Supporting Lifelong Readers:
One book At a Time!

*Our Inquiry into Independent Reading*

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Context:
Both classes are located in the State College Area School District, which is a suburban school district in central Pennsylvania.

Classroom A is a third grade class at Radio Park Elementary. It is composed of 22 students, nine of which are males and thirteen are females. The students range in age from eight years old to nine years old. Two female students receive Title One services for reading. Three students go to a learning support class for reading instruction where they receive special and individualized reading plans. There are daily instructional guided reading groups where students are divided into three groups based on their AIMS WEB Comprehension and Fluency Tests and running records. In these groups, the students are given books selected by the teacher that are most appropriate for their reading level. After reading, students will answer comprehension and analysis questions.

Classroom B is a sixth grade class at Park Forest Middle School. It is composed of 25 students, thirteen of which are females and twelve are males. The students range in age from ten years old to twelve years old. Three students receive Title One services for reading. In the beginning of the year, the class was divided into groups based on their comprehension levels, as determined by PSSA scores from 5th grade and the 6th grade reading assessment given in September. Eleven students receive a modified and differentiated reading plan to enrich their skills in reading comprehension. In the fall, five students were part of a reading enrichment book club where they read a book of a higher reading level.

Rationale:

Jessica’s Rationale:
My interest and love for children’s literature as well as my own love for reading books led me to this inquiry. I think that reading is an extremely important aspect of elementary
schooling and I really want all of my students, present and future, to enjoy reading. My interest in the current reading curriculum and how independent reading is incorporated into that has influenced me to look deeper into reading instruction. I want to explore ways that I can strengthen my abilities to teach reading, especially in regards to independent reading.

Over the past few weeks I instructed a reading group of eight students using the book *All About Sam* by Lois Lowery. I observed my students laughing and smiling as they were reading the book independently and they often told me how much they enjoyed the story as well as the characters. I was able to have great discussions about the characters and the storyline with my group of students after reading the text. This specific discussion made me wonder if the students’ interest in the book contributed to their full understanding and comprehension of the story. I am curious to learn if students will be able to answer higher order questions on Blooms Taxonomy about a book that they are not interested in reading. I want to further explore these wonderings in order to help my students fully comprehend and understand each and every story they read. I think that my investigations and research into this wondering will help me to become a better reading teacher. Through this inquiry, I am hoping that I will be able to instruct my students with books that they can enjoy and comprehend.

Another part of my wondering came when I was observing my students at library class one week. I was watching students pick out independent reading books and I wondered how they each selected their books. Did they read the summary on the back? Did they choose it because of the pictures on the cover? Did they choose it because it was short? I am curious to learn why my students chose to read the books that they do. I want to learn how I can guide students to pick books that they enjoy, while also challenging them to reach higher reading levels. Through this inquiry, I hope to help my students pick independent reading books that they are interested
in. Ultimately, I want every one of my students to comprehend literature and really enjoy reading books.

As I was discussing this wondering with Melissa, we both realized we were really interested in children’s literature and how to help our students become better readers and enjoy the books they choose.

**Melissa’s Rationale:**

Because of my love for reading, writing, and anything involving literature, I decided to pursue a minor in English and interned at the Bellefonte Library as the Children’s Librarian Intern last summer. I believe that a child who reads a lot will benefit in a multitude of ways; literacy is of the highest importance for children of all ages, today and in the future. When considering a topic for inquiry, I found I had a lot of questions about children and their reading habits, especially when considering how independent reading can support the reading curriculum.

After finishing *Janitor’s Boy* with a group of my students in January, I asked them, “What did you like about the book? What did you dislike?” I had enjoyed the book myself so I was eager to know of their own thoughts and feelings. Only a handful of students shared reasons why they liked the book. One student liked that it taught lessons about being thankful and respecting one’s parents. Another student said that she liked how it was a little mysterious. However, more than half of the class responded, “I didn’t like it at all.” When prompted to share why, they said, “It didn’t have enough action in it” and “it was just about school, so it was boring.” There was also a mix of grades on the final comprehension quiz; students were able to answer multiple-choice questions correctly. On average, students missed one or two multiple choice questions out of 10, but when answering “higher level thinking” questions during the short answer section of the quiz, students missed points because they could not back up their
reasons with evidence from the book. So I began to wonder: Did liking a book correlate with getting a high score on reading comprehension? Does a book with more action, or something that interests my students, result in higher scores on comprehension tests? Would sharing independent reading books with one another increase their involvement in reading?

Upon discussing my wondering with Jessica, we realized we were having similar wonderings about reading, even though we were in different grades. Working with my 6th graders on reading has led me to wonder a great deal about how to strengthen my own teaching of reading and of the independent reading curriculum. I plan to utilize this inquiry in my future teaching career, so as to influence the love of reading in all of my future students and use their love of reading to improve their involvement in the classroom as confident readers. I hope to bring our two classrooms together with one goal—helping kids enjoy reading and succeed in whatever they read!

Main Wondering:
- How can we improve the independent reading curriculum in our classrooms?

