life in general. It has also been proven that many students simply do not do it, or even view it as a worthwhile activity. Even educators, who know its value, are not providing enough time for it in their classrooms. There are exceptions to this generalization, though. There *are* students who *do* read voraciously. There *are* teachers who *do* schedule reading time into their lesson plans. There *are* practices, methods, and approaches that *do* lead students, and boys in particular, to become highly literate citizens.

The evidence in favor of recreational reading is clear and the many problems are evident, but there are solutions. There are components commonly found in classrooms where boys are reading often and well. Some of those common features are discussed in this section.

Allington (2002) studied classrooms where teachers were considered exemplary. He found those teachers provided at least 50% or more of classroom time on reading and responding to reading. Reading discussions were more conversational than quiz-like. Assignments involved

choice and fit the individual's learning style. The classrooms also had an enormous supply of texts the students could read "accurately, fluently, and with strong comprehension" (p.4).

Sullivan (2003) suggests combating the gender stereotypes associated with boys and reading by including men in reading. Just the act of welcoming males into classrooms, libraries and school activities can work to de-feminize school and reading. Sullivan also suggests having a large supply of boy-friendly reading materials. This includes informational texts, magazines, graphic novels, and varied genres. In presenting these books to boys, he recommends luring them in with short book talks that appeal to their humor, sense of reason, guilty pleasures, predisposition to challenges and action, and their enjoyment of a quest or a battle of good and evil.

Brozo (2002) addresses the issue of gender and reading as well. As previously mentioned, Brozo believes that boys' reading choices should include books with male protagonists fitting into ten archetypes. In addition to books that champion boys, Brozo gives examples of actual teaching strategies and lessons that appeal to male students. Lessons for boys, he says, should be "innovative, meaningful, and engaging learning experiences" (p. 48) that still "foster language development, critical thinking, and an expanded consciousness of what it means to be a boy and a man" (p. 76).

Ross et al. (2006) suggests some of the previously mentioned approaches, but also includes the need for educators to extend their views of what "counts" as reading. The authors conclude that much of what boy readers enjoy does not hold literary status and some seems to hold no value to educators at all. This practice undermines boys' reading efforts and can further alienate them from reading, literacy, and possibly from school.

Newkirk (2002) writes of the importance of understanding boys' interests. By knowing boys, educators can work to make classrooms a place where boys are more inclined to participate and to learn what they need to learn. Critical to knowing boys, says Newkirk, is understanding the learning conditions that best suit them. These include "a sense of control and competence, an appropriate challenge, clear goals and feedback, and a focus on the immediate" (p.53). The last point, that of focusing on the immediate rather than on the future, could be a key point of reflection for teachers of boys. According to Newkirk's work, boys readily accept and understand the ultimate value of education and literacy, but tended to see it mostly as a means to an end. Boys need to see both the ultimate value and the immediate value to what they are asked to do in the classroom.

Educators must design lessons and provide reading materials that engage their male students and serve as entry points for immersion into the world of literacy. These efforts will pay off when boys begin to see themselves as a true part of the classroom, where their reading preference is valued, where their interests are sought, and where their ideas and maleness matter.

Conclusions

Taylor (2004) believes that educators must first "look at the unique problems associated with gender so that we can promote learning that helps all of our students evolve into productive world citizens" (p.292). To restate, in order to solve a problem, teachers must first acknowledge it. This literature review has given examples of the types of difficulties that boys face in their journey to become literate citizens. It has also given examples of ways that literacy instruction can be improved. Some changes are easily made, while others will involve major changes in thinking, attitudes, and construct. Leonhardt (2003) claims, "I decided that my first

responsibility wasn't to the school, or the dean of students, or even the parents, but to my students. I had to do what was right by them"(p.12). What was right, according to Leonhardt, was allowing choice of reading materials and providing time to read. The author strongly believes that schools can and should take responsibility for developing avid readers.

