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Motivation in Male Adolescent Readers

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## **Chapter One**

### **General Problem/Issue**

I am about to begin my sixth year of teaching middle school and high school English. In many ways, I still feel like a new teacher. I am still developing my pedagogy and what I want my classroom culture to feel like. I am continuously improving my classroom management skills, and I am constantly questioning the effectiveness of new strategies I implement each year. When asked to think of a specific issue in my classroom, there is a lot to choose from, but I immediately gravitated towards the issue of motivation in the classroom. When asked to narrow down that issue to something researchable, I began to think of what motivation looks like in my classroom. When thinking of the female students in my 7th, 8th and 10th-grade classes, I feel that a majority of these students have something within themselves driving them to complete assignments and to do well. Adversely, I feel that too many of my male students lack this internal motivation, or drive, to succeed in or exceed expectations in my classroom. What's worse, there is a culture of apathy that surrounds the lack of motivation in my middle school male students. Several factors may contribute to this such as a student trying out different personality traits, or because they believe 7th and 8th grade "don't matter" as grades don't count towards their transcript until 9th grade. Whatever the reason may be, I feel that researching strategies to engage students in my classroom in order to motivate them is a worthwhile research topic.

### **Subjects and Settings**

#### **Description of subjects**

The participants in this study are fourteen male students in 8th-grade from a rural, Midwest high school. 100% of the participants indicated "white" as their ethnicity. 7.6% of the

study population have been diagnosed with autism. 7.6% of the study population have been diagnosed with attention deficit disorder. 7.6% of the study population come from single-parent households.

### **Selection criteria**

I chose the 8th-grade students because I am most familiar with the curriculum I teach for that age group. We are a small school, so I have taught grades 7-12 within the past five years. The 8th-grade class is the only one I have taught consecutively over those five years. It is also the grade I have the most freedom in when it comes to implementing new strategies. The sections of 7th and 10th grade that I teach have curriculum schedules that would make frequent conferencing unpredictable.

### **Description of setting**

This study takes place in a small, rural town in the Midwest. This is a K-12 school, with about sixty students per grade. 95% of the students are identified as Caucasian, with the remaining 2% identified as Hispanic, 1% identified as black, and 1% identified as two or more races. 38.7% of the total population of students receive free and reduced lunch. Most families are identified as being low-income. The graduation rate at this school is 89.5%, which is higher than the state average which rests at 82.7%.

### **Informed consent**

Permission will be obtained from the Institutional Review Board at Minnesota State University Moorhead and from the school district to conduct this study. The school district's IRB procedure will be followed to obtain permission to conduct research. This will involve receiving permission from the superintendent and principal of the school where the research will be conducted.

Protection of human subject participants in research will be assured. Participants will be informed of the purpose of the research and any procedures required by the participant, including disclosure of risks or benefits. Confidentiality will be protected through the use of pseudonyms without identifying information. The choice to participate or withdraw at any time was outlined both verbally and in writing. Because all of the invited students will be minors, parents will be made aware of this study and will need to provide their permission in order for their child to participate.

### **Review of Literature**

Within the classroom, English teachers are confronted with a barrage of issues. One issue that continues to deter students from achieving growth throughout the academic year is motivation in regards to reading independently. The research found on this topic focuses on teaching strategies to increase motivation, as well as possible factors behind the lack of motivation in male students. One teaching strategy that has been implemented in English classrooms is conferring with students. The goal of this study is to determine if the specific teaching strategy of conferring is effective in increasing the motivation to read independently in male students.

### **Intrinsic Motivation in Adolescent Male Readers**

Motivation to read can be defined as the likelihood of engaging in reading or choosing to read (Gambrell, 2011). According to Guthrie, Wigfield, and VonSecker (2000), intrinsic motivation is being motivated to accomplish or learn something for its own sake out of curiosity and interest. Guthrie, Wigfield, and VonSecker (2000) cited several students that indicated intrinsic motivation as being a stronger predictor of reading than extrinsic motivation. Although it is unclear what factors lead to a decreased sense of motivation in male students, it typically

happens around the time when children begin middle school (Pennington, 2017). Green and Toster (1986) cited a large amount of research done that points to cognitive differences in development that explain the differences in intrinsic motivation seen in males and females; whereas females were perhaps trained to evaluate themselves in terms of others' approval, males are affected by adult approval to a lesser degree. Green and Toster (1986) continue to draw on gender expectations claiming that boys are encouraged to pursue challenges that require movement and spatial awareness, which does not usually translate into a traditional classroom. Kim and Kim (2018) also note that the influence of motivation in male students continues to decrease over the course of a high-school student's career.

According to Gambrell (2011), variables that are associated with motivation has made empirical research difficult as both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation are affected by several variables. Gambrell (2001) identified nine components of reading motivation: curiosity, preference for challenge, task involvement, self-efficacy, competition, recognition, grades, social interaction, and avoidance. Unrau, Ragusa, & Bowers (2015) believe that reading motivation relies on "goals, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, and social motivation". In a recent study conducted by Kim and Kim (2018), motivation in high-school male students was observed in order to see which motivational components mattered to the students most, and which motivational components were tied to student success. At the end of the study, it was found that male students were motivated by competition and the avoidance of negative consequences (Kim and Kim, 2018). Kim and Kim (2018) note that male students who learn for curiosity and self-efficacy are more likely to be successful in their learning endeavors.

