An Abstract
of a research paper submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Library Science and Information Services
in the Department of Educational Leadership and Human Development
University of Central Missouri

December, 2011
Students entering middle school become less motivated to read. This research identifies why students become reluctant readers. It identifies factors that explain why students lack motivation to read for pleasure. The research also explains how Deci and Ryan’s self-determination theory identifies autonomy, competence, and relatedness as the three basic psychological needs that motivate students. Motivational strategies are identified which teachers are using to improve student motivation to read. Research suggests that integrating reading strategies into cooperative learning groups will motivate students to become better readers.
MOTIVATING MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS TO BECOME ACTIVE READERS

by

Sheryl Harms

December, 2011

APPROVED:

Research Paper Advisor: Patricia Antrim

Committee Member: Jennifer Robins

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL MISSOURI
WARRENSBURG, MISSOURI
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank Dr. Robins in all her directions and guidance while writing this paper. Her comments and suggestions have been invaluable. I would also like to thank Mrs. Pedersen and Mrs. Zieber, English teachers, for their writing suggestions, and Mrs. Daniels, business teacher, for helping with computer applications. Finally I would like to thank my husband for his patience with me while I worked on this paper.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitation of the Study</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reluctant Readers</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factors That Attribute to Reading Attitudes</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extrinsic Verses Intrinsic Motivation</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Determination Theory</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies for Promoting Reading in Middle School</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Circles</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book Clubs</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read Alouds</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustained Silent Reading</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 3: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Reluctant Readers

Why Middle School Students Lack Motivation to Read

Self-Determination Theory Explains Student’s Motivation

Reading Strategies that Motivate Students to Read

REFERENCES
Watching a child learn to read is a rewarding experience for a teacher as well as a parent. Watching a child who is reluctant to reading, however, is very disheartening. Teachers automatically want to find ways to motivate these students when they do not read for whatever reasons. Boehm says that a reluctant reader is someone who struggles or someone who reads but does not tend to do so beyond what is required (Boehm 2009, p. 75). Many middle school students lack motivation to read.

Why students lack motivation as they grow older may be caused by the many changes in their lives. Students begin to go through physical and psychological changes as they reach middle school age. Research by Roberts and Wilson (2006) shows that motivation to read and learn begins to decrease in upper elementary and continues to decrease as students enter middle school and continues on through high school. It is very challenging, but teachers strive to generate and sustain motivation among reluctant readers at this middle school age by determining what motivational strategies work best.

Teachers use strategies that focus on social aspects of reading (Wilfong 2009). These strategies engage and motivate students so they will take an interest in their learning. Strategies such as literature circles and book clubs allow students to participate in small groups instead of sharing and discussing information with the whole class. Students are more comfortable and willing to share information when working in small groups. Strategies that involve group work allow students to share ideas, make decisions, and help each other. Social activities boost students’ self esteem, and their attitudes improve, along with their desire to read and talk about what they have read.
Teachers who use strategies designed to meet the student’s needs motivate students to read. One of the goals of teachers is to foster intrinsic motivation in their students. Cambri and Gutheri (2010, p.17) describe motivation in this context “as the enjoyment and fulfillment in reading.” If students do not find enjoyment in reading, then it is more difficult to motivate them to keep reading. Students who are intrinsically motivated will continue to read long after their formal education (Bokelman, 2005).

**Statement of the Problem**

Middle school students at one Missouri school are always waiting until the last minute to come to the library to take an Accelerated Reader™ test. They try to find a book with the fewest number of pages so they won’t have to read much. Many of them grumble that they don’t like to read. The students develop negative attitudes and these attitudes affect their motivation to read. As students enter middle school, their motivation to read begins to decline. Many physical and psychological factors affect students’ motivation. Their attitudes and lack of motivation present a challenge to teachers when they try to encourage students to read. Using motivational reading strategies in the middle school will greatly benefit the students who tend to not read often. Students need to be reading more to improve their reading skills. Implementing reading strategies into the classrooms and in after school reading programs where students work cooperatively will motive reluctant students to become better readers.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate why students become reluctant readers and to identify strategies to motivate students to become life-long readers. Research by Roberts and Wilson (2006) noted that as students move into the middle school and reading becomes more of a task, negative attitudes develop, and a lack of motivation becomes greater for reluctant readers. This research study has identified many characteristics and traits that reluctant reader share. It reviews the research literature that explores the physical and psychological needs of students and explains why they lack the motivation to read. Ryan and Deci’s (2000) self-determination theory is a possible explanation for the needs of many students and why they lack motivation. This research study focuses on proven motivational strategies for teachers to use in the classroom to help motivate reluctant readers. Teachers need to know which strategies will keep students engaged so they will be motivated to read.