The evidence is clear. Recreational reading, pleasure reading, voluntary reading, is a necessary component of a successful literacy program. The reality is sobering, though. Many students are not given the time to simply read. Many teachers are either unaware of its potential impact, unwilling to give up instructional time, or even afraid to allow time for their students to read. It is up to each teacher to search his or her own soul, to reflect on the problems in the classroom, and to decide to make the school experience better for boys.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of male reading role models on the reading attitudes of fourth grade males.

Design

In this study, a pre-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design was used with a convenience sample. The independent variable was exposure to a male reading role model. The dependent variable was the students' attitudes toward reading as measured by three scores from the Reading Attitude Survey: Attitude Toward Reading, Attitude Toward Reading as a Male Activity, and Total Reading Attitude. This study used a convenience sample because the participants were the existing students of the researcher, making access to them easier. All students enrolled in the researcher's reading class were participants in the study. All students were given the same Reading Attitude Survey before and after the experimental period.

Participants

Participants in this study were fourth grade students in an all-boys private school of approximately 600 students in grades K-12 in Baltimore, Maryland. The sample was made up of 14 students who ranged in age from nine through eleven. The students were all enrolled in the researcher's reading/language arts class, which is considered slightly above grade level. Twelve of the students were White/Caucasian, one was Black/African American, and two were a combination of two ethnicities. The socio-economic status of the boys ranged from middle to upper class. All students were present for the entire experimental period.

The mentors consisted of five male teachers, ten middle school students, and four high school students. Teachers included an assistant head of school, and representatives from the science, music, physical education, and math departments. The teachers were from the lower, middle, and upper divisions of the school. Students included middle school reading students, high school athletes, and representatives of several academic clubs. The students were from the middle and upper school divisions, chosen for their willingness to participate and for their areas of interest, including academics, clubs, and athletics.

Instrument

The survey was designed by the researcher based on understanding of literature reviewed and on experience in the field of teaching reading. It was modeled after the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS) developed by McKenna and Kear (1990), which measured the attitudes of students toward recreational and academic reading. For the purposes of this study, the researcher designed the survey to include items that surveyed boys' general views of recreational reading and reading as a male activity. Participants were not informed about these categories. They were asked to respond to each of twenty statements according to the following scale: "Love it," "Like it," "Ho-Hum," and "Don't Like It." Four emojis were used to visually represent the emotional state of the ranking categories. Of the twenty statements, ten were designed for each of two scales, Attitude Toward Reading, and Attitude Toward Reading as a Male Activity. The statements were worded positively and points were assigned such that a higher score meant a more positive attitude. Points were awarded as follows: "Love it" responses were worth four points each, "Like it" earned three points each, "Ho-Hum" scored two points per response, and "Don't Like It" responses earned one point each. Points earned on each of the two subscales ranged from ten to forty, while full scale scores ranged from twenty to

eighty points. A blank page was included for students who chose to write additional comments on the survey, although this was optional. A copy of the survey is presented in Appendix A. Given that the instrument was created by the researcher for use in this specific study, there is no reliability or validity data.

Procedure

Permission to complete the study was granted by the lower division head of school. Students completed the pre-test of the Reading Attitude Survey during their regular reading class time period. Mentors were then invited to participate in the project, and were told that their assistance was needed during a fifteen -minute free reading period, which was an established part of the daily routine. Like the students, the mentors were asked to bring a self-selected book, enter the room quietly, and find a comfortable place to read. From those invited, a group including male teachers, middle school students, and high school students agreed to act as mentors. A schedule was made to ensure that a reading mentor would be present during the class' regularly scheduled independent reading period at least three times per week. The initial plan was to have these sessions for six weeks. However, due to scheduling issues, the eighteen sessions were extended to seven weeks. In most weeks, there were three sessions per week, but in two weeks, there was just one session per week, and in one week, there were four sessions. The goal was to have the mentor read along with the boys for a minimum of fifteen minutes per visit. Due to the engagement level of both the mentors and the students, most sessions were extended to twenty, but no more than twenty- five minutes. It should be noted that although none of the mentors was asked to prepare anything to discuss with the students after the reading sessions, they each spent time explaining their book choices and sharing their reading habits with the boys. The researcher gathered notes on this portion of the sessions as well.

