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Power of Choice: Empowerment through Reading

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Dedication

I would like to gratefully acknowledge various people in my life who have journeyed right along my side through the entire process of my Master's degree. First off, I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to my husband, Michael, for being there for me through thick and thin, for believing in me, and sticking by my side throughout the duration of the completion of my Master's program. Through the struggles and tears of completing this final milestone, I am blessed to have him as a constant source of joy. Secondly, I would like to thank my amazing parents for being my biggest support system since grade school, for encouraging me to pursue my dreams, and for proof-reading hundreds of papers through the years. A special thanks to my sisters, brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, grandparents, aunt, nephews, and niece for being there for me when I needed a break from school, and inspiring me along the way. I am incredibly fortunate to have grandparents looking down from Heaven above, with the biggest Norwegian smiles, as well. Thirdly, thank you to all of my professors who believed in me, encouraged me, and gave me the numerous opportunities to learn and gain insight in the world of teaching, especially in the education department and special education department at MSUM. A special thank you to Professor Courtney LaLonde for being flexible and empathetic during the most difficult time in my husband and my life, as we went through a miscarriage a few months after becoming married, during the biggest project, at the time, in my Master's program. I am incredibly fortunate to have graduated from MSUM—Moorhead with not only my undergrad, but most recently, with my Master's degree. It has been a journey that will always be remembered and reminisced. I am blessed to have had faith in myself to have accomplished such a milestone in my profession. Lastly, I would like to give thanks and acknowledge, Jesus Christ, our Savior, who gave his only life as a ransom for me.

"You are my God. My future is in your hands"—Psalm 31:14-15

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<u>Abstract:</u>

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine the impact and relationship between empowerment through choice of literary work and hand-selection "on-level" books within public schools, precisely grade three, in the West-Central region of Minnesota. Twenty-three third graders completed a written questionnaire before and after the study to determine their preference when reading for enjoyment using a Richter Scale. Upon completion of the study, students' Accelerated Reader scores, a tool for comprehension, were thoroughly analyzed and calculated. Scores were sorted between choice books, those that students chose for themselves, and hand-selected "on-level" texts that I chose for them. The significance of the relationship is that it informed an understanding of how teachers influence students' love of learning through empowering them with choice to read books that students want; which has been correlated to overall satisfaction of students. This study was accomplished through daily interactions and quantitative test scores upon completion of reading hand-picked selections and chosen novels. Only those students' parents signing an informed consent partook in the study. In this study, it was concluded that students perform better on Accelerated Reader tests given books they chose when compared to books that were hand-picked for them.

CHAPTER 1—Introduction

General Problem/Issue:

With less than 50% of the school meeting proficient standards on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCAs) in the area of reading, that sparked my interest to research areas of reading. I particularly was interested in the fact that more students are drawn away from reading because they seem uninterested and unmotivated, partially due to being a below level reader. I remember being a student who passionately hated to read. Quite frankly, I hated reading from second grade through at least tenth, from my knowledge. Today, I still am not fond of reading; however, I know the importance of it, so I have grown to like it, and love teaching kids how to read and become better readers. I was a struggling reader who not only didn't comprehend anything, but was expected to take computerized comprehension tests because I wasn't making adequate progress on Accelerated Reading tests. Looking back, it dawned on me that those computerized tests that my teacher attempted to hype up, made me dislike reading even more than I already had. Not only was I expected to pass those reading tests, I was put on the computer during whole-group and small-group lessons, in hopes that I could rejoin the class once I "mastered" the program. I felt down-right humiliated being secluded to the back corner of the room with big ugly headphones on. Thankfully, interventions today are improving and allowing students to succeed without negatively impacting them years after, but I still think about the negative impacts some interventions might have on kids as they progress through the years. In that unfortunate timeline of events, I "mastered" the program, when in reality, I just figured out the "game" in order to "get by". I was a third grader. From my personal experiences, I could see students sliding by in the areas that didn't come as easy for them. I not

only experienced the lack of desire, motivation, lack of interest in reading as a student, I experienced it on the other side, as a third grade teacher.

Coming from being a kindergarten teacher to taking the leap up to third grade, and now moving onto the special education world, I have been most concerned with students not having the eagerness to go to school each day, partially due to state requirements. As a kindergartener, one loves school—it's the best place on earth; however, the older one gets, the less they enjoy/appreciate school due to many aspects: peer stressors, home stressors, academics become more demanding, etc… Kindergarteners who were read to on a daily basis prior to entering school with or without preschool, were more interested in reading than those exposed to a slight amount, as experienced from my few years as a kindergarten teacher. As a kindergarten teacher I especially loved teaching students how to read and help them create a love for learning. From my experience, an average of 95% loved reading, even those who struggled the most. I made sure to remind parents that reading starts in the home; therefore, I stressed parents reading to their child, their child reading to them, and listening to books online, using applications, etc… Although schools can push having a growth mindset, which is simply "having the belief that intelligence can be developed when individuals understand they can get smarter through hard work, the use of effective strategies, and help from others when needed" (Dwek, 2015). Having a growth mindset counteracts a fixed mindset, which is "the belief that intelligence is a fixed trait that is pre-programmed by birth". Unfortunately, when students progress through the years, it can be observed that their mindset changes—eventually creating more of a fixed mindset when they aren't making or excelling at the same rate as peers, partially due to reading programs schools implement. With third grade being a grade that students are expected to be reading to learn, rather than learning to read, their mindset typically is a negative one when they continue to

struggle with the reading basics. It is even more apparent when texts like social studies, science, and health are two or more grade levels above their current grade; therefore, making it even more challenging to excel, grow, and be confident in one's abilities. Difficulties in reading, then spiral to all other subjects, as students heavily rely on comprehension of the text. With comprehension, comes the development of effective writing, as well. When students are required to read the same texts as all their peers, they may get frustrated, shutdown, and/or they may start talking negatively about their overall capabilities. I clearly remember fake reading as a child, and still find myself "reading" just to satisfy the page number requirement. Why? When uninterested, feeling anxious to complete the work, I find it easier to use strategies of skimming, rather than reading every single word on the page. My anxieties with reading stem from my adolescents when required to read aloud, as well as, being required to read so many pages in a given amount of time. I was never complete, but I sure tried my best to fake it. Even in my adulthood, I find it extremely difficult to read to a particular page number, especially amongst my adult peers. Even though some students do not enjoy reading 'yet', I am a teacher that encourages them to read for enjoyment every day. When students read for enjoyment, I do not set a page number requirement, as I know from personal experiences that that will not build a love for reading. Rather, I rotate around the room, listening to children read as they read their own book chosen by them, not necessarily at their level. In my case, students are aware that their independent reading time is for them to gain knowledge in the areas that interest them. During students' small group time, they are encouraged to share a little about the book they are reading, in order to give others insight of what their peers enjoy, as well as, possibly interesting others to read the same book. Thus, the problem seems to be stemmed from students being required to read particular "on-level", hand-selected texts for a comprehension grade, and not enjoying reading altogether.

