

2020

Influence of book clubs on reading motivation for third through fifth grade students

Allyson Reister
University of Northern Iowa

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Influence of book clubs on reading motivation for third through fifth grade students

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Abstract

This qualitative case study reports the influence book clubs have on the reading motivation of third through fifth grade students, including reluctant readers, and examines how book clubs can be used as a reading promotion tool to enhance the reading culture of the school library program. Forty-one third through fifth grade students and their teacher librarian from a small Pre-K through eighth grade private school in Midwestern suburb met via Zoom in separate grade level book club meetings once during the spring 2020 semester. The researcher discovered three main themes in response to the research questions: 1) Sociability with Others through Conversations around the Book motivates students to read the book, 2) Appreciation for the Novelty of Book Club through Choice of Book and a Snack, and 3) Reading Motivation and Book Club Appeal Enhance Reading Culture through an Essential Teacher Librarian Role. The camaraderie of being with their peers, love of reading, interest in the book club book, and the collaborative community book clubs create, make book clubs an excellent reading promotional tool that enhances a school library program's reading culture

INFLUENCE OF BOOK CLUBS ON READING MOTIVATION FOR THIRD THROUGH FIFTH
GRADE STUDENTS

A Graduate Research Paper
Submitted to the
Division of School Library Studies
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by
Allyson Reister
August 2020

This Research Paper by: Allyson Reister

Titled: Influence of Book Clubs on Reading Motivation for Third Through Fifth Grade Students

has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the
Degree of Master of Arts.

under the supervision of

First Reader: Karla Krueger, EdD

Second Reader: Joan Bessman Taylor, PhD.

Curriculum and Instruction Department Head: Robin Dada, PhD

Paper approved on _____

First Reader Signature: _____

ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study reports the influence book clubs have on the reading motivation of third through fifth grade students, including reluctant readers, and examines how book clubs can be used as a reading promotion tool to enhance the reading culture of the school library program. Forty-one third through fifth grade students and their teacher librarian from a small Pre-K through eighth grade private school in Midwestern suburb met via Zoom in separate grade level book club meetings once during the spring 2020 semester. The researcher discovered three main themes in response to the research questions: 1) Sociability with Others through Conversations around the Book motivates students to read the book, 2) Appreciation for the Novelty of Book Club through Choice of Book and a Snack, and 3) Reading Motivation and Book Club Appeal Enhance Reading Culture through an Essential Teacher Librarian Role. The camaraderie of being with their peers, love of reading, interest in the book club book, and the collaborative community book clubs create, make book clubs an excellent reading promotional tool that enhances a school library program's reading culture.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	1
Justification of Problem	1
Reading Motivation	2
Reluctant Readers	3
Reading Culture	3
Rationale	4
Uncertainty and Deficiencies	4
Summary of Problem Statement	5
Purpose	5
Research Questions	5
Assumptions and Limitations	5
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW	6
Reading Motivation	6
Reluctant Readers	8
Reading Culture	10
Summary	12
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY	14
Research Design	14
Participants	15
Procedures	15
Data Sources	15

Data Analysis	17
Limitations	18
CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS	19
Research Question 1: Reading Motivation	19
Research Question 2: Book Club Appeal	20
CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	25
Conclusions	25
Research Question 3: Reading Promotion	25
Recommendations for Practice	29
Recommendations for Future Research	30
REFERENCES	31
APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP CONVERSATION QUESTION GUIDE	34

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"When I say to a parent, "read to a child," I don't want it to sound like medicine. I want it to sound like chocolate. " — Mem Fox

When a teacher tells a student to read, it often sounds like a chore. Educators can try to endorse reading in a positive light, or “like chocolate” as Mem Fox so eloquently put it. Teachers' attitudes can shape the attitudes of impressionable students. Instead of “telling” a child that they need to read more, it is better to reframe how reading is presented to students. This can be as simple as changing our questioning to students, saying things like “we ‘get’ to read more,” and “aren’t you excited to see what happens next?” Educators have the unique ability to present reading in a way that makes students want to read.

Justification of Problem

According to the Report of the National Reading Panel (2000), “The extent to which children are successful with reading and how much they actually read is directly related to how they feel about reading” (p. 1). Students who have a poor attitude about reading because they are struggling or reluctant readers need to be encouraged and motivated at a young age, specifically upper elementary school students, defined in this paper as third through fifth grades. Worthy et al. (2002), found that “as students progress through the elementary grades and into middle school, reading attitudes often plummet and voluntary reading is not common” (para. 2). The American Association of School Librarians [AASL] (2018) Common Beliefs say, “Reading is the core of personal and academic competency. School librarians support, supplement, and

elevate learners' literacy experience by guiding them and involving them in motivational reading initiatives" (p. 13). Through the school library, "school librarians take a leadership role in organizing and promoting literacy projects and events that encourage learners to become lifelong learners and readers" (p. 13). Book clubs can be used as both a motivational tool and a reading promotion tool. Book clubs designed toward motivating reluctant readers support the Iowa Core Standards (2016): "The Standards insist that instruction in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language be a shared responsibility within the school" (para. 13). The positive effects that book clubs have in elementary schools is informed by national standards and scholarly research in the following areas: reading motivation, reluctant readers, and reading culture.