Research Questions

Determining the reason students lack motivation to read helps to identify strategies to use when working with reluctant readers. This investigation sought to determine what causes middle school students to lack motivation to read, and what strategies can be used to help them become better readers. The questions used for this investigation are

1. Are there general characteristics that identify a student as a reluctant reader?
2. Are there certain factors that cause middle school students to lack motivation to read?
3. Does Deci and Ryan’s (1985, 2008) self-determination theory play a role in motivating reluctant readers?

4. What are some reading strategies that increase motivation in reluctant readers?

**Limitations of the Study**

Research articles on motivating middle school students to read were limited. Many articles about motivation and reading exist, but few articles on motivating middle school readers exist. Many of the motivational reading articles were directed toward reading in the elementary school. Some of the articles on middle school dealt with the use of technology, graphic novels, and other strategies to motivate student readers, but these were not the focus of this study. This research paper addresses the needs of students who lack motivation to read, not the struggling readers.

The study was limited to just four strategies that have been used for years, literature circles, book clubs, read alouds and sustained silent reading. Limited information was available on these strategies, but enough was found to prove these strategies viable. These motivational strategies have been successfully used by teachers for many years, but it would be interesting to compare research and data from newer strategies to these.

**Definition of Terms**

The definition of the following terms will help the reader to better understand the terminology of this study.

Extrinsic motivation - arises from participation in an activity, not for its own sake, but for rewards or the release from some external social demand (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000).
Intrinsic motivation - arises from an individual’s personal interest in a topic or activity and is satisfied through pursuit of that topic or activity (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Reluctant reader – are readers who lack the motivation and desire to read independently (Boehm 2009).

**Research Design**

The researcher collaborated with the English teachers to discuss areas of concern about reluctant readers in the middle school. They determined that several of their students could read, but were reluctant to read and do not read unless it is necessary. The researcher began by reading journals and articles found in the databases from the James C. Kirkpatrick Library. The researcher found several articles on motivating middle school readers using reading strategies. The researcher’s objective was to find proven strategies to use in the classroom and the library that would motivate students to read more. No original research was conducted; instead, articles from journals were reviewed and data was examined and compared on existing research.

Articles were retrieved form the following databases: *Academic OneFile, Library Literature & Information Full Text, Education Research Complete*, and *Education Journals*. Search terms include motivating reluctant middle school readers, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, bookclubs, read alouds, sustained silent reading, literature circles, and self-determination theory.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Motivating Middle School Readers

The purpose of this study is to review the research literature about reluctant readers in the middle school and to identify strategies that used to motivate students to become enthusiastic readers. It is the job of teachers and librarians to encourage students to become good readers, thus helping them to become lifelong learners (Bokelman, 2005). In this study the researcher focused on why students become reluctant readers, how Deci and Ryan’s (1985, 2008) self-determination theory relates to motivation to read, and strategies that help students become active readers.

Identifying Reluctant Readers

What becomes apparent when reviewing several articles about reluctant readers is that many definitions of a reluctant reader exist. Lesesne (2009) says, “There is no template for the reluctant reader” (p. 1). Her definition indicates that reluctant readers are not characterized by any certain pattern. However, Protheroe (as cited in Sancore, 2008) believes that many reluctant readers possess similar traits; they do not complete assignments, avoid challenges, and only try just hard enough to get by. These students are usually capable of doing extremely well in school, but they do not seem to care if they achieve (Sancore, 2008). Reluctant readers also come from a variety of backgrounds and situations and from both high and low socioeconomic statuses.

