

DISSERTATION

PERSPECTIVES ON YOUNG BOYS' READING: A SURVEY AND
CONVERSATIONS WITH EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

PERSPECTIVES ON YOUNG BOYS' READING: A SURVEY AND
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The purpose of this multi-method study was to describe early childhood teachers' beliefs regarding what motivates and what presents barriers to reading for boys. This study used the two data collection strategies of an online survey and interviews. The research questions guiding this study were: 1) what do early childhood teachers believe boys need in order to be successful readers, 2) what do early childhood teachers believe motivates boys to read, 3) what do early childhood teachers believe are barriers to reading for boys, 4) what strategies do early childhood teachers use to engage boys in reading, 5) what are the implications for early childhood teaching practices and education?

The findings of the study revealed early childhood teachers demonstrate an understanding of the factors motivating and creating barriers to reading for boys, as described by current literature, however they are not making changes to their practice with respect to what they understand. In addition, the findings revealed a need for providing early childhood teachers with the knowledge necessary to effectively engage boys as readers in the classroom.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

When I started my first teaching job, regarding 12 years ago as a sixth grade teacher, I was looking forward to an exciting year of teaching and learning. However, this excitement quickly waned as I discovered the majority of the students in my class were not close to grade level in reading. I was met with the challenge of adapting a sixth grade curriculum to make it accessible to students whose reading levels fell between Kindergarten and Third Grade. At the time, being a young teacher, I was in survival mode and with limited support systems I am not sure I made a difference in the reading lives of my students.

Knowing what I know today regarding reading, and especially looking at the different needs of boys and girls as readers, I wish I could go back and start over. Today, entering that same classroom, I would have a different approach to teaching reading, especially for the boys. I would have a better understanding of their need for movement to learn and I would not discredit their interest in comic books, magazines, and video game manuals. What I am aware of today as an elementary teacher, with great concern for the young boys in today's classrooms who do not like reading, is the need for teachers to take the time to know the boys. I wish I had done that 12 years ago because I know it would have made a difference in my teaching life and the lives of my students.

The reading lives of boys have become a great concern for many educators. With boys' struggles becoming more apparent through testing reports (see Table 1), the

concern that once existed for girls being marginalized in school has shifted to the boys (Maynard, 2002; Sadker & Sadker, 1994). With the context of this study being Colorado (CO), Table 1 provides the reading scores for both boys and girls in Grade 3 for 2009. The data represents the scoring of all third graders in the state of Colorado when disaggregated by gender (Colorado Department of Education, 2009). Grade 3 is displayed because it is the first year of testing and the expectation, per the Colorado Basic Literacy Act of 1997, is for all students to have the skills for success as lifelong learners in school and life by grade 3 (Colorado Department of Education, 2009a). Grade 3 also represents the final grade level categorized as representing early childhood education.

Table 1

Colorado Grade 3 CSAP Summary Data by Gender for Reading 2009

Gender	Total	Unsatisfactory	Partially Proficient	Proficient	Advanced
Female	29344	2089 (7%)	5009 (17%)	19715 (67%)	2432 (8%)
Male	30730	3156 (10%)	5985 (19%)	19718 (64%)	1736 (5%)

The table shows more boys in third grade are not meeting the expected level of proficiency in reading. Therefore, if third grade is truly a point in a young boy's school career when he has decided whether or not school is working for him, it appears something may need to change if approximately 10% of boys are scoring at unsatisfactory levels (Kindlon & Thompson, 2002).

As an elementary teacher, I encountered some boys who presented themselves as a puzzle to be solved when it came to reading, while other boys were immediately hooked. Oftentimes, even parents were baffled by their sons' dislike for reading and school tasks. At times, much like many of the parents of my former students, I found

myself shaking my head not knowing where to begin. I imagine there are plenty of teachers out there who have felt the same way. It is important to note that the discussion throughout this study is speaking in general regarding boys and not attempting to assert that what is presented applies to all boys. In this chapter, I will address the following topics: early childhood educators, boys as readers, insights into the teaching of reading, classroom environments that nurture boys, the theoretical framework guiding this study, the purpose of this study, the research questions, significance of the study, and my perspective as the researcher.

Background

As an elementary teacher, I have become increasingly interested and aware of the research and media reports discussing boys' disengagement from reading (Sax, 2007; Zambo & Brozo, 2009). Current research indicates a growing concern regarding boys' literacy skills, especially reading, as the boys continue to reach lower achievement levels on standardized tests and engagement in reading as was illustrated by Table 1 (Brozo, 2006; Gurian, 2001; Lever-Chain, 2008; Sax, 2007; Young & Brozo, 2001; Zambo & Brozo, 2009).

Jon Scieszka, the National Ambassador for Young People's Literature and a well-known children's author and creator of Guys Read (www.guysread.com), when interviewed by Bafile (2005) asserted the biggest challenge in the field of literacy is getting people to understand boys do need help. This perspective intrigued me because in all of my educational experiences and teacher training there was never discussion about boys needing extra support. While more emphasis has been placed on boys' literacy there are individuals who feel boys do not need help and the idea of a "boy crisis" is

being perpetuated by the media (Brozo, 2002; Mead, 2006). From here, the conversation often circles back to the research highlighting the discussion of girls being “shortchanged” in schools as teachers offered more attention to the boys (Sadker & Sadker, 1994). In recent years, many studies have focused attention on adolescent or late elementary age boys, but given the growing concern regarding literacy, especially reading, the emphasis is shifting to younger boys (Zambo & Brozo, 2009). While there may be individuals who feel boys are not in need of help, my teaching and research experiences have placed me in conversations with teachers who have expressed their lack of knowledge regarding meeting the needs of boys. In addition, when attending conferences over the past few years I have seen sessions for boys become standing room only as teachers seek to understand how to connect the boys in their classrooms with books.

A focus on early childhood educators

In this study, early childhood teachers were surveyed and interviewed regarding their perspectives on what they believe motivates and creates barriers to reading for boys (see Appendix A). According to Kindlon and Thompson (2002), boys are often considered to be a challenge during reading instruction time as they turn their attention to their peers or other areas of the classroom and ignore the reading instruction. My hope was to gain insight into the beliefs held by early childhood teachers regarding boys as readers.

For the purpose of this study, an early childhood teacher was defined as an individual who worked as an assistant or lead teacher with children between the ages of 0-8. Given the age range of students, it is important to note the different standards to

which teachers are held depending upon the age they teach. Teachers of ages 5-8, typically Kindergarten (K)-Grade 3, are required to hold a teaching license, granted by the state in which they live, indicating they have completed an approved teacher education program and hold at least a Bachelor's Degree. Teachers of children 0-4, or infant to Pre-K, are not yet required to hold a teaching license, but may have a Bachelor's or Associates Degree or experience working with young children. Early childhood teachers were the target population because of their role in nurturing and shaping the minds of young children, and potentially influencing their success as lifelong readers.

How boys are characterized as readers?

When teachers are asked to describe boys as readers, it appears gender stereotypes prevail. Boys are often characterized as nonreaders and only interested in reading nonfiction or comics (Bardsley, 1999; Merisuo-Storm, 2006). Boys who are identified as academic and engaged in reading are often ridiculed by peers as they get older, hence some of the reasoning for boys disengaging from reading as they enter adolescence (Brozo, 2002). Boys are often reluctant to cross gender lines when it comes to reading books as they quickly shy away from books perceived as feminine (Bardsley, 1999; Dutro, 2002). However, an interesting point to consider is that through her research process Dutro discovered boys were more willing to accept books that were considered for the girls once they had an opportunity to read and discuss them within an environment that allowed them to be themselves and arrive at the discovery on their own. This illustrates how a teacher's approach to the teaching of reading has the potential to influence perspectives regarding book choice and reframed the experience for boys (Dutro, 2000; Dutro, 2002; Pressley, 2001; Zambo & Brozo, 2009).

Gender and reading

With girls' reading as a point of comparison, the pendulum appears to be swinging back and forth in conversations regarding gender equity as the discussion continues regarding what needs to be done to engage boys in reading, but without losing sight of the educational needs of girls (AAUW, 1992; Brozo, 2006; Perkins-Gough, 2006). Many caution against creating a boys versus girls approach when discussing reading needs, but rather recommends noticing the individual differences of each child. It is not helpful to the educational needs of boys to be placed in a position of constant comparison with what girls are achieving (Dutro, 2002; Mead, 2006).

According to Lundberg and Linnakyla (1993), the teaching of reading is situated within social contexts as teachers and students interact with one another and texts to construct meaning. Others contend the teaching of reading should emphasize the development of skills, such as phonemic awareness, in order to build a foundation for later reading success (National Institute for Literacy, 2008). Many researchers assert students are socialized into particular gender roles in the classroom, with selection of reading material being a part of this process, and how such social contexts influence learning especially for boys who become greatly influenced by their peers as they get older (Adler, Kless, & Adler, 1992; Dutro, 2002; Merisuo-Storm, 2006; Sax, 2007; Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1999).

It appears a key component to reading skill development is getting to know and understanding the individual child. With the overrepresentation of boys in special education, often 75% of students represented are boys, something clearly needs to change with respect to how teachers are informed and how they can be empowered to challenge

the current educational system and address the perception of a feminized learning culture in early childhood education as harmful to boys' reading development (Gambell & Hunter, 1999; Gurian, 2001; Sanderson, 1995; Sax, 2007; Weaver-Hightower, 2008; Young & Brozo, 2001). There are differing perspectives regarding this idea of a feminized learning culture as some feel for boys it makes no difference with respect to the gender of the teacher because what is more important is the relationship while others feel very strongly that boys need male role models in order to better identify themselves as readers (Bafile, 2005; Brozo, 2002; Weaver-Hightower, 2008).

Perspectives on boys and reading

The disengagement of boys from reading activities has become a focus for many, as boys often choose to engage in sports or video games because they perceive the activities to be more meaningful and relevant to their identity (Bardsley, 1999; Gurian, 2001; Sax, 2007; Zambo & Brozo, 2009). When entering the discussion regarding how to best teach boys to read, two very prominent perspectives generally emerge: whole language and phonics. Quite often a teacher subscribes very strongly to one or the other, while others integrate both perspectives into their teaching of reading. Lundberg and Linnakyla (1993) present an overview of the two perspectives describing phonics as decoding and whole language as the construction of meaning. Sax (2007) contends that phonics is not the best approach for boys because they need rich, meaningful reading experiences, while others have observed boys thriving in an environment focused on basic skill development, or phonics.

Boys' achievement, especially in reading, has been a growing concern amongst parents and teachers as test scores continue to decline in this era of standardization and

accountability. Honestly, with my experience attending all-girls' schools and reading regarding the struggles girls have faced in schools, I never realized boys have also faced challenges (Sadker & Sadker, 1994). This assertion peaked my curiosity, so I started to read regarding boys and their early childhood experiences. The information regarding boys being held back more often, diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, being referred for special education services, or simply being expelled from early childhood programs was astounding (King & Gurian, 2006; Lever-Chain, 2008; Weaver-Hightower, 2008; Zambo & Brozo, 2009).

While it seems boys are being continuously referred for special education services, some researchers have found this may not be related to their learning needs, but because teachers are not willing to manage the behavior boys exhibit when disengaging from tasks, especially those related to reading (Kindlon & Thompson, 2002; King & Gurian, 2006; Naiden, 1976; Sax, 2007; Weaver-Hightower, 2008). Boys' development, especially related to the brain, shows differences in learning with respect to the language areas of a boy's brain at age 5 appearing similar to that of a girl's at age 3 (Sax, 2007). By recognizing the differences in brain development for boys there may be an opportunity for teachers to understand their disengagement from reading. Sax (2007), a psychologist who focuses on issues of gender and education and is the founder of the National Association for Single Sex Public Education, asserts the following: "asking five-year-old boys to learn to read-when they'd rather be running around or playing games-may be the worst possible introduction to school, at least for some boys" (p.18).

Research indicates that reading engagement and success in Kindergarten is a fairly good predictor of future academic success, so with the perceived dramatic shift of

the curriculum towards more academics resembling that of the traditional first grade classroom, boys may become disadvantaged in school (Sax, 2007). With the growing concern of equitable experiences for all boys in school, more emphasis has been placed on early childhood programs. This is evidenced by the number of growing early childhood facilities and national, state, and local policy emphasis on creating opportunities for children birth to age five (Education Week, 2009; Fowler, 2004).

Boys often perceive reading as something for the girls. Most boys start school excited regarding learning but lose momentum when they feel reading tasks are boring and without purpose (Zambo & Brozo, 2009). It seems possible to empower early childhood teachers as literacy leaders contributing to changing this perspective for boys by showing them the value of reading in their lives (Allen, 2005). Kim and Kwon (2002), in their study of early childhood programs and the attitudes of adults found boys respond very enthusiastically when the adults in their lives, whether it is a teacher or parent, become actively involved in reading activities. Kindlon and Thompson (2002), in their study of a K classroom learned boys often disengage from school by the third grade when they perceive it as a place where they cannot do anything right, and they shared their observations of the challenges encountered by the teacher in the classroom to get the boys to sit still in preparation for reading time.

Developing classroom communities for boys

The theory and practice of school are contributing factors to boys' disengagement as "changes in education over the past thirty years have created a negative attitude toward education among many boys...a consequence of the gender-blind changes in education over the past thirty years" and decisions being made based on test scores (Sax, 2007,

p.39). The classroom environment contributes to boys' development as readers (Bardsley, 1999; Dutro, 2002; Zambo & Brozo, 2009). Creating a classroom that honors the qualities of boys and nurtures their learning is regarding thinking sustainably. When thinking regarding sustainability, it is important to consider the approaches to the teaching of reading implemented by teachers that develop lifelong readers. The learning community, situated within the context of the classroom, contributes to how boys are socialized into being readers (Gurian, 2001; Maynard, 2002; Sax, 2007). A sustainable learning community creates lifelong readers, even if that does not always look like traditional book reading, because it aspires to respect the individuality of each child who participates in the learning process (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). For example, I never imagined I would discuss video games, but as a popular activity for boys there is the need to consider the reading possibilities involved in playing video games, even if this may conflict with perspectives of many teachers (Gee, 2003). In addition, the research clearly speaks to the needs of changing the definition of what counts as reading for boys because they are often not interested in what is considered traditional reading for school (Bardsley, 1999; Brozo, 2002; Merisuo-Storm, 2006; Newkirk, 2004; Zambo & Brozo, 2009).

It is unfortunate but the current emphasis on test scores as a measure of reading success does not lend itself to sustainability nor does it engage boys (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). As Sax (2007) asserts, there is "growing evidence that the intensive reading drills that now characterize early elementary education may actually disengage students, particularly boys," and such tasks are the foundation for success on standardized tests (p.38). A test score is a snapshot of one moment of time for boys, yet scores are

becoming the foundation upon which policy decisions are being made and contributing to an obsession with adhering standards rather than learning regarding students and meeting their needs, thus the concern regarding boys' reading because they continue to score below their female counterparts (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Mead, 2006). The emphasis on standards has taken away the focus on student attitudes towards reading, in the case of boys most often negative, and the influence on reading skill development (Lever-Chain, 2008).

Weaver-Hightower (2008), in his book discussing the development of a national education policy for boys in Australia, indicates that while there has been concern in the United States related to the achievement of boys, the opportunity for development of a national policy has been limited because boys are not considered a disadvantaged group. The driving force behind educational policy and a central democratic value of policy is ensuring equitable learning experiences for all students, however for boys the perception is they do not need a policy similar to Title IX which provides educational opportunities for girls (Fowler, 2004; Weaver-Hightower, 2008).

With the strong trend toward emphasizing early childhood education, preparing and sustaining the academic success of students as they enter school, K classrooms have become more academic (National Institute for Literacy, 2008). The pressure for boys to be reading has increased and parents raise concerns as they watch their children, most often boys, struggle to adapt to the social norms of today's classrooms (Sax, 2007). Despite the emphasis on high stakes testing, there is a need in our current educational system to develop innovative and creative approaches to learning. This pressure on academic accountability with respect to test scores is not limited to schooling in the

United States (U.S.) as there are also reports from Britain of such pressures (Lever-Chain, 2008). Much of educational policy related to the teaching of reading involves an emphasis on a phonics-based program, but the reality for boys is phonics does not engage them in books because once they learn it and know how to read they can abandon an emphasis on books and do other activities, whereas if they are shown the wonders of books they can become more engaged (Goodman, 1996).

Teachers enter the profession with the desire to make a difference in the lives of children and the intention to treat all children equitably. A growing concern regarding boys may cause some to take pause and wonder regarding how teachers are addressing the reading struggles and disengagement of boys.

Purpose statement

The purpose of this study was to describe, through survey responses and individual interviews, early childhood teachers' beliefs regarding what motivates and presents barriers to reading for boys.

Research questions

1. What do early childhood teachers believe boys need in order to be successful readers?
2. What do early childhood teachers believe motivates boys to read?
3. What do early childhood teachers believe are barriers to reading for boys?
4. What strategies do early childhood teachers use to engage boys in reading?
5. What are the implications for early childhood teaching practices and education?

Significance of the study

This multi-method dissertation study used an online survey and interviews to gather and present the perspectives held by early childhood teachers regarding what they believe motivates or creates barriers to reading for boys. The analysis of data used a constant comparative approach guided by Dewey's (1913) four types of educative interest (physical, constructive, intellectual, and social) and then poetry was used to summarize the findings (Cahnmann, 2003; Furman, 2006).

This study has the potential to contribute to the field of reading, especially since there is so much emphasis on policy related to early childhood education and meeting the needs of boys, because the emphasis is on young boys when the literature generally focuses on older boys (King & Gurian, 2006; Weaver-Hightower, 2008; Zambo & Brozo, 2009). In addition, with the majority of the literature focusing on adolescents and older elementary aged students, this study has the potential to provide more opportunity to generate discussions among early childhood educators who can play a significant role in the reading identity development of young boys (Brozo, 2002; Dutro, 2002; Merisuo-Storm, 2006).

With the emphasis on early childhood education as a key policy issue through programs such as Head Start, which is defined by Miedel and Reynolds (1999) as "the first and largest early intervention program for disadvantaged preschoolers that emphasizes parental involvement," and a recent publication with respect to early childhood literacy published by the National Institute for Literacy (2008), there is a great need for understanding boys' reading development in preparation for entry into Kindergarten (p. 380). As boys enter school "reading has become a school task associated with standards...to be met," and they quickly disengage when it does not align

with their interests (Lever-Chain, 2008, p. 89). Engaging teachers in conversations regarding boys and raising awareness of how gender influences learning has the potential to influence change and address the growing concern of boys' disengagement from reading. Teachers play a critical role in making learning enjoyable and fun for boys in and out of the rigors of the school environment. When boys are provided with a "point of entry" into literacy learning there is greater potential for their commitment to school (Zambo & Brozo, 2009).