From experience, I have wanted to leave the education profession due to minimal support from administration, grade-level team colleagues, aggressive parents, disrespectful students, and the demands of state standards; however, I have kept my mind on the simple fact that although I may only touch one life in each class, I am making a difference in their world.

Subjects and Setting:

Description of Subjects: The participants in this study were twenty-three third grade students, all of varying reading abilities, gender, and nationalities. Five of the students received Title support in reading, and five of the students received reading support in the special education setting. Fourteen of the students were on IEPs; twelve students were female, while eleven were male. Two students received English Language Learner (ELL) supports. Fifteen students were considered reading well-below/below-grade level according to the STAR reading assessment, and eight were reading at or above grade level. Eleven of the twenty-three students were on the free and reduced lunch program.

I obtained permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Minnesota State University Moorhead and from the school district to conduct this study. In order to obtain permission to conduct the study, I also followed the school district's IRB procedure. Permission from the Superintendent of the district was obtain immediately, as well as, receiving permission from the building principal at the school where the research was conducted.

Selection criteria: These students were current third graders during the 2018-2019 school year and attended the summer targeted services (TS) following the academic school year. Because of the focus on finding enjoyment in reading, these students were a logical choice to use as my sample participants.

Description of the setting: This study took place in an elementary school in West-Central Minnesota. The district housed 1,739 students in the 2018-2019 school year with approximately 750 students being in kindergarten through fourth grade, and 100 students receiving Targeted Services during the summer. 887 students are receiving free and reduced lunch, 337 receive special education services, and 39 students are English Language Learners. The school receives Title I services, as well, which are offered through the summer and after-school hours.

Informed consent: Permission was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Minnesota State University—Moorhead and from the school district to conduct this study. Protocol from the Review Board at the University and the school district was precisely followed.

Protection of human subjects participating in research was assured, as confidentiality was protected throughout the duration of the study. Participants and their parents were informed prior of the purpose of research and any procedures required by the participant, including disclosure of risks and benefits. Confidentiality was protected through the use of keeping names and results anonymous, without identifying personal information. The risks to students was minimal, as permission from parents was obtained for their children to participate. The choice to participate or withdraw at any time was clearly outlined in the written consent, as well as, verbally stated to the participants involved with the Method of Assent. The participants' parents were informed of the nature of the study and they were asked to give their written consent for their child to participate in the research, with understanding that they could withdraw from the study at any point. The research study practiced ethical principles, including, but not limited to: respect for the participants and parents, respect for autonomy, and minimizing the risks for all

participants. Students did not express concerns or anxieties with the books selected for them, as well as, books they were able to choose throughout the study. If stress or any ethical issues would have arisen, then I would have dealt with them accordingly. My written survey was created to avoid biasing my students' attitudes toward the research topic by reviewing questions and surveys with individuals outside the classroom. I had discussions with the students prior to conducting the research, so they knew what information could and could not be shared. I also introduced the research with my students by saying that I was looking for information only on the topic of reading.

CHAPTER 2—Literature Review

Introduction:

The purpose of researching a surplus of content for this quantitative study was to determine the impact and relationship between empowerment through choice of literary work and hand-selection "on-level" books. It was also to determine the impact of reading comprehension when reading for enjoyment and reading based off teacher requirements. I wanted to know how I could be a better teacher by empowering students to read more because they loved it, not because they were required to read particular selections. Prior to the study, the school district was on a rigorous Accelerated Reader program through Renaissance; however, as they learned about my research topic, they became intrigued to decide if they should deviate away from AR requirements or remain the same. I wanted to delve into different research already conducted on the topic of allowing students choice in reading material and "on-level" hand-selected books.

Definition of Terms:

Accelerated Reader (AR): A program designed to test students' comprehension of a book read.

Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA): The State test that help districts measure student progress toward Minnesota's academic standards and also meet federal and state legislative requirements

Phonemes: letter sounds

Read for Enjoyment: When an individual chooses a book to read for nonacademic purposes, but to become a better reader

Read for Pleasure: When an individual picks up any text of choice on their own time

and reads

STARs Reading Assessment: Short tests that provide teachers with learning data, in this case, reading data. They are computer adaptive, meaning they adjust to each answer a child provides making it harder of easier depending on how the child achieved on the previous question

Hypothesis Statement:

When students are given the power of choice through the selection of books, their overall achievement on comprehension tests will be better and their enjoyment to read will increase.

Review of Literature:

Reading takes people on adventures; reading opens an entirely different world for people to escape to; reading increases knowledge about the world. Allowing students to read for pleasure, allows them to have their doors opened to take them on a journey. With allowing students plenty of time to read in the classroom, teachers can also teach students how to choose their own books based on interest or questions they want answers to.

Reading is one of the hardest skills to learn, as the English language doesn't always make sense when different letters join to make phonemes, and rules don't always apply. Keep in mind that students who have challenging listening and speaking proficiency, will affect their progress in reading. Each developmental reading skills builds on one another, and those living in low-income homes are less likely to achieve at rates compared to those of their peers. Although most educators do not like to compare socio-economic status with overall education rate, it should be considered to take necessary interventions for those known to be in low-income places. For instance, low-income households are less likely to attain a multitude of rich engaging texts for their children; thus, children are not exposed to as many rich conversations with family

members. Conversations, being read to, and independently reading exposes people to a surplus of rich-vocabulary, as well. Research verifies the importance of having a rich vocabulary and the correlation between having a rich background with socio-economic status. For instance, Marilee Sprenger states in her journal, "Professional educators know that the amount of background knowledge our students have may rely a great deal on their cultural differences and their economic status" (2019). Marzano also confirms his findings with background knowledge by saying: "background knowledge is acquired through the interaction of two factors: the ability of the student to process and store information, and the regularity with which a student has academically oriented experiences" (2004). Therefore, a student should be given many opportunities to build their background knowledge not solely based on home life experiences, but those created at school.

