Everybody Reads in Poulsbo:

An Examination of the Intersection Between

Reading for Pleasure and Teaching Complex Texts

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A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Education

University of Washington

2014

Committee:

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

Education

University of Washington

Abstract

Everybody Reads in Poulsbo: An Examination of the Intersection Between Reading for Pleasure and Teaching Complex Texts

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The Common Core State Standards suggests that we will more equitably and effectively prepare students for college and career readiness through spiraling standards across foundational content areas. In literacy, this requires that students maintain a predictable, consistent trajectory in their reading growth from kindergarten through 12th grade. However, with the American educational system seemingly in decline in contrast to other developed countries and our national alliteracy on the rise, this author asks: How can we enshrine both a love of reading and rigorous reading curriculum into our instruction in secondary schools? In exploring this question, Sophia Sinco first seeks to fill a void in the literature, compiling information related specifically to the motivation of readers at the secondary level and modernizing this information to fit it within the realm of our contemporary curricular discussion. Secondly, her research proposes teacher actions that might address the engagement of secondary readers, investing them in their own growth as readers and, consequently, advancing deeper thinking that accompanies the shared commitment to literacy growth between the instructor and the student.

I. Purpose

In the course of this study, I had the chance to interview several students, enrolled in secondary schools in lower-income neighborhoods of Seattle and Chicago. One interview I conducted was with Nadjanai, a feisty seventh grader at the time who loved basketball and who adamantly, publically, and unapologetically hated reading. She had been raised in various neighborhoods around Seattle, but briefly moved to the more affluent town of Poulsbo in her late-elementary and early-secondary school years. A semi-isolated city—accessible by ferry or by a several-hour car ride from Seattle—this peninsula city was once a destination for immigrants of Scandinavia. This racial profile largely persists to this day, with approximately 75% of the city's population stemming from a white-only background (Onboard Informatics, 2013). The city's website boasts of "its picturesque downtown core with rosemaled storefronts and shopping areas at Poulsbo Village" and cites such features of the community as "interesting gift shops, delicious bakeries, good schools…and panoramic views" (City of Poulsbo, 2014).

In the course of our conversation, Nadjanai and I had the chance to discuss the environmental contrasts between Seattle and Poulsbo, especially as it came to the promotion of literacy. When I asked her how the students compared between the two communities, this is what she said:

> *"Everybody reads in Poulsbo. I don't want to be racist, but people look at white people as good readers and look at black people as bad readers. But like we can improve. People just look at good readers, like that's who they are. They look at black people as ghetto and stuff. The environment is, too. Rich. There's like huge houses over there and their parents expect them to read."*

When I pushed to understand whether this was a natural feature of Poulsbo or something that we could replicate in Seattle, here's what she suggested:

> *"Yeah [people could like reading here]. They just don't choose to. The parents too…their parents focus more on their children…Over there it's like nice and people care…I guess it depends how they're raised."*

In advancing the adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) nationwide, educators and policymakers have insisted that one of the greatest gains will be the consistency of expectations for students. From district to district and state to state, a student can expect to have the same demands put upon them, and there will be a greater sense around the country of what a young person should be able to do at each grade level. The assumption is that the CCSS will contribute to greater equity as we think about evaluating students for college and career readiness and create a system better equipped to compete with the likes of some high performing countries like South Korea and Norway.

These spiraling standards, as they are illustrated, promise to increase the rigor of what students should be able to do year to year, building their skills more authentically throughout their time in school rather than providing a prescribed set of topics to be learned and then neglected. As the CCSS' website outlines: "High standards that are consistent across states

provide teachers, parents, and students with a set of clear expectations to ensure that all students have the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college, career, and life upon graduation from high school, regardless of where they live. These standards are aligned to the expectations of colleges, workforce training programs, and employers. The standards promote equity by ensuring all students are well prepared to collaborate and compete with their peers in the United States and abroad." This assumes, however, that students will, in fact, maintain a predictable trajectory in their learning; that they will advance in certain ways that allow them to handle the increased rigor from year to year.

When it comes to literacy education, however, this becomes complicated. Students' abilities to address some of the new questions or grasp the building concepts depend on their access to the level of text complexity that these assessments present. They must maintain that predictable, progressive growth not just in discrete subjects, but as readers, specifically. This is where we run into a problem. If students aren't motivated to grow as readers, if their scores plateau or—worse yet—dip after elementary or early secondary school, how can we expect them to succeed when presented with college level math questions or document-based questions presented on Advanced Placement (AP) exams? Certainly, there are a multitude of factors that affect a student's literacy engagement: lack of books that they find enjoyable, other demands on their time that they feel more invested in pursuing, deficiencies of accessible texts, to name a few. But as we look at Nadjanai's insights into the environments and expectations that we ascribe to readers—based on skill level, race, class, and a whole slew of other factors—I find myself asking the question: If literacy growth depends on students' motivations to read, what are we doing to balance the need to cultivate high skill levels of text analysis alongside the will to help students love reading, unburdened by scholastic pursuits and academic learning targets? We must, as instructors, weigh passion for reading and students' internal motivation to grow alongside our expectations that students become college- and career-ready by the end of high school.

In elementary school, we teach the basic foundations to advance reading, the skills of working through tough words and developing students toward appropriate levels. Many curriculums, such as the popular Lucy Calkins Reader's Workshop series, also teach a love of reading and the habits of a good reader. Whether or not this is embedded into the instruction, such structures as informal story times or opportunities for kids to read stories that they love are a relatively consistent feature of the elementary school experience.

This emphasis—on the creation of an environment that supports a passion for reading—significantly drops off upon entrance into secondary schools. With the advancement of the Common Core State Standards, the discourse shifts to prioritize scaled growth around text complexity, defined as "appropriately complex texts at each grade level to develop the mature language skills and the conceptual knowledge [students] need for success in school and life" (Coleman, 2012). As a middle school teacher, my colleagues and I rely on students to be self-driven, to want to grow as readers and to ultimately push themselves to tackle tough texts while we focus on equipping them with the skills to elevate their comprehension and reasoning. The Common Core State Standards Committee, in fact, advances this independent work as vital, suggesting, "Students need access to a wide range of materials on a variety of topics and genres both in their classrooms and in their school libraries to ensure that they have opportunities to

independently read broadly and widely to build their knowledge, experience, and joy in reading" (Coleman, 2012). In secondary schools across America, we ask students to be self-motivated to grow as readers and, therefore, as scholars across all disciplines. In this regard, we are failing our kids.

The research discussed in this paper reveals that in America kids are increasingly de-motivated to read, whether for school or for pleasure. Amongst lines of race and class, this motivational-plummet is even greater. And yet, as we move toward nationwide application of the Common Core, we push increasingly toward the teaching of rigorous reading and away from the emphasis of a love of reading. As cited above, David Coleman, author of the Common Core State Standards, may disagree. However, the application of these learning targets seems, in practice, to push away from reading for pleasure, to institute structures that force students away from reading for pleasure and instead compel them toward an increasingly academic framework for engaging with literature.

This paper will argue that the push toward text complexity and the lack of separation between reading for pleasure and for school is presently and will increasingly undermine students' motivation to grow as readers and, therefore, to improve at the rates that we would expect. In short, we ask students to scaffold themselves up to higher and higher levels of processing and reasoning while kicking out the pylons from beneath them. The students who suffer most are those who do not have the self-efficacy, the social supports, or the academic drive to rise to that challenge: the marginalized groups that learn in the lowest income communities around the nation. So while we are advancing these standards that are meant to be the great equalizer in education, we may in fact be only widening the divide between the rich and the poor, between girls and boys, and between majority and minority races in this country.

In my own classroom, I have spent the last year focusing on investing students in reading as a lifestyle, a practice enshrined within a student's daily activities and mindset and which persists without external motivations or incentives. Sometimes this occurred to the detriment of the very rigor and demand heralded by the Common Core. As I move forward in my own practice, I have sought a way to balance the push for students to do more critical thinking about texts while simultaneously keeping them engaged in the practice of literacy growth and development.

The purpose of this project is two-fold:

1. To fill a void in the literature, compiling information related specifically to the motivation of readers at the secondary level and modernizing this information to fit it within the realm of our contemporary curricular discussion

2. To propose teacher actions that might address the engagement of secondary readers, investing them in their own growth as readers and, consequently, advancing deeper thinking that accompanies the shared commitment to literacy growth between the instructor and the student

Ultimately, this paper seeks to answer the question: How can we enshrine both a love of reading and rigorous reading curriculum into our instruction in secondary schools?