Researcher's perspective

I feel there is a need for empowering early childhood teachers and valuing the commitment and dedication they bring to the classroom and lives of very young boys and provide them with the tools necessary to understand the learning needs of boys. I have discovered a passion for this topic and focus because it is meaningful and relevant to my experience. When I first enrolled my oldest boy in school just after his first birthday, I have to be honest I was skeptical regarding school at such a young age, but my perspective has dramatically changed. I am amazed by the talent and gifts of those who choose to work with children between the ages of 0-8.

I feel there is the potential for providing teachers with the knowledge to understand and approach boys' reading skill development in a way that meets their needs. I am very interested in the reflective practice of teachers as a route to professional development. As an elementary teacher, I believe it is critical to sustaining best practices in the classroom to continuously stop and reflect upon practice. I believe when teachers stop to take the time to evaluate their approach to teaching everything improves in the lives of boys.

I feel the importance of engaging in this survey and interview approach to understanding boys' reading needs relates to the fact that book reading, which is most often considered to be the standard for measuring reading achievement in schools, does not always take into consideration the contexts of boys' lives and I am curious regarding what does or does not engage boys (Goodman, 1999). I believe this study is the beginning of my process for future research related to boys in early childhood education settings. As more boys are being placed in such environments, I believe it is critical to understand the perspectives of the teachers placed in charge of boys. Current research indicates boys want to engage in reading activities that are meaningful and relevant to their experiences and involve their peers, however teacher practice does not always take the interests of boys into consideration (Bardsley, 1999; Booth, 2003; Faires, Nichols, & Rickelman, 2000; Goodman, 1999; Gurian, 2001; Sax, 2007; Smith & Wilhelm 2002; Zambo & Brozo, 2009). In addition, too often for school districts, test scores are what are considered to be a reflection of reading ability, when in fact "large scale tests usually require students of diverse backgrounds to engage in reading practices very different from...home and community" (Au, 2006, p. 38). Teachers willing to examine their practice and engage in professional conversations with other teachers regarding boys as readers, and to understand how different boys' learning styles might be from their own has the potential for encouraging changes in perspectives regarding best practices in the reading lives of boys.

I appreciate the participation of the early childhood teachers in this study as they shared with me their beliefs regarding boys as readers, their heartfelt passion for teaching, and demonstrated their willingness to participate in the conversation. In the

next chapter, I will present the research perspectives on what motivates and creates barriers to reading for boys. I will also provide information gathered from the research on the teaching of reading and the influence of teacher beliefs on practice in the classroom.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This multi-method dissertation study focused on the perspectives held by early childhood teachers regarding boys as readers and the teaching of reading. The review of literature in this chapter will provide an overview of the research perspectives guiding this study and is organized in the following manner: reading instruction, motivating boy readers, barriers to boys' reading, and the role of the teacher in boys' reading development.

Background

Early success at reading creates a lifelong habit and is a critical skill for an individual's future (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997; Kennedy, 2004). While some argue the media has put too much emphasis on the boy reading crisis, others contend there is a need for teachers to focus on the needs of the boys in their classrooms, especially in reading (Bafile, 2005, Sax, 2007; Sciescka, 2002; Weaver-Hightower, 2008; Young & Brozo, 2001; Zambo & Brozo, 2009). In addition, awareness of the developmental needs of boys is important because they often develop at a different rate from girls. According to Sax (2007), age seven is a developmentally appropriate age for engaging boys in school tasks, such as reading, and he cites the school system in Finland, where students begin at age seven, as a leading example of successful school environments for engaging boys in reading. However, current research indicates that while boys may be performing well in Finland, the girls are continuing to surpass the boys making it appear as though the boys are struggling, and this has been observed in the United States as well (Mead, 2006; Merisuo-Storm, 2006).

There is concern regarding the decisions made by educational leaders to institute changes to the curriculum with an accelerated early childhood curriculum because emphasizing “phonics and reading drills, by itself might well have created a minor gender crisis in education” (Sax, 2007, p. 27). Boys often perceive reading as a job and not something done for enjoyment because there are often restrictions in place for reading choices and their identity as successful boys is more often through sports than school tasks (Bardsley, 1999).

Approaches to Reading Instruction

“Reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world” (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p.35)

It is common in today’s early childhood classrooms to find the teaching of reading grounded in a phonics perspective and approach. According to Pressley (2001), the emphasis on a phonics or skills-based approach to the teaching of reading is influenced by national reports, such as those produced by the National Reading Panel (2000), which often spend less time reporting on a broad range of strategies and tend to focus more on specific sets of skills. What this generally means is the teaching of reading focuses on the alphabet, emphasizing letters, letter sounds, and encouraging students to build and sound out words.

Reading should not be restricted to phonics that emphasizes a sound-symbol relationship with text (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Pressley, 2001). According to Smith (2003) and Goodman (1993), the issue of phonics has become so heavily politicized that it’s been hard to examine what it is really regarding, and it’s been pushed as the successful method in teaching children, especially boys, to read. Farstrup (2002) asserts

that the National Reading Panel (2000) has been very influential when it comes to legislative and policy decision making because the section on phonics is the most widely cited. While national reports provide insight into reading practice, they do not provide a broad enough overview of the research and most reading professionals know there is so much more to reading than focusing on a skills-based approach (Pressley, 2001).

From the perspective of some reading professionals, most often those in favor of a whole language approach, when phonics is used as a primary focus and isolated from the reading process, reading can often become more mysterious and challenging for some students (Adomat, 2009; Goodman, 1993; Goodman, 1996; Sax, 2007; Smith, 1993). Smith's (1993) perspective describes phonics as an educational hazard and discusses how a teacher's use of phonics in isolation will make reading more difficult for many students, thus concurring with the assertion of Sax (2007) that phonics can be a barrier for engagement in reading, especially for boys. A common recommendation is to incorporate phonics into the reading instruction of whole texts that are meaningful and relevant to student's lives, and to consider a broad range of approaches that may influence early reading development, such as parental involvement (Farstrup, 2002; Goodman, 1996; Goodman, 1993; Pressley, 2001; Smith, 1993).

Parents play an important role in the reading process, and while some may advocate for more involvement of fathers, most look towards mothers because as their boy's first teacher, mothers contribute to establishing a foundation for learning (Faires, Nichols, & Rickelman, 2000). According to Kim & Kwon (2002), who conducted research in Korea focused on attitudes toward emergent literacy among teachers, parents, and caregivers, when mothers are active in inviting their boys to engage in reading

activities, the boys respond with enthusiasm. Several studies have examined early childhood reading practices in the home, and while they are not specific to boys' reading experiences, they represent a foundation upon which to build future research for understanding the value of home reading practices led by mothers (Faires et al., 2000; Kim & Kwon, 2002; Metsala, 1996;).

Parents and teachers have the potential to create activities that optimize the learning experience and create what has been referred to as “flow” with an emphasis on the pleasure of involvement rather than focusing on the fact that an activity is school-related (Czikszenmihalyi, 1990; Kim & Kwon, 2002). There are many approaches to reading development in young boys that are employed by teachers that can be modeled by parents at home and engaging parents creates a powerful resource for early literacy learning (Faires et al., 2000).

A common strategy teachers share with parents to help early readers is sounding out words. According to Goodman (1993), this strategy can give us a general idea, but “because there’s no one-to-one correspondence” when letters are sounded out in sequence and “sounds change with the context” children can become discouraged when trying to read (p. 50). According to Goodman (1996), all readers work to make sense of the text, however more confident readers won’t spend as much time on an individual word while less confident readers try multiple attempts and lose meaning in the process. The multiple attempts for sounding out a word can only lead to frustration for students, and an eventual disinterest in reading. All readers use phonics, but it should not be the sole reading strategy used, but should be combined with other approaches to create a balanced learning approach: “phonics is learned best in the course of learning to read and

write, not as a prerequisite. In fact, our phonics is determined by our speaking, listening, reading, and writing experiences” (Goodman, 1993, p. 51).

As children are learning to read Smith (2003) asserts that “print is just another facet of the world” that is not “mysterious or intimidating”, but something to explore and discover (p. 9). When considering a child, as young as an infant, the infant is constantly making sense of his or her environment. The infant is doing what Smith (2003) refers to as “reading the world” and it is the most natural activity (p. 9). According to Goodman (1996), when children enter school, they have already been exposed to a richness of literacy experiences and have an awareness of making sense of print because from a young age, children “begin very early to respond to print as meaningful, recognizing logos and signs as a way of identifying places and products” (Goodman, 1993, p.120).

Through the process of reading, children are able to develop their understanding of phonics and this will best equip them for reading success. When phonics is the basis of reading instruction, it can make young readers less confident because they will resort to the approach of decoding which may produce nonsense rather than trusting the meaning they have constructed for themselves. In phonics instruction, there is room for invention as “the creative force that each of us, and every human society, possesses is to create language” as children begin to apply what they know regarding phonics in all aspects of their learning experiences, yet so often in schools the creativity is not encouraged (Goodman, 1993, p. 62).

An important aspect of the reading process is the transaction between reader and text. This idea of transacting with text is not only referred to by Goodman (1996), but is based in work done by Rosenblatt (1995) who states that “reading is a constructive,

selective process over time in a particular context” and through the process the reader is interacting with the text (p. 26). In making sense of the text, based on Rosenblatt’s (1995) theory, the reader is engaged with the text and “meaning emerges as the reader carries on give-and-take with the signs on the page” (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 26). In Rosenblatt’s (1995) work, the discussion is centered on the idea that there is no one way to respond to text, and students should have the opportunity to discover for themselves what a text means.

The ideas presented in Rosenblatt’s (1995) work emphasize constructing meaning for oneself through transacting with the text and through this process there is greater understanding and a greater joy in reading. Freire and Macedo (1987) also emphasize the importance of connecting reading to one’s experience with the world. Once a reader discovered the joy of reading, the discussions can begin with others to discover that there are many interpretations for one text (Dutro, 2002; Goodman, 1996; Merisuo-Storm, 2006).

Many feel boys need reading instruction that follows their natural developmental processes (Gurian, 2001; Sax, 2007). Despite efforts by whole language teachers working to demonstrate the use of phonics in their teaching, there are still people determined to reduce reading to decoding letters to sounds and “anyone who tries to read phonetically is a disabled reader” (Smith, 1993, p. 30). This is such a powerful statement by Smith (2003) and refers to what you hear when listening to a child read by decoding. The words they are reading through decoding are not the same as the words on the page and therefore there is no construction of meaning (Goodman, 1996).

The construction of meaning is an important aspect of reading and the exploration of text should be encouraged rather than discouraged by those who fall into a strictly phonics approach. Goodman (1993) asserts that with a strictly phonics approach to reading, the knowledge and awareness children have regarding text is ignored. In addition, Smith (1993) states that “it is not reading that many...find difficult, but the instruction” because all of a sudden in the school environment, through a phonics approach, the schema developed by boys for making sense of text changes when instruction begins (p.11).

According to Smith (2003), phonics looks easy after familiarity with reading is attained and teachers who claim they are successful at teaching reading using phonics must have been doing something else right. They must have been using conversations regarding books as one teacher remarks “we always talk...regarding letters, sounds, rhymes, and more” when talking regarding reading in her classroom (Meyer, 2002, p. 452).

Based on his observations in a classroom that transitioned from whole language to phonics, Meyer (2002) reports that during phonics instruction the children were less likely to pay attention: “During phonics instruction, the children’s behavior is qualitatively different when compared to the engaged behaviors during the book reading and journal writing” (p. 456). In addition, the students were also trying to make sense of nonsense words, and it made sense when asked to read the word they would want to know its meaning. Meyer (2002) citing Wells (1986) indicates that what becomes confusing for children is the language used by the scripted program indicates they should

read, yet the words make not sense and may send the message that reading is not regarding making meaning, but simply mastering letter sounds.

The definition of what reading is gradually changes for boys as they enter school and begin to associate reading with school tasks, and what once was something enjoyable and fun to discover the stories within books may become more frustrating (Bardsley, 1999; Lever-Chain, 2008; Sax, 2007). In the case of the classroom described by Meyer (2002), after one year of sticking to the strict script, the teacher, decided that she could still incorporate the script into her whole language program, but had initially stuck to the phonics program out of fear for losing her job if she did not comply with district policy. Therefore, when real texts were brought back into her discussions in the classroom, the teacher stated “the children make connections to other texts they’ve read and talk regarding what they know and wonder regarding” and are thus engaged in learning (Meyer, 2002, p. 455). According to Weaver (2002), “there is a significant correlation between teachers’ approach to reading instruction and children understanding of what reading is and what it involves” (p. 3). In the case of the teacher observed by Meyer (2002), it was challenging for her to shift her language associated with the teaching of reading to a script and watch her students, oftentimes the boys, disengage from the reading process.

Another example regarding how discouraging phonics can be for children familiar with constructing meaning from texts and enjoying reading is from a parent-researcher’s perspective of her eight-year-old daughter, Kelli. While this article reflects the experience of a young girl, it could certainly apply to the experience of young boys. Kelli, once an avid reader becomes discouraged when reading was taken out of the

context of meaningful texts and reduced to “its lowest level - calling words” (Long, 2004, p. 417). According to Long (2004), Kelli’s passion shifted to boredom, embarrassment, and confusion regarding reading. Kelli’s reading experience, one of reading for meaning, became discouraged when she tried to make sense of the basal readers and found herself encountering text that lacked “natural language and a coherent story line” (Long, 2004, p. 420). Kelli’s experience demonstrates that a problem with a phonics scripted program is the potential for boys being able to read the words on a page, by sounding them out, but ultimately not understanding what they are reading. According to Goodman (1993), oral reading can become a performance more than an attempt to make meaning and therefore “we can often produce an oral rendition of the text that sounds as if we understand it, even though we don’t” (115). Rather than transacting with the text and working to make meaning, boys may demonstrate their skills at decoding but do not comprehend the text. According to Long (2004), through a basal reader in a phonics-based program, “children quickly learn that reading is not regarding anything connected to their worlds or making sense of those worlds” (424). This is unfortunate when taking into consideration boys learn when books are meaningful.

According to Goodman (1993), boys, like all children, bring prior knowledge and experiences to their reading. The process of reading should focus on meaning because it’s more motivating for boys when they are able to read meaningful texts rather than simple texts to which they cannot relate. In addition, according to Weaver (2002), “most children (and adults) learn whole words and/or whole, simple texts first, before they develop knowledge of letter-sound patterns” (214).

Boys should be encouraged to engage in meaningful literacy practices that present texts in meaningful contexts. As Smith (2003) asserts “phonics becomes problematic when it is regarded as an instructional necessity” (31). It is indeed important for there to be phonics, but again it should not be the main focus. Teachers and educators need to take into consideration that “the most effective literacy teacher is the author of the book a child is enjoying reading, with help if necessary” (Smith, 2003, p. 32). It is from their reading experiences that boys walk away with the knowledge and experience to tackle the next text.

In light of the enforcement of the No Child Left Behind Act, it appears the message is “systematic direct intense phonics instruction will solve the reading problem, end the debate, lead to student success in life beyond school, and provide teachers with the prestige of successful reading instruction” (Meyer, 2002, p. 453). This perspective will continue to be challenged by proponents of allowing boys to engage in the natural process of reading. It is important for teachers to reflect upon their approach to the teaching of reading and the impact on boys. Placing the needs of boys at the center of curriculum planning is very important, and those considerations are often lost when packaged programs are adopted rather than relying on the expertise and knowledge of the teachers working each day with students.

Motivating boys to engage in reading:

“Perhaps the answer to motivating students to read is as simple as encouraging them to follow their interests” (Worthy et al., 1999, p. 24)

Once boys are hooked it can be easier to introduce school texts and so a teacher’s task is clearly to find that hook (Merisuo-Storm 2006; Worthy, 1996; Zambo & Brozo,

2009). A few recommendations suggested in the research with respect to motivating boys are: introduce them to series books, provide safe space within the classroom to encourage boys to cross gender boundaries as conversations regarding books are often gendered, and using reading material that is meaningful and relevant (Dutro, 2002; McCarthy, 2001; Merisuo-Storm, 2006).

Interest in a subject is directly connected to motivation to continue and feel success. Interest theory which is directly connected to the work of Dewey (1913), relates to the work of Vygotsky (1978) with respect to emphasizing that having an interest in a topic can be influenced by the environment (Hidi, 1991). Hidi (1991) argues that interest is central to how individuals select and persist in the acquisition of knowledge. Worthy (1996) asserts that interest can allow students to transcend the labels given to them with respect to reading ability and is paramount to learning and engagement in subject matter. Within any learning environment, an awareness of the importance of considering interest often refers to both situational and individual interest (Dewey, 1913; Brozo, 2002; Herbart, 1806; Schiefele, 1991; Worthy, 1996). Individual interest is chosen and situational interest is momentary (Schiefele, 1991). Baker and Wigfield (1999), in their study examining boys' reading motivation, found in their review of the literature there often tends to be more emphasis on the cognitive aspect of reading while the research related to motivation focuses on attitudes and interest.

Schiefele (1991) discusses how individuals are naturally drawn to topics of interest and this then enhances the learning experience. Interest is closely tied to learning because it makes everything meaningful for the individual, and for boys there appears to be a connection between engagement in reading and interest in the subject (Hidi, 1991;

Schiefele, 1991; Zambo & Brozo, 2009). The most common discussion in the literature is with respect to individual interest being a strong motivating factor because it is attached to an emotional component and an individual's values (Schiefele, 1991). When boys are in search of meaning they are more motivated to read, and this connects greatly to the work of Goodman (1996) and the discussion of reading as the construction of meaning rather than simply relying on cracking the phonics code.

Worthy (1996) provides a list of titles that are a valuable reference for teachers interested in finding titles that will engage their students. Baker and Wigfield (1999) emphasize the importance of students being engaged because it contributes to motivation and enhances social interactions. Motivated readers will engage in reading more often and with positive attitudes (Baker & Wigfield, 1999). For boys, the social aspect of learning becomes a more influential force in their academic experience as they get older and this presents a challenge for teachers, but if there is the possibility of recognizing the need to engage boys earlier in reading there may be a chance to keep them hooked as they get older.