Teachers have these facets to contend with when trying to decide how they will increase motivation within their classroom. What makes motivation even more complicated to instill

within the classroom is that students are not all motivated by the same needs or desires (Gambrell, 2011). As noted earlier on, the education system may be set up in a way that caters towards intrinsic motivation in female students and not to their male counterparts. In the literature reviewed within the section of motivation, intrinsic motivation is largely focused on over extrinsic motivation. Gambrell (2011) believes that intrinsic motivation is more associated with achievement as it is long-lasting and provides a deep sense of contentment.

### **Teaching Practices**

Due to a decrease in intrinsic motivation as students become older, teachers must find strategies that illicit intrinsic motivation in order to see student achievement. Creating motivation within a classroom can be done through principals created by the educator (Guthrie & Alao, 1997), classroom activities to harness intrinsic motivation, such as collaborative discussion and small group work (Pennington, 2017), and building personal relationships (Unrau, Ragusa, & Bowers, 2015, p. 118).

A good educator realizes the importance of implementing teaching strategies that will engage and motivate his or her students. Henry, Lagos, and Berndt (2012) delineate several different ways boys can be motivated to read by giving more choice, opening up a dialogue about reading, and creating more hands-on experiences in conjunction with reading. Expanding the classroom library, specifically expanding on books geared towards boys, and encouraging students to find literature independently outside of the classroom can give students a sense of ownership over their reading (Henry, Lagos, & Berndt, 2012). Conferencing is one-way teachers can open up dialogue about books, as well as creating spaces to give students the opportunity to discuss what they are currently reading (Henry, Lagos, and Berndt, 2012). Hands-on experiences must be can often be implemented when teachers are able to differentiate their instruction

(Henry, Lagos, and Berndt, 2012). The problem occurs when educators do not know how to decide on the strategies that will work, and may not have enough time or resources to successfully integrate new ideas into their classroom. “Turner and Paris found that the most reliable indicator of reading motivation was not the type of reading program districts follow but the actual daily classroom tasks that teachers provided” (Marinak, Malloy, & Gambrell, 2010, p. 506). What teachers do every single day impacts the level of motivation in their students. Teaching strategies that have proven to be effective include literacy choices, authentic and challenging literacy tasks, and using rewards that are proximal to reading (Marinak, Malloy, & Gambrell, 2010, p. 509).

### **Conferring with Students**

Conferring can be defined as “an opportunity for teachers to assess students’ understanding, help them organize their work, break down assignments and projects, reteach content, provide encouragement, and renew motivation” (Learned, Dowd, & Jenkins, 2009, p. 46). When looking at all the different strategies an educator can utilize in their classroom, the question must be asked, why conferencing? Allen (2009), an educator who advocates for conferring and has written educational texts on the subject, states that there are specific guiding principles to successful conferencing a teacher should consider when implementing the strategy into their classroom. One principle is knowledge, and understanding that conferring provides insight to the student’s thinking and assess their understanding of what has been covered in the classroom. A second principle is goal setting, and that the outcome of every conference should include a goal the student can walk away with. Yet another principle is the process, or the way a teacher uncovers a student’s metacognitive stance; when a teacher is in close communication with an individual student, you get to uncover the way they think about reading. A teacher can



also discover patterns of growth or misconceptions when conferring on a regular basis, which can only happen if the teacher is documenting student growth, strengths, and needed interventions. Allen (2009) continues to discuss the principles of conferencing by explaining that conferencing should be a tool a teacher can use to strengthen the abilities of each student and have them reflect on their progress. All of these elements point directly back to the student, which is the entire point.

Costello (2014) argues that conferring is successful when the teacher is flexible, and the conference is student-oriented. Because my research revolves around this one strategy, it is important that I know what I want my conferencing to look like. Porath (2014) argues that successful conferencing happens, “When teachers are aware of their own experiences, ask direct questions about student thinking, probe for further elaboration, and wait for students to join the conversation” (p.1). Porath (2014) continues to support her rationale by saying that, when students feel understood as a reader, by their teacher, conferencing becomes more meaningful. When conferencing, it is important to listen to what your students have to say. According to Porath (2014) there is an increased amount of student motivation and engagement after the teacher focuses more on asking questions and listening rather than focusing on an instructional point with the student. Allen (2009) supports this by stating listening as a key element of conferencing, “The more time we spend listening, the more time the conferee spends talking. The more the conferee talks, the more clarity we have about his reading strengths and growth areas” (chap. 1). Conferencing is a way to motivate students by setting individual goals, and opening up a dialogue between the educator and the student (Costello, 2014).

### **Components of Conferencing with Students**

Allen (2009) believes that, like all good rituals and routines, conferencing should follow a specific structure every time it is used. This helps the educator stay on track and keep accurate records, but it also helps the students identify the process and become comfortable with the routine. The routine Allen (2009) advocates for is “RIP”, where each letter stands for a specific conferencing strategy used with the student. The “R” stands for review, read aloud, and record. During this stage of the conference, a student will discuss how their reading is going with the teacher, talk about a specific part of their book, and discuss questions that elicit further discussion. Allen (2009) describes the “I” as instruction, insight, and intrigue. During this section of the conferencing, the teacher will use the information gleaned from the “R” portion of the conferencing and go more in depth. A teacher could perhaps ask a student how they are monitoring comprehension, or discuss new vocabulary words, or discuss a major theme that seems to be emerging. Finally, Allen (2009) wraps up his conferencing sessions with “P”, which is plan, progress, and purpose. The teacher and student will discuss what the student needs to work on before the next conference occurs, or perhaps a new strategy to focus on, and specific “next steps” so the reader knows what he or she needs to do.