Mentors were not required to sign up for multiple visits. However, several mentors who had initially committed to a single session ultimately decided to return for a second visit.

Reading students were not told that mentors would be coming to class. Instead, the researcher informed the students that some staff members and older students had been told about the class' daily reading time and had requested permission to participate.

When a mentor arrived, he found a quiet spot in the classroom to sit among the students. He read a self-selected book while the students read their own self-selected reading materials. When the fifteen- minute quiet reading time was over, the mentor usually asked the boys about what they had been reading. He then answered questions posed by the boys and/or discussed his reading choices, preferences, and reading habits. When the mentors left, the boys typically asked questions of the researcher, or made statements about what the mentors had said or done. For example, boys inquired why the music teacher was reading a book about space and the science teacher was reading about fly fishing. They noticed that some of the middle school mentors brought books by authors that they enjoyed as well and were excited that they could continue choosing favorite writers in the next division of school. The researcher kept notes of these comments, questions, and statements for later qualitative evaluation.

Following the experimental period, the students were given the same Reading Attitude Survey to complete. They were asked to consider the statements honestly and thoughtfully and to mark the response that most closely matched their feelings. They were told that their responses were anonymous and not graded. The survey was filled out independently and returned to the researcher immediately. The scores for the pre- and post-assessments were then compared by a paired samples *t*-test.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to compare the attitudinal differences of fourth grade male students toward pleasure reading and their feelings about male readers before and after they had been exposed to male reading role models in the classroom setting. Scores on the attitude survey were used to evaluate each student's Attitude Toward Reading and Attitude Toward Reading as a Male Activity. There was also a Total Reading Attitude Score.

There was no significant difference between the mean pre-intervention Attitude Toward Reading score (Mean = 27.64, SD = 6.02) and the mean post-intervention score (Mean = 27.57, SD = 5.42) [$t(13) = .08$, $p = .94$]. The mean post-intervention Attitude Toward Reading as a Male Activity score (Mean = 26.21, SD = 3.95) was significantly higher than the mean pre-intervention score (Mean = 23.57, SD = 3.92) [$t(13) = 4.17$, $p = .001$]. The mean post-intervention Total Reading Attitude score (Mean = 53.79, SD = 8.68) was significantly higher than the pre-intervention score [Mean = 51.21, SD = 8.51] [$t(13) = 2.17$, $p = .05$]. See Table 1.

Consequently, the results of null hypothesis testing were mixed. The study failed to reject the null hypothesis that there would be no statistically significant difference in Attitude Toward Reading scores before and after exposure to male reading role models among fourth grade male students. However, the null hypotheses that there would be no statistically significant differences in Attitude Toward Reading as a Male Activity and Total Reading Attitude before and after the intervention were rejected. These rating scores were significantly higher among fourth grade male students after the exposure to male reading role models.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and t-test Results for Reading Attitude Survey Scores Before and After Exposure to Male Reading Role Models

Scores	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-statistic
Pre Attitude Toward Reading	27.64	6.02	.08 (NS)
Post Attitude Toward Reading	27.57	5.42	
Pre Attitude Toward Reading as a Male Activity	23.57	3.92	4.17*
Post Attitude Toward Reading as a Male activity	26.21	3.95	
Pre Total Reading Attitude	51.21	8.51	2.17**
Post Total Reading Attitude	53.79	8.68	

N = 14

NS = non-significant at $p \leq .05$

* significant at $p \leq .001$

**significant at $p \leq .05$

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Data collected in the research revealed mixed results. The study failed to reject the null hypothesis that there would be no statistically significant difference in Attitude Toward Reading scores before and after exposure to male reading role models among fourth grade male students. However, the null hypothesis that there would be no statistically significant differences in Attitude Toward Reading as a Male Activity and Total Reading Attitude before and after the intervention was rejected. The rating scores in these two areas were significantly higher after exposure to male reading role models.