II. Rationale

The first goal of this project is to address the deficiency in literature specifically related to readers at the middle school level. Through an investigation of the research that exists thus far, there is a clear divide: At the elementary level, there is an emphasis on the development of readers insofar as teachers instruct students on the procedures of good reading; at the secondary level, there is an emphasis on the advanced dissection of texts, both literary and informational, that moves away from any commitment to investing students in their comprehensive growth and engagement as readers. In short, my sense is that the higher that students ascend in school, the less that we as instructors concern ourselves with whether reading as a practice is relevant and responsive to the needs of our students. Today's focus on learning outcomes "can be measured within considerable precision which means, in turn, those that conform to the epistemological outlook of the mimetic tradition" (Jackson, 1986). This is especially true in lower socioeconomic schools, where Readers' Workshop models have shown such great triumph and yet where we emphasize most the sort of analysis that directly correlates to success on standardized assessments. Broadly in teaching, but especially in a foundational skill like reading, "…students are differentially exposed to the two traditions on the basis of social class membership…in schools serving children from poor and working class families…the focus is on the development of character traits such as docility and punctuality rather than those of inquisitiveness and intellectual aggressiveness" (Jackson, 1986).

Kelly Gallagher referred to this propensity as the "poverty of low expectations, noting that students in lower income communities:

- "Are more likely to be placed in drill-and-kill reading remediation programs
- Are more likely to be placed in curriculums that heavily emphasize multiple choice exams
- Have less access to interesting academic reading materials
- Have less access to high-interest recreational reading materials
- Often are not given time to read extensively" (Gallagher, 2009).

By consolidating the literature on reading motivation and student engagement, this project will pull into a single place the texts relevant to secondary literacy instructors, equipping them to better address these deficiencies in their own contexts.

The second goal of this project is to generate a curricular lens and tangible tools for teachers to apply to their classrooms in order to evaluate student engagement with texts, to assess the environment for reading and readers both within and outside of the classroom, and to adjust their own practice to best respond to the investment (or lack thereof) that they're seeing in their own contexts. This step will set this project apart, acting on the deficiency within (Gallagher, 2009) the research to better equip teachers to respond to the literacy apathy that they're observing. Ultimately, the instruction coming out of Pearson, College Board, and like organizations, in large part, has abandoned the question of reading investment. This project will

pull together the private work being done toward text sets that integrate high-interest informational texts with traditional literary selections. In addition, this work will use a series of surveys and interviews to solicit student feedback on reading instruction and to evaluate the reaction of readers to the efforts proposed on this project. Taken together, these two pieces aim to highlight the problem of reader disengagement at the secondary level and to address the voids that have allowed this gap to widen in the wake of the Common Core State Standards movement.

III. Literature Review

In 2013, *The Wall Street Journal* published an article entitled "U.S. High-School Students Slip in Global Rankings". Unfortunately, this proclamation was not wholly unexpected. America's results, compared to countries with comparable or weaker economically than ours, had been declining for years. Now, the United States had fallen out of even the top 10 school systems in the world. The problem was not that our schools has somehow changed their methods; it was that they had not changed at all. Fifteen-year old students "made no progress on…international achievement exams" which means that, as other countries advanced, our schools fell in the rankings (Banchero, 2013). In fact, scores on this internationally administered exam had flat-lined since the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) piloted their evaluation in 2000 (Banchero, 2013). In reflecting on this and similar reports of schools' short-fallings, Arne Duncan and the Department of Education downplayed the decline, noting that only five educational systems performed substantially better than the United States: Hong Kong-China, Florida-USA (which has a separate education system and is therefore evaluated apart from the United States as a whole in international comparisons), the Russian Federation, Finland and Singapore (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). In their 2013 report, the OECD found that only 12% of adults read at Level 4/5, at which standard a reader can "integrate, interpret, and synthesize information from complex or lengthy texts that contain conditional and/or competing information" (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2013). This proportion pales in comparison to the 22% of adults performing at this level in Finland and Japan, both of whom top the rankings of school systems in the world (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2014). So whether ranked fifth or fifteenth, it is clear that we have a problem.

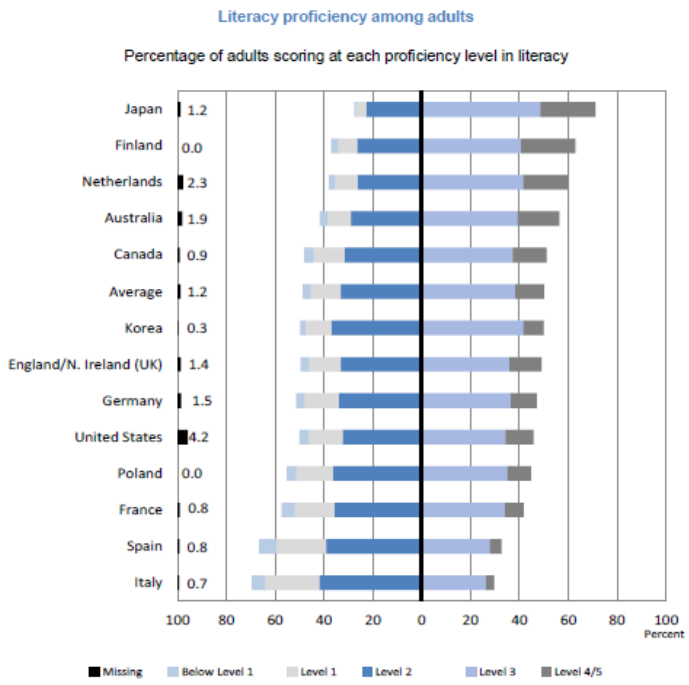
TOP 10 COUNTRIES IN THE LEARNING CURVE INDEX 2014

COUNTRY	2014 INDEX RANK	CHANGE ON 2012 RANKING
SOUTH KOREA	1	+1
JAPAN	2	+2
SINGAPORE	3	+2
HONG KONG-CHINA	4	-1
FINLAND	5	-4
UNITED KINGDOM	6	0
CANADA	7	+3
NETHERLANDS	8	-1
IRELAND	9	+2
POLAND	10	+4

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit

These results mirror those of children that participated in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's review. Only 8% of students across the world achieved a Level 5 or higher level of performance in reading (Schleicher, 2014). Level 5 for this age group means that students can tackle texts that are unfamiliar in form or content and can analyze these texts in nuanced ways. Shanghai had the highest proportion of top performers (25%), followed by Hong-Kong, China, Japan, and Singapore, all of whom had about 15% of their students attain this result (Schleicher, 2014). Behind them, around 10% of students in Australia, Belgium, Canada,

Finland, France, Korea, Liechtenstein, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, and Chinese Taipei (Schleicher, 2014).



In exploring the rationale behind these results, researchers noticed that inequality and educational attainment more significantly affected the test results of American participants than it did for nationals from elsewhere around the world (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2011). For instance, adults with higher levels of education here in the United States tended to have better skills than those with similar degrees of educational attainment around the world. However, those whose highest degree was a high school diploma performed worse than their counterparts abroad (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2013).

Similarly, differences in race and socioeconomic status more significantly correlated to the results of American participants. In fact, the chances of being "low-skilled are ten times greater among low-educated adults born to low-educated parents than among higher-educated adults born to high-educated parents, much greater than in other countries" (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2013). In America, where socioeconomic status and race are exceptionally correlated, the distinction of the results along lines of colors were particularly marked. While only about 10% of white adults achieved a Level 2 or below in the assessment, more than one in three (35%) of black adults and approximately one in two (43%) of Hispanics performed thus poorly (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2013). Separate research has found that by late elementary school, African Americans in thirteen states studied are already three years of learning behind grade level; by eighth grade, they are two or more years behind in thirty-six states (Gallagher, 2009). The trends amongst Latino students echo these same deficiencies (Gallagher, 2009). Similarly patterns appeared in the tests gauging numeracy, suggesting that the problem may extend across the system, rather than being confined to isolated, content-based weaknesses. Furthermore, research has shown that the shrinking of literacy proficiency in especially affecting boys. Females generally have more positive attitudes toward reading than males globally, a gap that grew in 11 of the countries evaluated between 2000 and 2012 (Michael McKenna, 2012; Schleicher, 2014). In short, the United States is falling further and further behind in its literacy achievement, an outcome that is

particularly marked amongst students of minority races, lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and boys.

A *New York Times* article blamed "some of the weakest mathematical and problem-solving skills in the developed world" on the decline on the teaching profession (The New York Times Editorial Board, 2013). Comparing our teaching corps to that of Finland, the authors of this article characterize American teacher preparation programs as "an industry of mediocrity" (Julia Greenberg, 2013; Finnish National Board of Education, 2003). Teacher education programs here in the United States, the National Council for Teacher Quality (NCTQ) criticizes, "…now view their job as forming the *professional identities* of teachers" in a way targeted more at helping teachers to "confront and expunge prejudices…related to race, class, language, and culture" more than providing them "access to *what is actually known* about how children work best (Julia Greenberg, 2013). Comparing our schools to those in Canada, the New York Times also criticizes the way that we determine funding by property taxes. They claim that while "Americans tend to see inequalities as the natural order of things…Canadians do not" and thus our neighbors to the North have moved toward province-level funding that determine the allocation of resources based on a district's size and need (The New York Times Editorial Board, 2013). Finally, *The New York Times* draws comparisons to the schools in Shanghai-China. Acknowledging the "might of the authoritarian state" and the country's "centuries-old reverence for scholarship and education," the authors largely credit the first-place rankings of this district in math, science, and literacy to their more egalitarian perspective of schooling (The New York Times Editorial Board, 2013). In short, the people of Shanghai do not see it as my school and your school, but view all students as *our students*, adopting a greater sense of commitment to the improvement of the system, rather than accepting the advancement of just a few. This leads the country to transfer money and teachers from richer areas to poorer institutions in a way that aims to push the whole system continuously forward in its instructional practices.