Guthrie, Wigfield, and VonSecker (2000) report that students are intrinsically motivated when clear goals are provided by the teacher and that when teachers help students focus on a specific learning goal, a positive impact is seen on student’s intrinsic motivation. Both Allen (2009) and Porath (2009) stress the importance of listening to the students and allowing them time to formulate their answers and to be honest with who they are as a reader.

Allen (2009) suggests that educators take notes in order to paint a portrait of each student as a learner. When an educator is setting up their notes, Allen (2009) advises that the form be simple, flexible, roomy, functional, and modifiable. He provides his own version of note-taking which he

encourages educators to use and revise in order to fit their needs. Allen (2009) argues that note-taking is an important part of the process, “Conferring with students is a deliberate act. The notes I take as I confer have to be just as thoughtful, ruminative, and solicitous” (chap. 4).

### **Benefits of Conferring with Students**

The benefits of conferring affect students and teachers alike. Allen (2009) observes that conferring helps him monitor readers more closely and see patterns begin to emerge. He was able to evaluate a student’s thinking behaviors and comprehension, fluency, word-level skills, and problem-solving strategies as well as their engagement and motivation. Allen (2009) says that the side-by-side conferring method, in which a teacher confers with one student at a time, helps build stronger relationships throughout the academic year.

Conferencing helps students with short and long-term reading habits. Students are able to walk away from conferences with a specific strategy to focus on that would help nudge them as readers (Allen, 2009). Students should also walk away from conferences satisfied with their accomplishments, knowing that they are on their way to becoming more independent readers and learners (Allen, 2009). This is, perhaps, the greatest benefit conferencing has to offer. Allen (2009) hopes that conferencing builds long-lasting independent and engaged readers. Guthrie, Wigfield, and VonSecker (2000) say that “Students who participated in a program designed to enhance students’ ownership over literacy activities appeared to increase their interest in reading and their sense of reading efficacy” (p. 332) and that “Students who perceived the classroom as autonomy supportive were more likely to be intrinsically motivated for learning than students who did not perceive autonomy support in the classroom” (Guthrie, Wigfield, and VonSecker, p. 331). While it is certainly the hope that students improve throughout the academic year, the best

result is that conferencing with students would help them along to become life-long, independent readers.

### **Summary of the literature and its implications**

Low intrinsic motivation in adolescent male readers is an important educational issue. While this does not mean educators disregard intrinsic motivation in their female students, teaching strategies implemented should be chosen with care in regards to their lesser motivated male readers. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation can be engaged with carefully chosen teaching strategies; because students are motivated by a variety of things, educators need to be aware of what the needs are of their classroom. Specific teaching strategies like conferring with students can also bolster motivation within the classroom. Conferring with students is successful when following a specific pattern, such as the one Allen (2009) suggests. Note-taking is a necessary part of conferencing in order to collect data and identify patterns in student growth. Student conferencing has been proven to increase motivation in students through frequent discussions and goal setting while giving students autonomy over their learning.

### **Statement of the Hypothesis**

8th-grade male students who confer with their instructor show improved reading habits from the onset of the study to the conclusion of the study.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to see if conferring with students is an effective way to increase motivation in adolescent male readers. Information was first gathered about male student's attitudes towards reading and motivation. Then, information about several studies done on motivation in adolescents was reviewed before looking at instructional practices implemented by various teachers. Now that the information has been gathered, it is my intention to implement

the instructional practice of conferring and document its effects on unmotivated male readers over the course of this study.

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purposes of this study, the following terms are defined using Gambrell's (2011) article "Motivation in the School Reading Curriculum" and Allen's (200) book titled *Conferring: The Keystone of Reader's Workshop*:

**Intrinsic Motivation:** behavior that motivated by internal needs or feelings

**Extrinsic Motivation:** forces that are external to an individual that influence his or her inclination to engage in a behavior

**Self-efficacy:** One's belief in one's ability to achieve a goal or succeed in something

Motivation to read: the likelihood of engaging to read or choosing to read

**Conferring:** a series of meetings that occur between a teacher and their student.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Research Questions**

Over the past five years of teaching middle and high school English, I have seen and tried different strategies in order to increase motivation in independent reading habits. I have used both incentives and punitive measures, which speak more to those who are extrinsically motivated; results were mediocre at best. I have built an impressive classroom library, with over 500 books that speak to all types of readers. I have created a classroom environment that exudes a sense of comfort (flexible seating, dimmed lighting, the use of relaxing music). While these choices have made those who already like to read, read more, I am still struggling to engage my non-readers and resistant readers. I want to try something that focused on increasing intrinsic

motivation while building relationships with my students. Conferring with students is one technique that I have always wanted to try, which led me to my research questions:

1. What motivates 8th-grade male students to read?
2. Does conferring with students encourage them to reach independent reading goals that they have created for themselves?
3. Does having students identify poor and strong reading habits influence their own, personal reading habits?
4. Does building a personal relationship with male students increase intrinsic motivation to read independently?