Sub-questions:
- How do students find an independent reading book without any guidance?
- How does a student’s interest in a book influence his or her ability to answer comprehension questions, specifically questions of varying levels of Blooms Taxonomy?
- How does student recommendations motivate peers to choose independent reading books?
- How can book sharing, book walls, comprehension quizzes, and independent reading journals support the independent reading curriculum?
Data Collection:

Pre-Survey

Our first goal was to gain more understanding of our students as readers. We created a survey for each of our homerooms that gave us information about the genres of books that the students like to read as well as how they go about picking a book to read for independent reading. The sixth grade students took the survey using Google applications; this survey allowed students to choose from multiple-choice answers as well as elaborate through a paragraph response for some of the answers. The third grade students took a paper-based survey in class. The survey had multiple choice questions as well as open-ended questions where the students could elaborate on their responses. Both surveys were not anonymous. In order to help our students’ find books they were interested in, we thought it was important for the students to identify themselves on the surveys so that we could refer back it to when trying to help our students to pick independent reading books. (Appendix B)

Observations

In order to keep track of our students’ book choices and involvement in independent reading time, we observed them during library when they were able to choose books for themselves. We created a chart to check off what we saw students doing as they were in the library. Our chart covered a wide variety of actions that we observed the students doing while in library in order to account for any possibilities. (Appendix B)

We kept a notebook full of quotes we heard our students say to one another as well as to other teachers about their independent reading books and choices. We took these notes in any setting throughout the day. (Appendix B)
In order to keep track of the students’ actions during independent reading time, Jessica created a chart. She kept track of whether the student was reading an actual chapter book or a picture book. She also observed the students’ actions during independent reading time. She consistently scanned the room and watched the whole class. When independent reading time was over, she decided if each student was on task for the entire reading time, for only a short time, or was consistently distracted with other things and/or people. If a student was reading for the entire time, they received a $\sqrt{+}$. If they were reading, but distracted while they were reading, they received a $\sqrt{\;}$. If they were reading for only a short amount of time, then they received a $\sqrt{-}$.

(Appendix B).

**Implementations**

The first intervention we implemented was a reading journal. We had the students keep track of the books they read and if they were enjoying the books or not. When they finished a book, they would answer comprehension questions that were arranged in order from lowest to highest in Bloom’s Taxonomy. The third grade students answered six questions, while the sixth grade students answered nine. On the journal response page, students kept track of the book they read, answered a few minor questions, and then explained how they were feeling about their book choice and the book in general. (Appendix D)

The second intervention we implemented was allowing the students to share good books they enjoyed and display these around the classroom. In the third grade classroom, there was an interactive book recommendation wall where the students could fill out cards about a book they enjoyed and shared it with the rest of the class. The students had to write their names, the book’s title and author, the genre of the book, and a short statement of why another student in the class would like that specific book. The sixth grade classroom already had a recommendation poster set up by the school; this poster hung outside the classroom door in order to share books with the
rest of the school, rather than just within the classroom. The students added their book titles to
this poster, as they came across one that they wanted to share with their peers within the school.
(Appendix E)

**Post Survey**

The final part of our inquiry included a final survey. The final surveys in the third and
sixth grade classrooms looked different, but they both gave us information regarding our
students’ opinions on independent reading time and the implementations that we introduced over
the past few weeks. The third grade survey included many yes or no questions about the book
recommendation wall that was introduced. It also asked the students to explain their feelings
about independent reading time in our classroom. The sixth grade survey included many short
answer questions about the book recommendation poster, the students’ feelings on independent
reading, and what future independent reading activities the students might like to see. Both of
these surveys were not anonymous. They provided both of us with great information on our
individual students’ feelings on independent reading. (Appendix B)

**Data Analysis:**

**Pre-Survey**

For the sixth grade survey, Google Applications easily allowed us to analyze the data;
Google Applications created a summary of results in which we could read all the data from the
survey in an excel spreadsheet. From this, we could highlight words or trends we saw occurring
down the columns. Google Applications has an option to create a “Summary” in which we could
see the data in categories; each multiple-choice question was graphed and each free-response
was grouped underneath the question to easily compare and contrast each of the responses. By
looking at the graphs, we could quickly gather a consensus of the sixth grade students’ likes and
dislikes of book genres. We could also group students based on the types of literature each sixth
grade student liked to read and the ways they chose books. (Appendix C)

To analyze the third grade survey, we made notes of common answers that students gave to the questions they were asked. We made a chart to better organize the data and then counted up the number of students in each category. Looking at the data in this way allowed us to see the differences in the students’ preferences in book choices. It also showed us the similarities and differences in how third grade students feel about books they like and dislike and how they go about finding an independent reading book. (Appendix C)

Observations

To gather observation notes about the quotes the students say to each other or to us, we kept track of them in a notebook. This allowed us to mark down trends we saw about the students’ opinions on independent reading. We went through our notes and highlighted positive remarks in yellow and negative remarks in blue. This allowed us to group their comments according to positive and negative viewpoints on independent reading. (Appendix C)

In order to analyze the third grade survey, we went through each student’s survey answers and charted his or her answers. After tallying the students’ answers, we counted how many students gave common answers to each question. Organizing the data in this way helped us to see common trends and how the majority of the students felt about independent reading. (Appendix C)

Implementations

Every week we looked at and made note of both the third grade students and the sixth grade students’ responses in their book journal. We commented on their responses in order for them to improve their responses and future book choices for their next independent reading books. (We are thinking of creating a rubric for the comprehension question responses. The rubrics would be just for our records and would not be returned to the students.)
Post Survey

In analyzing the post survey data, we grouped responses of students for each of the question. We added up yes and no responses for each of the questions to determine the effectiveness of our implementations, our students overall thoughts on our implementations. When analyzing the data, we grouped them into piles for each question and tallied our responses. (Appendix C)

Explanation of Findings:

Claim 1: An interactive book recommendation wall is more motivating for students to look at and use rather than a single poster hung outside of the classroom.

We had two different types of book recommendation wall posters; one way was implemented in the third grade classroom and another way was implemented in the sixth grade classroom. In the third grade classroom, students took part in an interactive book recommendation wall on a bulletin board, where students could display book recommendation cards. As the students came across an interesting and enjoyable book that they wanted to share, they could fill out a card and place it on the bulletin board. In the sixth grade classroom, students wrote a list of books they were currently reading and placed it outside of the classroom for the whole school to see as they walked through the hallway.