However, none of these cases wholly explains the plateauing of American results. If we accepted these theories at face-value, we would have to conclude that economic growth should at least partly contributed to a rise in our educational results by comparison. Regardless, we are being outpaced by systems with less money like Chile, Brazil, Indonesia, and Peru, all of whom have made "impressive gains catching up from very low levels of performance" since OECD first began their evaluations (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2011).

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) suggests that the explanation for these results may lie within the students themselves. They found that "drive, motivation, and confidence in oneself are essential if students are to fulfill their potential" (Schleicher, 2014). In Shanghai-China, students both feel in control of their ability to succeed as well as being better prepared to do so. In a survey, 73% of students from this region agreed or strongly agreed that they remain interested in the tasks that they begin…and equate achievement with hard work, suggesting that educational contexts can make a difference in instilling and perpetuating the values that foster success in school (Schleicher, 2014). This is a very different attitude than the one exemplified by American teenagers. Here, the proportion of 17-year-olds who read nothing at all for pleasure doubled between the years of 1982 and 2002 and the percentage of college graduates who reported reading literature fell from 82% to 67% within that same window (Michael McKenna, 2012). In short:

> *"…we don't need statistics to show us that the less students read, the poorer students they become. The poorer the readers they become, the harder reading is for them, which validates their negative attitudes toward reading. We also know that many of these students who dislike reading become parents who dislike reading. Consequently, they spend little time reading to, with, or in front of their own children. This in turn creates a new generation of students who often…see little use for reading beyond completing their school work. This downward spiral is difficult to break especially as state mandated minimum competency tests force many teachers to think they should focus more on reading skills than on reading pleasure"* (Lu, 2008).

More likely than any failing on the part of teachers in this country or than new curriculums that districts and states pilot each year, the decrease in our country's performance may strongly correlate to our national disinterest in reading. Numerous studies have found that this "alliteracy" may begin as early as elementary school (Beers, 1996; Boorstin, 1984; Decker, 1986; Mikulecky, 1978; Ohanian, 1989). In surveying reading attitudes, McKenna et al. found that motivation to read slowly declined from grades 1 to 6, suggesting that the relationship between attitudes and achievement is "complex and…reciprocal, with the frustration associated with poor reading contributing to worsening attitudes" that inhibits voluntary reading and, therefore, further reduces proficiency (Michael McKenna, 2012). This trend only gets worse as students move into secondary schools, where the emphasis is on reading skills at greater levels of text complexity and less so on the love of reading itself. For instance, the NAEP administered a survey to fourth- and eighth-graders, asking them to evaluate the statement "Reading is a favorite activity" and weighed the drifts in attitudes between 2002 and 2007. Amongst the younger sample, between 33% and 40% characterized this statement as "a lot like me" (Michael McKenna, 2012). Amongst older students, the responses were even worse. In that same time frame, only 10% to 14% of eighth-grade students strongly agreed with this statement while as many as 68% disagreed or strongly disagreed with it (Michael McKenna, 2012). As one might imagine, the decrease in appreciation for pleasurable and personal reading affects students' motivation to read for school or otherwise. It is "gateway skill that makes all other learning possible" (Obama, 2005). Where we allow attitudes to lapse and interest to wane, we invite a national decline in performance across subject areas. As prophesized in *The 90% Reading Goal*:

> *"The most expensive burden we place on society is those students we have failed to teach to read well. The silent army of low readers who move through our schools…emerge into society as adults lacking the single prerequisite for managing their lives…They are chronically unemployed, underemployed, or unemployable. They form the single largest identifiable group of those whom we incarcerate, and to whom we provide assistance, housing, medical care, and other social services. They perpetuate and enlarge the problem of creating another generation of poor readers"* (Lynn Fielding, 1998).

Historically, we have viewed only illiteracy as a problem. But if we add to our concerns the challenges of alliterate readers, as well, we find that the size and scope of the problem is astronomical and largely unaddressed. The prevalence of alliteracy reflects a change in our

values and an overall loss of skills in our work force, both of which "threaten the processes of a free and democratic society" and "leads exorably to a two-tiered society: the knowledgable elite and the masses" (Lu, 2008). Addressing the issue of reading demotivation is about more than curriculum or teacher preparation; we need to consider whether we are instilling our students with the values to persist through tough texts, to become curious about unknown topics, or to incorporate the act of reading into their daily lives. Reinforcing the importance of this shift in our thinking as instructors, recent research has found that American teenagers classified as highly engaged in reading but whose parents experienced lower occupational status and limited income achieved better reading scores than disengaged readers whose parents came from high or middle income backgrounds (Brazo, December 2007/January 2008). To begin that process, we must first understand what it means to motivate readers, and which students are chronically undermotivated in the system that we have sustained thus far.

In understanding the demotivation of readers, we look first at how these attitudes pan out along lines of race, class, and gender in order to further examine the supposition that the Common Core State Standards will level the quality of education provided to all students, regardless of these attributes. In teaching reading, we embed in students the idea that literacy is strictly a school-santioned activity, typically determined by the teacher, and often fail to acknowledge the out-of-school literacies that are influenced by social networks and driven by choice (Michael McKenna, 2012). Sometimes studnets who find no relevance for in-school literacies would, in fact, be more inclined to reading if we were to recognize their out-of-school practices and medias. This is especially true for males, who often engaged in "sophisticated and frequent literacy activities" in the home but resisted what felt like "schoolish" literacies in class (Smith and Wilhelm, 2002). As a result, feeling incompetent in regard to in-school literacies, boys disengaged from these activities all together, becoming *nonreaders* or *alliterate* (Sharon M. Pitcher, 2007). Females, on the other hand, tend to have more positive attitudes toward this sort of school-endorsed form of reading, tending toward academic reading in print and digital settings and recreational reading of print materials (Michael McKenna, 2012). Men, by contrast, preferred to do their recreational reading in digital formats (Michael McKenna, 2012). The literacy gap only widens with age, as positive attitudes among girls leads to both more academic and recreational reading over the years (Michael McKenna D. K., 1995).

Similarly, different sub-groups engage disproportionately in reading based on their perceptions of these activities as relevant (or irrelevant) to their own lives. Attitudes are formed on the basis of perceived success in reading and judged based on the outcomes of engaging in this activity. Thus, poorer readers have more reason to expect frustrating outcomes, and will tend to harbor more negative attitudes than better readers, a perception that is perpetuated generationally because it contributes to a child's cultural environment (Michael C. McKenna, 1995). In effect, the logic around why girls prefer to read more than boys is fundmanetally the same as why students from disadvantaged backgrounds harbor more negative attitudes toward reading. Students pick up their social cues about reading from friends and family, meaning that the amount of time children read voluntarily outside fo school is correlated to the existance of a "positive educational home environment and in parcular to the value placed on reading in the home" (McKool, 2007). Amongst avid, proficient readers, studies have found that there is a routine of reading in the home, even before students enter school. However, the families of uncommitted and unmotivated readers admitted that these routines were rare or nonexistant,

meaning that these students entered school remembering few aesthetic transactions with texts (Beers, 1998). Furthermore, when pressed to recall when in the day the few interactions around literature occurred, most of these parents admitted that it happened at bedtime, which convinced students that reading is boring because, "It was an activity meant to keep me quiet and make me go to sleep" (Beers, 1998). Consequently, as these boys and girls entered school, their sense of the purposes of reading were consistently and strictly scholastic: to get information, to answer questions, to make diagrams, to complete worksheets, and to write reports; not to enjoy these texts for themselves. When given the choice, students from lower income homes preferred to watch television rather than to read. In fact, low income reluctant readers watched the most television (136 minutes per day) compared even to low income avid readers, who watched TV for about half of that time (McKool, 2007). When pressed to understand why they made this choice, reluctant readers described that they often came home to empty houses after the school day and the television provided a source of company and entertainment for them that a book could not (McKool, 2007). This furthers the idea that our attitudes toward reading are largely the product of the social and cultural environment that we create both inside and outside of the classroom and how these settings perceive the purposes of reading

Ultimately, reading is a social experience and our understanding of why readers choose not to read is often couched in the inability of instructors to create space for this sociability. When we talk about reading being social, this means both that it depends on the creation of a social environment supportive of passion for reading and on instruction that encourages students to interact socially around reading. It reflects as much a students' perception of self as their perception of the relevance of reading. Most recent models have narrowed down the causes of motivation and demotivation into three basic factors: (a) a student's beliefs in the outcomes of reading and how much they desire those outcomes; (b) the reader's belief about what others expect of them and their motivation to conform to those expectations; and (c) the results of specific incidents of reading (Michael C. McKenna, 1995). In short, there is a strongly relationship between beliefs and attitudes, and the decision to read and to continue reading once that process has begun boil down to three factors: "normative beliefs about reading, beliefs about the outcomes of reading, and specific reading experiences" (Michael C. McKenna, 1995). These factors are complex and interdependent, influencing one another as well as contributing to a student's overall attitude toward reading.