### **Methods and Rationale**

I will collect data using two different resources. The first resource I will use is the Adolescent Motivations for School Reading (AMSR) questionnaire. The AMSR is a measure of motivation in Language Arts (Coddington, 2009). There are six constructs measured with reliability ranging from .75 -.92 (Coddington, 2009). These constructs will gauge how students feel towards various parts of being in English 8, from their socialization with classmates, to how they feel when reading independently. The questionnaire will be administered once at the beginning of the research period, and then again at the end of the research period. Although I will only be using data from the male students, all students will complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire can be read aloud for students with reading difficulties. Students will not be timed during the questionnaire and may complete it at their own pace (within the 50 minute class period). After this questionnaire, I will have students create short and long-term goals when they meet with me individually. I do this every year, but I will make sure to limit their goals to their independent reading.

The second way I will collect data is through routine questions asked during one-on-one conferencing. I will have standard questions asked at each meeting to gauge any changes in motivation or reading habits. I will include the questions below:

1. How do you feel about independent reading?

a. I think it is important for students to identify how they see themselves as a reader.

Thinking about their thinking and sharing that with me will provide information on ties between those who see themselves as non-readers and poor reading habits.

2. What motivates you to read?

a. Student responses will indicate whether intrinsic or extrinsic motivation plays a role in their independent reading.

3. I want you to think about semester one and your independent reading grade. Did you meet the goal you had set for yourself?

1. If students reply no: What happened? What stopped you from reaching that goal?

2. If students reply yes: Please share what worked well for you.

a. As their teacher, I genuinely want to know what the common downfalls are for students who do not meet academic expectations. This information can be used in later conversations when helping students create short and long-term goals, as well as providing encouragement and advice.

4. I want you to think about your independent reading goal for this semester. Do you think you are making progress towards the goal you have set for yourself?

1. If students reply no: What is getting in the way?

2. If students reply yes: What is working well for you?

a. Similarly to question two, I want to gather information on what non-successful reading looks like and what successful reading looks like at the 8th-grade level. Students need to be able to identify when a choice, or unhealthy habit, is getting in the way of them making academic progress.

5. What, if anything, do you want to change this next week to strengthen your independent reading habits?

a. Students need to be conscious of how their choices have an impact on what happens in the classroom. Having them verbalize ideas on how to improve their reading habits helps to hold them accountable when they leave my room.

6. What can I do to help you strengthen your independent reading habits?

a. Students need to know that I am their team member when it comes to reading independently and that I will do what I can to help them succeed.

7. By the time we meet next week, what do you hope has been accomplished?

1. How are you going to make that happen?

a. Students should always create short-term goals in order to reach a long-term goal, so having them verbally express what they need to do before the next meeting will further solidify the expectation and remind them to continue to work outside of the classroom.

These questions are intentionally open-ended in order to elicit honest feedback from the students. Seeing how their responses change or remain the same will not only provide data on if conferencing has any impact on their independent reading habits, but will provide me with information on what the reading trends are in my classroom.



**Schedule**

At the onset of the research period, I will administer the AMSR questionnaire. At the end of the research period, I will have students complete the AMSR questionnaire a second time, to document any changes in motivation. I will implement a schedule for conferencing with all of my 8th-grade students (although data will only be collected for male students). My goal is to meet with each student every one-two weeks (depending on class size and our school calendar). One class size consists of only fourteen students, while the other class consists of twenty-two, so rotations will vary slightly between the two classes.

**Ethical Issues**

In regards to my research, one ethical issue comes to mind. I am concerned about how existing relationships with students may affect the conferences or their attitude towards reading in my class. Although rare, there have been instances where students who enjoy reading purposefully react negatively to any type of survey or feedback in my classroom because they do not care for me as their instructor, or wish to appear indifferent to being engaged in the classroom due to fear of their classmate's perception of them.

**Anticipated Response**

My hope is that conferencing will further improve my relationships with students who have not developed a positive relationship with me at this point in the academic year. It will give us time to get to know one another even better and to show them I do care for them as my student and that their success in my classroom is a team effort. The routine of our conferencing will hopefully put these students at ease and allow them to answer the questions openly and honestly.

### Chapter 3

#### **Purpose of the study**

This study was conducted in order to see if conferring with male students had an impact on their intrinsic motivation. Research was gathered from many reputable sources about male student's attitudes towards reading and motivation. Then, information about several studies done on motivation in adolescents was reviewed before looking at instructional practices implemented by various teachers. Next, the instruction practice of conferring was decided on as the appropriate path to take in order to see if intrinsic motivation could be built through fostering a personal relationship with the classroom educator. After the information was gathered, a reading survey was distributed to in order to review and compare results at the beginning and end of the research study in order to see if conferring had any impact on intrinsic motivation in the classroom.

#### **What motivates 8th-grade male students to read?**

The data for this question was collected from the survey titled "Student Reading Questionnaire". It was distributed before conferring with students began as well as at the conclusion of the study. This was done in order to gather a framework for how students felt before conferring began, as well as a baseline to observe any changes in attitudes towards reading at the conclusion of the study. Students were given the survey at the onset of class and not timed when taking the survey both times it was distributed. The three questions that are presented in the data below identify beliefs and values that correlate with intrinsic motivation to read. According to the data, male adolescent readers are motivated by interesting books more than any other factor.