Often the terms “reluctant reader” and “struggling reader” overlap. Struggling readers have difficulty with the process of reading, while reluctant readers shy away from
the idea of reading (Truax, 2010). Boehm (2009) says that a reluctant reader is someone who struggles or who can read but does not tend to do so beyond what is required (p. 75). One misconception is that reluctant readers are students who have lower abilities, but not all reluctant readers rank poor academically. Some students are intelligent and interested in reading but do not read well because they choose not to read unless they are required to do so. Teachers label students as reluctant readers because they are able to read but lack motivation to read on their own. These unmotivated students tend to not participate in reading activities; they do not try or they just give up.

Reluctant readers have many excuses for not reading. Younger students, especially girls in elementary school, are usually excited and have positive attitudes as they learn to read (Roberts & Wilson, 2006). As students move into middle school and reading becomes more of a task, the negative attitudes begin to appear and the lack of motivation becomes greater for many (Roberts & Wilson, 2006). These negative attitudes hamper students’ motivation and ability to improve in reading.

Motivation is a factor in promoting literacy among reluctant middle school readers (Shaaban, 2006). Students at this age are faced with many challenges as they go through both physical and psychological changes. Adolescents at the middle school age are very social and are busy interacting with their friends. They also become very busy with academics, sports, extracurricular events, and other outside activities (Edwards, 2009). As a result, their time for reading is limited. As Powell-Brown (as cited in Bolkman 2005) found, students have many more forms of entertainment than before, such as the Internet, video games, and school activities. McKool (2007) suggests that students do less reading because they are involved in many organized activities in and out
of school, watch more television, and playing move video games than before. It is not an easy task to motivate these reluctant readers who are enticed by other forms of entertainment.

Many studies reveal a difference in habits and attitudes toward reading between girls and boys. Hughes-Hassell and Lutz (2006) found that girls read more often and a greater amount per month than boys. Girls tend to be more positive about reading than boys. Sainsbury (as cited in Roberts & Wilson, 2006, p1) found that “girls tend to read more stories, magazines, and poems than boys, whereas boys are more likely to read comics, newspapers and information books”. Applegate & Applegate (2010) found that the attitudes and motivation levels of females are consistently and significantly higher than those of males. Positive attitudes are necessary to motivate students if they are to continue reading and develop a sense of enjoyment toward reading.

Motivation

A student’s attitude can definitely determine whether he or she reads or not (Roberts & Wilson, 2006). Reading attitude is an important part of students’ development in elevating their reading skills. Parker and Paradis (as cited in Roberts & Wilson, 2006) determined that reading attitudes are linked with a student’s ability. Poor readers generally have a negative attitude, while better readers have a more positive attitude about reading (Roberts & Wilson, 2006). This is not always the case, as revealed by others. Lazarus and Callahan (as cited in Roberts & Wilson, 2006, p.1) found negative attitudes towards reading regardless of ability. Lazarus and Callahan also examined reading attitudes of students with learning disabilities and gifted students who were good readers and found that they can also have negative attitudes toward reading.
According to the theory by McKenna and colleagues (as cited in Unrau & Schlackman, 2006), when readers get frustrated, they tend to view reading as a frustrating experience, thus developing a negative attitude toward reading. On the other hand, those students who find reading enjoyable develop a positive attitude toward reading. As found in comparison of these studies, reading attitudes are not necessarily linked to students’ ability. Their attitudes, however, affect their motivation to read and how much time they spend reading affects their ability to read. To understand the factors that impact motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are discussed below. This is followed by an explanation of self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan 1985, 2008) and its relationship to students’ attitudes toward reading.

**Extrinsic versus Intrinsic Motivation**

Ryan and Deci (2000) define two types of motivation in their self-determination theory: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. “Intrinsic motivation is the inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one’s capacities, as well as to explore and to learn” (p.70). Intrinsic motivation is a result of students’ interest in a topic or activity and the pleasure they receive as they pursue that topic or activity. Examples of intrinsic motivation are when students engage in reading a book for the pleasure, doing art, playing games for enjoyment, or seeking out information on a certain topic they are interested in (Unrau & Schlackman, 2006). When a person becomes intrinsically motivated and engages in activities, he becomes absorbed and committed to what he is doing. Intrinsic motivation comes from within a person and is caused by internal satisfaction (Crow, 2006). To foster intrinsic motivation is one of the goals of teachers and librarians, so that students will find enjoyment and fulfillment through
reading (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010). Students who are intrinsically motivated will continue to read long after they are out of school where there are no more grades or rewards (Bokelman, 2005).