As boys construct their social norms through their interactions with peers, this can prove to be a motivational factor if properly framed within the classroom (Adler et al., 1992; Alloway & Gilbert, 1997). Appealing to boys and their pursuit of achieving a particular status with respect to what is considered to be masculine within school contexts: athleticism, toughness, being cool.

It is often difficult for teachers to accept what is considered light reading as valuable reading material in school as boys are often deterred from traditional school texts, so the definition of school reading needs to be broadened to accommodate the

interests (Alloway & Gilbert, 1997; Merisuo-Storm, 2006; Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1999). Comic books are commonly identified as light reading because they are not considered academic, and Worthy (1996) shares a personal anecdote regarding how her son struggled with reading until he encountered comic books. Upon discovering comic books Worthy's (1996) son became a fluent reader and provided her with the opportunity to reflect on her own definition of reading and then make a change because of what she had observed happening in her research and with her own child. Boys often include a lot more nonacademic reading materials on a list of preferences and it is important to consider the need to celebrate the fact they are reading and that such materials help motivate them to engage in the process (Worthy et al., 1999).

Currently, "many boys enter school excited but soon lose their passion because they perceive the reading they are asked to complete as boring" and something for the girls (Zambo & Brozo, 2009, p.1). With this perception of reading being something girls do, there has also been discussion regarding the feminization of school reading practices at the early elementary level disadvantaging boys and for many boys there is a lack of connection to meaningful contexts and experiences (Weaver-Hightower, 2008; Young & Brozo, 2001). According to Kindlon and Thompson (2002), in their study of a Kindergarten classroom and the learning behavior of boys in that environment, boys have often disengaged from school by third grade when they perceive it as a place where they cannot do anything right because they are often being continuously reprimanded for their behavior.

One aspect of the school experience that may be contributing to boys disengaging from reading is the book selections by librarians, teachers, and parents. Dressman (1997)

asserts that book selection by boys is influenced by stereotypes put forth within the culture of schools based on tradition and limited research regarding reading interests. It is interesting to consider how boys often arrive at school with preconceived ideas regarding books to select and it may be a contributing factor to boys disengaging from reading tasks because they do not align with their interests (Moss, 1998 cited by Barrs, 2000). It is concerning there is a lack of availability of books in schools that engage boys because research indicates “students who have access to materials of interest are more likely to read and thus to improve their reading achievement and attitudes” (Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1999, p. 13).

When it comes to the idea of engaging boy, we need to consider getting the parents involved, Metsala (1996), in his study of boys from African-American and European-American households enrolled in pre-kindergarten classrooms, found that parents need to be involved more because boys’ reading experiences at home are often very different from school and may contribute to boys’ disengagement. Smith and Wilhelm (2002), noted experts in studying and examining boys’ disengagement from reading, cite the evidence of boys’ struggle with reading, but feel when boys have a sense of meaningful interactions there is no real evidence of a gap in their reading achievement. Booth (2003) concurs with the findings as he has found boys interact differently with texts and their reaction differs based on experience.

While a lot of emphasis is being placed on boys falling behind in schools and disengaging from reading, Mead (2006), in her review of current discussions with respect to boys and policy for the education think tank, Education Sector, in Washington, D.C., discusses the fact that the current crisis for boys is not as bad as reports indicate because

she found the manner in which research is being reported does not take into consideration how boys are continuing to improve, yet with girls excelling at even faster rates and passing the new growth in scores made by boys it still appears that boys are failing. Despite these findings, there is still a growing concern with respect to the boys being referred more often for special education programs. As King and Gurian (2006) note in their review of demographic information for an elementary school in Boulder, CO, approximately 75% of the students in special education are boys. Oftentimes, parents are influenced by pressures from school and medical professionals to make decisions that are not always beneficial to their boy's reading potential (Weaver-Hightower, 2008; Zambo & Brozo, 2009).

Barriers to boys engaging in reading

"...reading communities in schools have been more relevant to girls' needs than to boys' because of their focus on fiction and narrative, because of the emphasis on emotions and relationships, and because of their discouragement of certain kinds of literature (such as comics and non-fiction texts)." (Warrington, Younger & McLellan, 2003, p. 144)

Brozo (2002) discusses how boys are 3 to 5 times more likely to be labeled as learning disabled, be referred for special education services, and 50% more likely to be held back. According to Bank, Biddle, and Good (1980), boys are more likely to be referred for help with reading, and while this study is well over twenty years old it is still reflective of what is happening in today's school environments. Bank, Biddle, and Good (1980) might refer to the fact that boys are mostly taught by female teachers as a barrier since their study emphasizes the success of boys being related to having a male teacher as a role model.

Alloway and Gilbert (1997) emphasize the fact that alienation from reading can start early for boys and is not starting at the secondary level, as it appears to be expressed in the literature because the majority of literature focuses on adolescents. Worthy, Moorman, and Turner (1999), in their study of middle school students' reading tastes, found they often have negative attitudes towards reading and the less they engage in reading the more their reading skills begins to decline, and they also learned that often what engages students the most with respect to reading material are not always available in school libraries and classrooms. Worthy et al. (1999) mention the importance of considering interest as a strong factor in academic engagement. Without access and without interest, boys are most likely to disengage from reading. Teachers and librarians often mention their disapproval with the material chosen by students (Worthy et al., 1999). What appears to be critical is the lack of consideration for students' interests when selecting reading material (Worthy et al., 1999).

Worthy (1996) shares the research of working with a group of struggling 3rd grade readers who were all boys assigned to work through a basal reader and the boys immediately wanted to disengage. If boys have encountered any instance of failure in relationship to reading they are likely to disengage (Worthy, 1996).

Adler et al. (1992) noticed that boys who focused on academics, specifically tasks related to reading, were often subject to ridicule even if they exhibited characteristics considered to provide them with status. The norms established by peer groups can create a barrier. When boys begin to focus on the social aspect of school and develop a "group think" mentality with their peers it can create a situation in which they avoid anything related to academic work, and especially reading which they perceive as being for the

girls (Adler et al., 1992). Peer pressure often contributes to boys losing ground with their reading skills because it is not considered “cool” to be a reader (Merisuo-Storm, 2006). Boys are less willing to cross gendered boundaries of reading (Dutro, 2002). There is often a gap between the reading boys engage in at school and outside of school because they often perceive the reading at school to not be boyish (Dutro, 2002).

Boys often report not being interested in school texts as books selected by adults may not reflect boys’ interests (Merisuo-Storm, 2006). Even though books may be labeled by school as being “good” books, they may not be the books that are appealing to boys (Bafile, 2005; Merisuo-Storm, 2006). Jon Scieszka, a well-known children’s author and creator of Guys Read (www.guysread.com), is very concerned regarding the lack of motivation being exhibited by boys and in an attempt to work towards making a difference has created GUYS READ. Scieszka contends that we need more male elementary teachers because boys are lacking good role models in the area of reading, however, there are others who have discovered that the gender of the teacher is not what matters with boys, it’s the relationship that is established, or in the case of creating a barrier, not established. Some research asserts that boys who struggle with reading are influenced by an overfeminized culture in the classroom (Alloway & Gilbert, 1997).

Boys’ potentially negative attitude towards reading can influence the classroom culture and if they do not find the books to be meaningful or purposeful to their lives they are less likely to engage in reading (Lever-Chain, 2008; Merisuo-Storm, 2006). Comic books which are often the most popular with boys are often not considered to be quality reading material, this is true in Finland, but also appears in studies conducted in the United States. The greatest concern asserted by Worthy (1996) is that boys who are not

interested in school reading material may never engage in reading as a lifelong habit. Boys would prefer to be engaged in an activity in which they feel successful if reading is a struggle. Gender creates tension in the book selection process, especially for boys. Dutro (2002) asserts that gender is socially-constructed, however Sax (2007) would disagree and emphasize the biological construction of gender. Dutro (2002) shares a vignette of a 5 year old boy eager to leave the school library with a book until his peers insist it is a book for girls, so the boy quickly scurries to find another book.

Tyack and Hansot (1990) found that the “boy problem” was the focus of educational reform at the turn of the 20th century because of the concern regarding boys’ performance in public schools being so poor compared to girls (p.166). Currently, “many boys enter school excited but soon lose their passion because they perceive the reading they are asked to complete as boring” and something for the girls (Zambo & Brozo, 2009, p.1).

Dressman (1997) asserts that book selection by boys is influenced by stereotypes put forth by teachers and librarians who base their decisions on tradition and limited research regarding reading interests. When boys arrive at school with preconceived ideas regarding books to select, and this begins at very young ages based on play and social behavior, this may be contributing factor to boys disengaging from reading tasks because they do not align with their interests. Book selection by librarians does not often reflect preferences of boys, and the lack of availability of books in schools that engage boys becomes a concern because we know “students who have access to materials of interest are more likely to read and thus to improve their reading achievement and attitudes” (Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1999, p. 13).

Miedel and Reynolds (1999), in their study of parent involvement in early childhood education and school achievement for inner-city boys, found that while parents may be influential, there may be aspects of a boy's personality or motivation that engages or disengages him from the learning process, and so whether a boy learns or does not learn may not always be directly related to parental involvement.

The current emphasis on an accelerated early childhood reading curriculum emphasizing "phonics and reading drills, by itself might well have created a minor gender crisis in education "(Sax, 2007, p. 27). Currently, "many boys enter school excited but soon lose their passion because they perceive the reading they are asked to complete as boring" and something for the girls (Zambo & Brozo, 2009, p.1).

With this perception of reading being something for the girls, several researchers have mentioned the connection to a feminization of school reading practices at the early elementary level disadvantaging boys (Weaver-Hightower, 2008; Young & Brozo, 2001). Young & Brozo (2001), in reference to the work of Gambell & Hunter (1999) and Sanderson (1995), discuss how "a feminized school environment, at least at the elementary and middle grades, results in reading experiences and texts that work for girls and unwittingly punish boys" (p. 322). Boys often perceive reading as a job and not something done for enjoyment because there are often restrictions in place for reading choices and their identity as successful boys is more often through sports than school tasks that may not be meaningful and relevant to their lives (Bardsley, 1999; Dyson, 2007).

Many explain the disadvantages of boys as related to feminists and teachers who do not recognize the different learning styles of boys (Weaver-Hightower, 2008, p. 101).

The current research, while offering an explanation of boys' needs in relation to girls, attempts to ensure we are careful not to pit boys against girls when discussing learning needs because there are different needs and they need to be valued and respected (Gurian, 2001; Maynard, 2002; Sax, 2007; Weaver-Hightower, 2008; Young & Brozo, 2001; Zambo & Brozo, 2009).

As evidenced from the literature, the aspect of boy's reading that has been explored the most relates to the context of school and teachers. From a search of the literature, there have been studies done with respect to the involvement of parents and families in the early literacy development of their boys, but very few studies have focused on young boys as readers. Developing reading is a social process embedded in relationships and involving parents and teachers in the process there can be the potential for a greater understanding of meeting boys' reading needs (Au, 2006; Lever-Chain, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978; Young & Brozo, 2001).

The current emphasis on test scores as a measure of reading success does not lend itself to sustainability (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). As Sax (2007) asserts, there is "growing evidence that the intensive reading drills that now characterize early elementary education may actually disengage students, particularly boys" (p.38). A test score is a snapshot of one moment of time for boys, yet scores are becoming the foundation upon which policy decisions are being made and contributing to an obsession with standards over learning (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). The theory and practice of school are contributing factors to boys' disengagement... "changes in education over the past thirty years have created a negative attitude toward education among many boys... a consequence of the gender-blind changes in education over the past thirty years" and

decisions being made based on test scores (Sax, 2007, p.39). The emphasis on standards has taken away the focus on student attitudes towards reading and the influence on reading skill development (Lever-Chain, 2008).

Not only is the number of boys represented in special education a concern, but Zambo & Brozo (2009) state “that failing to meet the reading needs of all young boys isn’t so much a crisis as it is an imperative educational challenge...because those who struggle most to learn how to read...are boys of color” (p.3). With this in mind, it seems to me that it is imperative that we begin to engage parents and teachers in the process of discovering what engages their boys to help with school success.

Teachers’ influence on boys’ engagement with reading

A teacher’s definition of what counts as reading for young boys is an influential factor as it can impact curriculum planning and a teachers’ attitude towards the material selected by boys for reading (Brozo, 2002; Dutro, 2002; Merisuo-Storm, 2006; Zambo & Brozo, 2009). In addition, a teacher’s personal beliefs can influence his or her approach to instruction and as Nespor (1987) contends, beliefs are drawn from experience and so may color future encounters, so therefore in this study, teachers’ beliefs about boys may be rooted in personal experience more than professional knowledge gained from texts and coursework (Connell, 1996; Pajares, 1992).

The teaching of reading is situated within social contexts and it is through a socially constructed learning process that learning and achievement are influenced especially when you consider the number one contributor to student success in learning to read is the teacher and what happens in the classroom (Au, 2006; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978). Boys are more likely to be referred for special education services, and

the majority of the time the referrals come from teachers (Bank et al., 1980). To be lifelong readers, boys must willingly engage in reading (Baker et al., 1999). With boys doing the majority of their reading in school, it makes sense that teachers play a critical role in the reading engagement and development of boys (Baker et al., 1999). The environment in which a student learns contributes to interest and engagement (Hidi, 1991).

Teachers contribute to the construction of gendered identities and boys are especially aware of being perceived as un-masculine in a school setting, if they like to read, and they do not want this label (Adler et al., 1992). Oftentimes, teachers are not aware of the role they play in contributing to the construction of such gendered identities with respect to reading and there is a need for teachers to help students navigate the gendered boundaries in order to engage in reading (Dutro, 2002). In Dutro's (2002) study, the teacher she worked with was able to successfully create a safe classroom environment allowing boys to cross the gendered boundaries of reading and participate in book groups reading titles perceived as more feminine. Teachers are very influential to boys at a young age, it is only as boys approach third grade that perspectives change and they begin to become more influenced by their peers (Adler et al., 1992). It is important for teachers to be aware of what motivates boys to read (Brozo, 2002; Merisuo-Storm, 2006). Merisuo-Storm (2006) also asserts that there is pressure on teachers to develop and implement a curriculum that engages boys in reading. What of the practices often employed by teachers known as "round robin reading" when students are asked to read passages aloud in class is one that greatly deters, disengages, and frustrates boys (Merisuo-Storm, 2006).

It is important for teachers to take into consideration the interests of boys. Teachers often disapprove of what boys select for reading material as they prefer more conventional titles, meaning those identified as having won literary honors (Worthy, 1996; Worthy et al., 1999). Dutro (2002) and Bardsley (1999) observed teachers creating a safe classroom learning environment in which, while discussion regarding books was gendered, the boys had an opportunity to participate in book groups without stigma and ridicule because it was part of the academic expectation. Au (1980) asserts with great conviction the importance of the teacher taking time to value the cultural norms and individual learning needs of students.

Bafle (2005) in an interview with Jon Scieszka asserts that teachers, especially those who are women, need to re-examine the lists of books they are assigning their students to read and consider if they are of interest to boys. Those who emphasize the overfeminization of early childhood education would be in agreement with Jon Scieszka in his assertion that when boys are told reading is important it is most often by women and thus there is the need for more men to be role models. Those in opposition to this claim state there is no need to consider the gender of the teacher, but consider the relationship the teacher develops and builds with the boys in her class that contributes to their interest and engagement in reading.

Teachers are very influential in the reading development of boys and can serve as literacy leaders for their boys, and for the purpose of this paper “literacy leader” is being defined, with respect to the work of Allen (2005), as an individual who reflects and contributes to the development of a child’s lifelong dedication to reading.

Reading development is a social practice and it is important to consider the contexts in which reading takes place in boys' lives (Au, 2006). A social constructivist perspective takes into account the fact that literacy skill development is socially constructed (McCarthy, 2001). It is often the early childhood education experiences before entering elementary school that can shape boys' ideas regarding reading (Lever-Chain, 2008).

When implementing a curriculum, I believe in what bell hooks (1994) calls "engaged pedagogy" that allows for moving beyond the boundaries of the classroom to the possibilities for learning that exist in the lives and experiences of students, and discussions that reach to the depths of what is possible to learn. With this in mind, there is great potential for understanding the possibilities for parents to be recognized as literacy leaders for their boys in order to enhance their learning potential in school. Defining the role of a literacy leader is complex, but for the purpose of this paper "literacy leader" is being defined, with respect to the work of Allen (2005), as an individual who reflects and contributes to the development of a child's lifelong dedication to reading.

As literacy leaders, parents and teachers can provide support to teachers and create networks of support to ensure the needs of their boys are met within schools, especially if they find themselves in a meeting with school professionals recommending their boy be referred for special education services. Weaver-Hightower (2008) asserts that in special education, there is a concern that the overrepresentation of boys is due to their behavior and less likely related to specific educational needs. Naiden (1976), in a study of the Seattle public schools found that boys were overrepresented in special

education classes and asserts it was most likely due to boy's behavior. With this in mind, it seems to me that it is imperative that we begin to engage parents and teachers in the process of discovering what engages boys to help with school success.

Durgunoglu & Öney (2000) observed that home experiences are important in the development of language skills that enhance engagement in reading. Durgunoglu & Öney (2000) discuss that boys become aware of how language functions through interactions with family and this is instrumental in their reading development. However, with schools continuing to emphasize a skills-based approach, the activities boys engage in at home and in their community are often not considered relevant to the classroom (Au, 2006; Goodman, 1996; Smith, 2003). Parents and teachers as literacy leaders can become advocates for boys' reading development and help schools understand how to enhance engagement and excitement regarding books (Allen, 2005; Goodman, 1996).

With the recent publication of a report by the National Literacy Panel (2008) emphasizing skill based instruction, or phonics, the pressure may be placed on teachers to encourage parents to engage in more phonics based activities at home, thus ignoring research supporting whole language experiences in which boys experience literacy in a meaningful context which research has shown is more effective for engaging boys in reading because they are often turned off from skill drill activities (Goodman, 1996; Newkirk, 2004; Sax, 2007; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002) The stories within basal readers and early readers are not always the most engaging for boys, and boys need a point of entry into literature in order to engage in the process (Dyson, 2007; Zambo & Brozo, 2009).