Normative beliefs relate to the acceptability of reading as a practice and pasttime, which is where the affinity groups of a student come into play. Certain subpopulations, specifically gender and ethnic identities, may exert influence on individual members. Reading, therefore, becomes a defining activity for students and therefore is subject to the identity that they want to assert socially among their peers. To read is to accept "these games and all the statuses and identities that accompany them…[whereas] Not to read is to accept peer group games and their accompanying statuses and identites" (McDermott, 1974; Hudley, 2001; Graham, 1998). Consequently, within certain subpopulations, reading failure itself may be a social achievement.

Beliefs about the outcomes of reading might be understood as a social prioritization related closely to the normative beliefs about reading. These opinions regarding whether reading is pleasurable, useful, frustrating, or boring derive from a child's beliefs about the outcomes of competing activities (Michael C. McKenna, 1995). The older they get, the more leisure options

that become available to them. Therefore, if reading's value is perceived to be relatively low, "the development of reading ability will be constrained and beliefs about the outcomes of reading…will tend to confirm the normative belief that reading has little value to begin with" (Michael C. McKenna, 1995). Similarly, informational beliefs about reading advance or deter a student's motivation. If the sources of feedback surrounding the child suggest that reading is advantageous (Example: "My friends say books can be interesting"), this might serve to reinforce that students' love of reading or to challenge his or her alliteracy, even where one's own experiences may not provide sufficient evidence one way or the other. An attitude is 'correct' or 'valid' to the extent that "it is anchored in a group of people with similar beliefs, opinions, and attitudes" (Festinger, 1959). This particular factor may contribute most to the differences that we see along lines of race, class, and gender in reading attitudes. Knowing that girls tend to prefer academic reading more than boys and, consequently, outperform them on assessments, societal beleifs may "in turn faciltiate an advantage over boys in acquiring ability…[which] then helps to perpetuate more positive attitudes among girls" (Michael C. McKenna, 1995).

Finally, the choice to read is influenced by an individual's emotional state and the emotional effect of certain incidents of reading. Acknowledging that we form attitudes about our social experiences based on the consequences of these undertakings, "it is natural to predict that poorer readers, who have reason to expect frustrating outcomes, will tend to harbor more negative attitudes than better readers" (Michael C. McKenna, 1995; Gallagher, 2009). Although there is an overall decline in interest toward reading in America, given their link to ability, increasingly negative attitudes about recreational reading lead to more rapid decline in reading motivation for the readers who struggle most early on, widening the gap that instructors must traverse in order to challenge a student's normative beliefs (McKool, 2007). This attitudinal gap is only apt to widen with age, as a student falls further and further behind his or her peers and must face levels of text complexity above where that reader can realistically handle. In other words, if we fail to invest in students' love of reading and to grow this habit as a part of their daily lives and routines, we will only perpetuate negative attitudes about reading system-wide. The students that struggle the most will become increasingly disillusioned when exposed to the rigor deemed appropriate for their age level and this perception will effuse throughot the student population as a result of the social nature of reading and reading motivation. John Guthrie broke down the categories of reading motivation as such:

1. *Intrinsically motivated readers*. These students are independently motivated to read regularly and are invested in their growth as readers. Students in this category often develop such an attitude over several years in school and through exposure to a home environment that is physically and intellectually supportive of intensive reading.

2. *Resistant readers*. These students "actively avoid books, shun texts, neglect reading homework, and deny school literacy of most kinds" (Guthrie, 2008: 12-13). They may engage in multimodal forms of literacy, such as texting and internet activity, but these tasks are not easily translatable to school-based reading demands.

3. *Extrinsically motivated readers.* These students are "moderately able to read, but have no interest in school topics" (Guthrie, 2008: 13). Because they lack the personal

investment to dig deeper, their reading tends to be minimal, superficial, and inauthentic.

4. *Lowest achieving readers.* These students are performing at or below 3rd grade level while enrolled in middle or high school. Their belief in their own abilities—which John Guthrie terms as self-efficacy—are low and, as a result, their investment in growing as readers is stifled (Guthrie, 2008).

Our ability as teachers to address this demotivation begins with recognizing the various levels of disengagement. Some have suggested that out-of-reading school habits may become embedded in the minds of students as early as the end of elementary school and stay with these readers throughout their lifetimes (Michael C. McKenna, 1995; Michael McKenna, 2012; McKool, 2007). Ultimately, this process involves a relative comparison of the interest in literacy in our classrooms to understanding the makeup of a given community of readers. The need for instructors to rethink their approaches to literacy instruction has never been more urgent. Reluctant readers, first and foremost, do not view reading as a positive social experience, so our job must be to create an environment where they might see their reactions to a text as important and, in sharing these responses, they can come to challenge their own normative beliefs about reading (Beers, 1998). This does not mean, however, that we should funnel students into classrooms based on their literacy ability. Rather, we must acknowledge where students are at motivationally, helping students in a more wholistic sense to persevere through demanding tasks through high expectations fo themselves and supporting them to see mistakes and setbacks as learing opportunities (Programme for International Student Assessment, 2014). Reactions to American students' relatively demotivation lead researchers to propose that, in evaluating the changes that must come about in our school systems, we might do the following:

- "Recognize the multiple literacies in which students are engaging in outside of the classroom and find ways to incorporate them into classroom instruction
- Model our own reading enjoyment
- Embrace engaging activities, such as literature circles and book clubs, into regular instruction in secondary schools
- Include reading materials of varied formats, levels, and topics in the classroom; and
- Incorporate elements of choice in readings and projects" (Sharon M. Pitcher, 2007)

In pursuing these goals, we want to create classrooms where the teacher is a reading model, where there is an abundance of diverse books and an opportunity for students to choose texts for themselves, where we provide opportunities for social interactions around reading, and where we provide literacy-based incentives that reflect and reinforce the value of reading (Gambrell, 1996). To be an effective reading model, the goal of teachers should be to use a variety of approaches to inspire and motivate children to find pleasure in reading, well beyond the scope of elementary school. One important way that they can do this is by providing explicit reading models, "[sharing] their own reading experiences with students and [emphasizing] how reading enhances and enriches their lives" (Gambrell, 1996). In addition, teachers might create a space for the promotion of voluntary reading through such practices as Sustained Silent Reading, periods of uninterrupted reading time during which students can choose their materials and truly get lost in a book (Bishop, 2004; Lu, 2008; McKool, 2007). In fact, in 51 out of 54 schools

evaluated in their study, Gordon and Lu (2008) found that students did as well or better than those who received a traditional, skill-based reading curriculum only. Particularly with the readers that we identify to be demotivated or disinterested in reading, we must be careful to give them this space and autonomy for true choice. Often times, reluctant readers shared that "true choice was really not an option...because their teachers did not allow them to read from their favorite materials (i.e. comics and magazines)" so they instead elected to use this time to work toward the required materials to reduce the amount of work that they would have to do at home (McKool, 2007).

In addition to rethinking our own perspectives as instructors, we must strive to create spaces that accept students' varied approaches to literacy and encourage social interactions around shared and recreational texts alike. Students' comprehension of texts is supported by combinations, rather than stand-alone practices, of "imagining, using mnemonic techniques, self-monitoring, using graphic organizers, asking and generating questions, learning story structure, summarizing, [and] using prior knowledge," a multiplicity of skills that is most advanced by opportunities for social interactions around readings (Bishop, 2004). Alone, sustained silent reading or direct instruction are insufficient. But combining them in ways that allow students to practice their use, educators not only enhance comprehension and reasoning, but are more likely to invest students in the practices of reading in the long-term. If we opened up our classrooms to these social interactions: "students could learn from one another, teachers could design strategy instruction to meet student needs, and confusion and misunderstanding could be avoided" (Bishop, 2004). Ultimately, our perpsecitve as instructors must move toward a new pedagogy that addresses readers at various levels of competency and engagement, "[addressing] the affective dimension of reading as well as reading for comprehension that acknowledges that reading is pleasure" (Lu, 2008). These approaches will be discussed further in the subsequent sections.

One of the final pillars of this transformation requires that we rethink the texts that we deem to be academically acceptable, trying to balance those that will vary the text complexity that students see and with those that will capture their interests. Historically, parents and teachers have seen series such as *The Babysitters Club*, *Goosebumps*, and *Drama High* as "trashy" literature, preventing access to such materials in the purported interest of helping their students to become better readers. Selection and circulation policies that exclude alternative medias—comic books, magazines, and digital texts, to name a few—narrow the opportunities for low readers to find engaging materials to read (Lu, 2008). These texts—particularly series that can invest readers over several books at a time—provide a springboard to launch students toward more sophisticated reading over time, rather than by coercion. There is a need for reading evaluations that measure not only students' comprehension abilities but also more qualitative assessments of "the emotional, psychological, and social benefits of reading," which must come to "reflect a more humane and realistic definition of reading literacy" (Lu, 2008). Reading should be rewarding, both personally and academically. When we siphon off whole collections of texts because we deem them to be below our students, then we are reinforcing for reluctant readers the idea that reading is a punishment and that their levels of reading are intolerable in the traditional school setting. If our focus is to truly advance reading as a mean-getting processes—as a way that we come to understand ourselves and the world in which we live—then we need to structure our classrooms and our remedial programs that encourage children to take risks and that

support the effective management of those risks in a way that promotes long-term perseverence in reading (Holbrook, 1982).