After observing these two methods of book sharing, we came to the conclusion that the interactive book wall was more motivating for the third grade students in fostering a book sharing community. The sixth grade book recommendation poster outside of the classroom had a different effect; although it was created to support a book sharing community, it was not as motivating to students as the interactive book wall.
Jessica’s Findings:

The interactive book recommendation wall motivated students to contribute to it because it was prominently displayed in the classroom. In the third grade classroom, the book recommendation wall was behind a projector screen that could be raised and lowered as the students needed in order to view and add to the display. After the wall was introduced to the class, students would consistently ask the teachers to raise the projector screen so that they could view or add to the wall with book recommendation cards. Over the course of a few weeks, the teachers often heard students ask, “Can you please move the screen so I can see the book wall?” These students were aware of the use of the book wall and wanted to include their thoughts and ideas onto the wall. Often times, when one student wanted the screen raised to look at the wall, multiple students would congregate to the wall and look at it as well. As students were observing the wall, they would talk to one another about the recommendations they made as well as the recommendations their classmates had made. Students said quotes such as, “I see that you read this book, I read that too”, “I really liked that book too”, and “That book sounds super interesting, I think I want to read it next.” (Appendix B) The students wanted their ideas displayed and shared with their classmates as seen through how often they took recommendation cards, filled them out, placed them on the wall, and talked with one another about different book selections. Over the span of a month, sixteen different students added at least one card to the book recommendation wall. Currently, there are twenty-six book recommendation cards on the wall. Three are nonfiction books and twenty-three are fiction books. According to the post-survey results, seven of the students in the class took a suggestion from the book wall, read the book, and reported that they enjoyed it after reading it. The interactive book wall was motivating for students to participate in due to how prominently it displayed the students’ book choices and thoughts about different independent reading books in the classroom.
The interactive book recommendation wall also motivated the third grade students to independently find a reading book that they were interested in. They took the initiative to go to the library or look through the classroom library to get new independent reading books without reminders from the teachers. One student observed the book wall, saw a book he might be interested in, and asked to go to the library to check it out. He said, “Miss Silvi, I saw a book on the wall that I want to read. Can I go to the library to get it?” (Appendix B) This showed that the student observed the book wall and initiated his quest to find a good book that sounded interesting to him independently. Similar statements could also be heard from other students in the classroom. Before the implementation of the book recommendation wall, students did not frequently ask to go to the library to get new independent reading books. The book recommendation wall in the third grade classroom motivated the students to find independent reading books that they were more interested in at the library. Most of the students were very aware of the purpose of the book recommendation wall and looked at it in order to find a book that they would be interested in.

Melissa’s Findings:

The sixth grade poster was implemented by the middle school so that all students and teachers could share what they were reading with one another. The poster, therefore, needed to be hung outside of the classroom. Students were prompted to add to the poster as they came across a book they liked and wanted to share. (Appendix E) All students were able to add to the book recommendations poster; however, since it was outside of the classroom, the poster fell into a “out of sight, out of mind” trend. When discussing the purpose of the poster a few weeks after its implementation, I heard from a 10 of my students that they did not use the recommendations poster. I asked the class, “Have any of you checked out what other students wrote on their recommendations posters from other homerooms?” The class offered a choral response of “no.”
Again, I prompted students to add to their poster. On April 13, I noticed that 6 students added to the poster when I prompted them to do so during SSR. Students also admitted that they had not used the recommendations poster that was outside of the room when looking for a book during this same conversation on April 13. (Appendix B)

In reading over the post-survey responses, I received more data to support the fact that the poster was not motivating for my students, although it did support sharing within my classroom. (Appendix B) I found that nine of the twenty students polled admitted that they have not used the recommendations poster at all; they did not add to the poster to share their books nor did they look for recommendations of a good book to read on the poster. Out of the students who did use the poster, only four students found a book on our classroom poster. In considering why this might be, the poster does not share anything about the book or even what genre the book might be in. In this sense, students would only pick a book based upon the title, which would not lead them to a satisfactory read. The other eight students who used the wall either wrote their books on the poster to share what they were reading or perused over the lists in front of our door or in front of other classroom doors just to see what other students were reading, not to find a book recommendation. Only one student out of the twenty students who took the survey used a door other than our own to find a book; she found a recommendation from a 7th grade room. Two students used our poster to find a recommendation. The last group of students who admitted to not using the wall did not explain why. From further examination, three of these seven students shared in another question within the survey that they liked nonfiction books. One student, JJ, realized that students were not writing non-fiction books on the poster, so he did not find it helpful in any means of book sharing. Another student, CS, said “no” to using the wall because she did not need to, yet. CS reasoned that once she finished the Twilight series, that she would look on the wall. However, her plan to look at the poster does not represent a strong enough
correlation to being motivated or supported to use the poster. This mirrored the response of my entire class. Although students were aware of the poster, few used it as a tool to find a book. Only a small group of students took the initiative to refer to it to find a book, even though they were spread around the school.

**Collective Findings:**

When comparing the sixth grade responses to the third graders’ discussion and actions, we noticed a large difference in motivation and participation. The third grade students were very aware of its purpose, often asked to look at the wall, and went out of their way to fill out cards to be placed on the wall. The third grade students were also more motivated to use it as shown by how frequently they took recommendation cards and asked to raise the projector screen so they could see it. The sixth graders had to be reminded to add to the recommendations poster and look outside the classroom. The sixth grade students, although prompted to check the poster, did not use it on their own as the third grade students did. Although both implementations supported a book sharing community within the two classrooms, the interactive book wall was more motivating for the students to participate in than the poster hung outside the sixth grade classroom.