With the help of parents and teachers as literacy leaders there is the potential for examining reading in the context of the child's environment and understand what

motivates or disengages their boys from reading (Goodman, 1996; Young & Brozo, 2001). Hargreaves & Fink (2006), in their discussion of creating sustainable learning environments, emphasize the importance of learning being personalized and meaningful. This is important when thinking regarding boys' reading because of the need to equip them with experiences that are meaningful and relevant in order to motivate them to engage in other learning opportunities (Booth, 2003; Brozo, 2002; Newkirk, 2004; Zambo & Brozo, 2009). King and Gurian (2006) describe the process of transforming the learning environments at Douglass Elementary School in Boulder, CO by focusing on approaches to instruction for engaging boys when review of the CSAP scores revealed boys underachievement by an overall 13 point gap in literacy, and within one year raised the test scores and level of engagement in learning.

Carr (1990) declares there is an "urgent need to teach thinking skills...every teacher should create an atmosphere where students are encouraged to read deeply, question, engage in divergent thinking, look for relationships among ideas, and grapple with real life issues" (para. 13). I feel this is what could be possible when teachers engage in transacting with texts with their boys. Goodman (1996), an Emeritus Professor of Education at the University of Arizona who strongly advocates for a whole language approach to reading, would argue that a fair amount of research focused on reading has reduced it to emphasizing parts of language rather than language in whole contexts that are meaningful and relevant to boys. A teacher's emphasis on a whole language reading experience may be the route to success for her boys, despite the fact that they may be exposed to a predominantly skills-based approach in school. Neumann, Hood, and Neumann (2009), in their study of a mother scaffolding her boy's emergent reading skills

at home, learned that the use of environmental print and making connections to the world provided a framework for learning, and suggest that such experiences can transfer to other settings. “Environmental print is non-costly, highly accessible, and available for use by parents from a range of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds” and therefore a great resource for parents and teachers looking to engage their boys in reading (Neumann et al., 2009, p. 318).

Reading and diversity

Yang (2003), in reference to the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979), asserts that the learning taking place within a classroom context is “substantially influenced by the...backgrounds of participants” (p.81). The possibilities for teachers to engage with boys as literacy leaders, and in turn provide parents and other teachers with the knowledge of how to provide a point of entry into reading for boys, can only enhance the potential for school achievement (Zambo & Brozo, 2009). Moll and Greenberg (1990), in their study of Latino household reading practices, observed a teacher with the willingness to adapt and change a packaged curriculum by inviting parents as experts into the classroom. Based on observations, Moll and Greenberg (1990) found that this type of planning contributed to the lesson development and valued the students’ and their parent’s backgrounds. This represents the importance of considering a child’s “funds of knowledge” by schools considering reading practices from home and contributes to creating classrooms responsive to the individual needs of students (Moll, 2001, p. 17). Putting funds of knowledge into practice involves considering what students “bring to school is who they are, what they believe, how they feel, and how they behave in a culture” (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004, p. 10). Teachers can contribute to creating sustainable

learning environments that value the interests, skills, and lives of their boys. The idea of being part of a learning community is strongly supported by the work of Vygotsky (1978) who writes regarding the importance of socially constructed learning.

Au (2006) also discusses the importance of reading engagement being created within a social context, but raises concerns regarding the approach by so many schools to measure reading achievement with test scores from assessments that traditionally favor mainstream students. Lopez (1999), in a study of three fifth-grade boys of diverse backgrounds learning to negotiate the academic discourse in school, found they struggled in relation to their more privileged peers and often perceived their parents as inadequate to help them in school which highlights the importance of involving teachers and empowering them as literacy leaders. Most often, the blame for the boys' struggles was on the home and "the boys' language and experiences were systematically excluded from school activities" (p.53).

While a structured approach to the teaching of reading is emphasized by conventional reading programs, Dyson (2007) emphasizes the fact that boys are often not interested in what is presented to them by a traditional reading program in school because they are looking for experiences with books that are meaningful and relevant to their experience. In addition, the school is often selective as to what is deemed appropriate within the classroom environment and for many children, especially boys, this can disadvantage them during their educational experience (Dyson, 2007; Zambo & Brozo, 2009).

Summary

This review of the literature focused on approaches to reading instruction,

motivating boy readers, barriers to boys' reading, and the role of the teacher in boys' reading development. In the chapters to follow, through the discussion of my methodology, the presentation of my data, and drawing connections between my data and this review of literature, I hope to provide you, as the reader, with insights into early childhood teachers' perspectives on boys as readers.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Research approach and rationale

This multi-method dissertation research study used a multiple method approach by integrating the analysis of a questionnaire, with mostly open-ended questions, and structured interviews. The study attempted to describe and gain insight into the beliefs held by early childhood teachers regarding boys as readers. With my strong interest in teacher practice, the teaching of reading, and the education of young boys, I was aware of the fact that many studies related to boys and reading have typically been qualitative in nature, using ethnographic or case study approaches, however previous studies have typically focused on the responses from students regarding their interest in reading rather than examining teacher perspectives on their students as readers (Au, 1980; Bardsley, 1999; Dutro, 2002; Kim & Kwon, 2002).

This research study started with the development of a questionnaire to distribute to early childhood teachers. The questionnaire was influenced by questions for reflection presented in Zambo and Brozo's (2009) text *Bright Beginnings for Boys* published by the International Reading Association recommended for professional development and feedback from conducting a pilot study (see Appendix A). I started with a survey approach because of my interest in gathering information from a large group of early childhood teachers within a short amount of time. However, to allow for breadth and depth to the survey results the decision was made to complement the data by engaging in interviews with early childhood teachers.

The analysis of survey results, which were primarily open-ended responses, in this study utilized a constant comparative methodology supported by poetic analysis (Boeije, 2002; Butler-Kisber, 1998; Cahnmann, 2003; Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg & Coleman, 2000; Furman, 2006; Furman, Lietz, & Langer, 2006; Glaser, 1965; Poindexter, 2002; Thorne, 2000). The coding, categorizing, and analysis of data were influenced by the responses from early childhood teachers. The final analysis of data, as will be thoroughly outlined in Chapter 4, was situated within the theoretical perspective of Dewey's (1913) theory of interest.

This study evolved as a multiple methods approach employing survey research and interviews. The decision was made to emphasize this as a multiple method study because it used complementary methods for the purpose of answering the research questions (Darbyshire, MacDougall, & Schiller, 2005). Surveys allowed for accessing information from a large group and the interviews provided depth.

Participants

Survey Respondents

The participants who responded to the survey in this study were early childhood teachers. The early childhood teachers were identified by the Director or Principal of their respective school as the lead or assistant teacher in a classroom of students between the ages of 0-8. The participants were teachers at accredited early childhood schools in the state of Colorado. Several different schools were approached for participation. Participation in the study was voluntary. In order to ensure confidentiality, descriptions of the schools and their locations were not disclosed, however the combined demographics of the schools represented teachers working with children representing

different cultural and linguistic groups. As I determined who would participate, I wanted to be able to allow for the possibility of generalizing the findings because according to Baumann and Bason (2004) if the sample is too limited, such as within one school, it is not possible to generalize.

Interviewees

The early childhood teachers selected to be interviewed were not asked to complete the questionnaire. This decision was made because the early childhood teachers selected to be interviewed were from different schools than those selected to complete the questionnaire, and were strategically selected to ensure the representation of teacher voices who I was certain worked with culturally and linguistically diverse students. This was done because it was not possible through the survey to determine the schools or students the teachers were thinking regarding as they responded. A total of five early childhood teachers were interviewed. All of the teachers were female and taught children between the ages of 0-8. Due to the short time frame within which this study was conducted, and to maintain confidentiality and anonymity, all of the interviews were conducted over the phone and responses were typed and I attempted to document the exact words of the respondents.

Survey Development

Baumann and Bason (2004) state: “Surveys are popular methods of collecting information from individuals and the preferred means to address a research question when it is most efficient to simply *ask* those who can inform the question” (p. 288). According to Baumann and Bason (2004), the most common use for surveys in the field of education have been related to school districts using them to evaluate programs and

instructional practices with reading being a common area of focus. One of the seminal studies related to evaluating the teaching of reading was conducted by Austin and Morrison (1963) and used questionnaires and observations in school systems nationwide to assess the approaches to reading instruction.

While the Austin and Morrison (1963) study was important in its focus on the teaching of reading, it did not specifically address the beliefs held by teachers regarding their practice, and so I did not use their survey as a guide for the development of the survey used in this dissertation study. The survey distributed for this study was developed by me, as the researcher, after reading *Bright Beginnings for Boys* by Debby Zambo and William Brozo. The development of questions was influenced by the reflection questions provided in the text and my interest in having early childhood teachers reflect on their beliefs regarding boys as readers and the teaching of reading. In order to determine the effectiveness of the questions that were developed, a pilot study was conducted and provided valuable feedback for the final revisions and distribution of the survey.

Pilot Study

The questionnaire was piloted by a group of early childhood pre-service teachers in a university teacher education program. The early childhood pre-service teachers had already completed coursework in the teaching of reading. The pilot study was useful for determining the clarity of questions and if the questions helped answer the research questions for this study. The survey that was piloted only contained questions regarding beliefs regarding boys as readers.

After piloting the survey, while I will not be focusing on girls for my study, I determined the need to include the same questions for teachers to respond to regarding girls and boys in order to attempt to create a balanced approach to gaining insight into the beliefs held by early childhood teachers regarding boys as readers. It was determined that it would be challenging to discuss and report on the findings regarding the early childhood teachers' beliefs regarding boys as readers without also having some knowledge of their beliefs regarding girls as readers. In addition, the balanced perspective with respect to gender in the survey provided useful insights for the possibility of developing future studies and research reports.

Survey

Following the pilot study, revisions were made to the survey and once approval was granted by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) the survey was released to participants. The survey was developed online using Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com) and participants were able to access the survey through a dedicated web link. The web link was distributed to the Director or Principal of participating schools and they provided the information to their teachers. This particular procedure was followed to allow for the Directors and Principals to serve as gatekeepers to staff contact information and maximize the assurance of maintaining confidentiality for respondents.

A quality survey allows for the replication of the study, and an example of this is the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS) developed and tested in a study by McKenna and Kear (1990). The survey has since been used by other researchers and is recommended for teachers in the monitoring of reading instruction with respect to interest

and motivation (Baumann & Bason, 2004; Lazarus & Callahan, 2000). While perspectives from students are of interest, the purpose of this study is to focus on early childhood teachers as there are very few studies available in the literature illustrating a study in which early childhood teachers were surveyed regarding their perspectives on reading, and especially reading with respect to gender.

Shulman (1997) asserts that research starts with a carefully designed question and is not solely focused on the methodology. Therefore it follows that the core research question for this study (What do early childhood teachers believe boys need in order to be successful readers?) is one for which a survey methodology can be used because the question can be answered through a questionnaire and interviews.

Incorporating Interviews

Baumann and Bason (2004) mention the use of interviews within the context of survey research. An interview allows for a fluid conversation providing depth to the information gathered from a survey. Interviewing also allows for the opportunity to understand feelings and thoughts, what cannot be observed, and what I was most interested in for this study given the emphasis on asking teachers regarding their beliefs (Patton, 2002).

With the aforementioned examples of surveys that have been conducted in the field of literacy, it is interesting to note that those considered to be exemplars in survey research have employed both survey and interview methods. Baumann and Bason (2004) cite two specific exemplars: a survey of attitudes toward reading conducted by McKenna, Kear, and Ellsworth (1995) with children in grades 1-6 using descriptive statistics from the completion of the ERAS and a survey of reading instruction conducted by Baumann,

Hoffman, Duffy-Hester, and Ro (2000) in which teachers completed closed and open-ended questions with respect to their teaching practices. Therefore, in order to support the data gathered from the online survey, I conducted interviews with early childhood teachers who were invited by me, as the researcher, to participate. Participation was voluntary.

Interview Process

The decision to conduct interviews was late in my process, but definitely added to the data collected from surveys. My first steps involved deciding how I would determine who to interview. I decided to interview teachers who were not part of the population of teachers selected for completing the survey. While the teachers selected to complete the survey represented a broad demographic, there was no way to determine who completed the survey, so when I selected the teachers to interview I made sure to find teachers who worked in a variety of different school settings. I made this decision because I wanted to be purposeful in my selection of teachers, and I wanted to allow for the building of connections between what was revealed in the survey data and the interview responses.

I selected five early childhood teachers to interview. The teachers were all interviewed over the phone. The decision was made to conduct the interviews by phone because of the limited time frame for the study and it was more convenient for most teachers. An additional level was the maintenance of confidentiality of the teachers because the conversations were not recorded. The approach I took for conducting the interviews followed what Patton (2002) refers to as the interview guide approach. Using the interview guide approach made sure all participants were asked the same questions, but with the opportunity for interjecting questions and allowing for some free flow to the

conversation during the interview (Patton, 2002). During the interview process it was important for me to maintain neutrality, and I have to admit this was a challenge for me because of how passionate I have become regarding the topic of boys' literacy, so I made sure I focused on listening and asking for clarification when needed to make sure I did not interject my opinion or redirect the responses.

Researcher Bias

It was very important throughout this study that I maintained an active awareness of my own biases. As an elementary teacher, having taught Kindergarten and First Grade, and with a strong academic background in the teaching of reading, I entered this study with ideas regarding what I wanted to hear from teachers. As the study progressed, it was very important for me to remember to examine the data and conduct the interviews without placing my opinions, perspectives, and biases into the process. It was important to review and analyze the data as it was presented. My intention in conducting this study was to add to the knowledge base in early childhood education, and so while my own experiences as a teacher have shaped my perspectives on the teaching of reading and boys as readers, it was important for me to listen carefully and analyze thoughtfully.

Ethical Considerations

In preparation to conduct this study, I completed the application process for approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Upon receiving my letter of approval I provided the Directors of the early childhood schools with access to the survey online. I communicated with the Directors through email and included the cover letter for which I had received approval from IRB. I then contacted the teachers for the interview process and provided them, through regular mail, with a copy of the letter of

informed consent, and they promptly returned those to me before we arranged a time to speak on the phone. The signed documents from the teachers were immediately placed in a locked file and only accessible by the researcher.

Throughout the process, confidentiality and anonymity were maintained with the Directors serving as gatekeepers to their staff's contact information because the Directors distributed the link to the online survey. In addition, the online survey did not ask for any identifying information from the teachers and was accessed through a designated link and did not keep a record of those who completed the survey, as there was an option to keep a record of IP addresses, but in order to ensure confidentiality I made sure this feature was turned off. For the interviews, all interviews were conducted over the phone and only notes were taken, so there were no recording devices used in the process. In addition, by conducting the interviews over the phone, it would not present the teacher participating in the study with any concerns regarding a breach of confidentiality.

Theoretical Grounding

The theoretical grounding for this study was the work of Dewey (1913) on interest and learning. This particular theory was selected for this study because of the emphasis in the literature regarding boys and reading on being aware of their interests and using them as an entry point for boys into reading (Zambo & Brozo, 2009). In this seminal work on interest and education, Dewey presents four types of educative interest: physical interest, constructive interest, social interest, and intellectual interest. These four types of interest were used to support the analysis of data to determine the connections between the teachers' statements and the role of interest in learning. The four types of interest are defined in the following way: *physical activity* involves

engaging the senses through movement, *constructive activity* uses tools to sustain activity for a long time and encourages imaginative play within the context of an activity, *intellectual activity* refers to engaging in an activity to find out something, thus turning interest to learning, and *social activity* involves the presence of objects or individuals to carry an activity forward. While it would certainly be possible to include other theoretical perspectives in the gathering and analysis of data, for the purpose of simplifying the data analysis and process only Dewey's framework was used as a guide.

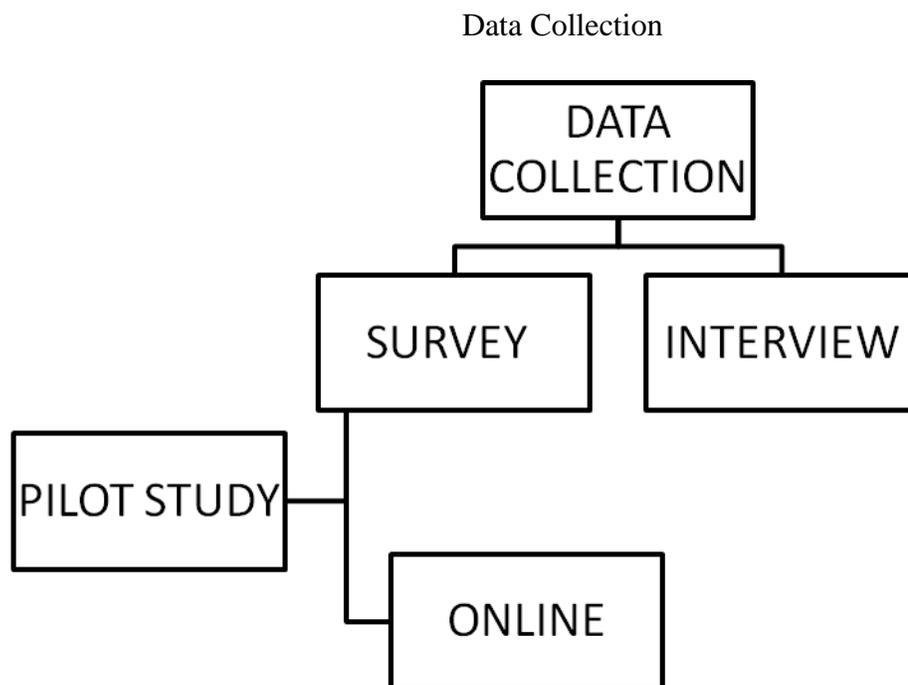


Figure 1: Visual representation of Data Collection

Data sources

Data collection was in the form of questionnaires with closed and open-ended questions, structured interviews, and personal anecdotes in the form of haiku poetry. The

closed questions will present the respondent with pre-determined options for a response of either one or select all that apply. The open-ended questions and the structured interview questions will present the early childhood teacher participant with questions that will all them to reflect regarding their teaching practice with respect to reading and their perspectives on the reading practices and behaviors of young boys. The development of the interview questions was done following the pilot study based on the questions used to collect survey data in order to explore common themes to the responses in greater depth. Palmer (1998) expresses his opinion that reflection is central to teacher effectiveness because of its ability to enhance learning, and I believe there is great potential for improving reading experiences for young boys when teachers are provided with opportunities to reflect regarding the boys' learning needs and interests.