As I reviewed this literature, I found that, while there was a lot of research to suggest that there is an increasingly pervasive problem of alliteracy in our country and, in particular, amongst our highest need schools, there were not many recommendations on how to resolve this problem. This deficiency only exacerbates the issue, as teachers grapple to administer the new Common Core State Standards, often to the detriment of instructional time spent investing students in reading and combatting the lack of motivation amongst secondary students. The work that I have done as part of this project seeks to fill that void, to reflect on why students are dropping off in their reading for pleasure and to suggest usable practices that teachers can introduce into their classroom based on my own interpretations of these findings.

IV. Procedure

In the course of this examination, I largely focused my studies on Dimmitt Middle School, located in the Bryn Mawr-Skyway area in King County. This neighborhood lies in an unincorporated island roughly between the cities of Seattle, Tukwila, and Renton. At the onset of this project, I spent five class periods a day with 7th graders, two of which were Language Arts courses. We used a modified version of Lucy Calkins' Reader's Workshop, adapted from her work at the upper elementary level. Students are given limited time in class to read silently and independently, although the administration of SSR depended largely on the discretion of the teacher. In my classroom, I attempted to secure 20 to 30 minutes of each period for this work, leaving about half of the period for direct instruction. During this reading time, I conferenced with students, which provided the opportunity for the interviews cited in the data section. When not conducting such research, I met with students regarding their interest in their chosen independent text, their growth on various standards assessed, and their habits of reading at home.

In the initial administration of this project, I distributed a paper survey to my students. This process is one that I would ideally give to students at the beginning, middle, and the end of the school year in order to analyze trends in their reading engagement by line item and by category. Questions in this initial draft of the survey represented some of the buckets of pedagogy in literacy instruction: 1) Student motivation; 2) Reading environment; and 3) Teacher action. Students were asked to read a statement and to indicate whether they strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree. The statements that students evaluated are shown in Appendix A.

When administered, students were given ample time to respond, so that no participant felt compelled to alter their viewpoints under pressure. Questions 1-8 relate to students' motivation to read; questions 9-13 connect to the reading environment and instructional demands; and questions 14-20 address specifically teacher actions.

In addition, students answer a series of five questions, asking them to delve more deeply into the three sub-groups outlined above (Appendix B):

1. What does it mean to be a good reader?

2. What motivates you to read outside of class?
3. What keeps you from reading outside of class?
4. What helps you personally to grow as a reader?
5. Is there anything else you'd like for your teacher to know?

These open-ended questions then served as starting points for deeper discussion, developed through a collection of interviews. Students had the opportunity to articulate whether they would like to opt in to these interviews, providing some information about students that self-select to engage in this work. Other participants were selected because they represented through their work ethic and their approaches to reading practices a series of categories, outlined by John Guthrie: Intrinsically motivated readers, resistant readers, extrinsically motivated readers, and lowest achieving readers.

In these interviews, I focused in on the tensions raised by the quantitative data, reflective of inconsistencies between students' perceptions of and reactions to reading. These choices were derived from a sense of statements that should produce correlated data but that revealed inexplicably contradictory results. In the first round of interviews that we conducted, some of the incongruences that observed were:

1. Students that enjoy reading versus those that believe they are good at reading
2. Students who find reading to be important versus those that read when it's not required
3. Students who feel that they can connect personally with texts as opposed to those that find academic relevance

Through these interviews, we aimed to dig more deeply into students' perception of their own abilities as readers, their needs in the classroom and outside of the school context to support reading, and the work that might be done by instructors to enhance literacy growth and engagement.

The final stage of this project was to use the evidence to draw conclusions about best practices that teachers could immediately reform classrooms. These tools are meant to provide varied, differentiated options to meet a variety of challenges to reading motivation, tailored to the different categories of struggling readers as outlined by John Guthrie. The final product presents an ethnographic reflection on the experience of engaging students in reading, to reveal the challenges raised by this task at the secondary level, and to open up a conversation about how to continue to match our adoption of the Common Core State Standards with a continued commitment to investing life-long readers.

IV. Data Analysis

There is something formulaic about the way that students engage with reading. If we consider the intersection of their enjoyment, perceptions of ability, and belief of the utility of reading, we can begin to notice trends within single classrooms or amongst cohorts of students that echo the trends cited by the likes of OECP and PISA.

In the first round, I administered the surveys to two periods of students, amounting to approximately 60 students. If we are indeed looking at these three factors—enjoyment, self-efficacy, and perception of utility—then the three questions most reflective of those traits are:

Statement 1: I enjoy reading
Statement 2: I am good at reading
Statement 3: I think reading it important

In the aggregate data, the responses to these questions were most often "Strongly Agree" or "Agree": 95% of students believed that reading was important; 88% claimed to enjoy reading; and 82% felt that they were good at reading. All of these results are above an 80% threshold, which my colleagues and I felt represented generally positive attitudes. In fact, there were no students that responded with "Strongly Disagree" when presented with the statement "I think reading is important" and only one student responded thus to Statement 1 and 2, respectively.

As was mentioned previously, we noticed some incongruences as we considered this data and these three components specifically. For instance, while positive results were high for Statement 3 (and its similar option, which clarified, "Reading helps me to learn"), statements that dug into that notion did not seem to line up. Students were split when presented with the idea that they might only read to do well on assessments (49% responded "Strongly Agree" or "Agree") but overwhelmingly agreed with the idea that reading helps them to learn (96% responded "Strongly Agree" or "Agree"). How can a student feel so fervently that reading helps them to learn but not feel that reading is an asset on an assessment designed to evaluate that very learning? Are students distinguishing between learning and assessment? We teachers certainly view those two practices as critical and interdependent in our own pedagogy; are we wrong to do so? Perhaps what we need is to look back at those first two statements:

Statement 1: I enjoy reading
Statement 2: I am good at reading

While both statements had high levels of respondents that agreed, these results were comparatively much lower than how students reacted to the statements about reading's importance (6% lower for Statement 1 and 12% lower for Statement 2). The issue is that we, as teachers, construe learning and what it would mean for students to be good readers differently than students perceive it themselves. To better understand the nuances of students' self-perception of reading, I looked back at how they described what it meant to be a good reader, categorizing student responses to this short-answer question into groups. Students felt that good readers were defined by:

Understanding texts at your grade level (18%)
Reading frequently and for long periods of time (24%)
Reading fluently and accurately (10%)
Asking questions while you're reading (4%)
Understanding and analyzing texts as you go through (10%)
Learning academic skills (e.g. new words) from reading (8%)
Learning about your life and the world from reading (20%)

No response (6%)

Looking at these responses, we can see some broad trends in responses. The plurality of students believe that being a good reader is about time spent engaged in a book, suggesting that these students do believe that reading success connotes passion for reading. In fact, another 20% of students seem to believe that being a good reader is explicitly about using texts to understand more about your life and the world in which you live. However, if we were to lump together like responses, we can see that the greatest majority of students—a conglomerate of 50% of respondents—believe that a good reader is determined based on the skills that they practice while they are reading, the practices that we hammer into students in elementary school and largely abandon as we move toward more rigorous demands at the secondary level.

The interviews with students echoed this idea that reading proficiency is more about quantity and skills than about passion and engagement. When asked what it means to be a good reader, some of the responses were:

"Read whenever they get the chance to. Reading without actually reading."

"I think I'm good at reading fluently. Like not reading like a robot, word by word. Reading the sentence. Stop at the periods and stuff."

"Reading all the time."

While students did have limited space and may have included the possibility of learning about life given the opportunity, this list reveals that the foundational ideas of what it means to be a good reader are based on skills that largely taper off from our instruction after the 5th grade. Students equate good reading with reading quickly, reading a lot, and seeming to read easily (fluently). For the most part, neither the paper survey respondents nor the interviewees mentioned loving reading or choosing to pick up a book over engaging in other activities as indicative of good reading. Only one student even suggested that appreciate a book's entertainment value factored into her a good reader. When asked whether she thought of herself as a good reader, this interviewee said:

"Well, I never really downplay any book unless I've read it for myself. Like I don't usually go along with the review unless I've read the book myself. I won't continue reading a book unless I believe I'm getting something from it."

Examples of such practices include reading quickly and fluently, working through tough words and learning new ones from a variety of texts, and looking for connections within the text as part of a broader endeavor of analysis. To better understand the effect of this academic-heavy interpretation of what it means to be a good reader, we can turn to other statements in the student survey:

Statement 3: I read outside of class.
Statement 4: I read outside of class, even when it's not required.
Statement 8: Reading helps me to grow as a person.