Reading Motivation

Guthrie et al. (2007) purport the common understanding that "When children are motivated to read, they are more likely to be engaged in reading" (p. 286). Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) define reading motivation as values, beliefs, and individual goals that encourage a person to read. Teacher Librarians have the opportunity to bring children in contact with books. Locher (2019) states, "school plays an important role in the development of students' intrinsic reading motivation" (p. 12). Guthrie et al. (2007) connects intrinsic reading motivation to libraries: school libraries that offer book clubs engage readers with "real-world interaction, which is a desirable starting point because it is intrinsically motivating" (p. 284). Holloway (1999) furthers the connection between intrinsic reading motivation and students' reading confidence, and the enjoyment they get from learning to read. Children with high intrinsic reading motivation tend to engage in reading activities more often. As student's age and become young adults, "the desire to learn, often referred to as intrinsic motivation, usually declines during the adolescent

years” (p. 80). Thus, targeting students in the third through fifth grades through the current study is important because as students get closer to middle school, their reading motivation often drops.

Reluctant Readers

Powell, McIntyre, and Rightmeyer (2006) notes that students who struggle with reading often exhibit avoidant behaviors, fearing failure and embarrassment. A reluctant reader is defined in this article as a student who has trouble reading, those who can read and choose not to, and/or those who can read but can’t find anything interesting to read (Johnson, 2017). Chapman (2000) says “often times in less proficient readers, negative feelings seem to develop during the early years of schooling, when they face reading failure. Young children who face failure in reading are less engaged in reading activities than their more proficient peers” (p. 704). Worthy et al. (2002) captures ways libraries can engage reluctant readers through reading promotion noting that “social interaction, students’ interests, and access to appropriate texts were all likely key factors in promoting voluntary reading in resistant readers” (p. 8).

Reading Culture

Book clubs in the school library can be used as a reading promotion tool to promote a school reading culture, because the nature of book clubs organically encourages reading and builds community. A reading culture can be defined as an environment where reading is valued, promoted and encouraged (White, 2017, p. 2). AASL National School Library Standards (2019) state that “libraries of all types foster education by promoting the free expression and interchange of ideas, leading to empowered lifelong learners” (p. 244). According to the AASL (2018) reading for pleasure increases reading proficiency, better communication skills and the ability to

process information. Book clubs in the school library have the potential to inspire a culture of reading throughout the entire school community. Ample research has shown that school librarians impact student achievement and play a major role in accomplishing a school's desired student outcomes (Hughes, 2014).

Rationale

Book clubs are an “effective way to encourage reluctant readers to build and strengthen reading skills, foster reading enjoyment, and engage students” (Maldonado, 2012, p. 61). Book clubs are also a way to build a culture of reading in your school which includes everyone. Students, teachers, librarians, and parents will benefit from their students participating in a book club. Given that reading motivation typically drops in middle and high school, this study will explore how book clubs influence reading motivation in third through fifth grades in an effort to create a positive influence building up to those years.

Uncertainty and Deficiencies

A study by White (2017) focused on how recreational reading in secondary schools can improve with the implementation of book clubs. In order to further understand how book clubs motivate younger students, and inspire a reading culture in the school library, this study follows one of White's recommendations for future research. The current study explores the influence book clubs have on the reading motivation of third through fifth grade students, including reluctant readers, and examines how book clubs can be used as a reading promotion tool to enhance the reading culture of the school library program.

Summary of Problem

There is little research about the influence of book clubs on reading motivation at the upper elementary level.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to analyze the influence book clubs have on the reading motivation of third through fifth grade students, including reluctant readers, and examine how book clubs can be used as a reading promotion tool to enhance the reading culture of the school library program.

Research Questions

1. How do book clubs influence the reading motivation of students in upper elementary school?
2. What makes a book club appealing to students in third-fifth grades?
3. How can book clubs be used as a reading promotion tool to influence a school library program's reading culture?

Assumptions and Limitations

The researcher is only analyzing data from third through fifth graders in one private school in Iowa. The book club can be recommended to students by teachers and the librarian, but ultimately it is an optional book club, and students are not required to join, although based on past experience, it is assumed that many students will want to participate.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to analyze the influence book clubs have on the reading motivation of third through fifth grade students, including reluctant readers, and examine how book clubs can be used as a reading promotion tool to enhance the reading culture of the school library program. Prior research used to inform this topic fell into three categories: reading motivation, reluctant readers, and reading culture.

Reading Motivation

Whittingham and Huffman (2009) set out to address the effects that book clubs have on the reading attitudes of middle school students. The participants of the study consisted of sixty students from two middle schools. Two professional education interns served as adult participants/book club leaders. The book club met once a week for 25 minutes throughout an entire semester. At both the beginning and end of the semester, students took a survey using a Likert-type response scale asking students to strongly agree, agree, render no opinion, disagree, or strongly disagree with statements pertaining to their reading attitudes. Students were also asked to keep a log to track changes in their reading attitudes as they participated in the book club meetings throughout the semester. Whittingham and Huffman found exposure to a book club is a key factor in the attitudes of reluctant readers. Participation in the book club was a positive way for students to realign their initial attitudes about the benefits of reading.