Procedures

Data was collected from early childhood education teachers who were lead or assistant teachers in classrooms with children ages 0-8. The timeline for the data collection was for the period of two weeks from late September to the beginning of October. The data was managed using the online program Survey Monkey which automatically organized the data and I was able to generate reports and track responses. I checked the survey everyday and maintained a daily record of the progress of responses. After the first week, I sent a reminder to the Directors depending on the response rate of participants. The interview data was gathered by phone conversations and coded based on the date the interview occurred preceded by the acronym ECE for Early Childhood Educator. No names of the participant or their respective school were used when recording, storing, and analyzing the data. The questionnaire was online using the

program Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com). Approximately 100 teachers were asked to complete the questionnaire and I interviewed 5 early childhood teachers.

The intended audience of the study results are teachers, administrators, and teacher educators working in early childhood education. Parents may also be interested in the report findings.

Both the questionnaire and interview provided the teachers with an opportunity for reflection. The questions allowed for their stories to emerge and thus contribute to their professional practice (Johnson & Golombek, 2002). Reflection is an important component of learning because there are continually things to learn regarding oneself and the process. With respect to teachers, Milner (2003) expresses concern regarding the potential dangers when teachers are not reflective practitioners, especially with respect to diversity, because their belief systems influence how they will teach their students and may force them “to teach and to think regarding their racially diverse students through deficit models,” and this is especially troubling with a large percentage of boys who are struggling with reading are boys of color (p. 198). Milner (2003) feels strongly, and I concur, that there is a “need to move beyond the general to the more specific areas of reflection if we are serious regarding improving the quality of education and teaching and learning among racially marginalized students in the USA” (p.206). If we can reach the students and their families earlier, it seems to me it can only improve outcomes for students. I feel the reflections of early childhood teachers through the questionnaire and interviews have provided possibilities for moving this conversation forward and providing appropriate supports for young boys, especially boys of color, so they can be

reached before they start disengaging from school during adolescence (Brozo, 2002; Newkirk, 2002; Zambo & Brozo, 2009).

Data analysis

Describing the process

My approach to data analysis was guided by the framework presented by Seidel (1998) of noticing, collecting, and thinking and with guidance from Miles and Huberman (1994) in their presentation of organizing data into a comprehensible, accessible format for readers. In addition, poems were created from the data to support the traditional thematic analysis approach and bring forth the voices of early childhood teachers (Butler-Kisber, 1998; Furman, 2006; Furman, Lietz, & Langer, 2006; Kinsella, 2006). To begin my process, I created the following figure to help me visualize Seidel's (1998) framework for data analysis.

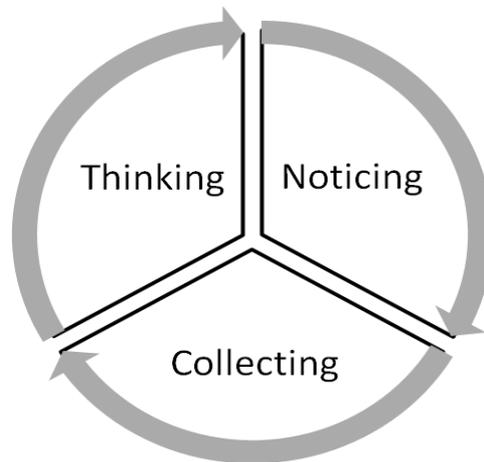


Figure 2: Visual representation of Data Analysis

Using Seidel's (1998) framework my data analysis process consisted of: *noticing* which involved creating an ongoing record of what was appearing in the survey data through the process of reading, re-reading, coding, and carefully documenting the

responses during the interview process. *Collecting* involved sorting the data into common categories with the hope of creating a clear depiction of the responses elicited from participants. Finally, *thinking regarding things* was the analysis of the data, thus attempting to make sense of the data by reflecting on patterns and relationships with the hope of making discoveries, and creatively summarizing as poems.

Noticing

The *noticing* phase of the analysis process was the first level of coding, an open coding process, identifying what was said by the respondents (Seidel, 1998). The codes I developed focused the process of *noticing* on common responses, threads, and contributed to the development of themes that were in the data and helped provide perspective for answering the research questions. The coding process involved developing categories with the initial approach centered on brainstorming what is relevant and then progressing to marking passages with specific words or phrases to develop connections between the information (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). Using Miles & Huberman (1994) as a guide, the data was represented using tables to display the data visually.

As I approached my data set, I used open coding which led to determining the major themes emerging from the data to analyze the written statements in response to the survey questions and metaphor to analyze the spoken statements by early childhood educators (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The open coding approach was guided by the raw data and my research questions.

The first level of coding simply looked for key words or phrases that related to the ideas being shared and contributed to answering the research questions guiding this

study. The key words and phrases were selected from each participant's responses (see Table 2). The second level of coding then grouped similar responses according to the codes by which they were identified and then themes were developed related to responses for each question from the survey and interviews. The data was then displayed as an unordered list to be further analyzed. Finally, the third level of coding provided a summary of the responses to the survey and interview questions by organizing the data into categories and then into summative poetry.

Table 2

Codes and Definitions

CODE	MEANING	USED FOR...
RT	Role of teacher	Identifying statements made by teachers in which they mention actions, behaviors, ideas regarding their role as teachers of reading
B	Beliefs	Coding statements beginning with <i>I believe, Reading is, Teaching reading is</i>
G	Genre	Statements referring to a particular genre of literature, or when teachers used the word <i>topic</i> as that is situated within a particular genre
I	Interest	Statements with specific topics mentioned, such as cars, and for the use of the word <i>interest</i> within a phrase regarding boys as readers
CM	Competition	Statements that alluded to or directly mentioned varying levels of competition, whether as an individual competing with oneself or in a group
KN	Kinesthetic/Active	Statements in which teachers refer to boys in motion or specific activities involving movement
LI	Lack of Interest	Statements referring to aspects of boys disengaging from reading
TB	Teacher bias	Statements regarding teacher behaviors or thoughts representative of being biased towards boys
SOCE	Social Expectations	Statements by teachers regarding expectations

		for boys often held by society, peers, parents, and teachers
M	Meaningful	Statements describing activities, topics, and learning opportunities that could be considered important to boys
SI	Social Interest	Statements fitting within Dewey's (1913) definition of social interest as described in this study
PHI	Physical Interest	Statements fitting within Dewey's definition of physical interest as described in this study
CNI	Constructive Interest	Statements fitting within Dewey's definition of constructive interest as described in this study
INI	Intellectual Interest	Statements fitting within Dewey's definition of intellectual interest as described in this study

The intent with the use of a survey and interviews was to try and encourage, by asking regarding personal beliefs, responses that were truly representative of early childhood teachers being self-reflective. With the structure of the survey being completely anonymous, the hope was teachers would feel able to express their actual beliefs and not those put forth by their school environment. With the interviews, the hope was to also allow for teachers to express their beliefs while I listened carefully and made sure not to interject my opinion or perspectives from research. There was, of course, no way to know whether or not the teachers were responding truthfully or simply expressing what has been taught to them in their teacher training and the belief statements shared within the context of their work environments. What developed from this process was the creation of codes for all responses and the beginning steps for the next stage of analysis involving the categorization of data.

Collecting

Once the different stages of coding were complete, the collecting phase involved the organization of the data into unordered lists and categories. The unordered lists were

used to separate the coded responses from the other data. The lists are unordered so as to provide assurance to the respondents they will not be identified. The unordered lists proved very useful for direct access to data for analysis. From the unordered lists, the data was organized into categories. The category labels were decided based on what appeared to summarize the data as it was being organized. The following table lists the categories used to organize data in this study.

Table 3

Listing of categories used to organize data

Physical Activity	Constructive Activity	Intellectual Activity	Social Activity
Hands-on Activities	Materials	Teaching strategies	Engaging
Genre	Interests	Competition	Kinesthetic
Lack of Interest	Social Expectations	Active	Teacher bias

The next phase of analysis to be discussed drew connections to Dewey's (1913) framework and summarized responses in the form of poems.

Thinking regarding things

My use of close reading, coding, and data displays were all part of my thoughtful processing of data as I compared the responses within questions and then between the survey and interview responses to arrive at a better understanding (Boeije, 2002; Glaser, 1965). Following the development of categories and the organization of data according to the categories, Dewey's (1913) four types of educative interest were used to further organize the categorized data. The decisions for drawing connections between the categories and the four types of educative interest were made based on how I interpreted

the definitions of interest. For the purposes of this study, Dewey's four types of interest are defined as follows: *physical activity* involves engaging the senses through movement, *constructive activity* uses tools to sustain activity for a long time and encourages imaginative play within the context of an activity, *intellectual activity* refers to engaging in an activity to find out something, thus turning interest to learning, and *social activity* involves the presence of objects or individuals to carry an activity forward.

The final step in thinking regarding the data involved poetry. I am going to take a moment here and pause to share how the idea developed and my thinking behind using it as an approach to data analysis within the context of this dissertation. This discussion is my attempt at presenting proof for the value of such a methodology in a dissertation focused on the perspectives of early childhood teachers. The idea was presented to my in Dr. Louise Jennings' *Ethnographic Research Methods* course during Spring Semester 2009. The article we were assigned to read was by Cahnmann (2003) and it discussed the arguments presented against the use of poetry in qualitative analysis, but also provided support for the value of using poetry within the field of education as a means for encouraging scholarship and improving teacher education.

The definitive argument against the use of poetry is due to its connection with creative writing and is thus not considered to be particularly scientific in its presentation of data (Cahnmann, 2003). Despite the idea of poetry not being as rigorous, I am willing to take the risk and explore using poetry as part of my data analysis because it does force a different way of thinking regarding the data and is gaining support among qualitative researchers who are working to legitimize the value of such an approach to looking at data (Eisner, 1997; Barone & Eisner, 1997; Butler-Kisber, 1998; Furman, 2006).

Cahnmann (2003) begins the discussion regarding poetry with a focus on craft. When talking regarding craft, the emphasis is on taking a look at the language and its structure. The focus falls on the rhythm and pattern of language and determining where to place the emphasis. In addition, the form and structure of the poem also contributes to where attention is given and can help visually display the contents of an interview or place particular emphasis on the data. The use of poetry can help to illuminate what is already known, but also contribute to the development of new concepts:

By reading and implementing poetic craft, researchers can enhance their abilities to listen and notice in the field during data collection, creatively play with metaphor and image during analysis, and communicate with more liveliness and accuracy when representing data to larger audiences. (Cahnmann, 2003, p. 32)

My intent in the use of poetic analysis was to bring forth the voices of early childhood teachers, and poetry provided a framework within which to work to accomplish the rhythm and repetition of the language used by teachers (Cahnmann. 2003). Cahnmann's (2003) recommendation is for using poetry to enhance the research, and that is exactly how I use it for data analysis. I am not using poetry as my primary approach, but as a means to summarize the findings into a meaningful, comprehensible format for teachers and others who work closely with young boys. Furman, Lietz, and Langer (2006) validate the use of poetry as a means for presenting insights, connecting to emotions, and presenting data. Langer and Furman (2004) describe the process of mining the data and writing poems based on the themes that develop. Butler-Kisber (1998), in a paper presentation to the American Education Research Association (AERA), describes the use of poetry as pushing what is considered acceptable within research circles, yet encourages its use because it encourages a different way of thinking and situates "the

voice of the participants more centrally in the work” (p.13). Finally, one of the great values of using poetry in the representation of data is for the opportunity to share it with a larger audience than just those within the world of academia (Cahnmann, 2003). Given the nature of my topic focusing on young boys’ literacy and the perspectives of early childhood teachers, I could conceivably present the findings to parents and with the use of poetry it would be more comprehensible and accessible. In addition, with my experience teaching pre-service teachers, the presentation of the data in poetry form would be much more useful and memorable for the purpose of potentially impacting their practice. My experience presenting at conferences has also taught me how much teachers prefer to have tangible, accessible material that can be quickly referenced, and poetry can help provide teachers with the heart of what the data is saying (Cahnmann, 2003; Furman, 2006).

Limitations

This study is delimited to the decision by the Directors of individual schools to distribute the questionnaires to their teachers and then for the teachers to complete the questionnaire. The early childhood teachers in Colorado selected to respond to the questionnaire teach at an accredited early childhood program. The early childhood teachers who are interviewed will be those who volunteer, so they may not be representative of a broad spectrum of early childhood teachers. With a questionnaire and interviews, self reporting can be limiting because with respect to teachers they may write or speak regarding what is expected rather than what they might actually be practicing.

Trustworthiness

When conducting this multi-method study it was important to consider trustworthiness because when asking teachers to provide personal belief statements there is only the possibility for inferring meaning because the process of thinking is not observable (Morine-Dershimer, 1983). In order to ensure trustworthiness of this study, the process of triangulation of methods was used by incorporating surveys, interviews, and poetry. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007), triangulation is characterized by a multi-method approach and is defined as using two or more methods of data collection. Trustworthiness was established through this process of triangulation because multiple sources allowed for greater credibility when looking at the findings (Lichtman, 2006).

Boy Readers positioned in relation to Girl Readers

In the collection of data, the same questions regarding boys were provided to the teachers to reflect on the girls they teach. This was determined after completing a pilot study in which early childhood pre-service teachers were only asked questions regarding boys, and while the responses were informative, it was determined by the researcher the responses would have greater meaning when viewed in relation to responses regarding girls. The intent was not to compare boys and girls, but given that the intent of this study was to focus on perspectives regarding boys, it seemed necessary to understand the perspectives in relation to early childhood teacher's characterizations of the girls in their classrooms. This was done to try and determine if through the responses it would be possible to show whether teacher bias exists towards boys and examine the word choice and language used when discussing boys and girls as readers. During the completion of

the survey, the teachers were presented with one question at a time. Several teachers approached the questions regarding boys by answering in relation to girls.

Summary

The current discussion regarding the need to raise awareness regarding the needs of boys as readers has started to shift from adolescent boys to boys in early childhood and elementary school settings. With very few studies having been conducted in which teachers have been the focus, I wanted to bring their voices into the conversation to begin to move an emphasis on boys' literacy forward in the best interest of boys. The data analysis approach was an inductive approach meaning the analysis is grounded in the data that has been collected, sorted, and analyzed with respect to the written responses and interview responses gathered during the study with an emphasis on boy's reading (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). Miles and Huberman (1994) discuss the need to be aware of the potential for "analytic bias that can weaken or even invalidate...findings"(p. 263). The data analysis was conducted in a multiple step process.

The first step was reading the data to get an idea of the responses and use open coding. The second step was defining codes and revisiting the data. The third step was the development of unordered lists. The fourth step was categorizing the data. The fifth step was drawing connections between the data and the theoretical grounding of the study. The sixth step was creating poetry. At times these steps were followed sequentially, while at other times the process cycled between categorization, drawing connections, and creating poetry. The process was continuous and ongoing throughout the course of the study as new data was received and looked at in relation to what had already been collected.

The next chapter will provide you with the findings from the data collected. The next chapter is organized in four parts with: an introduction, the findings from the survey, the findings from the interviews, and will conclude with the poetry that was created to summarize the survey and interview data.

CHAPTER 4

REPORT OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this multi-method dissertation study was to describe early childhood teachers' beliefs regarding what motivates and what presents barriers to reading for boys. This study used the two data collection strategies of an online survey and interviews. The research questions guiding this study were: 1) what do early childhood teachers believe boys need in order to be successful readers, 2) what do early childhood teachers believe motivates boys to read, 3) what do early childhood teachers believe are barriers to reading for boys, 4) what strategies do early childhood teachers use to engage boys in reading, 5) what are the implications for early childhood teaching practices and education?

In this chapter, I will present the findings of the survey and interview responses by early childhood teachers as they were asked to reflect on their beliefs regarding boys and reading. The findings will be reported in the form of narratives, tables, and poetry to bring forth the voices of early childhood teachers. As discussed in Chapter 3, the feedback and analysis of responses from the pilot study determined it would prove useful to present early childhood teachers with questions regarding both boys and girls. While the data was collected with respect to girls and will be summarized at the end of this chapter, only detailed analyses were conducted on the responses to the questions that helped answer the research questions. This chapter will present the data and Chapter 5 will then draw connections to the literature, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research. This chapter has been divided into three sections to present the data. The first section will discuss the results of the survey questions focused

on boys. The second section will present the results of the interview responses. A final section will summarize the findings.

Survey Findings

The data gathered through the online survey was qualitative because the early childhood teachers were asked questions requiring an open-ended response. A total of 31 early childhood teachers responded from an estimated sample size of 100. The online survey was accessed by early childhood teachers using a designated link through Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com). Use of the online survey format allowed for complete anonymity, therefore, in the reporting of the data it is not possible to identify the school or demographics of the student population being referred to when teachers discuss their beliefs regarding boys. The reporting of survey findings were organized according to the following themes: reading is more than decoding, make it interesting for boys, lots of wiggles lead to struggles for boys, and keep it co-educational.

Reading is more than decoding

The early childhood teachers were asked to write a belief statement regarding the teaching of reading. The intent of the question was to have the teachers reflect regarding their beliefs and practices before asking specifics with respect to boys. The data was used to attempt to answer the following research questions: 1) what do early childhood teachers believe boys need in order to be successful readers, and 4) what strategies do early childhood teacher use to engage boys in reading? The data provided insight into early childhood teachers' beliefs and practices as they approach the teaching of reading. In the coding and organization of this data, the following ideas guided the analysis: the

role of the early childhood teacher in reading engagement, early childhood teacher beliefs regarding reading, and early childhood teachers' approaches to teaching reading.

The role of the early childhood teacher in reading engagement

The responses that addressed this guiding idea of the role of the early childhood teacher in reading engagement were pulled from the data. The responses, 16 of 31, had been coded with RT (role of teacher), so it was possible to create the following unordered list from the original data:

- Getting children excited regarding books
- Encouraging children
- Taking care and time to nurture the love of reading
- Providing children with strategies
- Interacting with children
- Modeling what it means to be a reader
- Asking questions
- Selecting good books
- Challenging children to reach beyond what they know
- Allowing children to have a choice
- Finding books of interest to read aloud
- Being patient
- Teaching in a fun, interactive manner
- Teaching children to be detectives
- Fostering curiosity

- Helping children understand the purpose for reading

This unordered list was used for the purpose of separating the relevant responses from the original data for further analysis. When looking at this data set, you will notice the first word of each response uses an action verb thus illustrating how the early childhood teacher was active in the reading process. The list was then further organized according to Dewey’s (1913) four types of educative interest because of the role of the teacher in fostering a young child’s interest in reading. While an explanation was provided in Chapter 3, I will refresh your memory here as to the working definitions for the four types of interest activity for learning: *physical activity* involves engaging the senses through movement, *constructive activity* uses tools to sustain activity for a long time and encourages imaginative play within the context of an activity, *intellectual activity* refers to engaging in an activity to find out something, thus turning interest to learning, and *social activity* involves the presence of objects or individuals to carry an activity forward.