One would think that, amongst students who believe so highly in the importance of reading, we would see echoes of this sentiment in Statements 3 and 4. In fact, the opposite is true. Only 78% of students claimed to read outside of class and only 51% continued to do so when it was not required. These results are not just concerning; they are dismal. This means that the second that we, as teachers, stop demanding that students read and hold them accountable for this work, we might lose as many as half of the people in the room, whose motivation to read cannot and will not sustain themselves.

In breaking down this understanding of what actually motivates students to read when they are given the space to freely respond to this prompt, I against filtered through the short answer questions in the student survey. This time, I organized the responses to the question, "What motivates you to read outside of class?" What engaged respondents in reading were:

Interesting books (37%)
Boredom or a lack of alternative entertainment (14%)
Authority figures, such as parents or teachers (22%)
Access to an idealized reading environment (8%)
A sense of the long-term college and career opportunities brought about by reading (6%)
Nothing (8%)
No response (5%)

If we were to bundle these responses according to John Guthrie's thesis, I would classify the majority of respondents as intrinsically motivated. I reached this conclusion by adding together those who said that books themselves could be motivating (37%) or had a sense of the long-term implications of a reading lifestyle on one's ability to access colleges and careers of choice (6%). As Guthrie would say, these readers often develop such an attitude over several years in school and through exposure to a home environment that is physically and intellectually supportive of intensive reading (Guthrie, 2008). However, there is a substantial proportion of these students that Guthrie would view as externally motivated, whose will to read derives from an outside authority (22%) or depends on factors outside of the student's control (8%). These students are "moderately able to read, but have no interest in school topics" (Guthrie, 2008). A smaller contingent of respondents might be actively resisting reading, as suggested by those that either read only when they lack other meaningful activities (14%) or who outright felt that nothing motivated them to read (8%). These students "actively avoid books, shun texts, neglect reading homework, and deny school literacy of most kinds" (Guthrie, 2008). Unfortunately, because I collected the surveys anonymously, it is impossible to gauge the low achievers, as defined by Guthrie, from this data. Through the interviews, a select few students did have a chance to clarify their reasoning for choosing other activities over reading when no longer externally motivated:

> *"My mom always gets to me about reading at home. You know when you sent emails about bookmarks? She tells me that she hasn't...I tell her that I read…but she says that she hasn't seen me read, so it doesn't count. So I have to read another 40 minutes for it to count. A lot of times, I'll just go outside and I won't end up reading. I mean, it kind of motivates me to read. She gives me these*

speeches or something, tells me that reading is what helps you to be a better learner. [She's done that] Since like fifth grade… [When] my grades went down. I wasn't really focused on school; I'm trying to get more focused."

"I don't know. Sometimes I get bored. I do other stuff. [I do better] If a teacher tells me [what to read] because if I have my own book to read on my own time, I don't do it. We get handed a book and all so that we all have to read it, it's like we don't have a choice. When we have our own and our own time, we have a choice: are you going to read or not?"

In these two instances, both respondents were boys who viewed themselves as good readers but admitted that their motivations were wholly external. For additional sources of information, I would have to look to alternative benchmark assessments and consult directly with the students at the lowest ends of proficiency to better understand their engagement, or lack thereof, with reading.

In all transparency, at this point in the year, I was not only having students track their nightly reading at home and asking that a parent confirm this work weekly by signing the bookmarks, but was also phoning home when I noticed a trend in students' reading time over as little as a single week. If they did not turn in a bookmark, I communicated home. If they continued to neglect their at-home reading, the punishments escalated. I was taking the students who most resented reading and making the practice of reading for pleasure punitive. In doing so, I was also taking those students who might have been on the fence and suggesting to them that reading was important because I said that it was important, not necessarily because it held any intrinsic value or their own progress or pleasure. This realization is supported by the fact that 96% of students said that I helped them to understand how they can improve their reading and 86% indicated that I, as the instructor, motivated them to read via Statements 18 and 20, respectively. But what is the alternative?

At this point, we turn to that final statement: Reading helps me to grow as a person. As we consider all the interpretations of what it would mean for a student to think that reading is important, the degree of positive reactions to this particular component are telling. 86% of students expressed that they strongly agreed or agreed with this idea, more than believed that they were good at reading. If we accept that literacy is a foundational skill that contributes directly to the success in other classes and advances students toward greater preparedness for higher-education and careers, then at its base: what does it mean for a student to learn by reading?

Taking these statements, what quickly becomes clear is that reading, while valued as a vehicle to learning, only serves academic functions. Put simply, students do not see reading as a means of learning about themselves or the world around them. They see it almost as a necessary evil; they can regurgitate the rationale for reading as it relates to life and future success, but their actions reveal their lack of investment in these reasons to read. Some interviewees mentioned that they read because:

"It gets you a job and there are contracts that you have to read. So I guess like reading is kind of important in life."

"Do an assignment and you have to read a book. So I have to read to do well on the assignment. If you don't read, then you can't really do anything. So you have to read sometimes. Like a job application, you have to know the sentence to answer the question."

In a Language Arts class where students are allowed to pick their own independent reading books and receive blocks of time to do participate in Silent Sustained Reading (SSR), only 64% of students felt that they could connect with their reading in class and 73% felt that what they read connected to the outside world. Again, these are books they picked! As a result, reading ends up serving one of two broad purposes for unmotivated readers: to succeed academically or to fill time that otherwise cannot or is not occupied with more entertaining activities. Students, therefore, are engaging in a constant cost-benefit analysis, and the costs of sacrificing time that they might otherwise spent jockeying for social status and advancing specialized interests becomes steeper and steeper as students advance through secondary school.

V. Limitations and Further Research

One of the constraints on this work is its sample size. Even between the surveys administered and the interviews conducted, the reach of this project barely approached 100 students across two urban cities. In both populations, the communities accessed were poorer and had a greater representation of minority races. While this was a relevant population to assess as we think about the implications of this reading motivation work on the most underserved students in our society, the choice also provided no basis for comparison. If we are to suggest that the Common Core State Standards will not, in fact, by a great equalizer, as promised, then we would need to have undertaken this same process in middle-income and highly affluent communities to evaluate whether the trends of engagement were really that distinct from one population to the next. Furthermore, because the samples were anonymous, it would be impossible to reflect on the demographics of students amongst the respondents in ways that would help us to better understand distinctions based on home environment, income level, or academic experience.

In addition, although I collected similar surveys from my students in Chicago, I chose to exclude this data because I felt that it was unreliable and would ultimately bias the conclusions. First of all, the students served there were enrolled in summer school, which their school mandated them to attend as a result of either low attendance or insufficient annual growth in reading. Many of those students who had failed to show up for school at a rate commensurate with the institution's expectations were enrolled in Language Arts during their time in summer school, even if they had, in fact, demonstrated proficiency in this content area. In short, I was looking at rooms filled with resistant readers and low-achievers, as categorized by John T. Guthrie. In addition, when I did go to administer the surveys, students were under duress: they had just finished their final day of summer school (and, as a result, few chose to actually attend that day), I had just returned their final assessments (on which several students had showed insufficient growth over the summer), and they had a limited amount of time in which to

complete it, as contrasted with my year-long students who were given an entire period. All of these factors led me to believe that the quantitative data would more so reflect the feeling of these students toward summer school than it would speak to their perspectives on reading more broadly.

Finally, the project itself failed to track students' progression over time when it came to reading motivation. While I was coincidentally lucky to move up with the same cohort of kids this year, I did not necessarily end up with the same students in my classes. Therefore, the connections I could make between last year's approaches and this year's progress would be correlated, at best. There simply was not the time, resources, or circumstances in my case to establish the causal link between the work done in my classroom and any changes in attitude that students may have experienced. However, I will qualify this limitation by saying that I derived the recommendations provided herein from varied approaches to student feedback, gathering both quantitative measurements as well as ethnographic testimonies to support my findings. In addition, the resources created—from the student survey itself to the Recommended Series for Secondary Readers (Appendix D)—were developed in collaboration with a plurality of experienced literacy teachers who represent diverse teaching backgrounds and tenures in the classroom.

VI. Reflections

What we have created through the slow and steady polarization of school reading and pleasure reading is a condition which Kelly Gallagher coined as *readicide*. This term refers to the "systematic killing of the love of reading, often exacerbated by the inane, mind-numbing practices found in schools" (Gallagher, 2009). He proposes that these conditions surfaced because:

1. Schools value the development of effective test-takers more than they foster the cultivation of passionate readers. As Gallagher concedes, "Teaching to the test is the foundation of good teaching, and when every minute counts, teaching to the test provides necessary focus, so time is not wasted" (Gallagher, 2009).
2. Schools, therefore, limit authentic, pleasurable reading experiences
3. Teachers, in turn, are both over-teaching and under-teaching books, referring to the overemphasis of analysis of text minutiae to the detriment of broader appreciation of books. We must, summarily, "Recognize the difference between liking a text and gleaning value from a text" (Gallagher, 2009).