In a similar study of student reading motivation, Casey (2008) supported using learning clubs, which are similar to book clubs, to motivate struggling adolescent readers and writers. The participants of the study included one seventh grade class of 19 students, 6 who were

identified as struggling with reading and writing. This six week study included six 80-minute observations, two semi-structured interviews, interview type conversations, lesson plans and photos. The results of Casey's research showed that the literacy clubs were successful, but it was because the students had an effective teacher guiding the learning club:

The learning clubs evolve in Sharon's (the teacher) class not because she read a single professional text and then reproduced it in her room, but because she is always reading and listening and learning and refuses to dismiss the adolescent who struggles as lost. (p. 292)

Casey concluded that learning/book clubs have the potential to be a powerful motivational tool for disengaged and frustrated adolescent readers and writers, specifically when led by a proficient teacher.

Unlike Whittingham and Huffman (2009) and Casey (2008) who studied how book clubs motivate readers, Edmunds and Bauserman (2006) examined what motivated students to read in general. They began their research by simply asking their students what motivated them to read and recorded their answers. The students and teachers questioned in the study attended an elementary school with 831 students and 37 teachers. During data analysis, the researchers used the constant comparative method to find patterns about what motivated students to read. While analyzing the patterns, the researchers discovered common themes that increased their students' reading motivation. Based on their findings of these common themes, Edmunds and Bauserman made five recommendations for motivating students to read more in the classroom. The five recommendations include: self-selection, attention to the characteristics of books, personal interests, access to books, and active involvement of others. The authors stated that the majority

of the books the students read were from the school library. They recommended that children have the opportunity to have flexible library visiting times to browse for their books. These studies of reading motivation inform the current study through analysis of best practices in how book clubs can be used as a reading motivation tool for students in third through fifth grades.

Reluctant Readers

Research by Venegas (2018), aimed to explore how literature circles had the potential to strengthen readers' self-efficacies, especially in reluctant readers in Grades Four through Six. This was a multiple case study that used both qualitative and quantitative data. The site of the study was a fourth through sixth grade classroom in a central Texas public school with 20 students, 17 of whom participated in the study. Out of the 17 students, 7 were considered reluctant readers. Venegas observed literature circles for this study over an 8-week period. The study participants consisted of both proficient and struggling readers. Data was collected from a variety of sources, including (a) RSPS pre- and posttest scores, interviews, direct observation, documentation and a focus group. The results of this study suggested that reluctant readers who participated in literature circles could potentially improve their reader self-efficacies.. Venegas concluded her research by noting that her results were significant. She goes on to say, "the reader self-efficacies of Grade fourth through sixth students often do not correlate with their reading abilities. Therefore, there is a need to strengthen the reader self-effacacies of reluctant and struggling readers to improve their affinities for reading and arguably their reading achievement" (p. 433).

By the same token, Worthy et al., (2002) examined factors that influenced students' changing reading outlooks and habits. They focused on the question: What factors influence

resistant readers to read on their own? The participants in this year long study included 24 struggling, reluctant readers in third through fifth grades. The study took place in the “reading club,” an after school literacy tutorial program. The reading club was developed in 1996 by a university professor to provide a field experience for university graduate students and support intensive instruction for students in need of literacy support. The researchers chose to study students in third through fifth grades because “students at this age level are most likely to have a declining motivation in reading” (Worthy et al., 2002, p. 4). Data included parent and teacher interviews, reading assessments, written student reflections, and any data related to students’ reading attitudes, habits and preferences. The researchers found that 21 out of 24 students participating in the study greatly increased their at-home voluntary reading. In case after case of students who increased their voluntary reading, it was the human interaction that got students to read. The key factors were the tutors, teachers, librarians, etc. that provided the instruction, support, and encouragement that the students needed.

Unlike both Venegas’ (2018), and Worthy et al. (2002), research by Weih (n.d.) concentrated on the difficulties of getting boys interested in reading. His primary research question was: What can we learn about boys and reading from a book club for middle school boys? The participants of the book club study included four teachers from various teaching backgrounds and 10 boys from a nearby university laboratory school. The study consisted of five book club meetings. The data collected included a reading interest survey, field notes, and a concluding survey. The take-aways Weih had from his research were based upon his findings from the book club. For boys as a whole, he suggested the characteristics of a book are more important than the genre. He also noted that the boys liked highly interesting, fast-paced reads

with well-developed characters. Like Casey (2008), Weih suggested that the facilitator of the book club is an integral part of the success of a boys' book club. These three studies of reluctant readers inform the current study through analysis of best practices on how book clubs can be influential to the self-efficacy of reluctant readers to improve their affinities for reading and reading achievement, especially for students in third through fifth grades.

Reading Culture

George (2004), a staff developer, was working in New York City schools when he was asked how to address the problem of poor reading culture in schools. His research was formulated to address the need to enhance school reading culture in schools. George initiated and facilitated faculty and faculty-student book clubs to increase the school reading culture of two middle schools in a Manhattan school district. East Middle School served around 1,400 diverse students in 6-8 grades, and Park Middle School was made up of 400 diverse students. Both schools had an open campus lunch period which allowed students and teachers to all have the same lunch time. Once a month for a year, students and teachers were to have a "brown bag" affair and talk about works of adolescent literature. George used surveys and interviews as well as written transcripts of the meetings for his research. The data showed the book clubs to be a positive influence. The book clubs were successful at increasing both of the schools' reading cultures, so much that each school continued with the book clubs after the initial year research project was completed. George concluded that faculty and faculty-student book clubs can be an effective means for establishing a school reading culture.

