FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE DECISION TO READ: AN INVESTIGATION OF FIFTH GRADE STUDENTS' OUT-OF-SCHOOL READING HABITS

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According to recent research, there is a strong relationship between the amount of out-of-school reading a student engages in and his or her success in school in reading (Anderson, Fielding, & Wilson, 1988; Stanovich, 1986; Taylor, Frye, & Maruyama, 1990; Walberg & Tsai, 1984). This relationship reveals the importance of investigating why so few children choose to read outside-of-school. The purpose of this study was to investigate why some children choose to read out-of-school and others do not, focusing not only on factors that contribute to intermediate grade students' decisions to read, but also on the students' perspectives about these factors.

The results of this study revealed several significant factors related to the decision to read. Using regression analysis, three of the variables studied proved to be statistically significant: self-concept as a reader, television viewing, and organized activities. The qualitative data helped to further explain factors related to voluntary reading. Children who came from homes where voluntary reading was promoted had parents who read aloud to them, modeled reading themselves for recreational purposes, recommended good books, and discussed books at home that they and their children were reading. It was also discovered through these same interviews that students who were in schools where they were given opportunities to read self-selected materials and were given access to materials that they were personally interested in reading were more likely to engage in voluntary reading than those in classrooms where these practices were not evident. This study also found that caution should be taken when relying on external rewards to motivate and promote voluntary reading.

According to recent research, there is a strong relationship between the amount of out-of-school reading a student engages in and his or her success in school in reading (Anderson, Fielding, & Wilson, 1988; Stanovich, 1986; Taylor, Frye, & Maruyama, 1990; Walberg & Tsai, 1984). Anderson, Fielding, and Wilson (1988) found that time spent reading books out-of-school was the best predictor of a child's growth as a reader from the second through the fifth grade. Time spent reading out-of-school has also been tied to vocabulary development, fluency, comprehension, and general intellectual development (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Anderson, Fielding, & Wilson, 1988; Stanovich, 1986; Taylor, Frye, & Maruyama, 1990).

However, researchers (Anderson, Fielding, & Wilson, 1988) who have investigated time spent reading out-of-school and reading achievement have

found that most children do very little reading out-of-school and only a small number read for extended periods of time. Researchers have documented that while most children begin their school careers with positive attitudes toward reading, many show a steady decline in reading attitudes as they progress through school (Anderson, Tollefson, & Gilbert, 1985; McKenna, Ellsworth, & Kear, 1995), and these negative attitudes are reflected in a steady decrease in the amount of leisure time children spend reading (Greaney, 1980). By the middle and high school years, the majority of children rarely read for pleasure (Cline & Kretke, 1985; McKenna, Ellsworth & Kear, 1995). Even if these students are not initially struggling readers, reluctant readers tend to gradually lose academic ground, since time spent reading is tied to academic success (Anderson, Fielding, & Wilson, 1988; Stanovich, 1986; Taylor, Frye, & Maruyama, 1990).

Hansen (1969) reported that the out-of-school reading habits that students establish by the fifth and sixth grades are the independent reading habits that remain with them throughout their lifetimes. This helps to explain the fact that half of all American adults admit to never having read a single book since graduation from high school and most of the rest admit to reading only one book a year (Woiwode, 1992; Morrow, 1991).

Other researchers who have explored the independent reading habits of intermediate grade students have examined time spent out-of-school reading books, comics, and newspapers (Greaney, 1980); the correlation between reading achievement and attitude toward reading (Walberg and Tsai, 1984); the home environment as it relates to children's leisure reading behavior (Neuman, 1986); the relationship between leisure-time reading with home environment, attitude to reading and motivations for reading (Greaney and Hegarty, 1987); time spent engaged in various activities outside of school (Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding, 1988); the antecedents of ludic reading (pleasure reading) and its consequences (Nell, 1988); and the impact of time spent reading at school and at home on fifth and sixth grade students' reading achievement (Taylor, Frye, & Maruyama, 1990).

Statement of the Problem

Due to the relationship between out-of-school reading habits and school achievement that have already been established, the dearth of reading done outside-of-school has become a major concern in our schools today. As Thomas and Moorman (1983) assert: "The student who can read, but chooses not to, is probably the most crucial concern confronting our educational institutions today." This relationship between out-of-school reading and success in school reveals the importance of investigating why so few children choose to read outside-of-school. Other researchers (Long & Henderson, 1973; Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding, 1988; Greaney and Hegarty, 1987; Guthrie, Schafer, Wang, & Afflerbach, 1995) have investigated students out-of-school reading habits, but rarely have they included the voices of the students in their investigations. Cazden (1986) now believes that research should focus on what the student has to say, think, and feel, rather than on

someone else's perception of the problem. As Nieto (1994, p. 396) points out: "...students' perspectives are for the most part missing in discussions concerning strategies for confronting educational problems." For this reason, this investigation of why some children choose to read out-of-school and others do not focused not only on factors that contribute to intermediate grade students' decisions to read, but also on the students' perspectives about these factors. Listening to why some students choose to read out-of-school and others do not has the potential to extend and enrich our understanding of this phenomenon.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to advance our understanding of why some children choose to read out-of-school and others do not. The following research questions guided this study:

1. Are there differences between avid and reluctant readers from diverse economic backgrounds in regard to their involvement in after school activities and their reading attitudes and motivations?
2. What factors (i.e. television viewing, homework, organized activities, play, chores, attitude toward recreational reading, attitude toward academic reading, self-concept as a reader, and value of reading) contribute the most in predicting out-of-school reading?
3. What are the similarities and differences among avid and reluctant readers from diverse economic backgrounds across the following categories in regard to reading?
   a. home life and preschool literacy experiences

b. personal thoughts about reading
c. reading preferences and access
d. social influences on reading
e. classroom context/influences of reading
4. What suggestions do avid and reluctant readers make to teachers and parents for promoting voluntary reading?

One hundred and ninety-nine fifth grade students from two elementary schools were surveyed and a subset of those students were interviewed to investigate whether or not differences existed between fifth grade avid and reluctant readers from differing socio-economic backgrounds in regard to a variety of factors including amount of out-of-school reading, involvement in after school activities, and their motivations and attitudes toward reading. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used for this study. The purpose for using mixed methods was to reveal both statistical data pertaining to factors related to out-of-school reading and to investigate students' perspectives on voluntary reading through individual interviews. Data collected for research questions one and two reveal statistical data pertaining to the amount of after school voluntary reading reported by fifth grade students, their involvement in other after school activities, and their reading attitudes and motivations. Data collected for research questions three and four reveal factors related to voluntary reading revealed through individual interviews with a selected group of these fifth grade students.

Research Settings and Participants

I chose to study fifth grade students because other researchers have shown that this is the critical age at which students are establishing patterns of voluntary reading. The two schools in this study were both recognized by the state for their academic achievement, yet their neighborhoods were vastly different in terms of ethnicity and socioeconomic status. A brief description of the two schools used in this study follows.

Fieldcrest Elementary School

Fieldcrest Elementary School is one of five elementary schools in a somewhat rural area on the east side of a large metropolitan area in the southwest. The single story building housed approximately 400 fourth through sixth grade students drawn from surrounding neighborhoods. The student population was ethnically diverse (13% African American, 32% European American, 53% Hispanic, and 2% Asian American), with 70% of the student population eligible for free or reduced lunch. The faculty (3% Hispanic, 94% European American, and 3% Asian American) was experienced (12 years average teaching experienced). Approximately 14% of the students received Special Education services and approximately 4.5% received Gifted and Talented services, while 13% were identified as Limited English Proficient (LEP) and 100% qualified for Title 1 support services as this school was a designated Title I school.

Mountain View Elementary School

Mountain View Elementary School is one of 66 elementary schools in a large school district in the southwest. The single-story building housed approximately 789 kindergarten through fifth grade students drawn from the surrounding residential area in the north west area of the city. The student population was somewhat ethnically diverse (3.2% African American, 5.2% Hispanic, 85.2% European American, 6.3% Asian American, and .1% Native American), with 3% eligible for free or reduced lunch. The faculty (2% African American, 0% Hispanic, and 98% European American) was experienced (12 years average teaching experience). Approximately 5% of the students received Special Education services and approximately 8% received Gifted and Talented services, 3% were identified as Limited English Proficient (LEP) and 0% qualified for Chapter I support services.

Participants. One hundred ninety-nine fifth grade students initially agreed to participate in this study and secured permission from their parents to participate by returning the parent consent form. Seventy-nine of these students were from Fieldcrest Elementary School and one hundred and twenty of these students were from Mountainview Elementary School. Of the 199 fifth grade participants in this study, 105 were female and 94 were male; 133 were European American, 41 were Hispanic, 13 were African American, 8 were Asian American, and 1 was Native American. Seventy of these participants were considered low income and 152 were considered middle or upper income students. Sixty-eight of the 70 low income students came from Fieldcrest Elementary. One hundred forty-nine of the 199 participants passed the reading portion of the

state's assessment of academic skills. Only the data from the students who passed the reading portion of this test were used in this study as lack of reading ability was not a variable studied. Students from Fieldcrest Elementary School had a 75% passing rate and students from Mountainview Elementary School had a 92% passing rate on this state mandated basic skills test.