Table 4

Role of teacher responses

Physical Activity	Constructive Activity	Intellectual Activity	Social Activity
Teaching in a fun, interactive manner	Providing children with strategies	Teaching children to be detectives	Interacting with children
	Modeling what it means to be a reader	Getting children excited regarding books	Being patient
	Challenging children to reach beyond what they know	Fostering curiosity	Selecting good books

		Allowing children to have a choice	Encouraging children
		Helping children understand the purpose for reading	Taking care and time to nurture the love of reading
			Finding books of interest to read aloud
			Asking questions

This table displays the responses as they fit within Dewey’s (1913) framework for interest based on the definitions provided. The table shows statements for the role of the teacher concentrated in intellectual and social activity, and more limited with physical and constructive activity. The responses, while not directly in relation to a question regarding the role of the teacher, demonstrate how early childhood teachers view their role when reflecting upon their belief regarding the teaching of reading.

Early childhood teacher beliefs regarding reading

The responses in which early childhood teachers used the opening phrases of: *I believe...*, *Reading is...*, *Teaching reading...* had been coded with B (belief). The responses were organized as poetry, using the technique of repeating the same word or phrase to start each line, for the purpose of bringing forth the voices of early childhood teachers (Butler-Kisber, 1998; Kinsella, 2006):

Table 5

Teacher belief statements in poetry form

I Believe
I believe literacy is the foundation of learning
I believe reading starts from a very young age
I believe parents are important
I believe reading involves a balanced literacy approach
I believe all children have the ability to learn
I believe reading should be exciting
I believe reading needs to be fun
I believe learning to read is the foundation for everything
I believe that all children can be readers, but that not all children know what a reader is.

This table displays a selection of belief statements by early childhood teachers taken directly from the data. Of the 31 respondents, only the 8 statements displayed here started with the phrase *I believe* when developing a belief statement regarding the teaching of reading. The statements of belief emphasize reading as the foundation for all other learning starting at a young age being fun and exciting. The statement regarding balanced literacy appears to assume an audience familiar with terminology used in the field of reading. The beliefs seem to fall along a continuum from being vague to specific with the possibility for being open to interpretation.

Table 6

Teacher belief statements regarding reading in poetry form

Reading
Reading should be exciting
Reading is for all children
Reading is regarding teaching children to love books
Reading is taught by modeling
Reading is teaching phonemic awareness
Reading is regarding getting kids excited regarding books
Reading is taught in stages
Reading should start when children are infants

This table displays another selection of belief statements, a total of 8, taken from the data regarding the teaching of reading. These statements were selected because they started with the word *reading* and were the format in which some teachers expressed belief.

These statements appear to distance the teacher from a personal commitment by presenting a belief statement as a definition for reading.

Table 7

Teacher belief statements regarding the teaching of reading in poetry form

Teaching Reading
Teaching reading is helping students think critically
Teaching reading is providing tools for tackling text
Teaching reading is interactive

Teaching reading is the same for all students
Teaching reading is regarding creating lifelong readers
Teaching reading is regarding sharing great books
Teaching reading is regarding patience
Teaching reading is regarding repetition
Teaching reading is more than just decoding
Teaching reading is like baking cookies as you slowly integrate all of the ingredients (strategies) together to create a delicious result (the love of reading)

This table displays 10 belief statements beginning with the phrase *teaching reading*. The ideas were taken directly from the data and therefore attempt to represent the voices of early childhood teachers. Tables 5 through 7 share belief statements, of which 26 of 31 respondents included the specific word or phrase guiding the construction of the poetic verse, provide good information regarding the perspectives of early childhood teachers regarding the teaching of reading. The remaining 5 statements were expressions of belief but did not use the structure chosen for organizing the data. The 5 statements are included here to ensure the representation of all respondents:

- The foundation for learning to read is phonics
- At an early age, children should be given the tools to discover the magic of books

- When I teach reading, I like to help children make meaningful connections
- Books are important for young children to be excited about and interested in
- Teaching children to love books

It is evident from the statements that creating space for children: to develop as lifelong readers, to become excited regarding books, to learn reading strategies, and to understand the role of reading in their lives, are all part of the beliefs held by early childhood teachers.

Early childhood teachers' approaches to teaching reading

The coding of the data using the guiding idea of approaches to teaching reading specifically intended to examine references to strategies or teaching techniques referred to by the teacher for reading instruction. The initial findings are presented in the form of an unordered list:

- Asking open ended questions
- Phonics is the start
- Phonemic awareness
- Guided reading
- More than just teaching decoding
- Find books that are appropriate to the level
- Providing young children with the tools
- To be successful lifelong readers
- Sharing books
- Letting kids have a choice
- Getting kids excited

- Use many different strategies and techniques
- Focus on sound-letter recognition
- Building words
- Patience, repetition, providing help
- Find books that are of interest
- Fun and interactive

The following categories emerged from the data:

Good reading role models

Different qualities praised for each gender

Engage boys in reading at an earlier age (2-5)

Grouping: learning styles, interests, skills

Targeted instruction

The data was further categorized as: hands-on activities, materials, teaching, and engaging. Following the categorization, the data was connected to Dewey's (1913) framework of interest, as a means to view where the particular strategies mentioned by the teachers fall for the purpose of understanding practice in relation to interest.

Table 8

Approaches to teaching categories

Hands-on Activities	Materials	Teaching strategies	Engaging
Building words	Books at the appropriate level	Phonics Phonemic awareness Sound-letter recognition	Asking open ended questions
		More than decoding	Guided reading
		Sight words	Sharing books

		Choosing books	
PHYSICAL	CONSTRUCTIVE	INTELLECTUAL	SOCIAL

The category, *hands-on activities*, relates to physical activity because working with materials by hand engages the senses. The category, *materials*, relates to constructive activity because of the use of tangible tools for learning. The category, *teaching strategies*, relates to intellectual activity because they engage students in activities of the mind. The category, *engaging*, relates to social activity because the activities are interactive.

The belief statements and comments regarding particular strategies show what the teachers are thinking in general regarding reading, so now the lens shifts to view the responses specific to boys as readers, and in the final section of this chapter I will provide a summary to relate the general perspectives held by early childhood teachers regarding the teaching of reading and the specific viewpoints when asked to reflect on boys.

Make it interesting for boys

The perspectives held by early childhood teachers regarding what motivates boys as readers are reflected in their responses. The following data was gathered in response to the survey question: What do you believe motivates boys to read? The data attempts to answer the research question: What do early childhood teachers believe motivates boys to read? All of the responses either state or allude to the role of interest as a motivating factor for boys. The first stage of analysis sorted the data into an unordered list:

- Reading books with topics of interest-action and adventure
- Seeing progress

- Being recognized
- Read something of interest-magazines, newspapers
- Be involved in the reading
- Books that interest them-nonfiction
- Motivated by the topic
- Motivated by extrinsic rewards
- Strive for accomplishment
- Extrinsic rewards
- Love to read
- If it catches their interest-comic books
- Boys have to be interested in the topic of the books
- When the topic interests them
- When they have a chance to earn a reward
- Having good reading role models

After engaging in the process of coding and multiple readings of the data set, the statements were further organized into categories. The following categories were developed for arranging the data: genre, interest, competition, and kinesthetic.

Table 9

What do you believe motivates boys to read?

Genre	Interests	Competition	Movement
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Nonfiction Action & Adventure Magazines Comic Books Newspapers	Cars, trucks, dinosaurs, sports, wrestlers, superheroes, spiders	Extrinsic reward Seeing progress Peers Strive for accomplishment Moving up levels	Activities Exploring print Involved in Reading
CONSTRUCTIVE	INTELLECTUAL	SOCIAL	PHYSICAL

The bottom row of the table makes the connection between the categorization of the data and Dewey's (1913) four types of educative interest. The category, *genre*, relates to constructive activity because the different types of books are tools for helping boys sustain the activity of reading for a long period of time. The types of genres listed allow for boys to avoid what might be considered drudgery and engage in imaginative and playful interactions with books. The category, *interests*, relates to intellectual activity because the topics boys choose engage them in the act of reading to find out information. The category, *competition*, relates to social activity because boys become interested and focused on what other students are doing, and so then the social aspect of learning becomes part of developing an interest in reading. The category, *movement*, relates to physical activity because the tasks boys are being asked to do engage the senses in a purposeful manner and allow knowledge to grow.

The categorization and synthesis of responses to the question, what do you believe motivates boys to read, shows early childhood teachers believe boys need: a topic

of interest, specific genres of text, extrinsic rewards, competition, movement, and good role models. The next question for analysis will examine early childhood teachers' beliefs regarding what barriers may exist for boys when it comes to reading.

Movement lead to struggles for boys

The responses to the question, what do you believe are barriers to reading for boys, revealed early childhood teachers focused on high distractibility and boys' need for movement during reading time. The data attempts to answer the research question: What do early childhood teachers believe are barriers to reading for boys?

The findings were first presented in the form of an unordered list:

- Not being able to sit still
- Reading what is not interesting
- Boys struggle
- When they have no interest
- Boys get bored
- Not interested in the books
- Not the right level
- Bias that teachers have
- Disinterested in the books
- Social barriers
- Expectation placed on them from society
- Start when they are very young
- Do not want to be known as someone who likes to read
- Highly distractible

- Lack high interest reading material

This list of data was further organized into the following four categories: lack of interest, social expectations, active, and teacher bias.

Table 10

What do you believe are barriers to reading for boys?

Lack of Interest	Social Expectations	Active	Teacher bias
Not enough nonfiction	Play sports	Highly distractible	Boys not as strong at reading as girls
Get bored easily	Be outside	Hard to sit still	No books of interest in classroom library
Not at the right level	Not cool to be a reader	Difficulty focusing	Little value placed on boys as readers
Do not see the purpose	Stereotypes		Traditional classroom
INTELLECTUAL	CONSTRUCTIVE	PHYSICAL	SOCIAL

In the same manner of organization as the table regarding motivators for boys, the bottom row of this table draws a connection between the categorization of the data and Dewey's (1913) framework. Although in this instance the connection involves the type of interest that is not present for learning to occur, or how the type of interest highlights what is missing for boys. The category, *lack of interest*, relates to a lack of intellectual activity because there is no engagement in an activity that is purposeful for finding information. The category, *social expectations*, relates to constructive activity because of boys being given other tools for learning, not books, and this presents a barrier. The category, *active*, relates to physical activity because of the need for boys to move and through movement

their senses are engaged and learning can occur. The category, *teacher bias*, relates to social activity because if boys feel they are treated differently or separated from a group because of learning difficulties, the social aspect of learning will not be engaged and boys will not want to learn.

The categorization and synthesis of responses to the question, what do you believe are barriers to reading for boys, shows early childhood teachers believe boys struggle because of a lack of interesting reading material, teacher bias, and their desire to move. The perspectives of early childhood teachers have been carefully reported examining beliefs regarding the teaching of reading, beliefs regarding what motivates boys to read, beliefs regarding what barriers to reading may exist for boys, and now the focus turns to considering the learning environment for boys. The next question for analysis will examine early childhood teachers' perspectives on considering the possibility of a boys' only learning environment for the teaching of reading and what their responses highlight with respect to the best learning environment for boys.

Keep it coeducational

The following data was received in response to the survey question: Do you believe boys would benefit from being placed in a BOYS ONLY classroom environment for the teaching of reading? This question prompted early childhood teachers to consider the possibility of separating boys into a single sex classroom for reading instruction and produced a resounding response against the idea supported by explanations. The explanations for why early childhood teachers were not supportive of the idea helped to create the data set for the type of classroom environment best suited for boys. The data attempts to answer the research question: What do early childhood teachers believe boys

need to be successful readers? The purpose of this question was to determine the type of learning environment early childhood teachers feel is suitable for boys by presenting what may be considered an extreme idea of separating children by gender for the teaching of reading. This particular theme was more strongly developed through the interviews, however there were comments and insights into this theme that could be found in the survey data.

The following unordered list reveals the perspective of early childhood teachers regarding the learning environment that is best for boys:

- Focus on the needs of boys
- Have all different types of children together
- Grouping by reading level is better than by gender
- Benefit from being with girls
- With only boys they could get really distracted
- They can learn from girls
- Quality of teaching
- Environment matters
- Boys need influence of the girls
- Group according to learning style
- Group according to areas of interest
- Group according to skill level to provide targeted instruction
- Wish that the curriculum wasn't so frequently focused on a "girl style" of learning
- If girls are sitting still boys will sit still

- Teacher is prepared to work with boys

The data was further categorized using the following categories: classroom environment, teachers, learning styles, and role models.

Table 11

Perspectives on the best learning environment for boys

Classroom Environment	Teachers	Learning Styles	Role Models
Have all different types of children together	Focus on the needs of boys	Grouping by reading level is better than by gender	Benefit from being with girls
With only boys they could get really distracted	Quality of teaching		They can learn from girls
Environment matters	Teacher is prepared to work with boys	Group according to learning style	Boys need influence of the girls
Wish that the curriculum wasn't so frequently focused on a "girl style" of learning		Group according to areas of interest	If girls are sitting still boys will sit still
		Group according to skill level to provide targeted instruction	
CONSTRUCTIVE	INTELLECTUAL	PHYSICAL	SOCIAL

An attempt was then made to draw connections between the categories and Dewey's (1913) framework given the connection between developing interest as a motivation for learning. The connections to Dewey are shown at the bottom of the chart. *Learning styles* relates to physical activity because there are opportunities for students to move around when grouped in different manners. *Classroom environment* relates to constructive activity because when students are in a learning environment providing them

with the tools to be successful learners this helps them be better students. *Role models* relates to social activity because the girls' ability to sit still, as observed by their teachers, influences the behavior of the boys in order to move learning forward. *Teachers* relates to intellectual activity because when they are prepared to work with boys there is the potential for turning interest into learning opportunities.

In the next section, I will report on the findings from the interviews with early childhood teachers. The findings from the interviews will be reported in a similar manner as those from the survey to allow for drawing connections between the survey and interview data.

Interview Findings

The interviews helped to provide additional insight into the findings from the surveys. The interviews were conducted on the phone and no recording devices were used. The data being displayed here represents the actual phrasing of responses documented in my interview notes. The same coding process as outlined for the survey question responses was used in the analysis of the interview responses. With the display of actual statements drawn from the interview conversations, you will not find an unordered list of responses, but you will find the data categorized and a connection to Dewey's (1913) framework for interest and summaries in the form of poems.

The challenging aspect of organizing and analyzing the interview data was using typed notes that combined exact statements and my own paraphrasing of what was said by each teacher, however whenever possible during the analysis of data the teachers were contacted for clarification of statements. A total of five early childhood teachers were interviewed for the study. The benefit of the interview process was the opportunity to

provide greater depth to this study because I was able to ask my questions, but also allow for a deeper exploration.

Given the fact that the teachers interviewed for this study did not complete the survey, many of the same questions were asked and so the presentation of data will be organized in a similar manner to the reporting of survey data. The following questions were asked:

1. What is your belief regarding reading?
2. What do you believe motivates boys to read?
3. What do you believe are barriers to reading for boys?
4. What strategies do you use to engage boys in reading?
5. What do you believe is the best learning environment for boys?

It is important to note here that only questions regarding boys were asked during the interview. The interviews focused on boys to add the depth to the survey responses. In addition, approval from IRB was only for the questions regarding boys. The guiding themes were the same as those for analysis of survey data in order to provide opportunities to draw connections through the discussion in Chapter 5: reading is more than decoding, make it interesting for boys, Movement contributes to struggles for boys, and keep it coeducational.

Reading is more than decoding

The following data emerged in response to the interview question: What is your belief regarding reading? The data attempts to support or challenge the survey data and attempted to contribute to answering the research questions. This question was asked to gain insight into each teacher's core beliefs regarding reading before asking specifics

regarding boys. The statements selected for analysis were only those using the same beginning as those pulled from the survey data: Reading...; Teaching reading...; I believe... What follows is a look at how the teachers responded. An ellipsis was used to indicate places where I may have missed the exact wording or had simply paraphrased in my notes. In the display of data, I wanted to use exact statements by teachers as were provided for the survey. This decision was also made to keep the responses at the same level of brevity as those in the surveys for easier accessibility by readers. The interviewees were identified as A, B, C, D, and E to ensure confidentiality in the reporting of data. What follows are the statements made by the teachers interviewed and a summary of the paraphrased comments.

Teacher A: "Reading is the foundation upon which all other skills are built"

Teacher B: "Reading begins early as children master signs, symbols, and language in their environment...using environmental print helps children begin to learn to read"

Teacher C: "I believe reading needs to be taught from a very young age...reading is the foundation for success in all areas of learning"

Teacher D: "I believe it is important to get kids reading even if it's not what I would consider good for school"

Teacher E: "Reading gives my students the skills they will need to be successful for their school career"

These interview responses reflect the belief statements of the teachers about reading. A common focus is an emphasis on reading as a foundational skill for future success, and that as long as they are reading it should not matter whether it is environmental print or

something else. I then organized the data for which I did not record exact statements, but paraphrased comments into note form, and created an unordered list from my notes that had been coded for the role of the teacher, just as I did for the survey data for the belief statement about the teaching of reading.

- Finding books of interest
- Using environmental print
- Showing students book handling skills
- Using good literature
- Teaching decoding skills
- Learning about student interests
- Providing students with good reading skills
- Helping students learn the alphabet
- Using what is familiar to make connections to stories
- Making sure parents are involved
- Singing songs to learn letter sounds
- Acting out stories
- Reading to students as often as possible

The data were then categorized using the same categories as those from the survey data to try and create some continuity across the sets of data.

Table 12

Role of the teacher from interviews

Physical Activity	Constructive Activity	Intellectual Activity	Social Activity
Acting out stories	Using environmental	Teaching decoding	Finding books of

	print	skills	interest
	Showing students book handling skills	Helping students learn the alphabet	Learning about student interests
	Using good literature	Using what is familiar to make connections to stories	Providing students with good reading skills
			Making sure parents are involved
			Reading to students as often as possible
			Singing songs to learn letter sounds

This table shows a similar trend in the categorization of statements by teachers regarding their role with more comments related to social and intellectual activity and fewer comments related to physical and constructive activity.