Continuing study in the area of promoting school culture, Polleck (2010), a literacy coach for an inner city school, wanted to create a transformative space in her school. The

transformative place was to be a place where academic, social, and emotional growth occurred. Polleck chose to use book clubs as a way to provide the transformative culture that her high-school needed. The study was conducted in a small, progressive high school in the Northeast. The population of the school consisted of 55% Latino and 35% African-American with 68% of students qualifying for free lunch. Polleck created three separate book clubs for this study. One book club consisted of only freshmen and sophomore girls, one of all junior girls and the last book club was a co-ed group of students at all different grade levels. The book clubs met separately for 45 minutes once a week, either after school or at lunch. Qualitative data from sources such as observations, interviews, discussions and surveys were used for data collection and analysis. The results of this study showed the positive effect the book clubs had on the young women as readers, while simultaneously addressing the girls social and emotional needs. The book clubs started out as book discussions, but as the students got more comfortable together their discussions moved beyond books and they made personal connections with each other. These personal connections enhanced their school's culture as a whole, and the book clubs also greatly improved the reading culture of the school.

Unlike George (2004) and Polleck (2010) who focused their research on book clubs as a way to transform the culture of schools in older grades, Guldager (2016) concentrated on various kinds of reading promotion events for elementary school students. The purpose of her research project was to provide teacher librarians with various ways to create effective reading promotion events. Guldger's research project contained 31 reading promotion events meeting the following criteria: the primary audience was K-6 graders; events had to be either free or very low cost; events could not be tied to extrinsic rewards; and events could be implemented in one day with

future follow up lessons or discussions. The goal of choosing at least two events per month was encouraged. Guldger divided her research into phases to best find promotional events for her project. In Phase One the researcher reviewed professional books about reading promotion events. Phase Two included a deeper investigation of each event to be sure the reading promotion events fit her criteria. In Phase Three of the project she selected the events and organized them into months for implementation, and in Phase Four she created an annotation for each event. Lastly, in Phase Five she gathered feedback about the list and made improvements. The researcher concluded that there are a multitude of promotional reading events for children, and teacher librarians can choose those they find appropriate for their schools. Overall, these three studies inform the current study by exploring how library reading promotions, particularly book clubs, can potentially develop a robust reading culture.

Summary

In summary, these studies related to how book clubs can encourage student reading motivation (Whittingham & Huffman, 2009; Casey, 2008; Edmonds & Bauserman, 2006), how book clubs can be influential to the self-efficacy of reluctant readers to improve their affinities for reading and reading achievement, (Venegas, 2018, Worthy et al., 2002, Weih, n.d.), and by exploring how library reading promotions, particularly book clubs, can encourage the growth of a school's reading culture (George, 2004; Polleck, 2010; Guldager, 2016). These studies provide this researcher with information to guide the current research. The studies included in the Reading Motivation sub-theme focused on increasing reading motivation through book clubs of middle and high school students. The current study will provide information on how to fill the gap of increasing student motivation for third through fifth graders that was lacking in past

research. This study will also replicate research about the importance of how reading promotion can have a positive impact on school reading culture.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Prior studies revealed a need for analyzing how book clubs can encourage student reading motivation in upper elementary school students (Whittingham & Huffman, 2009; Casey, 2008; Edmonds & Bauserman, 2006), and by exploring how library reading promotions, particularly book clubs, can encourage the growth of a school reading culture (George, 2010; Polleck, 2010; Guldager, 2016). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to analyze the influence book clubs have on the reading motivation of third through fifth grade students, including reluctant readers, and examined how book clubs can be used as a reading promotion tool to enhance the reading culture of the school library program.

Research Design

The research used a qualitative case study design since “case studies are often used in exploratory studies to define phenomena worth studying further” (Wildemuth, 2017, p. 52). Wildemuth notes that case studies frequently address *why* and *how* questions, which made using a qualitative case study design applicable to the current research because it asks how book clubs influence reading motivation. Case studies are “intended to generate rich data concerning a particular case” (p. 54). Methods for data collection for this research were a focus group which was also a conversation about the book, the transcript of the audio-recording of that conversation, and observation as their teacher and participant. “The lack of generalizability of the study findings is the weakness of case studies,” (p. 55) but Wildemuth explains that its weakness can be its greatest strength because, “the richness with which a particular setting or phenomenon can be described” (p. 55). The current research focused on analyzing the influence

book clubs have on student motivation of upper elementary students and examined how book clubs can be used as a reading promotion tool to enhance the reading culture of the school library program. A case study approach benefited the current research since “the strength of the case study approach primarily focuses on the flexibility of this research strategy and its incorporation of a rich array of data collection techniques” (p. 58).

Participants

Forty-one 3rd through 5th grade students and their teacher librarian (TL) participated at a small Pre-K-8th grade private school in Midwestern suburb.. All students in third through fifth grades were invited to sign up for the optional book club, called *Brown Bag Book Club*. Since I am the current TL, and the book club has always been a library promotion event, I was the facilitator of the book club meeting. Before the *Brown Bag Book Club* meetings happened, the COVID-19 pandemic took place and our book club participants had to meet virtually via Zoom. Zoom Video Communications, Inc. provides video online chat services and is used for distance education. The *Brown Bag Book Club* was divided into three separate Zoom meetings which included, one third grade meeting with 13 students, one fourth grade meeting with 15 students, and one fifth grade meeting with 13 students. The division into three groups was done to keep the number of students in each book club meeting down and keep the meeting manageable for myself, as both the facilitator and the researcher.