Implications of the Results

Based on results of this research, it does appear that exposure to male reading role models improved the attitudes of fourth grade male students toward reading as a “male” activity. Attitude Toward Reading scores, which measured a generalized view of reading, was not affected by male reading role models in this study. Although the overall Total Reading Attitude was higher after the intervention, it was higher because of the increased perception of reading as a male behavior.

Although participants did not report changing their general view of reading as a recreational activity on the survey questions, their optional feedback on the post-intervention survey indicated that they thought about it considerably more and were far more willing to discuss their views on reading than they were on the pre-intervention survey. On the pre-intervention survey, only five of fourteen students chose to give any additional, optional feedback. In most cases, this feedback consisted of one or a few sentences. In contrast, on the

post-intervention survey, twelve of fourteen students provided optional feedback. This feedback varied from lengthy paragraphs explaining overall views to bullet-pointed explanations of why they ranked particular items in a certain way. “I think having male readers come into our class influenced me to think differently about males reading,” wrote one participant. “There is nothing wrong with males reading, including celebrities and athletes,” he continued. After visits by the science and music teachers, participants seemed surprised by the role models’ choices of reading material. “Our science teacher was reading about fishing and our music teacher was reading about outer space,” observed one student. “I didn’t think they would read about such different things.” This, again, illustrates the boys’ more open attitude toward discussing reading preferences and routines in general. A willingness to discuss reading and an awareness of role models’ varied reading preferences could provide yet another opening for change in perception of reading as a worthwhile, “male” activity. The teacher could use this newfound openness as an entry point for further discussion about reading. The level of the students’ engagement in conversation about reading was unexpected and valuable data.

Data indicates that the act of exposing the fourth grade male students to males who model reading improved attitudes toward reading as a male activity. Such a change in view could eventually make a long-term impact on the students’ views of reading as a recreational activity of choice for themselves. The fact that the boys’ views were changed at all during a rather short and uncomplicated intervention period is important. Fourth grade male students who hold stereotypical views of reading as a feminine activity could benefit from implementation of a male reading role model program. This would involve few to no resources or finances.

Theoretical Consequences

This study's findings indicate that fourth grade male students who are exposed to male reading role models will improve their overall attitude toward views of reading as a male activity, which confirms the findings of previous studies and research. Sullivan (2003) noted that an effective way to combat gender stereotypes surrounding boys and reading is by simply having males in classrooms and libraries. Brozo and International (2002) suggested that reading activities for boys should "expand consciousness of what it means to be a boy and a man" (p.76). As indicated by the earlier mentioned optional responses, the boys in this study were far more conscious of and willing to discuss males' views of reading and the role of reading in men's and boys' lives. The act of having males present during free reading time and openly discussing books had a significant effect on participants' views on reading stereotypes. The theory that male role models can positively influence boys' attitudes toward learning, and reading specifically, was upheld by this research.

Threats to Validity

Several factors in this study could have threatened both the external and internal validity of the results. Selection-treatment interaction is a threat to external validity. Participants were chosen because of their availability to the researcher. They are not representative of the overall population of fourth grade males. The participants had a high overall ability level and were students in a private, all male school. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized to include all fourth grade male students who are exposed to male reading role models. Data is relevant for only those who participated in this specific study and cannot be extended beyond unless the study was replicated with a broader sample.

There are also generalization issues related to the characteristics of the male reading models. The researcher invited a large group of male reading role models to participate in the study, but only a limited number of responses were received. Reading role models who participated did represent different areas of influence from the school community. However, it is possible that the role models who participated affected the attitudes of the fourth grade male students in different ways than would models with different characteristics.

Another threat to external validity involves the possibility of a pre-test treatment interaction, especially given that it involved an attitude scale, which is particularly susceptible to this type of threat. The students may have responded differently to the treatment because they had been sensitized by the pre-test. For example, after answering survey questions about their opinions about male readers, they were likely suspicious that the influx of male readers of different backgrounds into their classroom was related to the questionnaire. This may have caused them to regard the readers in a different light or have contributed to their increased level of participation. At the time of the post-test, the participants would still have remembered the pre-test and may have suspected the point of the two tests was to assess the impact of the male readers coming into the classroom. They might have responded differently to the post-test if they felt they were providing feedback about the intervention.