According to the Minnesota State Report, and paying special attention to the district's vision for the school I work in, "Preparing today's learners for tomorrow's challenges" (2018). School isn't always easy, and it takes a village to work with children, but that village is more capable of moving mountains for kids by constantly encouraging them despite the obstacles they may come across. According to Jennifer Nicolas, "We may not know exactly what lies ahead for our students in the future, but we have the advantage of knowing what skills they will need once they get there (2013). Reading is one of those skills that teachers know children of all ages will need, but the challenge lies within students being motivated to read. Children, beginning at infancy, are curious about the world around them. They want to explore all realms of their world, so the task of teachers is more about continuing to allow students to be curious and less to do with teaching them verbatim from a teacher's book. Teachers need to encourage their students to develop skills, and teach them how to apply their skills creatively and purposefully.

When students arrive already with a fixed-mindset, disliking to read, it is the teacher's job to expose a child to all areas of reading. The teacher should encourage, despite a child's struggle with reading. The older kids get, the more aware they are of their surroundings; hence, the importance to also be conscious of not embarrassing a child when they struggle to read one, two, three years below grade level. Children are fragile, and need to constantly be empowered by positivity in their lives, as too many times people are impatient, judgmental, and unwilling to take the 'extra' time to assist a child in any way, over-and-above 'daily' duties.

Scott Filkins mentions, "While it's likely that being asked to read (with reasonable support) in every classroom would improve standardized test scores, that's a side benefit to the real reasons to make sure that reading is a part of students' content area learning" (2019). Teachers become burnt out from the stressors of administration and state requirements, which ultimately leads to career changes. "Nearly 50% of teachers leave the profession within five years of teaching" (Department of Education, 2019). Teachers should be given some leniency with test scores, as a test score does not show overall progress a child has made in a given year socially, behaviorally, and academically. A child should not be looked at differently when they do not progress adequately, shown on the state test. Despite the tests, reading for enjoyment should be a daily part of a child's life in order to allow them to 'disappear' for a bit from their daily requirements.

In their journal, Armbuster, Lehr, and Osborn stated, "Good readers have a purpose for reading" (2001). Donald Martin also said, "The purpose of reading is to connect the ideas on the page to what you already know. If you don't know anything about a subject, then pouring words of text into your mind is like pouring water into your hand. You don't retain much" (1991). From Martin's statement, he is referring to the importance of being able to read using strategies

such as decoding by chunking to understand text. He also makes the comparison of reading to sports. For example, children interested in a particular sport will have a purpose to continue to improve; similarly, children interested in a precise topic, genre, or author will have a purpose to read for enjoyment. Booker Washington says, "The whole purpose of reading is to gain meaning from printed text" (2007). But, when kids are asked to decode, find the main idea, tear apart literature, they are becoming less impressed with reading in general. Terry Heick made some valid points in his article stating, "We tend to teach reading in a very industrial way in the United States" (2017). What Heick means, teachers tend to focus on giving kids 'tools' and 'strategies' to 'make sense' of text. Burton also mentions, "Reading is not simply a system of decoding words or deciphering combinations of letters on the page or screen, but an active process and readers will have a purpose for reading" (2007). Children are expected to take apart words and literature to 'understand' what they have read. When in essence, kids are overwhelmed by the pragmatics of literature that they aren't fully understanding and more so turned away from reading because they aren't able to fully read for enjoyment. When students do not have a purpose for reading, they aren't going to become great readers who can read fluently, with dictation and voice, as well as, comprehend texts. Therefore, giving readers the purpose to read for enjoyment would be beneficial, in my opinion. When students are taught skills to help them understand text, they become frustrated easily, especially when strategies that work off one another aren't taught in previous grades. It is imperative that teachers work together throughout the grade levels to make sure content and strategies align with one another.   Like the authors said, "Comprehension strategies are not ends in themselves; they are means of helping your students understand what they are reading. Help your students learn to use comprehension strategies in natural learning situations" (2001). Booker Washington also states,

The practice of reading for purpose is a powerful one. It motivates children who

might otherwise overlook the value of reading the text. It also provides a gentle

push for readers who read too quickly over material and who might otherwise

skip over key messages in the story. Reading for a purpose can keep kids

engaged and focused throughout the guided reading lesson. (2007).

When teaching kids to read for enjoyment, it is argued that students should never be told

to read up to a specific point. In *Setting a Purpose for Reading*, Washington says, "The practice

of reading until you get to a certain page is one that chops up the meaning" (2017). Hence, best

practices would suggest allowing children to read without giving them requirements of a

particular end-point. Giving students an end point can cause anxieties and could stress them out

more, especially when they should be reading for enjoyment. Booker Washington also states,

"Some children see this [page number requirement] as a means of getting out of reading the story

in their group lesson. In other words, they often resort to "fake reading" by moving their eyes

across the pages, turning the pages, and landing on the page they were instructed to read to"

(2017). Washington made a powerful point, "There is simply no incentive for reading to a page

number, because the purposes for reading the text become unclear" (2017). Therefore, educators

should seriously consider Washington's advice, especially when reading for enjoyment. Heick

confirms individuals rather skimming text verses taking the time to fully read as he states, "Most

readers are already working from a disadvantaged position, where they view themselves as not

only distinct from the text (false), but somehow further along in time and priority, as if they are

being brought to some text to see if it's worth their time" (2017).

According to Clark and Rumbold, in their 2006 article, "reading is conceived as a

"creative activity" that is far removed from the passive pursuit it is frequently perceived to be"

(2006). James Aycock also mentions, "it's important to make a distinction between academic

reading, which feels like work, and choice reading, which feels like pleasure" (2015).