Extrinsic motivation comes not from within the individual, but from outside. Students will become engaged in activities that they do not necessarily like, but they will complete the assignment or job for the external rewards. These external rewards may be money, grades, or recognition. These rewards bring satisfaction, although the student may not like the tasks they are performing (Bokelman, 2005).

Many teachers try to entice students to study, or perform well on a test, or act nice in class by bribing them with candy, prizes, grades, and so on. This has been practiced by teachers for years and continues to be practiced in schools today. Students like this type of motivation because they like to receive rewards. Rewards will excite students and get them started reading, but extrinsic rewards such as these do not motivate students to continue reading in the long term. Research shows that extrinsic sources of motivation may not have lasting affects when it comes to reading (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010). Students will expect a reward every time they engage in reading, as opposed to developing an interest for reading.

Lepper, Corpus, and Iyengar (2005) conducted a study on extrinsic and intrinsic motivation among an ethnic diverse group of 797 students in grades 3 – 8 from two schools in the San Francisco Bay Area of California. The study showed that intrinsic motivation declined significantly across the grades. Intrinsic motivation was highest for students in the lower grades, and intrinsic motivation was lowest in the higher grades. Their findings were consistent with those from a 1981 study by Harter. This study
showed there was a positive connection between intrinsic motivation and student achievement. Lepper, Corpus, and Iyengar (2005) also noted that students who were interested and engaged in learning, achieved higher scores on standardized tests as opposed to those who exhibited extrinsic motivation. The students who exhibited extrinsic motivation performed worse on standardized tests as well as on their daily assignments in the classroom.

Unrau and Schlackman (2005) investigated the effects of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation on the reading achievement in an urban middle school of approximately 2,000 students in the Los Angeles area. Students in grades 6 through 8 participated in this study. The majority of the students were Hispanic, while the remaining were Asians, Whites, American Indian, and African Americans. Unrau and Schlackman developed a research-based theoretical model that tracked the interrelationships among student’s ethnicity, gender, grade level, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and reading achievement. Students were tested at the beginning of the study using the Motivation for Reading Questionnaire (MRQ) and the Gates-MacGinitie test to determine the student’s motivation to reading performance (Unrau & Schlackman, 2005). Their motivation and reading achievement was tracked over a two-year period. The findings showed there was a significant decline in intrinsic and extrinsic motivation among the middle school students. The results also showed that intrinsic motivation had a positive effect while extrinsic motivation had a negative effect on the reading achievement of these students.

**Self-Determination Theory**

Self-determination theory (SDT), developed by researchers Deci and Ryan (1985), addresses human motivation, development, and psychological wellness. It is an
effective way of explaining student motivation in the classroom. SDT identifies autonomy, competence, and relatedness as the three basic psychological needs that motivate students. Deci and Ryan describe autonomy as the need to feel self-governing, competence as the need to feel effective or adequate, and relatedness as the need to be connected to others. Students are more likely to be motivated if these three basic needs are satisfied, thus making conditions more comfortable for them when participating in classroom activities.

The first basic need of students is autonomy. Autonomy focuses on students having choices about what they do. Students experience a sense of autonomy when they feel they are in control, and they are able to make independent decisions (Moos & Honkomp, 2011). Students who are allowed to make decisions within a group or on their own develop a feeling of self-worth. They develop a sense of pride in themselves and their ability to make independent decisions. Students become intrinsically motivated when they are given the opportunity to make independent decisions and choose books that draw their interest. Being able to choose their own books empowers young readers and promotes literacy (Wittingham & Huffman, 2009).

The second basic need of students is competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Being able to accomplish a task successfully will give students a sense of competence. Giving students positive feedback on assignments and tasks fulfills their need for competence. This competence increases their intrinsic motivation to continue learning. Students develop knowledge and learn skills to perform tasks or activities in daily life. If they feel they are successful in an activity that has personal meaning for them, they develop self-confidence in their abilities and will continue to tackle tasks inside and outside of school.
The third need is relatedness. Students need to develop relationships with a mentor or teacher who cares about them (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This gives them a sense of security which helps maintain their sense of motivation. Relationships at the middle school level are very important because this is when student interest in reading declines. Students like to know that the teacher cares about them (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010). Students will usually work better for teachers they like, but they tend to put little effort into classes where they feel uncomfortable. Students benefit from teachers and administrators who are caring and willing to create an environment that is supportive of the students’ needs, enabling them to succeed academically (Palumbo & Sanacore, 2008). Teachers develop enjoyable and enriched learning atmospheres by providing guidance and direct help to students, individual tutoring, and activities that are both academic and social (Palumbo & Sanacore, 2008). Based on years of research on intrinsic motivation, Deci & Ryan (2008) found that the psychological needs of individuals must be satisfied for effective functioning and psychological health.