Data Collection Procedures

I collected data over a four month period. Data for the study came from six different sources: my reflexive journals and memos, students' activity logs, researcher administered reading surveys, reading achievement information from state mandated assessment testing, free or reduced price lunch status, and student interviews. All surveys and questionnaires were given during the language arts block of the school day, taking no longer than fifteen minutes each. Interviews were conducted during the language arts block or during special area periods such as physical education, art, or music. Each interview took approximately twenty to thirty minutes.

Data Sources and Procedures

Reflexive journals and memos. Throughout the study's conceptualization, data generation, and analysis phases, I kept a detailed reflexive journal of all communication about the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which included notes about contacts between myself and the classroom teachers and principals, and memos of my thoughts, comments, and wonderings about issues that emerged during data collection and analysis.

Activity logs. All fifth grade students from both schools kept daily out-of-school activity logs for a ten day period. Each morning during the ten day period, students were asked to record the previous day's after-school activities (in fifteen minute intervals) using a preprinted log. A three day training period was used to orient students on how to use these logs. This log was designed after Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding's (1988) activity form that they used when they investigated fifth grade students out-of-school activities. The questions at the bottom of the log were intended to help students better remember their activities from the previous day. For instance, a question would ask, "What time did you eat dinner or what time did you go to bed?" By filling in the time for the major events of the day, I felt it might be easier for students to remember what time they did specific activities such as watching television, reading a book, playing, or doing homework. These students were not aware, however, that their reading habits were being studied.

Reading attitude and motivation surveys. All fifth grade participants from both schools completed the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (McKenna & Kear, 1990) and the Motivation to Read Profile (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni, 1996). These two surveys were group administered to each of the language arts classrooms participating in this study. The Elementary Reading Attitude Survey asked students to respond to twenty statements about their attitudes toward both recreational and academic reading.

After the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey was given, the Motivation to Read

Profile was distributed. This survey asked students to respond to twenty questions that revealed information related to how students' perceive themselves as readers and whether or not they value reading. The items that focused on self-concept as a reader were designed to elicit information about students' self-perceived competence in reading and self-perceived performance relative to peers. The value of reading items were designed to elicit information about the value students place on reading tasks and activities, particularly in terms of frequency of engagement and reading-related activities.

Reading achievement information. Reading achievement information was obtained on all participating students to determine if each participant was reading on grade level. Only data on participants reading at or above grade level were used in this study, as I did not want reading ability to be a factor for not reading outside of school. Reading achievement was determined by the state's standardized achievement test scores given at the end of the fourth grade. At Fieldcrest Elementary School, 15 of the 60 students who took the state's mandated assessment were eliminated from participating from this study because they did not pass the reading portion of this assessment. At Mountain View Elementary school, only nine of 113 students were eliminated from participating in this study because of failing the reading portion of this assessment. Teacher interviews were also used to corroborate this information. This information provided additional descriptive data on all participants. Special education students were not eliminated from this study if they took and passed the reading portion of this assessment.

Income information. Free or reduced price lunch status was obtained on all participants to identify family income level. Realizing that this also was a gross measure of income level, I found it to be more reliable than a student self-report of parental education and occupation that I received.

Student interviews. All participants, who completed the activity logs and the surveys and also passed the reading portion of the state mandated assessment in reading, were divided into two groups by school: 1) students from Fieldcrest Elementary School; and, 2) students from Mountainview Elementary School. Then each student in each group was rank ordered by the number of minutes he or she spent voluntarily reading outside of school. I then interviewed the ten readers from each school who reported the most voluntary reading outside of school and the ten readers from each school who reported the least voluntary reading outside of school. Those students who reportedly read the most from their schools were considered avid readers. Those students who reportedly read the least from their schools were considered reluctant readers. The avid readers (regardless of income grouping) interviewed for this study voluntarily read an average of 62 minutes each day during the ten day data collection period. The reluctant readers (regardless of income) interviewed for this study did no reading voluntarily at home during the two week recording period.

These avid and reluctant readers then fit into one of four groups based on income

level and number of minutes a day of voluntary reading: 1) middle/high income avid readers; 2) low income avid readers; 3) middle/high income reluctant readers; and, 4) low income reluctant readers. Twelve middle/high avid readers, eleven middle/high reluctant readers, eight low income avid readers, and six low income reluctant readers were interviewed for this study. The reason for the unequal group sizes is that when I originally began my interviews, I assumed that all the students from Fieldcrest Elementary School would be low income and all the students from Mountainview Elementary School would be middle/high income. Therefore, I set up interviews with approximately twenty students from each school: ten avid readers and ten reluctant readers from each school. However, after obtaining these students free and reduced lunch status, I discovered that not all of the students I had interviewed from Fieldcrest Elementary were low income. Therefore, I interviewed fewer low income students than middle/high income students, which accounted for the unequal group sizes.

Both avid and reluctant readers were interviewed about their out-of-school reading habits as well as leisure time habits in general. The interview began with a question regarding the activities they and their families engage in after school until bedtime. Amount of television viewing, interaction with family and friends, and other activities that occupied leisure time were also noted. The purpose of this line of questioning was to see the relative placement of reading in their homes in comparison with other activities.