Procedures

Data Sources

The *Brown Bag Book Club* meetings were structured exactly the same for each grade level, except that each grade level read a different book. The third grade participants read *Wayside*

School Is Falling Down by Louis Sachar, the fourth grade read *The Wild Robot* by Peter Brown, and the fifth grade read *Gathering Blue* by Lois Lowry.

Prior to COVID-19, I would eat lunch with the students during the book club meeting. To stay consistent with the *Brown Bag Book Club* lunch theme, I asked students to bring their own snack to our Zoom meeting that represented something from the book. Talking about the snack was an ice-breaker that got the students talking to each other and about the book. I had prepared questions before the book club meeting, see Appendix A, which were adapted from the Motivation to Read Profile - Revised (MRP-R) (Malloy, Marinak, Gambrell, & Mazzoni, 2013) to guide the discussion.

During each of the book club meetings, I first asked questions about what students liked about the book club to find out what attracted them to join it. Then I asked questions that encouraged discussion about the book. As students discussed the book, I served as a participant observer, a role “in which the observer has a role as a participant in the setting being observed” (Wildemuth, 2017, p. 210).

At the closing of each of the book club meetings, I again questioned the students (using questions from Appendix A) about their reading motivation and their thoughts about the book club. By asking students similar questions at the beginning and end of the meeting, I could also gauge whether talking about the book during the book club made them describe a greater motivation to read or join a book club in the future. I also asked the students for book recommendations for future *Brown Bag Book Club* meetings.

Data Analysis

Data from the focus group transcripts, observations, and audio-recordings were examined using conventional qualitative analysis of content. I used this approach because coding categories and themes can be drawn both directly and inductively from the raw data. Wildemuth (2017), breaks down the qualitative analysis of content into eight steps. Qualitative analysis of content “often begins during the early stages of data collection” (p. 320). This early involvement in the data analysis helped the researcher “move back and forth between concept design and data collection” (p. 320). I used the constant comparative method to code, “because it is not only able to establish original insights, but it is also able to make differences between categories apparent” (p. 321). The eight steps of qualitative analysis of content provided me with a clear action plan while I analyzed data. Step 1 was to Prepare the Data. In this first step, I created and used focus group transcripts to understand the student’s thoughts and feelings about the book club. In Step 2, Define the Unit of Analysis, I gathered all the data (i.e. content) from the focus group transcripts, audio-recordings, and observations. Then I identified big ideas and new understandings about their participation in the book club that I gained from all of these and classified it into themes. The themes that came from the data helped me code in Step 3, Develop Categories and a Coding Scheme, for example, students talked about their enjoyment or the atmosphere created in the book club, which I categorized as a theme of Appreciation. Step 4, Test Your Coding Scheme on a Sample of Text, was a way for me to test the clarity of my coding scheme. For example, if I identified a theme of Appreciation through the focus group, I then looked for evidence of that in my observations or from the audio-recordings. If I found none, I let other themes or replacement themes emerge, and I reported the new themes that

emerged. I looked at the data to try to identify themes that I coded similarly and differently. By checking the coding consistency, I was able to analyze the data throughout the data analysis phase more easily. In Step 5, Code All the Text, I needed to check my consistency repeatedly, so I was able to see new themes develop from the data. Once I coded all the text, I moved to Step 6, Assess Your Coding Consistency. This meant that I needed to recheck my coding consistency throughout the entire data set. After coding the focus group conversations, observations and audio-recordings, using the themes that emerged, I again revisited all data sources for further evidence or non-evidence of each theme. Step 7, Draw Conclusions from the Coded Data, involved making conclusions from the themes I found from the data analysis. Step 8, Report Your Methods and Findings, was when I finally explained how and why the themes I found were important to my research and helped to answer my research question.

Limitations

One limitation was the lack of generalizability of case study research. The case study only examined a small group of third through fifth grade students in one private school in Iowa. Another limitation was the short duration of the study. Although the *Brown Bag Book Club* has been a well received library event for several years, the researcher only collected and analyzed data from three book clubs meetings once during one semester.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to analyze the influence book clubs have on the reading motivation of third through fifth grade students, including reluctant readers, and examined how book clubs can be used as a reading promotion tool to enhance the reading culture of the school library program. As both the researcher and teacher librarian, I used an established library promotion event called *Brown Bag Book Club* to retrieve data for this case study. I used the conventional qualitative analysis approach because coding categories and themes can be drawn both directly and inductively from the raw data. Data from the focus group conversations with 41 students, observations, and audio recordings were examined using conventional qualitative analysis of content. I organized my findings, using my three research questions:

1. How do book clubs influence the reading motivation of students in upper elementary school?
2. What makes a book club appealing to students in third through fifth grades?
3. How can book clubs be used as a reading promotion tool to influence a school library program's reading culture?