Engaging in social activities allows students to interact with others, develop friendships, and gain a sense of belonging (Palumbo & Sanacore, 2008). Teachers provide supportive environments in the classroom for students to engage in cooperative learning activities. Cooperative learning allows students to work together and share their thoughts and opinions about what they are reading. They are allowed to make decisions about what they read and are given opportunities for self-expression. As students interact socially, their desire to achieve, their motivation to read, and their overall psychological health improves (Shaaban, 2006).

**Strategies for Promoting Reading in Middle School**
Motivating Reluctant Readers

Librarians and teachers have the greatest opportunities to influence children’s reading habits and attitudes (Hughes-Hassell & Lutz, 2006). Engaging students in middle school reading programs is the first step, but it is often challenging. Helping students develop and nourish a love of leisure reading is high on the list of priorities for most middle school librarians. Leisure reading is the reading teenagers do by choice as opposed to reading in content areas assigned by teachers (Hughes-Hassell & Lutz, 2006).

Brozo and Flynt (2008) found that students who are engaged are better thinkers, readers, and overall better students. Guthrie (as cited in Tilley, 2009) describes engaged reading as motivation and thoughtfulness coming together. Engaged readers enjoy learning because they are motivated and have self-efficacy (Tilley, 2009). Wigfield and Guthrie (as cited in Applegate & Applegate, 2010) found that engaged and motivated readers read more than reluctant readers, attain higher levels of achievement in reading, perform better on reading tests, and usually receive higher grades. Engaged readers are confident in their reading abilities and enjoy participating in learning (Tilley, 2009).

Learning facilitated by library activities, engages and motivates students so they will take more interest in their learning (Walther & Fuhler, 2008). Students become engaged by “doing, making, creating, reading, writing, designing, and solving” (p. 2).

Focusing on the social aspects of reading can increase middle school students’ engagement and motivation to read (Bokeman, 2005). Librarians facilitate the social aspects of reading by hosting reading groups. Students participate with a group of other readers who come together to present and share stories to others. Some students are more willing to participate because they are more comfortable working in small groups instead of sharing and discussing ideas and opinions with the whole class. When middle school
students are engaged in social interactions, their intrinsic motivation increases and their desire to learn increases as well (Bokeman, 2005). Middle school students are at an age where they enjoy participating in a variety of social activities. This creates an opportunity for librarians to keep students engaged, which in turn helps them develop better reading attitudes. Librarians promote social activities such as literature circles and book clubs to provide opportunities to motivate students to read. In addition to social activities, there are passive activities, such as reading aloud to students and sustained silent reading that can be used to promote reading.

**Literature Circles**

Literature circles implemented in classrooms have been successful (DeVault, 2009). Literature circles consist of small groups of students working together to read a fiction or nonfiction book that the teacher has introduced. Within these groups students assume various “roles.” The discussion director leads the group discussion by asking good questions. The summarizer summarizes what the group read. The vocabulary keeper finds new and important words to learn in the text. The illustrator is responsible for making a story map such as a Venn diagram, flow chart, or some illustration relating to the story (DeVault, 2009). Students are able to share and discuss ideas and opinions, and relate their own experiences to the literature they have read (Day & Ainley, 2008). The groups meet on a regular basis, rotating roles to discuss and reflect on assigned sections of a book and present information about a book to their peers in creative ways (Wilfong, 2009).