Table 1.0

*Onset of the study: I enjoy reading in my free time*

Responses	Male Students (14)	%	Female Students (21)	%
Not at all like me	4	28.57%	4	19.04%
Not like me	8	57.14%	5	23.80%
Somewhat like me	2	18.18%	6	28.57%
A lot like me	0	0.00%	6	28.57%

Table 2.0

*Onset of study: I enjoy the challenge of reading*

Responses	Male Students (14)	%	Female Students (21)	%
Not at all like me	2	18.18%	0	0.00%
Not like me	5	35.71%	6	28.57%
Somewhat like me	6	42.85%	9	42.85%
A lot like me	1	7.14%	6	28.57%

Table 3.0

*Onset of the study: I choose easy books to read so I don't have to work as hard*

Responses	Male Students (14)	%	Female Students (21)	%
Not at all like me	2	14.28%	7	33.33%
Not like me	8	57.14%	9	42.85%
Somewhat like me	4	28.57%	4	19.04%
A lot like me	0	0.00%	1	4.76%

Figure 1.0

*Conferring Question: What motivates you to read? (Male students only)*

Motivator	Week One (14)	Week Two (14)	Week Three (14)
Grades	2	2	2
The Topic	0	1	1
Family	1	0	0
Book was Interesting	10	10	10
Relaxing or Fun	1	1	1

### Interpretation of Data

These results shown in Tables 2 and 3 were what I expected from the reading survey. The entire purpose of my study was to identify motivators for adolescent male readers because I have noticed a lack of intrinsic motivation in my male students when compared to their female counterparts. I say this cautiously as not all male readers have low intrinsic motivation just as not all female readers have high intrinsic motivation, but I have noticed a trend that leans in that direction since I began teaching six years ago. According to Guthrie, Wigfield, and VonSecker (2000), intrinsic motivation is being motivated to accomplish or learn something for its own sake out of curiosity and interest. Green and Toster (1986) cited a large amount of research done that points to cognitive differences in development that explain the differences in intrinsic motivation seen in males and females; whereas females were perhaps trained to evaluate themselves in terms of others' approval, males are affected by adult approval to a lesser degree. This information supports the evidence I found when breaking down the results from various questions about reading that identify intrinsic motivation.

When asked if they enjoyed reading in their free time, the results from the fourteen male students was significantly different than their female classmates. Approximately 57% of the female population answered positively to this question with “Somewhat like me” or “A lot like me”. In comparison, only 18% of the male population answered positively with “Somewhat like me” and no male student answering with “A lot like me”. To further support the research gathered in the literature review, when asked if they enjoyed the challenge of reading, 71% of the female responded positively with “Somewhat like me” or “A lot like me” whereas only 50% of the males responded positively with “Somewhat like me” or “A lot like me”, with only one male student falling the latter category.

The question regarding avoidance does not support the research conducted. Kim and Kim (2018) found in their research that male students were often motivated by the avoidance of negative consequences, such as embarrassment in front of their peers, or the inability to play in an athletic sport due to poor grades. When asked if they read easy books in order to avoid hard work, only 28% of my male students answered positively with “Somewhat like me”, with 23.8% of the female students also answering positively. I was expecting different results with a higher percentage of males answering positively considering what the research said as well as my own classroom observations of reading habits. I wonder if the question had been changed to be more inclusive to say “short” and “easy” students would have answered differently.

The conferring question included really interested me. The overwhelming response to why my male students will sit down to read is because they found a good or interesting book. Thirteen of the fourteen responded the same way when asked the questioned three separate times, with only one student changing his answer from a family member telling him to read as being a motivator to the topic being a motivator (he is fascinated with WWII planes and

Warcraft). I inaccurately assumed that most of my male students would answer “grades” as being the most significant motivator in order to avoid negative consequences that come with not reading for English class. However, Henry, Lagos, and Berndt (2012) did say that expanding the classroom library to include books that would cater to boy readers specifically could motivate reading.

The school reading questionnaire proved to be an adequate tool for gathering a foundation of knowledge on how each student felt about reading in class and on their own while supporting my observations of males not being as motivated to read independently as females. After viewing student results, I do think some of the language used was not specific enough to elicit the most accurate response from students, as mentioned above when discussing the avoidance question. If I were to repeat this study, I would rephrase the questions so they just focused on independent reading instead of reading for language arts. I believe that several students answered questions with the mindset of how they act while reading a classroom novel or out of the textbook, even though I tried to clarify before distributing the survey.

**Does conferring with students encourage them to reach independent reading goals that they have created for themselves?**

The data collected for this question came from both the reading questionnaire as well as the conferring questions. Questions chosen focused on student success when reading and making goals that they had set for themselves. The questions analyzed for data were chosen to see if the feeling of success is tied to the ability to reach long and short term independent reading goals. According to the data, conferring with students had no significant impact on their independent reading progress on a week to week basis, or on their long term independent reading goals.