He concludes:

> *"What I am advocating is that we teachers must create reading situations in which our students discover the reading flow they need to achieve while reading both academic and recreational works, assigned and self-selected…If our students are to have any chance of discovering reading flow, if they are to have any chance to discover what it is like to come up for air while reading, if they are to have any chance of becoming lifelong readers, they will need what all readers*

need when they read: access to great books and large doses of uninterrupted time to read them" (Gallagher, 2009).

Ultimately, it is my goal that this project be something useful to teachers, regardless of school location, student demographic, or years in the classroom. I acknowledge that every teacher's context is unique and the amount of time available to devote to such practices may not feel sufficient. Therefore, I will make three recommendations, which can be applied individually or collectively and adapted across age- and content-settings. Certainly, there are many more that I could suggest and I am sure more still that teachers across the nation would contribute to the ongoing dialogue about the evolving practice of literacy instruction. However, we need first steps. We need to balance the pursuit of rigor with the love of reading, which will leverage our instruction far beyond the constraints of a single class period or a single school year. If we cannot strike this balance, then we will continue to find ourselves finding students experiencing that summer slide, becoming more and more disengaged as the years go on, and ultimately struggling to motivate themselves toward inquiry as they move into institutions of higher learning and careers of their choice.

A. Create classroom and school libraries that are extensive, easy to use, and heavy in series and collections

If we truly believe that literacy is a foundational skills, then we need to set up environments where it is made holistically accessible. A student should be able to connect his love of science with reading or her questions about a historical period with a subject-aligned novel. To make such texts accessible would be to promote inquiry through reading, to suggest to students that reading is not about filling time or achieving a particular objective; it is about discovering more about who we are and what we can make of this world in which we live. That starts with an extensive library, filled with books that spans all genres, subject matters, and character profiles. From the relatable to the wholly unrealistically, we need structures that allow kids to bring themselves into reading, to pick up books that will interest them, wherever that interest may stem from.

To especially entice those students who might resist reading or struggle to lock down a book that reflects their interests, we also need libraries that are as easy to use as possible. A student should be able to check out a book without delay, to select text after text of high interest without necessarily walking shelf after shelf. These sorts of aesthetic considerations create a space that is accessible and have the effect of making reading continuously less burdensome. As a result, students spend more time engaged in books themselves, rather than scanning shelves to pull down texts that they will only moderately enjoy.

One way to further ease student's access to books of interest is to stock complete, popular series. At the beginning of this year, I requested several hundred books through Donors Choose—a feat that I acknowledge may not necessarily be equally available to all teachers—all of which were full series. As they arrived, I gathered them on the floor at the front of my room, waiting to put them on the shelves until I knew that series were complete. The effect was wilder than I could have imagined. Students begged to pull books early from these collections. They talked to their friends about what they were seeing on the floor and what they hoped that would

mean for other texts that were on the way. They left me notes of waitlists that they had built amongst their classmates for a single book before it had even arrived at our school. And once those books went onto the shelf, the effect was instantaneous. My series shelf was cleared out by the end of the day, while my realistic fiction, historical fiction, action and adventure, and other single texts stood unacknowledged. In time, students made their way through series and were so invested in a particular collection of books that they were able to advocate for themselves in their later picks, whether that meant that they wanted a new series or that they were ready to tuck into the stand-alone texts. What these complete series did was to get readers invested in reading, to make it a part of their daily routine, which was particularly important coming out of summer, when many of them had abandoned the practice all-together. In addition, students had formed connections around books and made recommendations based on series that they had vied for early in September. They knew to expect that sequels existed and would track who had which book at what point so that they could pick it up next. Certainly, there are incredible books that are not a part of a series, but if we are talking about motivating otherwise disengaged readers, series are the place to begin.

This extends to informational texts as well. The Common Core State Standards pushes for a greater balance of text types introduced in literacy classrooms. Therefore, as we think about what it would mean to create a library "heavy in series," we can also extend this thinking to address the hot topics that may pull students into otherwise academic realms. Examples include infection and disease, child slavery, crimes and games; the list goes on and on. While series are an important tool, they are certainly not the only tool. Rather, they can act as a vehicle targeted toward the engagement of otherwise resistant readers who can be drawn in and carried along by a series or collection of books that will hold their interest over a longer period than a single text selection.

See Appendix C for a comprehensive list of literary series and informational topics for secondary readers, compiled by teachers and students.

B. Give students the space to love reading

Our inclination—as proficient readers ourselves and as those working in education in the era of the Common Core's conversations of rigor—is to push students into the books that align with their current grade level. At the very least, we want students engaged in texts that match their personal reading abilities. But putting these pressures on students has the effect of positioning us as the motivator to read. Kids are reading because we have told them that it is good for them and they are choosing because we say that it is what they should be reading.

As I have reflected on this mandate in my own practice, I always think of one student in particular, a girl whom I will call Dana. In 7th grade, her scores on the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) and Measurement of Student Progress (MSP) suggested that she was reading somewhere around the K-2 level. As much as Dana had all the factors to push her toward the status of a low achieving reader, she was surprisingly motivated intrinsically to read. She loved it. However, for years, teachers had given her the books that they thought were good for her, which would have aligned with her grade level (or close to it) rather than her ability level. As a result, she had come to accept that she would not understand the books she read; to her, that was

not what it meant to be a good reader. So she got by page to page and picked up moments chapter by chapter, but struggled to recall what happened over an entire text and certainly could not have demonstrated the learning targets set before someone of her age given her ability level.

As a result of my work on this project, I worked in collaboration with a classroom volunteer to first deconstruct Dana's understanding of what it meant to be a good reader. This ended up being an effort that had to extend to the family, as well, because they wanted her to succeed and had been told over the years that her failings were the result of her low reading scores. They were not equipped to interpret what that meant or how they might change those results as home, so they too pushed her into the hardest books that they could find around the house and hoped that she would improve. Therefore, the classroom volunteer and I had to collaborate with Dana to get her to understand that it was actually okay if she selected an easier book—one that was still of high interest to her—in order to promote her growth. We talked her through such tools as the Five Finger Test and gave her ample opportunities to read aloud to us (and worked with her parents to continue these conversations at home). Although we ultimately bumped her books down about four grade-levels, she ended up growing so much that she was reading at a low middle school level by the end of the year. All of this we achieved because we helped her to love reading without being ashamed or constrained by her present reading levels.

There has to be a balance because assessing students' reading scores and setting them up with books that will truly catch their interests. This work begins with building a culture of reading in the classroom, and helping students to reading for academic growth and for personal development. A place to begin this discussion is to ask: Why is reading important? Beyond grades, tests, and skills, why does it really matter? Thinking more systematically, do we need to broaden what it means to assess readers in order to also weigh the evaluation of alliteracy and to counter this de-motivation? If students are engaged in this dialogue, if they are invested in what it means to be a good reader and counseled to understand their own growth in relation to their abilities and understandings in the real world, then we begin to set students up to advocate for themselves as readers, as academics, and ultimately as members of a broader global community.

C. Position literacy as a social, sense-making practice

What the Common Core's literacy standards do very well is to think about how the skills of reading and writing will spiral through student's academic careers. As much as students are asked to do deeper and deeper thinking about literature, we should also be engaging them in more critical questions about the world in which they live. Books are, after all, a vehicle to understanding ourselves, our societies, and the future of humanity. They illuminate our pasts, they mirror our mistakes as well as our successes, and they give us relatable characters whose realities can play out without the real world consequences. Whether students engage with characters to escape or to make sense of their own lives, books give them access to an opportunity for sense-making.

As a result, much as there is a push for project-based learning and inquiry in the fields of STEM and Social Studies, so too should we be looked at how to question books, how they help us to reach broader conclusions about our lives and the way that we lead them.

One way to institute this practice is to look for ways to make reading social. Whether it be individual books or shared texts, these opportunities remove the teacher from the equation and allow students to communicate their ideas and their realizations in accessible, scaffolded ways. Some strategies to get these dialogues going are:

Book Talks

Although this is not a strategy that I have formally used in my own classroom, it is one that I have seen achieve engagement in amongst other instructors. The objective is to provide consistent, passionate models of people that are engaged in reading, whether that model be drawn from the teacher or from the students themselves. In these book talks, the presenter has a limited amount of time in which to either recommend a book or discourage others from reading it. Yes, even negative reviews can positively influence reading motivation. Not only does it create a social space to discuss books, but it reinforces the idea that reading can (and should) be enjoyable, so even disliking a particular book serves the goal of getting every reader into a text that he or she will love.

Another way that I have seen this exercised is through the use of written book reviews. Upon completion of a text—whether that mean the full reading of a book or the moment when a reader chooses to move on to something different—students write a brief, one paragraph reflection. Given that so many students are engaged in a multimodal world of literacy, this activity can be a great way to engage those alternative reading sources. Have students Tweet a review; give them a camera and ask them to produce a 30-second news spot about the book; post reviews to a class blog; even creating a movie poster of the book with excerpts of "reviews" can do. The idea is to get students sharing out their reactions in a public, social forum that cultivates a positive reading environment in the classroom and opens up the opportunity for that discussion to stream out of the academic setting, as well.