After the general interview, more directed questions about reading habits, preferences and attitudes were asked. The purpose of these questions was to explore how students felt about themselves as readers and to investigate their motives behind their reading habits and preferences. Each student was asked to discuss reading instruction in their classrooms to see if there was a connection between in-school and out-of-school reading. And finally, questions pertaining to the relevance of reading were discussed in an attempt to see if students viewed out-of-school reading as purposeful to their lives. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed for data analysis.

Data Analysis Procedures

Quantitative analysis procedures. Two-way analysis of variance was used to determine whether there were statistically significant differences between fifth grade avid and reluctant readers from differing socio-economic backgrounds in relation to their: out-of-school reading habits, involvement in after school activities, and reading attitudes and motivations. This design, called a 2 x 2 factorial design, incorporated two factors [income and avidness], each having two levels [low income and middle/high income]. In this design, the factors and their levels defined my four subgroups (i.e. middle/high income avid readers, low income avid readers, middle/high income reluctant readers, and low income reluctant readers), and represented different populations in terms of the dependent variable being measured. Next, I assessed the effects of the two independent variables (income and avidness) on each dependent measure (voluntary read-

ing, television viewing, homework, organized activities, play, chores, attitude toward recreational reading, attitude toward academic reading, self-concept as a reader, and value of reading), one at a time. These main effects were noted an all comparisons. Interactions, which showed the effects of the two independent variables (income and avidness) in a combined form, are then discussed. The interaction variance is whatever remains in the way of group differences after the main effects variations have been removed.

Because of the large number of ANOVAs run and the unequal cell size in each group, two accommodations were made. First, the alpha level was adjusted to .01 to find levels of significance so that the likelihood of finding statistical significance was less likely to occur by chance. And secondly, a "unique solution" was used to correct for the unequal cell size. This alternative formula is used in randomized factorial designs when equal cell size is not assumed and when a "hierarchical" solution is not appropriate.

Multiple regression analysis was also used to analyze the quantitative data to determine which of the variables that were reported contributed the most to out-of-school reading. The dependent variable used was amount of out-of-school reading and the independent variables were income level, amount of television, homework, organized activities, play, and chores, and attitude toward recreational reading, attitude toward academic reading, self concept as a reader, and value of reading.

Qualitative analysis procedures. I used Grounded-theory methods to analyze the qualitative data collected. This involved a systematic set of procedures used to derive a grounded theory about a particular phenomenon (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Transcripts of all interviews with fifth grade participants, journal entries and notes provided the data for qualitative analysis. Data was analyzed using the technique of "constant-comparative analysis" in which pieces of information were compared against other pieces of information across all subjects. Through this methodology, the concepts and relationships among the pieces of information were not only generated but they were also provisionally tested.

Research Findings and Conclusions
Differences Between Avid and Reluctant Readers

Research Question 1: Are there differences between avid and reluctant readers from diverse economic backgrounds in regard to their involvement in after school activities and their reading attitudes and motivations?

Out-of-school voluntary reading. The findings from this study suggest that most fifth grade students do very little voluntary reading outside of school. Fifth grade students in this study spent an average of 17 minutes a day reading voluntarily outside of school. Avid readers, however, read voluntarily an average of 46 minutes a day, whereas reluctant readers read voluntarily only an average of three minutes a day outside of school. There were no significant differences between low income and middle/high income fifth grade students in terms of amount of voluntary reading outside of school.

These findings are consistent with the

work of Greaney (1980), Greaney and Hegarty (1987), and Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding (1988) who found that most children do very little reading outside of school and only a small number read for long periods of time. These data reveal that the dearth of reading done outside of school is not an exclusively low income phenomenon as some have speculated (Greaney, 1980; Himmelweit & Swift, 1976; and Guthrie & Seifert, 1984). This study, as well as Greaney and Hegarty's study (1987), reported that the amount of time children spend reading voluntarily outside of school is more directly related to the existence of a positive educational home environment and in particular to the value placed on reading in the home than on socio-economic background.

After school activities. The findings from this study suggest that fifth grade students participate in a number of after school activities, some of which appear to compete for time with voluntary reading while others seem unrelated to the decision to read voluntarily outside of school. Television viewing and participation in after school organized activities appear to be the most salient of after school activities related to out-of-school voluntary reading.

Reluctant readers reported that their favorite after school activity was watching television, and they watched significantly more television a day than did avid readers. Low income reluctant readers watched the most television (an average of 136 minutes of television a day compared with low income avid readers who viewed an average of 86 minutes of television a day). Interviews with both avid and reluctant readers confirmed their viewing practices. While avid readers did watch some television after school, all of these readers reported that they would rather read than watch television.