Research Question 1: Reading Motivation

Research Question 1 asked, How do book clubs influence reading motivation of readers in upper elementary school? Reading motivation was defined for purposes of this study in Chapter 1 as “values, beliefs, and individual goals that encourage a person to read” (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). In response to the focus group conversations about how book clubs influence reading motivation, Theme 1 is Sociability with Others through Conversations around the Book.

Students said that being with friends, or the social aspect of the book club as being an important factor in their reading motivation. For example, one third grade student reported that she joined the book club because her friends did, thus making her motivated to read the *Brown Bag Book Club* book, so she “could be with my friends.” Another third grader said, “I like to talk with my friends about the book,” to which another student said, “Yeah, I do too.” Similarly, a female fourth grader said “I also like to meet up with people who have the same book interests as me.” These students were motivated to read because they saw the book club as a way they could be with friends who shared the same interests. Two other fourth grade students explained how the sociability of the book club was important to them by saying, “I like being a part of the book club because I like being with my friends,” and “We like to read the same things and talk about them together.” As well as that, a fifth grade boy said that his reason for joining the *Brown Bag Book Club* was because “we all get to be with our friends at lunch and talk about the book.” His friend agreed, saying, “Yeah, I like to be with our friends at lunch and I like to read too.” Four other fifth grade students nodded their heads in agreement when their peers said that they joined the book club to be with friends.

In addition to this, students were motivated to read more if they showed an interest in the *Brown Bag Book Club* book. During the third grade book club meeting, a student explained that the book selections for the book club were usually “very good books” which, in turn, made him want to read them. In the fourth grade meeting, nine students put their thumbs up to agree that being interested in a book makes them more motivated to read it. Another example of increased reading motivation from interest in a particular book was exhibited during the fifth grade book

club meeting when a student explained that, “the last book I read like this was good, so I wanted to read this book because it seemed like it.”

Additional evidence pointing to increased reading motivation came from the conversations about the book. During the third grade meeting, the book *Wayside School Is Falling Down* was discussed, specifically what character students liked the best and why. One student responded, “That one kid that had to go home on the kindergarten bus everyday, he made me laugh so much.” Another student chimed in saying, “I loved that part too, he was my favorite character!” The students started a natural conversation from there about other characters of the book that they liked, or didn’t like. The conversations the students had about the characters from *Wayside School is Falling Down* displayed their enjoyment they got from reading the book. Similarly, during the fourth grade meeting, a student spoke about how reading *The Wild Robot* for the book club motivated him to read the second novel in the series, *The Wild Robot Escapes*, since he enjoyed the first book so much. The same appreciation for a particular book was mentioned in the fifth grade book club meeting as well. The fifth grade students had a deep discussion about the book, *Gathering Blue* by Lois Lowry, which could have gone longer than the thirty minute Zoom meeting. One student explained that she liked to discuss the book because she could relate to the feelings the characters had, even though her life was different. She spoke about how she related to the main character, saying, “I bet Kira was so scared when she was asked to go before the Guardians. I always get nervous when I have to go in front of people.” The students then animatedly continued to talk about connections to book they each noticed.

In summary, regarding Research Question 1 about the influence of the book club on students’ reading motivation, there was an indication students in grades third, fourth, and fifth

appreciated the social aspect, stating it as a reason for their participation, and for their appreciation of the book chosen for them, their discussion of the humor in the text as they identified with characters, and their connections from what they read to real life experiences.

Research Question 2: Book Club Appeal

Research Question 2 asked, What makes a book club appealing to students in third through fifth grades? In acknowledgement to the focus group conversations about what students liked about the book club, Theme 2 is Appreciation for the Novelty of Book Club through Choice of Book and a Snack. Students wanted to participate in the book club because of the appreciation or love they had for reading. One third grade student straightforwardly explained, “I like to read, it’s fun.” A fourth grade student said she joined because she “wanted to try out a new book she hadn’t read before.” In the fifth grade meeting, one student explained the reason she joined was because, “I just really like to read.” These students already had an appreciation for reading in general, which made joining the book club appealing to them.

As well as students wanting to join the book club because of their appreciation for reading in general, some students showed an appreciation for the particular book they were reading for the *Brown Bag Book Club*. For example, one third grade student explained their reason for joining the book club was because “the book looked good.” A fourth grader said, “I joined the book club because I liked the book we were going to talk about.” Another student said that she joined the book club because, “I don’t like *The Wild Robot*, I love it!” Students also liked the snacks provided during *Brown Bag Book Club*, and mentioned them as an attractive part of the book club appeal. The third graders were excited to be able to snack during the Zoom book club meeting. One third grader said, “I am happy that we can eat a snack!” In the fourth grade

meeting, one student made a trail mix that he called “Nuts and Bolts” because they had read *The Wild Robot*, and “Nuts and Bolts” connected with the theme of the book. One fifth grade student made sure to mention his love of the snacks that connected to the book we had read were his reason for being a part of the book club saying, “I love the snacks!” To which his peer replied, “the snacks are fun because they taste good and it's fun to figure out how they connect to the book.”

In contrast, a third grade student reported that it was the novelty of the *Brown Bag Book Club* that attracted him to join. He explained, “It was the first time I could sign up for *Brown Bag Book Club*, because last year I was only in second grade.” Since *Brown Bag Book Club* is only open to third through fifth graders, this particular student wanted to join since he was now old enough to participate.