Classrooms should be designed around reading for pleasure, rather than reading for a particular

number of Accelerated Reader points, in my honest opinion. AR seems to be used within

classroom in ways that it wasn't initially designed for. Initially, Accelerated Reader was created

by a means to "help teachers motivate students by providing opportunities for successful reading

practice, according to the developers of the program (Renaissance, 2011); however, it seems to

stress kids out. Since the development of the program, teachers have used it to initiate

accommodation for reading, especially for the upper grades, which adds additional stress on

students, parents, and drives children to think of reading as a chore with a negative consequence

when they do not make enough points required by the teacher. Report cards shouldn't share a

child's reading levels with parents, as that information should be kept for the sole purpose to

design small group lessons around. However, many schools around the Minnesota area have put

a great level of stress on parents and students regarding AR levels and points. Students are

losing their desire and interest to read, as they aren't allowed to go outside of their reading

levels. While Renaissance may have intended for teachers to use the information gained from

AR to "assist students with book selection, monitor reading practice, provide frequent and

objective feedback, and set reading goals" (2011), today, that is not what I have experienced

teachers utilizing the program for. On the contrary of Renaissance intended to help "students

learn that reading is fun, the amount they read and their motivation to read both increases",

students dislike reading and their motivation to read has decreased immensely throughout the

years. This causes concerns for me, as I strive to teach kids to have a love for learning, not add

extra stress to their already stressful lives. I found it interesting that Clark and Rumbold

mentioned the fact that reading for pleasure won't attain the highest levels of achievement, but it will attain a reasonable level: "Although free voluntary reading alone will not ensure attainment of the highest levels of literacy, it will at least ensure an acceptable level" (2006). Yes, teachers still are required to teach the standards in order for students to have the opportunity to learn above reasonable levels, but students should still have plenty of opportunities throughout the duration of a school day to read for enjoyment. Students should be taught how to choose appropriate leveled books but shouldn't be limited to stick within their level. As the authors stated: "Reading is an important gateway to personal development, and to social, economic, and civic life" (2006). Timothy Shanahan states, "The point shouldn't be to place students in books easy enough to ensure good reading, but to provide enough scaffolding to allow them to read harder books successfully" (2014). Research declares that adolescents will read and write more than any other time in history as they enter the adult world in the 21st century. Clark and Rumbold made an important note regarding students' ability to read, as many struggling readers are capable of reading, they may not have the interest in reading; therefore, educators need to grab the kids that are typically not interested in reading and find a way to get them hooked.

Clark and Rumbold also define "reading motivation", as it relates to an individual's personal goals, values, beliefs towards topics, processes, and outcomes of reading. In my opinion, developing a lifetime reader helps create a lifetime love for reading. According to the authors, "There has been a frequent murmur in recent years that fewer pupils now read for enjoyment" (2006). Laura Venning also mentions, "We know that academic attainment is of vital importance, but the benefits of reading for pleasure go beyond this and stretch throughout a person's life" (2015). With the understanding that children are enjoying reading less in the past five years, declining rates have been increasing for older students when compared to younger

students, as mentioned in Clark and Rumbold's article. Coming across these findings upsets me,

as students should have desire to read. I strongly believe students should be given many

opportunities to read texts that interest them verses constantly reading content based from the

curriculum. Given aspects of Clark and Rumbold's findings, I will continue to increase

opportunities for students to read for pleasure with books and/or materials (newspapers,

magazines, joke books, etc) that interest them. Students within all settings at school should be

given at least fifteen minutes to read for pleasure, if not more. When students are given the

opportunity to read for pleasure, they tend to come across material that they become interested in

to read.

Although teachers are unable to change a child's home life, particularly in the areas of

reading, they can always encourage them to read. Clark and Rumbold mentioned that more

households have televisions than books, which makes me wonder if technology is to blame for

the lack of motivation towards reading. Heick suggests, "Compared to media experiences most

modern student gravitate easily towards—Instagram, Facebook, Epic Fail YouTube channels,

video games—reading also lacks the immediate spectacle that can catalyze the experience"

(2017). I could attest for the 21st Century students to be more steered away from reading, as they

would rather play videogames or be "plugged-in" on tablets or other devices, as I overhear

multiple student interactions. More of my previous third graders would "gamer talk" than they

would discuss books, as books typically aren't a part of their daily interests. However, Heick

also suggests that teachers focus rather on the mechanics and standardization, verses what

reading was intended to do. Reading is intended to be personal and lure readers in, like that of

what social media does for people. Social media tends to hook readers to stay in touch, read

about the latest news or gossip, etc… Other than social media features, few households and

students take advantage of other reading programs/apps available. When attempting to meet students where they are at and to keep them interested in their learning, online books and devices are excellent tools; however, minimal improvement has been calculated for motivation for reading. With the technology shift, despite the minimal improvements for students wanting to read, I do believe keeping students interested in reading is important to accomplish by utilizing any means of appropriate devices, programs, applications, and educational websites. This does not go without saying that students still need a variety of rich literacy available within every setting.

The Department of Education also wrote a highly reputable research article in May 2012 based on their research regarding reading for pleasure. In their article, DPI quoted Clark and DeZoya in their 2011 article stating, "Research has shown that children who read at or above the expected level for their age hold more positive attitudes towards reading than children who read below the level for their age" (2012). Therefore, I strongly believe that immediate interventions should take place for those students achieving below grade level and having difficulties with reading, despite to what degree students may be struggling at. I have firsthand experienced colleagues, as well as myself, not attend to those students who may be struggling a little. Rather, teachers tend to focus on those students struggling a lot and in multiple areas of reading. Data proved to be driven towards the significance of improved reading scores by allowing children the choice of book selection when reading. It is interesting to note that DPI's research design was formulated with elementary through secondary students, and trends were positive throughout the ages by promoting reading through choice. Interestingly enough, the article noted, "Reading enjoyment has been reported as more important for children's educational success than their family's socio-economic status" (2012). Therefore, reading plays an important role in a child's

life, at all stages of learning. The article also mentioned the positive link between choice of

books to reading scores on assessments. I was fascinated by DPI's correlation of reading

motivation and scoring better on assessments, "children with the most positive attitudes to

reading were more likely to do well on the PIRLS reading assessments" (2012). After reading

this article, it completely surprised me that reading enjoyment outranked a family's socio-

economic status importance, as well. Once again, my personal beliefs for allowing choice when

reading, was solidified. I am an advocate of choice where it belongs in and out of the classroom.