Low income fifth grade students watched significantly more television a day than did middle/high income students. Interviews with low income participants suggested that many of these students came home to empty houses after school and that they watched television because they didn't feel they had anything else to do. These students reported that television provided a source of company and entertainment.

Excessive television viewing has been offered as a possible reason many children choose not to read outside of school. Neuman's displacement theory (1988) suggests that excessive television viewing displaces other activities that are crucial to the development of leisure time reading. This study supports this finding by revealing that reluctant readers watched significantly more television a day than did avid readers. This study indicates that one possible reason reluctant readers aren't reading more is that they are spending time, when they could be reading, watching television.

The findings from this study also suggest that participation in after school organized activities can further inhibit voluntary reading in students who are already reluctant readers. Many of the middle/high income reluctant readers in this study stated that they simply didn't have time to read outside of school due to extremely busy schedules. Besides doing nightly homework, these students discussed being involved in various organized activities including soccer, basketball, swimming,

tennis, piano, and foreign language instruction. While busy schedules were used as an excuse by reluctant readers, it is important to note that middle/high income avid readers were also involved in numerous organized activities. However, unlike reluctant readers, students who were avid readers didn't appear to let extracurricular activities get in their way of reading. In spite of involvement in organized activities, these middle/high income avid readers still found time to read voluntarily outside of school.

Low income students noted a different set of reasons for not reading out-of-school. While some said they didn't have time, few mentioned involvement in organized activities or homework as being the culprit. Students from low income families reported that they were often too busy to read because of taking care of younger siblings or doing chores. The finding in this study that suggests that after school organized activities inhibit voluntary reading in students who are already reluctant readers is an area that has not been studied by other researchers. Further investigation is needed to determine if involvement in organized activities keep some students from reading voluntarily outside of school.

Reading attitudes and motivations. The findings from this study suggest that avid and reluctant readers differ significantly in terms of their attitudes and motivations to read. Avid readers in this study had much more positive attitudes toward recreational reading than did reluctant readers. Avid readers also had much higher self-concepts as readers and tended to value the importance of reading more than reluctant readers.

These findings are consistent with the work of motivational theorists who have suggested that self-perceived competence and task value are major determinants of motivation and task engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Lepper, 1988). According to Self-determination theory (Deci et al., 1991), when a student realizes the value of an activity, he isn't necessarily more interested in the activity or intrinsically motivated, but he is more willing to complete the activity because of the value associated with it. Other researchers (Greaney and Hegarty, 1987) who have investigated the voluntary reading habits of intermediate grade students have also found that voluntary reading is related to the value placed on reading and in particular to the value placed on reading in the home. These research studies suggest that when students value the act of reading, they are more likely to engage in voluntary out-of-school reading.

Factors that Predict Out-of-school Reading
Research Question 2

What factors (i.e. television viewing, homework, organized activities, play, chores, attitude toward recreational reading, attitude toward academic reading, self-concept as a reader, and value of reading) contribute the most in predicting out-of-school reading?

The findings from this study revealed three variables that were statistically significant in predicting out-of-school voluntary reading in intermediate grade students: self-concept as a reader, television, and organized activities. A significant positive correlation was found between

out-of-school voluntary reading and self-concept. This suggests that students who have positive self-concepts as readers are more likely to engage in voluntary out-of-school reading than students with less positive self-concepts. Significant negative correlations were found between out-of-school voluntary reading and television and out-of-school voluntary reading and organized activities. These data suggest that the more television students watch and the more organized activities they are involved in, the less voluntary reading they do. This finding is consistent with Neuman (1988) who found that activities such as television viewing displaced time that could be used for reading. Even though these three variable together accounted for only 10% of the total variance in predicting out-of-school reading, in conducting studies involving human behavior it is sometimes difficult to account for large amounts of variance. These data reveal the importance of the qualitative data collected in this study which help to further explain factors related to voluntary reading that may not have been accounted for in the quantitative data.

Similarities and Differences among Avid and Reluctant Readers

Question 3: What are the similarities and differences among avid and reluctant readers from diverse economic backgrounds across the following categories in regard to reading?
  a. home life and preschool literacy experiences
  b. personal thoughts about reading
  c. reading preferences and access
  d. social influences on reading
  e. classroom context/influences of reading

Home life and preschool literacy experiences. The findings from this study suggest that there are differences between avid and reluctant readers from economically diverse backgrounds in terms of their home lives and preschool literacy experiences. In terms of income, more middle/high income students were read aloud to when they were young than low income participants. This finding is consistent with what Allington and Cunningham (1996) refer to as "blue collar values." According to Allington, parents who have blue collar jobs work hard during their work day and expect to relax and spend time with their families when they get home. These families expect the schools to educate their children, therefore, they don't place great value on home literacy practices such as reading aloud to their children.