Moreover, in all three grade level meetings, at least one student mentioned that being a part of the *Brown Bag Book Club* helped them understand what they were reading better. For example, in the third grade meeting, one student said, “talking about the book makes it easier.” During the fourth grade meeting, a student mentioned, “I like to talk about the book because it helps me understand the book and get into it more.” Another fourth grader said his confusion about what he read as a reason that he enjoyed discussing the book, “sometimes the book gets confusing, but if I talk to people about it, I understand it more.” Three more fourth grade students nodded their heads in agreement to his explanation, while another student continued the conversation saying, “I agree with what he said, that when you talk about the book, it does help you understand it more.”

Another reason provided for appreciation of the book club was that students like that the teacher librarian chose good books and that this helped them decide what to read. In the fifth grade meeting, a student discussed that his reason for joining the book club was because of his trouble deciding what to read. “I didn’t know what to read, so I thought I would give this book a try.” Another fifth grade student echoed his sentiment, saying “I needed to read a book, but I never know what to pick, so I decided to just read this.” One student reported his reason for joining the book club was because the book club book, “was right there,” meaning the book was easy to find and available for him to check out. These particular students were reluctant readers and had trouble either reading, or they didn’t like to read in general. Therefore, Research Question 2 about book club appeal is exhibited in the students' conversations about their love reading, interest in a particular book, the connections from text to the snack, the novelty of the book club, and their appreciation for having the teacher librarian choose a good book .

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This qualitative case study reports the influence book clubs have on the reading motivation of third through fifth grade students, including reluctant readers, and examines how book clubs can be used as a reading promotion tool to enhance the reading culture of the school library program. Forty-one third through fifth grade students and their teacher librarian from a small Pre-K through eighth grade private school in a suburb of a Midwestern city met via Zoom in separate grade level book club meetings once during the spring 2020 semester. The researcher discovered three main themes in response to the research questions. Theme 1 is Sociability with Others through Conversations around the Book motivates students to read the book. Theme 2 is Appreciation for the Novelty of Book Club through Choice of Book and a Snack, and Theme 3 is Reading Motivation and Book Club Appeal Enhance Reading Culture through an Essential Teacher Librarian Role. The camaraderie of being with their peers, love of reading, interest in the book club book, and the collaborative community book clubs create, make book clubs an excellent reading promotional tool that enhances a school library program's reading culture.

Conclusions

Research Question 3: Book Clubs as a Promotional Tool to Enhance Reading Culture

Research Question 3 asked, How can book clubs be used as a reading promotion tool to influence a school library program's reading culture? After analyzing the data from focus group conversations, the last theme emerged; it is placed in the Discussion because it also serves as an explanation of how and why reading promotion must be done by Teacher Librarians. Theme 3 is Reading Motivation and Book Club Appeal Enhance Reading Culture through an Essential

Teacher Librarian Role. As mentioned in Chapter 4, some participants said that being with their friends had an impact on them wanting to participate in the book club. These students enjoyed the camaraderie of being with their peers, which made them motivated to read the book club book. As discussed in Chapter 3, (Worthy, Patterson, Salas, et al., 2002) examined factors that influenced students' changing reading outlooks and habits. They concluded that for students who increased their voluntary reading, it was the human interaction that got students to read.

One example from Chapter 4 that illustrated this desire for human interaction around reading was displayed when a fifth grade boy said that his reason for joining the *Brown Bag Book Club* was because "we all get to be with our friends at lunch and talk about the book." His friend agreed, saying, "Yeah, I like to be with our friends at lunch and I like to read too." Although the students normally get to eat lunch together, they have to stay with their specific class. The *Brown Bag Book Club* gave students the opportunity to visit with their friends from other classes in their grade level while simultaneously encouraging reading. The Teacher Librarian was instrumental in creating and implementing the *Brown Bag Book Club*, and without the TL's initiative the students would have not been able to socialize and discuss what they had read with students in another class. In this instance, the TL was acting in the teacher role by encouraging students to become enthusiastic readers by providing the *Brown Bag Book Club*, which gave students the opportunity to be with their peers in a social and literacy focused environment. This data is important because it displays how being a part of a social group influences reading motivation in third through fifth grade students within the book club setting. Previously stated in Chapter 1, The AASL (2018) Common Beliefs say, "Reading is the core of personal and academic competency. School librarians support, supplement, and elevate learners' literacy

experience by guiding them and involving them in motivational reading initiatives” (p. 13).

Also, The National School Library Standards for School Librarians explain how TL’s establish opportunities for learners by:

1. Providing opportunities for learners to interact with others who reflect a range of perspectives.
2. Devising learning activities that require learners to evaluate a variety of perspectives.
3. Designing opportunities that help learners to illustrate diverse viewpoints (AASL, 2018).

This supports that Teacher Librarians enhance the reading culture in a school library program by creating and promoting literacy rich experiences, such as a book club.

Next, The Report of the National Reading Panel (2000) which said, “The extent to which children are successful with reading and how much they actually read is directly related to how they feel about reading” (p. 1). The book club attracted some students because they enjoyed reading or had interest in the book club book. These students had more positive feelings about reading, and in turn, were more motivated to read and to participate in the *Brown Bag Book Club*. This was an important finding, since it echoed previous research stating that students who have intrinsic reading motivation will be more likely to engage in reading activities (Holloway, 1999). The essential role of the Teacher Librarian in leading the book club not only enhances the appeal of the book club for those with intrinsic motivation, the TL is also instrumental in involving reluctant readers, alongside their more willing peers.