The belief statements made by the teachers I interviewed covered more that I was able to document accurately, so for the statements I was not able to accurately record in my notes I paraphrased and documented to the best of my ability. The common thread across the interviews was a focus on reading as more than decoding, meaning there is more to the act and teaching of reading than simply trying to sound out words to read. This synthesis of the interviews will then be followed by a summary of the teachers' beliefs about the teaching of reading in the form of a poem.

The teachers all mentioned the importance of quality literature as integral to making reading fun because the stories are often more engaging for children. Several teachers discussed the use of environmental print and using what is familiar for young

children. For example, one teacher talked regarding labeling items in the classroom and encouraging parents to label items at home. A few of the teachers talked regarding making reading part of play and always having books accessible. Finally, parents were mentioned as being important and one teacher spoke to the importance of encouraging parents of English Language Learners to make sure they keep reading to their children in their native language even as they are learning English.

All of the teachers provided these insights and thoughts in the general conversation regarding reading, but then the focus shifted to talking specifically regarding boys as readers.

Make it interesting for boys

Following the discussion of beliefs regarding reading, the conversation started its focus on boys and reading. The following data shows the responses to the interview question: What do you believe motivates boys to read? The data attempts to answer the research question: What do early childhood teachers believe motivates boys to read?

Teacher A: “Boys are motivated by interest...in my class a lot of boys really like Spiderman and so I see them spending a lot of time with the spider books...I also notice the boys get motivated when books are presented to them in an exciting way...if I show pictures they like or if I act out characters...it seems they like books I suggest”

Teacher B: “ Boys seem motivated by pictures on the covers of books...I watch boys in my class go to the classroom book area and they sort through books looking at the covers...they like the animal books, car books, train books, and nature books”

Teacher C: “Boys like action and animals...they seem motivated when they see a friend with a book and then they all of a sudden want that book...and if it’s an animal book they want to pretend to be the animals and make the sounds”

Teacher D: “Boys like books they can act out...they like familiar characters like Spongebob”

Teacher E: “The boys in my class are very motivated when they are interested in the topic, or if they see their friends interested in something”

These statements were then categorized in the same manner as the survey data with connections to Dewey’s (1913) four types of educative interest.

Table 13

Boys’ interests from teacher interviews

Genre	Interests	Competition	Movement
Non-fiction	Spiderman	Peer influence	Act out characters
Action	Spiders		Pretend to be animals
Cartoon	Book Covers		
	Pictures in books		
	Animals		
	Cars		
	Train		
	Nature		
	Spongebob		

CONSTRUCTIVE	INTELLECTUAL	SOCIAL	PHYSICAL
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The table shows a relationship between genre and interest, and like the survey data mentions the influence of peers and an interest in being involved in the reading process. The bottom row of the table makes the connection between the categorization of the data and Dewey's (1913) four types of educative interest. The connections are the same as for the survey data, so I will review my thought process for you.

The category, *genre*, relates to constructive activity because the different types of books are tools for helping boys sustain the activity of reading for a long period of time. The types of genres listed allow for boys to avoid what might be considered drudgery and engage in imaginative and playful interactions with books. The category, *interests*, relates to intellectual activity because the topics boys choose engage them in the act of reading to find out information. The category, *competition*, relates to social activity because boys become interested and focused on what other students are doing, and so then the social aspect of learning becomes part of developing an interest in reading. The category, *movement*, relates to physical activity because the tasks boys are being asked to do engage the senses in a purposeful manner and allow knowledge to grow.

Following the categorization of the actual statements, I synthesized my notes representing paraphrased responses by the teachers to provide additional insight into the teachers' thinking. The statements regarding what teachers believe motivates boys covered more than I was able to document accurately, so I paraphrased and took notes to the best of my ability as I listened to the teachers talk. The synthesis of interview statements will be followed by a poem summarizing the teachers' beliefs about what

motivates boys to read. The most common thread was their focus on interest as a big contributor to engaging boys as readers. A few of the teachers commented that with young boys it was sometimes hard to determine whether they were motivated on their own or if the books they seemed drawn to were related to topics imposed by parents, teachers, and siblings. The teachers then proceeded to comment on young boys being motivated to read because people who are important to them value reading. The teachers of students from Kindergarten to Third Grade, focused quite a bit on competition and boys' desire to earn rewards, even if it was as simple as a gold star on a chart and especially if it meant extra play time. After the teachers talked regarding what they believed motivated boys, the conversation shifted to having them reflect on what they believe may be roadblocks to reading for boys.

Movement contributes to struggles for boys

The following data emerged in response to the interview question: What do you believe are barriers to reading for boys? The data attempts to answer the research question: What do early childhood teachers believe are barriers to reading for boys?

Teacher A: "The boys only want to read what interests them...so in my class with their interest in spiders they aren't always into reading other books"

Teacher B: "The boys are much more fidgety than the girls...they don't do well sitting still and listening to me read...it can be really frustrating sometimes because I feel I take too much time trying to get them to pay attention"

Teacher C: "I think boys are not taught to be readers...I notice parents placing emphasis on the sports and activities...it can be frustrating because I want them to be successful, but if they don't have good role models it's hard"

Teacher D: “Boys’ attention span is shorter so it’s hard for them to sit still...but if I let them move around it’s distracting to other students”

Teacher E: “Boys may not have the same skills as the girls in the class and so they get shy...they get distracted, or maybe it’s because they see reading as hard...and I believe it’s even harder for boys who don’t read at home”

The data was then categorized in the same manner as the survey data with connections to Dewey’s (1913) four types of educative interest.

Table 14

Perspectives on barriers to reading for boys from interviews

Lack of interest	Social Expectations	Active	Teacher Bias
Appear distracted	Not taught to be readers	Fidget	Comparing to girls
Appear to only be drawn to one type of book	Not reading at home	Do not sit still Distract others	
INTELLECTUAL	CONSTRUCTIVE	PHYSICAL	SOCIAL

In the same manner as was done for the survey responses, the interview responses were connected to Dewey’s (1913) four types of educative interest. The difference in this instance is the connection involves the type of interest that is not present for learning to occur, or how the type of interest highlights what is missing for boys. The category, *lack of interest*, relates to a lack of intellectual activity because there is no engagement in an activity that is purposeful for finding information. The category, *social expectations*, relates to constructive activity because of boys being given other tools for learning, not

books, and this presents a barrier. The category, *active*, relates to physical activity because of the need for boys to move and through movement their senses are engaged and learning can occur. The category, *teacher bias*, relates to social activity because if boys feel they are treated differently or separated from a group because of learning difficulties, the social aspect of learning will not be engaged and boys will not want to learn.

Following the categorization of the actual statements, I synthesized my notes representing paraphrased responses by the teachers to provide additional insight into the teachers' thinking. The statements regarding what might create barriers to reading for boys covered more that I was able document accurately, but as with the previous questions I did my best to take notes paraphrasing and summarizing the teacher's comments. A common thread was how active boys are and how it can interfere with instruction. At least one teacher mentioned how often the girls will notice when boys do not follow instructions or pay attention during reading time and wondered if this could impact a boy's sense of himself as a reader. At times during the conversation regarding potential roadblocks to reading for boys, the teachers commented on how frustrating boys could be at times when they were resistant to learning and not knowing how to redirect or refocus the boys. They discussed how much time they feel they take trying to get the boys, and not always all the boys, but a select few to focus on reading. During this part of the interview, there was definitely a strong emphasis on behavior issues and wishing for more support to help get the boys on track.

Teachers discuss strategies

When considering the motivating factors and the roadblocks to reading for boys, it was interesting to discuss the strategies used by teachers to try and engage the boys in reading. All of the teachers when discussing strategies, at some point during the conversation, mentioned they did not focus on gender when designing activities, but what they consider best for all students. The following data emerged in response to the interview question: What strategies do you use to engage boys in reading?

Teacher A: “Well, with the boys in my class so focused on Spiderman, I try to make activities or have books out that focus on spiders...I don’t really like spiders, so it’s hard for me to get excited regarding them, but it seems to get them interested in wanting to know more...I have materials out for them to draw...or when we are outside they try to find spiders or spiderwebs...even though they can’t read a lot of what the books say they try to sound out the names or can recognize the letters and try to copy them”

Teacher B: “one of my favorite activities is using movement to learn regarding letters...all of my students seem to really love trying to draw letters using different parts of their body like their feet, arms, and head”

Teacher C: “for some of the boys in my class it has been through their writing that they have become interested in reading...since we are still at the inventive spelling stage and writing can be a struggle for some I let them dictate their stories and share them with the class...feeling like authors seems to get them excited regarding books”

Teacher D: “I usually start off the year by asking parents to fill out a form that tells me regarding who their child is and the type of reading they do at home...I like reading books that allow students to interact or move or we act out the story...drama and being in front of the class gets some boys excited regarding books we are reading”

Teacher E: “I have tried to include more nonfiction...my classroom library probably used to have more fiction and with more books for girls, so I have tried to include more books of interest to boys”

The teachers who completed the survey were not asked this specific question, but I had pulled from the survey data the comments focused on approaches to teaching, so the responses to the interview question were categorized in the same manner.

Table 15

Strategies

Hands-on Activities	Materials	Teaching strategies	Engaging
Drawing	Books of interest	Connecting to interests	Going outside to explore environment
Copying words of interest		Asking parents for input	Drama
PHYSICAL	CONSTRUCTIVE	INTELLECTUAL	SOCIAL

In the same way as for the surveys, the categories were connected the Dewey’s (1913) four types of educative interest. The category, *hands-on activities*, relates to physical activity because when students are working with their hands they are engaging their senses and this heightens their interest. The category, *materials*, relates to constructive activity because of the opportunity to manipulate items in a purposeful manner to draw interest. The category, *teaching strategies*, relates to intellectual activity...The category, *engaging*, relates to social activity because...

Keep it co-educational

Following the discussion of strategies, the conversation then segued into asking the teachers to reflect upon all they had talked regarding motivators, roadblocks, and strategies to think regarding the type of classroom environment for helping boys be successful in school. The following data emerged in response to the interview question: What do you believe is the best learning environment for boys?

Teacher A: “I believe boys need a classroom environment that nurtures their curiosities and lets them move”

Teacher B: “I am not really sure...depends on the boy you are talking regarding because they are all so different...some boys in my class do just fine but others maybe might do well in a less structured classroom”

Teacher C: “I believe boys like to know they have the respect of the teacher”

Teacher D: “Boys like to move, so a classroom that lets them explore”

Teacher E: “It depends on the boy...I know boys who want to have their nose in a book like the girls and then I know boys who would rather play sports”

I also asked the teachers what their thoughts were regarding a boys’ only classroom environment as a possibility for teaching reading, and all of them indicated they felt boys benefit from having the girls in class. They did not believe it would make a difference for the boys at such a young age. At least one teacher did comment regarding it possibly being more beneficial for boys when they are older because then they would not be distracted by trying to impress the girls. Overall, the comments by the teachers regarding the best learning environment for boys focused on the use of kinesthetic activities and how this can be more easily achieved with very young boys because of smaller class sizes and the nature of infant to preschool classrooms, but those

teaching Kindergarten to Third Grade students commented on how challenging this can be in a traditional classroom.

The data was further categorized using the following categories: classroom environment, teachers, learning styles, and role models.

Table 16

Perspectives on best learning environment for boys from interviews

Classroom Environment	Teachers	Learning Styles	Role Models
Nurture curiosities	Aware of boys' needs	Movement	Girls
Structured		Exploratory	Boys who like to read
Choice			
Smaller class size			

The teachers, both survey respondents and those interviewed, were overwhelmingly focused on the importance of not separating students by gender, and so to provide some perspective on early childhood teacher responses regarding girls, what follows is a summary of the survey responses only guided by the themes that emerged for boys.

Synthesis of survey and interview data as poetry

When I originally started reporting my data, I had decided to create a poem for both the survey and interview data. After providing you with the responses and different displays of the data, I decided to create one poem for each of the themes because so many of the responses were related and it made more sense to conclude the discussion and displays with this section focused specifically on the poem. My hope is, after having

read through all of the explanation of data, you will find the poetry brings forth the voices of early childhood teachers. In addition, I hope the poetry contributes to encouraging reflective practice for teachers and an awareness of boys' learning needs.

Therefore, following the categorization of data and theoretical analysis, the data then took the form of a poem as an attempt to creatively synthesize the responses and represent the major ideas and thoughts. The use of poetry is purposeful for engaging teachers and making the information relevant and memorable.

Table 17

Synthesis of Data as Poetry: What do you believe motivates boys to read?

Motivating Boys
Read books with a topic of interest
A topic of interest catches boys' attention
Nonfiction, adventure, action, and humor
It is often challenging and hard
Consider offering rewards
Extrinsic rewards satisfy boys' desire to be recognized
As boys strive to accomplish and move up in levels
Let them move, jump, and play
A good reading role model gets boys involved

The following poem highlights the main ideas and perspectives set forth by the early childhood teachers regarding the barriers to reading for boys.

Table 18

Synthesis of Data as Poetry: What do you believe are barriers to boys reading?

Barriers to reading for boys
Movement and exploration
Boredom sets in
No interesting books available
Movement and exploration
Not cool to be a reader
Teachers, teachers, teachers
Movement and exploration

The following poem synthesizes the data regarding what early childhood teachers discussed as the best learning environment for boys.

Table 19

Synthesis of Data as Poetry: What is the best learning environment for boys?

Knowledgeable teachers
Who know regarding boys
Grouping
 by interest
 by skill level
 by learning style
 by gender
Knowledgeable teachers
Who know regarding boys

Girls

help boys learn

influence boys

reduce distractions for boys

Knowledgeable teachers

Who know boys

Summary of responses regarding girls

Reading is more than decoding

The belief statements outlined earlier in this chapter were the same for girls and boys with respect to this theme because the teachers were responding in general. The emphasis was on getting children excited regarding books and providing them with the skills to be successful readers. As the categorization of statements indicated in Table 4, the teacher's beliefs seemed to settle in the areas of interest set forth by Dewey (1913) that might be considered in favor of a girl's style of learning.

Make it interesting

The idea of connecting books and the teaching of reading to interests appeared in the survey responses for girls just as much as for the boys, however the difference was in the topics mentioned by teachers. While teachers focused on action and adventure for boys, the emphasis for girls was on friendship and feelings. The teachers commented on girls wanting to read books with characters they felt they could connect with and enjoying fiction and fairy tales. Societal expectations were mentioned as a barrier for boys however the teachers mentioned how society encourages girls to be readers and how it just seems to come naturally to girls.

Movement contributes to struggles

This theme is not true for girls, on the contrary, the teacher's comments regarding girls focused on how their ability to sit still and focus could hopefully be a positive influence on the boys. What came out in the survey responses regarding struggles for girls were boredom and how they are perceived by peers. The comments related to boredom focused on how girls do not want to put effort into reading if they feel it is too easy and boring, but the comments also touched upon how girls will act as though something is boring when in fact it is challenging because of how they feel they are being viewed by peers. The influence of peers was mentioned quite often as a potential struggle for girls because the teachers commented girls want to be at the same place as others in their peer group and if they are not it can be a struggle.

Keep it co-educational

The same discussion emerged for girls as it did for boys regarding the idea of a single gender classroom for reading. The majority of teachers talked regarding how girls can benefit learning from boys in the same way boys can benefit learning from girls. A strong thread throughout the comments was to not focus on gender, and that girls especially do not need extra help with reading because they are encouraged so much more than boys to be readers.

Summary

This chapter displayed the data gathered from the online survey and the interviews. The theme of *reading is more than decoding* displayed statements in which teachers discussed reading in the global sense of being the foundation upon which all other skills develop, the need for starting at a young age, and getting children excited

about books. The theme of *make it interesting for boys* revealed statements about teachers' beliefs as to the topics of interest for boys and their increased motivation for reading when the topic is meaningful. The theme of *Movement contributes to struggles for boys* brought forth statements in which teachers focused on how active boys are in the classroom and the challenges associated with getting them to focus, especially during reading time. The theme of *keep it coeducational* displayed the beliefs by teachers about boys benefitting from the influence of girls with the majority of respondents not supporting the idea of single sex classrooms for reading instruction.

These themes helped to guide the display of data and will be used again for the actual interpretation of data which will appear in the next chapter. In addition to the interpretation of data, a discussion regarding the implications of the findings and recommendations for future research will be presented. The online survey and the interviews contributed to teacher professional practice because it provided them with an opportunity to reflect on their teaching practice. The survey provided an opportunity for this, but it was really through the interview process that beliefs, ideologies, perspectives were revealed more fully because teachers were given the opportunity to reflect more openly.

CHAPTER 5

INTERPRETATION

The purpose of this multi-method dissertation study was to gain insight into the perspectives early childhood teachers hold with respect to boys as readers. The participants were early childhood teachers working in classrooms of children ages 0-8. Through the use of an online survey and conducting individual interviews with a small group of early childhood teachers, I gathered information reflecting their beliefs concerning what motivates boys to read, what may prevent boys from becoming readers, and insights into teaching practice. With all of the information I gathered, my hope was to emphasize the importance of understanding young boys as readers and the need for professional development opportunities for teachers focused on boys. The research has placed an emphasis on adolescent boys disengaging from reading, but gradually focus is shifting toward younger boys (Brozo, 2002; Maynard, 2002; Zambo & Brozo, 2009).

Ultimately, this study is very personal because I entered into the exploration of this topic because of my boys. I feel I have become a better parent, teacher, and researcher as a result of this process and I am looking forward to sharing my findings with others. The discoveries I have made both in the literature and my data results are concerning to me when I consider the educational environments my boys may be in and the teachers they may encounter as they go through school. I believe it is possible for one teacher to impact a child's motivation to read.

The following discussion attempts to answer the research questions driving this study by drawing connections between the literature and the themes developed from

analyzing the survey and interview data. In addition, you, as the reader, will have a clear understanding of where I stand. The research questions were:

1. What do early childhood teachers believe boys need in order to be successful readers?
2. What do early childhood teachers believe motivates boys to read?
3. What do early childhood teachers believe are barriers to reading for boys?
4. What strategies do early childhood teachers use to engage boys in reading?
5. What are the implications for early childhood teaching practices and education?

The themes I identified during my analysis of data were: reading is more than decoding, make it interesting for boys, Movement contributes to struggles for boys, and keep it co-educational. This chapter will use the themes to guide my responses to the research questions followed by a discussion of implications for early childhood teacher practice and suggestions for future research.