*Claim 2: Creating a classroom atmosphere that is open to book discussion and recommendations allows the students to feel comfortable asking the teacher and/or peers for good books to read and feel motivated to read and share their books with one another.*

In both the third grade and sixth grade classrooms, we implemented various strategies to foster a community of book sharing; this community provided students with the opportunity to
discuss their feelings about books both in written and verbal forms. Students were aware that they could ask their teachers and/or peers for help to find an independent reading book.

**Jessica’s Findings:**

In the third grade class, the book recommendation wall helped to create a stronger book sharing community in my classroom. It provided the students with a place to share interesting and enjoyable books they have read with one another and encouraged them to talk about what they have been reading. According to my post-survey results, every student answered yes to the question, “Do you feel like you can share what you’re reading independently with your teachers and classmates?” All of my students feel comfortable talking about their books not only with each other, but with their teachers as well.

I have seen and experienced many of the students talking about their book choices and what they are reading to one another as well as myself. One student in particular, AT, had been very excited to talk to me about her independent reading book, which was Harry Potter. Once she learned that I had read the same book and enjoyed it, she would come up to me almost every day and tell me how far she was in the book and what was occurring in the story at that particular point. AT could be heard saying, “Miss Silvi, I am on page 200 and something already”, “Miss Silvi, yesterday I read to page 103”, and “Miss Silvi, I am at the part with the sorting hat. I love it”. (Appendix B) Every time AT came up to me, I would respond with an excited expression to ensure that AT would continue reading and discussing her book with me. When AT finished her book, she could not wait to tell me. AT was smiling and eagerly waiting to talk to me the morning she finished. I was so proud of her for finishing it and showed it by complimenting her on her hard work and dedication to the book. This student felt comfortable talking to me about her book choice as shown through the multiple conversations I had with her over the span of a
few weeks. Our conversations motivated AT to continue reading her book as well as continue with the series because she is currently reading the second Harry Potter book. As the book sharing community in our classroom grew due to this inquiry, AT continued to share and expand her thoughts with me.

The conversations that I was having with AT not only motivated AT to keep reading, but it also motivated other students in the class to choose books they wanted to share and talk about. After other students observed AT enthusiastically talking to me, they started to come up to me and talk to me about their books as well. “Yesterday, I read a whole chapter of my book on the bus”, was said to me by one student, HD, a few minutes after I was discussing Harry Potter with AT. (Appendix B) On March 28, 2011, I observed my students at library class when they had time to pick their independent reading books. I observed four different students check out one of the Harry Potter books. After they made their selections, each student came up to me later that day to point out that they were starting to read Harry Potter. (Appendix B) Before making the third grade classroom open to book sharing, I had maybe seen one or two students in my class read Harry Potter. These other students wanted to share their book choices with me because they saw AT comfortably and enthusiastically discussing her independent reading book with me.

Over the span of a few weeks, the students could also be seen talking to one another about what was happening in their Harry Potter books and how they were enjoying the magical world that the Harry Potter books are famous for. This inquiry created a stronger book sharing community in the third grade classroom where the students were comfortable talking about their books with one another as well as with their teachers, as shown through the multiple conversations I had with the students and the students had amongst themselves.

Since the beginning of my implementations, I have helped multiple students find good independent reading books that they not only enjoyed, but are also more appropriate for them.
When I observed the third grade students during independent reading time before this inquiry, I noticed multiple students who were choosing to read picture books or informational books as their independent reading books instead of chapter books. On March 4, 2011, which was before the introduction of the book recommendation wall, the reading journals, and open book discussions, I observed seven out of twenty two students reading a picture book or informational book during independent reading time. After introducing ways to strengthen the independent reading curriculum, I helped two of these seven students find a more appropriate chapter book that they would enjoy during independent reading time. I sat down with each of these students separately and talked about what they each enjoyed reading. Together we picked out books that we both agreed were interesting and appropriate for them. Since I have helped these two girls choose better chapter books, I have observed them both only reading the chapter books we picked out together during independent reading time. As I was going through one of the students’ independent reading journal, I noticed that the student, SK, wrote, “I would recommend this book to a friend or my parents,” and “It was good and I liked it a lot. The book was funny and cute [cute].” In SK’s comprehension quiz, she was able to tell me a lot about the main characters in the books, such as their different character traits and how they were similar and/or different from her. (Appendix D) The actions and feelings that these two girls displayed about their new books tells me that because we found a good book for them, they were more motivated to read it on a regular basis.

I have also found that the open book sharing community in a classroom motivates students to read for a longer time during the allotted independent reading time. On March 4, 2011, before I introduced the book recommendation wall, the book journals, and open book discussions to my third grade classroom, I observed eight of the sixteen students in the class at the time only reading their books for a short amount of time. (See Appendix) The students could
be seen looking around the room at things other than their books, playing with things inside their
desks, and/or just flipping through the pages of their books and not actually reading. As this
inquiry grew and students were exposed to good, new and different books that their classmates
were reading, I observed more students reading for the entire allotted independent reading time.
On April 11, 2011, I observed the students in the same setting and fourteen out of the eighteen
students in the third grade class were thoroughly reading their books during independent reading
time. (See Appendix) I could tell they were reading because they had their books open with their
eyes on their books and every so often they would turn the page. I think that the book
recommendation wall had a lot to do with their increase in motivation to read. Because the
students were motivated to fill out the book recommendation cards and display them on the
bulletin board, they wanted to finish their books and share them with their classmates. I found
that a strong independent reading curriculum that is open to book sharing contributes to students
reading longer during the allotted independent reading time.

Melissa’s Findings:

Student opinions about books, conversations with my students, and student ownership of
the journals contributed to my understanding of the independent reading going on in my
classroom. From this, I was able to see a growth in the sharing community within my classroom
based around independent reading.