Librarians work with teachers to help set up and monitor literature circles. A librarian in Willoughby, Ohio, decided to try using literature circles with her fifth grade
library class (DeVault, 2009). The administration was concerned that students’ independent reading would diminish with all the extra activities that students have associated with middle school (DeVault, 2009). The literature circle class was held one day a week. No homework was assigned so all reading, recording, and discussion was done within the class period. The goal of implementing the literature circle was to have students continue to read and share their experiences with each other about the literature they read. They wanted the students to enjoy the books they read so they were allowed to make choices from a select group of books presented by the librarian. The students were placed into groups according to which book they chose. The personalities of some of the students emerged and developed as they interacted with each other. Surprisingly, students who were normally quiet in the classroom took control and led the groups in discussion. The students built on each others’ thoughts and were able to share their feelings about the literature they had read. Students enjoyed learning using literature circles and improved academically (DeVault, 2009).

Wilfong (2009) found that literature circles have positive outcomes successful. Many teachers use literature circles with textbook reading in classrooms with positive results. For example, Wilfong, a fifth grade science teacher, decided to use literature circles in her science room to enforce good literacy practices. She taught four classes of science, but had only one set of books, so all the reading had to be done in class. The setup was similar to what most teachers use when reading fiction and nonfiction books; however, this time it was to be used with textbooks. The teacher assigned similar roles as used in traditional circles. She also made up two new roles, vocabulary enricher, who picks out new words to learn, and textmaster, who takes the knowledge gained from
reading and enters it into a graphic organizer that helps other students understand the information. Wilfong called this strategy Textmasters because it reflects the purpose of the strategy. Students must become a “master” of any texts they read, and they must become competent in each of the roles and responsibilities. Students became engaged with the textbook reading and shared their ideas and helped each other through discussions and activities associated with the group work. After one month of using this new strategy, Wilfong compared scores from the last chapter test and found the average test scores had risen over three percent.

Researchers Miller, Straits, Kucan, Trathen, and Dass, (as cited in Wilfong, 2009) have studied using literature circles with classroom texts and found positive results. Using this type of group work in literature activities motivates reading and improves academic performance (Shaaban, 2006). Literature circles produce social interactions, decision making, and sharing of information which increases the students’ intrinsic motivation. Students feel they are able to understand the information from the text when they get to listen to others’ explanations, and vocabulary is easier as they learn to look for definitions in the text as a group (Wilfong, 2009).

**Book Clubs**

Book clubs are another social activity that promotes independent reading (Whittingham & Huffman, 2009). Many students, including reluctant readers, choose to participate because of the social aspects of book clubs. Book clubs consist of a group of students who meet regularly and participate in book discussions. Students are allowed the freedom to choose books that they have an interest in instead of having the teachers or librarians make the selection. Students like to discuss books that appeal to them, and they
enjoy giving their opinions to other students. Some teachers promote book clubs in their language arts classes, but usually they are held outside of the classroom.

Whittingham and Huffman (2009) investigated the effects of book clubs on the reading attitudes of middle school students. This age group was chosen because of their lack of interest, competence, and motivation. Sixty middle school students from two urban schools participated in this study. The students volunteered to participate in a book club, which met once a week before school for one semester. The study was done in cooperation with the local university, which provided interns majoring in education to work with the students. Students were divided into groups and assigned a student intern to serve as the adult participant for each group. The interns were there to show enthusiasm and encouragement by talking about the books they were reading. They hoped the students would be eager to read, discuss, and interact with the interns and other students. Students in the book club were given an attitude survey at the start and then again at the end of the semester. The results of the survey revealed that the book club had a positive effect on the attitudes of reluctant readers. The students’ attitudes improved along with their desire to read and talk about what they had read.

Book clubs help inside and outside the classroom, before school and after school, and sometimes during lunch (Whittingham & Huffman, 2009). Gordon (2011), a teacher at Turn of River Middle School in a town in Arkansas, used book clubs in her classroom for three years and saw a change in the attitudes and reading skills of her students. The classroom book clubs were held on Tuesdays and Thursdays during a three-week unit. Students were expected to read 60-70 pages between each meeting, complete a short written assignment, create notes for discussion, write a one-page reflection paper, and
discuss the last section of the novel at the end of the three-week period. The book club allowed students to take an active role in the classroom. “The role of the student looks like this: They’re setting goals; they’re thinking; they’re responsible for their own learning; they’re reflecting on their progress; they’re discussing and analyzing texts to confirm their thinking, extending it and deepening their understanding; and they’re writing to learn, meaning that after students read, they write ‘What did I think,’” (p. 2). The book clubs have been implemented throughout the district now, and students’ reading scores have begun to increase.