Table 4.0

*I feel successful when I read for language arts*

Responses	Onset of Study				Conclusion of Study			
	Male Students (14)	%	Female Students (21)	%	Male Students (14)	%	Female Students (21)	%
Not at all like me	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	1	4.76%
Not like me	5	35.7%	2	9.52%	2	18.18%	2	9.52%
Somewhat like me	7	50%	12	57.14%	10	71.42%	11	52.38%
A lot like me	2	14.28%	7	33.33%	2	14.28%	7	33.33%

Figure 2.0

*Are you making progress towards your independent reading goal for this semester?*

Response	Number of Male Students (14)	%
Consistent "Yes"	9	64.28%
Consistent "No"	3	21.42%
"Yes" to "No" (at the second meeting)	1	7.14%
"No" to "Yes" (at the second meeting)	1	7.14%

**Interpretation of Data**

The results from these two questions were not the ones I expected. After looking at the data, I realized that I truly do have more male students succeeding than I often realize. I sometimes think that, because I have female students that are much more excited about literature than the males (or are vocal about it, anyway), that my male students don't feel as confident

about their reading. When asked if they felt successful about reading for class, a majority of students from each gender answered positively with “Somewhat like me” and “A lot like me”. There was a higher percentage of male students that answered negatively, and I was expecting that. The biggest surprise was that no males answered with “Not at all like me” either time they took the survey. I have several male students who never complete a book and read at a very low reading level, and was expecting them to react very negatively to this question. I was pleasantly surprised by the results. When it came to making progress towards their independent reading goal, a majority of the male students answered “Yes” over the three conferring meetings that took place. The student who answered “Yes” at the first meeting and “No” at the second meeting reflect a small portion of students I have each year who start off strong and clearly understand the material but rapidly decline in regards to their efforts in reading.

Unrau, Ragusa, & Bowers (2015) argue that reading motivation relies on goals, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, and social motivation. The results found in the data above align with this statement; 71.42% reported making progress towards their independent reading goal. At the end of the study, 85.7% of the male students felt positive about the statement regarding success. This percentage correlates with the amount of male students who were making academic progress and reaching their independent reading goals. Unfortunately, it appears that the conferring didn't have an impact on three students who were not making progress with their goals. They continued to fall behind in class did not show signs of wanting to change their reading habits when they met with me. Allen (2009) noted that conferring can be a successful tool to strengthen the abilities of each student and have them reflect on their progress. The reflection piece of this statement was supported by my data, and that having students take time to think about their past week of reading and be able to speak to their level of success



sometimes made them realize that they were not making the progress that they assumed they were.

Costello (2014) says that conferring is a way to motivate students by setting individual goals, and opening up a dialogue between the educator and the student. While I did set individual goals with each student, each week, the male students who were not making academic progress did not show any signs in changing their behavior. Two male students in particular were open about rarely, if ever, reading at home. I made a plan with each of them to, instead of just having “read more” as a goal, to start smaller. Perhaps this week their goal would be to remember to take their book out of their back pack at night so it was visible. My rationale was that having a visible reminder may have increased their odds of picking the book up to read, eventually. When I would check in with them at the next meeting, the books hadn’t made it out of either backpacks and no independent reading had occurred outside of the classroom.

The reading survey was an adequate tool when collecting data for this research question. I do think there are variables included in the question that distort actual results. For example, students may define “success” in a variety of ways. I mentioned earlier that I would choose to change the language in order to replace any instance of “language arts/reading class” with “independent reading” in order to focus student thoughts to the type of reading I wanted to observe. The survey question provided helpful data to show me that most students are making progress, as I tend to focus on the students who are not. For the most part, students stayed consistent with their answers on making progress which was another unexpected, and welcome, surprise.

**Does having students identify poor and strong reading habits influence their own, personal reading habits?**

The data shown below covers four questions, three of which were asked at the beginning and end of the research study. The first three questions are analyzed in Tables 5 through 7 and were chosen in order to see if poor reading habits were influenced by meeting and conferring with me, where I would then have students explain how their week of reading went and what plans they should make moving forward. According to the data, conferring with students had no significant impact on changing independent reading habits in male adolescent readers.

Table 5.0

*I choose to do other things besides read for language arts/reading class*

Responses	Onset of Study				Conclusion of Study			
	Male Students (14)	%	Female Students (21)	%	Male Students (14)	%	Female Students (21)	%
Not at all like me	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Not like me	2	14.28%	1	4.76%	3	21.42%	3	12.28%
Somewhat like me	10	71.42%	14	66.66%	6	42.85%	12	57.14%
A lot like me	2	14.28%	7	33.33%	5	35.71%	6	25.57%

*Table 6.0 I avoid reading for language arts/reading class*

Responses	Onset of Study				Conclusion of Study			
	Male Students (14)	%	Female Students (21)	%	Male Students (14)	%	Female Students (21)	%
Not at all like me	0	0.00%	7	33.33%	0	0.00%	7	33.33%
Not like me	6	42.85%	8	38.09%	7	50.00%	7	33.33%

Somewhat like me	6	42.85%	4	19.04%	5	35.71%	5	23.80%
A lot like me	2	14.28%	2	9.52%	2	14.28%	2	9.52%

Table 7.0

*I choose easy books to read so I don't have to work as hard*

Responses	Onset of Study				Conclusion of Study			
	Male Students (14)	%	Female Students (21)	%	Male Students (14)	%	Female Students (21)	%
Not at all like me	2	14.28%	7	33.33%	0	0.00%	3	33.33%
Not like me	8	57.14%	9	42.85%	10	71.4%	11	52.38%
Somewhat like me	4	28.57%	4	19.04%	3	21.42%	5	23.80%
A lot like me	0	0.00%	1	4.76%	1	7.14%	2	14.28%

### Interpretation of Data

The results gathered from Table 5 fit with my predictions for whether or not students find time to read independently. During my conferring sessions, my male students expressed their feelings towards reading in platonic, reserved responses, and a few talked about it as if it were a chore they had to complete. I had one student who said he enjoyed reading because it was relaxing and fun, but also acknowledged that grades and academic performance also influenced him to read.