Chalk Talks

There are many tools in a teacher's arsenal to encourage small group discussion, and one thing that I struggled with in my earliest years in the classroom was making that transition from partner or table group discussions up to the whole-class level. Chalk talks helped me to bridge the divide in skills. For literature, create several stations, each equipped with an excerpt from a shared text. There may be a focus question to guide students' thinking, centered on some overarching skill such as analyzing the development of theme or examining character growth, or you can let them build their ideas without these structures. Students are then given a limited amount of time to reflect on the quote provided, annotating the page to make their team's thinking visible. Some of the observations that they might make include:

- Which word choices did the author make to reinforce a particular interpretation of the phrase?
- What questions occur to you as you think about this moment within the context of the text?
- What themes or motifs are developed from this excerpt?

After the allotted work time has concluded, have students move to the next station. They can continue the work of generating their own thinking or, at this point, they can build on to the ideas of a prior group, annotating these notes right alongside their reactions to the excerpt itself. Circles, arrows, counterevidence, and critical questions are strongly encouraged at this point. What ends up happening is that students are actually engaging in a class wide discussion, but in the limited, seemingly safer space of the small group. As they move from station to station, the ideas become deeper because they are now looking at not only the text but at the responses of groups that preceded them.

As students advance in their proficiency with this activity, I have also made it a competition, in which students do the same sort of work but publish it to the whiteboard at the front. As one team member writes observations, reactions, or questions, the others back at the table look for what other groups are adding and consider the connections that they see emerging between the diverse ideas. As the activity goes on, the ideas grow and I encourage students to begin circling similar ideas, drawing connections with arrows, and writing in their own explanation as to what they see emerging. When I first did this activity, I organized it around three to four simple themes that the students themselves identified in the text, which ultimately led them to realize how themes develop and intersect with one another as our interpretations deepen. Consequently, this activity, however it is administered, creates a social space where students are making sense of not only the text, but of the reactions that have come before them and of the context of this discussion within the broader dialogue of our lives and communities.

Socratic Seminars

As a result of the Common Core State Standards and their inclusion of specific speaking and listening standards, Socratic Seminars have gained significant popularity in recent years. As explained by Walter Parker, PhD of the University of Washington:

> *"A Socratic discussion is a text-based discussion in which an individual sets their own interpretations of the text alongside those of other participants. The aim is a mutual search for a clearer, wider, and deeper ('enlarged') understanding of the ideas, issues, and valued in the text at hand. It is shared inquiry, not debate; there is no opponent save the perplexity all persons face when they try to understand something that is both difficult and important."*

The emphasis in a Socratic Seminar is on the interpretation of the text and the ways that this source inserts itself into an ongoing dialogue about various aspects of our life, society, and world. Whether using a Fishbowl structure, in which half of the class participants in the discussion while the other half practices critical listening before a halftime switch, or including the whole class from the onset, the central tenant of this practice is to create a controlled space for the very type and topic of discussions that students will encounter outside of the classroom. Knowing this, it is advantageous to give those within the speaking group some sentence frames that will equip them with the same language they might use outside of this academic context, such as:

- I agree that _____ and found similar evidence…

- I disagree because…
- If I may clarify, are you suggesting that…
- It sounds like your idea builds on that of _____ because…

In short, we are setting students up as not just participants in a discussion, but facilitators and proprietors of the exchange of information that necessarily takes place in a constructive democracy. Likewise, we want those engaged as critical listeners to be aware of these skills, so that they, too, are on the lookout for effective leadership in discussions and can emulate these practices when they enter. For my part, I have historically set up listeners with a set of "look fors" that they tally as they listen to one particular participant within the inner circle. Such guided observations include:

- Adds evidence to support a claim made by another
- Seeks clarification about a claim made by another
- Connects ideas presented by two different speakers
- Invites an unheard voice into the conversation

At a minimum, students should be able to extract a minimal number of strong points made by a particular speaker that they are tracking within the conversation, a skill so important that it is actually included amongst the Common Core State Standards, even as early as elementary school. Paired with the prior two recommendations, making reading social sets reading up as a process of inquiry, one that allows us to investigate our world through literary and informational texts.

VII. Conclusion

It is my sense as a teacher that we have largely abandoned the commitment to investing our students in a lifelong process of growth in reading. Although we teach to this perspective at the elementary levels, increasingly we ask students to sustain their reading, inserting product demands that show their thinking but interrupt their process. My hope is that this project will insert itself into the ongoing discussions about how we need to adapt our teaching practices to support readers as we implement the Common Core State Standards in Washington. While instructors will face a tide of new standards and learning outcomes, we must also not forget that we are dealing with people, who will not persist to realize the intellectual gains that we've envisioned for them if they detach entirely from the tasks that we're expecting them to tackle. Through this work, I plan to provide teachers will the literature and tools needed to address the apathy that they're seeing in their contexts, and to concern themselves as much with "rigor" as with "readicide" in their classrooms.

Appendix A: Student Survey, Part 1

Reading and Motivation

Directions: This survey is meant to help your teacher learn more about your attitudes toward reading. This will not affect your grade and can be completely anonymous, if you choose, so be honest. First, read the statement. Then, indicate whether you "Strongly Disagree," "Disagree," "Agree," or "Strongly Agree" with that statement. Lastly, answer the questions on the back.

Statements	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly Agree
1. I enjoy reading.				
2. I am good at reading.				
3. I read outside of class.				
4. I read outside of class, even when it's not required.				
5. I read only to do well on the assessments.				
6. I think reading is important.				
7. Reading helps me to learn.				
8. Reading helps me to grow as a person.				
9. My parents expect me to read at home.				
10. In this class, I get to read things that are interesting.				
11. I can connect with what I read in this class.				
12. What I read in this class connects to the outside world.				
13. I think that reading class assignments help me to show what I can do.				
14. My teacher creates opportunities to discuss what we read with my classmates.				
15. I learn from discussions about reading.				
16. I talk to the teacher about books that I read.				
17. I talk to my classmates about books that I read.				
18. My teacher helps me to understand how I can improve my reading.				
19. My teacher encourages us to ask a lot of questions about what we read.				
20. My teacher motivates me to read.				

The statements compel students to reflect on three facets of their reading experience: 1) Personal perspectives on reading, 2) Motivation to read, and 3) Instructional motivators for reading.

Appendix B: Student Survey, Part 2

1. What does it mean to be a good reader?

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. What motivates you to read outside of class?

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. What keeps you from reading outside of class?

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. What helps you personally to grow as a reader?

_____

_____

_____

_____

5. Is there anything else you'd like for your teacher to know?

_____

_____

_____

_____

I would like the opportunity to discuss my responses more with my teacher: ☐ Yes, please ☐No, thanks

If you answer "Yes," write your name here so that your teacher can follow up with you: _____

These questions dig into John T. Guthrie's categorizations of reading motivation: 1) Intrinsically motivated readers; 2) Resistant readers; 3) Extrinsically motivated readers; and 4) Low achievers.

Appendix C: Recommended Literary Series and Informational Text Collections for Secondary Readers		
Low Readers *Orca Soundings Selections* *The Bluford Series by Anne Schraff* **Dystopian Fiction** *Ender's Game* *Matched* *Delirium* *Divergent* *The Hunger Games* *The Mortal Instruments* *Uglies* *Gone* *The Giver* *The Selection* *Maze Runner* *Chaos Walking* *Book of Ember* *Last Survivors* *The Testing* *Lux* *The 5th Wave* *Shatter Me* **Magic and Other Worlds** *Harry Potter* *The Lord of the Rings* *Gregor the Overlander* *The Lunar Chronicles* *Redwall* *His Dark Materials* *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* *Chronicles of Narnia* *His Dark Materials* *The Inheritance Cycle* *The Heroes of Olympus* *The Grisha* *The Diviners* *Artemis Fowl* *Warriors*	**Horror and the Supernatural** *Twilight* *Vampire Academy* *The Infernal Devices* *Fallen* *Hush, Hush* *House of Night* *The Daughter of Smoke and Bone* *Shatter Me* *House of Night* *Cirque du Freak* *Caster Chronicles* *Bloodlines* *The Immortals* *Darkest Powers* *Daughter of Smoke & Bone* *The Sweet Trilogy* *Dream Catcher* **Drama and Realistic Fiction** *The Unbecoming of Mara Dyer* *The Series of Unfortunate Events* *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* *Pretty Little Liars* *Gemma Doyle* *Drama High* *If I Stay* *Gossip Girl* *Freak the Mighty* *The Mediator* *The Princess Diaries* *The Clique* *My Bloody Life*	**Action and Adventure** *Alex Rider* *Leviathan* *Lorien Legacies* *Legend* *Kane Chronicles* *Heist Society* *Maximum Ride* *Brian's Saga* **Graphic Novels and Comic Books** *Persepolis* *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* *Naruto* *Megaman* *Scott Pilgrim* *Stickman Odyssey* **Single Books by Author** *John Green* *Walter Dean Meyers* *Sharon Draper* **High-Interest Nonfiction Topics** Infectious Diseases Gangs and Violence War and War Technologies Food (Ex: *Fast Food Nation*) Climate Change Child Slavery and Sex Trafficking Biographies Sports

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