In terms of avidness, more avid readers than reluctant readers, regardless of income, were read aloud to by their parents before they started to school and had parents or siblings who read from books or novels for recreational purposes on a daily basis. Most of these avid readers also reported that learning to read was easy for them and that they could read independently in kindergarten or before. These findings are consistent with the findings of other researchers (Clark, 1976; Durkin, 1966; Morrow, 1983; Walberg and Tsai, 1984; Morrow, 1983; Hess, et al, 1982; Anbar, 1986; Stanovich, 1986) who have explored the contribution of the home to the development of reading skills and

leisure time reading habits. These researchers found that children who develop the habit of leisure reading tended to learn to read at home before attending school, had parents who read to their children on a regular basis, and had parents who themselves were readers. Unlike Neuman's (1986) study of fifth grade students' leisure reading habits where she did not find parental reading to be a significant factor in promoting voluntary reading habits, this study suggests that parents do play an important role. Avid readers from both economic groups indicated that their parents were the greatest influence on them as readers. Several students attributed this influence to their parents reading to them before starting to school. This research suggests that reading aloud to children before they begin school increases the likelihood that they will learn to read at an earlier age and with less difficulty than children who come from homes where reading aloud is not a regular practice. However, it is important to note that not all of the children in this study who were read aloud to before going to school became avid readers. While reading aloud to children did appear to make learning to read easier, it did not ensure that these children would choose to read voluntarily in the future. Perhaps more significant, this study suggests that when children come from homes where they are read aloud to and where voluntary reading is modeled on a regular basis, the likelihood that children will choose to read voluntarily increases. In fact, even when children in this study came from homes where they were not read aloud to, but saw reading modeled in their homes on a regular basis, they were more likely to choose to read voluntarily themselves.

The findings from this study also suggest that the type of reading modeled in the home is an important factor in producing voluntary readers. Many of the reluctant readers in this study reported that they saw their parents reading the newspaper or materials related to work on a fairly regular basis, but rarely saw anyone in their homes reading books or novels for enjoyment. Avid readers in this study, however, were more likely to see adults or siblings reading novels and other materials more associated with pleasure reading. This study suggests that if parents want to raise children who voluntarily choose to read, then they must show the importance of reading for pleasure by modeling reading themselves and by reading a variety of materials at home including books and novels.

Personal thoughts about reading. The findings from this study suggest that avid readers have more positive attitudes toward recreational reading than do reluctant readers. Avid readers interviewed for this study freely admitted to liking to read voluntarily outside of school and described themselves as good or very good readers. Most of these avid readers also reported that they could read before going to school and that learning to read was easy. In contrast, only one of the reluctant readers in this study described himself as a good reader. All of the reluctant readers in this study reported that they learned to read in school and half of them reported that learning to read was difficult.

These findings are consistent with the work of Csikszentmihalyi (1990) who

described intrinsically rewarding experiences as "flow experiences." According to Csikszentmihalyi, when a person enters a state of "flow," he/she is fully engaged in the activity to the extent that there is a "merging of action and awareness." Several avid readers in this study described reading in this manner. One student reported that when he was reading an interesting book he didn't realize how much time had passed. His parents often had to interrupt his reading so that he would go to bed. Another student described his voluntary reading as a time when he frequently "got lost in a book." This finding is also consistent with the work of Nell (1988) who also described these moments of ludic reading as "getting lost in a book."

Reading preferences and access. The findings from this study suggest that the preferred reading materials of both avid and reluctant fifth grade readers are series type books. Not only was it typical for a student in this study to read all of the books in a particular series that they were interested in reading, but often these series books acted as spring boards to more sophisticated literature. One avid reader reported that he used to like reading *Goosebumps* books by R.L. Stine, but tired of their typical plots and characters. He was now reading a novel by Stephen King which contained a more sophisticated story line. In particular, reluctant readers in this study mentioned scary story series books as their favorites. Many of the reluctant readers also mentioned comic books and magazines as preferred reading materials, whereas only a few of the avid readers mentioned comic books and/or magazines as preferred reading materials.

Historically, many parents and teachers have seen series books such as *The Babysitter's Club* and *Goosebumps* as "trashy" literature and have not only discouraged children from reading them, but have also prevented access to such materials by not containing them in their homes, classrooms or school libraries (Worthy, 1996). These data reveal the importance of parents and teachers realizing the power of series type books, comics, and magazines. If promoting voluntary reading is a goal of parents and teachers, then it appears that introducing and encouraging the reading of these kinds of materials, in balance with more conventional literature, is critical.

The findings from this study also suggest that middle/high income readers have greater access to reading materials than do low income readers. The average middle/high income reader in this study reported that they had access to approximately three different sources of reading materials with the majority coming from home libraries and bookstores. Low income readers reported that they had access to only one or two sources, and that the majority of their reading materials came from their school libraries.