In Table 6, the data shows that over half of the male population avoids reading. This was true at the beginning and at the conclusion of the study. This supports the findings in Table 5 as

well as the responses heard from the conferring sessions. Green and Toster (1986) suggest that gender expectations influence motivation to read and that boys are often encouraged to participate in activities that require movement and spatial awareness. I believe that the data collected for this research question supports that statement. During my conferring questions, male students would often explain their feelings towards independent reading as “boring”. When asked why they would generally respond with wanting to move around or be outside. After viewing Table 7, I realized the results supported the data collected for common motivators in male readers (Figure 1). I expected a higher percentage of males to identify with choosing a book because it is easy, but if their main motivator for reading is a good or interesting book than ease is not as much of a factor as I previously thought.

After viewing the data collected, I do not feel that conferring with students in order for them to identify personal reading habits had any significant impact on their personal reading habits, although Allen’s (2009) observation of conferring being a strategy that allows the discover of patterns of growth and misconceptions was certainly true. When asked what they could do on their own time in order to improve their independent reading, the response I received almost every single time was “read more”. This was a red flag for me. When questioned further, several of the male students did not know how to make that happen. After giving several different strategies that they could employ, I would follow up at the next meeting and see no progress or really any attempt at trying the strategies given. I do feel like conferring is a strategy that does not yield immediate results, and that personal relationships and conversations about literature take time to foster and grow, but it was still frustrating to see that over the course of six weeks of conferring, I saw my at-risk students continue with their poor reading habits.

**Research Question #4 Does building a personal relationship with male students increase intrinsic motivation to read independently?**

Data collected for the final research project may be observed in Table 8, where students were asked at the beginning and the end of the research study if they enjoyed reading during their free time. Between the first time they were asked this question, and the last, approximately six weeks had passed with three conferring meeting taking place. The data shows that conferring with students had no significant impact on adolescent male's intrinsic motivation to read independently. Female students showed slightly higher levels of intrinsic motivation and answering positively to enjoying reading on their free time in both tables.

Table 8.0

*I enjoy reading in my free time*

Responses	Onset of Study				Conclusion of Study			
	Male Students (14)	%	Female Students (21)	%	Male Students (14)	%	Female Students (21)	%
Not at all like me	4	28.57%	4	19.04%	5	35.7%	3	14.28%
Not like me	8	57.14%	5	23.80%	8	57.14%	4	19.04%
Somewhat like me	2	18.18%	6	28.57%	1	7.14%	9	42.85%
A lot like me	0	0.00%	6	28.57%	0	0.00%	5	23.80%

**Interpretation of Data**

The data collected supported my ideas of conferring with students throughout the study. I was not seeing significant results from student responses on a week to week basis, so I did not expect to see any surprising results from the survey at the conclusion of the study. While I

believe conferring to be a beneficial and positive influence on reading and classroom relationships, after completing the study I do not think six weeks in a fifty minute class period is a sufficient amount of time to see real progress.

Unrau, Ragusa, & Bowers (2015) said that creating motivation within a classroom can be done by building personal relationships. While the data does not support this statement, I still believe it to be true. I was able to become better acquainted with my male readers and to hear some very honest and sincere thoughts from them on their reading habits and why they do or do not enjoy reading. The data shows that there was no significant change in reading behaviors, I do believe that the continuation of conferring would eventually foster some positive changes. When conferring with my students, I listened to what the research said on making sure I was listening and creating a session that was student oriented. Porath (2014) said that there was an increased amount of student motivation and engagement after the teacher focused more on asking questions and listening rather than focusing on an instructional point with the student. Instead of giving them a reading strategy at our sessions, I would try to give helpful advice to students who were falling behind on their independent reading goals. While the students who did read on their own did not heed my advice, I did have several success stories in which students meet or exceeding the goals that they had set for themselves. Allen (2009) argues that side-by-side conferring with one student at a time helped build stronger relationships throughout the academic year. I did not observe this throughout the conferring during the study, but fully believe that stronger relationships would be developed if this were to be a year-long strategy.

## **Conclusion**

While conferring may be an instructional practice that motivates students to read, my own action research proved to be a difficult one to confirm this as an effective teaching strategy.

I had several issues when trying to confer with my students on a weekly basis over six-week period. One issue was the limited time I had with students in my fifty minute class period. When it came to implementing the strategy, I learned during the first week that meeting with each student every week would be impossible. My plan was to meet with three to four students during independent work time in order to confer and gather data. The first issue was that I was normally only able to meet with one or two students each time, at most. Conferring took a little longer than I expected, as did the transition time between students. The second issue was that students who were supposed to be working independently while I conferred needed a lot more of my assistance than I anticipated. I attribute this to a particularly difficult research study we were working on at the time I was conducting the study. Although this study is incredibly important to me, guiding and teaching my students was still the first priority. Due to these factors, conferring had to be modified to meet with students once every two weeks. This made me think of all the research I completed for my action-research proposal. When looking for research studies on conferring at the high-school level, I found very few results. Most studies were conducted in elementary schools. After completing this study I can understand why it may not be as popular with middle and high-school students. When a teacher has only 50 minutes to spend with students every day, every instructional minute is precious.