Conversely, students who struggled to find a book to read often ended up choosing to read the *Brown Bag Book Club* book because they said they didn’t know what to read. The students' indecision turned out to be a determining factor in choosing a book. Most of the

students who chose to read the book club book because they didn't know what else to read were reluctant readers. As stated in Chapter 4, during the fifth grade meeting, a student discussed that his reason for joining the book club was because of his trouble deciding what to read. "I didn't know what to read, so I thought I would give this book a try." Another fifth grade student echoed his sentiment, saying "I needed to read a book, but I never know what to pick, so I decided to just read this." I believe it was the access and availability to the *Brown Bag Book Club* book selection that motivated some students to read the book and join the book club. This idea was confirmed for me when I reviewed Edmunds and Bauserman's five recommendations. One of the five recommendations was access to books. Access to books and book clubs can motivate all types of students to read. Powell, McIntyre, and Rightmeyer (2006) noted that "students who struggle with reading often exhibit avoidant behaviors, fearing failure and embarrassment" (p. 148). I think the placement of the book club display and access to the books made students who may have felt overwhelmed trying to find a book to read easier for them. The acknowledgement to providing and engaging different types of learners, in this case reluctant readers, follows The National School Library Standards Key Commitment for Include states that TL's, "Demonstrate an understanding of and commitment to inclusiveness and respect for diversity in the learning community" (AASL, 2018). The welcoming, non-threatening book display created by the TL encouraged students to read, and indirectly helped those students who were uncomfortable about choosing a book more confident.

Book clubs are an excellent reading promotion tool because they build a collaborative school community. Both state and national standards for student learning and for the implementation of school library programs support this role. The Iowa Core Standards (2016) for

students state: “The Standards insist that instruction in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language be a shared responsibility within the school” (para. 13). Additionally, the AASL National School Library Standards for school libraries and school librarians say that, “School librarians foster active participation in learning situations by: 1. Stimulating learners to actively contribute to group discussions. 2. Creating a learning environment in which learners understand that learning is a social responsibility” (AASL, 2018). Teacher Librarians develop reading initiatives such as book clubs in the library because they encourage collaboration. Collaboration between the TL, teachers, and students, lends to a community that works together toward similar goals. The Teacher Librarian can be a “catalyst in igniting a passion for reading in every student and creating a culture of literacy in the school” (Iowa Department of Education, 2020).

Recommendations for Practice

Several recommendations for practicing teacher librarians were derived from this research analysis of students’ comments about book clubs. First this research showed that book clubs are social and that students enjoy conversation with others about the selected books. Therefore book clubs are highly encouraged as an essential reading promotional tool in the school library program. This is best done by providing a book club that has a social atmosphere, since students in the third through fifth grades mentioned that being with their friends was very important to them. Second, this research showed that the students appreciate the novelty of the book club atmosphere, having snacks that coordinate with the book, and the choice of a good book by the teacher librarian because it helped them to know what to read. In order to make this possible, it is important that the teacher librarian understand the importance of encouraging students’ intrinsic reading motivation, or best practices in trying to influence a child to read more

because a book club needs to offer age-appropriate, high quality literature that will capture and then hold their interest. Third, to make book clubs inclusive to all types of readers, make the book club books easily accessible to students. For example, have all the book club books displayed next to the check out or by the main library doors, so students will easily notice them. Encourage all students to join by advertising the book club with prominent, captivating displays, or entice them with a snack that connects with the book. Book clubs naturally enhance the school library programs reading culture because book clubs are inherently a community, in this case, a community of readers.

Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of this case study was to analyze the influence book clubs have on the reading motivation of third through fifth grade students, including reluctant readers, and examined how book clubs can be used as a reading promotion tool to enhance the reading culture of the school library program. For future research, I would recommend more than one book club meeting with students. I think if I had had three book club meetings per grade, and met with them periodically while they were reading the book, I would have more detailed data about their reading motivation. Also, having the book club meetings over Zoom made it feel less personal. Many students seemed to shy away from talking online, which was unlike their personalities at school, so I felt like I didn't get as much data that I could have received if we met face-to-face.

Thinking ahead, I think it would be interesting to study if students who participated in a book club during third through fifth grades kept their reading motivation stable and/or increased their reading motivation in middle school.

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APPENDIX A
FOCUS GROUP CONVERSATION QUESTION GUIDE

Adapted from The Motivation to Read Profile - Revised (Malloy, Marinak, Gambrell, & Mazzoni, 2014)

Ice Breaker Questions:

1. What snack did you bring?
2. How does your snack connect to the book?

Essential questions (Extra questions are in parentheses)

1. Is this the first *Brown Bag Book Club* you have been to? Why did you want to sign up for this *Brown Bag Book Club* meeting?
2. What do you enjoy most about being in a book club?
3. What kind of a reader are you? (What is the easiest thing? Hardest thing?)
4. Did you like the book? What didn't you like about the book?
5. Does participating in the book club help you decide what books you like to pick out when you come to the library? Do you like the books that we have read at the *Brown Bag Book Club* meetings in the past?