Students who were struggling were greatly supported and motivated to continue their
search for a good book because of the classroom atmosphere generated by our inquiry. In the
sixth grade classroom, one student, CB, was having a particularly hard time finding a book that
interested her. She first approached me to ask for help during class time, “Miss Vaughan, I don’t
like this book I got for independent reading, do I have to keep reading it and use it for the
journal?” I responded by telling CB that she did not need to keep reading it and could pick something else; I also reminded her that if she wanted help during library time, I would be more than willing to help her. When reading CB’s independent reading journal that week, I was able to check on her progress; she had chosen another book, Anne of Green Gables. (Appendix D) In her journal, she still did not seem particularly interested and wrote, “…it’s hard for me to understand. I’m not sure if I’ll keep reading.” By the third week, this student had selected a book she found entertaining, because the characters were so different than her and it was something new for her to read about. She wrote, “I like the themes and moods of the book…” Although she didn’t describe these themes, she added more details to her response than in previous entries. Throughout CB’s struggle, I continued to offer support. At one point I wrote, “…you can put the book back on the shelf. That’s the beauty of independent reading,” to let her know that the struggle to find a good book was okay and was all a part of the process. CB demonstrates confidence in discussing her independent reading because she was very excited to tell me when she found a book she enjoyed. Her progress toward finding an appropriate book has strengthened throughout our inquiry.

The independent reading journals also offered a place for students to provide names of classmates with whom he/she would recommend the book to; students wrote that they would share their books with their friends, and in some cases, provided specific names. In this case, journaling continued to support an open and comfortable atmosphere centered around book sharing. As AC wrote in the first week, “I would recommend it to Annie because she loves to read any type of “girl” book… and Annie read books like that before.” AC continued to share with me that she had already told her friend about the book, so I was aware of the sharing that was occurring outside of my prompting. ZW read a book about World War II and recommended the book to JJ in our class because he knew that his classmate also enjoyed books on the subject.
Another student, EL, also recommended a book to me; she wrote in her journal for week 2, “I hope you can read this book someday.” Because of our conversation in the journaling, I was able to respond, “I would like to!” and prompted her to “Tell me more!” about the book. Through this book sharing community, students were able to relate to one another within the class by recommending books and include me on the community sharing as well. In the survey given to students at the end of the inquiry data in April, one student wrote that she liked getting feedback from me and seeing how I responded to her written journal. Because of our conversations through the journal, I was able to support her reading explorations. (Appendix B)

Students also found that they could come to me and share more about their independent reading and reading preferences. One student who looked at the recommendations poster told me that he “never looked at the wall because he knew they were all fiction books and he did not like reading fiction books.” This student, JJ, did not find the book wall helpful because he “likes nonfiction books and no one recommends those on the wall.” On April 13, I also noticed that JJ was in fact right, there were no non-fiction books on the recommendations wall for him. I responded to JJ that I thought he should add a nonfiction book, so that he could, “recommend nonfiction books to his peers. That way, they might be able to recommend one back to him.” Another student asked me when we would present a project on independent reading books, as she wanted to share more with the class. This student, SA, also told me that she did not enjoy the poetry we were reading because she would rather focus on independent reading books.

My students illustrated their own motivation through their feedback at the end of the inquiry. In the post-survey, eight students shared specific books that they were recommended that they enjoyed. From these same surveys, most students felt that our class book sharing was helpful because they were told books that were similar to what they liked. (Appendix D) Although not all the students were able to name a book that their peers recently suggested,
fourteen out of the twenty students who took the closing survey said that they liked the idea of having a book sharing time within the classroom. In addition to responding “yes,” to the question about book sharing, students furthered their response with a few sentences. Responses included, “you can discuss the book with your friends,” “you can talk about the book with your peers and teachers,” “I like to share my favorite books,” “I like to know what kinds of books my friends like,” “I can see the book from another point of view,” “if I give them a book then they can give one to me,” “it is nice to see why they liked it.” (Appendix D) Because there is a wide variety of learners and interests within my room, I also found when analyzing my data that although some students were not able to find a book recommendation that interested them, they were able to still see the benefits of book sharing. Although PH did not find a book he liked from the wall, he still enjoyed seeing what books his peers liked to read. The students effectively proved that they understood the importance of book sharing and that they wanted to continue they’re sharing. Many students mentioned the future use of book sharing within the classroom. Thirteen students specifically mentioned sharing more with their classmates through some type of independent reading project or book sharing report. They were clearly enthusiastic about continuing to strengthen our book sharing community.

Overall, my sixth grade students had become greater conversationalists about their independent reading and were highly motivated to further the book sharing process with their classmates and myself.

Collective Findings:

Before implementing a book sharing community in our classrooms, we rarely ever talked to our students about their independent reading books. Because of this we never tried to motivate them to keep reading. We both felt that because we were motivating our students to read new and
different books, that they were more inclined to share these books with their classmates and teachers. Without an open book sharing community within our classrooms, our students might not have felt inclined to discuss their thoughts about their book selections with us.

**Reflections and Future Practice:**

We implemented a reading journal in each of our classrooms that consisted of a reading log where students kept track of their independent reading books and their thoughts while and after reading as well as comprehension quizzes that were completed after reading. We found that although the comprehension quizzes did provide an additional way for the students to share their understandings of their independent reading books, the quizzes did not provide enough evidence for us to support a solid claim. We organized the comprehension quizzes so that they consisted of higher level and lower level Bloom’s Taxonomy questions. After reviewing multiple students’ answers to their questions, we could not find enough consistent data patterns to form a conclusion about our students’ comprehension of their independent reading books. The comprehension questions prompted our students to share what they were learning from their independent reading book; however, answering questions was not motivating enough to better our independent reading plan.