Another issue I was not expecting was the behavior of the students I conferred with. When students came back to confer with me, the dynamics in our relationship changed. I remember one specific student coming in to my classroom who was beside herself with excitement over a new book that she started reading. We talked about it for a couple of minutes until the bell rang. When I called her back to confer, I could hardly get her to say a single sentence about the book. I believe that because students knew they were a part of a research

study, and that I was recording their answers, I was not always able to obtain accurate and honest answers due to nerves or sudden shyness. Several students also felt uncomfortable being singled out, and looked visibly uncomfortable due to classmates being in close proximity that could perhaps overhear their answers. Due to these complications, I do not believe enough data was collected to truly see if conferring with students have an impact on their intrinsic motivation in regards to reading. I believe that if the study were to be conducted over the course of a school year, students would be able to learn how to discuss their book with their teacher and feel comfortable talking about their progress in a one-on-one setting.

In conclusion, the data suggests that male adolescent readers have less positive attitudes than female adolescent readers while also feeling less successful when it comes to reading than female adolescent students. Male students are most likely to read if a book appeals to their personal interests, and are motivated to read by little else. Male students who were not making progress in meeting their personal read goals remained that way over the course of the study. Overall, the data collected suggests that conferring with students on a regular basis over a short amount of time does not significantly change attitudes in regards to intrinsic motivation in reading.

#### **Chapter 4**

I plan to implement my knowledge gathered from this research project in my upcoming year with my middle school students. I can begin doing this before the academic year even begins by expanding my classroom library. If my male adolescent readers claim to be motivated to read by interesting books, I need to work on making sure I include titles that appeal to them. I do quite a bit of research each year to see what books I should include in my library, and have received grants to expand it in order to include literature that appeals specifically to teenagers



and teen issues. I have noticed popular titles in my classroom are *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie, *Crash* by Jerry Spinelli, and several books by Robert Cormier and Gary Schmidt. The books are passed from student to student, and I actually had to purchase three more copies of Alexie's book because of popular demand (all four copies are currently checked out with a waiting list). Between these classroom observations and the information I received from my conferring, I believe it worth my time and resources into gathering more high-interest literature for my middle school male readers.

I also plan to survey my middle-school students on their reading interests and habits. I thoroughly enjoyed going through each student's responses on the reading survey in order to see how each student felt about reading and how they saw themselves as readers. I would love to use that information in conversations I have with students to see where their head is at and figure out how we can come to a common understanding about reading expectations and how I can help them become a better and more successful reader. For example, I had one female student who responded to the statement "I feel successful when I read for language arts/reading class" with "Not at all like me". I was surprised when I saw her respond in this way as she is one of my stronger students. When I reviewed some of her state testing data, I saw that she exceeded expectations. I want to know why a student who is so very obviously successful feel the opposite way about herself. If our conversations could possibly increase her self-esteem as a reader, as well as other students in my classroom, I would consider conferring with students to be a success.

After considering the results and behavior I observed during the conferring, I would consider starting the year by placing students in small groups. I believe this would provide several benefits including increasing the comfort levels of students who may be hesitant on

meeting with me one-on-one, increase dialogue about reading among students (and not just between the student and the teacher) and build a common language about reading expectations. I have done something similar to this with 7th-grade students after they had been leveled through a reading program, but would like to see the dynamics of placing students in small groups based on their level of motivation as opposed to their reading ability.

In closing, this action-research study has taught me a lot about conferring with students and building relationships around reading in the classroom. Moving forward, I plan to continue using this teaching strategy in a way that promotes conversations and honesty about reading independently. It taught me the importance of planning and committing to seeing students on a regular basis while reflecting on each meeting. Most importantly, I was able to see how students viewed reading and to give them space to answer how they honestly felt about reading independently.

## **Chapter 5**

Now that this study is completed, I plan to share my findings with both my immediate English department and faculty as a whole. The English department meets on a monthly basis before contract time to go over immediate concerns or issues. Our last meeting, for example, was to discuss our professional binders, peer observations, and what requisitions we need to put in for next year. We will meet one more time during the month of May, and I plan to show the presentations I have prepared for my oral defense. My focus will be on student's attitude towards independent reading and how my male readers differed in what motivated them as opposed to the female students. This is an important conversation to have so that the English department can begin having conversations about high-interest books for male students, and perhaps allotting a specific monetary amount each year to continue to develop our classroom libraries in order to

reach our male students. I am also looking forward to sharing my results on conferring and the issues I faced. Two of my fellow English teachers have tried implementing conferring in small groups with the 7th-grade students (as have I). While we all agree conferring is a positive teaching strategy, we all struggle with the time it takes us away from our class as a whole.

I plan to share my findings with fellow faculty members at the next faculty meeting if time and my principal allows it. Our last faculty meeting is scheduled for Monday, May 13th. It is beneficial for staff to see how meeting with students on an individual basis can help with instruction and identifying individual student progress. Although I met with students to discuss their reading, any classroom teacher can meet with students to discuss any classroom content. I would not show the faculty the entire oral defense presentation but would focus on the differences in male and female motivation and how that ties to reaching goals they set for themselves in the classroom.

As an educator, I find it important to share helpful resources and tools with my colleagues. I have learned much through this research project, largely due to educators and researchers who were willing to share their ideas and findings from their own experiences and research studies. I am grateful to be a part of a professional field where sharing and distributing information is encouraged and appreciated. Sharing my own research and information with those around me is just one of the ways I can give back to my profession.

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