**Read Aloud**

Using social activities to motivate students to read has proven successful, but some teachers prefer to use strategies that are not as social. Read alouds have been used by many teachers for years to generate excitement and engagement for reading. After attending a very convincing workshop on read alouds, a seventh grade teacher working at one of the public schools in Chicago decided to try using a read aloud in her classroom (Meehan, 2006). She was excited about using the true-life story, *Left for Dead: A Young Man’s Search for Justice*, by Peter Nelson, because she thought it would create excitement and interest among middle school students. The teacher read to the students for approximately 15-20 minutes a day for six weeks. The class engaged in discussion, wrote responses to the text, incorporated vocabulary from the text and created projects related to the story. They wrote essays about subjects within the story related to medical issues, shark attacks, and ships wrecks. They also wrote and performed skits, and corresponded with actual survivors from the story. At the end of the read aloud the teacher presented the students with an informal survey to receive feedback on using a
nonfiction book. The survey reflected the students’ interest in listening to the book being read aloud. Most of them especially liked nonfiction because it related to real-life. The students’ attitudes were positive, and they were very enthusiastic while reading and working on assigned projects. The teacher found that the nonfiction book appealed to the readers as well as the nonreaders. Months after working on the read aloud, many of the students have continued reading and enjoying nonfiction books that they would never have thought about reading.

**Sustained Silent Reading**

Sustained silent reading (SSR) is a method that was introduced to schools over 30 years ago (Moser, 2006). This program is appealing to the students because it allows them to choose reading materials that are of interest to them while relaxing in a quiet atmosphere to read. This is a time where students read for pleasure. Teachers provide encouragement by recommending appropriate material and modeling reading behavior. SSR is usually offered on a regular basis for only a short period of time, often twenty minutes or less. To keep students excited and interested, follow-up activities such as keeping a journal, working with a partner, and group discussion are usually offered to reinforce what the students have read. Students who spend more time reading, especially books they are interested in, learn that reading can be enjoyable (Moser, 2006). Evidence shows that participation in sustained silent reading programs motivates the students and increases the amount of time they spend reading outside of school (Gordon, 2010).

**Conclusion**

As long as there are middle schools students, there will be reluctant readers. It is up to teachers to decide why students are not motivated and what strategies work best to
motivate them. Many reasons exist for why students are not motivated to read. Several reading strategies used by teachers over the years are effective in producing reading motivation and achievement. They include literature circles, book clubs, read alouds, and sustained silent reading.

Using strategies to help motivate students to read address three basic psychological needs of humans. When students have the freedom to make choices within these groups, they develop a sense of autonomy. They become competent when completing activities successfully, and they develop a sense of belonging through interactions with a teacher or within a group. Providing opportunities and using these strategies to motivate students to become life long readers is a major goal of teachers and school librarians.
CHAPTER 3:  
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study is to review the research literature investigating reluctant readers to identify strategies that will help motivate them to become better readers. As teachers work with students, they pose many questions as how to motivate students to read. The following questions about motivating reluctant readers are answered in this study:

1. Are there general characteristics that identify a student as a reluctant reader?
2. Are there certain factors that cause middle school students to lack motivation to read?
3. Does Deci and Ryan’s (1985, 2000) Self-Determination theory play a role in motivating reluctant readers?
4. Do reading strategies increase motivation in reluctant readers?

Reluctant Readers

This study identifies and describes reluctant readers. A reluctant reader is a student who prefers not to read for pleasure. Boehm (2009) says that reluctant readers are students who can read but do not tend to do so beyond what is required.

Lesesne (as cited in Boehm, 2009) noted that reluctant readers are not characterized by any certain pattern. Not all reluctant readers rank poorly academically. Reluctant readers can be of any intelligence. Parker and Paradis (2006) declared that reading attitudes are linked to a student’s ability; however, Roberts and Wilson (2006) determined that this is not always the case. Students with low or high academic ability have positive or negative attitudes toward reading. Some students do not read well
Motivating Reluctant Readers

because they choose not to read unless they are required to read. Poorer readers generally have a negative attitude toward reading while better readers have a more positive attitude about reading. Students’ attitudes affect their motivation and how much time they spend reading. Students who are unmotivated tend to not participate in reading activities; they do not try, or they just give up.