Students should be allowed to have choice in their reading material, within reason, in order to

help create lifelong desired readers.

Alan Gibbons also wrote a strong article titled: Reading4Pleasure, published in 2011. In

his article, he thoroughly describes the importance of allowing children choice when it comes to

reading. He stated, "The active encouragement of reading for pleasure should be a core part of

every child's educational entitlement, whatever their background or attainment, as extensive

reading and exposure to a wide range of texts make a huge contribution to students' educational

achievement" (2011). Laura Venning confirms Gibbons findings by stating, "The outcomes of

reading will occur more often and more strongly if reading is enjoyable in the first instance"

(2015). When trying to accomplish teaching students to enjoy reading, it can be a challenge,

especially when students are already struggling readers; however, reading is a lifelong skill in

order to be successful in any career field. I find reading for pleasure, that of students willingly

picking up literature at home, has immensely lowered. With the drive to read decreasing, I feel

as if it is partially due to children not having an assortment of literature to choose from within the

household. When students aren't exposed to reading material in the home, I do believe that they

are less desired to read at school and find an interest in reading. For instance, kindergarteners

who were read to on a daily basis prior to entering school with or without preschool, were more interested in reading than those exposed to a slight amount. I absolutely love Gibbon's powerful statement: "A reading child is, quite simply, a successful child" (2011). Quite frankly, wouldn't educators want to empower children to read through the simple task of allowing them choice? I know I am in favor of allowing children to read, no matter the material, as long as it is school appropriate. Research has mentioned over and over again how one only gets better at reading by reading, which should be common sense. Like anything, one only gets better at something by doing it; therefore, allowing choice will only improve chances that a child is reading, not only to improve, but to enjoy what they are reading. Interestingly enough, Gibbons made a point regarding the fact that allowing book choice is—in fact—leveraging a social change in the youth. Individuals pursuing the field of education need to be flexible, as change is good, specifically when it drives a love for learning.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) expressed the need to initiate reading in the early years to help promote literacy development. As it was stated in the article, "Although reading and writing abilities continue to develop throughout the life span, the early childhood years—from birth through age eight—are the most important period for literacy development" (1998). As students progress through school, they need exposure to rich content that provides them opportunities to unravel literature with social, cultural, and academic experiences. Despite a former superintendent's view on classroom libraries when I taught kindergarten, I made sure to include as much rich literature as I possibly could from ranging reading levels due to my desire to create learners that loved reading. From parent interactions, I may have helped develop children who found a love to read, but it was also accomplished by parents supporting reading in the home. I believe that students don't solely find a love for

reading at school, but that desire to read for pleasure in reinforced at home. Parents play an

imperative role when it comes to a child's overall ideologies of school, and teachers who shine a

light on a child make a difference in their world.

CHAPTER 3—Methods

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine the impact and relationship between empowerment through choice of literary work and hand-selection "on-level" books within public schools, precisely grade three, in the West-Central region of Minnesota. Upon completion of the study, students' Accelerated Reader scores, a tool for comprehension, were thoroughly analyzed and calculated. Scores were sorted between choice books, those that students chose for themselves, and hand-selected "on-level" texts that I chose for them. The significance of the relationship is that it informed an understanding of how teachers influence students' love of learning through empowering them with choice to read books that students want; which has been correlated to overall satisfaction of students. This study was accomplished through daily interactions and quantitative test scores upon completion of reading hand-picked selections and chosen novels. Only those students' parents signing an informed consent partook in the study. In this study, it was concluded that students perform better on Accelerated Reader tests given books they chose when compared to books that were hand-picked for them.

Research Question:

Therefore, my concerns lead me to the question: when students are given appropriate reading materials based off of their current readability level, are they achieving as well as they would when they are able to choose their own reading material?

1. What is the impact of reading comprehension while allowing students book-selection choice?

2. What is the impact of reading comprehension for teacher-selected "on-level" books?

Research Plan:

Methods and rationale: Students selected books based off their personal interest level, as well as, given teacher selected whole group and small group books based off readability levels. The teacher selected books were selected by analyzing the grade equivalence STAR Reading scores. An initial written survey (Appendix A) was conducted to collect baseline data, and progress data was collected upon students' completion of books and comprehension assessments given Accelerated Reader tests. The same survey was conducted at the end of the study to preciously analyze question two: "On a scale of 1-5 (1 being not at all and 5 being very much), how much do you enjoy reading?" The reading questionnaires collected both quantitative and qualitative data about student attitudes towards reading.

The second phase was the data collection intervention period, which lasted four weeks. It was during the four weeks that the study was completed during the typical school day from eight-twenty in the morning to three o'clock in the afternoon. Since reading was during the morning, data collection was completed from eight-twenty in the morning to eleven in the morning. Most of the participants chose to read at home for at least twenty minutes; however, it was not a requirement of them to read at home. Throughout the four consecutive weeks, the students chose what books they wanted to read, as well as, books were chosen within their reading levels in accordance to their STAR score. The books that students chose were chosen within the classroom library, the school library, as well as, books from home that students wanted to bring in to read. Books within the classroom library were arranged by series and genre. I also have a section of the library solely arranged by grade equivalence using Fountas and Pinnell's reading system. Students were free to choose their books right away in the

morning from eight o'clock in the morning to twenty after eight, at breaks throughout the school

day, five minutes of recess, snack, and at the end of the day. Every Tuesday, students visited the

library for thirty minutes, and could also check-out books right away in the morning at eight.