As stated, we have seen more students become motivated to read independently and participate as responsible independent readers. However, we both noticed a few students in our classes who did not seem motivated to read independently through our implementations. As educators, we want to strive to ensure that all of our students become life-long readers. We are curious as to what implementations we could make in the future to meet of the needs of students who we did not reach through our inquiry process. Although our implementations have become
beneficial to many of our students, we are still researching for new ways to strengthen our
independent reading curriculums.

One thing that we had considered doing for our inquiry was to reorganize our classrooms’
libraries so that the books were arranged by genre and topic. Although we both did not end up
doing this, we are curious as to how this would have improved the independent reading
curriculum and influence the students’ book choices. We also wonder if adding new and
different genres and books into our classroom libraries would have had an effect on the students’
book choices as well. In the future we would like to organize our classroom libraries so that there
is various genres and levels of books for the students to choose from.

As we were researching and reading published texts from other teachers about
independent reading, we came across a book called *The Book Whisper: Awakening the Inner
Reader in Every Child* by Donalyn Miller. Miller found that comprehension quizzes and book
reports were not motivating for her students, which is also what we found. In the future, we hope
to try other methods to improve the independent reading curriculum. Miller offered two
particularly interesting methods to create a more stimulating independent reading curriculum.
One method was a book review activity in which students acted as book critiques and wrote
reviews on what they were reading. Another activity allowed the students to create a commercial
or advertisement about a book that they really enjoyed. In the future, we hope to try these
activities in our classrooms to continue strengthening the independent reading curriculum.

When beginning to strengthen the independent reading curriculum in our classrooms, we
choose a few activities to implement. As we have observed the few things we have implemented,
we found some things that worked and some other things that didn’t work in our particular
classrooms. We are curious to see if these other activities would further improve the independent
reading curriculum in our classrooms. In addition, as we progress in our careers, we will be
interested to see how these same activities play out in our future classrooms or if other implementations need to occur.
Appendix A: Annotated Bibliography

This is a collection of resources that we used to help us find information on how other teachers have implemented a strong independent reading program in their classrooms.


This article on the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) website is a solid source of information about reading in the United States; the author, a professor at NYU, separated age groups and reflected upon each group in terms of their reading. The author includes valid research with data and facts to prove the struggles of today’s youth with reading. This article provides some startling facts about students who do not read a lot; this verifies our concerns for implementing a stronger independent reading program, examining how students chose books, and helping our students choose appropriate independent reading books.

We found that this article will provide a basis for our research; we can consider the data presented in this article to extend our thinking about improving student’s independent reading. We will specifically look at the data from the elementary and middle school groups. We can also utilize this source because the author included her own bibliography from where she gathered her data.


This short article is about an approach that one teacher has used to implement a successful independent reading curriculum. The teacher calls it PIE (Personalized Independent
Enrichment) and it paves the way for students to share good books that they have read with their friends and classmates. The approach requires collaboration on the teachers and students’ parts as well as the librarians. The objective is for every student to successfully choose a book that he or she enjoys and can fully understand. There are three steps to the PIE approach. First, students must choose a book with the help of a teacher and/or a librarian. The student chooses a book based on interest and enjoyment. Second, the student should write about the book, focusing on drawing conclusions, making inferences, and summarizing. Third, the students share their books with one another and give each other recommendations for new books. These three steps have created a successful independent reading plan in this teacher’s classroom.

We think this source is valuable for us because we can take elements from it and apply it to our classrooms in order to help our students choose independent reading books. We like the idea of allowing the students to have time to talk about their books with the rest of the class. The authors of the article have had a lot of success with this method and it would be interesting to pursue further with our inquiry.


This source is a chapter from a book and outlines many different ways to bring independent reading such as scaffolding silent reading, and structured independent reading. The chapter illustrates the importance of teachers and students doing more than just reading during independent reading time. The chapter guides educators in strengthening the independent reading curriculum and to think beyond “Sustained Silent Reading.” The chapter also provides an interview with a professor, Linda M. Gambrell, who shares her personal view on why student
book choice is important and her advice for teachers striving for effective independent reading time. In the interview, Linda discussed that in order to strengthen independent reading in the classroom, teachers should conference with students, listen to them read, guide them in sharing books, and helping students decide what books are “just right.” She believes that through these actions, students will flourish in a teacher-supported independent reading program. Linda also supports cleaning out and organizing the classroom library.

The chapter suggests that teachers and students engage in book talks, community reading and sharing, interactive read-alouds, and student-teacher conferences about books. We also can refer to this source when thinking about how to informally assess our student’s independent reading. The chapter also includes an example of a “Checklist for Just Right Books.” The book also provides questions that we can ask our students about how they choose books, why a specific book interests/did not interest them, and what books they may recommend to other students. The book also provides sample questions for checking for student comprehension, which ties in one of our sub-questions.

Because we have found this chapter to be extremely helpful with our inquiry, we may consider looking into the rest of the book for further discussion on implementing independent reading.


This source is an online PowerPoint by two student teachers from Richland Elementary School. We felt that this source would be helpful in gauging another student teacher’s
perspective on independent reading. This online PowerPoint provided pictures of the classroom, posters that supported independent reading, and examples of anecdotal notes.

Page and Owen also provided examples for data collection and how to begin implementing a focus on independent reading in the classroom. This source supported the use of reading journals from the start, as we have seen from other sources as well. We know that reading journals will be a valuable way to gather data from our students. This source also provided us with the idea to create a poster on finding a “Just Right Book” so that our students, our mentors, and ourselves can refer to the poster when looking for a book. The “Just Right Book” Poster outlined the ways we can know if the book is “just right”; it says: “you really understand it, you read it smoothly, only a few words are tricky, it makes sense, and you feel good about it.” Page and Owens also gave photographs of how they organized their classroom’s library, so that when we organize our classroom library, we will have a solid visual of how to go about organizing the classroom. They also gave us tips when conferencing or interviewing students about their independent reading books, “listen to the student read a short passage, discuss something in the story, ask a question to get the student to think more deeply… etc.”