These findings are consistent with the findings of researchers who have examined the inequity among school children in regard to availability of reading materials. These researchers found that this inequity partially explains why some children choose to read out-of-school and others do not (Lamme, 1976; Pumfrey, 1988; Allington, 1995). Studies have shown that schools serving largely lower socio-economic populations have characteristically

less access to resources than schools serving more advantaged populations (Pumfrey, 1988). This is alarming because it has been shown that a crucial element in the teaching of reading is the availability of an adequate supply of appropriate books (Allington, 1995). This study supports this finding by revealing that many of the low income, reluctant readers in this study did not have access to materials that they were personally interested in reading. Many of these students had limited materials at home to read and had great difficulty finding materials in the school library that they were interested in reading, because their preferred reading materials weren't contained in the school library or they were already checked out. These data confirmed Allington's (1995) finding that children who come from homes with few books are the children who have the least access to books once in school. This is a particular concern for low income students because they obtain their reading materials almost exclusively from their school libraries, whereas middle and upper income students obtain their reading materials from their home libraries or from public book stores.

Because low income students often do not have access to series books, comic books, and magazines outside of school, then providing access to them at school is another critical factor (Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1999). Although the public library plays a role in the lives of some readers, this study reveals that most students do not utilize public libraries. This is not surprising; in a study of the reading attitudes and habits of over a thousand British teenagers, Thomson (1987) found that the public library accounted for only

3% of students' book acquisition sources. These realities make the role of the school vital in students' lives, because school may be the only means of access, particularly for low-income students. School libraries need to be places where children can go and find the kinds of materials that they are interested in reading. If school libraries do not contain these kinds of materials then low income students who cannot afford to buy them will not have access to their preferred reading materials and thus may not choose to read voluntarily.

Social influences on reading. The findings from this study suggest that parents who discuss with their children the books that they are reading at home promote voluntary reading. The students in this study reported that having opportunities to dialog about the books that they were reading encouraged and motivated them to read. Other researchers (Anbar, 1986; Teale & Sulzby, 1986) have found that children who acquire reading before school came from homes where parents not only read, but interacted with their children around books. These researchers believe that this social interaction is a critical factor in the development of later literacy development.

Avid and reluctant readers in this study also revealed that they did not have opportunities in school to discuss informally the books that they were reading. The only book discussions these students reported were formal discussions of their book club books or informal discussions about voluntary reading books that took place on the playground, on the bus ride home from school, or at home. All of the students in this study talked positively about both of these kinds of book discussions and wished

that they had more opportunities to talk about books that they were reading in school. Both avid and reluctant readers felt this practice would encourage students to read more. These data suggest that students need to be given opportunities during school to discuss reading materials that they find interesting.

Avid readers also revealed that they were encouraged to read more when teachers, friends, and family members recommended interesting books to them. Many avid readers reported that their parents or friends recommended good books to them to read on a regular basis. Few reluctant readers had parents or friends who made such recommendations. However, most of the students in this study reported that they were much more likely to read a book if it was recommended by someone they liked and respected (i.e. friend, parent, sibling, or teacher). As other researchers have found (Worthy, 1996), peer recommendations were especially important to avid readers.

Classroom Context/Influences on Reading. The findings from this study suggest that classrooms that support reading for pleasure promote the habit of voluntary reading. Avid readers in this study reported that voluntary reading was promoted in their classrooms through the practice of Sustained Silent Reading. These avid readers talked positively about periods of uninterrupted reading and reported that they liked reading books in school when they were given choice over the materials and time to read for extended periods. They felt, however, that it was critical for teachers to allow them to read whatever they wanted to read. When avid readers were asked to read required materials during this time, they frequently admitted that, "This makes me not want to read."

Reluctant readers in this study appeared less enthusiastic about periods of sustained silent reading than did avid readers. Although these students were often given regular opportunities to read self-selected materials in class, they still were less than eager to read. Interestingly, these students revealed that true choice was really not an option during this period of uninterrupted reading because their teachers did not allow them to read from their favorite materials (i.e. comic books or magazines). Other reluctant readers revealed that even though they had choice in the materials that they read, they either didn't have access to the kinds of materials that they wanted to read or they elected to spend the SSR time reading required material so that they didn't have to read those materials at home. Even though all of these avid and reluctant readers participated in periods of Sustained Silent Reading at school, none reported opportunities to discuss these free reading books in class.

These results are consistent with the work of McCracken and McCracken (1978), Smith (1980), and Manning and Manning (1980) who found that students were motivated to read during periods of Sustained Silent Reading when they were given regular opportunities to read, a variety of classroom materials were available, teachers modeled the act of reading with their students, and when students were allowed to share what they had read. Unfortunately, some of the students in this study, especially reluctant readers, were not in classrooms where these practices

were implemented. As this study suggests, if sustained silent reading is not implemented effectively, it will not yield the results educators are looking for.