Finally, the researcher may have unintentionally affected study results by communicating emotions or excitement about the intervention to participants. This would be considered experimenter bias effect.

The study also contained threats to internal validity. Instrumentation is a threat to internal validity. Although the survey used in the research was based on a well-known survey,

the ERAS, it was essentially created by the researcher and therefore, has no proven reliability and validity.

A threat to both internal and external validity was sample size. With only 14 subjects, the study had limited power to find group differences. With such a low number of subjects, it is also harder to generalize results since only a very small portion of the population of interest participated in the study.

Connections to Previous Research/Prior Studies

Educators and researchers alike stress the importance of improving boys' literacy. Although there are many suggestions as to how, one that is repeatedly named is the use of male role models in boys' literacy development. Sullivan (2003) feels that males should be welcomed into all school activities in order to de-feminize school and reading. Ross et al. (2006) notes that fathers should read to their sons and males should be encouraged to serve as librarians. Tanksley (1995) recommends that men model reading by doing it themselves, by reading aloud to boys, and by telling boys how reading improves their lives. The results of the researcher's study support the recommendations of these authors.

In a study of leisure reading practices of teenaged boys by Hamston and Love (2005), participants who were encouraged, supported, and guided to read by parents still did not report an appreciation for recreational reading. This was the case in the researcher's study: Boys acknowledged the importance of male reading role models in improving their views of reading as a male activity, but still did not report a change in overall reading attitude. These findings indicate that further investigation in this area is necessary if teachers are to successfully improve fourth grade boys' views of reading as pleasurable.

Implications for Future Research

While many educational theories have stressed the importance of male role models in reading attitudes of boy readers and the current study suggests that providing models helps students to perceive reading as a male activity, further research is needed to determine how and when reading role models could be best utilized. Could teachers gather data about which specific *traits* of role models influence each student? For example, if a boy reports being impacted by a male parent, teacher, sibling, classmate, older student, sports figure, or other male, could the teacher then get a role model to match that student? In the researcher's experiment, various role models visited the classroom, each with different traits. It is possible that student readers did not view some or any of the visitors as true reading role models. It is also possible that the *type* of modeling could impact results. Further investigation would be needed to discover if a fourth grade boy prefers seeing a role model read, having a role model read to him, or discussing books and their impact on life with him. This information could help the teacher better coordinate the reader-role model interaction. Another question that could be researched is *timing*. Does *when* the role model enters a boys' life have an effect on the boy's attitude toward reading? Are male role models most effective at a certain age? Is there an ideal time in a boy's life for a male reading role model? Parents and educators could gain valuable information through further investigation of these topics.

In terms of study design, it would be helpful for additional research to be improved in several areas. First, the study sample could be extended to include boys of different reading levels and with varied backgrounds. The number of subjects could also be increased. It would be helpful to have not only a larger and more varied group, but also a control group so that

subjects could be randomly assigned. The data from the experimental group and the control group could then be compared, resulting in more valid and reliable data. Finally, instead of a six-week experimental period, the time of the experiment could be extended.

Conclusion

This study provides evidence that exposure to male reading role models improves fourth grade male students' attitudes toward reading as a male activity. However, the intervention did not significantly impact students' preference for reading as a recreational activity. Practical implications include the need to include male influences in the literacy development of boys, particularly in practices that encourage voluntary reading. Future research should examine *how* male role models can be used most effectively in and out of the classroom setting, *when* they should be introduced into boys' lives, and in what *capacity*. Years of research have revealed that boys are in need of intervention in the area of literacy. Providing male students with like-gender reading role models could have significant, long term effects on reading development, and improve the likelihood that students develop into not only literate, but happy, engaged, productive world citizens.