This website is written by a student from The University of North Carolina student. She did a research project on how to help fourth grade students choose “just right” books. She was curious to see if her students were choosing appropriate books and how her students defined “appropriate books”. She found out that she had a very different definition of appropriate books than her students did. In order to find out how she could help her students choose just right books, her interventions included book journals, small group discussions, and
parent/teacher/student conferences.

We feel that this website is a good source for us because Parks conducted a very similar research project to the one that we are currently inquiring about, which is helping students to choose independent reading books. She offers statics and data that we can use to compare our findings with when we are finished our interventions. We can compare what she found to what we found and see if we are getting similar or completely different results. We feel that this website is very well written and easy to follow, which will help us to compare our data and findings.


This article provides a lot of valuable information on how to improve reading comprehension in grades kindergarten through 3rd. Section five of the article explains that establishing a motivating and engaging context for the students to read helps to improve their comprehension. The panel researched reading comprehension and the article provided valuable data and statistics about how reading comprehension improved in various students.

A part of our inquiry is researching how we can improve our students’ reading comprehension and this article will help to support our findings. We have found this article useful because it offers a base for our research on improving student comprehension through motivation and interest in reading.


This book is a great reference for us because it offers a lot of valuable information about
how to organize classroom libraries based on interest and topic of books. The author stresses that it is important to teach students to make good independent reading book choices in order for every child to value reading.

We think that this source will be very valuable because it has a lot of great ideas about helping children to pick books that can be implemented in the classroom. It also gives us ideas about different book logs that teachers have created and given to their students. There are numerous work samples of students’ reflections on their independent reading books. This source will be very useful when constructing a new book log for our classes. *Still Learning to Read: Teaching Students in Grades 3-6* is especially relevant to our inquiry because it is written for teachers in grades three through six.


The book *On Solid Grounds: Strategies for Teaching Reading K-3* is written by an elementary school teacher. This book offers a lot of great information on how to match different children with appropriate books for independent reading time. It stresses the importance of finding a “just-right” book for every student and taking the time to match a student with a book. The author gives great incite to how to help children pick a book that not only interests them, but also is at the appropriate reading level.

*On Solid Grounds: Strategies for Teaching Reading K-3* is a great resource for our inquiry because it offers a lot of great ideas on how to help students pick independent reading books that they enjoy. There is an appendix in the back of the book that includes examples of reading logs that the author has used before in her classroom. It also includes book reflection response sheets that we could use to gather ideas from when making our own reflection sheets to give to our students. We think that one of the most beneficial parts of the book is a list of survey

This reading is a chapter in the book, *Bookmatch: How to Scaffold Student Book Selection for Independent Reading* and focuses on looking at the individual readers in each classroom. Since this chapter has provided support for our inquiry, we are going to look into reading the whole book. This online chapter has provided us with a new way of classifying our students, and is an excellent source for independent reading inquiries; the article was well-written and easy to understand, even when explaining the findings of the study on children of different reading levels.

Wedwick and Wutz provided an interesting look at classifying students to best help each individual student in the classroom. The authors called this the “Independent Reading Continuum of Self-Selection Behaviors” and outlines three categories of which to classify readers: “Reluctant, Transitional, Self-Directed.” Each of these three categories in the continuum provides characteristics for the type of reader and what goals the teacher and student should implement into their independent reading plan. The chapter goes on to give a real life example for each category and how the authors assisted the reader. Wedwick and Wutz said that their continuum “helps us set instructional objectives and learning goals, as well as meet individual needs.” What we liked about this chapter is that it supported our goal of helping INDIVIDUAL students within our classroom. Because of this chapter, we are considering grouping our students into these categories.
Appendix B- Data Collection Sheets

Figure 1: These are examples of Jessica’s data collection notebook. It consists of conversations she had with students about independent reading as well as things she observed in the classroom.
Figure 2: This is an example of a chart that Jessica used to collect data on what students were doing while in library class and choosing their independent reading books.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read the first few pages</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pull a random book from the shelf</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check the back of the book</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask the librarian or teacher</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search for a book (not about books)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just walk around</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4: This is an example of a chart Jessica used to observe her students during independent reading time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JB</td>
<td>P ✓ -</td>
<td>P ✓ -</td>
<td>C ✓</td>
<td>C ✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KC</td>
<td>C ✓ +</td>
<td>C ✓ +</td>
<td>C ✓ +</td>
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<tr>
<td>WBD</td>
<td>C ✓ +</td>
<td>C ✓ +</td>
<td>C ✓ +</td>
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<tr>
<td>ED</td>
<td>C ✓ +</td>
<td>C ✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>KD</td>
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<td>C ✓</td>
<td>C ✓ +</td>
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<tr>
<td>HD</td>
<td>C ✓ -</td>
<td>C ✓</td>
<td>C ✓ +</td>
<td>C ✓ +</td>
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<tr>
<td>MF</td>
<td>C ✓</td>
<td>C ✓ +</td>
<td>C ✓ +</td>
<td>C ✓ +</td>
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<tr>
<td>EH</td>
<td>C ✓ +</td>
<td>C ✓ +</td>
<td>C ✓ +</td>
<td>C ✓ -</td>
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<tr>
<td>SK</td>
<td>Absent</td>
<td>Absent</td>
<td>C ✓ +</td>
<td>C ✓ +</td>
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<tr>
<td>NK</td>
<td>Absent</td>
<td>Absent</td>
<td>P ✓ -</td>
<td>Absent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JL</td>
<td>P ✓ -</td>
<td>C ✓ -</td>
<td>P -&gt; C ✓ +</td>
<td>C ✓ +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AL</td>
<td>C ✓ +</td>
<td>C ✓ +</td>
<td>C ✓ +</td>
<td>C ✓ +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JM</td>
<td>Absent</td>
<td>Absent</td>
<td>P ✓</td>
<td>C ✓ +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GM</td>
<td>Absent</td>
<td>Absent</td>
<td>Absent</td>
<td>Absent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CP</td>
<td>C ✓ -</td>
<td>C ✓ +</td>
<td>C ✓</td>
<td>C ✓ -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SaS</td>
<td>P ✓ -</td>
<td>C ✓</td>
<td>C ✓ +</td>
<td>C ✓ +</td>
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<tr>
<td>SiS</td>
<td>C ✓ +</td>
<td>C ✓ +</td>
<td>C ✓ +</td>
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<tr>
<td>ES</td>
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<td>C ✓ +</td>
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<td>C ✓</td>
<td>P ✓</td>
<td>C ✓ -</td>
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<tr>
<td>AT</td>
<td>C ✓ +</td>
<td>C ✓ +</td>
<td>C ✓ +</td>
<td>C ✓ +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FT</td>
<td>Absent</td>
<td>Absent</td>
<td>P ✓ -</td>
<td>Absent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C = chapter book
P = picture book
✓+ = reading the whole time
✓ = reading and distracted
✓- = read for only a short time
Figure 3: This is an example of the survey the third grade students were asked to take before many of the implementations went into affect.