       Several steps were taken prior to allowing students to choose books on their own for

independent reading in order to ensure they were successful. I thoroughly explained and

modeled the five-finger rule when finding a "just right" book (2013). Students had many

opportunities to practice with peers before deciding on an independent book they wanted to read

for independent reading. I also presented the I-Pick strategy when choosing a book, which is an

acronym that stands for: I choose a book, I identify the purpose of reading the book, I ask

myself does this book interest me, I read the back cover or first few pages to check for

comprehension, and finally, I check to see if I know most of the words (Boushey & Moser,

2006). I not only modeled the five-finger rule model, but also deeply modeled how to find good-

fit books using the I-Pick strategy.

Schedule: Participants began the study by taking an anonymous written survey. After

completion of the study, data collection took place over a period of four consecutive weeks.

Following the final day of the study, participants were given the same survey to analyze question

two based off enjoyment of reading. Data collection consisted of averaging self-selected book

comprehension tests and comparing them to teacher-selected comprehension tests. Survey results

were also analyzed for an increase of student enjoyment on the lector scale. All data collection

was completed by July 12th, 2019.

Table 1

	Baseline Phase	**Intervention Phase**
Length of Phase	• 1 day	• 4 weeks
Type of Data Collected	• Qualitative and Quantitative	• Qualitative and Quantitative
Method of Data Collection	• Beginning Reading Survey • STARs Reading Score	• End Reading Survey • STARs Reading Score
Parent/Guardian Communication	• Sent Home Letter of Informed Consent	• Letter sent home explaining STARs improvement
Participant Communication	• Read Method of Assent to Participants	• Introduced 5-Finger Rule • Introduced I-Pick Strategy • Individual Conference to discuss STAR score progress

Ethical issues: I designed the study to limit the possibilities of ethical issues that could arise.

Students never expressed anxieties towards the study; rather, they expressed positivity and

excitement to have the opportunity to choose their own books. If any stresses or anxieties would

have arisen, I would then have dealt with them accordingly. I did have concerns going into the

study for the possible ethical issue regarding my English Language Learners and students with

Specific Learning Disabilities; however, from my knowledge, there weren't any issues.

Accommodations and modifications were made for those that were in need of differentiation,

which was thoroughly written and described in their IEP.

I intentionally created the survey with questions that were neutral to avoid biasing my

students' attitudes toward the research topic by reviewing questions and surveys with individuals

outside the classroom. I also had discussions with the students prior to conducting the research,

so they knew what information could and could not be shared. My students were prefaced with

my intent my explaining to them that I was solely looking for information in the area of reading.

Conclusion: Should any of the ethical issues above have arisen, they were to be dealt with accordingly to the students' specific needs. Students were read to, and met with in small learning groups to help alleviate most issues that had the potential to arise. Participants were well informed that any necessary sharing of their data would be kept anonymous. If any student's reading would have began to suffer in response to the study, their intervention would then have been altered accordingly.

CHAPTER 4—Results

Results:

The purpose of my study was to determine the impact of reading comprehension while allowing students book-selection and comparing it to the impact of reading comprehension for teacher-selected "on-level" books. Solely due to time restraints, there were four consecutive weeks of data collection. Throughout the duration of the study, I was working to answer how the impact of reading comprehension compared to choice and "on-level" selected books.

Participant Data:

For this study, I identified my high-achieving students, low-achieving students, as well as, those on-level students based off their spring 2019 MAPs Reading Assessment conducted on April 16th, listed in Table 2. Based off the students' MAP Lexile, I chose "on-level" books for each student to read and complete AR comprehension assessments for.

Table 2

Student MAP Reading Data

Group	Identifying Letter	Gender	MAP Reading Scaled Score	MAP Lexile Score	State Assessment Reading
Low-Achieving	A	Female	301	145	Does Not Meet
	B	Male	323	370	Does Not Meet
	C	Female	323	370	Does Not Meet
	D	Male	332	465	Does Not Meet
	E	Male	332	465	Does Not Meet
	F	Male	334	485	Does Not Meet
	G	Male	333	475	Does Not Meet
	H	Female	348	630	Does Not Meet
	I	Male	324	380	Does Not Meet
On-Target	J	Female	346	610	Partially Meets
	K	Female	346	610	Partially Meets
High-Achieving	L	Female	352	670	Meets
	M	Male	352	670	Meets
	N	Male	353	680	Meets
	O	Female	354	690	Meets

	P	Female	357	720	Meets
	Q	Male	358	735	Meets
	R	Female	360	755	Meets
	S	Female	361	765	Meets
	T	Female	362	775	Meets
	U	Female	362	775	Meets
	V	Male	364	795	Meets
	W	Male	365	805	Meets

Initial STARs Reading scores were also taken into account for each student listed in Table 3

which was completed on June 10th, 2019.

Table 3

Student STARs Initial Baseline Reading Data

Group	Identifying Letter	Gender	STARs Grade Equivalence	STARs Standard Score	On Target (G.E. 3.9)
Low-Achieving	A	Female	1.4	99	Does Not Meet
	B	Male	1.4	99	Does Not Meet
	C	Female	1.4	99	Does Not Meet
	D	Male	2.0	192	Does Not Meet
	E	Male	2.0	194	Does Not Meet
	F	Male	2.2	216	Does Not Meet
	G	Male	2.2	218	Does Not Meet
	H	Female	2.3	224	Does Not Meet
	I	Male	2.9	305	Does Not Meet
	J	Female	3.0	323	Does Not Meet
	K	Female	3.3	356	Does Not Meet
	L	Female	3.4	374	Does Not Meet
On-Target	M	Male	3.7	414	Does Not Meet
	N	Male	3.7	415	Does Not Meet
	O	Female	3.8	419	Does Not Meet
	P	Female	3.8	420	Does Not Meet
	Q	Male	3.8	421	Does Not Meet
	R	Female	3.9	430	Meets
High-Achieving	S	Female	4.0	445	Meets
	T	Female	4.0	447	Meets
	U	Female	4.2	466	Meets
	V	Male	4.2	473	Meets
	W	Male	5.3	610	Exceeds
Note: G.E. = Grade Equivalence					