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Appendix A

Reading Attitude Survey





1. How do you feel about reading in your free time at school?

 Love it!	 Like it.	 Ho Hum...	 Don't like it!
---	---	--	---





2. How do you feel about reading in your free time at home?

 Love it!	 Like it.	 Ho Hum...	 Don't like it!
---	---	--	---





3. How do you feel about telling other boys about books you've read?

 Love it!	 Like it.	 Ho Hum...	 Don't like it!
---	---	--	---





4. How do you feel when other boys tell you about books they've read?

 Love it!	 Like it.	 Ho Hum...	 Don't like it!
---	---	--	---





5. How do you feel about reading instead of playing?

 Love it!	 Like it.	 Ho Hum...	 Don't like it!
---	---	--	---





6. How do you feel about going to the library?

			
Love it!	Like it.	Ho Hum...	Don't like it!





7. How do you feel when other boys see you reading in your free time?

			
Love it!	Like it.	Ho Hum...	Don't like it!





8. How do you think other boys your age feel about reading?

			
Love it!	Like it.	Ho Hum...	Don't like it!





9. How do you feel about reading different kinds of books?

			
Love it!	Like it.	Ho Hum...	Don't like it!





10. How do you feel about going to the bookstore?

			
Love it!	Like it.	Ho Hum...	Don't like it!





11. **How do you think older boys feel about reading?**

 Love it!	 Like it.	 Ho Hum...	 Don't like it!
---	---	---	---





12. **How do you feel when other boys give you suggestions about what to read?**

 Love it!	 Like it.	 Ho Hum...	 Don't like it!
---	---	---	---





13. **How do you like going to the bookfair?**

 Love it!	 Like it.	 Ho Hum...	 Don't like it!
---	---	---	---





14. **How do you feel when your favorite author writes a new book?**

 Love it!	 Like it.	 Ho Hum...	 Don't like it!
---	---	---	---





15. **How do you think male athletes feel about reading?**

 Love it!	 Like it.	 Ho Hum...	 Don't like it!
---	---	---	---





16. **How do you think grown up men feel about reading?**

 Love it!	 Like it.	 Ho Hum...	 Don't like it!
---	---	---	---





17. **How do you feel when it is time for reading at school ?**

			
Love it!	Like it.	Ho Hum...	Don't like it!





18. **How do you feel about reading on vacation?**

			
Love it!	Like it.	Ho Hum...	Don't like it!

19. **How do you think male celebrities feel about reading?**

			
Love it!	Like it.	Ho Hum...	Don't like it!

20. **How do you think male leaders feel about reading?**

			
Love it!	Like it.	Ho Hum...	Don't like it!

Reading Attitude Survey

Student Name _____ **Teacher** _____

Grade _____ **Date** _____

Scoring Guide

Love it! 4 points
Like it! 3 points
Ho Hum... 2 points
Don't like it! 1 point

<i>Item Number</i>	<i>Type of Item</i>	<i>Score Received</i>
1	<i>Attitude toward Reading</i>	
2	<i>Attitude toward Reading</i>	
3	<i>Male Activity</i>	
4	<i>Male Activity</i>	
5	<i>Attitude toward Reading</i>	
6	<i>Attitude toward Reading</i>	
7	<i>Male Activity</i>	
8	<i>Male Activity</i>	
9	<i>Attitude toward Reading</i>	
10	<i>Attitude toward Reading</i>	
11	<i>Male Activity</i>	
12	<i>Male Activity</i>	
13	<i>Attitude toward Reading</i>	
14	<i>Attitude toward Reading</i>	
15	<i>Male Activity</i>	
16	<i>Male Activity</i>	
17	<i>Attitude toward Reading</i>	
18	<i>Attitude Toward Reading</i>	
19	<i>Male Activity</i>	
20	<i>Male Activity</i>	

Attitude Toward Reading Raw Score: _____

Attitude Toward Reading as a Male Activity Raw Score: _____

Full Scale Raw Score (Reading + Male Scores): _____