Why Middle School Students Lack Motivation to Read

Why middle school students lack motivation to read is a question that teachers have often asked themselves. Research shows that as students progress into middle school their motivation to read reaches an all time low and they become less motivated to read for pleasure. Reading becomes more of a task, negative attitudes begin to appear, and the lack of motivation becomes greater for many (Roberts & Wilson, 2006). The negative attitudes and lack of motivation hamper students’ ability to improve their reading. When readers get frustrated, they tend to view reading as a frustrating experience and often develop a negative attitude toward reading. Other students find reading enjoyable and develop a positive attitude toward reading. Their attitudes affect their motivation to read and how much time they spend reading.

Middle school students face many physical and emotional changes. As they go from elementary to middle school they are often overwhelmed with the amount of school work, and reading becomes more of a task. Negative attitudes begin to appear and their lack of motivation becomes greater. Students become socially involved in many extracurricular activities, sports, and academics. At the middle school level students are much busier than they were in grade school; therefore, they do not have the time to spend reading for pleasure.
Motivating Reluctant Readers

Middle school students also have so many more forms of entertainment than in the past. Television, Internet, video games, and school activities keep them busy (Powell-Brown, 2006). These forms of entertainment occupy their time and provide less time for reading. It is hard to motivate a student to read when he is preoccupied with other activities.

**Self-Determination Theory Explains Student’s Motivation**

Self-determination theory identifies autonomy, competence, and relatedness as the three basic psychological needs that motivate students (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Students are more likely to be motivated if these three basic needs are satisfied. Autonomy focuses on students having choices, allowing them to feel in control, and able to make their own decisions about what they read. Students gain a sense of competence when they are able to complete a task successfully. Their competence increases their intrinsic motivation so they will continue to learn. Relatedness gives students a sense of support and belonging. Students engage in social activities allowing them to interact with others, develop friendships, and work in environments that meet their needs. Meeting these basic psychological needs increases their intrinsic motivation, encouraging them to continue to read.

Intrinsic motivation is one type of motivation referred to in Deci and Ryan’s (year) self-determination theory. Intrinsic motivation is a result of a student’s interest in a topic or activity and the pleasure they receive as they pursue that topic or activity. Bokelman (2005) and Crow (2006) suggest that instilling intrinsic types of motivation in students will encourage students to read for pleasure. Understanding students’ basic
Motivating Reluctant Readers

psychological needs will help teachers develop strategies to motivate students to become life long readers.

**Reading Strategies that Motivate Students to Read**

As teachers engage students in activities that involve reading, they provide more opportunities for students to read. Some activities are very social, such as book clubs and literature circles. Students enjoy this type of activity because they like to be involved and interact with others. They take on specific roles in the groups to help guide discussion, and they are able to share and express their own ideas about literature. As students engage in book clubs and literature circles they gain a sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. They develop better attitudes and become motivated, which helps them to become better readers. Research on using book clubs and literature circles has shown they are successful in motivating reluctant readers.

Other strategies that are not social but are effective in motivating reluctant readers are read alouds and sustained silent reading (SSR). Read alouds are successful among readers as well as non-readers. After the teacher reads for a set number of minutes, the students engage in discussion, written responses, and activities related to the stories. These activities promote positive attitudes and enthusiasm among the students. With sustained silent reading students read for a certain amount of time followed by activities to keep them excited and interested. Evidence shows that participation in sustained silent reading programs motivates the students and increases the amount of time they spend reading outside of school (Gordon, 2010).

These strategies bring students together to address the three basic psychological needs of humans defined by Ryan and Deci (1985, 2000). The group work associated
with these strategies allows students to have the freedom to make choices, so they
develop a sense of autonomy. They become competent when completing activities, and
they develop a sense of belonging through interactions within group activities. Teachers
provide resources and activities to allow students to become engaged in reading.

Motivating students to read is very important, when students’ motivation to read
tends to decrease as they enter middle school. More research is needed that focuses on
what teachers do to motivate reluctant readers so they will continue to read long after
their formal education is complete. Stressing social aspects of reading is proving to be
successful for many students. The research suggests that teachers continue to use social
learning activities to increase student motivation. Social activities in the classroom
engage students and help them to build self-confidence. When students are engaged, they
become motivated, read more, and become better readers.
REFERENCES