The findings from this study also suggest that caution be taken in using reading incentive programs that use extrinsic rewards to promote voluntary reading. While reluctant readers seemed to be more motivated to read when they received some kind of extrinsic reward in return, they admitted that the reason they liked the incentive program was due to the reward associated with reading and not the reading itself. This finding is consistent with the findings of researchers who have studied the effects of extrinsic motivation. Lepper and Hodell (1989) found that when the external reinforcer was removed, the behavior that was being reinforced also declined.

When avid readers were asked about the reading incentive programs used in their schools, most reported that they did not find these programs to be effective. Not one of the avid readers felt that they read more as a result of this kind of program. In fact, several avid readers admitted that they read less because of such programs. This finding is consistent with the work of Lepper and Hodell (1989) who found that when students were already intrinsically motivated to read, extrinsic rewards were often seen as bribes and actually had negative effects. Avid readers also reported that they were turned off to reading incentive programs because they did not allow complete choice in material selection. Students in this study reported that participation in the reading incentive program required them to read a book off of a predetermined list on a particular reading level. Due to these constraints, one student stated, "I want to read whatever I want to read. When I have to read an AR (Accelerated Reader) book, it makes me not want to read."

Suggestions to Teachers and Parent for Promoting Voluntary Reading

Question 4: What suggestions do avid and reluctant readers make to teachers and parents for promoting voluntary reading?

The findings from this study suggest that when avid and reluctant readers are asked to make recommendations to teachers and parents for promoting voluntary reading, they have insightful and practical suggestions. Avid readers suggested that teachers spend more time in class introducing and recommending new and interesting books to students. They felt this would introduce students to books that they might not otherwise have encountered. Avid readers also suggested that teachers allow more time during school for students to read self-selected materials. Many of these avid readers felt that more students would be motivated to read if they only had more opportunities to read materials that they were personally interested in reading. Only one avid reader suggested the use of extrinsic rewards to motivate students to read voluntarily. In contrast, only two reluctant readers suggested that teachers recommend more good books to their classes. These reluctant readers offered a variety of suggestions including: allow more time to read self-selected reading materials at school, provide greater access to preferred reading materials at school, read aloud more often to the class, allow

comic books and magazines to be read at school, and to give rewards for voluntary reading.

These findings are consistent with the work of others (Ainley, Hidi & Berndorff, 2002; Morrow, 1992) who found that voluntary reading could be encouraged through classrooms where setting aside time for recreational reading, reading aloud to students, and using and discussing quality literature was a daily practice. However, as Worthy and McKool (1996) discovered, many teachers agree with these practices in theory, but admit that they are lower in priority than coverage of basic curriculum. Therefore, recommending good books, reading aloud, and informal book discussions are often relegated to the occasional times when "real work" is completed. These avid and reluctant readers' suggestions remind teachers of the importance of these practices.

Implications for Educational Practice

The relationship between out-of-school reading and success in school reveals the importance of investigating why so few children choose to read outside of school. Understanding this phenomenon will lead educators and parents to more successfully promote the practice of reading outside of school, thus increasing vocabulary development, fluency, comprehension, and general intellectual development. This study which investigated the out-of-school reading habits of fifth grade students from diverse economic backgrounds may help educators and parents better understand the complexities involving voluntary reading. The voices of both avid and reluctant readers in this study reveal insightful and practical implications for librarians, teachers, and parents.

The findings from student interviews suggest that voluntary reading habits could be promoted by school librarians if they purchased more materials that intermediate grade students were interested in reading, such as series books (in particular scary story series books), comic books, and magazines, as well as more conventional types of literature. Students also suggested that they value their teachers' book recommendations, thus if librarians recommended more new and interesting reading materials by reading them aloud and then discussing them, students may choose to read more voluntarily.

Students also made it clear that teachers could promote voluntary reading by finding out what students are interested in reading and then providing access to those materials. Students suggested that teachers give students daily opportunities to read self-selected materials in school and then allow opportunities for them to discuss and recommend these preferred materials with their peers. Interviews with avid readers revealed that teachers need to be cautious when relying on external rewards to motivate and promote voluntary reading.

Interviews with both avid and reluctant readers also gave insight into the importance of home literacy practices. These students suggested that parents could promote the voluntary reading habits of their children by reading aloud to them on a daily basis and by parents modeling the reading of books and novels themselves. Many of the students in this study talked about the importance of discussing and recommending books with family mem-

bers. These students suggest that parents recommend and provide good books to their children which would introduce them to a variety of reading materials that may promote voluntary reading. These interviews also suggest that parents be aware that television viewing and involvement in after school organized activities could displace time for voluntary reading.

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