Table 4

Student STARs Post Reading Data

Group	Identifying Letter	Gender	STARs Grade Equivalence	STARs Standard Score	On Target (G.E. 3.9)
Low-Achieving	A	Female	2.0	194	Does Not Meet
	B	Male	2.2	216	Does Not Meet
	C	Female	2.2	217	Does Not Meet
	D	Male	2.2	218	Does Not Meet
	E	Male	2.2	218	Does Not Meet
	F	Male	2.3	223	Does Not Meet
	G	Male	2.3	224	Does Not Meet
	H	Female	2.9	307	Does Not Meet
	I	Male	3.0	320	Does Not Meet
	J	Female	3.1	328	Does Not Meet
	K	Female	3.4	373	Does Not Meet
	L	Female	3.4	374	Does Not Meet
	M	Male	3.7	415	Does Not Meet
On Target	N	Male	3.9	430	Meets
	O	Female	3.9	431	Meets
	P	Female	3.9	431	Meets
	Q	Male	3.9	437	Meets
	R	Female	3.9	439	Meets
High-Achieving	S	Female	4.1	462	Meets
	T	Female	4.1	463	Meets
	U	Female	4.3	478	Meets
	V	Male	4.3	480	Meets
	W	Male	5.5	635	Exceeds
Note: G.E. = Grade Equivalence					

Student Survey:

The student survey consisted of questions that asked the students to rate their attitudes toward reading on a lector scale of one to five, how often they spend time reading an assortment of genres, the types of books they like reading, if they feel they read enough, their overall rating for rather they feel they read enough or not, if they personally feel they are a struggling reader, reasons for why they read, and reasons they would choose to read more. Students completed the

survey on two separate occasions, once at the beginning of the study, and once following the

study to reflect their feelings about reading from the initial start of the study. This reflective data

was helpful for me to determine the effectiveness of my interventions. The results of the two

surveys were compared and data was collected on question two: "On a scale of one to five (one

being not at all and five being very much), how much do you enjoy reading". My goal of the

two surveys was to determine how students' attitudes were affected by the impact of student

choice books. When compiling data, my main focus was driven from comprehension data

between student choice books and that of teacher selected on-level books.

Data Collection and Analysis:

Research Question 1: What is the impact of reading comprehension while allowing students

book-selection choice?

When comparing the baseline averages to the intervention averages, survey question two

scores increased to 91% of students enjoyed reading compared to the 65% that stated they

enjoyed reading on the first survey. Given survey results, prior to intervention, 83% of students

scored a one, two, or three. Only 17% of the students gave question two on the survey a four or

a five. Following the study, 91% of the students increased their score, importantly noting zero of

the students had scored their enjoyment for reading as a one or two. Question two on the survey,

following the study, had all scores being a three or higher. Based off of AR comprehension

assessment scores, 95% of students received an 80% or higher on their choice book tests, given

at least three selections. Most students read an average of five choice books during the duration

of four consecutive weeks, verses the three teacher-selected books. *Refer to Table 5.*

Table 5

Survey Data Collected

Based off of question 2, percentage of participants that increased their score or stayed at a 5	Based off of question 2, percentage of participants that decreased their score or stayed at a rating lower than a 5	Percentage of participants that scored an average of 80% or more on their self-selected comprehension texts	Percentage of participants that scored an average of 80% or more on their teacher-selected comprehension texts
95%	0%	95%	83%

Research Question 2: What is the impact of reading comprehension for teacher-selected "on-level" books?

When comparing my baseline data to the teacher-selected "on-level" books, 83% of the students received an 80% or higher on their AR comprehension test average, given three selections. *Refer to Table 5.* Research points in the direction of allowing students choice in the areas of reading, as students will be more eager to read. I found this to hold true, as students' demeaner for books I chose compared to that of the books they chose was of less interest for those books I chose for them. Students would rather read books they chose for themselves, even if the selection was more challenging than the on-level book I chose for them. When comparing survey results for question eight: "I read because…", at the beginning of the study, two of the twenty-three students stated reading being fun and enjoyable. Following the study, nineteen of the twenty-three students declared reading being fun and enjoyable. Interesting enough, one student in particular wrote on their survey saying "reading is fun and enjoyable when I am able to choose the books I read" (*Appendix B*).

Conclusions:

Throughout this study, I observed my students choosing to read more frequently throughout the day, and conversing about their books they chose to read for themselves. Prior to introducing the study, my students had negative attitudes towards reading, and would not make the conscious choice to read for fun during or outside of the school day. After implementing the study, students generally asked if they could have more independent reading time to read the books they chose for themselves. They seemed eager to read, and more interested in the books that they chose. Students were having in-depth discussions about their books, and persuading others to read the same selections. Overall, students performed better on their AR comprehension assessments for books they chose compared to the books I chose for them.

I found that my students' attitudes toward reading improved, which was the goal of this study, when comparing the baseline data to the intervention data. There were significant differences between the high-achieving, on-target, and the three low-achieving students at the start of the study. On the contrary, following the study, the scores improved drastically given all types of learners.

Twenty-two of the twenty-three students showed excitement about reading throughout the study. The students showed excitement to have the opportunity to read selections that they have not had the opportunity to explore previously. Although students did not seem as eager to read the teacher-selected books, they were interested to have in-depth discussions with those that were reading the same selection. Through careful analysis of the study results, the goals of the study were validated. The students' attitudes toward reading improved with the use of the interventions of allowing students to chose "just-right" books.

CHAPTER 5—Implications for Practice

Action Plan

After studying how student choice impacts students' overall attitude with reading, and affects students' comprehension, I plan to continue to allow book-selection choice with my future classes. I will allow every student to chose their books verses choosing for them for independent reading. I am thrilled about the positive impact the study had with my students, and I want to continue that excitement with all the students I teach. Since I will be changing roles for the upcoming school year, from a third grade teacher to a Learning Disabilities Special Education teacher, I will aspire to continue to grow a love for reading. Following this study, I feel like I will better create a life-long love for reading, given the knowledge I have, rather than a negative attitude towards reading.

I plan to allow my students at least ten minutes of every resource period to read selections they choose to read, versus the books and selections read for intervention purposes. With technology readily at our fingertips, I also plan to allow students to have to opportunity to choose selections from an assortment of applications on the IPad or tablet, if they desire. Students will also have the option to read books on CD, as well, during the ten-minute independent reading devotion time.