Figure 4: This is an example of the survey the third grade students were asked to take at the end of this inquiry process.
Figure 5: This is an example of the survey the sixth grade students were asked to take online before many of the implementations went into affect.
Figure 6: This is an example of the survey the sixth grade students were asked to take at the end of this inquiry process.

| Name: __________________________ | Date: ______________________ |

**Independent Reading Questions**

Please answer the following in a few sentences:

1. Have you noticed if your reading preferences have changed over the course of the year? Describe if your likes have changed or if they have not, and how you knew.

2. Have you come across any new favorite books in the recent months? List them here:

3. Have any of your peers, friends or teachers suggested any books to you recently? If yes, please share here:

4. Do you like sharing books with your friends or peers at Why or why not? Do you find it helpful? Why or why not?
Figure 3: This is an example of Melissa’s data collection notebook.
Figure 4: This is an example of the data chart that Melissa kept while she observed her students in the library picking independent reading books.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Name</th>
<th>Reading a book</th>
<th>Socializing</th>
<th>Walking around</th>
<th>Reading Summary</th>
<th>Pulling random book off shelf</th>
<th>Asking a friend</th>
<th>Asking an adult</th>
<th>Looking on Computer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Jade</td>
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Appendix C- Data Analysis

Figure 1: This is an example of how Jessica analyzed the information she gained from the student surveys at the beginning of this inquiry process.

Figure 2: These are examples of how Melissa analyzed the information she gained form the student surveys at the beginning of this inquiry process.
Appendix D: Independent Reading Journals

Figure 1: This is an example of the reading journal.

Figure 2: This is an example of the sheet the third grade students had to fill out every week to keep track of the books they were reading.
Figure 3: This is an example of the comprehension questions that the third grade students had to answer once they were finished reading their independent reading books.

Figure 4: These are examples of the sheet the sixth grade students were asked to complete once a week about the book they were currently reading.
Figure 5: This is an example of the comprehension questions that the sixth grade students were asked to complete after they finished reading a book.

Reading
Comprehension Questions

I read The Way of the Sword by [Name Redacted]

Date [Date]

1. Identify the main character of the story. (Pick the character you think is most important.) Jack Fletcher

2. Describe a character trait for the character listed above, using details from the story to explain your choice. Jack showed a lot of courage, because he persevered to become a samurai despite being a civilian, or "foreigner." He also faced many challenges because of his skin color and race. His bravery and determination led to his success. Despite facing discrimination and mistreatment, Jack never gave up and continued to work hard to achieve his goals.

3. Where does the story take place? (Be specific: when and where.) Niten i-ji (the school of two swords) in Japan, around the year 1700.

4. Summarize the rising actions and events of the story. (Look back in the book if necessary!) Jack signs up for the trials for being in the Circle. He must protect his father's reputation and learn the way of the sword. Jack faces many challenges and must overcome them to become a true samurai.

5. What is the main conflict of the story? The main conflict is between the main character, Jack, and his father, Mr. Fletcher.
6. Decide what caused this conflict.
   The death of Jack's father and then Jack taking the cutter caused this conflict. Dauygan, originally murdered Jack's father for the cutter.

7. Determine the climax of the story and elaborate as to why. (Remember, the
   climax of the story is the turning point.) The climax is when
   Dauygan Ryu takes the cutter because
   now Jack can't protect it, he has to
   get it back. Also, now the nature of the world
   is at risk; because, with the cutter, Dauygan's
   employer can go anywhere and attack anyone.

8. Conclude who solved the problem and how he/she solved it.
   It was Jack's friend solved it. She told him
   that the only mistake that was made was
   Dauygan's (he let Jack live). She also told him to
   pursue the way of the Dragon.

9. Did the story have any themes? If so, list and describe the themes that
   appeared in the story. Use details from the book for support.
   The story had many, especially in the samurai vs.
   Jack and Dauygan Ryu vs. Jack fights. There was
   also betrayal because one of Jack's friends tried
   to cheat in the circle of three trials. There's also
   purity in Jack's life. There's courage, because of all the
   bravery in Jack, Jack is stand up to the people
   who looked down at him as a gojin.
Appendix E: Book Recommendation Walls

Figure 1: This is a picture of the book recommendation wall in the third grade classroom.
Figure 2: This is an example of the book recommendation poster in the sixth grade classroom.
Appendix F: References

Figure 1: This is a list of books that we reference directly.

References