Themes guide interpretation

The interpretation of data was guided by Dewey's (1913) focus on the value of recognizing interest as motivation for learning. Interest and its role in motivation and learning became the primary emphasis in this study because it connected so solidly with what was emphasized in the responses by teachers. Interest has always been considered to be important for learning, and this is reflected in the data, however it appeared to me that while the literature makes reference to its value, the reality is teacher are not actually considering the role of interest in their everyday practice (Krapp et al., 1992). When

considering the learning needs of boys, I discovered it is important to pay attention to their interests because attitudes, effort, and learning will improve. The statements made in connection with each of the themes guiding this study are based on what appeared in the data from this study and are not meant to be used in reference to all early childhood teachers.

Reading is more than decoding

The theme, *reading is more than decoding*, was used to identify belief statements made by early childhood teachers regarding the teaching of reading. While the belief statements were not specific to boys, the interpretation of data attempted to respond to the research question: what do early childhood teachers believe boys need to be successful readers? While the data was broad in its scope of including all children, it can be inferred from the data, that what early childhood teachers believe is good for all children is probably close to what they consider being good practice for teaching boys. The following findings will be discussed in connection with the literature:

1. Teachers believe they are active participants in the reading process
2. Teacher beliefs situate the teaching of reading within Dewey's (1913) social and intellectual interest more than constructive and physical interests
3. Teachers believe reading is more than basic skills

Teachers believe they are active participants in the reading process

The process of coding the survey data for role of the teacher revealed teachers saw themselves as active participants in the teaching of reading. The data in Tables 5 through 7 in Chapter 4 displays the statements of early childhood teachers in which they

are using action verbs such as: providing, interacting, modeling, finding, teaching and helping. During the interviews, teachers described their enjoyment of reading with children and providing them with the foundation for reading. An emphasis was placed on modeling for children what it means to be a reader. While teacher may be active, the challenge is often motivating students to read, or to engage them in the learning process (Kindlon & Thompson, 2002).

In the context of early childhood settings, especially those for children 0-4, many children are often there for long days with their teachers. I believe this increases the need to more closely scrutinize the role of the early childhood teacher in preparing children for the expectations for success in school, especially reading, set forth by the current administration's focus on early childhood education (Education Week, 2009). With attitudes toward reading developing early, the early childhood teacher can potentially have a positive or negative effect on a child's decision to be a reader (Merisuo-Storm, 2006; Lundberg & Linnakyla, 1993). This makes me think of several conversations I have had with other mothers of boys during which they have described their sons' teachers suggesting extra testing, special support services, or being moved to a less challenging reading group. Based on what I have read, it is all too common for boys to be referred for services, and while it may be appropriate for some, the fact that 75% of students in special education are boys is concerning (King & Gurian, 2006; Weaver-Hightower, 2008). I believe it is important to bring into question here the skill level of the teacher and his or her level of competency in the teaching of reading and knowledge of boys (Merisuo-Storm, 2006; International Reading Association, 2007). The reason I raise this as an issue here is because I believe there needs to be more emphasis in teacher

education programs on gender specific teaching strategies. As a former instructor in a teacher preparation program, I am aware of the emphasis on differentiated instruction and multiple intelligences in the planning of instruction, and while those are good approaches for all learners, I still believe there is the need to understand gendered differences in learning.

Teacher beliefs situate the teaching of reading within Dewey's framework

Table 4 in Chapter 3 displays the data for belief statements regarding the teaching of reading using Dewey's (1913) framework as a guide. What I discovered in my process of categorization is teacher beliefs were situated within the social and intellectual interest areas more than the constructive and physical interest areas. This is my observation based on how the data fell within the categories. Of the 16 responses coded as role of the teacher, 7 are in the social activity, 5 are intellectual activity, 3 are constructive and 1 is physical (although could be social with the potential for no responses in the physical column). The categorization is based on my interpretation of the statements as they appeared in the data and the definitions for Dewey's four types of interest in learning. It appears with the majority of responses filling the social and intellectual activity boxes, it could be interpreted that girls' learning styles are favored, whereas the limited number of responses appearing in the constructive and physical columns indicates a lack of connection to boys' learning styles (Sax, 2007; Gurian, 2001; Maynard, 2004). This finding is of concern when considering what boys need because it favors school environments supporting the learning style of girls. It is quite possible that another researcher could make a different decision. What my interpretation possibly means is in relation to how a classroom is perceived to favor the type of learning preferable to girls.

Current discussions in the literature highlight the growing concern regarding the overfeminization of the early childhood environment, however others contend the gender of the teacher is of little importance (Weaver-Hightower, 2008). What is concerning regarding the way the data fell in the table is the possibility the learning styles of boys are not being considered in the discussion regarding reading. It may not be what is visible but is present as part of the hidden curriculum in schools (Henson, 2006). I believe teachers, despite any amount of training, approach their practice in a manner consistent with what is most familiar, and for most female teachers that would be expecting reading to be a quiet, calming activity for students. I make this statement based on my experiences teaching elementary school and what I have observed in teacher practice.

Teachers believe reading is more than basic skills

This theme is encouraging given the discussion in the literature about the common use of phonics in early childhood settings for teaching reading and the concern of its contribution to boys disengaging from reading (Adomat, 2009; Sax, 2007). While the pressures exist for teachers to emphasize a skills-based approach at a young age to provide a common foundation for all students, early childhood teachers presented beliefs focused on a broader perspective on reading (National Literacy Panel, 2008; Sax, 2007).

Make it interesting for boys

The theme, *make it interesting for boys*, was used to identify statements made by early childhood teachers in their belief statements regarding what motivates boys to read. The interpretation of data attempted to respond to the research question: what do you believe motivates boys to read? The following findings will be discussed in connection with the literature:

1. Boys are motivated by topics or genres of interest
2. Boys are motivated by competition
3. Boys are motivated by kinesthetic activities

The research indicates when boys find the point of entry into reading they can get hooked. It is important to understand how to motivate boys because once they think of themselves as readers it is easier to get them to read (Brozo, 2002).

Boys are motivated by topics or genres of interest

The key word in this guiding theme for interpreting the data is interest. Boys prefer reading regarding what is meaningful or purposeful to their lives because when it is of interest they have the background knowledge to support reading (Merisuo-Storm, 2006). The topics mentioned by the early childhood teachers in the survey and interviews, such as cars, are consistent with some of what is mentioned in the research and highlight the gendered nature of book choice (Dutro, 2002). While the literature encourages presenting the option of choosing books to read because preferences are linked to motivation and learning, the reality of most classrooms is children are not always given the opportunity to choose (Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1999; Merisuo-Storm, 2006). The books boys select are often nonacademic material not found in classrooms or school libraries, such as comic books, and the content is often more violent than what is deemed appropriate in schools (Newkirk, 2004; Worthy et al, 1999).

Dutro (2002) emphasizes the need for teachers to develop knowledge regarding books, but the reality is most teachers' libraries reflect their personal preferences regarding what is considered appropriate reading material for school. While the teachers clearly expressed being aware of interests in the surveys and interviews, I am still not

convinced that they follow through in practice with taking into consideration boys' interests. The reason I am not convinced is it appears to me from all of the literature I have been reading that researchers are overwhelmingly emphasizing the need to pay attention to student interests, especially boys, which signals to me a lack of attention being paid in the classroom. Teachers seem to know, but given large class sizes and curriculum mandates, but I believe some teachers do not want to put in the effort to consider boys' interests. This may be due to an emphasis on a gender blind approach to education and adhering to a specific curriculum (Sax, 2007). This is concerning, especially when the literature clearly speaks to the importance of interest for learning, and especially when you have classrooms with so many reluctant boy readers.

Boys are motivated by competition

The responses from early childhood teachers in Table 9 indicate boys respond well to extrinsic rewards. The discussion surrounding extrinsic rewards asserts boys like to know they will be receiving a reward for accomplishing a school task. What is interesting is the intense focus on the part of early childhood teachers on extrinsic rewards for boys, whereas the literature emphasizes the need to place value on developing intrinsic motivation (Deci, 1992; Baker & Wigfield, 1999). The reason for intrinsic motivation is its roots in being personal, and thus more likely to last longer, than something external. The challenge with considering the fact that boys are motivated by competition is most schools discourage teachers from incorporating it into the school day (Sax, 2007; Gurian, 2001).

Boys are motivated by kinesthetic activities

The categorization of data in Tables 9 and 13 shows boys are motivated by getting involved in reading and through activities. The literature supports this statement, but in a traditional classroom what do you most often see? Students are most often expected to be seated quietly at their desks with their attention focused on the teacher during instructional time. Boys are often in motion, and this fact is consistent with the current brain research indicating boys need to move to learn (Gurian, 2001). The challenge is using movement to motivate boys rather than letting what appear to be the complaints by teachers of boys being too wiggly becoming a barrier. One of the teachers I interviewed shared with me her strategies for getting children moving to learn the alphabet.

Movement contributes to struggles for boys

The theme, *Movement contributes to struggles for boys*, was used to identify statements made by early childhood teachers in their belief statements regarding barriers to reading for boys. Boys do not often see themselves as readers, and so if they encounter failure, or perceive their teacher does not place the same value on the act of reading for them, they will not be motivated to read (Worthy, 1996). The interpretation of data attempted to respond to the research question: what do you believe are barriers to reading for boys? The following findings will be discussed in connection with the literature:

1. Boys' desire to wiggle, move, and be active creates a barrier to reading
2. Societal expectations create a barrier to reading
3. Teacher bias contributes to barriers to reading

The data in Tables 10 and 14 categorized the data to fit somewhere within the guiding themes driving this discussion of barriers to reading for boys.

Boys' desire to wiggle, move, and be active creates a barrier to reading

In an earlier discussion regarding motivation, the responses of teachers had indicated boys are motivated to read when they are actively involved, yet the data is filled with an overwhelming sentiment of frustration with boys' desire to move. This belief is concerning because it highlights an observation from Kindlon and Thompson (2002) in which boys decide by third grade if school works for them because they often find themselves in classroom settings where they feel they cannot do anything right.

Undoubtedly, if teachers are focusing on movement as a barrier to reading success, they are making a note of it for parents and the boys may begin to feel frustrated with school. The boys' activity may be because they would rather be doing an activity that makes them feel successful (Merisuo-Storm, 2006; Worthy, 1996). It also appears this was mentioned quite often by teachers because of the expectations within a traditional classroom where students are expected to sit quietly during instruction time. While the teachers' statements express this belief as a barrier, the literature addressing boys' learning needs asserts boys require movement to learn (Zambo & Brozo, 2009; Gurian, 2001; Maynard, 2004).

Societal expectations create a barrier to reading

According to Bank et al (1980), the cultural norms established in the United States have created barriers to reading for boys. The teachers mention the emphasis on encouraging boys to play sports or be outside rather than reading a book. For my boys, books are a part of their play things, there is nightly story time, and visits to bookstores and libraries, but I am aware this is not the norm in all home environments (Heath, 1983).

Teacher bias contributes to barriers to reading

I believe bias towards boys is rooted in the challenges teachers face managing classroom behavior. A few of the teachers I interviewed mentioned requesting changes to class rosters so as not to have as many boys in their classes. However, despite this practice, I recently attended a professional development workshop and teachers were asked to pick a side of the room as to whether they preferred teaching girls or boys, and the majority of teachers stood on the side of the room for teaching boys. In classrooms, the libraries of teachers may not reflect the interests of boys (Merisuo-Storm, 2006). The presence of a gap between what boys are reading in school and outside of school because often what boys are reading is not always considered appropriate for school (Hyatt, 2002). Bank et al (1980) describe aspects of teacher bias, yet also assert it is less regarding the gender and more regarding teacher expectations that influence learning.

Keep it co-educational

The theme, *keep it co-educational*, was used to identify statements made by early childhood teachers in their belief statements regarding the best learning environment for boys. While the question did not specifically address a co-educational classroom, given the responses it quickly became apparent in the gathering of data the early childhood teachers' beliefs regarding the value of a co-educational classroom. The interpretation of data attempted to respond to the research question: The following findings will be discussed in connection with the literature:

1. Teachers believe co-educational classrooms are the best
2. Teachers believe boys would not benefit from a boys only classroom
3. Teachers believe their role is important in boys' success

The data in Table...presents the majority of responses against the idea of creating

a boys' only learning environment for the teaching of reading.

Teachers believe co-education classrooms are the best

The strong assertion from the survey and interviews is in favor of keeping boys and girls together. The responses are most likely connected with personal experience and seem to be perpetuating what Sax (2007) refers to as a gender-blind approach to education that may not be in the best interest of students. Sax (2006) in his review of learning environments for boys discovered that for reading a single sex environment may be the best option.

Teachers believe boys will not benefit from a boys only classroom

The negative influence of peers is the strongest argument presented for why teachers believe boys will not benefit from a boys only classroom. However, current research in single sex education indicates that boys may benefit from a classroom for the teaching of reading that is especially for boys, and this is especially true for boys of color (Zambo & Brozo, 2009). Many researchers assert peer pressure contributes to boys losing ground in reading because gender norms are socially constructed and being viewed as a reader is not always beneficial for boys (Merisuo-Storm, 2006; Dutro, 2002; McCarthey, 2001).

Teachers believe their role is important

The approach to instruction influences engagement and motivation for learning (McCarthey, 2001). When boys are able to connect on an emotional level, such an affective response, creates a natural energy boost and interest in learning (Hidi, 1991).

The focused analysis of statements made by early childhood teachers both in writing and during the interview process directed attention to their belief statements. In

analyzing the written responses on the surveys, the connections to practice were inferred whereas the interviews provided more direct connections with actual practice as the teachers were able to expand upon an idea.

Implications for practice

Implications for early childhood teacher practice

The interpretation of findings led me to the following 10 belief statements I have formed in light of the literature I have read and the study I conducted:

1. I believe boys need a literacy program emphasizing their interests
2. I believe parents need to be educated regarding how to help their boys be readers and how to advocate for their boys when teachers recommend medication or placement in a remedial reading group
3. I believe we need to be concerned regarding teacher bias towards boys and this should be explored in teacher education programs because bias leads to treating boys differently and it can impact whether boys feel successful in school
4. I believe teacher education programs need to address gender when teaching strategies for curriculum development and meeting the needs of students
5. I believe we need to focus on young boys because if the literature is correct in its assertion that boys decide by third grade whether or not school works for them, then something needs to change in early childhood programs
6. I believe in advocating for single sex classrooms for reading because developmentally boys and girls are at different places when they are young, however I believe the classrooms will only be effective if teachers are trained to work with boys

7. I believe we need to work towards changing boys' perceptions of what it means to be a reader
8. I believe we need to allow competition in the classrooms
9. I believe we need to encourage teachers to be reflective practitioners because it will lead to better practice
10. I believe we need to reflect upon the language we use as teachers when discussing boys and their learning styles

Suggestions for future research

I believe there is still a lot of work to be done to continue this conversation regarding boys and reading. I think it would be valuable to conduct this study within schools and within school districts. I am also convinced there is a need to examine early childhood teacher education programs especially with respect to the coursework and experiences students participate in to learn how to teach reading. While this study focused on boys as readers, I believe there is also a need to look at girls as readers because while they may appear to be successful in school, reading may still be a struggle. I also believe more research needs to be done in the area of the impact of teacher's beliefs about boys and the impact on instruction.

Summary and Conclusion

As I bring this multiple method dissertation study to a close, I would like to revisit the highlights and describe my learning. This study focused on bringing forth the voices of early childhood teachers to describe and understand their perspectives on boys as readers. Early childhood teacher shared with me what they believe motivates boys to read and what may create barriers to reading for boys.

I believe the findings support recommendations for early childhood teacher education programs to take a closer look at preparing students for teaching boys, especially given the fact that early childhood teachers are overwhelmingly female and may not have a familiarity with the needs of boys if they teach from experience. The need for professional development support focused on the topic of understanding learning differences based on gender. I believe providing opportunities for reflective practice and application in the classroom is important. The final question of the survey prompted teachers to respond to the following question: If you had the opportunity to participate in a workshop focused on boys and reading, would you be interested? Of the teachers who participated in this study, 90% of the survey respondents and 100% of the interview participants expressed interest in a workshop to learn more regarding boys as readers indicates an interest in understanding the boys. The strong response to an interest in attending a workshop focused on boys could suggest teachers' desire to understand how to move past the frustration and feel successful when meeting the needs of boys.

With the growing emphasis on the importance of early childhood education, heavily influenced by the work of Head Start programs, it is important to note the academic pressure is reaching boys at younger and younger ages and with this comes the need to examine teacher practice. There is the potential to enrich the conversation regarding boys' learning needs. I feel the process of conducting this study has made me a better teacher and a better parent.

While I focused on young boys, I feel there are a lot of ideas that are relevant to the university classroom, especially in teacher education programs. When I look to the future and the education experiences of my boys, I am hopeful they will have teachers

who value their individuality and are not quick to judge their desire to wiggle and move as a strike against them in school. Even though my oldest boy is just a toddler, I feel myself already preparing for the conversation with his Kindergarten teacher regarding what he will need to be successful and work to reframe a recommendation for testing for Attention Deficit Disorder.

I know there is a need for teachers to understand boys. I also believe very strongly there is a need to improve the standards for early childhood teachers, and I know this is starting to happen with changes coming in May 2010, because if they are serving in the role of the parent for so many children in today's society when both parents have to work it appears critical to me they have the proper training and knowledge for providing the best foundation for all children, but especially for boys.

APPENDIX A

BOYS AND READING

Fall 2009

The purpose of this survey is to gather information regarding your perspectives on boys as readers. Please be advised that your participation in this survey is voluntary. Should you decide to participate, your involvement will not pose any risk to you and your identity will remain confidential. You may stop the survey at any time. The survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

Please answer the following questions.

1. How many years of teaching experience (volunteer, classroom) do you have with children 0-8?

0 - 2 years 2 - 4 years

4 - 6 years 6 or more years

2. Write a belief statement regarding the teaching of reading

3. What do you believe motivates boys to read?

4. What do you believe motivates girls to read?

5. What do you believe are barriers to reading for boys?

6. What do you believe are barriers to reading for girls?

7. Do you believe boys would benefit from being placed in a BOYS ONLY classroom environment for the teaching of reading? Why or Why not?

8. Do you believe girls would benefit from being placed in a GIRLS ONLY classroom environment for the teaching of reading? Why or Why not?

9. If you had the opportunity to participate in a workshop focused on boys and reading, would you be interested?

YES

NO

Thank you for participating in this survey!

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