If I were to conduct this study again, I would make sure to choose hand-selected books by interest, as well as, keeping grade equivalence scores in mind. I would have students chose a book from my pile of hand-selected books, and books that they choose completely independently using the 5-finger rule and I-Pick strategies.

Plan for Sharing:

Throughout my study, many colleagues were interested to learn about the results; therefore, I plan to share my results with the general education classroom teachers, as well as, my special education colleagues. Following my study, I shared my results with the administration, whom decided to eliminate AR for the 2019-2020 school year, and encourage teachers to allow students to read for enjoyment, rather than reading for a test. Since the school has decided to eliminate AR, the concern was that students wouldn't be held accountable for reading; however, studies confirm that individuals will read when they are interested. Thus, teachers will implement ways to empower students to read for enjoyment, rather than pushing them to read for requirements.

Going forward, I will use my knowledge gained form conducting this study to inspire teachers. I will be more than happy to discuss results with those interested in encouraging our youth to enjoy reading, especially since I have such a passion to create a love for learning since I had an incredibly difficult time enjoying it for myself throughout school.

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Appendix A

Before completing this questionnaire, participation in it is completely voluntary. If you decide not to participate there will not be any negative consequences. Please be aware that if you decide to participate, you may stop participating at any time and you may decide not to answer any specific question.

<u>**Questionnaire:**</u>

1. Are you a: girl or boy

2. On a scale of 1-5 (1 being not at all and 5 being very much),
   how much do you enjoy reading 1 2 3 4 5

3. On a scale of 1-5 (1 being a struggling reader and 5 being an excellent reader), what type of reader do you feel you are? 1 2 3 4 5

4. Do you think you read enough?

   Yes

   No, but I would like to read more

   No, and I don't want to read more

5. How often do you read the following? Place an X in the box accordingly.

	Often	Sometimes	Never
Magazines			
Fiction Books			
Information Books			
Poems			
Newspapers			
Comics/Graphic Novels			
Websites/Blogs			

6. I would read more if…. (mark as many as you'd like)

	I had more time
	Someone read aloud to me
	My family encouraged me to read more
	My school encouraged me to read more
	Books were shorter
	I found it easier
	Books had more pictures
	My friends read more
	I had more books at home
	It was about things that I was interested in

7. What do you think about reading? (Mark Agree or Disagree)

	Agree	Disagree
I only read when I have to		
Reading is more for girls than boys		
I like going to the library		
Reading is boring		
I read outside of school		
I can't find much to read that I am interested in		

8. I read because… (Mark all that apply with an X)

	It gives me a break
	It is fun
	I enjoy reading
	I have to for school
	It helps me understand things
	It will help me get a job
	It helps me find out more about things
	It is a skill for life

Appendix B

Student Response on Post Survey

8. I read because… (Mark all that apply with an X)

	It gives me a break
X	It is fun
X	I enjoy reading
	I have to for school
	It helps me understand things
	It will help me get a job
	It helps me find out more about things
X	It is a skill for life

Reading is fun and enjoyable when I am able to choose the books I read.

Appendix C

Superintendent Approval:

PARK RAPIDS AREA SCHOOLS
DISTRICT OFFICE
301 HUNTSINGER AVENUE
PARK RAPIDS, MN 56470

LANCE BAGSTAD, SUPERINTENDENT
LBAGSTAD@PARKRAPIDS.K12.MN.US
218-237-6500 - PHONE
218-237-6519 - FAX

PARK RAPIDS PANTHERS

April 23rd, 2019

To whom it may concern:

This letter is to grant Sarah Heise (Peper) permission to conduct an action research project study at Park Rapids School District 309 during the 2019 extended school year. I understand that this study poses no risk to those persons involved or to the Park Rapids School District. I also understand that all information received will be kept confidential and will only be used for purposes of this study.

Sincerely,

Lance Bagstad, Superintendent
Park Rapids Area Schools #309

Appendix D

Method of Assent:

      I will explain to the third-grade students that "your parents have given consent for you to participate in a research project that I am conducting. You do not have to participate if you don't want to and once you start the project with me, you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty from me, this class, or your third grade teachers. Here is what will happen: you will participate in a questionnaire about reading, and will then participate in reading different selections of books you choose for yourself, as well as, books I choose for you. After you complete a selection, you will take a comprehension test which will be scored and recorded. After six weeks you will take the questionnaire again in order to conclude what reading selections motivate your love for reading."

Appendix E

Parental Consent:
PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT: To learn how students will gain a love for reading by having the power of choice or by the teacher's hand-selected novel.
IF YOU PARTICIPATE, YOU WILL BE ASKED TO: Allow your child to partake in two questionnaires (at the start of the study, and at the end), and complete reading comprehension tests following reading each book.
TIME REQUIRED FOR PARTICIPATION: 4 weeks
RISKS: There are no apparent risks to be involved in the study.
BENEFITS: To learn how students will gain a love for reading through the power of choice or teacher selected books.
HOW CONFIDENTIALITY WILL BE MAINTAINED: All information will be anonymous throughout the entire study.
If you have any questions about this study, feel free to contact:
Adult Sponsor/College Professor overseeing the study: Dr. Ximena Suarez-Sousa
Phone/email: 218.477.22007/ suarez@mnstate.edu
Any questions about your rights may be directed to Lisa Karch, Ph. D., Chair of the MSUM Institutional Review Board, at 218-477-2699 or by emal at lisa.karch@mnstat.edu. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Sarah Heise

TITLE OF PROJECT: Power of Choice: Empowerment through Reading

I am asking for your voluntary participation in my action research project to obtain my Master's degree. Please read the following information about the project. If you would like to participate, please sign in the appropriate box below.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION:
Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you decide not to participate there will not be any negative consequences. Please be aware that if you decide to participate, you may stop participating at any time and you may decide not to answer any specific question.

By signing this form I am attesting that I have read and understand the information above and I freely give my consent/assent to participate or permission for my child to participate.

ADULT INFORMED CONSENT OR MINOR ASSENT

Printed Name of Research Subject: _____

Parental/Guardian Permission (if applicable) Parent/Guardian Printed Name: _____

Date Reviewed & Signed: _____
Signature:_____ Date Reviewed & Signed: _____

Signature:_____ Date Reviewed & Signed: _____